



**Grace Alone**  
**MATT BLACK**, Sun, Oct 8, 2017  
 Eph 1-2, "Five Solas" series

**Introduction:** Open your Bible to Ephesians 1. We are continuing in a series on "The Five Solas." This morning's study is entitled: "Grace Alone."

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **1. Welcome to our Visitors!**

"At last meditating day and night, by the mercy of God, I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that through which the righteous live by a gift of God, namely by faith. Here I felt as if I were entirely born again and had entered paradise itself through the gates that had been flung open."

~ **Martin Luther**

## **Introduction**

We know theologically that God loves us. He loves rebel sinners. It's joyous mystery. Yet often we don't feel the love of God. Even those of us who have been born again often struggle with sin. And if we are honest, there are times, moments, days – that we feel that God does not love us. We sometimes have an underlying feeling of guilt and shame and fear.

If we are honest there are days, though we have not committed any great or scandalous sin, that we feel guilty. On my worst days, even as a Christian, I have felt that perhaps God was angry with me, that his wrath was still upon me. Why do I at time still struggle this way? It is because I need to be reminded and refreshed with a God size reality check. God is gracious. God is good. Salvation is by grace alone, though faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone. Martin Luther was one who had a deep struggle with guilt.

In order to destroy guilt and welcome peace in our lives, we must understand the doctrine of God's grace. God is a righteous God. The good news is that God has sent Jesus to make you righteous. We are going to see how God makes sinners righteous today. But one thing you need to understand. You are in Christ and righteous here today because God wants you to be righteous. It doesn't depend on you. It depends on God.

## **The Lighting Storm & St. Anne (Mary's Mother)**

I want to tell you about someone mired in guilt as a young man. He has a lot to teach us. His name is Martin Luther. Martin was born at Eisleben (about 120 miles southwest of modern Berlin) to Margaret and Hans Luder (as it was locally pronounced). He was raised in Mansfeld, where his father worked at the local copper mines. Hans sent Martin to Latin school and then, when Martin was only 13 years old, to the University of Erfurt to study law. There Martin earned both his baccalaureate and master's degrees in the shortest time allowed by university statutes. He proved so adept at public debates that he earned the nickname "The Philosopher."

Then in 1505 his life took a dramatic turn. As the 21-year-old Luther fought his way through a severe thunderstorm on the road to Erfurt, a bolt of lightning struck the ground near him. "Help me, St. Anne!" Luther screamed. "I will become a monk!"

The scrupulous Luther fulfilled his vow: he gave away all his possessions and entered the monastic life. Luther was extraordinarily successful as a monk. He devoted himself to doing whatever he could to work off his guilt to achieve some favor with God. He said in his own words, “I tortured myself with praying, fasting, keeping vigils, and freezing—the cold alone was enough to kill me—and I inflicted upon myself such pain as I would never inflict again, even if I could.” As he later commented, “If anyone could have earned heaven by the life of a monk, it was I.”

He was trying to attain heaven, but the more he tried, the more he felt like a child of hell. In the *Bondage of the Will*, Luther reflected on this dark and gloomy period of his graceless life: “If I lived and worked to all eternity, my conscience would never reach comfortable certainty as to how much it must do to satisfy God. Whatever work I had done, there would still be a nagging doubt as to whether it pleased God, or whether He required something more.”

### The Main Question

What *causes* salvation? “Do we make some kind of contribution to our salvation?” What is the basis for our justification? **Sola Gratia** is the doctrine that God saves sinners from their fallen condition and his just wrath on the basis of his good pleasure only through the merits of his Son, Jesus. Justification is by grace alone, Titus 3:7– “Having been justified by his grace.”

Outline: Salvation is by Grace Alone because...

- 1– of God’s Election
- 2– of Man’s Fallen Condition
- 3– of God’s Affection
- 4– of God’s Preservation

## I. Grace alone because of election (1:3-6)

### God is to be Blessed because He Chose Us in Christ

We are constantly praising and blessing God, because salvation is all of grace, from beginning to the end. Here is a summary what God the Father does in our salvation. It’s from our doctrinal statement in Article 9, entitled “God’s Purpose of Grace,”:

1:3: “We believe that God, in his grace, chooses to save sinners and to keep them to the end. Divine election is consistent with human free will. It excludes boasting and promotes humility. All true believers will be kept by God’s grace and will persevere to the end. Perseverance is the mark, which distinguishes true believers from professing Christians.” “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.” But how did that happen?

### God Chose Us in Christ to be Children

1:4-6, “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.”

In other words, the only one who has a truly free choice is God. “God chose us in him before the foundation of the world... in love he predestined us for adoption” (1:4-5). God is the only, truly free Being. Ever. This means he is sovereign. Human “freedom” is perhaps a quality of being

created in God's image, but it is a *dependent* freedom; not *independent* (Acts 17:24-28). What does this mean? In love, God predestined us to be sons and daughters in his family.

God has chosen us – elected us. Before you were born, before your father or mother, before the creation of the universe, God chose you. When I was younger, I moved from Chicago to Louisiana. I was the strange city boy! I can remember a game of stick ball on the playground, and I was the last one picked. Listen God doesn't choose us because of anything in us. It is because of his goodness and glory he chooses us.

### Creation and Conscience

The book of Romans says that God calls every human being through creation and conscience. There is enough supernatural revelation of God's person and attributes that the whole creation should be coming to God in worship. But they are not. They are without excuse. They recognized him as God but did not honor him as God.

God's sovereign grace has been since Eternity *past* (1:4)→Eternity *future* (1:10, 14). Christ is the basis of ALL blessing. Jesus' work on the Cross is grace incarnate (John 1:14, 17). Every blessing is ours (1:3) because we are united to him.

And, there's truly a sense in which we all have "free will," but let us not misunderstand that to be a little bit of inherent goodness coupled with a lot of God's work. Salvation is not earned. Even the ability to respond to his grace is a gift (2:8-9). "Again, the free will has been so enslaved that it can have no power for righteousness. Again, what God's grace has not freed will not be free" (John Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.8, p. 265, vol. 1). In other words, we freely choose whatever we want within the bounds of our nature. The problem is we have a nature that loves sin.

*Transition:* Sola Gratia (Grace alone) is the doctrine that God saves sinners from their fallen condition and his just wrath on basis of his good pleasure ***ONLY*** through the merits of Jesus Christ. Grace starts with God; not us. God alone is sovereign, free, independent, the creator of salvation.

## II. Grace alone because of our fallen **condition** (2:1-3)

**Ephesians 2:1-6**, "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."

Have any of you ever seen the Sears Tower? Many people have only seen it from a distance. It's a whole lot different when you get inside it. I can remember going up to the sky deck where people looked like ants on the sidewalk below. There's a big difference between seeing the Sears Tower up close and just seeing it from a distance.

This morning most of us have seen God's love for us from a distance. We know it's there, we understand that God is love—that He loves sinners, but today I want to look up close at it and be awed by it. In order to see the brightness of God's love, we need to see the darkness and brokenness of the human condition.

Here biblically man's condition. The Father had to predestine me in love, because I would never have initiated anything. Without Christ I am dead in sin.

- Dead (I was positively, spiritually “dead” and unable to help myself. I needed to be raised up by God in order to live.
- Disobedient (2:2b) – slave to my desire, the devil, and the world.
- Depraved (Isaiah 64:6; Phil 3:8). I wasn’t unable to do anything. I was dead in sin. I was so full of sin there was no room for obeying God. Bottom line: I was my own god.
- Doomed (2:3b) – I was a child of wrath unable to redeem myself. I could not help myself.

### **Illustration from Lion, Witch and Wardrobe**

In the Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe the wicked witch had brought a perpetual winter to Narnia. She kept turning all her subjects to stone. But Aslan comes and breathes into them new life.

### **Man reaching for life line**

Most of us picture us throwing out a lifeline to mankind. We just need to get them to latch on to the life line. Dear friends man cannot latch on to the life line because He is not sick or struggling with the lifeline. He is *dead* on the bottom of the ocean floor. Can I give you a little hope? God can raise the dead. God can quicken the spiritually doomed and depraved.

This tells us that there is hope! God came to save those who were in the worst condition. He didn’t come to call the righteous, but *sinners* to repentance.

In order to even grasp God’s free gift of salvation, his grace, you must understand your fallen condition—and agree with God about it—and how devoid you are of any ability to please God or clean yourself up.

Transition: Grace alone is the belief that God alone can freely save chosen sinners from the their spiritual death and give them new life and desires all based on the merits of Jesus Christ alone.

## **III. Grace alone because of God’s affection (2:4-6)**

Ephesians 2:4-6, “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ... 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.”

### **Why is Grace is So Odious to Man?**

We sing: Amazing Grace, but to man, there is something about grace that is amazing yet fundamentally unattractive to man. Grace makes God big and man small. Luther succinctly nailed this truth in theses 62 and 63: “The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God. But this treasure is naturally most odious, for it makes the first to be last.”

When you were dead in sins, God justified you. He did what you could not do. If you ground your hope in what you can do, you will have nothing but constant guilt. You’ll never do enough. When is enough enough? Never! Grace means that God saw you in your inability to save yourself, and he did what you could not do. He saved you. God justifies the ungodly. You could be nothing but dead in sin. He sovereignly chose, because he wanted to, to elect you and save you.

## A Payment So Big Only God Can Pay it

Listen, there is a costly payment that has to be paid. It's a payment so big, only God can pay it. God is rich! Listen to **Ephesians 2:4-6**, "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ... But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 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."

Oh, how costly your salvation is. God loves you. He so loved the world he gave the riches of his grace and mercy for you: his dearly beloved Son.

## From Trespasses to Righteousness

Salvation is by grace alone. How can we who are dead in sin become righteous in God? Yet that's what Paul says here and in Romans. We are raised together and righteous in Christ. Apart from grace, a sinner has no hope regardless of how fervent or sincere his efforts to merit favor with God.

Luther did not understand how the righteousness of God is obtained through Christ. He thought he had to obtain it himself, so he hated the righteousness of God. Luther's pre-grace hatred of the righteousness of God is well attested. Listen to his own testimony. He says:

"That expression 'righteousness of God' was like a thunderbolt in my heart. When under [Catholicism]...I thought at once that this righteousness was an avenging anger, namely the wrath of God. [It was unattainable!] I hated Paul with all my heart when I read that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel (Rom. 1:16,17 – *that wasn't good news to me!*). Only afterward, when I saw the words that follow—namely that the righteous [obtain it as a gift and] live through faith (Rom. 1:17). In addition, I consulted with Augustine, and I was cheered. I learned that the righteousness of God is really his mercy, and that he makes us righteous through Christ, who is the only remedy offered to me for my affliction."<sup>1</sup>

So Martin Luther came to understand what we all must understand: God loves us and pours out his mercy to us. He makes us righteous. He lavishes his love on us. He saves us by GRACE through Christ's merit.

We are justified in Christ. We are made alive in Christ. We come into union with Christ, because of God's sovereign choice and his grace.

**Martin Luther** said we all carry in our pocket Christ's nails. Who crucified Christ? You did! I did! Christ died "for us". Are you aware that you have Christ's nails in your possession? Look at the love God has for us!

## What Kept Jesus Christ on the Cross?

What kept Christ on that cross? What was it that held Him there? As He bore every ounce of the wrath of God for you, He became your eternal shield. He felt every ounce of the agony you deserved, and there was one thing that made it all worth it to Him. He loved you. He loved me. He loved you long before you came into this world. He will love you when ten thousand ages have passed. Christ's love for you held Him there on the cross.

## What Makes Christianity Unique?

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther. Theodore G. Tappert (Editor), Helmut T. Lehmann (Editor). *Luther's Works*, Vol 54 (Augsburg, Germany: Fortress Press, 1967), 308-309.

Some years ago, someone asked CS Lewis, “What is the unique message of Christianity?” “That’s an easy question,” Lewis replied. “The thing that makes Christianity unique is the doctrine of grace.”

The good news of Jesus’ amazing grace is uniquely Christian. Every other religion teaches people how to reach up to God, one way or another. But Christianity is the only one that tells us the truth. We are all unable to come to God. All of us are sinners that have fallen short of the glory of God.

But here’s the good news of God’s grace. God has deep affection for you. He says, “I’ve loved you with an everlasting love.” God has reached down to reconcile us to himself by the righteous life, atoning death, and glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:8 states this truth in simple terms, “By grace you have been saved.” What is grace? Grace is God’s unmerited favor. Grace is God’s scandalous love. **Romans 3:23-24**, “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.”

What does that mean? It means whether you’ve committed one sin or a thousand, you are deserving of hell. All equally need to be saved. We are all dead in sins, “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” (2:4-5)

#### IV. **Grace alone because of preservation** (2:7-10)

Paul tells us we are saved by grace in **Ephesians 2:7-10**, “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.”

#### **God has Immeasurable Riches of Grace for You FOREVER**

Dear child, you will be saved in the ages to come. God has his riches for you in the ages to come: “the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (2:7). Grace today and forever! Grace is for today and forever (Eph 2:10; Titus 2-3; 2 Cor 12).

#### **God is Giving you the Riches of His Grace NOW**

The same grace that saves us is the same grace that keeps us to eternal life. Eph 2:8-9, “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.”

#### **Now and Forever You are God’s Masterpiece**

Eph 2:10, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” We are literally God’s Masterpiece. This is something God has done. It’s God’s work. At salvation, God puts in us a new nature. It is a gift. We are “created in Christ Jesus.” This is a metaphor for regeneration.

Salvation is all of grace from beginning to end. Do not depend on your works to save you.

Your works are a response of **love** to your Savior who died for you.

Your works are an act of **unity**, because you abide in him, you carry out his will.

Your works are an act of God's **mercy**, because he is guiding your footsteps in his sovereign providence.

Is there anyone here who can claim that he is already saved by works, so far in life? Has anyone here been without sin? Look at your lives; examine your conscience; observe your words, your thoughts, your imaginations, your motives; for all these things will be brought to account on the Last Day. Is there a man here that "does good, and does not sin"? Scripture declares that "there is none that does good, no, not one." "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way."

We are justified by grace through faith. If there is any good works in my life it is because Jesus is carrying me. I'm his masterpiece, "...created in Christ Jesus for **good works**, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (2:10).

Before the foundation of the world, God prepares our good works. We are not saved BY good works, but for them. In other words, good works are the evidence that we are truly converted.

Paul tells us that Christ came "to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous [ON FIRE] for good works" (**Titus 2:14**). Let me ask you are you ON FIRE to do God's bidding through Christ in your life? Are you a vessel for Christ? Are you displaying the glory of His GRACE in your life? Are you living up to the high CALLING He's put on you as His MASTERPIECE?

Jesus Says

Today if you are trusting in Christ, Jesus will carry you. All the pain is part of Jesus' masterpiece.

Isaiah 43:2, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you."

There is flame to get the dross out of your life. There is water is there to purify you of your sinful habits.

Jesus says, "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (**Isa 41:10**).

God says, I'm forming you to be like my son. Every heartache. Every tragedy, I want you to obey me and walk in my good works because, "all things work together for good, for those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose...." Because you are "predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son."

Paul says, "He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it" (**1 Thessalonians 5:24**).

He says, I know you're suffering, but "I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (**Philippians 1:6**).

Jude says, "Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ"

our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24-25).

**Conclusion:** Martin Luther tried everything to try to gain God's favor. He slept on hard floors. Going without food, even climbing a staircase to Rome on his hands and knees—but it was to no avail. His teachers in the monastery told him that he was doing enough to have peace with God, but he had no peace. His sense of sin was too great.

Luther one day turned to Romans 3:24, "We are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Luther added a word in his German translation to help understanding. He translate it: "We are justified by Grace ALONE as a gift."

Grace alone! We're saved by grace alone! Glory to God it's not my merit. My salvation is all of grace from beginning to end. I could not contribute to it. I am a sinner, saved by grace, and grace alone!