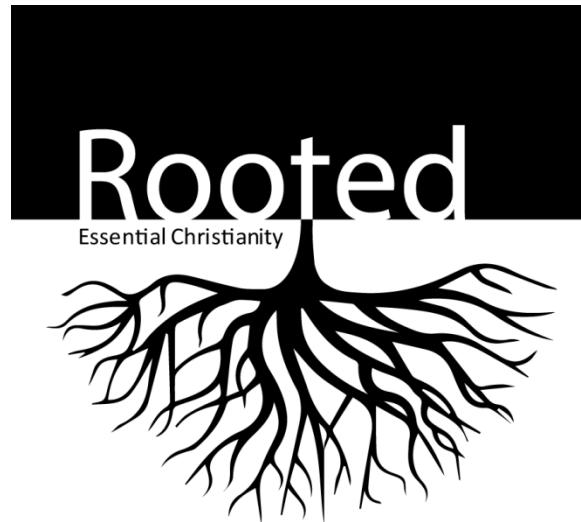




The Reformation Solas

Part 3 – Sola Fide

None is righteous, no, not one.

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested...

Romans 3:21-31

In chapter one of Romans the Apostle Paul writes, "For in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The just will live by faith'" (vs. 17). Prior to the Reformation while teaching the Bible at the University of Wittenberg, Martin Luther could not understand how the righteousness or justice of God could have anything to do with the gospel. In Luther's thinking, the

righteousness of God could only lead to judgment for sinners, not salvation. For sinners, the righteousness of God could only bring condemnation. So, as far as Luther was concerned, there could be no hope if both the law and the gospel reveal the righteousness of God.

Main Idea: Sinners are justified before God as he imputes to them his righteousness by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Vv. 21-22 – "But now..." Paul is contrasting what people knew before the gospel with what the gospel has now revealed. The law of God can only reveal to sinners their guilt. "But now the righteousness of God" which is imputed to sinners by grace through faith has been revealed in the gospel. The gospel is not new. It has now been "manifested" or "revealed." The gospel has been a reality since Genesis 3:15 and later when God announced his gracious covenant with Abram (Genesis 12, 15, 17). "The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe" has always been God's way to save his people. But what was known in types and shadows in the Old Testament has now been "manifested" in the work of Christ and the preaching of the Apostles.

Vv. 23-24 – "All have sinned" sums up the comprehensive human tragedy of the fall (Gen. 3). Sinners, by definition, cannot justify themselves. For justification they must have an alien righteousness granted to them by grace through faith. This righteousness is granted "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

Vv. 25-26 – Propitiation (*hilasterion*) – the removal of wrath. The Father put forth the Son to take upon himself the wrath deserved by sinners. Sinners receive the benefits of Christ's propitiation "by faith." Propitiation leaves no room for improvement. In the dying of Christ the divine justice was fully satisfied; God's wrath was poured out on sin. There is no way for the sinner to improve upon that finished work. The sinner can only believe. Only the One sinned against can make such an arrangement. The Son as wrath-bearer ensures that justice is done. In his patience ("divine forbearance") with sinners it could have been speculated that God's justice was in question since he "passed over former sins." The cross, however, vindicates the justice of God. Upon the cross the sins of all of God's people were punished decisively. "So that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." – What God required, God gave.

Vv. 27-28 – Justification by faith alone removes all ground for boasting. The sinner comes empty handed for salvation. Sinners are not justified by an infusion of grace which empowers them to do the necessary good works. Sinners are justified by way of the just verdict of God who paid their debt through the dying of Christ. "By what kind of law?" – Paul is explaining in regulatory categories why sinners are justified through faith alone.

Vv. 29-31 – Hebrew monotheism did not exclude the gentiles nations which worshiped many gods. The typical pagan would have considered the one God of the Hebrews far too small. Paul therefore works to establish the fact that there is no final distinction between Jew and Gentile.

All are sinners and all may be justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul's final question – "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith?" The answer is an emphatic no. Paul anticipates the Jewish objection that justification by grace through faith alone undermines God's law. However, just the opposite is the case. The demands of God's holy law were met completely through the obedience and sacrificial death of Jesus. Indeed salvation through faith alone in Jesus is possible precisely because God's law has been upheld.

1. Everyone's greatest need is justification by faith alone.

Romans 3:20 – "For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."

- Romans 1:18-3:20 are dedicated to exposing the devastating effects of human sin upon the human soul. Sin has brought ruin upon mankind in general and every human person specifically. Most tragic is the spiritual ruin wrought by sin. Not even obedience to God's law can justify a sinner before God.

2. Only justification by faith alone provides an adequate answer to the problem of our sin.

Romans 3:26 – "It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

Romans 3:31 – "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law."

- How can a sinner under the condemnation of God be justified before God? How can sinners be made right with a holy God who cannot overlook sin? On what basis can a righteous God justify sinners? These are questions which fueled the Protestant Reformation.
- Justification is a legal term. It is an act. It is not an ongoing process such as sanctification. Justification is a decisive accomplishment. In justification God declares sinners righteous. But on what basis? Paul explains why this can be by using words such as propitiation and redemption.
- Justification by faith alone takes into account the full range of Christ's redemptive work on behalf of sinners. There is a logic and moral genius to the way that God saves sinners. At no point in the saving of sinners does God compromise his justice or blunt his mercy. The cross stands as testimony that both the righteousness and mercy of God are fully revealed in his gracious justification of the guilty. This is why Paul can say that salvation through faith alone upholds the law. Jesus Christ has met the law's demands entirely. So when God justifies the one who believes the law is actually upheld rather than undermined.

3. Justification by faith alone is freely received.

Romans 3:21-22 – "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe."

- Justification on any basis other than grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone would not accomplish salvation for sinners. It must be freely received by faith alone because the sinner does not have within himself the spiritual insight or resources to contribute in any way to his justification.