

## FIVE REFORMATION SOLAS

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### Study 3 - Sola Gratia

The Reformation affirmed God's gift of Grace alone against the Roman Catholic idea that God gives Grace to earn merit. This must continually be appropriated to complete justification & sanctification. If the process is not completed, it's finished in purgatory after death. Roman church taught that God grants grace in the Mass, remits sins plus penance; & seven sacraments. --- Brief historical background

**Augustine (354-430)**: 4th C. Bishop of Hippo, north Africa; theologian of grace who opposed British monk, **Pelagius (354-420)**; who denied original sin, predestination and grace to be saved. Taught that Adam's sin affected only himself. Infants not born with disposition to sin; born innocent. He taught that we have natural capacity to reject evil and seek God; and even pagans can enter heaven through good morals. We need new direction not new birth. Therefore, we can live lives that please God and have ability to take initial steps towards salvation by own efforts apart from special grace. Unconditional free will.

**Augustine** emphasised that we are all born in sin and sinful human nature predisposes us to commit sin. No one can meet demands of God's Holy Law. Absolute necessity of God's grace for salvation.

**Arminius**: (1560-1609) 16<sup>th</sup> C. Dutch theologian and semi-Pelagian; election after grace. This view teaches that humanity tainted by sin, but not so tainted that we cannot cooperate with God's offer of grace. God decrees to save all who repent, believe & persevere; election depends on our response. God gives enough grace for any to believe on Christ if they will for will is free; can believe or resist God; no assurance of ultimate salvation. **Arminius** did not believe that God chose anyone but knows who will choose Him; same as Pelagius. In 1618/9 the **Synod of Dort** held in Dordrecht, Holland; to settle controversy. Issued Five points of Calvinism to settle controversy initiated by Arminianism. At the heart of the Five Points is the doctrine of the absolute sovereignty of God in the work of salvation by grace alone.

**Charles Finney**: (1792-1875), US lawyer and revivalist; advocated Christian perfectionism. Anxious bench, piercing eyes, make decisions now; emphasised human responsibility to dramatically improve, if not perfect self and society. Pelagian belief has continued as grace plus in our day.

**18<sup>th</sup> C. Age of Reason or Enlightenment**, intellectual movement; human advancement by logic and reason; John Locke, Voltaire & Deism; French & American civil wars. Evolution, Modernism. Post-modernism, Pluralism & Ecumenism.

**1: Grace only today.** Most people see themselves as good. I'm OK if I don't get caught; it wasn't my fault. Judgment & hell outmoded. Beliefs from TV; films, computer games; social pressures. Idea of God (whatever!) not holiness; no Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1. God knows we are not that bad if we do our best. Reformation Protestants believed Scriptures from Genesis 3, that humanity is rebellious. Also, Noah, flood & rainbow, we have fallen and cannot rise. Tower of Babel. We are lost rebels; born in sin, guilty before a Holy God. All rejected by modern people, & some who profess "religion".

**2: Grace only Scriptures.** Galatians 1:15; Ephesians 2:1-10. By free, sovereign grace, God who is Supreme above all heaven and earth, the triune God of salvation; freely wills and applies saving grace to guilty, contemptible evil sinners, transforming their lives so that they can enjoy Him forever. Grace comes to us in the person of Jesus Christ; wholly unmerited, full forgiveness in God's act of redemption in His Son by death & resurrection; Titus 3:3-7. Divine grace equips us with varied gifts to serve in His church for His glory. Salvation by Grace alone secures us in our salvation. Not a power or substance but entirely the work of God, permanent & complete; Romans 5:20; *And the Law came in that the transgression might increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more*. If we experience such sovereign grace, we will understand what it really means.

If it is not free, and not sovereign and we have to earn it or work for it or take steps to obtain it; there is no grace. 2 Corinthians 12:9. *My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness...*

**3: Grace only, ever only.** Grace calls us, Galatians 1:15; regenerates, Titus 3:5; justifies, Romans 3:24; & preserves us 1 Peter 1:3-5. Grace reigns in isolation; *For of His fulness we have all received, and grace upon grace ... grace and truth were realised through Jesus Christ*; John 1:16 & 17.

"Grace grows on a tree'. Grace is not a commodity, not even a power: it is God acting, but acting to do man good, even though he does not merit that action. There is one place in all history where grace presents itself brilliantly and it is in the Atonement, i.e. the work of the Cross and resurrection." (G C Bingham).

**SOLI DEO GLORIA**