



# THE SOLAS

## Week 2 - Sola Gratia

### Opening prayer

#### Prayer for the persecuted church:

MALAYSIA

Praise God for a recent Standing Strong Through the Storm training in a village. After the training, believers were met with spiritual warfare when unbelieving villagers practiced witchcraft against them. Please pray for this group of believers.

#### Prayer for a local church:

This morning we pray for our brother Erick Cobb and Covenant Grace Church.

### Closing prayer

## **INTRO:**

It was that time in my life when I had fallen away from the Lord. It had been ten years and though I wanted to return, I knew I had no moral resolve to do anything. I was powerless and felt for the first time in my life that only God could do what needed to be done. And that was my prayer, “If you want this done, you will have to do it.” And that is when I can say I experienced grace.

The reason we began last week with the Reformation slogan “Scripture Alone” is because everything that follows regarding the gospel cannot be spoken authoritatively if the Bible does not have the final word. If the Bible does not have the final word about the gospel, someone else does. That was the problem during the time of the Reformation in the 1500s.

The system of indulgences, which never did have a biblical basis, came by way of an authority other than the Bible. And when examined, indulgences is a completely different gospel than the one found in the letters of Paul. That’s why the battle of the Reformation was, “Who has the final say?”

The church’s fear at that time was that if they just put the Bible in the hands of the laypeople, the people would find all kinds of faulty interpretations and begin to publish books like *Your Best Life Now* and *Jesus Calling*. It was a legitimate fear. But in the long run, even the average layperson can read the Bible and understand its message, because — and this can be seen as the entire theme of the solas — the gospel brings everything you need. The first thing the gospel brings us is the authority to tell us how we can be saved.

And in telling us how to be saved, the second thing we discover about the gospel is that we are saved by grace alone. And that is the Reformation Sola we’re looking at today — Sola Gratia or grace alone.

**THEME:** The gospel brings everything you need.

**BIG IDEA:** Grace always reminds us — it’s not you, it’s Him. (If you want this done, you have to do it.)

**Gospel grace can be defined this way, “Your acceptance with God is not by works, nor by a mixture of works and grace, but by God’s grace alone, received by faith alone.”**

**Grace is God’s unmerited favor. Unmerited means you cannot earn it. You don’t earn points toward heaven with your behavior because salvation is by grace alone.**

**As we examine Scripture today, it will become apparent that this definition of grace faithfully represents the Bible’s teaching about salvation.**

**Grace always reminds us — it’s not you, it’s Him.**

**Now, there are many verses we could use to show that Scripture teaches this gospel truth. Thankfully, it’s plain when we read it. This is not a hard truth to understand, but it is a hard truth to accept because it takes our effort out of the equation completely.**

**And all the Apostles taught it.**

**Here we have the Apostle Peter saying:**

## **Acts 15:11**

**11** But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

**Notice it’s not grace plus anything, but simply “we’ll be saved through grace.”**

**Then we have the Apostle John writing:**

## **John 20:30-31**

**30** Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; **31** but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

**Notice the condition John gives for eternal life — believing in the revealed Christ and nothing else.**

**This is where the Reformers developed their slogans, from reading the Bible. Another way of saying what John means is that you may have life by grace alone through faith alone.**

**To unpack the Bible’s teaching on grace, let’s turn first to the book of Romans, beginning in verse 23 of chapter 3.**

# Romans 3:23

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

We're going to begin with sin, because our view of grace will be very much affected by our view of sin.

- Packer quote

“For all have sinned” is universally accepted enough. It is no great feat to get someone to agree with the basic premise that they are not perfect. But that is not a biblical view of sin. Because most people who agree that they are not perfect have a relative view of perfection. They often feel, of course, they are not perfect, but they ain't far from it either. As a matter of fact, they would probably say they ain't that bad.

Most people believe they have acceptable imperfections and thus feel no great need to be free of their imperfections. As a matter of fact, they would view it as unreasonable if someone demanded that they change, because no one can be free of their imperfections. Therefore, how can God be upset with us?

There are several things wrong with this point of view, the first being that the focus of being imperfect is only about behavior. When behavior is the issue, we admit that, sure, there are times we are not as patient or as kind as we should be, so we could use a little help in the behavior department.

However, sin is not a behavioral problem. It's a corruption problem.

It's been put this way: “Sin is irrational rebellion and plagues every human heart. We are created to love God, but we love ourselves instead and act like we are God. Sin affects all that we are and damages us in all kinds of ways, leading us deeper into depravity.”

In other words, the behavior is just a symptom of the corruption in our hearts. The behavior is the taste of water from the spring of irrational rebellion.

If you have an impure source, you will have impure water. Now, you can cover up the taste with various ingredients, but a better solution would be to rid the water of its corruption.

The springs of the human heart are corrupt therefore what flows from it is corrupt. We have simply gotten use to the taste. We wash in dirty water, we bathe in dirty water, we drink with dirty water and think nothing of it. No one's perfect.

What can drive home the sinfulness of our sin? The second part of this verse tells us.

and fall short of the glory of God,

We were created to image God, to reflect God. And the law of God expresses His nature and character and everything that we should be.

But when we actually look at the law of God we do not find comfort, but we find, rather, condemnation. Looking at the law of God we see the sinfulness of our sin.

## **Romans 7:13**

13 Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means!

Because to find fault with the law would be to find fault with God.

It was sin,

It's like he's personifying sin here, giving it personhood. It's like there is an evil entity in you named Sin who works against everything good thing you'd like to do.

producing death in me through what is good,

So, here's the commandment, what is good, and it says, "Do not commit adultery." And here's this entity within you that whispers thoughts about someone else's spouse. And you say, "Wow, where did that come from?" Well, it came from deep within you. That evil entity you think is working against you is you.

So, the law comes...

in order that sin might be shown to be sin,

It's not just about behavior, it's about corruption.

and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

He's saying the more you look at the righteous commands of God, the more you will see how deep down your sin nature goes. And you will see that the problem is not your

behavior. The problem is where your behavior comes from — your heart.

## **1 Timothy 1:9**

9 understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just

If you were righteous, if you were just, if you were truly a good human being, the law wouldn't touch you. It would only confirm your goodness. But that is not the case.

So, if you're not righteous or just, or as our culture would describe it, if you're not basically a good human being, then what are you? Who are you?

Well, you're the person the law is for...

but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers,

That's you. Things are not looking good. This is why faith cannot be the product of the human heart. If faith is the product of the human heart, then not everything in salvation is from God, because we add to what God has done with our faith and presto — salvation is complete.

But the biblical teaching is that grace comes to our rescue as a gift.

## **Romans 3:23-24**

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift,

Grace is the unmerited favor of God. This means there is nothing we can do to earn God's favor. If we could earn God's favor with our faith then grace would not be grace.

That's why one of the slogans of the Reformation is Grace Alone. Grace alone means the overwhelming teaching of the Bible is that we cannot add anything to what God does for us. We cannot add anything to the salvation He has provided for us in Christ.

Let's break this sentence down so the meaning overwhelms us.

“And are justified.” To be justified means to be declared not guilty. Now that's wonderful news because we are guilty. But God says, “Not guilty.”

But the enemy accuses you, “Look at you! How can God have anything to do with you?”

And God says, “Not guilty!” Now, we can turn to the enemy and say, “Shut up!”

Other human beings can accuse us, “Look at what you did!” But God says, “Not guilty!” And we can turn to our accusers and say, “Look up! And you, too, can find forgiveness!”

“And we are justified!”

How? How are we justified? “By His grace.” Not by anything else, but God’s own gracious choice. He showered His favor upon us for reasons that are beyond us.

So, you can spend all the time you want asking, “Why me? Why not Aunt Martha?” But what a waste of time! You’re in the Kingdom! By His grace. Tell Aunt Martha about it, but if she wants nothing to do with it then all you can do is marvel that you have ears to hear for reasons that are beyond you.

“And we are justified by His grace... as a gift.”

There is no payment required for a gift. If there was payment of any kind required, then it would not be a gift.

There is nothing given in exchange for this gift and this is where we error biblically so often, because how many Christians believe that salvation is a gift that is given in response to our faith. Realize what that’s saying. It says faith becomes the exchange rate for salvation. If we give God our faith then He will give us salvation.

That’s not how gifts work. Here’s how gifts work. You’re doing nothing and someone jumps up from behind the couch and says, “Surprise! Keys to a new car!” You don’t receive a gift. Gifts are brought to you. They are given to you. They’re already there. (Now, if you have questions on that we’re going to unpack faith next week.)

But let’s close with the personal application of grace alone.

## **1 Corinthians 15:8-10**

8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

Paul came to faith in Christ later than all the other Apostles. This is why he says...

9 For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

**Here's a man who is not in denial of his sinful past. He knows what his sins were and he knows who he was, but that is not what defines him. He doesn't let who he was define him. He doesn't let his past define him.**

**This is so incredibly important, because this is something the enemy uses against Christians all the time. The enemy will say, "Let me remind you of who you were. Right. Remember that?" And he'll get you focused on the past. You know why? Because when you're focused on the past you make no difference in the present.**

**In his past, Paul held the garments for people who were stoning Christians to death. Have you ever aided and abetted someone in a murder? What I love about Paul, because I find it so helpful and encouraging, is that when Paul talks about his past he doesn't strike one woe-is-me-horrible-person-that-I-was-I-just-can't-get-over-it note. He doesn't deny who he was, but he has been "justified by his grace as a gift."**

10 But by the grace of God I am what I am,

**You're in the Kingdom. Do you know why you're in the Kingdom? Because God wanted you in the Kingdom. That's it. You are in because of God. You can rejoice about being in because of God. You can move forward in this life because you're in the Kingdom. That's who you are — someone bound for the Kingdom.**

**Don't live based on what you were — lawless, disobedient, unholy, profane. Live based on who Christ has made you.**

- **Lloyd-Jones quote**

and his grace toward me was not in vain.

**Now, don't waste what you've been given. Don't fret over the days you've wasted up to now. Just move in His grace from here on out.**

On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.

**The more we understand grace the harder we will work.**

**Paul was the last Apostle, but who wrote most of the New Testament? The last shall be first.**

**Paul's reward is not going to be any less because he was last and their reward is going to be any more because they were first.**

**The more we understand grace the harder we will work. The more we understand grace the more we will do.**

- **Bonhoeffer quotes on cheap grace**
- **God gave His one and only Son...**

**Grace always reminds us — it's not you, it's Him.**

**The enemy wants to sidetrack your thinking and get you focused on you. But grace always answers him with, "It's not me, it's Him. Deal with Him. Take up your issues about me with Him. And let me get on with the work."**

Unique Salvation History—What about the passage is important for the way God unfolds his plan of salvation in history? What's unrepeatably by us but worthy of worshipping God for or needing further explanation?

Non-Christian—How does the passage speak to the unbeliever? How does it call him/her to repentance and belief? How does it warn, rebuke, correct, or prod the unbeliever? What does it say about the danger of the unbeliever's situation, the exclusivity of Christ, the sinner's need for a Savior, or the sufficiency of that Savior as a substitute for the sinner?

Public—What does the passage say about our lives and roles in the public sphere, both as Christians and non-Christians (e.g. government, neighborhood)?

Christ—How is Jesus foreshadowed or typed? What particular perfection of Christ does that type depict? How is Jesus remembered or described in character, authority, glory, or essence?

Unity in Diversity—How does this passage demonstrate the unity that we have in Christ? How does it reflect the diversity of the body?

Work—What does this passage say to the employee and employer?

Gender/Marriage/Family—How does the passage speak to men? How does the

passage speak to women? How does this passage apply to the husband and wife and how does this apply to the family? Individual

Christian—What does the passage mean for the life of the individual Christian? How does it call him/her to deeper repentance and belief? How does it warn, rebuke, correct, motivate, comfort or encourage the Christian?

Your Local Church—What does the passage mean for the corporate life of our local church? How does it call the local corporate body to tend to its corporate life together and corporate witness to the unbelieving community around it?