Sola Fide ~ the Forgotten Doctrine

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The doctrine of *Sola Fide* (faith alone) which teaches that God *imputes* (credits, accounts,) *His* righteousness to our account is the very edge of the wedge that divides Biblical Christendom from all other religions and cults!

The doctrine of imputation is like a sister to justification. You cannot have one without the other. Imputation means to transfer from one account to the other. An illustration of this could be the idea of transferring a credit amount to a debit amount, or attaching a credit statement over the top of a debit invoice. Spiritually, this is not an inner matter but a *legal*, *forensic*, and *external* thing declared in the courts of Heaven. This divine act makes us legally righteous in the sight of God. This is done by grace through *faith* and *without works*, (Eph.2:8,9), - in other words, *faith alone,* (*'Sola Fide'*).

Today's ecumenical movement to Rome either ignores this doctrine or waters it down. Historic Evangelicism says that grace is not infused but is *imputed* by Christ alone and without works. However, Rome says that God's righteousness is not imputed but rather instilled or *infused into* us through the *sacraments* and *works* of the Roman Catholic religion. This begins at infant baptism where grace is first infused into the baby so as to delete original sin. This grace then has to be renewed regularly. The Vatican says: ***'Justification is conferred in baptism… it conforms us to the righteousness of God...'*** Roman Catholic 'justification' actually follows 'sanctification' and followers must be constantly gaining a personal righteousness through the sacraments and other works. The Roman Catholic sacramental system arguably becomes a surrogate Christ, since only by these means (the sacraments) does an *'unrighteous man becomes righteous'* (1) Note how the tense here is in the *ongoing future*.

However, the Biblical stance on Justification refers to a past thing, (e.g. Rom.5:1,9; 8:1). The so called infusion of grace through the Roman Catholic sacramental system in practice becomes a *works* programme attempting to obtain righteousness with God. Yet Romans 4:5 says: ***'But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted*** [imputed] ***for righteousness'.*** This verse says at least four things in regard to salvation:

1. That the justified *does not work*
2. The justified trusts in *another*
3. The Lord justifies the *sinner*
4. The justified one does not have faith in his own faith but sees his faith as only *'counted'* (imputed, not infused) to him for righteousness.

The word *'counted'* here is the Greek word 'logizimai' and this same word is mentioned no less than *eleven* times in this one chapter of Romans! Here the Greek word is translated as several different English words: ***'counted'*** (vs.3,5); ***'reckoned'*** (vs.4,9,10); and ***'imputed'*** (vs.6,8,11,22,23,24). Other passages in the New Testament also translate 'logizomai' as '***reasoned'***, (Mk.11:31); ***'numbered',*** (Mk.15:28); ***'thinkest'***, (Rom.2:3); '***conclude***', (Rom.3:28); ***'accounted'***, (Rom.8:36); ***'esteemeth',*** (Rom.14:14); ***'thought'***, (1Cor.13:11); ***'suppose'***, (2Cor.11:5); and ***'charge'***, (2Tim.4:16).

This imputation of righteousness is an *outside* thing which legally justifies us, and must not be confused with sanctification, an *inside* work done by the Spirit of Christ within. The reformers called the righteousness of justification an *'alien'* ('alienum') righteousness - a righteousness residing with an-other and given by another, on our behalf,

(Is.45:24,25; Acts 13:39; 1Cor.6:11; Eph.1:7). This *substitutionary* righteousness exists in Christ and resides in Heaven . Our righteousness is ***'the lord our righteousness'***, (Jer.23:6).

The Reformation brought the Bible back to the people and the people back to the Bible. It forced a counter-reformation from Rome. Rome stated: *'If anyone says that the guilt is remitted to every penitent sinner after the grace of justification has been received, and that the debt of eternal punishment is so blotted out that there remains no debt of temporal punishment to be discharged either in this world or in the next in Purgatory… let him be anathema [cursed]* (2). .. *'If anyone says that by the said sacraments… grace is not conferred through the work worked but that faith alone… is sufficient for obtaining the grace, let him be anathema [cursed]."*(3) …*'If anyone says that men are justified either by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ alone… let him be anathema* [cursed].' (4)

Yet what do the Scriptures say?: ***'Abraham believed God and it was counted*** ['logizomai'] ***unto him for righteousness… his faith is counted*** ['logizomai'] ***for righteousness… God imputes*** ['logizomai'] ***righteousness with-out works… faith was reckoned*** ['logizomai'] ***to Abraham for righteousness… it was imputed*** ['logizomai'] ***to him for righteousness… it was imputed*** ['logizomai'] ***to him… it shall be imputed*** ['logizomai'] ***if we believe on him.***.., (Rom. Ch.4:) ***'...not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is of the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith,*** (Phil.3:9). The latter phrase is literally translated 'a righteousness from God', (*'dikaiosune Theou'*).

In short, Biblically *there is no justification without imputation!*

What part does faith play in this sovereign act of God? Faith alone is the *instrument* of justification. '***For by grace are ye saved through faith*** ['dia pistei'] ***and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. Not of works lest any man should boast',*** (Eph.2:8,9). The use of the preposition 'dia' (***'through'***) with the word 'pistei' (***'faith'***) shows clearly that even faith in itself is not any grounds for *merit* for salvation. If it were, the words used would be *'dia ten pistin'* or *'on the ground of'*; *'on account of'*. Whenever faith is connected to salvation it is presented only as a *means* of justification. Faith can be likened to an empty vessel. *Faith has no merit in itself* and is a ***'gift'*** from God. Therefore, ultimately justification is on the grounds of *Christ* and *His* righteousness *alone*.

What part does works play in salvation? *Initially, none. We are saved apart from the merit of works, but not apart from the presence of works after salvation*, (Eph.2:10; James 2:14-18). Faith alone saves but that true faith will have works. Faith is linked with works like a train engine is linked to the carriages by its couplings. Without the couplings the engine will not move a single carriage. *The only way we can ever perhaps say we are saved by works is by the once and for all perfect work of Jesus Christ!*

Such a salvation is in fact ***'not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy',*** (Rom.9:16). God must first draw the sinner before man can be saved: ***'No man can come to me except the Father which has sent me draw him:...'***, (Jn 6:44). A sinner by nature will not seek God (Rom.3:11,12), unless first drawn! Then he or she must receive the truth of Jesus Christ to be saved, (Matt.23:37; Rom.9:16; Jn.1:12,13). At salvation, the sovereign grace which imputes the righteousness of Christ through faith alone justifies and separates the sinner from the penalty of the law and sin.

Today justification is being confused with sanctification. We must *distinguish* between the two yet *not separate* them. Christ *without* is the ground for *justification* and the Spirit of Christ *within* is the fruit of sanctification. Only one, (justification), is the *cause* of right standing with God; the other, (sanctification), is the *effect* of right standing with God.

Sanctification in itself and by itself it does not make a sinner righteous before God. In practical terms any form of 'holiness' or good works that does not stem from the imputed righteousness that comes from the saving grace of God is nothing more than human effort and 'filthy rags' to God.

On the other hand, justification without sanctification is impossible. Justification *declares* the sinner righteous, sanctification produces the fruit of that transacted declaration. One is legal and complete, the other is progressive and incomplete until the day we meet Jesus. One gives us the title for Heaven, the other prepares and trains us for Heaven. One gives us the right of salvation, the other begins at salvation and then progressively works it out. One is objective, the other is subjective. But God does not give justification without also giving the free gift of the Holy Spirit to sanctify us, conforming us into the image of Christ in holiness.

Therefore there should be no such thing as a fruitless Christian - this would defy Jesus words himself that 'a good tree will produce good fruit', and also James' words that 'faith without works is dead'. Justification without holiness (sanctification) is as a (false) faith without works - dead and not genuine.

Those that are justified through the imputed righteousness of Christ manifest in varying degrees, the fruits of the faith. They will have the fruit of repentance, (Lk.3:8); the fruit of holiness (Rom.6:22); the fruit of righteousness, (James 3:18;

Heb.12:11; 2Cor.9:10; Phil.1:11); the fruit of the Spirit, (Gal.5:22); and the fruit of works, (Col.1:10). They should be *obedient* to Christ and *follow* Him and His Word, (Lk.14:26-33). They should deny themselves, take up their cross, and count everything else as *dung* by comparison, (Phil.3:8). This is the standard Christians look to, yet arguably is lacking in the fruit of modern Western evangelism!

The doctrine of justification by faith through the imputed righteousness of Christ, like any truth, can fall into extremes. On one side there is 'antinomianism'; on the other 'legalism'. Both are well used by Satan to divert the church from the truth.

The twentieth century has seen a cancerous 'easy believism' where multitudes have made 'professions', 'Confessions' and 'decisions' of faith, arguably causing many to assume they are saved despite there being questionable or no evidence of sanctification (holiness). The progress of this cancer ends up in 'Antinomianism' ('against the law') - a term denoting the thinking that Christians can remain carnal, continue in sin, keep the baggage of the world, and generally lack holiness, and yet call themselves and be called 'Christian'. ***'What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we who are dead to sin live any longer therein?',*** (Rom.6:1,2)… ***'for sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law but under grace. What then, shall we sin because we are not under the law, but under grace? God Forbid.',*** (Rom.6:14,15)**…** ***'is Christ therefore the minister of sin. God forbid',*** (Gal.2:17).

The other extreme is 'legalism'. This was the error of the Galatian legalists who added to the salvation Gospel various laws. Paul condemned it as ***'another gospel',*** (Gal.1:6-9). This adding of something to the true Gospel can take many forms, whether it be adding Old Testament laws, as the Galatians had

done, or adding mans rules, rituals and regulations - even to what you eat and drink, (see Col.2:16), and even wear. Roman Catholicism is fundamentally similar to the Galatian heresy whereby laws, works and sacraments are *added* to the Gospel. This form of legalism may even use terminology such as salvation 'by grace alone'; 'by grace through faith'; and even the 'imputed righteousness of Christ'. But the understanding of these terms is often different to the historical, orthodox and Biblical teaching down through the ages. Often these terms are used to hide the many *added* sacraments, rules and rituals that become *'leaven'* to the truth.

Sometimes the dividing line between error and truth is only a wisp away. Truth has boundaries, error has none. If the boundaries are not clearly defined and unbroken, error creeps in and the 'leaven' spreads like a cancer. *Sola Fide* steers a course between two evils - antinomianism on one side, and a legalistic works righteousness on the other. The former cares not to test the faith to see if it is genuine, (2Cor.13:5; 2Pet.1:10); the latter *adds* something to the faith that justifies.

The doctrine of *Sola Fide* has brought true revivals down through the centuries. The first Great Awakening in America under Jonathan Edwards came when he preached on *Sola Fide!* Today there are groups both Roman Catholic and Evangelical who are showing great interest in experiences and 'revival' phenomena, supposedly of the Holy Spirit. Charismatic/ Pentecostal type 'revivals' now share familiar impartation theology to Rome. Evangelicals are now majoring on the Pentecostal type infusion of power and experiential 'anointings'. This activity is uniting the two groups and Evangelicals are now looking favourably upon Rome.

Today we are closer than ever to Rome, not just in the current ecumenical movement but in doctrine! In short, today's 'revivals' increasingly centre around mystical experiences and phenomena. Few realise how close this is to a false Catholic and mystical type sanctification. Yet, hundreds of ecstatic religious experiences will not make anyone right with God! Only the imputed righteousness of Christ alone does this.

The emphasis has indeed swung from Christ to a counterfeit spirit. This is helping to build the apostate ecumenical church of the end-times. Multitudes are worshipping the spirit. This is not the desire of the Holy Spirit but rather it must *grieve* Him. *The Holy Spirit never attracts attention to Himself and only ever points to and glorifies Christ's finished work*, (Jn.16:13,14). No work of the Holy Spirit in itself gives us righteousness with God but only the *finished* work of Christ. The gift that God gives those who receive Him is the Holy Spirit to work out our salvation within us. The fruit of the Spirit is not the ground for righteousness before God but rather the result of it. The only righteousness we have is not in us but in Christ and through His blood.

It is crucial at this time that the church teach again such Biblical truths as Justification by faith alone through the imputed righteousness of Christ. Why has God blessed this teaching in the past with massive revivals and awakenings? Perhaps it is because it simply glorifies God instead of man!; perhaps it highlights the sovereignty of God; perhaps it gives man a higher view of salvation and therefore a passion for holiness!

We are commanded to be ***'perfect'*** (Matt.5:48), which is humanly *impossible* - except *positionally* in Christ! This is logically why justification and the imputed righteousness must be all the work of God and not of man. It is a forensic and legal declaration made in the courts of Heaven.

Dear readers, if we have trusted Jesus as Lord and Saviour then we run to, and trust in His righteousness alone. We place our faith in His finished work alone. The object of our faith is *Him* - the Lord Jesus Christ! Our hope is based in His blood and His *imputed righteousness!*

(1) *'Grace and Gifts'*, Trent, Sess.6, Ch.7

(2) Trent Session 6, canon 30

(3) Trent Session 7, canon 8.

(4) Trent Session 6 canon 11.

About the Author and the Ministry

Terry Arnold holds a Doctorate in Theology (Dth), a Masters degree (MABS) and several diplomas. He was founder and president of *South Pacific Bible Institute*, a Bible college training and equipping people for ministry. In addition he was the founder of Hervey Bay Bible Church in Queensland, Australia. He has for 25 years served as an elder and then pastor.

Terry is the author of several books and is involved in a full time ministry of *teaching*, *informing* and *equipping* the church. He is also editor of a growing worldwide publication '*Diakrisis (Australia)*'.

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TA Ministries is a non-denominational and non-profit faith ministry founded in 1989 when the book *'To Catholics Whom I Love*' was written by Terry Arnold. This book went through several re-prints and served as a fruitful outreach to Roman Catholics.

In 1996 the ministry became a full-time operation with the introduction of a free newsletter, later named '*Diakrisis (Australia)*'.

Diakrisis is published bi-monthly to *teach*, *inform* and *equip* the church of Biblical truths and to warn of false teaching. It has also been a valuable reference aid to hundreds of pastors/elders.