
CELEBRATING REFORMATION

GRACE ALONE

A message presented by Pastor Marc Minter
to First Baptist Church of Diana, TX on October 15, 2017

INTRODUCTION

Grace is a word like many others in our day that has lost its sense. The word is used either infrequently or too flippantly, and we simply do not know what it means anymore. When Christians affirm, “God saves sinners by grace alone,” the meaning is profound and particular. This is our third message in a series on the “Five Solas” of the Protestant Reformation, and the doctrine of “Sola Gratia” (or grace alone) was a major battleground during that time and since. In this message today, we shall consider the concept and its implications for humility, assurance, and adoration.

- ***Sola Scriptura* in the headlines this week**

Pope Francis said on Wednesday (10/11), that there is a “[harmonious development of doctrine](#)” in the Roman Catholic Church. He said Christians must come to embrace a “[new understanding of Christian truth...](#)”¹

This statement is regarding the death penalty and Rome’s catechetical instruction on the matter. Pope Francis spoke in contradiction to the harmonious doctrinal assertions of Rome throughout history and today, but he is calling for “development” and “new understanding.”

- ***Sola Fide & Solus Christus* in the Catholic News**

“[For the 100th anniversary of the apparitions of Our Lady of Fatima in Portugal, Pope Francis has decided to grant a plenary indulgence opportunity throughout the entire anniversary year, which... will end Nov. 26, 2017.](#)”²

There are three ways to obtain this indulgence.

- (1) Make a pilgrimage to the shrine in Portugal;
- (2) Pray before any statue of Our Lady of Fatima [the shrine] at any location;
- (3) The elderly or infirm may “spiritually unite themselves” to Our Lady of Fatima’s celebrations on certain days of the year. In each case, the person is required to recite the Lord’s prayer and the Apostle’s creed, and to pray in the name of the Virgin Mary and Our Lady of Fatima.

¹ <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope-francis-death-penalty-is-contrary-to-the-gospel-81181>

² <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/three-ways-to-obtain-an-indulgence-for-the-100-year-fatima-anniversary-78258>

EPHESIANS 2:1-10 (ESV)

1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

8 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.

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

THE POINT I'M AIMING AT TODAY

Grace is the beginning, middle, and end of God's gift to all those in Christ.

MESSAGE OUTLINE

(1) THE REFORMATION PROTEST: PAST & PRESENT CONTRAST

(2) THE REFORMATION RENEWAL: GOD GRACIOUSLY SAVES FROM BEGINNING TO END

(3) THE REFORMATION TODAY: AFFECTING HUMILITY & FINDING ASSURANCE

(4) APPLICATION: WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH THIS?

(1) THE REFORMATION PROTEST: PAST & PRESENT CONTRAST

- **The Issue of Motive**

- The Formal Cause was “*Sola Scriptura*”
 - “*Who says?*” or “*Who has the authority to say?*”
- The Material Cause was “*Sola Fide*”
 - “*How does God justify me, a guilty sinner?*”
- The Issue of Motive was “*Sola Gratia*”
 - “*Why does God love, justify, and ultimately save me?*”
 - What motivated God to save me? What motivates His promise to keep me?
 - Has He found something noble within?
 - Does He expect some honorable attainment in the future?
 - Am I now, or must I become a worthy object of His love?

- **Reformers & Protestants on Justification by Grace Alone**

- Heidelberg Catechism (1563)³
 - 60. How are you righteous before God?

Only by true faith in Jesus Christ. That is: although my conscience accuse me, that I have grievously sinned against all the commandments of God, and have never kept any of them, and that I am still prone always to all evil, yet God, without any merit of mine, *of mere grace*, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ, as if I had never committed nor had any sin, and had myself accomplished all the obedience which Christ has fulfilled for me, if only I accept such benefit with a believing heart.

³ See full *Heidelberg Catechism* here: <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/heidelberg-catechism-1563/>

- Second London Confession (1689)
 - Of God's Covenant
 - *“The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience to Him as their creator, yet **they could never have attained the reward of life but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which He hath been pleased to express by way of covenant...** [and] **it pleased the Lord to make a covenant of grace...**”⁴*

- Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)
 - Uses nearly the exact same language as the 2nd London.⁵

- The Baptist Faith & Message (1925, 1963, *1998, and 2000)
 - Under the heading: “God's Purpose of Grace”
 - *“Election [or God's choosing to save some] is the **gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners.**”⁶*

- **Rome on Grace**
 - Council of Trent (1545-1563)
 - # 5 on Original Sin
 - *“If anyone denies that... the **grace of our Lord Jesus Christ... is conferred in Baptism... let him be anathema.**”⁷*
 - In other words, grace is a *substance* or *thing*, which comes to the Christian *through the sacraments*.
 - “*anathema*” – Conflict is equal to rejection of Christianity.

⁴ See the *Second London Confession* here: <http://www.1689.com/confession.html#Ch.%201>

⁵ See the *Westminster Confession* here: http://www.reformed.org/documents/westminster_conf_of_faith.html

* There was only a slight amendment in 1998, and not a full revision.

⁶ See Baptist Faith and Message here: <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfmcomparison.asp>

⁷ http://www.ecatholic2000.com/trent/untitled-14.shtml#_Toc385685490

- *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992, and still used today)
 - Grace is a kind of substance, bestowed upon the Christian, first through baptism, and then continuing through other acts of “holiness” and “charity.”⁸

Summary: Is grace a kind of substance bestowed upon sinners? Does God move towards sinners because of something in them or something they do?

(Segue) If not, then what do we mean by “grace”?

(2) THE REFORMATION RENEWAL:

GOD GRACIOUSLY SAVES FROM BEGINNING TO END

1 And *you were dead* in the trespasses and sins 2 in which *you once walked...*

- ***“Walking dead”?***

- Spiritual, not physical

- ***What does spiritual death look like?***

*...following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once **lived in the passions of our flesh**, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were **by nature children of wrath**, like **the rest of mankind**.*

- ***The world, the devil, and the flesh***

- Corrupt worldly system (1 Cor. 1:18-31).
- Evil/sinful fleshly desires (Gal. 5:16-21).
- The adversary seeks to devour (1 Pet. 5:8).

- ***By nature, all are “children of wrath” – “sons of disobedience”***

- All are equally valuable image-bearers, but only those in Christ are children of God (Jn. 1:12-13).

⁸ Catechism of the Catholic Church, pg. 353-358

4 But God...

- ***God is the gracious initiator!***

4 But God, being ***rich in mercy***, because of the great love with which ***he loved us***, 5 even ***when we were dead*** in our trespasses, ***made us alive*** together with Christ—***by grace*** you have been saved—

- ***This is what it means to be “saved by grace”!***
- ***God is rich in mercy and decidedly loving... even when we were dead!***
 - The work of saving is motivated by love... a gracious love... that’s what it means to be saved by grace!

6 and ***raised us up with him*** and ***seated us with him*** in the heavenly places ***in Christ*** Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show ***the immeasurable riches of his grace*** in kindness toward us ***in Christ*** Jesus.

- ***with Christ... with Christ... in Christ... in Christ...***
 - God never, never, never saves anyone apart from Christ.
 - All blessings we have from God are because of our union with Christ, and this has huge implications on church family/membership.
- ***“So that... [God] might show the immeasurable riches of His grace...”***
 - How is it that we see the display of God’s grace?!
 - God’s grace is immeasurably rich!... just look how wretched you are, and He has saved you! Now imagine a multitude of wretches... all graciously washed – redeemed by the blood of Christ!

8 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.

- ***Grace = gift***
- ***Wage = performance***

10 For we are ***his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works***, which God prepared beforehand, that ***we should walk in them***.

- ***All of this is for the purpose of God creating a people for Himself.***

- Ephesians 2:19–22 – “*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and **members of the household of God**, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, **grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.**”*

Summary: **God graciously loved, God graciously makes dead sinners live, God graciously grants faith as a gift, God graciously creates a people for Himself...**

(Segue) *And, this is both shockingly humbling and absolutely assuring.*

(3) THE REFORMATION TODAY: AFFECTING HUMILITY & FINDING ASSURANCE

- **Salvation by Grace Alone makes a people *Humble***
 - Boasting is ***excluded*** (Rom. 3:27).
 - ***Not even Abraham***, our father in faith, has reason to boast (Rom. 4:2).
 - ***No human can boast*** in the presence of God (1 Cor. 1:29).
 - If one ever boasts, it is to be ***boasting in the Lord*** (2 Cor. 10:17).
 - Colossians 3:12, 16 – “***Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience... And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.***”

- **Salvation by Grace Alone makes a people Certain**

- **Romans 8:28–39** – “**28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew⁹ he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. 31**

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? 33 Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

⁹ **30.100 προβλέπομαι^b; προγινώσκω^b**: to choose or select in advance of some other event—‘to choose beforehand, to select in advance.’

προβλέπομαι^b: τοῦ θεοῦ περὶ ἡμῶν κρεῖττόν τι προβλεψαμένου ‘because God had chosen ahead of time an even better plan for us’ He 11:40. It is also possible to understand **προβλέπομαι** in He 11:40 as meaning ‘to decide in advance’ (compare the meanings in 30.84) or ‘to provide for’ (35.35).

προγινώσκω^b: οὓς προέγνω, καὶ προώρισεν συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνης τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ ‘those whom he had chosen beforehand, he had already decided should become like his Son’ Ro 8:29. In Ro 8:29 **προγινώσκω** may also be understood as meaning ‘to know beforehand’ (28.6).

Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 362). New York: United Bible Societies.

- **Salvation by Grace Alone makes a people Worship**

- ***Psalm 95:1-7 – “1 Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! 2 Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!***

3 For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. 4 In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. 5 The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.

6 Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! 7 For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand...”

- John Calvin: “Now let us fall before the majesty of our great God, acknowledging our sins, and asking that he would make us increasingly aware of them, that we may hate them more and more, and grow in repentance (*a [gracious gift] that we need to exercise all our lives*).

May we learn so to magnify His grace, as it is shown to us in the Lord Jesus Christ, that we might be completely taken up with it; and may we not only do so with our lips, but place our entire trust in Him.

May we grow in that trust until we are gathered up into our eternal home, where we shall receive faith's reward.

May [God] not only grant this grace to us, but to all peoples...”¹⁰

Summary: Grace is the beginning, middle, and end of God’s gift to all those in Christ.

(Segue) May we humbly rest assured by His faithfulness,

and may we gratefully worship the God of our gracious salvation!

¹⁰ *Justification is by Grace Alone* by John Calvin:

https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/pdf/calvin_varsermon02.pdf

(4) APPLICATION: WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH THIS?

- **Will you humble yourself before God?**
 - Non-Christian, will you throw down your presumptions?
 - Stop thinking that you have time!
 - Stop thinking that you are in control!
 - Stop imagining that God is merely waiting upon you.
 - Christian, will you express humble gratitude for the God who graciously saved you?

- **Will you enjoy the assurance only a gracious God can give?**
 - Will you praise God that His love for you did not begin in you?
 - Will you trust God that His love for you will continue forever?

- **Will you worship the sovereign God of grace?**
 - Will you let the awe and wonder of such grace wash over you?
 - Will you behold this God, who stand above and outside of history, making the riches of His grace known through guilty sinners like us?

Major Point: Grace is the beginning, middle, and end of God's gift to all those in Christ.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Sola Gratia by Guy Waters

<http://www.ligonier.org/blog/sola-gratia-christians-are-saved-grace-god-alone/>

All of Grace by Charles Spurgeon (see “*By Grace Through Faith*”)

<https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/spurgeon/allgrace.pdf>

Sola Gratia is so Un-American by Kim Riddlebarger

<https://www.monergism.com/sola-gratia-so-un-american>

Grace Alone by Ligonier Contributors

<http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/grace-alone/>

Justification is by Grace Alone by John Calvin

https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/pdf/calvin_varsermon02.pdf

Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent compiled by Theodore Buckley

<http://www.ecatholic2000.com/trent/untitled-114.shtml>