

Sola Gratia

Titus 2:11 - 3:8

“Latin is a dead language, as dead as dead can be. First, it killed the Romans and now it’s killing me!” That’s the little song I remember singing many years ago sitting in a Latin I class in the 9th grade. It was fun to sing, and there might even have been a bit of truth to it.

But actually, it’s good to know a little Latin. It never really killed anybody! So this morning, it won’t kill you to learn some Latin. You may already know some. Five Latin phrases, to be specific, all beginning with the word “sola.” Sola means alone, by itself. These are the five statements of essential doctrine that were reestablished for the church as a result of the Protestant reformation of the 16th century. Five statements of doctrine that have come to define the orthodox Christian faith as it was rediscovered by the protestant church during that great reformation that began 500 years ago. As reformed Protestants, our spiritual heritage from that great historical movement of God can be summarized by the doctrines captured in those five simple phrases: Sola Scriptura, Sola Christus, Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, and Sola Deo Gloria. In other words, English words, Scripture alone, Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone, and for God's glory alone. Each of those doctrines, with the particular emphasis of that word "sola," were attacked and denied by the Roman Catholic church of that day (and ours!), and are often denied by other professing Christians as well. So we must ever be mindful of these important truths, for without that word "alone", these doctrines are destroyed!

Scripture alone is our infallible rule of faith and practice, for it alone is inspired as a special revelation from God. No creed, no council, no individual and no church can bind your conscience as

to what you must believe or how you must live--the Scripture alone carries that authority.

Christ alone is the mediator between God and man. His sinless life and substitutionary atonement alone are sufficient for you and me to be reconciled with God the Father.

Grace alone is the basis of our salvation. We are redeemed and rescued from the wrath and curse of God not because of any merit or strategy in our own efforts and works, but only by the motivation of God in his own free and sovereign grace. Salvation is all of grace, coming to us by the undeserved and unmerited favor of God.

Faith alone is the means or instrument by which we receive this salvation. We are justified (forgiven our sins and received as righteous in the sight of God) by the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ credited to us and received by us by faith alone. Justification is by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. And all of that brings you to point of understanding that all of this is...

For God's glory alone. Thus the object and goal of true, biblical Christianity is well summarized by Paul: "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."

Today, on the 504th anniversary of Martin Luther nailing his 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany, I want to focus on the third of those solas. Sola Gratia. We are saved by grace alone. So look at our text, and let me declare the obvious, to the eternal encouragement of your souls!

I. THE GRACE OF GOD BRINGS SALVATION.

Not just “God appeared, “ but this one attribute of God brought to the forefront. The GRACE of God appeared. This is a divine intervention. A divine appearance. A divine revelation. God entered the realm of men in order to bring salvation. He did not leave us to ourselves to work it all out.

The grace of God appeared, and the essential meaning of that grace is simply the idea of something “unmerited”, undeserved, unearned. That is what all this is about. That is what the reclamation of apostolic doctrine during the Protestant Reformation was all about. Anything that has merit before God, comes from God. Everything that has merit comes from God. Whenever you even begin to speak about anything being earned or deserved, then God is the author. With one exception, of course. One thing that we have earned as wages. “The wages of sin is death.” We have all sinned, everyone of us has sinned. And we have therefore earned God’s justice and wrath.

So it is that when Paul writes to the Ephesians, before speaking about our salvation, he describes the sin from which we saved.

Eph. 2:1 “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.”

Only then does the meaning of grace make sense!

Eph. 2:4 “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.”

And then, back in our text, in Titus 3, we have one specific aspect of that salvation identified, justification. Again we read a reference to grace.

v.7

Let’s look at this idea of grace a bit more deeply in order that you can appreciate it all the more fully.

v.4-5

All of those words help define the fullness of what grace is all about. The first word is rightly translated either “kindness” or “goodness.” It refers to a goodness of heart, the good intentions and motives that show forth in expressions of kindness. And this is a foundation upon which your knowledge of God must be based. Peter uses this same word in quoting from,

Ps. 34:8 “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! 9 Oh, fear the Lord, you his saints for those who fear him have no lack! 10 The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.”

God’s goodness is something you are to experience. To feel it, to taste it for yourself. And it is a goodness that finds its origin in God himself, not merely in some good response to something good that we have done. That’s grace.

The second word Paul uses here is sometimes translated “lovingkindness.” Or simply “love.” Somewhat literally, it is his love for man. Beloved, God is a lover of men! That’s grace.

With the essential element of mercy mixed in. Mercy is his compassion upon those in need. Mercy is his love extended to those who are in desperate straights. Thus to declare that the grace of God brings salvation is to say that that salvation comes,

A. By the kindness and mercy of God.

And, in conjunction with that movement within the heart of God, that salvation comes by his power.

B. By the sovereign power of God.

Look at how this grace of God that brought salvation works. This is the working of that grace, “He saved us.” He did it to us. Salvation is not something we “do.” It is something God does. Redemption is not something we do. “He redeemed us.”

And God the Father accomplished this by sending to earth, in the flesh, God the Son, the Lord Jesus. So we read,
v.14

God is in the business of “purifying for himself his own special people.” All of that points to the sovereignty of God’s power and work. We don’t purify ourselves in order to come to God. God purifies us through the blood of his son Jesus. Christ alone--another of those great reformation “solas.”

And what is it that God does to purify us? What does his sovereign power accomplish? Look at chapter 3,

v.5b. “He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior.”

That’s God’s plan of salvation. The washing of regeneration. Lots of really important theological words here. The word for regeneration is the same word for being born again. Born from above. Born of the spirit. Born a second time, unto spiritual life.

And being born again is not something you or I do! I hope all of this fits together for you. Salvation is what God does. The plan of salvation is God’s plan for what he will do to accomplish our salvation for us. It is all of grace!

Notice how Paul describes that new birth. It is a bath, a washing. The washing of regeneration. And that washing is made equivalent with the “renewing of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior.”

So how can you be born again? Well, God has to pour out his Holy Spirit upon you to give you a new heart. And on what basis does he do that? Because of your faith? Because of your faithfulness? NO. Because of HIS mercy. Because of HIS grace. Because of his sovereign power. That comes first. The grace of God comes first. We respond with faith and repentance.

What is the basis of your salvation? Not simply grace, but sola gratia. Your righteousness has nothing to do with it, as Paul emphasizes in,
v.5

C. Not by your works of righteousness.

As I read earlier from,

Eph. 2:8 “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

People of God, there is nothing of which you have to boast

before God! Nothing. Nothing in yourself in which to take glory. There is no merit in anyone you have done, or in anything you will do. It is all of grace. Grace alone. And, therefore, some would say in great opposition to this doctrine, that means you can live however you want. If all that is true, they would say, go on sinning that grace may increase!

But there is a fascinating emphasis in our text this morning, and I want you to see it for all its worth. In preaching grace, I clearly want to keep you from ever thinking that you need to do good works in order to achieve a reconciliation with God. But I don't want you to keep you doing good works! Just the opposite. And in this text, so full of an explanation of grace alone, there is a huge emphasis upon doing good works. But the issue is why? What is the motivation for doing good works? What is the purpose or the goal of doing them?

Well, despite my repeated emphasis that there is no merit in any good work that you will ever do, still the truth of the Bible and the true experience of all true believers is that,

II. THE GRACE OF GOD BRINGS ABOUT GOOD WORKS.

As cause and effect. As a consequence. And as we studied in James not too long ago, a necessary consequence in terms of validating the legitimacy of the work of grace in the life of a believer.

In our text, Paul makes this connection between grace and subsequent good works very clear.

v.14

God redeemed us and purified us for a very specific purpose--to make us "zealous for good works."

I could go back to Ephesians 2 and read verse 10, where I had left off.

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."

And to emphasize how important this is, Paul adds in this letter to Titus,

v.15

In other words, this is important! He adds another statement of importance with a phrase found frequently in these pastoral epistles,

v.8

Those who are saved by grace alone are to be careful to do good works! As chapter 3 began, Paul gets practical and personal, with specific exhortations,

v.1-2

What, then, are we to do with this? In a sermon on the subject of grace alone, what are we to do with the subject of good works? I want the answer to those questions to be so perfectly clear. Grace is the only appropriate foundation for the whole subject of good works. The grace of God actually brings about good works. Specifically, it is the motive.

A. Grace is the motive to deny the ungodly desires of your hearts.

v.11-12

Grace trains us! Actually, the word is discipline, training by discipline, instruction and teaching by discipline. It isn't automatic or magical, but a process of teaching and training.

Understanding grace as I have attempted to preach it to you this morning, trains you to do good works. Because when you understand grace, when you understand your secure position and unchangeable status before God, if you really understand that, with that new heart that he has given you in regeneration, you love him. And love to God as a response to his love for you is a powerful motivation.

So there is no contradiction between preaching grace and exhorting unto obedience. Indeed, if the one doesn't lead into the other, you've missed the whole point. "The grace of God has appeared...training us to renounce ungodliness." "The grace of God has appeared, bring salvation,...training us "to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives."

Do you struggle with self-control? Consider the grace of God that has appeared, bringing salvation. That is the training ground in which you need to hear these exhortations!

Do you struggle with various passions and pleasures? Look at,
v.3-4

Consider God's goodness and loving kindness. Consider God's mercy. Consider the exercise of God's own sovereign power. That's maturity of faith. Sometimes the threat of discipline is necessary to restrain sin, and that is especially appropriate for young children. But that's not the goal of maturity. That's not the basis for good works.

B. Grace is the motive for good works.

Again, v.14

God redeems and God purifies. By grace. Grace alone. Not

of works. He redeems us from every lawless did, that means sin. He redeems us that we might stop sinning. Therefore, we are urged, stop sinning, because you understand that he has already saved you. Stop sinning, instead do the good works of obedience, be zealous for good works, work hard at it, because the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation for all people.

With this additional perspective, as Paul also makes clear to Titus, the perspective of future glory.

III. THE GRACE OF GOD ESTABLISHES THE PERSPECTIVE OF FUTURE GLORY.

Here is the outworking of grace when you are really able to understand it. It is grace that gives you the confidence to look toward the future with security. Thus the foundation of our assurance is this same doctrine of grace.

Look at how Paul ties this confidence of future glory with the awareness of God's grace. Verse 12, with all the emphasis upon the actual areas of training in our lives, identifies "this present age." That refers to the current age, the age that began with Christ's first coming and will end with Christ's second coming. All of Scripture can be divided up into three such "ages," the three separated by the two comings of Christ, the past age before the birth of Christ, this current age, and then the age to come after he comes back.

And that age to come is the focus for those who are training in this present age. Specifically,

A. Grace enables you to anticipate your blessed hope in the second coming of Jesus.

v.13

And don't forget what Paul has just written. The nitty-gritty

stuff of sanctification, mortification, training in righteousness. Self-control, self-denial. Do all of that, beloved, in this present age, knowing two very vital things. That the grace of God has appeared, in the flesh. And that the grace of God will guarantee your inheritance, for your blessed hope is the appearing, the second coming, of Jesus. Because your salvation is of grace, and grace alone, you can be sure that “he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

So you can train yourself in godliness in the anticipation of your blessed hope. Or to turn that around, with the anticipation of your blessed hope, looking forward to that and longing for that glorious appearing of Jesus when you, too, shall be made perfect in glory, knowing that and waiting for it, you train yourself in godliness now. You learn to “renounce ungodliness and worldly passions” now because the grace of God has made certain the return of Jesus Christ in glory.

And so,

B. Grace provides the motive for your own good works in the certainty of your future glorification.

Look at that absolutely essential connection between verse 7 and verse 8

v.7

Now, what is the application?

v.8

The same connection is found in verse 14 of chapter 2. He redeemed us to make us zealous for good works.

God saved you, because he chose to love you. All to the praise of his glorious grace. He saved you by grace alone, so that that grace might teach you to deny ungodliness and to be

zealous for good works. It is his grace that is presented as the chief motivation, the grace, alone, by which you are justified. And as soon as you remove the word “alone” from grace, it is no longer grace. If your salvation is not of sola gratia, then it is not of gratia at all. If you have any part at all, if you believe that anything you do has any merit, then I would simply tell you that you have not done enough.

Maybe, for a little while, I could motivate you to do more on the basis of urging you to obey the law in order to achieve your own salvation, but that would be a curse. A never ending curse. So that’s not how I will motivate you, for that’s not how the Apostle Paul motivates you. The motivation is your unshakeable and absolute confidence that “by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” Grace alone.

This is our heritage from the Protestant Reformation. May it be a heritage we preserve for generations to come, until Jesus returns. Sola gratia.