

Sola Fide (Faith Alone)

By Vicar Jake Zabel

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Sermon text: Romans 3:19-31

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

²⁰ Therefore by the works of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

²¹ But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; ²³ for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, ²⁴ being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, ²⁶ to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

²⁷ Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. ²⁹ Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, ³⁰ since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. ³¹ Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.

Book of Concord: *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, Article 4.77-78

We obtain the forgiveness of sins by **faith alone** in Christ, not through love, nor on account of love or works, although love follows faith. Therefore we are justified by **faith alone**, justification being understood as the making of a righteous person out of an unrighteous one or as regeneration.

Lord sanctify us by your truth, your Word is truth. Amen.

In 1522 Martin Luther released his German translation of the New Testament. In Romans 3:28 Luther included the word ‘alone’ (*allien* in the German). The word ‘alone’ (*monon* in the Greek) does not appear in the Greek text and thus does not appear in any other translation. However, Luther’s inclusion of the word ‘alone’ does not change the meaning of the text but instead clarifies it. The text reads “we are justified by faith apart from the works of the law.”

We are redeemed from sin freely by the grace of God (Rom. 3:24). By grace you have been saved. And this is the gift of God, and not of works, lest anyone should boast (Eph. 2:5,8-9). By works of the Law no one is justified (Rom. 3:20, Gal. 2:16). For by the Law comes the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20). The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the Law (1 Cor. 15:57).

God is a just judge, He cannot turn a blind eye to sin, He cannot tolerate it, He cannot simply forget about our sins. Sin must be punished. If a murderer was brought into court and the judge let him go because of the man's previous good works, then that judge would not be just. Regardless of that man's good works, his crime of murder must be punished.

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). None is righteous, no, not one (Rom. 3:10). No one can keep the Law perfectly, and thus no one can be saved by the Law. Paul says that the one who works, receives his wages (Rom. 4:4). And we know that the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). And unless the Law is kept absolutely you cannot be saved by the Law (James 2:10). All have fallen short, all are guilty. The one who is under the Law will be judged by the Law (Rom. 2:12). We know that whatever the Law says, it says to those who are under it, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may be guilty before God.

The Law brings wrath (Rom. 4:15). For sin warrants the wrath of God, and God must punish sin. No one can keep the Law and therefore all of us are guilty under the Law. All of us are deserving of punishment in time and in eternity. No one can be justified by the works of the Law. Therefore, redemption comes not by the works of the Law but by Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as propitiation by His blood. God poured out His wrath not upon the guilty but upon the innocent. Upon the one and only innocent man, Jesus, God placed the punishment for sin. By this, Christ's blood has washed us clean (Rev. 7:14). Our sins have been forgiven. And now we stand covered in the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God. Just as God passed over the houses marked by the lamb's blood in Egypt (Exod. 12:13,23), so too He now passes over our sins, on account of the blood of Christ.

In this way God remains both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. For by punishing sin, God has remained just. But in order to save mankind, God could not place the punishment on those who deserved it. Instead, in order to justify sinners, God placed the punishment upon Himself. In order to save mankind, Jesus, the Son of God and God Himself took on flesh (John 1:14). God loves us and He desires our salvation. And because God so loved the world He sent His only begotten Son to die in our place, so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). By punishing sin God remains a just judge, but by taking that punishment upon Himself, God becomes the justifier of all.

No one is justified by the works of the Law. By Christ alone have your sins been paid for. By grace alone you have been freely justified. And by faith alone a man is justified apart from the work of the Law. Jesus died to save the whole world. This redemption is given to all people, freely by grace, as a gift, lest any should boast. This is what we call Objective Justification. This redemption which comes by grace alone is

received not by our works, not by our doing, not by our choosing, but by faith alone. This is what we call Subjective Justification. He who believes in Jesus is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:18). Thus salvation comes not by works, but by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

As we approach Reformation 500, I have been preaching on the Solas, or alones, of the Reformation. Today we are looking at Sola Fide, that is Faith Alone.

The *Apology of the Augsburg Confession* states that, “this little word ‘alone’ offends some, even though Paul says in Romans 3:28 that a person is justified apart from the works of the Law. And again in Ephesians 2:8-9, ‘it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.’ And again in Romans 3:24 ‘justified freely by grace.’ If anyone dislikes this exclusive word ‘alone’ then let them also banish the exclusive terminology ‘freely’, ‘not by works’, ‘it is a gift’, etc. from Paul as well. For these, too, are exclusive.” (Art. IV.73).

Therefore, Luther’s inclusion of the word ‘alone’, in Romans 3:28, does not change the meaning of the text, but instead makes the meaning clear. For the verse clearly says that we are justified by faith apart from works. Therefore, Luther added the word ‘alone’ to make it clear that we are not justified on account of love or works but by faith alone in Christ Jesus. For God has become the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

God does not justify us by our works, for by the works of the Law no one can be justified (Rom. 3:20, Gal. 2:16). For those who live by the Law faith is void and the promise of God is destroyed (Rom. 4:14). For the one who works, his wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes in Jesus Christ, who justifies the ungodly, his faith will be reckoned to him as righteousness (Rom. 4:4-5). For justification is the making of a righteous person out of an unrighteous person, not by the works of man but by the works of Christ which are freely given by grace and received by faith.

The opponents of the Reformation, the Roman Catholics, deny justification by faith alone. Instead, the Catholics believe that a person is justified by faith and works. The favourite verse used by the Catholics to reject faith alone is James 2:24, which reads “you see that a man is justified by works and not faith alone.”

Wait a minute, ‘not by faith alone’, ‘justified by works’. OH NO! Scripture doesn’t teach ‘faith alone’, the whole Reformation is based on a lie, the entire Lutheran Church is coming undone. Looks like I better renounce Lutheranism and head off to the Catholic Church.

But hold on, didn't Paul say that we justified apart from works, that no one is justified by the Law, that salvation is a free gift of God, and that we are justified by grace through faith and not by works?

Could St. James be contradicting St. Paul? Could Scripture contain contradicts? To quote Paul, "certainly not!"

As the *Apology* states (Art. V.123), the Catholics believe that no single passage is supposed to contradict the Lutherans more than James 2:24. Yet as the Lutherans say, our response is easy and clear. James' words do not reject the Lutheran (Scriptural) teaching of faith alone, James' words do not contradict Paul, as long as the Catholics stop reading into them their own opinions about justification by works.

Yes, James says the words, 'justified by works and not faith alone', but context tells us what he means. When we read and interpret Scripture, we must remember three important things, "context, context, context."

Paul is writing to the saints at Rome (Rom. 1:7), Jews and Gentiles who are recent converts to Christianity. Those who have been living under the Law and need to hear that their works do not save them, but that salvation comes freely from Christ by grace through faith. James on the other hand is writing to the Jewish Christians scattered around the Roman Empire (James 1:1). James is responding to mature Christians (or at least those claiming to be Christian) who claim to have faith but do not have any works. Christians who coming upon a brother who is naked or hungry, say 'go in peace' but do nothing to help the one who is in need (James 2:14-16). James is not talking about justification by works instead James is talking about the difference between a living faith and a dead faith. James teaches that faith without works is dead (James 2:17, 20, 26). James teaches us that faith and good works are connected, that faith works together with good works, and that works are perfected by faith (v22). James is talking about true living Christian faith that is followed by good works, verses the false dead hypocritical faith that is not followed by works. As James said, "show me faith without works, and I will show you my faith by my works." (v18)

Faith and works are connected, as Luther said, trying to separate faith and good works is like trying to separate light and heat from a fire. The light and heat don't exist without the fire, and a fire cannot burn without producing light and heat. In the same way faith cannot exist without producing good works. For as Luther said, "faith is a living, busy and active thing. It is impossible for it not to do good works incessantly. It does not ask whether there are good works to do, but before the question rises, it has already done them, and is always doing them." As our reading from the *Apology* said, "love [and works] follows faith."

James was not teaching that we are justified by works and not faith alone. What James was teaching is that faith without works, is not justifying faith. Faith that is not

followed by works is dead and is not true Christian faith. As Jesus said in Matthew 7:16-20, we will know false teachers by their fruits, for a good tree produces good fruits and a bad tree, bad fruits. Those who have faith will seek to do good works. But those who do not seek to do good works do not possess true faith. As Luther said in the *Smalcald Articles* (3.13.2-3), “good works follow such [justifying] faith, renewal and forgiveness of sin.... Furthermore, we also say that if good works do not follow, then faith is false and not true.”

Paul agrees with James, that works must follow faith, otherwise faith is dead and is not true faith. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:2, if you have faith but do not have love, you are nothing.

For faith is not to be used as licence to sin. As Paul says in Romans 6:1-2 “Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who have died to sin live in it any longer?” Before Christ we were slaves to sin, but by grace received through faith we have been set free from sin and made slaves of righteousness. We have not been set free for sin but from sin. We have not been forgiven in order that we keep on sinning, instead we have been set free so that we may strive after holiness, that we may strive to keep the Law, that we may go forth and sin no more (John 4:14, 8:11).

Faith does not make the Law void. On the contrary faith establishes the Law (Rom. 3:31). James said “works are perfected by faith.” (James 2:22). Faith doesn’t remove the demands of good works, instead, faith permits us to do good works. For just as fire produces light and heat so too does faith produce good works. And just as fire cannot produce light or heat when there is no fire, so too where there are no good works faith is dead and there is not a true faith. As the *Apology* says, since faith is a new life, it produces new works. Thus James rightly denies that we are justified by a faith that is without works. (Art. V.129)

But when he says that we are justified by faith and works, he certainly does not mean that we are born again by works. Nor does he say that Christ is our propitiation only in part and that our works are part of our propitiation (Art. V. 130).

Faith produces good works, but we are saved not on account of those works, but by the faith that produces them. Faith establishes the Law (Rom. 3:31) but no one will be justified by the Law (Rom. 3:20). Faith produces good works, but we are justified by faith apart from good works (Rom. 3:28). We can only do good works because we have already been justified by grace through faith in Christ. We are only able to do good works because we are already saved, already forgiven. Our good works do not produce salvation, for they are only a result of our salvation, just as light and heat cannot create a fire but are merely products of the fire. Our works do not renew us, instead we do good works because we have been renewed. We only love because

Christ first loved us (1 John 4:19). Without Christ we can do nothing (John 15:5). Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). Before God our good works are nothing but filthy rags (Isa. 64:6). Only by faith can our good works ever be pleasing to God. For whatever does not come from faith is sin. (Rom. 14:23)

Even though our good works follow faith, they cannot save us. For even though we are saved, even though we have faith, we continue to do what we don't want to do and don't do what we should do (Rom. 7:15). For nothing good dwells in our sinful flesh (Rom. 7:18), therefore, by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified (Rom. 3:20). For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (v23).

But for our sake God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21). And through faith, the righteousness of God is given to all who believe in Jesus Christ.

You have been justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Salvation does not come through the works of man but by the works of Christ. Therefore, we conclude that you are justified apart from the works of the Law, by faith alone. Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Almighty and merciful God, we praise Your holy name. We praise You for Your witness to Yourself in your glorious creation, with all its wisdom and its wonders, and in all the blessings that come to us through them. We thank You, Father, for giving us a clearer and fuller message of Your truth in the Holy Scriptures. By the Spirit who inspired them, make us living stones in Your temple, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Above all, centre our lives in Your Son, whom You have sent as the living Word, to convey to all people Your full grace and truth.

We praise You that Your Son became a human being like us. We praise You that He has given us His life of perfect obedience to redeem our lives, and to set His example before us. We praise you that He has died to take on Himself our sins; and that He has risen to give us unending life. We praise You for making these blessings of Christ our own through Baptism and the gift of faith.

Grant that we may grow in them day by day, so that we may always be clothed with His righteousness and live the new life. By Your Spirit, help us to put to death the desires of our sinful natures, to put away all hatred and bitterness, to conquer all evil habits, and to live in fellowship with You.

Spirit of the living God, we praise You for bringing the Church into existence. By Your gracious power, renew it daily in faith and life. Move Your people to offer their whole selves to their Lord and to proclaim His saving love.

Give saving faith to the nations of the earth, that they may acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord, and live before You in obedience. Bless our country Australia with leaders whose consciences are guided by Your voice, and with citizens whose minds are fixed on doing Your will.

Bless all who are in some special need of Your help. Remember, in particular, those who are sick, or suffering physical or mental distress. Touch them with Your healing love, and show them what great things You have prepared for them.

O God, Creator, Saviour, and Advocate, help us during our days on earth to let Your light transform every area of our lives, and, when death comes, keep us for Your eternal kingdom. These things we ask in the precious name of Jesus Christ, who, together with You and the Holy Spirit, lives and rules, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

7th Sunday after Pentecost

Isaiah 44:6-8

⁶ This is what the LORD, Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD of hosts, has said: "I am the First and I am the Last, and there is no God except Me. ⁷ Who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it! Let him recount to Me what has happened since I established an ancient people! Then let them predict what is to come and what will happen to them! ⁸ Do not be terrified and do not be afraid! Have I not been telling you and declaring it from long ago? You are My witnesses. Is there any God except Me? There is no other Rock. I do not know of any."

Romans 8:18-27

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time do not deserve to be compared with the glory that is about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation is waiting with eager expectation to see the

revealing of God's children. ²⁰ For this created world has been subjected to futility, not by its own choice, but because of the One who subjected it; in hope, ²¹ because the created world itself will also be freed from its slavery to decay, in order to have the glorious freedom of the children of God. ²² For we know that all the creation has been groaning together with them, and labouring with birth-pangs together with them until now.

²³ Not only so, but we ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as His children, for the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For we have been saved by hope. If hope is seen, it is not hope. Who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ However, if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it, with patience.

²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit also helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what we are to pray for as we ought to, but the Spirit Himself pleads for us with groanings that cannot be uttered. ²⁷ He who searches our hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is. For the Spirit pleads for God's holy people according to God's will.

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

²⁴ He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ However, while people were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat came up and formed grains, then the weeds also showed up. ²⁷ The owner's slaves came to him and asked him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where have the weeds come from?'

²⁸ 'He told them, "An enemy has done this."

'The slaves asked him, "Do you want us to go and pull them out?"

²⁹ 'He said, "No. If you pull out the weeds, you may pull up the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest! When the grain is cut, I shall

tell the reapers, 'Gather the weeds first, and tie them in bundles to be burnt, but bring the wheat into my barn!'"'"' ...

³⁶ When Jesus had dismissed the crowds, He went into the house. His disciples came to Him and said, "Explain the parable of the weeds in the field to us!"

³⁷ He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. ³⁸ The field is the world. The good seeds are the people who belong to the kingdom. The weeds are the people who belong to the Evil One. ³⁹ The enemy who sowed them is the Devil. The harvest is the end of the age and the reapers are the angels. ⁴⁰ Therefore, as the weeds are gathered and burnt with fire, it will be like that at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send His angels, they will gather out of His kingdom all the things that cause sin and the people who continue to do evil, ⁴² and they will throw them into the fiery furnace. There people will weep and grind their teeth. ⁴³ Then righteous people will shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let the one who has ears listen!