

Important Creeds and Councils of the Christian Church

By Charles R. Biggs

Many Thanks to William Barker, Daryl Hart, and Clair Davis for their Church History Lectures. Also to John Gerstner, Philip Schaff, and Williston Walker. I have benefited from their writings.

Class XII: The Council of Trent (1546 - 1564) II: The Fall of Ecclesiastical Rome - Sola Fide

Gen. 15; Job 9:2, 32-35; Romans 3:20-28; Romans 4:2-8, 4:20-25

The Formal and Material cause of the 16th Century Reformation

Justification by Faith and Justification by Faith Alone

The relationship and distinction between justification and sanctification

Imputation and Infusion

Instrumental cause of justification: faith or the sacraments (baptism & penance)

The Council of Trent (1546 - 1564): Session VI "On Justification"

The Formal and Material Cause of the Reformation

The Formal cause of the Reformation was Scripture Alone, or Sola Scriptura. The Material cause, or the teaching that is derived from the sole authority of Scripture is Faith Alone, or Sola Fide. This meant that God reckons a sinner righteous by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ alone. It is this "alien righteousness" of Christ applied to us that makes us righteous before a holy God. Jesus Christ, who came to save His people from their sins, has applied His righteousness, perfection, and redemption to the sinner. This imputation is given by faith alone. "A Christian is righteous and holy by an alien or foreign holiness- -I call it this for the sake of instruction- - that is, he is righteous by the mercy and grace of God. This mercy and grace is not something human; it is not some sort of disposition or quality in the heart. It is a divine blessing, given us through the true knowledge of the Gospel, when we know or believe that our sin has been forgiven through the grace and merit of Christ... Is not this righteousness and alien righteousness? It consists completely in the indulgence of another and is a pure gift of God, who shows mercy and favor for Christ's sake..." -Martin Luther, 'What Luther Says'

Justification by Faith and Justification by Faith Alone

Rome's View of Justification "The merits of Christ's death are reckoned to the believing sinner not as the immediate and all-sufficient grounds of the sinner's justification, but only as a remote "procuring" cause of that 'infused sanctifying grace' given at baptism (deleting original sin in infants and deleting original sin and past sins in adults) by which the believer would be perfected more and more, not only in this life, but fully in purgatory through the endurance of 'temporal punishment.' Only when the believer had been thus purged from all taint of sin could he be 'made righteous' and thereby be justified in God's eyes and granted the 'beatific vision.'" -John H. Armstrong, 'Justification by Faith Alone'

What is "Sola Fide"?

Faith is an instrument with no power in and of itself. Faith is the gift of God when He regenerates a lost sinner. This divine ability is given and it is the instrument in which we take hold of Christ by believing in His meritorious life, death and resurrection. Salvation is by works. The works of Christ alone applied to the sinner, received by faith. "Strictly speaking, the true Christian church does not teach justification by faith. It teaches justification by Christ. Where does the faith come in? It is simply the uniting with, becoming one with, the Lord Jesus Christ. Being married to Christ, all that is His becomes His bride's, the believer's... that is the meaning of the word 'reckons' or imputes or credits. The justified one 'does not work, but trusts God who justifies the wicked' (Rom. 4:5)." - John Gerstner, 'Justification by Faith Alone'

Roman Catholicism - Faith + Works = (brings) justification

Modern Evangelicalism - Faith = (brings) justification - works

Reformed Theology - Faith = (brings) justification + works

Infused vs. Imputed Righteousness

"Some Romanists will say that they teach justification by grace- by Christ's righteousness, in fact. But the righteousness of Christ which they claim justifies is not Christ's own personal righteousness reckoned or credited or given or imputed to believers. Romanists refer to righteousness which Christ works into the life of the believer and infuses into him in his own living and behavior. It is not Christ's personal righteousness but the believer's personal righteousness, which he

performs by the grace of God... Protestantism's salvation by faith versus Rome's salvation by works - this is not a technically accurate way to state this vital difference, but it points to the truth. The Protestant trusts Christ to save him and the Catholic trusts Christ to help him save himself. If it is a salvation based on works that come from grace, it is not based on grace but on the Christian's works that come from grace... Faith is merely union with Christ who is our righteousness, our grace, our salvation... Our righteousness does not result from His righteousness, it is His righteousness." - John Geistner, 'Justification by Faith Alone'

Romanist Instruments of Justification: Baptism and Penance The New Catechism of the Catholic Church: "Justification is conferred in Baptism, the sacrament of faith. It conforms us to the righteousness of God, who makes us inwardly just by the power of His mercy." Chap. 14, Session VI of Trent: "Those who through sin have forfeited the received grace of justification, can again be justified when, moved by God, they exert themselves to obtain through the sacrament of penance the recovery, by the merits of Christ, of the grace lost. For this manner of justification is restoration for those fallen, which the Holy Fathers have aptly called a second plank after the shipwreck of grace lost." "It is not us that these Tridentine Fathers anathematize so much as Paul, to whom we owe the definition that the righteousness of man consists in the forgiveness of sins." - John Calvin, 'Institutes of the Christian Religion' The Sixth Session of the Council of Trent Celebrated on the thirteenth day of the month of January, 1547.

Excerpts from the Canons:

CANON IX.-If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be anathema.

CALVIN'S RESPONSE - This Canon is very far from being canonical; for it joins things which are utterly at variance. They imagine that a man is justified by faith without any movement of his own will, as if it were not with the heart that a man believeth unto righteousness. Between them and us there is a difference, that they persuade themselves that the movement comes from man himself, whereas we maintain that faith is voluntary, because God draws our wills to himself. Add, that when we say that a man is justified by faith alone, we do not fancy a faith devoid of charity, but we mean that faith alone is the cause of justification." - John Calvin, 'Acts of the Council of Trent 3:151'

CANON X.-If any one saith, that men are just without the justice of Christ, whereby He merited for us to be justified; or that it is by that justice itself that they are formally just; let him be anathema. (see Infused vs. Imputed)

CALVIN'S RESPONSE - Could these anathemas take effect, all who are not versed in the sophistical art would pay dearly for their simplicity. They formerly asserted in their decrees that the righteousness of God was the only formal cause of justification; now they anathematize those who say that we are formally righteous by the obedience of Christ... For as it were impious to say that the righteousness of Christ is only an exemplar or type to us, so if anyone were to teach that we are righteous formally, i.e., not by quality but by imputation, meaning that our righteousness is in relation merely, there would be nothing worthy of censure. The adverb formally is used in both senses." - John Calvin, 'Acts of the Council of Trent 3:151-2'

CANON XI.-If any one saith, that men are justified, either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ, or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and the charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost, and is inherent in them (remains in them); or even that the grace, whereby we are justified, is only the favour (good will) of God; let him be anathema.

CALVIN'S RESPONSE - I wish the reader to understand that as often as we mention Faith alone in this question, we are not thinking of a dead faith, which worketh not by love, but holding faith to be the only cause of justification (Gal. 5:6; Rom. 3:22). It is therefore faith alone which justifies, and yet the faith which justifies is not alone... we do not separate the whole grace of regeneration from faith, but claim the power and faculty of justifying entirely for faith, as we ought. - John Calvin, 'Acts of the Council of Trent 3:152'

The Closing Petition of the Council of Trent, heard and granted by Pope Pius IV. Pius declared: "In virtue of holy obedience and under the penalties prescribed by the holy canons, and others more severe, even of deprivation, to be imposed at our discretion, we command each and all of our venerable brethren, patriarchs, archbishops, bishops and all other prelates of churches, whatever may be their state, rank, order, and dignity, even though distinguished with the honor of the cardinalate, to observe diligently the said decrees and ordinances in their churches, cities and dioceses both in and out of the court of justice, and to cause them to be observed inviolately, each by his own subjects whom it may in any way concern; restraining all opponents and obstinate persons by means of judicial sentences, censures and ecclesiastical penalties contained in those decrees, every appeal being set aside, calling in also, if need be, the aid of the secular arm."

"The gospel teaches that what could not be found in us and was to be sought in another, could be found nowhere else than in Christ, the God-man (*qeanqrwpw* -theanthropo); who taking upon himself the office of surety most fully satisfied the justice of God by his perfect obedience and thus brought to us an everlasting righteousness by which alone we can be justified before God; in order that covered and clothed with that garment as though it were of our first-born (like Jacob), we may obtain under it the eternal blessing of our heavenly Father." -**Francis Turretin, 'Institutes of Elenctic Theology'**