

## The Main Thing

It is no small thing that these “*five solas*” were given in order to **clarify the essentials of Christian teaching**. They show us what is at the heart of the Gospel, the message of the person and work of Jesus Christ. They teach us exactly what is central to the Christian Faith and what is required to have an orthodox or genuine profession of the Historic (what the true Church has always maintained) and Apostolic (what Jesus and the Apostles taught) Christian Faith. In other words, they teach what the “*main thing*” in Christianity really is. How could the Church have gotten so far from the central teaching about Christ and salvation? Well the truth is, we are in a constant struggle to reaffirm the truth of the Gospel to each successive generation because our enemy the Devil is waging war against the truth of the Gospel in every generation. He is always reinventing old lies into new ways to deceive us and obscure the true Gospel. He represents himself as a beacon of light and truth with false prophets and teachers, but their message is only a bit of truth, perverted into a devious lie which robs the Gospel message of its power to save.

**2 Corinthians 11:13-15** - 13 For **such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ**. 14 And no wonder, **for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light**. 15 Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds. NASB

As we look around in our world, just as with any period of Church History, we can see perversions of the Gospel by false prophets and false teachers abounding everywhere. This has been true ever since the first century when the Apostles contended for the truth of the Gospel in their own generation. Of this fact, our Lord and the Apostles strictly warned.

**Matthew 24:11** - "And **many false prophets will arise**, and will mislead many. NASB

**2 Peter 2:1-3** - But false prophets also arose among the people, just as **there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies**, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. 2 And many will follow their sensuality, and **because of them the way of the truth will be maligned**; 3 and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. NASB

Therefore it is incumbent upon each new generation to clarify and to preach the Gospel with conviction and with clarity. Lest we think that we will not succumb to the deceitfulness of Satan or his schemes of deception, we must keep the main thing “*THE Main Thing!*” We must continually test ourselves and the things we believe in order to always maintain the purity and simplicity of the Gospel.

**2 Corinthians 11:2-4** - 3 But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, **your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ**. 4 For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, **or a different gospel which you have not accepted**, you bear this beautifully. NASB

**1 John 4:1** – 1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but **test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world**. NASB

From the Reformers then, we have learned a huge and unmistakable lesson about essential Christian Doctrine. They have clarified and recorded for us the essential message of the Gospel and the doctrine of Salvation. These “*five solas*” then are great way for us to keep the essentials always before us. Let us not enthrone the Reformers or the banners that they carried, but let us instead enthrone the Lord Jesus, the living Word and know and understand the truth and principle about Him that the Reformers clarified so well for us. The heart of the Gospel and the Kingdom of God is the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is the center of Christian salvation and the centerpiece of Christian worship. Let us not forget to keep Him as the “*main thing*” and always keep our eyes fixed upon Jesus! Let us say with the Apostle Paul, “*I am determined to nothing but Christ and Him crucified!*”

**1 Corinthians 2:1-2** - 2 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For **I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified**. NASB

## The Elements of Justification

In the beginning of the Puritan era, Christians were seeking to continue to define and purify their doctrine and drew up several *catechisms* and various *confessions* of faith in order to define the parameters of their faith. In 1646 the Church of England, by the minds and hands of the Westminster Assembly, drew up their own confession which was called the **Westminster Confession of Faith**. From this confession, both Baptist and Congregation Churches also drew up confessions which were actually just modified arrangements of the Westminster. Later the Westminster was officially adopted by the Presbyterians and the Church of Scotland and so most Protestant branches of Christianity had roots which sprung from this comprehensive confession of faith. At this time, Christians were also busy writing catechisms to have standards for teaching the faith to future generations. From these efforts many great catechisms were developed including one that the Westminster Assembly drew up which is called the Westminster Larger and Shorter catechisms. These documents were very helpful in defining many of the different aspects of biblical doctrine. Now concerning the doctrine of Justification, the Westminster catechism asks in question number 32....

### Q. What is Justification.

A. Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins, (Rom 3:24, Eph 1:7) and accepts us as righteous in His sight (2 Cor 5:21) only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, (Rom 5:19) and received by faith alone. (Gal 2:16, Phil 3:9)

Now this statement gets right to the heart of what Justification in the biblical sense really is. It is broken down into four parts as follows....

- **Justification is an act of God's free grace** - God's work, given freely(at no cost to the beneficiary, flowing from the gracious character of God)
- **wherein he pardons all our sins** – It is a legal(forensic) term dealing with Law and includes pardon from sin, God is pictured as Judge
- **and accepts us as righteous in His sight only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us** – Righteousness is also a legal(forensic) matter which comes by imputation
- **and received by faith alone** – Faith is seen as the means of reception or appropriation

This description of Justification speaks to us clearly about the basic *elements* of Justification. They tell us of the nature of Justification, of what it is like and how it functions in God's plan of Redemption. With these elements in mind, let us look a little closer and understand how these are described in the Bible.

**Justification is an act of God's free grace** – The Scripture clearly ascribes justification as being an act of God.

**Romans 8:33** - 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? **God is the one who justifies**; NASB

**Galatians 3:8** - 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that **God would justify the Gentiles by faith**, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the nations shall be blessed in you." NASB

As the Scripture describes this act, it also clearly describes it as flowing from God's gracious character and identifies it as a free gift (at no cost) given to the beneficiary. Justification in the Bible is always free and always associated with God's grace.

**Romans 3:24-26** - 24 **being justified as a gift by His grace** through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; 25 **whom God displayed** publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; 26 for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that **He might be just and the justifier** of the one who has faith in Jesus. NASB

**Romans 5:16-17** - 16 And **the gift** is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand **the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification**. 17 For if by the transgression of the one,