



The Continuity and Reinterpretation of Sola Fide from the Reformation to Postmodernity

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how the doctrine of sola fide has been interpreted and reinterpreted. To achieve this goal, the author uses the historical-theological analysis method (textual research analysis). Through this method, the author finds that Christians (churches) face views that are not only inconsistent with the sola fide of Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul, and the Reformers, but are no longer worthy of being called *sola fide*. The fundamental principle of *Sola fide* helps the people of God stand in the midst of hardship, suffering/sickness, pressure, threats, and persecution, and can even challenge the times by faith. Only faith alone in Christ can save this world, including those who have not believed in Him. This study's findings are meaningful as material for evaluating contemporary theology and as encouragement to engage in God's agenda, namely the Church's reformation agenda, which begins with and is carried out by reformation theology.

Keywords: Faith Alone, Justification, Postmodernism, Reformation, *Sola Fide*.

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INTRODUCTION

Justification by faith alone (*Sola fide*) is one of the most fundamental tenets of the Protestant Christian faith, standing alongside and inextricably linked with the other four ‘*solae*’ of the Reformation: Scripture alone (*Sola Scriptura*), grace alone (*Sola Gratia*), Christ alone (*Solus Christus*), and to the glory of God alone (*Soli Deo Gloria*) (Hamilton, 2012; Holcomb, 2012; Santrac, 2017). As such, denying or neglecting any one of these five fundamental principles is tantamount to rejecting all. In other words, a church cannot be called a church anymore if that church community neglects even one of these five *solae*. In particular, Martin Luther wrote that: “The doctrine of justification by faith alone is the central position in the Christian theological system” (Hanko, 2022). That means that *Sola fide* stands at the center of all Christian theology, of all doctrine that is systematized in a consistent, coherent, correspondent, and consequent manner.

Since *Sola fide* is the center of the Christian theological system, justification by faith alone is, according to both Luther and Calvin, the primary and vital Christian doctrine (Calvin, 2006; Timothy, 2013, p. 62). ‘Vital Christian doctrine’ refers to its decisive scope and weight. The absence of this vital doctrine is therefore fatal to the church. The same thing was emphasized by Martin Luther by stating: *articulus stantis et cadentis Ecclesiae*, which means the central article of doctrine by which the Church stands or falls (Lumintang, 2017, p. 83). In the 16th century, the doctrine of justification by faith alone was re-established through the Reformation of Martin Luther and other reformers. In other words, *sola fide* was rediscovered by the reformers after having been pushed aside and, in many ways, disregarded by church leaders for centuries (Williams, 2006).

Although justification by faith has remained one of the most extensively discussed doctrines in Christian theology, scholarly debate has continued across historical, biblical, ecumenical, and systematic perspectives. Key contributions include McGrath’s (2012) historical analysis of the development of the doctrine of justification (*Justitia Dei*), Schreiner’s biblical-theological exposition of Faith Alone, Williams’ (2006) examination of patristic understandings of justification, and discussions of the New Perspective on Paul and contemporary ecumenical dialogues between Protestant and Catholic traditions. These studies demonstrate that justification remains a dynamic field of theological inquiry rather than a settled historical doctrine.

Now, five centuries after the Reformation, many Protestant churches have fallen into the same error again, and even more severely than before. Indeed, at the beginning of the 21st century, it seems that churches around the world are thriving in numbers and local congregations and are generally very active, as reported in many books and on social media. In fact, the research results of MacArthur (2010), Sider (2005), Wells (2005), and Barna (2005)—as affirmed in the book, *Theology of the XII Century Church Reformation*—suggest that many churches have become like the world in their practices and tend to be worldly (Elliott, 2024; Lumintang, 2017, pp. 126–129). Moreover, Zylstra (2017) found that 500 years after the Reformation, many Protestants were closer to Catholicism than to Martin Luther. The indication of this is Zylstra’s (2017) findings that between 52-70% of churches in Germany (the center of Lutheranism), Switzerland (the

center of Calvinism), and America (the center of the modern Evangelical movement) adhere to the understanding of “salvation, no longer as *sola fide*, but Faith Plus” (*i.e.*, good deeds, piety, or spirituality). From a classical Reformation perspective, such responses may reflect understandings of salvation that incorporate elements beyond faith alone. Nevertheless, this study does not equate these survey findings with the official doctrinal teaching of Protestant churches, but treats them as evidence of diversity in contemporary theological understanding.

These developments have generated renewed scholarly discussion about whether the classical Reformation doctrine of justification continues to be understood, interpreted, and applied consistently in contemporary theological contexts. Rather than assuming either continuity or discontinuity, this issue invites critical theological investigation into how the doctrine has been reinterpreted within postmodern intellectual and ecclesial environments.

Despite this substantial body of scholarship, existing studies generally focus on one of three areas: 1) historical reconstruction of Reformation doctrine, 2) biblical interpretation of Pauline justification, or 3) ecumenical debates concerning Protestant and Catholic perspectives. Comparatively less attention has been given to examining how the theological meaning of *sola fide* has shifted from its sixteenth-century Reformation formulation to its interpretation within the intellectual and theological climate of postmodernism using a historical-theological comparative framework. This gap is the present study's specific scholarly focus. Accordingly, this article's novelty lies not in reintroducing the doctrine of *sola fide*, but in providing a comparative historical-theological analysis that evaluates the doctrine's continuity and discontinuity between the Reformation and the postmodern era. By bringing together historical theology and contemporary theological developments, this study seeks to contribute to ongoing international discussions concerning the interpretation and relevance of justification by faith in contemporary Christianity.

Based on the above discussion, an important difference also appears between the sixteenth-century Reformation formulation of *sola fide* and several contemporary interpretations of justification. Although the language of *sola fide* remains widely used in Christian theology, its meaning and theological implications remain subjects of ongoing scholarly debate. Contemporary discussions include Protestant-Catholic dialogues, the New Perspective on Paul, and recent developments in systematic and biblical theology. The New Perspective on Paul, represented by scholars such as Sanders (1977), Dunn (1998), and Wright (2018), does not reject justification by faith but reinterprets Paul's doctrine within the framework of covenantal nomism and the social function of the “works of the law.” This reinterpretation has generated extensive debate among biblical and systematic theologians concerning its continuity with the classical Reformation doctrine of justification.

From a confessional Reformed perspective, MacArthur (2010) argues that aspects of the New Perspective on Paul weaken the traditional understanding of justification by faith alone, while other scholars see it as a historical re-reading of Paul's theology rather than a rejection of justification by faith. Likewise, Sungenis (2009) presents a Roman Catholic interpretation of justification that emphasizes the relationship between faith, grace, and good works. Santrac

(2017) explores the continuing significance of Luther's *sola fide* in responding to discrimination and social inequality, while Schreiner (2015) rearticulates the doctrine within contemporary evangelical theology. These diverse theological approaches demonstrate that justification remains an active area of international theological discussion. Rather than assuming that one contemporary interpretation simply replaces another, this study investigates how the doctrine of *sola fide* has been interpreted and reinterpreted in relation to the classical Reformation understanding.

The author has not found a comparative study analyzing the relationship between *sola fide* in the 16th-century Reformation and the 21st-century postmodern era. This paper thus addresses that gap in the literature. The primary research question to be answered in this study is: Does the understanding and practice of Christian *sola fide* (by the Protestant Church) in the postmodern era in the 21st century still correspond to the *sola fide* of the 16th-century Reformation-era Church? This paper evaluates the shift in understanding and belief about justification by faith alone (*sola fide*) from the 16th-century Reformation to the early 21st-century postmodern era. This study's findings contribute to contemporary theological discussions by providing a historical-theological evaluation of the continuity and reinterpretation of the doctrine of *sola fide* from the Reformation to the postmodern era. The study also offers a framework for understanding how classical Reformation theology continues to inform contemporary theological reflection on justification.

METHOD

To achieve the objectives set out above, the researcher has used a theological-historical analysis approach (textual research analysis). This method is part of a qualitative research approach aimed at developing knowledge and study models, including regarding *sola fide*. This study analyzes theological texts discussing *sola fide* by leading theologians in the 16th and 21st centuries. Historical-biblical-theological research studies original sources, especially the content of texts from the primary literature, regarding the focus and sub-focus of the research (Erickson, 2013, p. 66). The researcher conducted the text analysis using thematic analysis. For this, the researcher used a thematic map of research topics (<https://openknowledgemaps.org>), built by searching using the keywords of this article. This method aims to inventory, evaluate, synthesize, and understand the new. The main step is to analyze the literature regarding the focus of the study, namely justification by faith alone (*sola fide*) from theologians of certain eras (synchronic approach), and thoughts that “fall up and down” in a given period of church history, namely, in the Reformation era and this postmodern era (diachronic approach) (Lumintang & Lumintang, 2016, pp. 60, 143). The synchronic analysis examines representative theological positions within each historical period independently. For the Reformation period, the analysis focuses on major theological formulations of justification by faith in the writings of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and other reformers. For the contemporary period, the analysis examines selected theological perspectives, including postmodern theology, the New Perspective on Paul, Roman Catholic theology, and contemporary evangelical theology, as represented in the selected literature.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Views on Faith in the Postmodern Era of the 21st Century

The church has not overcome modernism, and it now faces the influence of postmodernism. In general, scholars argue that postmodernism is a change in worldview, from modern to postmodern (Dockery, 1997, p. 6), to the point of even denying the modern worldview (Henry, 1997, p. 48), which radically denies modern standards (Huyssteen, 1989, p. 40). Oden calls it the death of modernism (Oden, 1997, p. 19). The modern worldview sets the standard of absolute truth, which is objective, rational, empirical, and universal (Dockery, 1997, p. 15), but the postmodern worldview denies all modern standards, and in fact denies all basis whatsoever, leading to absolute relativism (subjectivism) (Dockery, 1997, p. 11). Denying modernism means denying truth in the ontological sense, including the church's formulation of theological truth. Postmodern thinkers deny all foundations; academic postmodernists especially reject all foundations on their own terms. "The postmodern academic should not be committed to any one religion, philosophy, or world-view," as stated by Padgett (2003, p. 115).

Postmodernists are no longer interested in traditional theological formulations. If modernists argue that faith is a throwback to civilization and contradicts the principle of progress, that to progress one must abandon faith (Johnson, 2012, p. 16), then postmodernists, in the spirit of returning to nature, encourage people to have faith; however, the faith intended by postmodernists is natural faith in anything good and in oneself (Locke, 2022). Believe in anyone who is good and in anything good and useful. Like the "all you can eat" principle in culinary business slogans, they apply it to faith: "all you can believe" (Lumintang, 2017). In particular, this belief is closely connected to the New Age Movement, which blends all beliefs (syncretism) with the principle of "if it's good, why not!" Indeed, they emphasize faith itself, their own faith, which is not really faith but self-confidence. Furthermore, faith itself, in postmodern society influenced by postmodernism, stems from belief in a supernatural force (power/positive energy) that exists in nature and natural bodies. This power exists in all things that are good and useful. The faith of the religious (Christian) community of postmodernists can be explained in Figure 1 below:

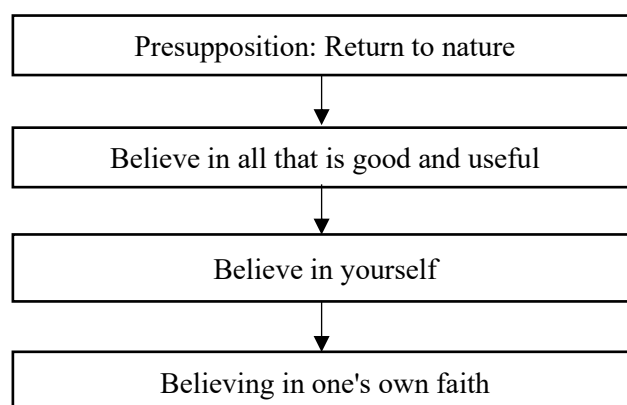


Figure 1. New Age Movement Christian Community Faith

This is also the same habit of pluralists within religious pluralism. They openly acknowledge that by stating “all you can believe,” one opens space for religious freedom, including all forms and models of religious expression. Religious pluralism is the belief that recognizes the existence and rights of other religions. It assumes all religions are the same (or have equal validity) and together lead to the same goal. It also holds that all religions lead to the same God. Of course, each religion offers a different perspective on this idea of pluralism. This suggests that pluralists adapt to change by setting aside the identity of the most essential beliefs. On this account, faith is a composite of all religious beliefs. Belief or faith in Jesus Christ is neither the whole nor the only true possibility, but merely one of many options.

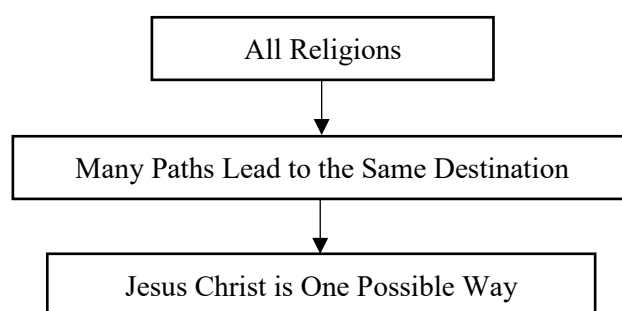


Figure 2. Christian Community Faith Religious Pluralism

In addition to the New Age Movement and religious pluralism, there are also heretical views among the churches: Purbiatmadi (2021) sees this in the Catholic Church, to the extent that it states that faith is the subject that saves; Sulyista (2013, p. 15) in Evangelical churches claiming that God as Savior (redeemer, *go'el*) is the means of faith, and Hiles and Lee in other groups who state that faith is a human response to God's work (Hiles, 2016; Lee, 2014), whereas humans cannot possibly respond to God without God's grace that grants faith. Indeed, *sola fide* is faith in Christ as the subject and object of justification for the believer. There is a further interpretation of *sola fide* that is widely misunderstood or misapplied, and which is certainly very dangerous for Christian faith/belief, such as the Sunday School children's song that says, “Just believe, just believe. Believe that gives us victory. Just believe in His blood, believe, of course, we win.” Of course, *sola fide* should not have the essence of minimalist meaning, not in the context of Christians facing economic, health, work, and other problems and meaning that just believing then resolves all problems. Not at all, but “just believe” in the context of sinners facing punishment and eternal death. Unsurprisingly, these cases ignore the good traditions of the Reformation, including the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith, including *sola fide*.

One face of postmodernity is the New Age Movement (Thompson, 2018). The New Age Movement's views influence many churches (and many Christians). They still believe in the Bible, but they also believe in reincarnation, astrology, and the spiritual (positive) energy of physical objects (houses, trees, mountains, etc.). Fundamentally, this is syncretism (Gecewicz, 2018). Still others believe not only in Jesus as God, but also in their own power (self-help), which highly glorifies self-potential. Vitz (1977, p. 126) calls this “the Cult of Self-

Worship and Selfism as Idolatry.” In addition, certain interpretations of the second blessing teaching have sparked theological discussion about the relationship between faith, grace, and spiritual experience, particularly from a Reformed perspective. Two groups of second-blessing Christians exist: First, some Evangelical groups recognize receiving Christ for justification and receiving the Holy Spirit for sanctification, even though the two are inseparable (Stamps, 2019). Second, extreme charismatic groups teach that receiving full salvation is receiving the Holy Spirit with the sign of speaking in tongues as the second blessing of believing and receiving Jesus as the first blessing (DePra, 2005). This is “Faith Plus,” not “Faith Only.”

Not only do some perspectives deny sola fide by positing some kind of “faith plus,” but others claim something that is not really faith at all. At least five things look like faith but are not really faith. The first is psychological faith (confidence): “I believe because I can succeed; I believe because I have the God-given potential to succeed” (DePra, 2001). Second, scientific faith, which says: “I believe because I know the evidence of success” (God is only as far as the evidence); I believe because I have calculated everything thoroughly (Bloom, 2015). Third, empirical faith, where people often say: “I believe because I have experienced it myself” (Mark, 2020). Fourth, sociological faith, saying: “I believe because we are Christians (Christianity that is only an identity), because our parents are pastors, because our church is a biblical church.” Fifth, mystical faith, where not a few people say: “I believe because I have been prayed for by the anointed servant of God,” or: “I believe because I have received this sacrament of baptism. I believe in this anointing oil, because after applying it to my sick body parts, I am healed.” All this is empty faith! Because the Bible does not intend them. These are all artificial faiths, invented faiths of the psyche or social confidence, faith by man’s own efforts.

Back to the Understanding of Faith according to the Bible and Justification by Faith Alone according to the 16th Century Reformers

True faith results from the grace of God, as witnessed by the apostle Paul (Ephesians 2:8-9). Faith causes people to believe in Christ, who saves them, through the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts (Hebrews 10:39) and through the preaching of the Word (Romans 10:14, 17). Faith can grow and be strengthened through the preaching of the word, the administration of the sacraments and prayer (1 Peter 2:2; Acts 20:32; Romans 4:11). Through faith, a believer is able to believe all the truths of God’s Word, because of the authority of God Himself who speaks through it (John 4:42; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 John 5:10; Acts 24:14) and because of faith, a believer is able to act in accordance with every part of the Word; resulting in obedience to its commands (Romans 16:26), trembling at the threats contained therein (Isaiah 66:2) and holding on to the promises of God, both for this life and the next (Hebrews 11:13; 1 Timothy 4:8). However, the primary action that results from this saving faith is to recognize, accept and rely on Christ alone for justification, sanctification and eternal life, through the power of the covenant of grace (John 1:12; Acts 16:31) (May, 2025; The Westminster Assembly, 1647).

Faith is an absolute gift of God, not a human endeavor. The Apostle Paul affirms: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not

of works...” (Ephesians 2:8). Faith is entirely God's work. Martin Luther emphasized that faith is “coming to understand justification as being entirely the work of God.” That is what he intended with the term *sola fide*. *Sola fide* (by faith alone) is one of the five *solae* that became the motto of the Reformation (1521), with many theologians claiming that *sola fide* is Martin Luther’s greatest work. Among others, Hanks (2022), professor of church history, wrote: “It was the unique contribution of the work of the first of all the reformers.” Likewise, Herrmann (2018) states that Luther’s doctrine of justification may be regarded as his most important contribution to Christian theology. Nevertheless, this paper contends that *sola fide* was not the idea of Martin Luther, John Calvin, or other reformers, but of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Therefore, it is inappropriate to argue that *sola fide* is an idea or thought contributed by the reformers, as the following Figure 3 explains.

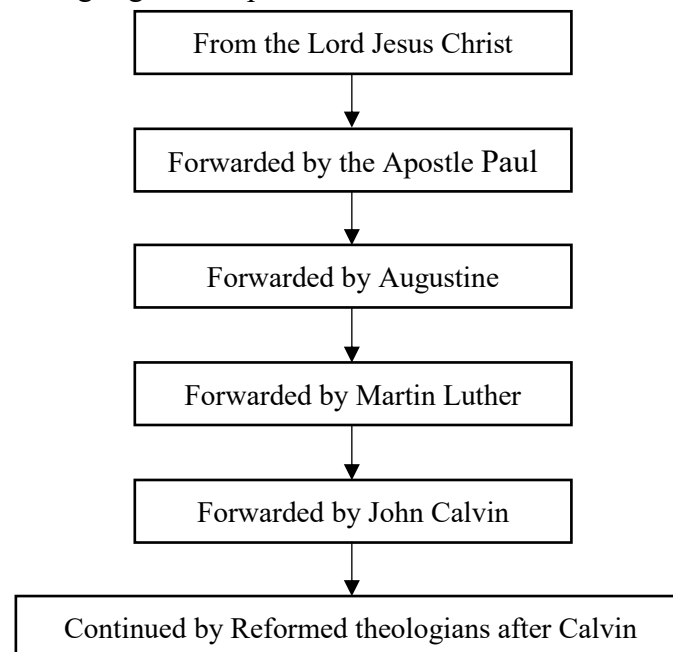


Figure 3. *Sola fide* Idea

Jesus Christ repeatedly stated, “Your faith has healed you” (Mark 5:34, Matthew 9:22). The healing Jesus intended was not limited to physical healing; by believing in Him, they would be saved. Explicitly, through the parable of the two men, the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, the Lord Jesus stated: “This man (the tax collector) went home justified by God, but the other man was not” (Luke 18:14). Therefore, it is more appropriate that *sola fide* was proclaimed again, rather than generated by the reformers. Godfrey (2017) argues this point: justification by faith alone was one of the Reformation’s critical rediscoveries. If the church’s understanding of justification by faith alone is not correct, then the church is fatally ill. According to Godfrey (2017), Churches (Christians) that do not fully understand the doctrine of justification by faith (*sola fide*) fail to fully understand the Bible’s teachings on God, Christ, sin, grace, and certainly do not glorify God. Likewise, to ignore *sola fide* is to ignore or trivialize God’s grace (*Sola*

Gratia), trivialize Christ (*Solo Christo*), trivialize Scripture (*Sola Scriptura*), and not glorify God (*Soli Deo Gloria*).

Sola fide is not merely an important doctrine of Christianity; it is life itself, says Griffith (2017). This motto of *sola fide* was expressed as the result of a theological faith-struggle of Martin Luther, namely, out of the depth of his own personal experience of knowing himself as a sinner before God (Santrac, 2017). He had tried to live righteously, but became unhappy with the “righteousness of God” who punished sinners. Luther further explained the human condition in *The Bondage of the Will*: human free will is the will of the flesh; without righteousness, it hates Christ because it is under Satan's control, so humans cannot escape it (i.e., be saved). Man is dead and in captivity to the will of sin, but by the absolute grace of God, is justified by faith alone (Luther, 2020). This was experienced by Martin Luther himself, as God guided Luther through a serious study of the Scriptures until he arrived at Romans 1:17, where rather than a punitive measure, “the righteousness of God” refers more to the righteousness that comes from God and is freely, graciously given to sinners for Christ’s sake, a righteousness that is legally imputed. It is an act of God in which God declares the sinner innocent and makes the sinner to be in the righteousness of Christ (Hanko, 2022).

Luther soon saw that faith is more than he had thought. Faith is what places the believer in eternal union with Christ. It is the opposite of works, which Luther had already struggled to fulfill. It is the God-given power whereby the believer lives in Christ and Christ lives in the believer. It is the power that enables the believer to cling to Christ, to hold on to Christ’s perfect sacrifice as his own, to find refuge and security in all the stormy seas of sin under the cross of Calvary. God makes us one with Christ and, uniting us with Christ, God declares us righteous because of Christ’s righteousness. That is what “by faith alone” means. The experience of being justified by faith alone is revealed through repentance. Martin Luther explained that he came to understand justification only after a spiritual crisis in his life. John Calvin came to understand it after his conversion (Godfrey, 2017).

The apostle Paul continued the Lord Jesus Christ’s idea of justification by faith alone. Paul explained this statement by writing in Romans 4:4-5: “If anyone works, his wages are not counted as a reward, but as his right. But if anyone does not work, but believes in the one who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” From this text, we can find two types of religion and salvation. The first is the religion of nature, or the religion of right; i.e., a religious person works for salvation, and then what he or she receives is his or her natural right. This is religion and salvation as a human endeavor. Second, we also find a religion of grace, that the ungodly person, not working (not seeking), yet believes in Christ, and his faith is reckoned to him as righteousness. This is a gift of grace, not the result of effort or work, but of belief in Christ; that is, the receipt of Christ's righteousness. In this sense, the reformers affirmed that faith yields justification and good works, contrary to the idea Luther saw in the Roman Catholic Church of his day: that faith and good works yield justification (Lumintang, 2017, p. 84).

Justification by faith received wide attention and influence through the writings of John Calvin. For Calvin, faith unites the believer with Christ in a mystical union, as Luther argued,

and this mystical union has a double effect, which Calvin called double grace. First, the believer's union with Christ mystically declares that, through Christ, the believer is declared righteous in God's sight. Secondly, because of this union, the believer begins the process of becoming like Christ through rebirth (McGrath, 2012, pp. 145–146). Martin Bucer, the reformer from Strasbourg, also taught about justification by faith, namely the justification of the unbeliever (*iustificatio impii*), which is the forgiveness by God's mercy of the sinner, and the justification of the guilty, and a second justification, which is the believer's response to moral demands in obedience to the Gospel (*iustificatio pii*) (McGrath, 2012, p. 144).

The meaning of “his faith is counted for righteousness” according to Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul

In particular, the phrase “his faith was counted for righteousness” is understood in many ways. There are at least three different views on this phrase. Firstly, the traditional Christian view is that “the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the ungodly so that they may believe.” Second, the Catholic view is that “the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer so that it is revealed in his right attitude.” Thirdly, the contemporary (and postmodern) view is that the gospel is about the Jewish community, which is not legalistic, not oriented towards salvation through works, but rather on God's covenant (the New Perspective on Paul) (MacArthur, 2010).

In fact, justification by faith is an act of God as a just Judge, as in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector: “this man went home justified by God, and the other man was not” (Luke 18:14). Paul affirms: “believing on Him who justifies the ungodly ... becomes righteousness” (Romans 4:5). The tax collector and the lawless man are helpless, they produce no effort or work, but simply believe in the righteousness of Christ, unlike the Pharisees who place their faith in their effort and good works, not faith alone, which is not really faith at all. As Paul affirms, “everything that is not of faith is sin” (Romans 14:23), and good works (religious endeavors) without faith, are only for self-aggrandizement (Ephesians 2:9). Jesus Christ made the statement in his Sermon on the Mount that, “unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:20). Righteousness is imputed to a person that is not his by nature or by effort at the moment of faith in Christ who is the truth (John 14:6). It is his righteousness justifies us, that is, forgives our transgressions or sins (Romans 4:7) (MacArthur, 2010).

The phrase “counted for righteousness,” according to the Westminster Confession of Faith, does not mean salvation by infusing righteousness into people, but by forgiving their sin (thus being made righteous), reckoning and accepting their persons as righteous, not because of anything in themselves, not because they do what is right, but solely because of Jesus Christ. Faith is the acceptance of and complete reliance on Christ and His righteousness, the only righteousness that justifies (John 1:12; 14:6; Romans 3:28; 5:1) (The Westminster Assembly, 1647).

Justification by faith is the good news of the gospel, because those who have no righteousness of their own are reckoned according to the righteousness of Christ. And this gospel is for all people, not just for the circumcised (*i.e.*, the Jewish people; Romans 4:9). In

this passage, Paul is correcting the narrow, ethnocentric understanding of faith as group faith only, tribal faith only, synod faith only, local church faith only, as if justification belonged only to them. Paul opened the narrow minds of Christians who were still influenced by Judaism by stating that “it is counted as righteousness,” and “it was not written for Abraham alone” (Romans 4:23), but it was also written for us (the Romans and other Gentiles of diverse backgrounds), all by faith alone. Furthermore, Paul also corrected the understanding of the Christians in Rome who were still influenced by Judaism, especially regarding faith plus circumcision, by stating that “Abraham, the patriarch, had faith (believed) before being circumcised. That means that Abraham was justified (counted as righteous) by faith, not by circumcision and not by faith plus circumcision.

Faith that Precedes Understanding and Results in Righteous Deeds (Obedience) and Endurance (Faithfulness) Righteousness (Obedience) and Endurance (Faithfulness)

Through the writer of Hebrews, it is affirmed that “without faith no one can know God, no one can please God, no one can hope in the invisible God, no one can understand the will of God, and no one can obey God” (Hebrews 11:1-8). Paul proclaimed the righteousness of God, which proceeds from faith as its cause and leads to faith as its effect. Only those justified by faith will live by faith (Romans 1:17). By faith, people understand and obey God’s will; faith precedes understanding and obedience. Only those who are justified by faith can live righteously in the eyes of God. Furthermore, God’s grace precedes faith, and faith precedes understanding and obedience. Obedience without faith is empty obedience. A righteous and holy life without faith is not pleasing to God. Only those who are justified by faith can live righteously and holily. Just as justification and sanctification are inseparable, so faith and righteous living are inseparable. We have been justified, but we still struggle with the pollution of sin within us, coupled with the world’s influence. Luther wrote *simul justus et peccator*: the believer, on the one hand, is justified by faith, but on the other hand remains a sinner (one is at the same time justified and a sinner).

Justification by faith fulfills God’s decree of choosing us in Christ. Therefore, the purpose of election and justification is for us to live holy and blameless lives before him (Ephesians 1:4). Furthermore, Paul emphasizes that being justified by faith (Ephesians 2:8-9) continues and bears fruit in the doing of good works (Ephesians 2:10). The goal of justification by faith does not stop at salvation, but rather continues on to good works. Paul emphasized justification by faith and James emphasized justification by works. The two do not contradict each other, but in their respective contexts (Romans and James), they point to the inseparability of justification and sanctification. James corrects the mistaken notion that a life of faith, focused only on God, does not care about others. In fact, faith is manifested in good deeds toward others (James 2:17-18; 20-26).

Good deeds are done out of faith and obedience to God, done out of gratitude (Psalms 116:12-13; 1 Peter 2:9), for the edification of others, to beautify the testimony of the gospel and evangelism (Titus 2:5-12, 1 Timothy 6:1), to silence the mouths of the enemies of the truth (1

Peter 2:15) (The Westminster Assembly, 1647). The ability to do good deeds does not come at all from themselves, but comes entirely from the Holy Spirit, who gives the understanding, the will, and the ability to obey God's will (John 15:4-5, Ezekiel 36:26-27). The good deeds of unbelievers, even if they are beneficial to themselves and their neighbors, are not done out of obedience to God; without faith, they are not done in a way that is in accordance with God's word and do not glorify God (The Westminster Assembly, 1647).

Only one who has been justified by faith will live righteously and faithfully, doing good each day in God's eyes. Only the person who has been justified by faith can live, survive in the midst of difficulties, be victorious every day, and even bear fruit and continue to bear fruit. Not only that, but he will also bear fruit in abundance regardless of the season, even in the dry season. This is expressed in Martin Luther's statement of faith. With the fundamental principle, *sola fide*, Martin Luther was able to stand before the church leaders and the Emperor at Worms with courage and say, "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of Scripture or by clear reason, I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted, and my conscience is held captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not retract anything, for it is neither peaceful nor right against conscience. May God help me. Amen." Luther was like the Psalmist, "What can man do to me?" (Psalm 56:11) and, with the apostles, could say: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

CONCLUSION

Justification by faith alone (*sola fide*) is faith in Jesus Christ alone (*solo Christo*); and that faith is in accordance with what is written in the Bible (*sola Scriptura*) which comes out or comes, only from God's grace alone (*sola gratia*), and all is to declare only the glory of and for God alone (*solus Deo gloria*). The principle of *sola fide* is not only a fundamental Christian doctrinal handle and confession, but also the power of believers and of local churches to theologize - do - survive - have a good impact on the world, such as the experience of the apostle Paul, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and other Reformation theologians, and so on to this day. Everything is rooted in the teachings and deeds of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today, the Church in the postmodern era encounters a worldview substantially opposed to the principle of *sola fide*. Of course, not by comparing the model and concept of *sola fide* of the 16th century with *sola fide* of the 21st century, but by evaluating and analyzing the understanding and practice of *sola fide* in the postmodern era of the 21st century with reference to the *sola fide* of the Reformation era of the 16th century, as they refer to the *sola fide* of the early Church itself, and this also to the apostle Paul, as the apostle Paul himself refers back to Jesus Christ.

In the postmodern context, *sola fide* provides a coherent theological framework for confronting relativism, human autonomy, religious pluralism, and pragmatism. It is not merely a Reformation formula, but a biblical and Christocentric principle affirming that justification rests solely on God's grace in Christ and is received through faith. Therefore, the church must

consistently embody sola fide in its theology, ethics, communal life, and public witness, without compromising Scripture's authority or Christ's finality.

The fundamental principle of *Sola fide* provides a theological framework for believers to reflect on and respond to the challenges of the twenty-first century, particularly within the context of diverse postmodern worldviews. This study offers a theological perspective that may serve as an academic resource for understanding how faith grounded in biblical justification shapes Christian identity, perseverance, and engagement with contemporary challenges.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests. This study is based on historical-theological and textual analysis and does not involve any financial, personal, or institutional interests that could influence the research findings or conclusions.

Author contributions

N.G. conceptualized the study, developed the research focus, conducted the historical-theological analysis, and drafted the manuscript. S.P.N.I.L. contributed to the theological analysis, interpretation of the findings, and critical revision of the manuscript. A.I.L. contributed to the literature review, analysis of relevant theological sources, and revision of the manuscript. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Ethical considerations

This article followed ethical standards for research based on theological and historical textual analysis. The study did not involve direct contact with human or animal subjects; therefore, it did not require ethical approval from a research ethics committee.

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Data availability

The data used in this study consist of theological and historical texts from published literature. This study generated or analyzed no new empirical dataset.

Disclaimer

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