

Week 1 - Sola Fide

By Faith Alone

Learning Objectives

- Understand what it means to be justified by faith alone.
- Reflect on how we live in light of this reality.

Pray for your time together as a group.

Read Out Loud:

500 years. 95 Theses. A church forever changed. We're going to take a dive into the Reformation. Luther's work, and that of subsequent reformers, has left a lasting impact on the Church as a whole. We'll spend several weeks discussing the five "solas" of the Reformation, and then work our way through the foundation of Calvinism—TULIP.

"Each of these Latin phrases [the five "solas"] represents a key area of doctrine that was an issue of contention between the Reformers and the Roman Catholic Church, and today they still serve to summarize key doctrines essential to the Gospel and to Christian life and practice. The Latin word sola means "alone" or "only" and the essential Christian doctrines represented by these five Latin phrases accurately summarize the biblical teaching on these crucial subjects: sola scriptura—Scripture alone, sola fide—faith alone, sola gratia—grace alone, sola Christus—Christ alone, and sola Deo gloria—for the glory of God alone. Each one is vitally important, and they are all closely tied together. Deviation from one will lead to error in another essential doctrine, and the result will almost always be a false gospel which is powerless to save." (<https://www.gotquestions.org/sola-fide.html>)

In Hebrews 11:1, Paul defines faith as "confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."

In this study we'll be focusing on the doctrine of *sola fide*, justification by faith alone.

Leader's Note: Because of the interconnectedness of all of the topics of this series, it will be easy for you to stray from one to the other over the course of your discussions each week. Please try to keep group members focused on the specific topic at hand so as to decrease the likelihood of having the "same" discussion each week.

Faith. Period.



Can you describe a time when you had to step out in faith? What happened?

Read Out Loud: Example of Faith in the Old Testament - The Story of Abraham

When we think about examples of faith in the Bible, Abraham often comes to mind. In Genesis, God called Abraham to leave his land and people, and everything that was familiar to him. God also made

several promises to Abraham, including the promise of blessing, land, and many descendants. Abraham and his wife Sarah were both beyond child-bearing age at the time, so the thought of one descendant, let alone many, seemed impossible. But “Abraham believed the Lord and it was credited to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6). And in the New Testament Paul explains that “Abraham grew strong in his faith, giving glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. This is why it was credited to him as righteousness” (Romans 4:20-22).

Here are just a few more places you can look to in the Old and New Testaments for helpful background on Abraham’s story: **Old Testament:** Genesis 16:1-6, 15-16; Genesis 17; Genesis 21:5, Genesis 22:1-18
New Testament: John 8:48-58, Galatians 3:5-9, Hebrews 11:8-10, 17-19.

? What do you think was going through Abraham’s mind when

God called him to leave his home and family? Can you think of other examples in the Bible where someone was called to step out in faith? What are they?

Possible Answers: He might have been wrestling with feelings of fear and doubt, but also may have felt hopeful that God chose him and promised him so much. Other examples could be the story of Moses, Ruth, Mary (Mother of Jesus), the apostles.

? Why did God credit righteousness to Abraham? What do you think righteousness means in this context?

Possible Answers: Abraham believed God. Righteousness as the state of being right with God (See sidebar for reference).

? How does this compare with the message of the Gospel that we hear today?

Possible Answers: Abraham was justified by faith and so are we. But we have the benefit of having more of God’s story revealed to us - we are trusting in Jesus’ death and resurrection for the forgiveness of our sins, and the promise that we will also share in His glory when He comes again.

The words **just**, **righteous**, and **righteousness** all stem from the same Greek (New Testament) and Hebrew (Old Testament) words. These terms refer to the perfection, uprightness, and justice of God’s character. Righteousness is also referred to as the state of being right with God (justified). Source: <http://biblehub.com/topical/r/righteousness.htm>

? Why do we need God to credit righteousness to us?

Possible Answers: Without having Christ’s righteousness credited to us, we are still enemies of God and dead in our sins - we have no hope of salvation apart from Christ because we all fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). But thankfully, Jesus bore our sins on the cross and when we put our hope in Him as Savior and Lord, His righteousness is given to us and we are reconciled to God. This is a one-time transaction, also known as justification.

Read Out Loud: Galatians 2:11-21 (NIV)

¹¹When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹²For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. ¹³The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

¹⁴When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?”

¹⁵“We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles ¹⁶know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

¹⁷“But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn’t that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! ¹⁸If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker.

¹⁹“For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. ²⁰I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

? What were Cephas and the other Jews doing that was upsetting Paul? Why do you think they were doing this?

Possible Answers: They were separating themselves from the Gentiles and refusing to eat with them. They were afraid of the circumcision group, the Jews that were still relying on the Old Testament Law.

? How were their actions “not acting in line with the truth of the gospel?” (vs. 14)

Possible Answers: The Gospel message is that Christ’s work on the cross is what determines our standing before God, not following laws - Cephas and the other Jews were separating from Gentiles when they should have been in fellowship with them - cr. Galatians 3:28: “there is neither Jew nor Gentile...”

During the Reformation period, under the leadership of Pope Leo X, The Roman Catholic Church issued the sale of indulgences for the forgiveness of sins. People were led to believe that these indulgences were the ticket to heaven for themselves and for their family members and friends. The promotion of these indulgences was often preached in place of the Gospel, and the money earned was used to pay for the construction of St. Peter’s basilica in Rome.

Source:

<http://lutheranreformation.org/theology/indulgences-then-and-now/>

? Why do you think Paul said that no one will be justified by works of the law?

Possible Answers: If we rely on works of the law, we are condemned because no one has ever, or will ever, follow the law perfectly (except for Jesus) - the only way we can be justified before God is through faith in Jesus - because Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience and was the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

? What do we try to add to our faith today to be justified?

Possible Answers: Good deeds, sacrifices, religious traditions/rituals, making promises to God (trying to bargain with Him).

? Which, if any, of these do you feel like you personally lean towards as a supplement (or replacement) for faith in Jesus? Why do you think that is?

Possible Answers: Believing God will love me more if I do good works, believing I have to follow the rules to be acceptable to God - could be a misunderstanding of the Gospel, what I grew up believing, what I learned in school or in church, etc.

? How does believing we are justified by faith alone vs. faith + _____ change the way we live?

Possible Answers: What we believe affects how we live - when we believe a false Gospel, it causes disunity and hypocrisy and we give up the freedom that comes from believing the true Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But What About Doubt?

Read Out Loud: We all go through seasons of life that challenge us in our faith. We might face difficult circumstances, deceptive teachings, or deep sin struggles that cause us to question God's promises. During these times of doubting, we can look to Thomas and other men and women in the Bible for encouragement. *(Other helpful passages: Judges 6:36-39 - Gideon; Genesis 17 - 18: Abraham and Sarah)*

Read Out Loud: John 20:24-31 (NIV)

²⁴ Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. ²⁵ So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

²⁶ A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" ²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

³⁰ Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.

³¹ But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

? What does God promise for those who put their faith in Jesus?

Possible Answers: Eternal life, freedom, hope, joy.

? What causes us to doubt these promises?

Possible Answers: I’m not good enough, I’ve made too many mistakes, I’m unforgivable, I’m unlovable, I don’t deserve salvation.

? What do you do when you have feelings of doubt about God’s promises?

Possible Answers: Read the Bible, pray, confide in friends, ask for others to speak truth to me, etc.

? Do you feel like you could relate more to Abraham, Thomas, or Cephas (Peter) (or a mix of the three)?

What resonated with you most from their stories?

Possible Answers: Cephas (Peter), because I slip into legalism and struggle with the fear of man; Abraham because I feel like God’s called me to take a leap of faith and it feels uncertain/impossible at times; Thomas because I struggle with believing that God is faithful (i.e. that He is for me, that I really am forgiven because of Christ, etc.).

For Discussion And Accountability

? Where are places you find yourself getting stuck, doubting, adding to or questioning Christ’s sufficiency when it comes to faith alone?

? How can we best come alongside you in these moments?