

Here We Stand: Sola Gratia (Grace Alone) "Grace Alone"

Intro:

- Recap previous two sermons: Scripture Alone (sola scriptura) & Faith Alone (sola fide);
 - Scripture Alone is the foundation for which Faith Alone & Grace Alone stand.
 - Faith Alone is shorthand for justification by faith alone, which means we receive the righteousness we need to stand justified/perfect/righteous before God by grace alone through faith alone.
 - What we are going to see this morning is that both grace and faith are gifts of God.

This morning we are going to work through **Ephesians 2:1-10**, which is another classic text that teaches us how we are saved by grace alone through our faith. Last Sunday we worked through **Romans 1:17**, which is the golden text of the Reformation.

When the Bible was finally printed in the language of the people and bishops, priests and professors could finally study the Scripture for themselves they realized how far the Roman Catholic church had drifted from the authority of Scripture alone.

One of the things they learned was that salvation was by grace alone through faith alone. Roman Catholic theology taught that it was man who must earn God's grace and then cooperate with grace through meritorious efforts (good works) plus their faith.

Illst: Roman Catholic theology taught God dispensed small amounts of grace through meritorious works. It was like there was a barrel of grace with a spigot at the bottom. Through your meritorious works designed by the church and exercising your faith as a work God and the church, God opens the spigot a bit and lets some grace out into your cup. Grace was earned and faith was all your effort. You hoped that by the end of your life you had enough grace in your cup so you would be justified before God and let into heaven but a person never knew. There was no confidence, no assurance of salvation. I am not bashing Roman Catholics but to understand the importance of the Reformation you must have some knowledge of Roman Catholic theology. They still practice the same understanding of dispensing grace by works today.¹

- This morning's sermon will break down into two sections just like last Sunday:
 - *Here They Stood: Where the Reformers Stood on Grace Alone*
 - *Here We Stand: Where we Stand on Grace Alone* (Ephesians 2:1-10)

I. Here They Stood: Where the Reformers Stood on Sola Gratia (Grace Alone)²

When it comes to *Sola Gratia* or *Grace Alone*, the issue for the Reformers was the fact that saving grace was pure, sovereign grace. Grace alone is the understanding that salvation is inseparable from the doctrine of *Faith Alone*. Justification is by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. The Bible is clear on this teaching.

I think when we consider the Protestant Reformation and the five solas, a logical question is: What was the church doing before Martin Luther? What was the church teaching about the grace of God?

Theologian Carl Trueman rightly points out that *sola gratia* or *salvation by grace alone* was not an innovation of the Reformation. Luther did not come up with this doctrine nor was it a radically new idea although the Reformers developed and deployed it in new and significant ways.

The classic Augustinian³ understanding of grace was central to the Reformation and this was made clear in 1525 when Martin Luther responded to the humanist Desiderius Erasmus's *Diatribe on Free Will* (1524). Erasmus was a Dutch Renaissance

¹ The desire is to not bash Roman Catholics but to set the historical setting of the Reformation and to continue to show the error of Roman Catholic theology has not changed.

² In this section of the sermon we get the backstory of the Reformation and some church history. We get to take a brief peak into the lives of the men who lead the Reformation and what they believed.

humanist, Catholic priest, social critic, teacher, and theologian. He was under intense pressure from Roman Catholics to make clear where he stood in relation to the emerging theology of the Reformation.

Catholics wanted Erasmus to silence Luther with a book that attacked Luther's understanding of sin and freedom of the will because Roman Catholic theology taught that man possessed the ability to choose salvation of his own ability and freewill but Luther did not see that in Scripture and taught that grace and faith were gifts of sovereign gifts of God.

The Luther-Erasmus debate took place through the publishing of books. It was a resurrection of the *Augustine-Pelagius* debate that took place over the freedom of the will from 411-418 CE.

Augustine, a bishop from north Africa, held that the Bible taught that in Adam's fall not only was the will broken and curved in upon itself in that it only chooses to sin. Augustine also emphasized the biblical doctrine that all who were born after Adam were born sinners and only desired to sin.

Pelagius, a Welsh priest in Brittan, held that the will was free and that Christ and Adam were examples for us to follow as to how we made moral decision. Pelagius had a "what would Jesus do" kind of theology. Pelagius also held that grace was given by merit that flowed from the freedom of the will.

Pelagius and his followers were condemned as heretics in 418. The Roman Catholic Church followed the teaching of Augustine for many years. However, over time the Roman Catholic Church adopted Pelagius doctrinal positions because they felt that free grace gave people the freedom to sin. So . . . in seeking to control its members . . . it began to add meritorious grace to its teaching and since the word of God was cloaked in Latin, a language no one spoke, over time they were able to push their doctrine upon the people.

For about 1000 years the Roman Catholic Church drifted away from Scripture as its authority and justification by grace through faith in Christ alone. There were pockets where priests and teachers sought reformation but were unable to gain any traction. Then Luther comes along and said, "*Enough!*" and nailed his 95 Theses to the Wittenberg door. Then a printing press picks up his post and his message goes viral. The reclamation of the gospel set the world on fire but not without persecution. [Now back to Luther & Erasmus]

Seven years after Luther posted his 95 Theses to the Wittenberg door, Erasmus attacked Luther's work in his book, *Diatribes on Free Will* (1524). Of all the issues Erasmus could have attacked Luther on he attacked Luther's understanding of sin's impact on the human will. This issue gets to the heart of why we need sovereign grace to be saved.

Luther responded with his all time classic book: *The Bondage of the Will*.⁴ In which, he wrote to Erasmus in the Preface, "*I praise and commend you highly for this also, that unlike all the rest, you alone have attacked the real issue, the essence of the matter in dispute, and have not wearied me with irrelevancies about the papacy, purgatory, indulgences, and such like trifles (for trifles they are rather than basic issues), with which almost everyone hitherto has gone hunting for me without success. You and you alone have seen the question on which everything hinges, and have aimed at the vital spot; for which I sincerely thank you, since I am only too glad to give as much attention to this subject as time and leisure permit.*"⁵

For Luther justification by grace alone through faith alone was the burning issue. To ultimately decide whether Christianity will be a religion of pure grace or of a polluted grace was the issue. Would it be part God and part man? Would God

³ Augustine was a Roman Catholic theologian who taught justification by grace through faith in Christ alone. He was a leader in the Roman Catholic church before it went astray.

⁴ For what it is worth, no one reads Erasmus's book.

⁵ Carl Trueman, *Grace Alone: Salvation as a Gift of God*, p. 112.

supply the grace and man supply the faith so that man becomes his co-Savior with God? Would it be that man saves himself as much as God save him by man applying the faith and God supplying the grace?

Luther said that this issue is the issue on which all turns. God supplies not only the forgiveness of sin through grace but God also supplies the gift of saving faith and the gift of repentance. God is exclusively the Savior of the lost for He supplies the sinner with all that is necessary both of grace and faith.

J. I. Packer says, “Here was the crucial issue for *Sola Gratia*. Whether God is the Author, not merely of justification but also of faith [so that] Christianity is a religion of utter reliance on God for salvation . . . or [is it] a self-reliant and self-effort religion? The principle of *Sola Fide* [faith alone] is not rightly understood until it is seen as anchored in the broader principle of *Sola Gratia* [grace alone].”⁶

Listen to me here: When Luther and all the Reformers spoke of *Sola Gratia*, they understood that unconditional election was the display of God’s sovereign grace to save His people from their sin. Why did they understand *Sola Gratia* this way? It was because the Reformers had been driven back to the Scripture. They were driven back to the biblical text because they were men of *Sola Scriptura*. They had placed their lives under the authority of Scripture. Scripture and Scripture only has the power to bind the conscience. They believed that when Scripture speaks that God speaks and in the word of God, God speaks with crystal clarity that saving faith is the gift of God that He gives faith to His elect at the proper time. It is all of grace—even our faith is a gift of grace. This is where they stood!

II. Here We Stand: Where We Stand on *Sola Gratia* (Grace Alone) Ephesians 2:1-10

So if what the Reformer were saying is true, we should be able to see it in the Scriptures just as they did.

- **Main Point: We are saved by grace alone through faith alone. [Ephesians 2:1-10]**
- **Here are the points to help us walk through the text:**
 - I. The Way We Were: The Walking Dead (Ephesians 2:1-3)
 - II. The Way We Are: The Waking Dead (Ephesians 2:4-9)
 - III. What’s Works Got to do With It? (Ephesians 2:10)

I. The Way We Were: The Walking Dead (Ephesians 2:1-3)

- **Illst:** When I was growing up in the 70’s (1973 to be exact) there was a very popular song and movie called *The Way We Were*. It starred Barbara Streisand and Robert Redford. The movie and song was of one looking back on how good things were in the beginning of their relationship.
- **Ephesians 2:1-10 is nothing like that song. Ephesians 2:1-3 teaches us three things about the way we were before being born again: We were: dead, disobedient and damned.**
 - 1. We were dead in our sin (v. 1)**
 - **When the text says we were dead in our trespasses and sins the Spirit was not reaching for some metaphor for which to describe our condition.** Death was a promised consequence for disobeying God in the Garden of Eden and since that time not only has physical death ruled but spiritual death as well.
 - **1 Corinthians 15:22,** “For as in Adam all **die**.” We inherited both physical and spiritual death from Adam’s sin.

⁶ J. I. Packer, *The Bondage of the Will*, pgs. 57-60.

- Later in Ephesians Paul says in **Ephesians 5:14**, "*Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the **dead**, and Christ will shine on you."* In order for us to be saved Christ must wake us from spiritual death much like he called Lazarus back to physical life.
- We just finished working through Colossians and in **Colossians 2:13** we hear the same words we hear in **Ephesians 2:1**, "*And you, who were **dead** in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh."*
- **What Scripture teaches us is that in Adam's Fall sinned we all.** In other words, although we were not there in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve because they are our spiritual parents when they sinned against God they put us all under the curse of sin. They passed along to us in their spiritual DNA of spiritual death.
- **Here is how spiritual death works.** It is like physical death in that when a person is dead he or she cannot respond to you. Have you ever tried to talk to a dead person?
- **Illst: Seeing my sister dead in 1983 . . .**

Application:

- **No one likes to hear this kind of truth about themselves.** Especially as Americans who believe in freedom to do what we want and choose what we want. Then God's word says that we are spiritually dead with no ability to choose Christ. This is an offensive truth to many. It creates anxiety in our hearts as well.
 - **Yet God's word is true and the truth is prior to Christ's work in our lives we were the walking dead.** We were walking around making lots of choices: what kind of car to drive, where you want to live, where you want to vacation or what you want to major in at school. You can make these kinds of choices but you cannot choose to make yourself become a Christian. This is the work of the grace of God in your heart. You cannot respond to Him because your spiritual heart is dead. There is no spiritual pulse, no spiritual life; you have no ability to choose Christ. **So if you are here this morning and you are not a Christian you probably have lots of questions right now. Just hang with me as we work through the text.**
 - **If you are here and you are a Christian and this is new information for you, you might be saying, "But Michael I did choose to trust Christ!"** To that I would say, yes you did but why did you choose to place your faith in Christ? Where did that desire and ability come from because prior to the grace of God working in your heart you were spiritually dead in your sin?
2. **We were disobedient (vv. 2-3a)**
- **The spiritually dead are disobedient toward God.** Look at how we lived in **vv. 2-3a**: "*. . . in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind . . .*"
 - **Because we were spiritually dead we walked according to the world, which was in disobedience to God.** This is the way we were. We were slaves to sin following Satan's schemes and we were sons of disobedience.
 - **Our "will"⁷ was not free but a slave to sin and Satan.** We lived according to the passions of our natures and so we always did what we most wanted to do and all we wanted to do is sin. This is what Scripture means when it says we

⁷ By the word "will" I mean the ability to choose. The will is the instrument by which we make choices.

were or are slaves to sin. It means we are slaves to our desires and our desires are a slave to Satan. News flash!

Scripture teaches us that we never had a free will.

- **What does the Scripture say?** It says there are only two conditions or positions we can be in: we are a child of wrath or a child of God. Scripture never gives us a third neutral position or undecided position. We are slaves to sin or slaves to Christ. There is no “undecided” box to check.
- **Here is how it works.** Our wills are like what Luther called a “beast of burden” and whoever rides that beast controls where it goes and what it does. Either it is being ridden by a heart that is dead in sin and controlled by Satan or it is a heart that is alive to God and desires to love Jesus. This was his illustration for how he taught people about the nature of their will. The “human will” is a slave to the condition of the heart and it is either a spiritually dead heart or a heart that has been raised from the dead and loves Jesus.
- **A more modern illustration of the will is like that of a car.**
 - **Think of your will as a vehicle for making choices.** It is like a car. However, it is never in neutral but it is always in gear going somewhere and it only goes where the driver tells it to go. The driver is your heart, your desires, your and passions. Now if your heart is spiritually dead you are a child of wrath and slave to sin and you always do what you most want to do and take your car where you most want to go and what you do with your car and where you go with it is sin because you are a slave to sin. You choose what you choose because you love what you love.
 - **However, if your heart is born again, if it is made new, if it is brought to life your desires and your passions change.** Then the driver behind the wheel is heart that loves God with all of its soul, strength, might and mind. Then the will goes where the driver tells it and at this point the will chooses freely to follow after Christ.
- **The text said we were disobedient but why were we disobedient?** We were disobedient because our hearts were spiritually dead and only chose to sin. This leads us to our last condition—damned.

3. We were damned (v. 3b)

- “. . . and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”
- Paul was reminding the Ephesians and us that being born sinners meant we were born damned from birth. We were in a hopeless condition. Unless something changed we were going to spend eternity in hell experiencing the wrath of God. This is bad news!

Application:

- **What should be our response to this?**
 - **If you are a Christian, you should tremble, be grateful and worship God all at the same time.** How many years were we hell bound and at any moment we could have died in that state. God could have stopped our hearts from beating; he could have stopped us from breathing and sent us screaming into conscious everlasting punishment. But he didn’t although that was what we deserved.
 - **If you are not a Christian right now you should tremble.** In John 3:18 Jesus says, “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” Later in the same chapter in v. 36, the Spirit says through John, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.” What this means is that we are all born

condemned to Hell and unless something or someone changes our status it will remain that way but remember we cannot change it. We are spiritually dead and what do the dead do? Nothing.

II. The Way We Are: The Waking Dead (Ephesians 2:4-9)

- **Brought to Life by the Riches of His Grace: Ephesians 2:4-7:** *"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."*
 - **Verse 4: "But God":** Two of the most wonderful words in the Bible. **Verse 4: "But God . . . because of the great love with which he loved us . . ."** You might be saying, *"But I thought I was a child of wrath?"* Yes . . . you were **But God** loved you despite your life lived in disobedience toward Him. This is how great His love is for you. We can be in the darkest moments of our lives, saying things like:
 - I am undone and cut off from God and spiritually dead—But God because of the great love with which he loved me.
 - My life is a wreck and ruined I might as well be dead— But God because of the great love with which he loved me.
 - Nothing in my life has worked out the way I planned— But God because of the great love with which he loved me.
 - My parents are divorcing— But God because of the great love with which he loved me.
 - My marriage is coming to an end— But God because of the great love with which he loved me.
 - I have lost my job and do not know how I will provide for my family— But God because of the great love with which he loved me.
 - I am pregnant and do not know what I will do— But God because of the great love with which he loved me.
 - I have done too many terrible things to be made right with God— But God because of the great love with which he loved me.
 - That great love with which he loved you is seen on the cross. It is not some abstract love or some feel good kind of emotion but seen in the very perfect life of obedience of Christ, His substitutionary dead of on the cross whereby He took the punishment for our sin by receiving the wrath of God that we deserved and His resurrection from the dead.
 - When God loves you with a love that raises the dead—there is always hope.
 - **Verse 5: "But God . . . loved us . . . even when we were dead in our trespasses, [and He] made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved . . ."**
 - **Verse 6: "But God . . . raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus . . ."** We ought to be thinking: *"But I was dead, disobedient and damned and under the curse of sin."* But God because God is rich in mercy and grace he resurrected our dead hearts, reversed the curse that had been on us since the Garden by making us alive in Christ. He has done more than we could have ever dreamed. We are no longer dead in our sin, disobedient because we follow our wicked passions and desires and no longer damned but instead we are seated with Christ in the heavenly places. Everything has changed!
 - **Verse 7: ". . . so that [God] in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."** Why did He do this? He did it so that we will be a display of His glorious grace of Christ Jesus. It is the grace of Jesus that saves us from beginning and to the end and throughout all eternity His grace is being applied to us. It is not just any kind of grace; it is not just a little grace being poured in your cup no it is an *immeasurable, incalculable, endless*

river of grace flowing from Christ. It is not a trickle of grace but a waterfall of grace larger than Niagara Falls that will flow over us from now to eternity.

- **We are saved by His Grace Through our Faith: Ephesians 2:8-9:** *"⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast."*
 - **The question we ought to ask here is, "What is the place of faith?"** Faith is a gift of grace. God must give the gift of faith for a dead, guilty sinner to believe upon Christ. This is a grace given not as a result of works. Not a grace polluted with works.
 - **Faith is a gift of grace.** We are justified by His grace through faith in Christ. It is all of grace and faith is the instrument by which we lay hold of Christ and that faith is a gift. The faith we have is not a work by us nor is faith our righteousness. Faith is a gift and faith unites us to Christ as our righteousness.
 - **Titus 3:5-7** reminds us of the place of works, *"He [God] saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."*
 - **The gift of grace and faith does a few things in our hearts:**
 - **It humbles the sinner and exalts God.** Because God chooses to give the gift of grace and faith no human being can boast in His presence. We cannot boast about our religious activity. No religious works earns grace or faith: Not baptism, church attendance, giving offerings to the church, going to do overseas missions, preaching, reciting the whole Bible by memory will not earn grace or faith. These are not bad things but they will not earn grace, they will not earn faith—grace is a gift, faith is a gift and they unite us to Christ who is our righteousness.

The sinner who is saved is humbled in the presence of God. As the great evangelist, George Whitefield wrote, *"Nothing but the doctrines of the Reformation can do this."*⁸
- **Confidence in evangelism and confidence for the salvation of the hardest of hearts.** For sinners to be saved they must hear the gospel and the good news is that because salvation is not based on works there is no heart too hard, no life too far gone and their salvation is not based on the ability of the one sharing the gospel.
- **Sovereign grace and faith is sanctifying grace.** It is sovereign grace that brings a dead heart to life. It breathes life into the heart of the sinner and that sinner exercises his gift of faith to believe in Christ. Now that the heart is new, because there is a new heart behind the wheel of the once broken will that life begins to pursue Christ for the glory of God and for His joy.

III. What's Works Got to do With It? (Ephesians 2:10)

- **What is the place of good works?** If we can do nothing to earn salvation, earn grace or earn faith then why good works? What is their place? **Verse 10** tells us that we are the new creation. Eden has happened all over in our hearts and we are God's new creation and His work of art. Now we are put back in condition we were meant to be in to carry out our mission as God's ambassadors on this earth.

⁸ John Piper, *The Pleasures of God*, p. 144.

We do good works not to earn God's favor but because we already have His favor. Our desires have been changed, our hearts have been made new and now we are created in the image of Christ and we want to do good works in order to display the glory of our Savior who delivered us from the bondage of sin and gave us His righteousness.

Conclusion:

- **Let me close with one of the biblical analogies that reflects the riches of grace seen in our salvation. It is a banking analogy. We hear this analogy in the words of 2 Corinthians 5:19, 21)** *"In Christ God was **reconciling** the world to himself, not **counting** their trespasses against them . . . For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the **righteousness** of God."*
- **We have two financial words in v. 19: *reconciled and counting*.** Both words point us to the bank ledger to seek an equitable transaction, to reconcile that bank statement.
- **Illst: I started out as an accounting major in college . . .** we learned about how to reconcile a bank statement, how to reconcile the books each month for a business. Since I did not finish my work in accounting, I decided to marry one. Stacy told me this week that she reconciled their bank statements at work and it was 36 pages.
- The words **riches, reconciled** and **counting** are all financial images in Scripture drawn upon to help us understand justification by the riches of grace through faith in Christ alone. Friends I can tell you if the books were opened on your life that the statement for your sin would be longer than 36 pages.
- **Not only that, when we look at the balance sheet of our lives and our sin against God you and I have no assets.** We only have liabilities. We have a debt of sin we must pay to God and the wages of our sin is death in Hell for eternity under the wrath of God. We are all spiritually bankrupt and drowning in an ocean of the debt of our sin that will crush us under its weight. This is a debt that cannot just be erased for it must be paid.
- Not only that in order to stand before God requires more than a zero balance of sin. We must possess the riches of God's righteousness and those riches are only received through Christ's righteousness. Here is what we learn.

God came in Jesus Christ and reconciled the world (sinners) to Himself by the precious, priceless blood of Christ we have been redeemed. So when the financial books are opened what God finds in our account is not a zero balance of sin but the riches of Christ's grace have been deposited in our account.

Jesus paid our debt of sin on the cross and then deposited in our account the riches of His grace and righteousness. We did not deserve it, earn it or work for it. It is a gift of grace through our faith in Christ.