



Faith Alone---The Doctrine of Justification: What the Reformers Taught...and Why It Still Matters

Thomas R. Schreiner , Matthew Barrett (Editor)

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Historians and theologians have long recognized that at the heart of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation were five declarations, often referred to as the ‘solas’: sola scriptura, solus Christus, sola gratia, sola fide, and soli Deo gloria. These five statements summarize much of what the Reformation was about, and they distinguish Protestantism from other expressions of the Christian faith. Protestants place ultimate and final authority in the Scriptures, acknowledge the work of Christ alone as sufficient for redemption, recognize that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, and seek to do all things for God’s glory.

In *Faith Alone—The Doctrine of Justification* renowned biblical scholar Thomas Schreiner looks at the historical and biblical roots of the doctrine of justification. He summarizes the history of the doctrine, looking at the early church and the writings of several of the Reformers. Then, he turns his attention to the Scriptures and walks readers through an examination of the key texts in the Old and New Testament. He discusses whether justification is transformative or forensic and introduces readers to some of the contemporary challenges to the Reformation teaching of *sola fide*, with particular attention to the new perspective on Paul.

Five hundred years after the Reformation, the doctrine of justification by faith alone still needs to be understood and proclaimed. In *Faith Alone* you will learn how the rallying cry of “sola fide” is rooted in the Scriptures and how to apply this sola in a fresh way in light of many contemporary challenges.

Faith Alone---The Doctrine of Justification: What the Reformers Taught...and Why It Still Matters Details

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From Reader Review Faith Alone---The Doctrine of Justification: What the Reformers Taught...and Why It Still Matters for online ebook

Becky says

First sentence: One of the five rallying cries of the Reformation was the statement that we are saved by faith alone — sola fide! These words declared that salvation does not come from looking at our own works of righteousness, but from looking outside ourselves to another, to the person and work of Jesus Christ. This statement grew out of a desire to return to the biblical text and to the teachings of the early church fathers, a cry to reform the church and return it to biblical orthodoxy. I believe that the Reformation cry of sola fide should continue to be taught and treasured today because it summarizes biblical teaching, and God's Word never loses its transforming power. The Word of God speaks in every era and in every place.

Premise/plot: Faith Alone is the first in a five-book-series celebrating the Protestant Reformation. Each book has a different author. Faith Alone is by Thomas R. Schreiner. In his own words: "In this book I attempt to tour the historical teaching of the church, explain the scriptural teaching on justification, and provide some sense of contemporary relevance." The book is divided into three sections: "A Historical Tour of Sola Fide," "A Biblical and Theological Tour of Sola Fide," and "Contemporary Challenges to Sola Fide."

My thoughts: I'll start with the good news. Each chapter has a clear-and-obvious introduction and conclusion. He tells you exactly what the chapter will be about at the beginning. At the end, he sums the chapter up tidily reminding you exactly what his points were.

Unfortunately, the introductions and conclusions were the only parts that I was able to grasp. It wasn't the subject matter that made it dense and hard to read. It wasn't. The subject can--and often is--presented in a way that is for everyone. There are books on the subject that feel almost like a devotional because they are packed with rich insights and shining gospel truths. There are books on the subject that can lift the weight of the world off your shoulders. There is something liberating and freeing and GLORIOUS and WONDERFUL on the subject of justification by faith alone. It wasn't the subject. It was the style.

I was not the right audience for this book...apparently.

Steve Taylor says

Some helpful thoughts, but I could not disagree more strongly than his invented idea of Final Justification being dependent upon works.

CJ Bowen says

Excellent summary presentation of the doctrine of justification, considered historically and biblically/theologically. Moves the ball forward on the role of good works in justification, although more needs to be done. Special sections critiquing ECT/Neuhaus, Beckwith, and Wright, with shorter critiques of

Mannermaa, Campbell, and Leithart.

Wyatt Graham says

Tom Schreiner has written a non-technical overview of faith alone and/or justification. Schreiner provides a simple overview of justification throughout church history but focuses more on current discussions of the doctrine as well as biblical passages on sola fide and justification.

If the topic is new to you or you want to understand the basic contours of these issues, take a read. But definitely get Horton's two-volume book on justification for a more detailed and profound understanding of the doctrine.

Graham Heslop says

Solid biblical presentation and defence of the Protestant view of justification. Schreiner handles history very well, refusing to smooth over the nascent doctrine of the early church. But his historical tour is far too brief. His book instead shines in his handling of Scripture and more contemporary debates.

Brian says

Excellent. I think this is the best entry in this Five Solas series.

Omar says

I found this book to be a deep overview, if such a thing can be.

I appreciated his examination of Justification throughout history and in the face of contemporary opposition. I found his pursuit of the truth to be challenging, yet refreshing; he is not content to use only “proof texts” that say what he wants the Bible to say, but he considers all biblical passages on the topic.

This book definitely gave me a lot to think about.

Summary Quote:

“Faith doesn’t save as if it constitutes our righteousness. It saves because it unites us to Jesus Christ, who is our righteousness and our only hope on the day of judgment.”

Ryan says

Clear, readable, enjoyable, worshipful.

Craig Hurst says

“We are talking about standing before God on the last day, on the day of judgment, and sola fide answers that question: How will we stand before the Holy One of Israel?”

With the Pope’s recent visit to the US, the differences between Catholic and Protestant theology on a number of key issues has come to the forefront of the internet. It is occasions like this that bring to remembrance those important doctrines that divide us. Doctrines that cut to the heart of the Gospel and our understanding of God’s work in Christ in salvation.

Once such doctrine is justification. The doctrine of justification was the foundational match with which Luther sparked the fire of the Reformation. “Justification by faith alone!,” was the battle cry of the Reformation. But while the Reformation may have popularized and brought to the forefront of Christian’s minds this important aspect of justification, the Reformational mantra of sola fide (justification by faith alone) was not born with Luther. It was already a part of orthodox theology because it was a part of Scripture.

Sola fide is one of five Reformation slogans which form the basis for a new series of books titled The 5 Solas Series from Zondervan and is edited by Matthew Barrett. The first book in this series is Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification by Thomas Schreiner. In the span of just over 250 pages, Schreiner carefully unpacks the historical development of sola fide, the biblical and theological grounds for the doctrine, and the continuing contemporary challenges to the doctrine.

From an historical perspective it would be easy to see the birth of sola fide within the Reformation period. But this would be wrong. The roots of the churches belief in this doctrine runs back much further – to the first century. Schreiner charts a path from the first century church fathers all the way to Edwards and Wesley. While sola fide may not have been the major focus of the church until the Reformation, it was by no means tucked away in a closet.

What will be quite shocking for some readers is to see the diversity of belief, especially among those of the Reformed tradition, on the relationship between justification and faith. For example, Richard Baxter, while believing in single imputation (that there is forgiveness of sins in Christ) did not believe in the imputation whereby Christ’s righteousness is credited to the believer (76-77). Further, after surveying Edwards position on the issue, Schreiner concludes that his “writings on justification lack clarity, and hence he is interpreted in different ways.” (89)

From a biblical and theological perspective, Schreiner goes to work in the second section succinctly hammering out the various aspects of sola fide. He makes a convincing cumulative case that the biblical authors clearly taught justification by faith alone. He shows the reader that justification is needed because of sin (our inability to keep the law), that it is by faith alone and not by works (though works are the fruit of true faith), that, while justification is ultimately eschatological, “the end-time declaration has been pronounced in advance by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ,” and the “future is revealed and announced in the present.” (156)

In addition to laying out the biblical and theological basis for sola fide, Schreiner takes the time to address a number of challenges to the doctrine. For one, the work of N. T. Wright on justification has forever shaped and permeated the discussion, and will so for generations to come. Schreiner ably responds to Wright’s rejection of imputed righteousness as found in texts like Romans 5:12-19 (see chap. 15). An entire chapter is

spent addressing the “faith in Christ” vs. “faithfulness of Christ” controversy. While I think he overstates the significance of the issue and his defense of the “faith in Christ” reading, he fairly presents those who hold to the “faithfulness of Christ” reading.

Closing out the book is a section on the contemporary challenges to sola fide. Here, Schreiner returns again to respond to some of the challenges by Roman Catholic, N. T. Wright, and others to sola fide. While he gave a defense for justification as forensic in chapter thirteen (over against the transformative view), Schreiner returns to this in chapter seventeen with a greater focus on the Roman Catholic documents. The RC church sees it as (like Augustine) an act of sanctification rather than an event and declaration about one's current position before God in Christ. In regards to Wright, Schreiner further parses out the problems with his rejection of imputed righteousness and why it is not enough to locate justification within ecclesiology but must also be tied to (and more primarily so) soteriology. Reading Schreiner list a number of things he agrees with Wright on, it further confirmed for me my thoughts towards Wright – I either really like what he says or really disagree with him; there is almost no middle ground when it comes to Wright.

While recognizing that the doctrine of justification is complex, Faith Alone manages to succinctly lay out a convincing historical, biblical and theological case for justification by faith alone. This is a mid-range level book that will require thoughtful reflection. Schreiner is thoroughly biblical and his confidence in his position shines through as he does not shy away from presenting alternative views to his.

This is an enjoyable book to read that will deepen your faith in sola fide. I look forward to the rest of the books in this series.

I received this book for free from Zondervan for this review. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255 : “Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising.”

Lance Kinzer says

If this book had not included John Piper's highly problematic Forward I would have leaned toward 4 stars. The best thing about this book is that, when taken in its entirety, it offers a very clear defense of the importance of sola fide against a wide range of critics, by stressing the scriptural basis for the imputation of Christ's righteousness through his active and passive obedience. That said, for what is I believe intended as an introductory work, the scope and technical nature of the issues covered was probably a bit overly ambitious given the likely audience.

Drake says

This was actually a very different book than I thought it would be. Having read two other books in the Five Sola series, I thought I knew pretty much what to expect from Schreiner's volume on Sola Fide. Not so. Instead of a sweeping biblical survey of the doctrine of justification of faith alone, Schreiner spends most of his space interacting with and critiquing New Testament scholars over the past hundred years who have sought to reinterpret the apostle Paul in such a way as to deny the doctrine that Martin Luther trumpeted (primarily Roman Catholic interpreters and representatives of the "New Perspective on Paul"). This is by no

means a criticism of the book, however, as Schreiner gives a tight, exegetical response to attacks on this extremely important doctrine of the Christian faith. Some sections I found particularly helpful were (1) his chapter on the early church fathers' view of justification, (2) his discussion of "faith in Christ" versus "the faithfulness of Christ," (3) his treatment of the concept of "righteousness" in the Old Testament, and (4) his response (given throughout the book but especially in the final two chapters) to N. T. Wright's arguments against justification. The only chapter I felt was unnecessary was his chapter on the beliefs of Edwards and Wesley, which I felt was somewhat confusing and did not really add anything to the overall argument of the book. Nevertheless, I would highly recommend the book to anyone looking for a rigorous, exegetical defense of Sola Fide against the claims of much of modern New Testament scholarship.

Brian Watson says

[Finished reading November 13, 2017. Yes, I'm catching up on reviews.]

This is an excellent book on justification by faith alone in Christ alone. Schreiner is a top-notch theologian and he makes a clear case for the truth of this doctrine by examining its history, showing that it existed before the Protestant Reformation (early statements are found in 1 Clement and the Epistle to Diognetus). Schreiner then turns to the biblical evidence and responds to recent charges against this doctrine by Francis Beckwith (a Catholic who became an evangelical Protestant and then a Catholic again) and N. T. Wright. His arguments against Catholic protestations and the New Perspective on Paul are clear, biblical, and persuasive.

I have now read all of Zondervan's 5 Sola Series and this is the best one, in my opinion. As with the other books in this series, I wish Zondervan had printed these using better paper (the paperback has paper that feels like a thicker version of newspaper; I don't think it will age well) and a hardcover or casebound binding. These books were printed for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, but they deserve to have a long shelf life.

Mike E. says

The quality of this volume is above that of the only other volume in the series I have read to this point. Included is a helpful chapter on Beckwith's journey from evangelicalism to Roman Catholicism as Schreiner is one who made the reverse journey. Schreiner deals cogently and concisely with the New Perspective, N.T. Wright, R. H. Gundry, et. al. The book is a helpful tour & defense of the NT's presentation of sola fide and the imputed righteousness of Christ.

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QUOTES

But when our unrighteousness was fulfilled, and it has been made perfectly clear that its wages -- punishment and death -- were to be expected, then the season arrived during which God had decided to reveal at last his goodness and power (oh, there's a passing kindness and love of God!). He did not hate us, or reject us, or bear a grudge against us; instead he was patient and forbearing; in his mercy he took upon himself our sins; he himself gave up his own Son as a ransom for us, the holy one for the lawless, the guiltless for the guilty, "the just for the unjust," the incorruptible for the corruptible, the immortal for the mortal. For what else but his righteousness could have covered our sins? In whom was it possible for us, the lawless and ungodly, to be justified, except in the Son of God alone? Oh the sweet exchange, oh the

incomprehensible work of God, oh the unexpected blessings, that the sinfulness of many should be hidden in one righteous man, while the righteousness of one should justify many sinners! ["Epistle to Diognetus" cited on p. 29]

Though biblical writers don't always pause to say that such works are the fruit of faith, there is sufficient evidence to clarify that works are a vital expression of faith. (199)

Matt Pitts says

Solid, wide-ranging, and gracious.

E says

Tom Schreiner is an excellent guide through the doctrine of justification by faith alone. He covers a ton of ground in this volume. He looks at the historical background of this doctrine, especially around the time of the Reformation (the book is part of a series on the five solas released around the 500th anniversary of 1517). He then covers the Biblical evidence while addressing all of the current debates--is it "faith in Jesus Christ" (as our Bibles usually translate it) or "faithfulness of Jesus Christ" (an equally valid translation of the Greek)?; just what is the "righteousness of God"? can it be imputed? why are good works necessary for final justification if it is "by faith alone"? and so on. He answers all of these questions in the traditional Reformed way, yet he's not just hewing to the party line--he turns to Scripture while turning back the alternative challenges. He closes with responses to the new perspective on Paul and to Francis Beckwith, a prominent evangelical who returned to Rome.

As I said, great material in this book. The editing left much to be desired (the hundreds of contractions were a constant distraction, for example), as did the material book itself (super cheap paper; flimsy cover). Yet Schreiner shines yet again.
