

Conference on the Church for God's Glory
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Union with Christ: The Heart of Sola Fide

Colossians 2:8–15 (ESV)

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. ¹¹ In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Introduction: *Sola fide* has been rightly lauded as the central concern of the Reformation. The focus of the reformers who framed this theological slogan was the doctrine of justification. They concluded that we are *justified* by faith alone. Martin Luther has been oft quoted as saying that justification is “the article by which the church stands and falls.”¹ In our contemplation of this doctrine, we cannot and must not treat it as if it stands alone. An essential doctrinal matrix upholds it. Each of the other *solas* supports it. This matrix extends beyond the five *solas* to include other crucial supporting truths. The burden of this sermon is to demonstrate that the doctrine of justification by faith alone rests upon union with Christ. In fact, while *sola fide* lay at the heart of the theology of the Protestant Reformation, union with Christ lies at the heart of Paul’s theology. It probes the issues more deeply. The Reformers asked, “how can a man be right with God.” They correctly answered, “God justifies the ungodly through faith alone” (Romans 4:5). This answer raises other questions. How can God do this and still be just? How does such a theory avoid the charge of “legal fiction?” Paul’s answer is union with Christ.

Today’s take-home truth: Christ is all you need.

I. Do not be deceived about how one can be right with God. 8

- A. Beware of empty, man-made teachings.
- B. You will only find this truth in the apostolic message of Christ.

¹ The Latin expression is, *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*. While no extant occurrence of these exact words exists in Luther’s writings, they certainly originated with Luther. Not only do they summarize his theological perspective well, but Balthasar Meisner described them as a “proverb of Luther” in 1615. See Philip J. Secker, ed., *The Sacred Scriptures and The Lutheran Confessions: Selected Writings of Arthur Carl Piepkorn*, vol. 2 (Mansfield, CT: CEC Press, 2007), 260.

II. Only those united with Christ have right standing with God. 9-12

- A. God lives fully in Christ. 9
- B. Christ lives fully in those united with him. 10
- C. Therefore, those united with Christ are right with God.
 - 1. God gives a new nature to those who are in Christ . . . 11
 - 2. because, through faith, they share Christ's death and resurrection. 12

III. All those united with Christ possess everything he accomplished. 13-15

- A. His life is ours. 13
- B. His righteousness is ours. 14
- C. His triumph is ours. 15