

Reformation Heritage: Sola Gratia - Grace Alone
Selected Scriptures

Introduction

We are quickly approaching the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther posting his 95 theses on the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg, Germany, October 31, 1517. In recognition of this event which is generally recognized as the match that lit the fires of the Reformation of the 16th Century, we are doing a short sermon series in the morning on the five fundamental doctrines that were recovered in the Reformation, the five solas, and highlighting key men leading up to and during the Reformation. Last week I spoke on Sola Scriptura, Scripture Alone and then we examined the life of John Wycliffe in the evening. If you were not here, then get a copy of those materials.

The work of John Wycliffe, sometimes referred to as the Morning Star of the Reformation, was taken to Bohemia by some of Wycliffe's students. Those directly influenced John Hus, whose life we will examine tonight, who influenced Luther, who influenced multiple people. Wycliffe's work and his sending out itinerant preachers, the Lollards, throughout England kept his ideas alive which sprang forth again with great vigor in the early 1500's coinciding with Luther.

I cannot stress enough the doctrine of Sola Scriptura, for as I pointed out last week, that is the cornerstone upon which the rest of the doctrines were recovered. Without a return to the authority of God's word properly interpreted according to its context, the other doctrines would have remained squashed by the traditions and allegorical interpretations of the Roman Catholic Church.

Whenever the supremacy of Scripture is replaced with something else either claiming a superior authority or claiming the exclusive right to interpret the Scriptures, the truth is lost and man is put back into bondage. A key characteristic of every false religion and cult is a claim of something else being superior to the Bible whether that be other writings, a religious leader or leaders, or being the only ones that know what the Bible means. Some groups such as Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and a new one in our area, World Mission Society Church of God, are easy to identify due to these characteristics, but others are more subtle. There are Charismatics that claim extra Biblical revelation from God that becomes teaching in their churches or specific instruction to an individual by claiming a "word of knowledge" or "word of wisdom." Authoritarian preachers in evangelical churches can cross the line when they demand fealty to their teaching alone.

I pointed out last week some of the passages in which Jesus points out the authority of Scripture and its importance. In Matthew 5:17-18 He declares that He came to fulfill the Law and that not even the smallest letter or stroke of it would pass away until all was accomplished. He then warns about annulling a commandment and pronounces blessings on those that keep and teach them. In Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17, He declares that God's word is truth. Back in John 8:31-32 Jesus explained how to know the truth and its blessing - *"If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free."* He went on to explain specifically that this freedom from the bondage to sin including the false doctrines of the religious leaders that ended up promoting sins such as lying and murder.

This morning we will examine the Biblical doctrine of sola gratia, Grace Alone. It is a doctrine that could only come from God because 1) it is against man's natural pride, and 2) even if man thought of it and desired it, he could not procure it himself. Grace must come from God alone, or it cannot be grace.