

The Three Solas

Romans 3:19-28

Introduction

Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Solus Christus. Grace alone, Faith alone, Christ alone. This was what the Reformation was all about. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. As we said before, according to Martin Luther, this is the pillar of the church. If we lose it, we lose the church. Where do we find this article of faith? What does it mean? Why is it such a big deal? Those are three questions we want to deal with on this Reformation Day. But if we do a good job of explaining the first two, the answer to the third should be obvious.

Where Do We Find This Doctrine of Salvation?

The short answer to the question, “Where do we find this article of faith?” is, “In the Bible.” Like all our doctrine, this article is scriptural. In our Epistle reading today, we see the exact wording of this article of faith (Read **Romans 3:23-25a**). The alert person might say that the wording isn’t exact because this says, “by faith” instead of “through faith.” But older versions, such as King James, read this way: *For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.* The point is this article of faith didn’t originate with Luther or a church council. It is taught simply and plainly in the Bible for all to see and learn. As Luther might say, “Even a seven-year-old can know this.”

What Does This Doctrine Mean?

So, it’s biblical, but what does this article teach? Simply put, all people are in the same state, fallen short of God’s glory because of our sin. There is nothing we can do about it. God, by His grace, has given us redemption in His Son through faith in His atoning death on the cross. Let’s take a closer look at these four parts: by grace, through faith, in Christ, and alone.

By Grace

Grace is unmerited favor, a free gift. We can’t work for it or earn it. God gives us salvation because He wants to do it. There is nothing in us that causes Him to do this. There is no price we can pay and nothing we can do to get it. When someone gives you a gift, there are no strings attached. All you must do is receive it.

Through Faith

How do we receive the gift of salvation? We receive it through faith. *Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved (Acts 16:31)*. Just as He offered to the Philippian jailer, God freely offers us salvation, and we receive it when we believe. Salvation doesn’t originate with faith. Faith is how we receive it. Faith is the conduit, not the generator. Another thing to remember about this faith that causes us to believe is that we do not somehow conjure this up on our own. It too is a gift from God, a gift of grace, given to us through the means of grace—Word and Sacrament. But it’s not enough to say, “just believe.” Faith has an object. In Whom do we believe?

In Christ

We believe in Christ. Now, faith in Christ is not just accepting as an historical fact that He died on a cross 2,000 years ago and that three days later, He arose from the dead. James says, *Even the demons believe—and shudder! (James 2:19)*. I take hold of salvation by my faith in Christ when I believe that He died for me. You take hold of salvation when you believe He died for you. Saving faith is personal faith in Jesus Christ.

Alone

“Alone” is the word that causes problems with most people. In fact, it is the part of this article that separates us from the Roman Church. They believe in Christ and that we are saved by grace through faith in Him. However, The Council of Trent, the foundational confession of the Roman Church, states no fewer than four times that whoever believes in justification by grace *alone* is anathema, that is, cursed.

- “Grace Alone” means we relinquish all control. That’s not easy for us to do. We want control. We feel we should earn things. But this isn’t a heavenly hand-out. It’s a gift of grace, given in love.
- “Faith Alone” means there is no other way to receive it. *One is justified by faith apart from works (Romans 3:28)*.
- “Christ Alone” means Christ is the only object of our faith and that His blood pays for all our sin—original sin and the sins we commit. *And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Hebrews 10:10)*. “Once for all” means that Christ is our complete atonement. His death paid the price for all sins of all people of all times.

The Big Deal

We said at the outset that this article of faith is the pillar of the church. It’s a big deal because it’s all about salvation. In fact, it is our salvation. It is the most important doctrine of the Christian religion. *There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12)*. It distinguishes the Christian religion from false religions, which all teach salvation by works (read *Galatians 5:4-5*). It gives comfort to the penitent sinner. To know we don’t have to rely on ourselves for our salvation is a great comfort. This is all communicated to us through the means of grace—Word and Sacrament. So, remember that you are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone ...

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
