

What Every Christian Needs To Know – Faith Alone

Faith alone is the third basic truth a Christian needs to know. Knowing the Bible as the Word of God is important. Knowing that Jesus saves is essential. But there must be a response to all these revealed truths. How do we respond to the saving message God has given to us? How do we move from a theoretical knowing to an inner experience of these truths? Or to put it simply, how does one become a Christian? The answer is faith alone. The Reformation uses the words “sola fidei” to express this core truth.

The Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages taught that God requires from every person who wants to be saved two things. Firstly he must believe in Jesus Christ. Then he must also perform good works. He needs good works to earn him enough merits to be right with God. God will count our good works and evaluate if we are good enough for heaven.

The obvious problem with a teaching like this is that it would paralyze people with fear. This was the situation at the time of the Reformation. People in and outside the Church was living in constant doubt and fear. If salvation depended on good works, then they could not have the assurance that they have enough works that are good enough to earn a place in heaven. People today are still gripped by such fears. Am I good enough? What can I do to undo the wrongs I have caused? What can I do more to make God happy with me?

Martin Luther, the German reformer, went through an intense struggle with such doubts and fears. It was when God showed him that a person is saved by trusting in Christ alone that he found liberation in his life. Luther’s greatest contribution to the Christian religion is his teaching of sola fidei - we are Christians by faith alone. Praise the Lord.

Faith is believing in God alone and trusting in His Word. When we say to God, “I believe in you”, we are exercising faith. Faith unites us to God and makes God a living reality in our life. Faith is like a hand stretched out to receive all the spiritual blessings from God. Such blessings are chiefly righteousness, peace and love.

When a person responds with faith to God’s message, we usually observe two things about him. Firstly, he knows something about God that others do not know. He knows God in a personal way. He knows Him as a Saviour who has given His Son to redeem him on the cross. He knows God because He now discovers God in the Bible. The Bible becomes for him a living Book. Then secondly, his life is changed. He becomes a new creature. He may have been a criminal behind bar, or an addict hooked to a sinful habit, or a proud individual who thinks he can do it on his own. But when he comes to Christ by faith, his thinking is changed, his desires are reoriented to spiritual things, and his heart delights in the love of God.

Finally, the faith we have is a gift from God to us. God gives it to us so that we may believe in Him. The Bible says, “But without faith *it is impossible to please him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.” Heb 11:6.

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