



February 4, 2018
Ephesians 2:1-10
Pastor Larry Adams

Sola Gratia (By Grace Alone)

Hi Everyone. My name is Larry Adams and I want to take a moment to thank you for reading this message. At Golden Hills we are committed to exalting Jesus and preaching the Word. Your downloading of this message is a great encouragement to us, as we know that our ministry is going out to spread God's Word all over the world.

We want you to know, too, that in no way do we intend these messages to be a replacement for your involvement in a good local church, where, sitting under the authority of pastors and other teachers, you can learn to worship, grow and serve and be engaged with a body of believers where you can grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We realize also, that some of you may be in areas of the world where there is no local church. Therefore, we hope these messages you are using, to gather with your family or other believers, or people from the community that it will be a great encouragement to you, as you hear God speak into your life, helping you to become disciples who are true, reproducing followers of Jesus Christ.

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If you have your Bible today, I'd like you to turn with me to the book of Ephesians, chapter 2. We are in week three of our series, The Five Solas. We are learning together, the foundational truths that define our faith as Christians. Many of you are involved in your small group, or in your class here at church, you've been engaged with the workbook. We're getting great reviews on it. People feel challenged and blessed to learn so much. I can't tell you how many people have come and said, I've been a Christian five year, ten years, twenty years, I never knew any of this stuff! They are so thrilled to be able to learn it along with us. We hope you are enjoying this series.

The Reformation was fueled by truth, foundational truths that define our faith, even today. Many of us are raised to believe that if we're going to gain anything worth having in this life, we have to earn it, including our salvation.

Well, the reformers discovered in the gospel, that not only can they not earn it, they don't have to. Because Jesus Christ's sacrifice is sufficient. It's all by God's grace. Sola Gratia. One of the things that fueled their understanding, was scriptures like this one in Ephesians 2:1-10. Paul wrote like this:

¹As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹not by works, so that no

one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Let's pray: Father, Your grace is amazing. More than we know. More than we know. So many times, God we want to feel as though we've done something to merit this kind of grace, this kind of salvation. It's very humbling for us to see that, even when we were dead in our sins, You offered us this grace. As we read this again today, as we discover all over again this wonderful truth, I'm praying You'll help build a foundation to our faith from which we'll go out into the world and share with others the good news of this grace. Sola Gratia, by Grace Alone. We thank You God for this, in Jesus' name, amen.

As I mention many times, we are taught from the time we're little, that if you're going to have anything, you have to go earn it. I was reading a piece by Kevin Miller, Executive VP of *Christianity Today*. Kevin Miller also pastors a church in Wheaton, Illinois. He said,

When I was five years old, I first fully understood the message of these words, "He sees you when you're sleeping. He knows when you're awake. He knows if you've been bad or good, so be good for goodness sake." [That's Santa Clause is Coming to Town, if you couldn't recognize it.] It goes on, "He is making a list, checking it twice, gonna find out who is naughty or nice, Santa Clause is coming to town." SO, "You better watch out, you better not cry, you better not pout, I'm telling you why. Santa Clause is coming to town."

Until that moment, I had lived in a childhood bliss in which Christmas was the best day of the year. I had always believed that the gifts at Christmas time were there because Christmas always came with gifts. You could count on it. But now, I painfully understood that if I wanted any gifts at Christmas, I had to be good! It was all riding on me! There was this all-seeing, all-knowing Santa and if there was going to be any gifts, I better shape up. Then I thought, how good is good? Can a person be pretty good? Does Santa understand that I have a twin brother, so I have more reason to be provoked than other kids? It was all so worrisome for me.

I grew up a little more, and I went to elementary school. There, I learned that if you're going to get what you want, it's all by your works. We had a reading program. I was nine years old. It was called SRA. You went to a box, pulled out a card and read what was on the card. You answered the questions. If you got them right, you moved up a color. So you went from red, to yellow, to blue. You worked your way up. Nobody wanted to be down at the bottom of the colors. That showed that you weren't too bright. So we all wanted to reach the epitome of elementary school glory – aqua marine! You could only get there by your own efforts.

When I grew up a little more, I was 14 years old. A friend invited me to a meeting after school called Campus Life. There was a guy there with a beard, which automatically made him cool. He also had a guitar, which made him even cooler. He started saying stuff I had never heard before. He said that if you wanted the good stuff from God, like peace and forgiveness, the Holy Spirit and eternal life, it didn't work like Santa, where you had to be good or you didn't get anything. He pointed out that it didn't work like my SRA reading program, where it all depended on me being good enough and working hard enough.

He said there was a thing called grace. That God has decided to take all my sin and forgive me. The grace had something to do with Jesus dying on a cross for me, he said. All I had to do was believe. This man read from the Bible, which I had never really read. He read that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life. This message was different from anything I'd ever heard before. It was not what I expected. It wasn't all on me. It was all on Him, on Jesus.

That message was so freeing, that as I took it in, I almost started to cry, but I was a 14 year old guy and we don't do stuff like that, not in front of our friends.

So the next week, I thought, I better not go to that meeting again because I almost started to cry last week. I cannot be humiliated by breaking down in front of my friends. But I did go. I heard the message of grace again. I believed it. I was saved by His amazing grace.

Amazing, indeed.

It's what saved a wretch like the slave trader, John Newton, who would go on to be a great pastor and write that timeless hymn, Amazing Grace.

It's what saved a man like Paul, chief of sinners, he said, and persecutor of Christians. That grace would make him into a powerful missionary and the man God would use to write half our New Testament.

It was God's grace that saved a moral low-life like me. He brought me into relationship with the God I had never known. He gave me the privilege over the years, of sharing this grace with thousands of people.

It was this grace that saved a bombastic Catholic monk by the name of Martin Luther. It transformed him into the morning star of the Reformation.

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound! It saved a wretch like me. The rediscovery of that grace fueled the Reformation. It opened the eyes and the hope of a whole generation. It is still saving people who believe. Sola Gratia, by grace alone.

The apostle Paul could not have been clearer when he wrote of this amazing grace to the church at Ephesus, in chapter 2:8

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

The grace, *karis* in the Greek. The unmerited favor of God. There are two aspects of this grace, to be experienced all the time. One is "common" grace. It's grace given to all humanity. It's grace that allows us to breathe His air, drink His water, eat His food, wear His clothes, drives His car, live in His house. It's everything God gives to sustain life for us. He does it for the just and the unjust. He does it for the rebellious and the repentant. As our choir sang, He does it for the saint and for the sinner. It's common grace – without it you cannot live.

There is also a thing called "saving" grace. As Pastor Matt Pierce said in the workbook this week,

Saving grace is God's response to our sin problem. The wages of sin is death – separation from God. God's saving grace put Jesus on the cross to die with my sin and your sin and the sin of the world. Without that saving grace, there would be no spiritual life. There would be no relationship with God, and I would be spending an eternity in a Christless hell.

Grace is God giving us what we don't deserve, what we cannot earn, what we are powerless to achieve. It is a gift God gives without any merit on our part that will cost Him everything: His Son.

That some of what we're remembering today in Communion. Communion is our remembrance of the death of Jesus, the death He died in our place because of God's grace.

Jesus said, “Do this as often as you eat it, in remembrance of Me.” We’ve reminded ourselves many times over the years that eating this meal will not earn you any grace; it will not get your sins forgiven; it will not reserve you a spot in heaven. Eating this meal as God intended can remind us of God and His grace, and what it has done to save us from our sins. God’s amazing grace.

Communion and Ephesians 2 remind us of what the reformers rediscovered in the gospel: **salvation is by grace alone.**

What did that mean for them and for us? Salvation is not by works. It is the gift of God’s grace alone. Paul said in verse 8:

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

I want you to imagine, if you can for a moment, that you are living in medieval Europe. It’s October 31, 1517. In the world you’re living in, the pope is your ultimate authority for all matters of faith and practice. You have been taught since you were little, that Christ’s righteousness is not enough for you to be saved. You must earn additional merits to have any hope of ever being accepted by God. You were taught that you will leave this planet without enough merits, so you will most likely go to a place called Purgatory. There, you will spend time being purged of sin and wickedness, where you can earn enough merits to hopefully make it to heaven. No one knows how long you will be there, but you can shorten your time in Purgatory by paying indulgences – paying money or giving land or possessions or livestock. The more indulgences you pay, the more merits you will earn and the shorter your time will be in Purgatory.

But you are also told that you can do works to gain extra merits. You can do things like make a pilgrimage, venerate the saints, or pay homage to the saints. Or you can do things like bow down and pay homage to a lock of what was said to be Mary’s hair. Or bow down and pay homage to a piece of wood, that was supposedly from the cross. And by doing these things, you will earn more and more merits to shorten your time in Purgatory. Not only that, but if you earned enough merits, more than you need, then you can apply some of your merits as a credit to some of your loved ones who don’t have enough, to give them an early spring from Purgatory.

Then you learn that the next day, after October 31, the very next day (November 1), the church is going to gather all the articles of the saints in one place at a castle church at the University of Wittenburg, Germany. By going there, you can have opportunity to venerate the saints, bow down before Mary’s hair, bow down before the piece of wood, do all those things, and earn a whole bunch of merits in a single day! Who isn’t going to show up for that?!

But when you show up at the castle door, to await your turn to go in, that castle door which is like a community bulletin board – today, it has a long laundry list of theses or statements against the indulgences. They declare to you that those things don’t work. They are not necessary. In fact you don’t have to earn anything! As you read these, you are learning that there is going to be a series of debates where one of the professors at the university, by the name of Martin Luther, is going to get into debate with the religious leaders, showing from the scriptures that salvation is a gift of God by grace alone. You not only don’t need to earn these merits, you CAN’T earn these merits. You don’t have to wonder if you’ll be accepted by God, but you’re going to learn, through the scriptures, that this is all by grace alone. In fact, if you’ve come to put your faith in Christ and His death on the cross, His burial and resurrection, His sacrifice is more than sufficient – then you’ve already been accepted by God because you are in Christ. Amazing.

That was the joy that the reformers rediscovered in the gospel and made known to the people. Great truths that were founded on passages like this one. (Ephesians 2:4-9)

⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.

The reformers learned that we are dead in our trespasses and sins. Dead in them! Dead people cannot do anything to earn anything! They're dead. Dead in our trespasses and sins means we are powerless to affect any change or earn any merits. Our spiritual deadness was proven by our works and by how we lived. That's why Paul said (Eph 2:1-3)

¹As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

That was me! I lived there. I was living in disobedience. I didn't give God the time of day. I drank in His common grace, and never even thought to thank Him for it. I was following what the world taught me to do. Without even knowing it, I was following the rule of Satan himself. That's the human condition. There are no exceptions. People live the way they do because they are spiritually dead and they are following the ways of the world in which they are living. But, (Eph 2:4-5)

⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

He saved us from sin, death and the grave. We were dead but God saved us. No works. No merits. No doubt. It is by grace you have been saved. Grace alone. Sola Gratia.

I like the way Pastor Matt Pierce put it this week in the workbook:

When someone is dead in trespasses and sins, as Reformer Martin Luther argued vehemently, they are incapable of choosing God. The human will is bound by sin and naturally inclined toward sinful choices and behaviors. If a person is to be saved, God must regenerate the heart first. Then and only then can a person "invite Jesus into their heart," or "commit their life to Him." Invitations and commitments to Christ don't save us, God saves us. Turning our life over to Jesus is our response to His saving work. God initiates, we respond. This is what it means to be saved by grace alone.

But God's grace doesn't stop there. It isn't as obvious in English, but in the Greek, it's very apparent: there are three verb prefixes here that make it clear what God's grace has powerfully done. The first is in verse 5. "He made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved." The next two are in verse 6, "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus." He made us alive in Christ, and He raised us up with Christ, and He seated us with Christ in the heavenly realms.

He made us alive in Him. We were dead! By God's grace, He came and made us alive through Christ. Through Christ we are made alive in Him.

He raised us up with Christ. Literally, He raised us together. When Christ arose from the dead, positionally we arose with Him. It's a done deal. Christ has done it.

He seated us Him in the heavenly realms. Seated. He literally enthroned us, with Christ in the heavenly realms with Jesus.

A. Skevington Wood, Principal of Cliff College in England wrote in his commentary on Ephesians:

God has also enthroned us with Christ "in the heavenly realms". Forty days after the resurrection Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father. Both these events have their counterpart in the experience of believers. Not only do they anticipate and assure resurrection and glorification at the end of the age; they are matched by a present realization of the risen life in Christ and of participation with him in his ascended majesty.

This is why Paul told the Colossians (3:1-4)

¹Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Let me ask you, is Jesus living right now in glory? Yes, He is. Is Jesus coming back again in all of that glory? Yes, He is. Is Jesus going to appear for all to see Him, in that glory? Yes, He is. Let me remind you of this: when He appears in that glory, you will be with Him! That's the promise of this grace! (applause). All by grace alone.

That's why Paul said (Eph 2:8-9)

⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast.

If it's by works, who gets the glory? The one who does the works. That's why it's all of God's grace. It's all of God – He gets. That's why Paul said it's not from yourself. Interestingly, that's written in the past tense, which mean you didn't do anything. You were passive. You did nothing to merit this. God did everything. Br grace, through faith. Faith is the instrument through which the grace is applied. As we shall see even more next week, Lord willing, even the faith we have is God's gift. Not by works, so that no one could boast. Heaven is not going to have a bunch of people running around saying, "Look what I did." Everyone is going to be standing in awe saying, look what HE did! Not from ourselves, it is a gift of God.

That's why Paul told the Romans in Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Pastor Matt wrote this week in the workbook,

Grace can be viewed as an incredible act of love on God's part, whereby He opens the hearts of those He has chosen and reveals to them their sinfulness. Then, He supernaturally turns their hearts toward Him and actually gives them the faith they need to respond to His offer of salvation. Salvation is by grace, through faith. From beginning to end, it's a work of God.

R.C. Sproul once wrote: "Even if you don't see the faith as the gift, since faith is included in the whole complex of salvation, faith itself must be understood as a gift of God and not as human achievement."

This grace alone through faith alone became the foundation of the Reformation material principle. Remember from week one, there were two great principles that were part of the Reformation. One was the foundational principle, answering the great question, "Who has ultimate authority?" (The pope, the council, or the scriptures?) Pastor Phil demonstrated so powerfully last week in his message, Sola Scripture – it isn't the pope or the council. It isn't us or anybody else. It's God who has ultimate authority. His word is our ultimate authority because it is God's word.

There was also the material principle. Remember that? It was addressing the question, how are people saved or justified before a holy God? Is it by works? Or is it by grace, through faith alone? Martin Luther and the other reformers took a stand on the scriptures because they declared that it was by grace through faith alone – Sola Gratia – became their cry.

That doesn't mean our works don't play an important part. Paul couldn't have been clearer when he said in Ephesians 2:10

¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

We aren't saved by our good works. Salvation is by grace alone. But we were saved to do good works as a response to the grace that we've received. Earlier, in Ephesians 2, Paul said, as for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of the world and ruler of the powers of the air. He is telling them – when you weren't connected to God, when you weren't walking in this grace, when you weren't saved and filled with salvation, the works in your life were demonstrating that you were dead in your sins. You were following the way of the world. You were following the way of the evil one without even knowing it. The works of your life were demonstrating that you didn't belong to God. But now that you are a recipient of this grace, if you are saved and justified by this grace, if you have put your faith in this Jesus, who lived and died and rose again, if that Christ lives in you and you in Him, it's going to show now, by the works in your life. When you were dead in your sin, those works proved it. Now that you're saying you're alive in Christ, your works must demonstrate it. Christ is going to be living His life out through you. If there are no works, it raises serious questions about whether or not you have really had saving faith.

Paul told Titus (2:11-14)

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. ¹² It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Sola Gratia! By grace alone.

This is the grace of the gospel. This is the grace of God. The grace that we remember today in Communion, that apart from law and works and our own merit, the gospel of righteousness from God has been revealed. A righteousness that is by faith because of God's grace.

Next week, Lord willing, we hope to focus a lot more on this chapter, Romans 3. Sola Fide – by faith alone. Where Paul wrote (Romans 3:21-24)

²¹ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

A redemption that came by grace, through the sacrifice of Jesus on a cross. The very grace and sacrifice that we're remembering today at this table.

Jesus said, This bread is My body. This cup is My blood. It's given for you. I gave this because of God's great love and His great grace, for you because you could not earn this. So I gave it to you. Now, as often as you eat this, remember Me. Remember Me, the one who saves you. Sola Gratia. By Grace alone.

Father, sometimes it seems that one eternity will not be enough to get our minds around this kind of a gift. We struggle with it because we so much want to say that we did something to earn it. We made a choice, or we did an act or we performed something, or there was something in us that made us worthy. But there isn't. We were dead in our transgressions and sins. We used to live in those, when we followed the ways of the world and the ruler and king of the air, the spirit now at work in those who are disobedient. We lived the way we did because we were dead in our sins. Now, we are alive in Christ Jesus. So the works that flow from our life have to be different, because they aren't our works, they are Your works. We're told to let those works so shine before men that they may see those things and glorify our Father who is in heaven. They're going to know it isn't us. And all of this accomplished through sacrifice greater than our words can tell. The sacrifice You asked us to remember at a table like this. So as we break this bread and eat it today, and as we drink of this cup, help us to remember You, the one who has saved us by grace alone. We'll thank You, in Jesus' name, amen.