

Sola Gratia - Grace Alone

Romans 3:19 – 26

How is a sinner made right with a holy God? The Protestant Reformers reply, “We are saved by **grace alone** through **faith alone** in **Christ alone** according to the **Scriptures alone** for **the glory of God alone.**”

What is God’s Grace?

Titus 3:4 – 7

The kindness and love of God our Savior toward undeserving sinners

Not by our righteous works
According to God’s mercy
The renewing of the Holy Spirit
Through Jesus Christ our Savior

Ephesians 2:7 – “the exceeding riches of his grace in **his kindness toward us** through Jesus Christ.”

Why is God’s Grace Necessary?

1. The depravity of the human condition: Augustine

We love sin: Augustine describes a time where he steals some pears from his neighbor. He describes how he stole them, not because he was hungry or even needed them, but simply because he wanted to steal. He writes, “I lusted to thief,” and even though “it was foul,” he says, “I loved it.”

Romans 7:14-25

2. The bondage of the human will to our sinful condition: Luther v. Erasmus

Romans 3:10-18

We are “dead in our trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1, 5), “slaves of sin” (Rom. 6:6, 12, 20; cf. John 8:34), “loving the darkness; hating the light” (John 3:19), “enemies of God” (Rom. 5:10), “hostile to God” (Rom. 8:7), and thereby, “children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3). Jeremiah 17:9 says that man’s heart is “deceitful and desperately wicked.” And David writes that he was “brought forth in iniquity... conceived in sin” (Ps. 51:5). In other words, born that way! And in our fallen, fleshly condition, according to Romans 8: 8, we cannot please God

because we are “not even able to do so.” The only logical conclusion that we can draw from the biblical evidence is that, apart from the grace of God, the soul is dead. And if the soul is dead, the will is dead.

How extensive is the bondage of our will?

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that our will is not so bound by sin that it cannot cooperate with God in choosing to be saved.

The Reformers responded that the human will is not free at all, but in bondage to our sinful depravity, so that only God acting independently of our wills and according to his mercy can save us. (Titus 2:11)

According to Romans 6, human beings are either “slaves of sin” (vv. 13, 16-17, 20) or “slaves of righteousness” (vv. 18, 22). There’s no neutral category. Jesus said, “No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other” (Matt. 6: 24). Luther adds, “Hence it follows that ‘free-will’ without God’s grace is not free at all, but is the permanent prisoner and bondslave of evil, since it cannot turn itself to good.” In other words, **fallen humanity lacks the ability to make spiritual decisions or accomplish righteous acts.** Isaiah records that our deeds done in unrighteousness are but “filthy rags” to God (Isa. 64: 6). Every righteous thing we think we’re doing ends up being nothing more than an exercise in self-righteousness. Luther concludes, “It follows, therefore, that ‘free-will’ is obviously a term applicable only to the Divine Majesty; for only He can do, and does (as the Psalmist sings) ‘whatever he wills in heaven and earth’ (Ps. 135.6).”

And if human beings are altogether dead in sin and unable to save themselves from judgment, then **only God, according to His sovereign will, can reach down from heaven, extend His hand, and pull sinners out of the grave (like Lazarus!). And He does it because He chooses to do it.** Jesus said, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6: 44). Paul writes, “But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, that, just as it is written, ‘Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.’” (1 Cor. 1:30-31, emphasis added).

Nate Picowicz: Why We’re Protestant:

We routinely appeal to the grace of God, the mercy of God, and the sovereignty of God in all things. We consistently rely on God to uphold creation, order events, set up and take down leaders, and influence governments. We humbly submit to God in all His knowledge, wisdom, goodness, and righteousness. We trust Him to make provision, to bless, to

curse, to heal, and to work reconciliation. We even pray to God for the salvation for others—our unsaved friends and family. We yield to His sovereign will at every point; yet we so desperately want to cling to the notion that we exercised our own free will to be saved, that we gave spiritual rebirth to ourselves!?

Oh, that we might behold the pure grace of God in salvation—our hearts would melt in adoration and thanksgiving! Our pride would be smashed, our strength would fail, our knees would buckle, and we would fall down and worship the Lord! That’s why we’re exhorted, not to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps, but to “draw near to the throne of grace” (Heb. 4: 16).

How is God’s Grace Received?

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that grace is received through seven sacraments, each of which has power from itself to infuse grace.

The Reformers - and the Bible - teach the grace of God is imputed through Jesus Christ, and the means for receiving saving grace is the Word of God (hearing it preached, studying it, memorizing it). The means for receiving persevering grace are the Lord’s Supper, and Baptism.

What does this have to do with justification - sinners being made right with a holy God?

“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”
(Romans 3:24)

God’s grace reaches to us in our total depravity which has spiritually incapacitated us. It gives us new life and causes us to believe:

Ephesians 2:4-5; Colossians 2:13

“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”