

Catholics Misunderstand Sola Fide

Catholics continue to accuse Protestants of antinomianism, as if we teach that 'faith alone' implies that believers are not obliged to obey God's moral law and abound in good works. Catholics hear us speak of justification by 'faith alone' but they do not listen when we insist that *the faith that justifies is never alone in the life of the Christian*, but is a living faith, working through love!

The Westminster Confession summarizes the Protestant doctrine clearly, '[Faith] receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the *alone instrument* of justification; yet is it *not alone* in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love.'

If the Catholic charge were correct, it would be utterly fatal to Protestantism -- *sola fide* would be a false gospel -- for Christ Jesus certainly did not come to save sinners from the guilt and punishment of sin only, but from its power and pollution as well. He saves his people *from* their sin, not *in* their sin! So if someone professes to be a believer and yet is not sanctified, he is not a believer at all, and is not anymore justified than the devil himself.

But why do Catholics persist with their charge against us?

They know that faith without works is dead, as the Scripture so clearly teaches, and they often hear Protestants speak of justification by faith alone apart from our works. They rush to an unwarranted conclusion (faith alone = antinomianism) even though we explain that 'apart from works' means 'apart from the *merit* of works' and not 'apart from the *presence* of works.'

Moreover they hear some Protestants, who misunderstand Protestantism as much as they twist the teaching of the Apostle Paul and the rest of Scripture, teaching 'easy-believism'. These wolves in sheep's clothing in Protestant pulpits assure those who 'put their faith in Christ' (which often means no more than parroting the so-called 'sinner's prayer') that they are saved and eternally secure, 'once saved always saved,' even though there is no hard evidence that their faith is genuine and even though they continue to wallow neck-deep in sin. Still these false teachers insist that such people are saved by faith; that discipleship and holiness are desirable goals but not necessary for salvation; and that 'worldly' and 'backslidden' Christians will ultimately be saved nonetheless.

Their deception of these blind teachers will be exposed and the delusion of their blind followers will be shattered on that Day when the Lord solemnly declares to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers.'

We join Catholics in condemning easy-believism and antinomianism, but sadly we must part company when it comes to the 'purpose' of the works that follow after faith. For Catholics these works merit grace and eternal life; for us, works are the fruits and signs of justifying faith, for which God also rewards his children.

But justification *per se*, the legal status of right standing before God's tribunal, is not based on our works at all, neither in the beginning, nor in the end, or at any other time in between. We are justified by faith alone on account of Christ alone, and not on account of anything that we did or will ever do.

Yet this faith is not a cheap, worthless, putrefying counterfeit that is so often passed as true faith. The faith that justifies is the gift of God -- a pulsating, living faith in Jesus Christ that bears much fruit. Good works are the necessary outcome and evidence of true faith, but then, true faith never ever deviates its attention from Christ to anything else, not even to the good works that result from the vital union with Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in us. For justification, the Christian relies by faith 100% on Christ alone, and 0% on the Christ-wrought works in and through the believer.

A true Christian believes in Christ. A true Christian believes in Christ *alone* for justification! His works show! They show that his faith is real. They show, moreover, because he relies not on them for justification, but continues to hold on to Christ alone till his last breath.