

Sola Fide

Romans 3:19-28

Introduction

Today, we celebrate the Reformation. Why is this a big thing? After all, aren't we "almost the same as Catholics?" That's what people tell me when they call me "father" and I say I'm not a Roman priest but a Lutheran pastor. My response to that is, "If there is no difference between us and the Roman church, why did they excommunicate Martin Luther?" Obviously, it was because he wanted to make some changes in the Roman church that the authorities didn't agree with. One of the big issues, and one the *95 Theses* focused on, was the sale of indulgences. But at the heart of this issue was what Luther called the pillar of the church, the doctrine that she stands on. If we lose sight of this doctrine, we lose the church. The doctrine is Justification, that we are justified by grace through faith in Christ alone. *Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, Solus Christus*: Grace Alone, Faith Alone, Christ Alone. Paul mentions three benefits of faith in our reading in **Romans 3** today. As we unpack these, we see what it means to be saved through faith alone.

Made Righteous Through Faith (v. 22)

(Read **Romans 3:21-22**). Jesus Christ was the Righteousness of God that was made manifest. Paul says in **2 Corinthians 5:21**, "For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." On the cross, Christ cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (**Matthew 27:46**). The Father had turned His back on His Son because Christ was carrying the sins of the world at that time. This separated Him from His Father. At this point in time, Christ was going through hell for us. In doing this, He exchanged His righteousness for our sinfulness. So, as Paul said, we might become the righteousness of God. But how do we receive that righteousness? What must we do to become righteous? This righteousness of God is available to all who believe through faith.

Faith in Christ

Of course, the operative phrase here is "in Christ." A lot of people have faith. They have faith in many different things. They put their faith in money, science, technology, power, politics, philosophy, or whatever they think has the answers for life. But there is only one kind of faith that counts and that's faith in Christ Jesus. That is, to believe that Jesus died and was raised from the dead for me. Anyone who believes that receives the righteousness of God through faith.

Propitiation Received by Faith (v. 25)

Verse 25 of our reading says that Jesus was the one "whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith." The word "propitiation" can be a problem. A propitiation is something that satisfies the wrath of God. The problem is that for many people, this brings to mind the pagan notion of propitiation, where worshipers try to appease their gods by gifts of food or sacrifices, sometimes even human ones. This makes it seem like we must assuage the anger of a hateful deity.

The Wrath of God

The truth is, God is angry. In 1741, Jonathan Edwards preached a sermon titled, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God", which was an appeal to sinners to recognize the just and fearful judgment of God that was coming. The image he used was that God is holding us over a flaming abyss and He is

angry, ready to let us drop. But here's the thing—God isn't angry at us. God is holy and hates sin. He has no choice. It is against His nature. And since we are sinful, we must be destroyed along with our sin.

God's Propitiation

The second thing is that we aren't the ones offering the propitiation. "God put forward [Christ] as a propitiation" (v. 25). Sin must be judged. Christ was judged on the cross in our place. He appeased the wrath of God by taking the punishment for sin upon Himself. The Father sent the Son, who went willingly to the cross. God appeased His own wrath.

God's Righteousness

This was to assure His righteousness, that we talked about earlier because "in His divine forbearance He passed over earlier sins" (v. 25). Before Christ came, millions of people were not judged for their sins. A holy God could not allow this. The punishment Christ received on the cross covered their sins as well. God's wrath was satisfied for them because they looked forward in faith to the Seed who would come and destroy the devil, just as God's wrath for our sins is appeased because we look back in faith to Jesus dying on the cross for us.

Justified Because of Faith (v. 26)

In **verse 26**, Paul says, "[God is] just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." Here we see he has been talking about the doctrine of justification. "Justify" is a legal term. It means to declare not guilty. Sometimes, we use the term "pardon." This is not accurate. To pardon is to release a guilty person from punishment. When a president offers a pardon, he isn't saying the person isn't guilty, he's merely saying they aren't to be punished. When God declares us not guilty, he makes us not guilty. He takes our sin away and we are made righteous, just, holy. This all takes place because of Christ's death on the cross. We receive the sentence of not guilty when we believe in Jesus. We are justified because of our faith in Jesus.

Justified to Live

Of course, God doesn't take away our sin so we can continue to live in sin. While there is nothing we can or must do to be justified, we are justified for a purpose, to live a holy life, pleasing to God. This is what it means to live by faith, as Paul says, (Read **Galatians 3:11**). We still have the sin nature, that desire to sin. But He has placed within us the desire and power to live for Him, His Holy Spirit. We do this by faith, when we hear the Word and receive the Sacrament. God comes to us through these, continuing to forgive our sins, strengthening our faith, and giving us the desire and power to follow Him. We go forth to follow Him in His Word. We live by faith alone. *Sola Fide!*

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