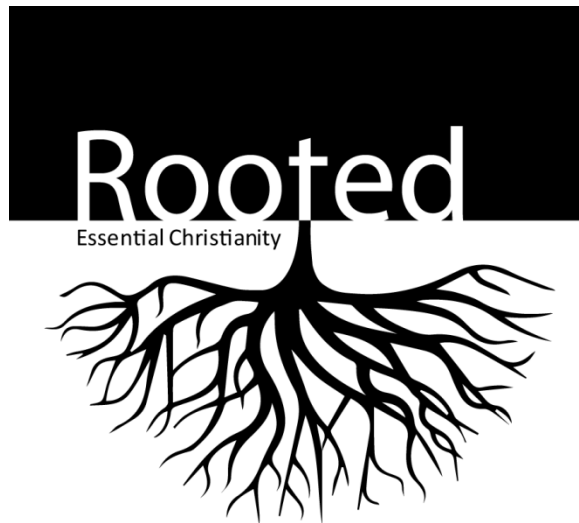




The Reformation Solas

Part 2 – Sola Gratia

Ephesians 2:1-10

Writing to the church in Ephesus Paul tells Christians that they “have been saved...” This past tense act of saving is otherwise known as justification. Christians *are being* sanctified in this life and *will be* glorified in the age to come. But Christians have already been completely and for all time justified. Unlike sanctification, justification is not an ongoing work of God in the life of the believer. It is a fully accomplished reality in which the Christian stands before God having been declared righteous without the slightest possibility that it can be altered or taken away.

The Roman Catholic Church has always taught that sinners are saved by grace. However, the Reformers understood that Rome’s definition of grace had departed sharply from that which is taught in Scripture. As a result the gospel itself had been gravely distorted. For Rome, grace was a substance one received from God which enabled the recipient to then do the works necessary to be justified. This amounts to a formula of justification by works.

After centuries of this errant teaching the Protestant Reformers recovered the biblical doctrine of grace which is that sinners are justified before a holy God entirely by grace alone. Rome taught that sinners are justified when God graciously gives them the ability to do the things which justify. The Reformers, armed with Scripture, retrieved the truth that sinners are justified not by any works of obedience that they perform. Rather, sinners are justified by God as he imputes or credits to them his own righteousness. The only righteousness that can justify the sinner is the righteousness of God.

Does God give his people the grace to live increasingly obedient lives? Absolutely! But those works of obedience can never be enough to justify or contribute to the justification of a sinner. Sinners are justified before God not because he enables them to live righteously. Sinners are justified before God when he, by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone declares them righteous. That is the great recovery of the Protestant Reformation. Any other formula for man’s salvation is a false gospel and cannot save.

Main Idea: Sinners are justified before God by grace alone apart from any works of obedience.

1. The need for grace alone.

Vv. 1-3

Having explained God’s sovereign predestination and election of his people (1:3-6) Paul now turns his attention to our need for such sovereign grace. Sinners cannot contribute to their salvation because of the comprehensive ruin which sin effects. What Paul describes in verses 1-3 is the doctrine of total depravity (that sin has brought ruin to every aspect of our being).

a) Our condition

vs. 1 – “dead in the trespasses and sins”

b) Our practice

vv. 1-2 – “following the course of this world”

c) Our nature

vs. 3 – “children of wrath.”

2. Salvation by grace alone.

Vv. 4-9

- The church of Rome had always declared that salvation was by grace. But their concept of grace was of a divinely given infusion of spiritual energy by which the recipient was enabled to do what was required in order to be justified before God. The Reformers, however, saw this formula as a clear departure from Scripture that obliterated the gospel. Grace is not a substance infused in the believer but a declaration by God that sinners are justified because of the doing, dying, and rising of Christ.

a) The motive of God's grace

- Vs. 4 – “because of the great love with which he loved us”
- Certainly God has more than a single motive in saving sinners. But here Paul chooses to focus on the love of God for sinners. God's love was expressed by showing mercy toward those still hostile toward him.

b) The power of God's grace

- Vs. 5 – “made us alive together with Christ”
- Grace does not help sinners along in their quest for salvation. By his grace, God brings the dead to life. He changes our status from children of wrath to those who are “seated with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

c) The sufficiency of God's grace

- Vv. 8-9 – “it is the gift of God, not a result of works”
- The “alone” in “grace alone” is essential. Grace does not merely aid our salvation. Grace does not generate the proper good works necessary for salvation. Nor is grace aided by our good works. All such formulas lead inevitably to human boasting. The only hope for sinners to be justified before a holy God is grace *alone*.

3. Living in grace alone.

Vs. 10 – “For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works...”

- God's grace to justify sinners does not leave them unchanged. Having been justified freely by God's grace, we are no longer “dead” in our sins but are now “God's workmanship.” What is more, we are no longer “following the course of this world” but “created in Christ Jesus for good works.”
- Notice that these good works have nothing to do with our standing before God. Rather the good works in which we walk are solely the fruit of God's gracious salvation and never the cause of it.