

## Sola Gratia - Grace Alone

**Luke 10:21 ESV (Pg. 506)** In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. **22** All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” **23** Then turning to the disciples he said privately, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! **24** For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”

- I. We’re in a series on the “5 Solas”, 5 statements of fundamental truth that guard all Christian theology. They framed the thinking of the Protestant Reformers. But though they became battle cries of the church during that time, they are thoroughly biblical, and are found throughout the Old and New Testament books.
  - A. “Sola” is Latin for “alone”. The 5 Solas are Scripture alone, Christ Alone, Grace Alone, Faith Alone and to the Glory of God alone. Every false doctrine that has infiltrated the church in two millennia springs from abandoning these truths.
    1. This is true of battles over the humanity and divinity of Christ and the nature of the Trinity that raged in the church’s first 500 years. It is true of the heresies that made the Protestant Reformation necessary.
    2. But it is also true of the false teachers that fill the airwaves and on the podcasts that we have today. The prosperity message is a departure from Grace alone. The overemphasis on signs and wonders are a rejection of the Glory of God alone. False religions like Mormonism, Catholicism, and the Jehovah’s Witnesses do not adhere to either Christ Alone or Faith Alone.
  - B. And all of these perversions of truth could have been avoided had their founders and adherents begun with the Bible, embracing the authority of Scripture alone.
  - C. These 5 Solas are at the heart of everything we embrace as believers. Any new deceptions that ungodly men try to impose on Jesus’ church in the future will be the result of the same types of abandonment of these 5 soul-anchoring beliefs.
- II. Today we’ll consider a third truth - **Sola Gratia - Grace Alone!** Paul reminded the Ephesians they were once completely cut off from salvation, saying **Ephesians 1:12 ESV** remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. They were like people who had fallen overboard from a great ship, miles from land, or another vessel that could hear their cries for help.
  - A. But Paul also makes it clear that **grace** is the reality that makes salvation possible for believers. It is the only life preserver! **Ephesians 2:8 ESV** 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
    1. You may have heard grace defined as “unmerited favor”; which points out the freely granted aspect of grace. Grace is “getting what you don’t deserve, and escaping what you do deserve”. There are two sides of grace: receiving of an undeserved gift, and escaping a well-deserved punishment.

2. But what makes grace, grace? Like a multi-faceted, flawless diamond, if we turn grace in the light of scripture, we can admire it's dazzling brilliance.
  - B. J.I. Packer commented that Christians should feel in their hearts four great component truths to understand grace: the sinfulness of sin; the judgement of God; the inability of humanity; and God's sovereign freedom<sup>1</sup>.
- III. **The Sinfulness of Sin.** Understanding grace requires a serious view of sin. I knew a teen who was always pushing the boundaries of acceptable behavior. The underage boy was drinking, and wrecked a couple of cars in an impaired state. But his dad would plead with the judge to go easy on him, begging for one more chance. Therefore, the boy had no regard for the danger or foolishness of his actions.
- A. This describes all of us at some point. Sadly, some of us are still there. But our sins aren't just "mistakes"; they are calculated, premeditated acts of rebellion.
    1. Flip Wilson would say in his routine, "The Devil made me do it!" But that's not true either! We're not sinners because we sin, we sin because we're sinners!
    2. Paul, borrowing from several Psalms, states our problem clearly in Romans 3: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one...There is no fear of God before their eyes."<sup>2</sup>
      - a) Don't tell me you're basically a good person! The Bible says there is none righteous, not even one! You may think you're not as bad as this woman, or that man. You hope God will consider that when he looks at your sin.
      - b) Don't tell me you understand how badly you need Christ! Scripture points its finger in your face and says, "There is no one who understands". **1 Corinthians 2:14 ESV** The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.
      - c) "But I've come to church for years, and I try to do the right thing". Maybe. But you've missed the point: no one seeks for God. He is not impressed by your morality. He calls it a menstrual cloth<sup>3</sup>. He calls your church-going "trampling on his courts"<sup>4</sup>. Romans says you have turned aside, you have become worthless, doing nothing good. You don't even fear God!
  - B. You may be thinking, "Wow. Pretty heavy for a message on grace". Stay with me. **Luke 18:9 ESV** He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: **10** "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. **11** The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. **12** I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' **13** But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' **14** I tell you, **this man went down to his house justified**, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."
  - C. If you want grace, you must start by recognizing your absolute need for it! You have no boot straps to pull yourself up by, no merit to bargain with for salvation.

1. Grace is never bestowed on the “good guy” who is sure he deserves it. It is lavished on the bad guys who are driven to humility as they beg for the mercy of God they know they could never earn. They go home justified.
  2. How long has it been since you were aware of the deep darkness that desires to master you<sup>5</sup>, and yet because of the scent of grace, bowed your head, beating your breast, crying, “Have mercy and grace on me, a sinner!”
- IV. Grace is also seen in **The Judgement of God**. When most of us speak of the judgement of God, we have in mind an outpouring of his wrath, not his grace. But when you discover your sinfulness (not only sinful acts, but from the core of your being), you become aware that no holy God could ever excuse or ignore sin. That would necessarily make him less than holy, even unholy; and unholy is one thing that God can never be! His innate perfection demands his perfect holiness!
- A. When holy God sees human sin, he is driven by perfect justice to judge every last bit of it in a deluge of his terrible wrath! But a perfectly holy and just God is also a perfectly loving God, and takes compassion on his failing creatures.
    1. **Romans 3:22b ESV** For there is no distinction: **23** for *all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24* and are *justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25* whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. **26** It was to show his righteousness at the present time, *so that he might be just and the justifier* of the one who has faith in Jesus.
    2. Jesus was put forward by God as a propitiation. A propitiation is a sacrifice made to appease someone. Any sacrifice that would satisfy God’s wrath would have to be perfect, so, right off the bat, all of us were disqualified.
      - a) The Son had to become man, and live his life in perfect obedience in order to pick up the tab for all of mankind’s non-stop wickedness.
      - b) This allowed God to remain holy and just, demanding satisfaction for the many ways we’ve vandalized his holiness-he has never lowered his standards! But by paying the price himself through Jesus, he is not only just, but the agent of our justification, we who were once enemies of God!
  - B. God, who is unspeakably holy and just, will judge all sin. He will either judge it by subjecting the sinner to eternal torment in hell, or he will allow the judgement they deserve to be applied to Christ at the cross, if they place their faith in him. We don’t deserve grace. It is a gift, and you give gifts to those whom you love.
  - C. The cross is the most vivid picture of the wrath of God against sin. If you ever doubt how much God hates sin, look what was done to him there. But without the cross, we could never know grace! That is where grace is displayed!
- V. But we must also consider **The Inability of Humanity** to understand grace. Even if we understand the problem posed by our own sinfulness, or even appreciate what God has done on the cross through Christ, we are helpless to fix what is at the root of our problems-our corrupt thoughts, desires and natures!
- A. Total depravity teaches we are completely corrupt! This doesn’t mean we are all equally evil in our actions (not everyone is a cannibal or child molester!). it means we’re all deeply stained with sin, and have no remedy in ourselves, no spiritual detergent! We can’t moralize or vow our way out of our sin predicament.

1. Our minds and hearts are corrupted: **Jeremiah 17:9 ESV** The heart is deceitful **above all things**, and **desperately sick**; who can understand it?
    - a) Paul said to Titus, “to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled.”<sup>6</sup>
    - b) Paul said to the Ephesians that the minds of unbelievers were futile, and that their understanding is darkened. In our sinfulness, we can’t even think the right kinds of thoughts, or have completely pure motives.
  2. Our will is enslaved. **John 8:34 ESV** Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who **practices sin is a slave to sin**.”
    - a) People like to talk about “free will”, meaning they have the right to choose morally. But can a slave to sin freely choose anything besides sin?
    - b) Jesus’ reference here isn’t an outlier either! The Bible talks about how we’re slaves to the flesh and sin in John, Romans, Galatians, 2 Timothy, Titus, 2 Peter. We are captives and prisoners to our sinful desires.
  3. Our affections and desires are perverted. **John 3:19 ESV** And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.
    - a) When we are doing something we know is morally wrong, or even destructive to our bodies or souls, how often do we persist in that thing?
    - b) Worse, how often do we engage in things that are killing us and either make excuses for it, or, if we don’t get caught, feel like we’ve gotten away with something. None of us (by default) chooses what is best for us.
- B. **Matthew 12:34 ESV** You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. **35** The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. We cannot change ourselves. Evil people produce evil. And we have already seen that “There is none righteous. No, not one.” Our only hope is grace. But do you see the problem? If our sinfulness is deeper than we can imagine; if we are under the sentence of the judgement of God; if we are incapable of helping ourselves in our sin trouble, what is to be done with us?
- VI. That question brings me to the last facet of God’s Amazing Grace, the one that reveals beauty even in the reality of our sinfulness, God’s judgement, and our hopeless inability. It is **The Sovereign Freedom of God**. It’s what our text this morning was all about. Let me set it up for you:
- A. In Luke 10, 72 of Christ’s followers, were sent out to the surrounding villages to proclaim the kingdom of God. They returned, telling of God’s power working through them. The sick were healed, and demons were evicted. They rejoice and tell Jesus the results of their ministry.
    1. Jesus says as they were doing the work, he saw Satan fall; his power broken in the area. He gives them authority over all the power of the enemy.
    2. **Luke 10:20 ESV** “Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” He draws their attention to his work, not theirs, as if he needed anything from them
  - B. And he’s not done declaring his own sovereignty! “In that same hour **he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit** and said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that

*you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will”.*

1. His response to their testimony was joy and thankfulness! But for what? The smartest, best educated, and spiritual have been left in the dark and that God has revealed his power and authority to “little children”.
  2. His followers weren’t kids; but they had simple childlike faith. **Luke 18:17 ESV** “Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” Those who should’ve known what God was doing missed it; not because they didn’t think enough, but because God’s “gracious will” was to reveal himself to the “little children” instead!
- C. *“All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”* Jesus is saying that no one has first-hand knowledge of who the Father or the Son truly are. It is a heavenly mystery.
1. Just like at Mount Sinai, so long ago, the face and nature of God is hidden from us. But with the coming of the Son, something has changed. There are now some to whom the Son is pleased to reveal the Father!
  2. It is by his sovereign will that any of this happens. **John 6:44a ESV** *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.* I’ve said it many times, no one ever “finds” Jesus. Our only hope is to be found by him, drawn by him, and for him to reveal the truth of Jesus to our innermost being.
- D. *Then turning to the disciples he said privately, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.”*
1. The moment has come where Christ has been revealed by the Father, and he is pleased to reveal the Father to all whom he calls. These disciples have lived to witness the apex of human history right before their eyes.
  2. And this is the capstone of the message of grace! People that are too enslaved to sin to desire freedom, and under a death sentence because of that sin, and yet incapable of doing anything about their sin, are now being called out of their rotten, sin-stained grave clothes, and called to new, eternal life in Christ Jesus, clothed in righteousness and fully forgiven and accepted.
- E. And scripture shouts that this is the work of grace alone. Something you could never own, freely given; something you would never seek, that overtakes you; something you will never deserve, granted by the goodness of God, that he might be praised eternally. **Sola Gratia! Grace Alone!** Our only hope!
- VII. Benediction: **Ephesians 1:3 ESV** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, **4** even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love **5** he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, **6** to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in “Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace” by James Montgomery Boice; Pg. 110; © 2001, Linda McNamara Boice; Published by Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL.

<sup>2</sup> Romans 3:10-18

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 64:4

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 1; especially vv. 11-15

<sup>5</sup> See Genesis 4:7

<sup>6</sup> Titus 1:15-16