

11-12-2017

**Message: Sola Gratia - Grace Alone**

**Text: Ephesians 1:3-8a; 2:1-10**

## **Introduction**

- A. Having examined in the previous 5 weeks the biblical and historical background of the Protestant reformers' slogans, Scripture Alone, Faith Alone, Christ Alone, today we examine the biblical and historical background of their slogan, Grace Alone.
- B. You might ask, "What can be so controversial about the phrase, "Grace Alone" within the institutional church? As a simple phrase left unexplained, you would be correct - it is unlikely to provoke much controversy among those claiming the name "Christian." As Carl R. Trueman, professor of historical theology and church history at Westminster Theological Seminary, writes (Grace Alone, p.17) ...

*The language of grace so permeates the Bible and all traditions of Christian theology that to claim that salvation is by grace alone is, in itself, to claim very little at all. It does not distinguish Augustine from Pelagious, ... Martin Luther from Desiderius Erasmus, or William Perkins from James Arminius. What distinguishes them is how grace is understood.*

- C. The Bible defines God's grace as His undeserved blessing and favor.
1. In one sense God's grace is enjoyed by everyone. We call this "common grace." It provides temporary blessings in this life, but no eternal blessing of salvation.

Matthew 5:45 your Father who is in heaven; ... **causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.**

2. In another sense God's grace is enjoyed only by believers. We call this "saving grace," providing eternal life in God's glory.

Acts 15:11 But we believe that **we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus ....**

- C. If Reformers such as Luther and Calvin were here today, they would not only see the church of Rome still in need of biblical reforming on its understanding of salvation by "Grace Alone," but also see many Protestant churches, including many Southern Baptist churches, in need of a reformed understanding of God's saving grace. But was Luther's and Calvin's biblical understanding of saving grace correct, that God's sovereign grace is needed for every aspect of our salvation, that we need God to create the faith He requires for our justification, that those of us who believe do so because He chose us, predestined us to believe? Did the church and does the church need reformation of its biblical understanding of the role of God's grace in our salvation? Since the church of Rome agrees that salvation is by God's grace, what problem did the Reformers see in its

teaching on grace?

D. On the subject of saving grace, Martin Luther stands on the shoulders of Augustine, and even sees himself fighting a contemporary version of Augustine's early 5<sup>th</sup> century battle with Pelagius.

1. Pelagius (354 - 420) was a British monk and theologian who denied original sin, believed all humans had the capacity, free will to choose good over evil, that God's grace was in making known His way of salvation, and that the power of human will could take it from there. Augustine (354 - 430) greatly contended against Pelagius, asserting God's sovereignty over salvation. In Luther's response to the Roman Catholic scholar, Erasmus in On the Bondage of the Will, Luther writes (Section 45, p. 134) ...

*Do you see, friend Erasmus ... The opinion of the Sophists, or at least the father of them, Peter Lombard, is far more tolerable: he says, "Free-will" is the faculty of discerning, and then choosing also good, if with grace, but evil if grace be wanting." He plainly agrees in sentiment with Augustine, that 'Free-will,' of its own power, cannot do any thing but fall, nor avail unto any thing but to sin.' Wherefore Augustine also, Book ii, against Julian, calls "Free-will" 'under bondage,' rather than 'free.' - But you make the power of "Free-will equal in both respects: that it can, by its own power, without grace, both apply itself unto good, and turn itself from evil.*

2. Luther's concern with grace and predestination stems from a desire to exclude any human merit as a cause for our salvation. For Luther, to fail to make faith a creative act of God's grace is to subvert God's grace and embrace the notion that our salvation is built on God's grace plus our merit. If anything decisive in our salvation is left to the power of the individual, then assurance of salvation is impossible. (Semi-pelagianism asserts that God's spirit gives enough grace to enable a person to choose to accept or reject the gospel.)

E. Calvin also believed the will to receive Christ as Lord and Savior by faith was due to God's predestining some to saving faith and some to destruction, making God's will determinative. (Institutes 3.21.5)

*By Predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, other to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death.*

F. Are Luther, Calvin, and the Reformers correct, that our will is not absolutely free, but our choices are determined by our sinful nature, that if God doesn't change our will and create faith in us, that we won't believe; if we do believe, it is because God has chosen to cause us to believe, and therefore predestined us to salvation? How can we know which is correct? Luther and Calvin would say, Sola Scriptura, Scripture Alone settles the

question. As Calvin writes (Institutes, 3.21.2 p. 923) ...

*Let this, therefore, first of all be before our eyes: to seek any other knowledge of predestination than what the Word of God discloses is not less insane than if one should purpose to walk in a pathless waste [Cf. Job 12:24], or to see in darkness.*

## **I. 1:3-6 God chose us by grace before the foundation of the world to be saved by Christ.**

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,<sup>4</sup> just as **He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world,** that we would be holy and blameless before Him. **In love**<sup>5</sup> **He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself,** according to the kind intention **of His will,**<sup>6</sup> **to the praise of the glory of His grace,** which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

A. 1:4,5 God predestined those He chose to be His children in Christ before the world existed.

B. 1:4,5, God's motivation in predestinating us was ...

1. 1:4 love

Ephesians 2:4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

2. 1:5 determined by "His will." This became known as "unconditional election" - God chooses individuals for salvation not based on Him foreseeing them meeting any condition (such as faith, good works).

Ephesians 1:11 also we have obtained an inheritance, **having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,**

3. 1:6 to bring glory and praise to His grace

## **II. 2:1-3 Before God saved us we were dead in trespasses and sin, dominated by Satan, and headed for destruction.**

A. We are all born into this world dead to God.

1. dead = having no ability know God, no ability to believe the gospel of Christ, no desire to entrust our lives to Christ and be saved from the doom of eternal hell. This is contrary to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

Ephesians 2:1 And **you were dead** in your trespasses and sins,<sup>2</sup> in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world,

1 Corinthians 2:14 But **a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God,** for **they are foolishness to him;** and **he cannot understand them,** because they are spiritually appraised.

CCC 2002 *God's free initiative demands man's free response, for God has created man in his image by conferring on him, along with freedom, the power to know him and love him.*

Catechism of the Catholic Church

2. dead = no ability to stop sinning, to desire to live by faith in Christ as Savior and Lord, no ability or desire to live righteously, to do good works, and be conformed to His image, no ability to in any way to be pleasing to God.

Romans 8:6 For **the mind set on the flesh is death,** but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because **the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so,** 8 and **those who are in the flesh cannot please God.**

Hebrews 11:6 And **without faith it is impossible to please Him ....**

3. Illustration: Lazarus, dead in a rolling stone tomb (show tomb slide). Opening a way of escape from the tomb would do Lazarus no good while he remained dead. Christ's death will do us no good while we remain dead to God. This condition became known as "total depravity."

#### B. 2:2 dominated by Satan

Ephesians 2:2 in which you formerly walked according to the course/age of this world, **according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.**

1. Sin renders our souls dead to God, Satan's agenda is to keep us dead to God.

1 John 5:19 We know that we are of God, and that **the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.**

2 Corinthians 4:3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 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.

#### C. 2:3 on the road to God's final wrath

Ephesians 2:3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and **were by nature children of wrath,** even as

the rest.

1. The wrath spoken of here is not the devil's wrath, but God's wrath, Christ's wrath at the final judgment.

Ephesians 5:5 For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things **the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.**

2. The reason being dead in sin and dominated by Satan is so problematic is that there is a universal principle created by God and rooted in His righteous character.

Ezekiel 18:4 **The soul who sins will die.** Romans 6:23 **For the wages of sin is death,**

D. So being dead and dominated by the power of sin and Satan inevitably leads to doom - having our souls destroyed by the wrath of God. And this would still be our destiny today Christian, if God had not in His grace loved us and made us alive to Him.

### **III. 2:4-7 But God in undeserved love and favor made us alive to Himself, securing us for glory.**

- A. God in His grace and mercy made us alive with Christ, regenerating us by the Spirit of Christ.

Ephesians 2:4 **But God, being rich in mercy,** because of His great love with which He loved us,<sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our transgressions, **made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),**<sup>6</sup> and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus,

- B. It was not because we loved Him first. It was not for any goodness within us, for we were dead toward Him when he exercised the power His saving grace toward us. It was because of His mercy and love that He delivered us by His power from being dead, dominated, and doomed.

Titus 3:5 **He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit,**<sup>6</sup> whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,

- C. God broke the power of our sinful nature, gave us a new heart by His indwelling Spirit to desire Christ, to live by faith in Christ, "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." (Eph. 3:17)

Ezekiel 36:26 "Moreover, **I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within**

**you**; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.<sup>27</sup>  
**"I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes,** and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

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

- D. With the power of sin broken by His Spirit's power to create and sustain faith in God's chosen ones, we are no longer dead in our sins. We are no longer unresponsive to God, dead to God, but are alive to God. This is called "Irresistible Grace," for with the Spirit we can't help but want to live by faith in Christ.

Romans 6:11 Even so consider yourselves to be **dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.**

- E. His power insures His purpose for saving us will be realized. God's elect will never be lost, never lose their salvation. Satan used to hold power over us, but no longer. We are kept by God's power. This has been called the perseverance of the saints.

Ephesians 2:7 **so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.**

Ephesians 1:19 and what is **the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe,** in accordance with the working of the strength of His might<sup>20</sup> **which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,**

1. The Council of Trent (Session 6, Chapter 14.1 On the fallen, and their restoration) teaches that those born again through baptism can lose their justification. This undercuts the possibility of assurance of salvation, which is why predestination to salvation by God was so important to Luther and Calvin.

*As regards those who, by sin, **have fallen from the received grace of Justification,** they may be again justified, when, God exciting them, through the sacrament of Penance they shall have attained to the recovery, by the merit of Christ, of the grace lost:*

2. But Peter, under the inspiration of Christ's Spirit, writes ...

1 Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,**<sup>4</sup> to obtain an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for **you,**<sup>5</sup> **who are**

**protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.**

#### **IV. 2:8-10 God creates the justifying faith that produces good works.**

Ephesians 2:8 For **by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;**<sup>9</sup> not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.<sup>10</sup> For **we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works,** which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

A. Our faith is created by God's Spirit in conjunction with His Word. We would not believe apart from the indwelling Spirit of God.

Acts 13:48 When the Gentiles heard this, they *began* rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and **as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.**

Acts 16:14 A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening; and **the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.**

Philippians 1:29 For **to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him,** but also to suffer for His sake,

B. The good works produced by God granted, Spirit generated faith can only be done by those created in Christ Jesus, transformed by the indwelling Spirit of God. So good works are done by the grace of God's power, not our own.

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.**

#### **Conclusion**

A. Out of the Reformation, particularly associated with the teachings of John Calvin, came what are called the "Doctrines of Grace" or the "Five Points of Calvinism,"

Total Depravity  
Unconditional Election  
Limited Atonement  
Irresistible Grace  
Perseverance of the Saints

B. Today we remember and celebrate all the spiritual blessings of God's grace granted to us in union with His divine Son, the crucified, risen, reigning, returning Lord Jesus Christ.

- C. We are all experiencing God's common grace at this moment, but are you experiencing God's saving grace, a grace that transforms your mind, heart, will to believe in Christ as Savior, to worship Christ as God, to love Christ for the beauty of His virtues, obey Christ as Lord
  
- D. For us who have been saved by God's grace through faith in Christ, let heart-filled love and worship be ever our experience. Bless God who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ!