

FBC POWELL, 10-15-17 AM NOTES  
*Sola Gratia* – “Grace Alone”  
Various Scriptures  
#4 in Series, “What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Reformation”

I. The Doctrine of Grace in the Scriptures

**Ephesians 2:8** “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.”

**1 Corinthians 15:10** “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.”

The **justice** of God involves getting what I deserve; the **mercy** of God involves not getting what I deserve; the **grace** of God is getting what I don't deserve!

II. The Doctrine of Grace Before the Reformation

“The fact that the souls of believers go immediately into God's presence means that *there is no such thing as purgatory*. In Roman Catholic teaching, purgatory is the place where souls of believers go to be further purified from sin until they are ready to be admitted into heaven. According to this view, the sufferings of purgatory are given to God in substitute for the punishment for sin that believers should have received in time, but did not...But this doctrine is not taught in Scripture, and it is in fact contrary to **2 Corinthians 5:8** ‘we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord’ and **Philippians 1:23b** ‘...to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better.’ The Roman Catholic church has found support for this doctrine, not in the pages of canonical Scripture...but in the writings of the Apocrypha...”  
—Wayne Grudem

III. The Doctrine of Grace Proclaimed by the Reformers

“When the reformers spoke about ‘grace alone’ (*sola gratia*), they were saying that sinners have no claim upon God, none at all; that God owes them nothing but punishment for their sins; and, that, if He saves them in spite of their sins, which He does in the case of those who are being saved, it is only because it pleases Him to do it and for no other reason. Today, large numbers of evangelicals undermine and effectively destroy this doctrine by supposing that human beings are basically good; that God owes everyone a chance to be saved; and that, if we are saved, in the final analysis it is because of our own good decision to receive the Jesus who is offered to us.”  
—James Boice

**Romans 5:12** “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned [in Adam].”

**Ephesians 2:1 (ESV)** “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins.”

“We are dead by nature in trespasses and sins. We are corpses before the holiness of God and a corpse cannot raise itself, it is dead. A corpse cannot will itself to be born anew; it is dead. A corpse cannot raise itself to a quickened life, it is dead. And I can stand and preach to a dead corpse and say, ‘Don't you see?’ But a corpse doesn't see. And I can lift up my voice and say to a dead corpse, ‘Don't you understand?’ But a dead corpse doesn't understand. And I can say to a dead corpse, ‘Don't you hear?’ But a dead corpse does not hear. It cannot will itself to a quickened life. It cannot choose; it cannot see; it cannot hear; it cannot think; it cannot understand; it is dead!”  
—Dr. W. A. Criswell

“[They] are as unable to raise themselves out of this loathsome dead state as Lazarus was...but all their efforts, exerted with ever so much vigor will prove quite fruitless till that same Jesus who cried, ‘Lazarus come forth’ quickens them.”

—George Whitefield

#### IV. The Doctrine of “Grace Alone” and the Trinity

##### A. Grace Alone and God the Father

**Ephesians 1:4-6 (NKJV)** “Just as He [God the Father] chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.”

Election is the Biblical truth that God chose us before the foundation of the world (before the world was created).

**2 Thessalonians 2:13** “But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because **God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation** through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.”

**2 Timothy 1:9** “Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.”

**2 Corinthians 4:4** “In whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

**Ephesians 4:18** “Being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart.”

**Romans 3:11** “There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God.”

##### B. Grace Alone and God the Son

**Ephesians 1:7-8a** “In Him [God the Son] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us.”

##### C. Grace Alone and God the Spirit

**Ephesians 1:13-14** “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.”

### **Sermon 4: *Sola Gratia* – “Grace Alone”**

#### **Various Scriptures**

Have you noticed that we have become a society that seems to celebrate almost everything? In the month of September that we just left a couple of weeks ago there was “Random Acts of

Poetry Day” (6th), “Video Games Day” (12<sup>th</sup>), “White Chocolate Day” (22<sup>nd</sup>), “Punctuation Day” (24<sup>th</sup>), “Corn Hash Day” (22<sup>nd</sup>), and “Quiet Day” (12<sup>th</sup>). Let me give you a day worth celebrating – October 31<sup>st</sup> is Reformation Day and 2017 is the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. On October 31, 1517, a German Priest whose name was Martin Luther wrote out 95 “theses” that addressed primarily the abuses of the church (remember, there was officially only one church at that time – there were no denominations as we know them today). Martin Luther nailed these theses or propositions to the Wittenberg church door (which acted much like a public bulletin board today). These 95 theses were copied and distributed to the people. Most Christian historians mark this posting of “The 95 Theses” as the beginning of the Protestant Reformation.

Most Protestant churches today know very little about the Protestant Reformation. This past week I read an article by a Pastor who was teaching a church history class, and when he explained about Martin Luther and The 95 Theses, a church member asked this question: “Was this before or after his ‘I have a dream’ speech?” That speech was given by a significant person in more recent history, but it was quite a few years after the Protestant Reformation! “The Reformation changed so much – everything from churches, culture, economics, to even marriage, and it still affects us today.

[Matthew Oser, *Church History Magazine*]

The focus of the reformers was not culture, economics or marriage. It was the doctrine of Salvation! If we are wrong about the doctrine of salvation, then from an eternal perspective it doesn’t really matter what we are right about. As we have seen these last three weeks, the Reformation and its approach to the doctrine of salvation was centered on five “battle cries” or themes:

***Sola Scriptura* – Scripture Alone,**

***Solus Christus* – Christ Alone,**

***Sola Gratia* – Grace Alone,**

***Sola Fide* – Faith Alone, and**

***Sola Deo Gloria* – God’s Glory Alone.**

For the truth behind those five themes, the reformers in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries risked their lives, lived at times in hiding, in prison, suffered rejection, and for most, excommunication from the organized visible church of their day.

In this message, we are focusing in on *Sola Gratia* – Grace Alone. It is grace that primarily separates Christianity from all other religions! When you understand the meaning of grace, you see that there is no true grace in Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Mormonism, or Jehovah’s Witnesses, or any other religion or cult. They may use the word *grace*, but they are not describing the grace that is proclaimed in the Bible. I fear that many who call themselves “Christians” don’t really comprehend the true meaning of grace. Many professing Christians think of grace as being a divine sentiment whereby God simply overlooks our sin much like a poor parent simply overlooks the rebellion of their child. Some treat grace as if it were a free pass to do whatever one wants to do. We desperately need to come back to the biblical concept of grace that the reformers majored on.

## I. The Doctrine of Grace in the Scriptures

While the doctrine of grace is all through the Old Testament, it is in the New Testament that the details of grace are most clearly revealed. There are two types or categories of grace. First, there is grace for lost sinners. To put it another way, there is grace related to salvation. Second, there is grace as it relates to the sanctification (spiritual growth) of the believer. In other words, we are saved by grace and we live out the Christian life by grace.

Here is an example of these two main categories of grace. We see grace in relation to salvation in Ephesians 2:8: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” We see grace relating to living the Christian life in 1 Corinthians 15:10: “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.” As vitally important as the enabling grace of God is to a Christian, in this message, we will be focusing on God’s grace in salvation. That was the focus of the reformers.

The traditional definition of Grace is, “the unmerited favor of God.” That definition is okay, but it doesn’t really do justice to something as amazing as grace. Martin Lloyd-Jones, the prominent pastor of Westminster Chapel in London used to say that the ultimate test of our spirituality is the measure of our amazement at the grace of God. The prerequisite of being amazed at the grace of God is seeing grace in conjunction with the justice and the mercy of God. The *justice* of God involves getting what I deserve; the *mercy* of God involves not getting what I deserve; the *grace* of God is getting what I don’t deserve!

The Greek word for grace originally meant to stoop down. It evolved to mean God stooping down, condescending, to give those who deserve His wrath, His unmerited favor – favor that we could never earn. When the reformers spoke of *sola gratia*, they were emphasizing the truth that no merit of our own contributed to our salvation; it was only given to us by the grace, the unmerited favor of God.

## II. The Doctrine of Grace before the Reformation

When we come to the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, the doctrine of grace had fallen on really hard times. The organized visible church spoke of grace, but it had totally lost its biblical meaning and had actually taken on a meaning that was opposite the biblical meaning. The corrupt church at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century taught that salvation was based on “grace” *plus* our accumulated *merit*. “Merit” is a key word in understanding how desperate the church was for reformation. In reality, biblical grace and merit are like oil and water – they cannot mix together. If salvation is of grace, it cannot be of merit; if one sees salvation being based on any merit at all, it cannot be of grace.

Allow me to illustrate one way the pre-reformation church taught that a person could gain merit. In Luther’s day, one of the most emphasized ways a person could accumulate merit was by purchasing indulgences. As we saw in the first message in this series, an indulgence could be purchased for you, or a dead loved one, to shorten the time in purgatory. We saw in that first message that purgatory is not in the Scriptures. Dr. Wayne Grudem gives a good summary of the false doctrine of purgatory.

The fact that the souls of believers go immediately into God’s presence means that *there is no such thing as purgatory*. In Roman Catholic teaching, purgatory is the place where souls of believers go to be further purified from sin until they are ready to be admitted into heaven. According to this view, the sufferings of

purgatory are given to God in substitute for the punishment for sin that believers should have received in time, but did not... But this doctrine is not taught in Scripture, and it is in fact contrary to [2 Corinthians 5:8 'we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.' and Philippians 1:23b '...to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better']. The Roman Catholic church has found support for this doctrine, not in the pages of canonical Scripture... but in the writings of the Apocrypha...

[Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, page 817]

The Apocrypha does not pass the tests that determine what is truly inspired Scripture.

Where did these indulgences come from? Did the church just create them like a government that just prints more money when they think they need it? Here is what the people were told: Peter, who was viewed as the head of the church, along with the other apostles and the saints had accumulated more merit than they needed and it was sort of stockpiled. It was out of this stockpile of merit that indulgences were sold. I don't really even need to comment on that for you to see the desperate need for the message of "Grace Alone."

Today, the evangelical church is not selling indulgences, but we have so watered down the truth of "Grace Alone" that we are in need of another reformation. We, like the visible church of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century don't deny grace, but we all too often deny grace *alone*. Salvation is seen as God presenting the offer of salvation, but man must examine it, think about it, and decide whether or not he wants to reach out in his own strength and take it. Salvation is often presented as a combination of God's grace offered and man's good sense and determination to rise up and take it. That is not salvation by grace alone. Let's examine what the reformers meant when they spoke of grace alone and examine what they taught in comparison with the authoritative Scriptures.

### III. The Doctrine of Grace Proclaimed by the Reformers

Dr. James M. Boice summarizes how far the evangelical church *today* has fallen from the reformers and their emphasis on grace alone:

When the reformers spoke about 'grace alone' (*sola gratia*), they were saying that sinners have no claim upon God, none at all; that God owes them nothing but punishment for their sins; and, that, if He saves them in spite of their sins, which He does in the case of those who are being saved, it is only because it pleases Him to do it and for no other reason. Today, large numbers of evangelicals undermine and effectively destroy this doctrine by supposing that human beings are basically good; that God owes everyone a chance to be saved; and that, if we are saved, in the final analysis it is because of our own good decision to receive the Jesus who is offered to us.

[James Boice, *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?* page 107]

The primary reason that many professing Christians today do not believe that salvation is by grace alone (in the sense the reformers believed it) is because they do not understand or believe the biblical doctrine of the total inability of man. This doctrine goes by several names. Some theologians call it "the doctrine of total depravity"; some call it "the doctrine of radical corruption." I prefer calling it, "the total inability of man." Because many in the church have bought in to the lie that mankind is basically good, *amazing grace* has become "ho hum" boring grace that means nothing more than God gives everyone a shot to be saved.

Last week we saw the exceeding sinfulness of sin. We saw that sin is not just a bad decision; sin is cosmic treason against the God who has all authority. Sin, coming into the world through Adam, resulted in all mankind being born spiritually dead. The Bible tells us that we were all born in the state of spiritual death because we were *in Adam* when he sinned and the consequence of sin (spiritual death) was passed on to every natural born descendent of Adam. Romans 5:12: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned [in Adam].” All mankind is born in a state of spiritual death. Ephesians 2:1 (ESV): “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins.”

One of the greatest sermons I ever heard preached on this subject was a message preached in 1983 by Dr. W. A. Criswell at the First Baptist Church of Dallas. I found a transcript of this wonderful sermon. Let me quote just one part of this sermon entitled “The Effectual Calling of God” (6-5-83). Dr. Criswell said:

We are dead by nature in trespasses and sins. We are corpses before the holiness of God and a corpse cannot raise itself, it is dead. A corpse cannot will itself to be born anew; it is dead. A corpse cannot raise itself to a quickened life, it is dead. And I can stand and preach to a dead corpse and say, ‘Don’t you see?’ But a corpse doesn’t see. And I can lift up my voice and say to a dead corpse, ‘Don’t you understand?’ But a dead corpse doesn’t understand. And I can say to a dead corpse, ‘Don’t you hear?’ But a dead corpse does not hear. It cannot will itself to a quickened life. It cannot choose; it cannot see; it cannot hear; it cannot think; it cannot understand; it is dead!

George Whitefield, the evangelist used so greatly of God in the First great Awakening in the American Colonies in the mid-1700’s, described the condition of man in terms of Lazarus when he was dead. Whitefield said that the unconverted are as bound with corruptions as Lazarus was with grave clothes. He said, “[They] are as unable to raise themselves out of this loathsome dead state as Lazarus was... but all their efforts, exerted with ever so much vigor will prove quite fruitless till that same Jesus who cried, ‘Lazarus come forth’ quickens them” [Quoted in Erwin Lutzer, *The Doctrines That Divide*, page 180]

Until that truth of Ephesians 2:1 sinks in on us, we will never understand what the reformers meant by *sola gratia* – Grace Alone! When we see the total inability of man we realize that anyone who is truly saved is saved by grace alone as God enables a spiritually dead person to see, to hear, to repent, and to believe. It is all of grace! Oh, how this truth motivates worship and compels us to a life of sacrifice and surrender out of sheer gratitude for His grace.

#### **IV. The Doctrine of “Grace Alone” and the Trinity**

Our salvation by grace alone saturates the New Testament and involves each person of the Trinity – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Nowhere in Scripture is that truth so clearly taught as it is Ephesians 1.

##### **A. Grace Alone and God the Father**

Ephesians 1:4-6 (NKJV): “just as He [God the Father] chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.” In these verses

we have the biblical doctrine of election. Election is the biblical truth that God chose us before the foundation of the world (before the world was created). With our emphasis on “rights” most people assume that God owes us salvation. The fact is that God owes us nothing. A God who “owes us” stands in opposition to the Bible’s cry of “Grace Alone.” Many people have a problem with a God that is sovereign. Since we were all dead in trespasses and sins, when a sovereign God saves anyone, it is all by His grace – grace alone! We could do a whole series on election, but I just want to introduce it here because it is essential to understanding the truth of “sola gratia.”

The Greek verb in verse 4 translated “He chose us” is reflexive; that means He chose us for Himself. This is very personal. He chose us before we were conceived and even before He created the world. This is not a truth taught in one isolated place in the Scriptures (even though once is enough to make it authoritative). We read in 2 Thessalonians 2:13: “But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.” 2 Timothy 1:9: “who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.” There are more verses, but that shows you that this is not an isolated truth in the Scriptures.

The question usually arises here, “But what about our free will? Doesn’t all mankind have a free will?” The answer to that question is “yes and no.” A lost person certainly is free to choose what he will have for breakfast, whether he will stay at his current job or accept another offer, whether he will steal merchandise in a store or pay for it, etc. His will is free to choose *what he wants to do*. The will, however, is in bondage to sin and is not free to choose *what he ought to do*. He is spiritually dead and a slave to sin. Jonathan Edwards said that the will is the mind choosing. What is the condition of the mind of a lost person? We’re told in 2 Corinthians 4:4: “in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” We read in Ephesians 4:18: “being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart.”

The will of a lost person is free to choose what he wants, but his will is in bondage and thus incapable of choosing what he needs. That’s why we are told in Romans 3:11: “There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God;” Why is that? Their will is in bondage and they are spiritually dead. Certainly the Bible teaches that man is responsible before God and we must *choose* to repent of our sins and trust in Christ alone, but we can’t choose until God does a work of grace in our life to cause blinded eyes to see and to enable us to repent and believe. We see grace alone in the election of God the Father.

## **B. Grace Alone and God the Son**

Ephesians 1:7-8a: “In Him [God the Son] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us.” To redeem is to purchase out of the slave market. Jesus paid our redemption price to be freed from the slavery of sin with His own precious blood. Though it was Satan who held us in slavery, the redemption price was paid not to Satan, but to God the Father whom we had sinned against. The Father set us free from sin’s slavery and made us new creations that now truly have a free will to choose what we ought to do. Notice the last words of verse 7, “according to the riches of His grace.” It was grace alone!

## **C. Grace Alone and the Holy Spirit**

Ephesians 1:13-14: “In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is

given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory." The seal referred to in verse 13 is the seal of ownership and protection. A seal in that culture meant no one could tamper with whatever the seal was on unless they had more power and authority than the one who had placed the seal there. By grace, we have been sealed by God the Spirit, and no one has more authority than Him. We can sing with confidence the truth of that line in the hymn *In Christ Alone*:

*No power of hell, no scheme of man  
can ever pluck me from His hand  
till He returns or calls me home,  
here in the power of Christ I'll stand.*

## **Conclusion**

Can you sing with the former slave trader turned preacher of the Gospel, John Newton, who wrote these well-known words? “

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,  
that saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost but now am found,  
[chosen by God the Father, redeemed by God the Son, sealed by God the Holy Spirit]  
was blind but now I see!”*

It is indeed *Amazing Grace*.

May it never become anything less than amazing in our eyes.