

Sola Gratia

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Preached on: Tuesday, October 23, 2018

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Well, those are certainly great songs to tune our hearts for what we want to look at tonight as we continue in our series on the Five Solas coming to the doctrine known as Sola Gratia, by grace alone. It is a wonderful mercy from God. It is the most wonderful thing that a soul could ever know that its sins are forgiven and that God accepts us not for the sake of anything that we have done, but he accepts us for the sake of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. To realize that God accepts us even though we do not deserve it is a cause and a groundswell for joy, for peace, for confidence, for a permanent joy in the soul that realizes that our well-being before God is secured not by the works of our hands but by the works of another. It is secured by Christ. He has done everything that is necessary for us to be saved.

We should start with just a definition of grace and then I just want to go through a couple of points with you here this evening; a definition of grace that I'll come back to in the middle of the message as well. But grace is this as defined by the Reform theologian, Louis Berkhof, he says that grace is the unmerited goodness or love of God to those who have forfeited it and are by nature under a sentence of condemnation. Unmerited goodness from God to a sinner who does not deserve it. Unmerited goodness, unmerited love from God to those of us who have forfeited it; who have no claim on it; who could never earn it on our own. And these beliefs that we are calling the Five Solas, historically it's not just us, it's everybody since the Reformation refers to these Five Solas, last week we look at Sola Scriptura, that Scripture alone is the place where we find God's revelation regarding salvation. God has revealed himself in a general way in the natural world but he has spoken to us verbally in the Scriptures alone, and now we come to the fact that salvation comes to us by grace alone, and grace alone distinguishes the true Gospel which alone can save. You know, there is no sense in which we contribute to our salvation. There is no sense in which we contribute merit that somehow earns or deserves salvation. We cannot do that because we are ruined sinners, as we shall review in just a moment.

How I want to break this message down tonight is to talk about, first of all, the need for grace alone, the need for grace alone; and then secondly, the provision of grace alone; and you need to understand, we need to come to grips with both of them. I wouldn't expect for those of you that attend our church on a regular basis, that you will hear anything too new this evening but it is important for us to articulate these Solas and have them, as it were, in our spiritual bank to draw upon in the future both for our own souls as we witness and try to lead our family members to Christ, and also as we share Christ with

others, we need to have a clarity about these things. You know, the prevailing sentiment in the world is that somehow, in some way or another, God's pretty much going to let everybody into heaven. That is not true. Jesus said, "The way is narrow that leads to life." The prevailing sentiment in our world, the prevailing mindset in our age is that everybody is basically pretty good and, therefore, what could God have against us? And the Bible comes against the spirit of our age and demolishes it with its truth about the nature of man as we look at the need for Sola Gratia as our first point here tonight. Contrary to that spirit of the age of which we spoke, Scripture speaks a dark truth about mankind and we'll unpack this.

Romans 3:23, of course, is a very familiar verse that says that, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." In those 11 English words, you have stated a devastating critique of every man, woman and child that has ever lived, that God is glorious, that he is holy, that he is righteous and every man who has ever lived falls short of that glory; has sinned against him; has transgressed his law; has not loved him with all of their heart, soul, strength and mind. As we think about this in terms of you and I, that we have missed the mark, that we have not accomplished what God would have us to do. We have sinned by what we have done, we have sinned by what we have not done, that in thought, in word, in deed, that there is a total collapse of righteousness of our own that dissipates into nothingness before God and leaves only a trail of guilt of our lives.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and this goes to the very heart of the spirit of our age, as I said. You and I, man, woman and child throughout the world of all tribes and tongues throughout all of the world, all 7 billion people that inhabit the planet earth at the present time, this is true about them. They are not inherently good. They are not basically good. You and I on our own do not have sparks of divinity within us. We are not good people. The Bible dispels that myth about mankind and says to the contrary, all men are born with corruption. All men are born into a corrupt state that is unacceptable to God and it is the nature of man, it is our human disposition as the sons of Adam to turn away from God and to love sin just as Adam and Eve did in the garden. When they fell, they took the human nature with them and we inherit their corruption.

In Psalm 51:5 it says, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me." Now he's not saying that his birth was illegitimate. That's not his point here. What he's saying is, "The nature of sin attached to me from the moment of my conception; that in my mother's womb there was transmitted to me a corrupt nature that I brought forth into the world when I was born and my life has developed from that fountain ever since."

To state it another way, the problem of sin in the heart of man is pervasive. It has contaminated every aspect of your being. Your heart, your mind, your will have all been corrupted by sin. There is nothing righteous in us, again, as we'll look at some verses in a moment.

Now, what we just described is the doctrine that is known as total depravity and what that doctrine means is this: it does not mean that you and I are as bad as we possibly could be apart from Christ; it doesn't mean that a man is incapable of a comparative degree of kindness and showing some measure of human philanthropy, of human charity on a horizontal level. It doesn't mean that but what it does mean is this: it means that no man can please God with good works or deeds of kindness; that no man has the ability to commend himself to God, to live a life that he can present to God and say, "God, on this basis you should reward me. God, on this basis you should accept me. Based on what I have done, you should receive me into your kingdom." No, to the contrary. The teaching of Scripture is this, is that unredeemed sinners, of which we all either are or were before coming to Christ, all men have no spiritual merit of their own before God. They are utterly unable to do any spiritual good that is righteous in the sight of God. They cannot change their condition. They cannot earn the favor of God with what they do. This is a blanket condemnation of every man, woman and child who has ever lived, and it is a blanket condemnation of every aspect of the being of every person who has ever lived. Scripture condemns man, it does not commend man. Let me say that again: Scripture condemns mankind, it does not commend mankind and we understand that that puts Scripture on a direct and immediate collision course with the desire of man to boast about himself; to take pride in himself in his intellect, in his achievements, in his supposed goodness.

Beloved, Scripture has none of that and there comes a point very quickly early on as you consider Sola Gratia, as you read Scripture even on the most superficial level, there comes a collision course where you have to choose sides about what you're going to believe, whether you will go and swim with the spirit of the age, or whether you will reject that utterly and completely in order to accept what Scripture says about each one of us.

Turn to the book of Romans and keep your finger there and also turn to Ephesians as well as we look at some blanket statements that Scripture makes in this regard. In Romans 3:10 as we continue to consider the need for grace alone, in Romans 3:10, as you know so well, it says that "There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one." And in verse 18 it says, "There is no fear of God before their eyes." In verse 19, what is the result of this doctrine of total depravity, what is the scriptural teaching on sin supposed to do to us? It is meant to silence us and our tendency to boast, to claim righteousness for ourselves. In Romans 3:19 it says, "Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin."

Beloved, you cannot read those verses and find any exceptions anywhere. The Apostle Paul writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit went out of his way to exclude everyone from that claim, Jews and Greeks alike. None righteous. Not one. None. None. All have turned aside. All have become useless. None who does good, not even one, as he

quotes from the Old Testament to make his point. Well, this is very sobering, isn't it? This is humbling in the presence of God.

If you look over at Ephesians 2, we find the Bible describing this same reality with different metaphors. Chapter 2, verse 1, "you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course 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. Among them we too all," do you see it again? The universal condemnation that Scripture makes of mankind? Scripture is not playing games here. These are not suggestions, these are not mild critiques of the condition of man, these are blanket condemnations that say man has no hope in himself. "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."

So you see a description in Romans 3 that there's none who does good, there's not even one; you see in Ephesians 2 dead in trespasses and sins, children of wrath, dominated by the devil. There is an unseen spiritual component to this reality that means that we are slaves not only to our own sin but slaves to Satan himself.

Beloved, let me just pause for a moment here, take a breath, step back, whichever metaphor you prefer that I use. Maybe we could do a survey sometime and you could tell me which of those ideas you like better. What we must do is come seriously to grips with these things. We must embrace these things as true not only of mankind in general but that they describe the condition of our own soul apart from the Lord Jesus Christ because one of the things that this does is it grinds out pride from the human heart. It grinds out any sense of trying to take credit for your salvation. It also grinds out all of the futile efforts of your own to try to make yourself good enough for God to accept you. Scripture has already declared in advance that you are not good enough for God to accept you and so the sooner that we come to grips with that reality, the sooner that we abandon our hope and our aspirations after our own self-righteousness as being the grounds of our acceptance with God, the sooner we can get to the reality of true salvation. It is not until you have been thoroughly crushed by the reality of Scripture's testimony against your sinful nature and sinful actions that you begin to understand and appreciate the reality of grace. The need for grace alone is utterly pervasive. It is expansive to all men of all times in all places, and it is deep within man the need for grace in every aspect of his being: in mind, in will, in feeling, in thought. Every aspect, we have need for grace and we are desperate and we are dependent upon grace if there is ever to be any change in that brutal condition in which we find ourselves.

Now let me just expand on this a little bit more. You know, things like this, for those of you that are just visiting perhaps or hearing this in subsequent media, it is truths like this that will help you distinguish between a man who is teaching who is either ashamed of the Gospel or who embraces the Gospel. When a man wants to curry the favor of his audience, he won't speak to them this way. If he is afraid of bringing offense to them by telling them the reality about their souls, he'll soften, he'll deadpan this, he won't be explicit about it because he realizes that the Gospel brings an offense in its conviction of

the spiritual lostness of mankind. So we dwell on this. We expand on this in tonight's message in what I'm about to say simply so that we can be very very clear on this. You know, it's one thing, as I've said in other contexts in many places, is that it's one thing to make a general statement about a spiritual truth, it's another thing to go through and to detail point by point by point and to get down into the details that undergird that general statement. Well, here tonight I want to go down into the details just a little bit more about the need for grace alone and to look at what the Bible describes about our sinful condition apart from Christ because it describes it in several different ways.

First of all, the Bible describes our sinful lost condition as a condition of spiritual slavery. Of spiritual slavery. John 8:34 says, "everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin." The slave of sin. Sin is the master of the unsaved man. In 2 Timothy 2:26 it describes unbelievers in this way and it says they are in "the snare of the devil and held captive by him to do his will." Beloved, do you start to see something of the urgency of grace alone? Do you start to see something of the urgency of your need for salvation? Do you start to see something of the urgency of your need for a Savior as we come to grips with these things? Contrary to every self-esteem thing that every teacher tried to instill in you, Scripture comes to you and says you are a slave to your own sinful desires. You are a slave to a higher supernatural power known as the devil and he holds you captive. In 2 Corinthians 4 it says he blinds men from the truth of the Gospel.

So as we talk about humanity being lost in sin, falling short of the glory of God, being dead in trespasses, we realize that Scripture uses an analogy to describe that unseen spiritual condition as one of slavery, that man is captive. Let's put it this way: his own rebellion against God holds man captive. Satan himself holds man captive to do his will. And the point of grace alone, the need for grace alone is that no one has the ability to escape the chains of their own slavery. No one has the ability to rise out of it. We can't simply turn over a new leaf and leave our sin behind. No, Scripture says you must be born again. You don't need a new leaf, you need a new life. You need a life from above that you cannot produce on your own energy and power.

Scripture describes our condition as a separation from God. In Isaiah 59:2 it says, "your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear." Forget about trying to get to heaven on your own merit, as a sinner God does not even listen favorably to your prayers. Your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear. There is a separation, a gulf, there is a chasm between man and God that man is unable to build the bridge to cross. There is a separation, there is a slavery.

Scripture describes it in legal terms as being under God's judgment. John 3:36 says, "He who does not obey the Son," meaning the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, "will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." What happens when you die in that state? What happens if you're not born again? What happens if Christ doesn't save you and you enter into eternal life in that condition? The Bible says that you are facing an eternal hell.

Turn in your Bibles to Revelation 21:8. This is frightening. This is sobering. Revelation 21:8 says, "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

So not only are we in this condition during our earthly life, to die in that condition, to be in that condition when the Lord Jesus Christ returns if he no longer carries and he comes back, to be in that condition is to seal a fate that is too unspeakable for words except that Scripture describes it for us in the terms that we have seen. Scripture warns us. Jesus himself warned us that these will go away into eternal destruction in Matthew 25, if you'll turn over there with me. Matthew 25. You know, I get the fact that people prefer to have a cuddly Jesus who will do whatever you want him to do, and who will just overlook our sin. The world would like that but Jesus doesn't say that that's the way that it is. He says in verse 46 talking about the unbelieving, he says, "These will go away into eternal punishment." Jesus himself said that.

You know, it used to be the great question on every bracelet, "What would Jesus do?" What would Jesus do with sinners who die and enter into his presence with unconfessed sin? Well, the "what would Jesus" movement creates this fuzzy idea of Jesus that utterly betrays his holiness and his promises of judgment. What will Jesus do with sinners who die unconverted, who die unrepentant? What will he do with them? He'll send them away into eternal punishment.

Now, in light of all of those things, why is there need for grace? Why is there need for undeserved, unmerited favor from God, the emphasis being on undeserved, unmerited, not something that you have coming to you, it's a goodness that you don't have coming to you, that is not yours by right? Why is there need for unmerited favor from God? Look at Romans 8 with me. Romans 8. This is utterly hopeless apart from Christ. In verse 7 it says, in Romans 8:7 it says, "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, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God." There is no possibility of an unconverted sinner pleasing God with anything that they do. All men, all woman, all children, of all time, in all places, they all have a hostile nature against God and they cannot come naturally to God on their own power. We do not even have the power to get up and rise and go to Christ on our own.

James Montgomery Boice said this, and I quote, he said, "Sinners have no claim upon God. None at all. God owes them nothing but punishment for their sins. If he saves them in spite of their sins, it is only because it pleases him to do it and for no other reason." In other words, for those of us that are here today in Christ, we have been saved by this grace of God that I'm going to speak on in just a moment. If we are here in Christ, it is not because somehow you were better than the next person. It is not because you had more insight than the other person. It was not because there was something attractive in you that God just had to have for himself. No, you were a spiritual slave. You were dead in trespasses and sins. You weren't just a corpse, you were a spiritual skeleton with no living flesh on you or in you.

We had no claim upon God and so if we are here today in Christ, there is only one cause that we can attribute that to, it's that God was good to us when we didn't deserve it; that God had kindness on us when we deserved punishment instead. If there is to be any salvation for anyone, if there is to be any spiritual deliverance, if there is to be any forgiveness of sin, it must come from God on his terms, by his favor, by his kindness, love, patience and mercy, not from anything that we do that obligates him to do something for us. We are bankrupt. In terms of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:3, we are poor in spirit, meaning we are poverty-stricken; we have no resources of our own. We're like Lazarus described in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, we're sitting outside the table of God, we're a beggar longing simply for any crumbs that might fall to us. We have no right to go up to the table and eat of our own accord. You and I brought no merit to our salvation, we contribute none to it now; before or after salvation, we don't add anything that gives any reason for God to bless us and if there is any spiritual favor to be found, we must come to God and seek it by grace, not by merit.

That leads us to our second point for this evening: the provision of grace alone. The provision of grace alone. The provision of Sola Gratia, in other words. Just to renew that definition of grace that I used at the beginning, now we get to the good stuff, so to speak. All of God's word is good but this is where we find hope for our lost and demerited soul. Again the definition from Louis Berkhof that we're using this evening: grace is the unmerited goodness or love of God to those who have forfeited it and are by nature under a sentence of condemnation. A judicial declaration that we deserve judgment. That's where every one of us was or is, is that God has declared that we deserve condemnation for our sins.

This is brutally important. We do our friends, we do our families no favor if we try to soften the edges of this. We do no one any favors by trying to soften this as if we could somehow by softening it make the Gospel a little bit more appealing to the unregenerate man. No, that's not the way that we think at all, that's not the way that we do things at all. The way that we think is that we have to be faithful to what God has revealed in his word. We have a vertical responsibility, duty and privilege of fidelity to what God has said and we speak the full counsel of God, we declare it for all that it says rather than trying to soften it as though we were somehow embarrassed or ashamed of what it said. I am not ashamed of these things that God's word says. How could I be? They're true. They're right. They're affirmed by my own experience of my own soul and it saddens me when I hear men in different locations hiding the doctrine of depravity, hiding the doctrine of the sinfulness of man. How are you going to know that you need a Savior unless someone tells you that you're dead in sin? How are you going to know that you need to be rescued if you don't know that you're separated from God? How are you going to know that God is not pleased with you unless someone declares it to you from the Scriptures? We don't hide these things, we proclaim them from the mountaintops and we proclaim them from the mountaintops so that we can then be in a position to talk about the wonders of grace, the wonders of Christ, the wonders of Calvary, the wonders of the love and patience and mercy of God and to do that in a way that he gets all of the glory for it.

So we say that God does not save sinners because he is obligated to do so, we've already seen that sinners deserve judgment. He does not save them because they merit salvation by any good works that they've done. We've just seen clearly from God's word that there are no such good works. They do not exist. They are a fiction. They are a figment of unsaved man's own imagination to think that he has done something that earns heaven for himself. No. No, the testimony of Scripture is that if any sinner is saved, God has saved them even though they do not deserve it. He saves them despite the fact that they are undeserving. He saves them because it pleases him to do so, because it's a manifestation of his own attributes of love, grace, mercy, kindness and patience. That's why God saves any of us, it's because it pleases him as the Sovereign to put his attributes on display toward us in the Lord Jesus Christ; to show mercy on us that we might come to love him and know him for who he is as a God of mercy, a God of grace, and I get to worship and serve him even though I deserve the exact opposite from him.

Look at Ephesians 2, and to lead up to the verses that I want to get to at this point, let's just review for a moment those prior three verses so that we see the contrast afresh here this evening. Chapter 2, verse 1, "you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course 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. 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." On a horizontal, purely human level, this was absolutely hopeless. There was no escape possible and that's why we rejoice in grace. Now we come to the provision of Sola Gratia. Look at verse 4 with me and see this great contrast. Martyn Lloyd-Jones at one time in his exposition of Ephesians preached an entire message on these first two words, "But God." But God, by contrast with the sinful undeserving state of all men, "But God," not by what man has done but God; not because man is deserving but God has done something else. "But God." What could God possibly do in the midst of that mess of spiritual destitution?

Verse 4, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions." You've got to be kidding me? When I deserved condemnation, when I've been hateful toward God, when I've rebelled against him, are you kidding me? When I was dead in transgression, dominated by the devil and I loved the lusts of my flesh? When it was my lips that blasphemed his great name? When it was my drunkenness that distorted the image of God that I was supposed to bear? Do you mean to tell me that when I was like that, God was like this? Rich in mercy? Great in love even when we were dead in our transgressions? Wow. Then what you're telling me is that God gave me a love and mercy and kindness that I didn't deserve. Precisely. You couldn't have deserved this. Not only did you not deserve this, you deserved the opposite, you deserved condemnation and look at what God did, look at what God did for you, look at what grace alone does against the black velvet backdrop of the darkness of your sin. That provides the context for us to see the sparkling flawless diamond of God's grace in contrast to it and we give no glory to the dark black velvet, we adore the glory of the diamond of God's grace.

"Rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus," not just for this life, no, in fact it has an ultimate purpose that far transcends anything that is connected with our 70 years here on earth, verse 7, "so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

What does it mean to be saved? What does it mean to be justified? What is salvation? Well, beloved, just never separate your understanding or your discussion of that term with the condition from which you have been saved. You must keep both in mind in order to see the glory of grace alone. What is salvation? Salvation is the spiritual deliverance of sinners from guilt and condemnation. If you have been saved in Christ, you have been delivered, you have been rescued from all of that death and separation and condemnation that Scripture says was true about you.

What does it mean to be justified? It means that God pardons all of our sins and accepts us as righteous in his sight solely for the sake of Christ. In other words, the glory of the Gospel, the offer of the Gospel is this: God will forgive all of your sins. All of them without exception. God gives new life to sinners that is unlike the dead life that they knew before. God rather than continuing in the righteous separation from us that our sins require and deserve, we're separated from God, rather than continuing in that state of alienation, God accepts us. The holy Creator of the universe, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, accepts us, welcomes us. In the language of 1 John 3, the daring language of 1 John 3 goes so far as to say we have become children of God. That's undeserved favor, undeserved grace. All of your blasphemies, all of your lusts, all of your drunkenness, all of the wickedness inside, all of your hateful attitudes, all of your hateful words, all of your divisive spirits from time gone by, in Christ God pardons them all. God says, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more," Psalm 103:12.

What does that mean? That means when you die, when Christ returns, when you stand before Christ in judgment, God is not going to hold any of those sins against you. Not one of them. Not one of them. The blood of Christ was so rich and full in its efficacy that it quenched all of that guilt. It washed it all away. All of the wrath of God that formerly abided on your head was absorbed in Christ at the cross of Calvary as he hung between heaven and earth as darkness descended and he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Biblically, the answer to that question is Christ was forsaken so that you could be forgiven; that Christ bore all of the judgment of all of the sins of all of the elect of all time so that we could be pardoned, that we could be accepted, so that we could be declared righteous. "He made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in him."

Beloved, as we've explained in the past, the reality of justification is that God treated Christ as though he had committed every sin that you ever committed and ever will commit at the cross, and punished him with a punishment that had all of the dimensions of infinity upon it. Because your guilt was infinite, the punishment that you deserved was

infinite. And Christ as the eternal Son of God, the God-man, absorbed all of that for you, all of that infinite guilt and in response, and in exchange perhaps better stated, God now treats us, accepts us, views us as though we were the full righteousness of Christ. He counts that to us. He imputes it to us. He credits it to us as a gift, as something undeserved.

Beloved, think through what salvation means and realize how utterly undeserving of it you are. What do you mean to tell me that the righteousness of Christ is now credited to my account and God accepts me as though he accepts his own Son, his own sinless Son? What do you mean that God deals with me like that? What do you mean when you tell me that all of my vile sin against God and against man will not be held against me in the court of God? It's all washed away. It's all forgiven. It's pardoned and no one can bring any charge against me now. Satan can try to go into the throne room of God and make accusation against me and it falls, as it were, on deaf ears. He has no grounds because Christ in grace, in undeserved goodness, interceded for sinners at the cross.

When we say, you know, we kind of banter these words around a bit, don't we? We get used to the theological and biblical language and the lingo and we talk casually about grace. "Oh, by God's grace I'll be here tomorrow." Well, that's true and that could be said in an earnest way, but when we're thinking rightly about grace, we are profoundly amazed by it. We are profoundly astonished by the reality that God who righteously could have condemned me has dealt with me with this kind of kindness and mercy and love and patience and favor, and we realize how surpassingly magnificent and excellent this God must be, how unlike anything we have ever seen on earth he must be that he would give that kind of love at the cost of his own life-blood to sinners who had defied and rebelled against him, and who were utterly undeserving, and God showed us grace like that. Grace alone, beloved.

You see, we need to step outside of our own desire to justify ourselves, to bring God down just a little and to lift ourselves up just a little bit. We need to banish those kinds of inclinations from our hearts and realize and freely and gladly acknowledge that in my life, in your life, in the life of anyone who was ever saved, that we would say clearly, definitively without qualification and without hesitation, God was not required to do that. He was not obligated to do that. He didn't have to do that. The Judge didn't have to pardon the guilty criminal. But not only did he pardon, he paid the price himself.

Don't you see, beloved, that Sola Gratia, grace alone rightly understood, rightly appropriated leads you to a place where not only do you not want to cling to your pride, you actively hate it, you actively despise it, you reject it, you say, "No, I can't let thoughts of self-righteousness have any place in defining my view of the world. I want to slay that for the sake of the real righteousness of Christ, the real glory of God. I want to deny myself and pick up my cross and follow after him because he alone is worthy based on this grace that he has shown." And as we'll see in a few weeks as we consider Solus Christus, Christ alone, God is gracious to us in his Son Jesus Christ. The two sweetest words that human language will ever know, Jesus Christ.

Look at Ephesians 2:5 and look at how in this great passage as Paul is declaring the glories of salvation, how often he is referring to Christ directly, referring to him with the pronoun, "in Him." Look at it with me, Ephesians 2:5, he "made us alive with Christ." He "raised us up with Him." He "seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Verse 10, "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works." That's just in a few short verses there. You just see how this passage drips with, is saturated with the glory of Christ and attributes the fullness of our salvation to Christ alone, by grace alone.

Think about it a little further, you know, just kind of going back to the fact, let's think about it in some details here about it. You know, Scripture declares that God appointed us for these riches before the foundation of the world. Ephesians 1:3-4, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who chose us in Him before the foundation of the world." Before you were ever born, before you had done anything good or bad, God had determined to show this kind of grace to you. This was his eternal plan from the beginning.

Think about it from another perspective. Before you were ever born, Christ was born of a virgin in a land far away. He had humbled himself before you were ever conceived in your mother's womb, he had humbled himself and left the glories of heaven, taken on human flesh. Apart from anything that you ever did, before you were ever born, Jesus Christ lived a sinless life and offered that life of his as an atoning sacrifice on the cross to pay the infinite debt of your sin. Do you realize, beloved, think about it chronologically with me. This was 2,000 years ago. Christ was doing this for you multiplied generations before you were ever even thought of, long before whoever first came to America, came here long before that, Christ had done this. In his grace, in his mercy, he executed the redemptive plan with his life, with his death, and with his resurrection so that the full price of your salvation had been paid long before you were born. Without any prompting from you, without any suggestions from you about how this plan of salvation might work out, think about it, you know? We are the eternal beneficiaries of this great grace of God and he didn't consult with us one bit before he planned it, before he carried it out, before Christ came. This is all of the genius loving mind of God. We didn't contribute a single idea to it, let alone a single act of righteousness to it. Without any prompting from us, without any assistance from us, God raised Christ from the dead, raised him from the grave, raised him from the tomb, proof that the payment had fully been made, death no longer had claim on Christ nor on any who are in Christ. Without your assistance, Christ ascended to heaven and now sits at the right hand of God, gladly interceding for you, gladly representing you before the holy Shekinah glory of God saying, "Father, those belong to me. He's mine, God." And God accepts you in Christ.

Let's look at that passage in Ephesians 1:3. For those of you that are newer to our church, about four years ago I did a message on this passage, Ephesians 1:3-14, 202 Greek words of praise. This is one sentence in Greek from verse 3 to 14. We won't look at all of it but Paul says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." You see, these truths lead you to bless his name. "Am I saved or not? Am I truly a Christian or not?"

And they start to say, "Well, you know, what kind of fruit do I see in my life? Am I avoiding sin or am I doing this or that?" Do you know what? If you're truly saved, there's going to be something in your heart, a predominant strain in your heart in response to the provision of grace alone, there is going to be something in your heart that joins with the Apostle Paul and says, "Oh, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" There is going to be a tone of praise if God has done this in your life that your response to that is one of adoring worship to him. If that note of worship is absent from your heart, then, yeah, you've got problems far greater than any sins you're committing because the one who has truly been saved and has some kind of understanding of it is drawn upward to give worship in response. What else could you do in response? Guilty and condemned, now accepted and pardoned, declared righteous?

Look at verse 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, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world." Do you know what, beloved? It was even grace that gave you the power to come to Christ in the first instance. John 6:44 says, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." And through all of this when you look at the need for Sola Gratia, the sinfulness of man, your own sinful depraved nature, you look at what Christ has done, you look at the benefits of being in Christ, you see the love, grace, mercy, patience and kindness of God that that reveals, and you say, "Salvation finds its cause in God's sovereign grace alone." It was his plan, it was the Father's plan, it was the Son's blood, it was the Spirit's application to your heart that has put you in a position to be here tonight if you are in Christ. If you are in Christ, it's because there was a Trinitarian work of grace that was done to secure your eternal redemption that you absolutely did not deserve but that God absolutely was pleased to do for his own glory. Apart from the grace of God, apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, no one would be saved.

Again, James Montgomery Boice, I quote, he says, "Human beings are not capable of winning, seeking out, or even cooperating with God's grace. It is to grace alone expressed through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit that brings us to Christ, releasing us from our bondage to sin, and raising us from death to spiritual life." We're completely humbled and we're completely overjoyed.

So Sola Gratia, at the risk of repeating myself here, emphasizes that God saves us from his own mercy not because there was anything desirable or worthy in us. The power came from God alone, not from our dead hearts. That's why, go back to Ephesians 2, that's why these verses, these two verses are justly and rightly famous. Now with a fresh and informed understanding, these familiar verses should leap off of the page into our hearts, into our minds, and lead us to adoring worship of this God who is blessed. Verse 8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." Do you see the absolute statements again? No one can boast. This salvation is a gift from God not something that you did on your own.

Now, sure, when we've been born again, when God imparts a new nature to us, we live a different life, we do good works, we live from a transformed nature, verse 10, "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them," but beloved, understand this: those good works in your subsequent life after you have been converted bring no merit to the table for you to be saved; they play no part in your justification; it is not that you are saved by faith plus works and that brings about justification. You are justified by faith alone, based on the righteousness of Christ alone, by the grace of God alone, to the glory of God alone.

It is solely and completely for the sake of Christ alone, of Christ's righteousness alone that God accepts us and the fact that it's not attributed to our works precludes boasting and, beloved, I know some of you really need to hear this because it's not about your works but the righteousness of Christ, that means that you can rest in Christ and say, "God accepts me in Christ despite my sin, even though I have fallen short of the glory of God, it is by grace alone that he accepts me. I rest in Christ. I trust in Christ alone." And to know the liberty of the position of the children of God that we might have that blessed acceptance from God that we completely do not deserve, and yet we have it as our eternal possession, secure, never to be taken away.

I ask you, my friends, have you trusted in Christ alone for this kind of grace and forgiveness? Have you forsaken your own claims to self-righteousness and rested in Christ alone? Grace is amazing. That kind of grace, that kind of love, that kind of mercy, that kind of patience demands your life, your soul, your all.

Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, impress these truths deeply upon our heart. Give hope to the struggling sinner, that wayward child of yours in these words of Sola Gratia, to realize afresh that no sin is so great that the sinner cannot find forgiveness in Christ. Stated in a positive way, Father, Christ is sufficient to cover all of our sins for all of time and that by undeserved favor, that by unmerited kindness, that by grace alone. Help those who are not in Christ to repent and believe in him, to forsake sin and to flee to Christ to take up their cross and follow after him, Father, knowing that the cross is not a heavy burden to bear. That cross is not a burden on our back. That cross is the instrument that breaks our chains and lifts us up to glory and we thank you deeply and profoundly from the bottom of our heart for grace and for grace alone. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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