

Martin Luther and Sola Fide

(MPJ)

Personally, my first encounter with Luther was over 30 years ago, when his Commentary on the Galatians, along with his work on the Romans, was opened before me, as I eagerly consumed its pages, having just two years' prior opened a Bible for the very first time in my life. It was sacred time of intense yearnings for life and truth, as the Gospel message began to engage my thoughts and the things of Christ were made pre-eminent. Over the years as I continued to consult Luther in divers writings, and on a variety of doctrinal matters, I began to question Luther's true perception of the Gospel, especially in this vital matter of Faith or Christ. In other words, to what we may attribute a believer's justification before the Lord? Is it a principle of faith, {justification by faith,} however Divinely generated, or Christ's Mediatorial merit alone? This is an imperative distinction! Luther says in his Commentary on the Galatians, "that when I first took upon me the defense of the Gospel, I remember that Dr. Staupitius, a worthy man, said thus unto me, 'this liketh me well, that this doctrine which thou preaches yieldeth glory, and all things else unto God alone, and nothing unto man, for unto God there cannot be attributed too much glory, goodness, mercy, &c.,' his saying did then greatly comfort and confirm me. And true it is, that the doctrine of the Gospel taketh from men all glory, wisdom, righteousness, &c., and giveth the same to the Creator alone, who made all things of nothing." This persuasion of mind, and a firm inability to ascribe a state of justification to our believing, as opposed to Christ, to whom it exclusively belongs, has prompted the following brief remarks, in essence, to reaffirm our belief in the truth that believers are justified {legally declared righteous from all imputed and contracted sin, guilt & condemnation} exclusively by Christ, and not in any respects by their believing, or anything else supposedly required at their hands as a condition of salvation. Though Luther's distinction between Law & Gospel is exceptionally sharp, and his emphasis upon the redemptive work of Christ paramount; yet, in some instances he speaks as though in a dark cloud, implying that the subjective faith of a believer is somehow instrumental in his justification towards God. This delusional persuasion, as often referred to as 'sola fide' which at its core places the work of salvation in the hands of lost sinners, infers that a principle of faith has to be conjured up or 'exercised' {as they say} to fulfill some supposed condition, before the work of salvation can be initiated or become effectual, in order for one to be found in a way of salvation before God; whilst genuine faith {an altogether Spirit infused motion of the soul unto Christ} believes not in order to somehow bring a spiritual reality into existence or to merit, secure, or acquire some gift, favour, or blessing at the hands of the LORD, but is a fixed persuasion of the mind, {a

pure revelation of God's grace in Christ, as it were,} which inwardly realizes, accredits and lays hold upon the assimilating truths of the Gospel, thereby bringing the believer to the assurance, realization, sense, perception & evidence of his salvation in Christ; whom he believes, wholly embraces, exclusively rests & lives upon for all of his justification, sanctification & eternal life. Holy Spirit generated faith or anything in us is not a cause, means, or condition required to partake of Grace, Justification or Salvation, but is simply a fruit and effect of the Eternal Covenant of Redemption, and a certain and sure evidence of Divine Regeneration, which faith accredits Christ as Surety, Representative and Substitute, {in essence Sovereign Divine Imputation, otherwise known as Christ Crucified,} as the sum and substance of all of salvation. Believing cannot render Christ's blood personally efficacious for anyone, as personal and subjective faith plays no part in this matter of salvation, apart from accrediting Christ's accomplishment; and to assert that the Scriptures teach decisional regeneration as 'Arminian' free-willers do, or faith and gospel regeneration as most 'Calvinists' do, is detrimental to the message of the Gospel, especially in this our day, as almost universally the evangelical false gospel is centered in justification before God occurring at the point of subjective faith being acted Christ-ward, which alleged "faith in Christ" is supposed to somehow initiate or activate the work of salvation, but in reality is nothing more than a self-induced persuasion of the mind {presumptuous and unwarranted belief} with no genuine work of the Spirit, revealing and sealing the infinite merit of Christ's Mediatorial Representation upon the heart of those that belong to Him. Sadly, as is so oft in our day, all is conditioned on the sinner, "if you do this – then God will do that," as if the LORD were in anywise dependent upon man, or as if implying that the Lord's unalterable nature were in any sense reactionary. Sincerity, faith, repentance, &c., have become the foundation of salvation, for we are informed that the LORD looketh upon the heart. Indeed, and so he does, {I Sam.16:7,} but this has absolutely nothing to do with the ground of Justification; or in other words with a believer's standing in Christ. If one makes that grand idol of sincerity, or anything for that matter, be it faith, love, repentance, &c., {"the Lord knows that I am sincere, &c.,"} the basis of his acceptance in Christ, and the ground of his Salvation, he will come to utter ruin! It's not that the Lord looks upon a sinner's heart to find certain "marks of grace," but that he looks to Christ, and that is where the Spirit will cause every penitent sinner to look. True fixated, illuminated and Spirit generated faith {a faith which excludes all boasting, when it comes to the ground of salvation and the procurement of salvation} which is of the operation of God will affirm a salvation in all its facets to be of the LORD. A salvation not built on a {personal} relationship, but on a Suretyship – not on sincere motivation, but Sovereign Imputation – not regeneration or sanctification, but Representation – not by means of grace, but on a Covenant of Grace, ordered in all things and sure, II Sam.23:5, based on Christ crucified being their Surety, Representative, Substitute, and their

being in Divinely established union with Him as Covenant Head. And whilst those that belong to Christ, his converted elect, who daily struggle with sin and temptation, have numerous faults, copious defects, inconsistencies, &c., sadly interwoven in many areas of their lives; yet, when it comes to their core confession and perception of the Gospel, will in every instance vehemently deny that their faith, &c., {which is Spirit generated,} plays any part whatsoever in their justification before the LORD. They attribute and impute all the glory, credit and preeminence in the matter of their justification before God to Him to whom it is due; and by faith {as a reflected act} they perceive {that which was given them on the basis of Christ's redemptive work, on account of Christ's righteousness imputed, out of consideration of nothing but Christ, by which all boasting is excluded, Rom.3:27,} their nothingness in the matter of salvation, and Christ's exclusiveness in all which constitutes grace and glory. And yes, though experience and godly living are indeed a vital consequence of salvation, yet these are never the means of obtaining that which is at God's sovereign disposal to bestow, freely through the merits of Christ alone. We read that "without controversy great is the mystery of godliness," and indeed so it is, as most would associate "godliness" with living a godly life, {and it is in one vital respect,} but the Scripture associates it with Christ, {"without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh,"} and that is the impetus behind these few comments, in essence to direct sinners to look to Christ exclusively for the whole of their salvation. To imply that Luther recognized this distinction seems fairly dubious, especially in the light of his other writings, which delineate the fact that he indeed held to some aspects of this abominable and soul-destroying lie, if not indeed being one of its chiefest proponents. MPJ January 2017