

## Reformation 500 Week 2 Sola Gratia

It is rare today, for even a month to go by without being confronted with a stark reminder of the depravity of man, his Lost and Sinful Condition.

- The violence that began with the murder of Able by his brother Cain in the book of Genesis has greatly multiplied in these last days.
- The shooting that took place a week ago in Los Vegas was only one of 11 mass shootings that took place that week. (Mass shooting defined as 4 or more people)

Deep within each and every one of us, believer and unbeliever alike, there is a recognition that something is desperately wrong.

- When we hear the report of a deranged individual indiscriminately taking the lives of unsuspecting concertgoers we think to ourselves, “What is wrong with that man?”
- When violence breaks out on college campuses because a conservative speaker is scheduled to speak we say to ourselves, “Something is desperately wrong here!”
- I frequently sit across the table from sincere Christian people who, after confessing the folly of their own sinful behavior ask. “What is wrong with me?”

The Scripture answers those difficult questions that plague our society as well as our own consciences. The Bible clearly tells us what is wrong here: ALL men, in every generation and location, WHO are descended from Adam, are sinful from birth.

Psalm 51: 5 **Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.**

Psalm 58: 3 **The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies.**

- Scripture teaches that ALL men are corrupt and that No one seeks after God.

Psalm 14:2 **The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. 3 They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.**

Romans 3:10 **As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:**

You would think that all those who call themselves Christian would see the violence that surrounds us, and feel the pangs of their own conscience and realize from the study of God’s Word that the whole of humanity languished away in a state of total depravity. That is a basic Biblical truth.

And yet somehow when the majority of those who call themselves “Christian” are questioned about the essential nature of man, when they are asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement:

“Everyone sins BUT most people are by nature good.”

- 51% of Evangelicals agreed, “YEA, People are essentially good.”
- 76% Main Line Protestants agree.
- 79% of Catholics agree. They believe that Man is by nature good!

When you sit down to study the Scripture, you discover that the heart of man is deceitfully wicked. As Paul said, “**In my flesh there dwells no good thing.**”

- And yet, as you can see from the statistics, the majority of Christian people hold fast to the prideful notion that man is essentially good.
- He may not be perfect, but that is where God steps in to help.

Like lifting weights in the gym. I know that, in myself, I possess a measure of strength, BUT when I lay down on the bench, I call for a friend to “Spot Me.”

- I can lift the weight, 8 – 10 times on my own but when I begin to struggle, I need a friend to grab the bar and help me lift it the rest of the way.
- That’s the way that many Christians view their relationship with God. They can get pretty far on their own. They just need a little push from time to time.
- After all doesn’t the Bible say somewhere that “**God helps those who help themselves?**” (No friends it doesn’t say that)

There are many who sing of God’s Amazing Grace BUT live their lives in the bondage of a “Works Righteousness” treadmill. (Ever laboring for God’s approval)

- Sadly they lack the assurance of Salvation that comes by resting in the finished work of Christ on the Cross.
- This erroneous idea OF Works Righteousness dates all the way back to the beginning of time, when Adam and Eve, after falling onto sin sought to cover themselves with fig leaves. (In order to make themselves presentable to God)

Early in church history (410) a controversy arose between one of the early church Fathers named Augustine and a man named Pelagius Britto.

- Pelagius is famous for his slogan, “**Whatever I ought to do, I can do.**” (He was the original “Little engine who could” I think I can, I think I can”)
- Pelagius reasoned that God would not require man to do something if he did not possess the innate ability to do it. If God said, “You shall not commit Adultery,” then you must have in yourself the restraint necessary to remain sexually pure.
- Of course Jesus blew that away when he said, everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

The Biblical side of the argument was taken up by Augustine, who was famous for saying, “**O God, command what you will, but give what you command.**”

- He reasoned from the Scripture that He, himself was so bound by sin that he could not keep even the most basic of God's commands.
- Obedience in Him would require a supernatural empowerment from God.

Pelagius believed that Adam's sin only effected Adam, that all human beings were born neutral. (Blank Slate) He believed it was possible for man to obtain salvation independent of God's grace.

Augustine believed that ALL of humanity was sold into the slavery of sin by the fall of Adam so that every human being is born under the dominion of a fallen, sinful nature.

- Augustine taught that salvation was only possible by the grace of God.

As time went on Pelagius was condemned as a heretic by the Bishop of Rome and the council of Ephesus.

- Nevertheless, his teaching influenced the church to the point where, even today there is an ongoing debate over the free will of man and the place of good works in salvation.

At the time of the Reformation, as it is today, the Roman Catholic Church taught that Justification was a process by which the grace of God and the works of man combined to bring about the eternal salvation of the soul. They say:

- Righteousness is poured into man at Baptism and must be diligently maintained through obedience to the Sacraments, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the sick holy orders and marriage.

The Council of Trent: the Catholic response to the Reformation declared:

“The merit of Christ can save you from hell but only your own merit can bring you into heaven.”

Well the Reformers taught that Salvation from beginning to end is a sovereign work of God's GRACE ALONE! “Sola Gratia”

- This morning I would like to consider the Biblical evidence that supports our Protestant believe that Salvation is by Grace Alone.

Here is a simple OUTLINE for us to follow this morning

1. Salvation by Grace Alone is Necessary in light of man's condition
2. Salvation by Grace Alone is Possible in light of God's character.

Man's Condition

Ephesians 2:1 **And you were dead in the trespasses and sins**

**2 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, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

- It is the purpose of the Apostle Paul here in Ephesians 2 to show the spiritual condition of all men apart from the saving work of Christ.
- Here, in the first three verses, Paul helps us to see that God's great work of redemption begins with a recognition of our desperate spiritual condition. WE were ALL Dead in transgressions and sins.

Like the Trauma Doc who turns and walks away from the Table declaring the time of death. The Apostle Paul declares ALL men "Dead in trespasses and sins."

- The time of man's death is found in the book of Genesis.
- You may remember in Genesis Ch. 2 that God commanded Adam saying:

Genesis 2:16 "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

- Of course, we know from the narrative of Genesis that our first parents broke the command of God and brought the curse of death upon the entire race.

Romans 5: 12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.

Our problem is that the devastation of sin and death has been passed down to US! Every one of us.

- Men and women, originally created in the image of God to reflect His glory and partake of His Holiness fell from their first estate. The fall of Adam in the garden separated man from His Holy Creator.
- Spiritual and Physical Death permeate our society, IT ravages every family and afflicts every individual.

My friends, I want you to know this morning that GOD is deeply moved by the devastation of sin and death that have afflicted humanity.

- Go with me to the Gospel of John Chapter 11.

Now the Lord Jesus had a dear friend named Lazarus. Whenever he traveled near to the town of Bethany he would stay in the home of Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha. And it came to pass that Lazarus fell ill, gravely ill and his sisters sent word to Jesus saying. John 11: 3 "Lord, he whom you love is ill."

Jesus responded with a statement that must have made people scratch their heads:

4 "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

- And in a way that seemed strange to Lazarus' sisters Jesus hesitated for two days before departing for Bethany.
- When Jesus finally arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. In their grief Lazarus' sisters chided their friend Jesus:

32 Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Now, I want to draw your attention to how John describes the Emotions expressed by the Lord Jesus at the grave of his friend.

33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.

35 Jesus wept.

36 So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

38 Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.

- Jesus who is the image of the invisible God, the exact representation of his being moved by the plight of man provides a glorious display of his compassion, and a powerful demonstration of his divine mission.
- He calls those who gathered to remove the stone.

39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days."

- I like the KJV, it is much more graphic, Martha says, "Lord by now he stinketh."
- Death has led to decomposition and Mary is concerned with the offensive effects of her brother's flesh.
- BUT the love and mercy of Christ the Messiah are able to overcome the power and the penalty of death and so Jesus Cried out with a loud voice:

43, "Lazarus Come Out!"

44 The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

- The power of God to raise the dead to life came from the Word of God.
- Jesus who is the Living Word of God called Lazarus by name and He arose.
- The one who was dead, powerless to help himself was freely given new life.

When the Apostle John speaks of the Lord Jesus as the Good Shepherd he says:

John 10: The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.

- And this my friends is a wonderful illustration of what took place when you were converted, IF in fact you have been converted.

- You were dead, powerless to save yourself, unable to do anything that would place you in a right relationship with God.
- No religious rituals or good deeds, no spiritual exercises or pious pilgrimage could save you from the just and holy wrath of God for sin.

BUT GOD! For His glory and for your good, called you by name; And His call effectively imparted Life to your Spirit.

- He opened your ears to Hear his voice, He opened your eyes to see His Kingdom, He gave you faith to believe and brought you from death to life.

Martin Lloyd – Jones uses the illustration of a flower that is closed up at night, its petals turned inward and its face closed to God. That is how our hearts and minds were with respect to God. (Completely closed off)

But when the sun comes up in the morning, and its glorious rays strike the flower's petals, what happens? The petals open toward the sun and soak in its life-giving rays. That is what God has done with us.

- Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:6

2 Corinthians 4: 6 **For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.**

- Moving on in Ephesians 2 from verse 3 to verse 4, we move from death to life and so we move from the condition of man to focus on God's Character.

2 Salvation by Grace Alone is Possible in light of God's character.

Ephesians 2:4 **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,**

- The Character of God that is methodically and carefully revealed to us throughout the pages of Scripture finds its climax in the person of Jesus Christ.
- The same God who displayed His glory in front of Moses, has shown himself to all men in the person of Jesus Christ.

Ex. 34:6 **The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,**

- The glorious mercy, grace and steadfast love that was proclaimed in Exodus finds its highest and most beautiful expression in Jesus Christ.

John 1:14 **The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.**

- Friends, all of the perfections of God are made visible for us in the person of Jesus Christ,

And it is by his sheer grace alone, not because of anything in you but because of something IN HIM that You are saved.

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

- You see: Salvation by Grace Alone is Necessary in light of man's condition
- AND: Salvation by Grace Alone is only Possible in light of God's character.

As we draw this to a close, here I have to ask:

WHAT would cause the Eternal Son of God to leave the realm of glory and put on human flesh, why would he subject himself to such horrendous torture and grief?

- Paul answers that question for us right here in Ephesians 2:

Ephesians 2: 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.

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

All of the grace and blessings that God has lavished on his people in Christ serve as the ultimate display of His glory.

- All of his magnificent perfections are paraded before the whole of creation, Angels and Men Principalities and Powers, from the heavenly host to the lowest of created beings they can look to the grace of God in Christ and see the immeasurable riches of his glory.
- His perfect justice, his abundant mercy, His infinite wisdom, His patience and lovingkindness, his goodness and faithfulness. His boundless power and majesty and of course His perfect love...
- OUR Salvation has been accomplished by the Grace of God in Christ ALONE for the display of his glory.

Pastor Richard Phillips:

“Here is a great ground of assurance and hope to Christians who believe God's Word but still feel unworthy of salvation: it is precisely by saving people like us that God glorifies himself; it is precisely by loving his enemies and transforming us into loving children by his grace that God is glorified in our salvation.”

Think about all of the great heroes of the Faith and consider that God did not hide their sinful condition BUT overcame it by His amazing grace.

- Paul who called himself “the Chief of Sinners,” could say, Where sin increased grace abounded all the more.
- David an adulterer and murderer could say.

Psalm 32: Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. 2 Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

If our salvation depended on our own works, if it rested on our performance, the keeping of a law or adherence to the sacraments then WE would have reason to boast. As it is ONLY GOD can glory in our salvation.

2Co 10:17 "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." 18 For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.