

I. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE SAVED "BY GRACE ALONE"?

The Reformers of the Sixteenth Century stressed three important principles that relate vitally to salvation: sola Scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia.

The first principle – sola Scriptura – stressed the sufficiency of the Scriptures alone for faith and conduct. By this Martin Luther meant that "what is asserted without the Scriptures or proven revelation may be held as an opinion, but need not be believed." This principle was aimed at the Roman Catholic practice of adding various traditions and teachings to the Bible and also calling them "the Word of God."

The Roman Catholic Church added to Scripture the Apocrypha, the Magisterium (i.e., the Church's authority to teach and interpret divine truth), the Pope's pronouncements ex cathedra (from the chair of St. Peter), and a large body of church tradition, some written and some still in oral form. Did Vatican II change this position? The documents of Vatican II claim that "it is not from sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed," but "sacred tradition transmits in its full purity God's word which was entrusted to the apostles." "Therefore both sacred tradition and sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of devotion and reverence." [Dei verbum, 9]

The second principle – sola fide – stressed the sufficiency of faith alone to justify sinners. By this the Reformers asserted that sinners who trusted in Jesus Christ and His saving work alone were declared righteous on the basis of Christ's righteousness imputed to them through faith alone.

At the Council of Trent (1545-1563) the Roman Catholic Church in session 6, canon 11, said:

If any one says 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 Spirit and is inherent in them; or even that the grace, whereby we are justified, is only the favor of God; let him be anathema.

Luther and Calvin insisted that human beings are justified instantaneously, not gradually; that they are declared righteous in justification, not made