

Passage Introduction: Notice the words *with Christ* in 2:5, 6 that appear three times. What God has done to us, He has also done to Christ. He expounds upon God's actions in raising up Christ in chapter 1:19-23. In chapter 2, he expounds on His grace in raising us up with Christ. In chapter 1, Paul prays that eyes would be enlightened so that the saints would be able to know the surpassing greatness of God's power that He demonstrated in the raising of Jesus Christ from the dead. If understanding God's work in Christ requires divine enablement and enlightenment, then understanding God's work in saving us by grace requires divine enablement.

Introduction: In 1505, a young man knocked at the gate of the Augustinian monastery at Erfurt, Germany. He was seeking peace for his soul, and had come to the most likely place in all of Germany to find it. Only weeks before, in the midst of a blinding thunderstorm, a lightning bolt seemingly from heaven had struck him to the ground and had wrenched from his prostrate form a vow to St. Anne that he would become a monk in exchange for protection in the tempest. The young man was Martin Luther, a 21-year old law student of Eisleben, Germany.

Growing up within the domain of the Holy Roman Empire in the late 15th century had thoroughly convinced him that without the grace of God, his soul was lost. He had always been a serious young man, and unlike other boys, his champions had been those who devoted themselves unreservedly to the pursuit of holy things. He particularly idolized Prince William of Anhalt, a noble who had taken up the life of a Franciscan monk and beat and starved himself so severely as to nearly extinguish his own life. Driving this extreme asceticism was the prevailing and very biblical understanding of God as angry judge. Man's sin had so trespassed the justice and holiness of God that man could expect nothing from God but judgment. As Catholic doctrine of the time taught, apart from God's grace man was hopelessly lost. Yet, to access God's grace, the common man needed look no further than the local parish of the Roman Church. The pope, or papa, headed up the Roman church and served as Christ's representative on earth. The pope possessed the authority to appoint bishops and clergy. As the mediator between heaven and earth, the Church, in the persons of the pope and clergy, possessed access to the grace of God. The church could weigh out for the individual the appropriate measure of grace to counteract the deadly influence of sins a man might commit. Sins depleted one's own personal stockpile of grace by quantifiable amounts. By addressing himself to the church, a man could replenish his supply of grace. The Church dispensed grace in exchange for participation in the seven sacraments. Thus, though God was thought to dispense His grace freely to needy sinners, the Church, the custodians of grace, dispensed it only to those who earned it through the sacraments.

Certain sacraments could be completed only once (baptism). In baptism, a newborn child received a measure of God's grace sufficient to unite the child to the church, the source of God's grace. Other sacraments enriched a man with grace as often as he participated in them. These sacraments were necessary because as a child grows he sins, depleting that original supply of grace he received in baptism. Central to the whole system was the Mass. On the altar, the priest offered daily the body and blood of Christ as an atoning sacrifice to God. Rome freely taught that in the daily offering, the Church carried on the uncompleted work of redemption. Grace came not in partaking of the elements (for how could the bumbling peasantry be trusted not to spill the blood of Christ or drop a crumb of Christ's body?) but simply in looking to the elements as the priest elevated the host with the words "*Hoc est corpus meum.*" The Mass was conducted in Latin, and this, combined with the distance at which the people were kept from the whole ordeal, gave it an air of mystery.

Another of the sacraments was the act of confession. In confession, the priest would probe the conscience of the penitent for sins through a list of carefully prepared questions. The penitent would confess those sins that came to light to the priest, and the priest who would prescribe some compensating act of penance by which the penitent could make amends for his sins. The church formally introduced confession as a sacrament in 1215 in order to more effectively settle the consciences of these laboring under their sins. The thinking was that confessing everything the sinner could remember and hearing the priest absolve the sinner would bring healing to the wounded conscience. However, the effect proved exactly the opposite. The penitent left the presence of the priest with a greater awareness of his own sinfulness before God. This drove the man back to the church for grace through the mass and penance. The failsafe for all of this was the sacrament of the Last Rites, a sacrament conducted by a priest over the body of a man near death to compensate for any sins not atoned for in the Mass.

On that fearful evening, as Luther labored along under the panic of the thunderstorm, the lightning bolt that knocked him to the ground also pressed upon his stricken conscience the realization that death was no respecter of the state of a man's soul. It could come unexpectedly before the opportunity to make a final confession of sins or prepare for Last Rites. The prospect of what awaited Luther in eternity without a full quota of the grace of God was too painful to consider. It was this that drove him to his vow to enter the monastery. The church taught that entrance into the monastery restored a man to the state of innocence enjoyed by a newly baptized infant. In the monastery, Luther could enjoy not only a spiritual reset on the meter that counted his sins before God, but also the safety of the seclusion and strictures of monastic life. It was a life apart from the degrading influences of everyday life and a life dedicating to climbing the steep ladder to heaven. Perhaps here, he could finally satisfy the God he knew to be so angry with him and finally come to peace in his soul. Luther threw himself into a monk's life, manifesting such zeal as to make a name for himself even among these most holy of men. He often took no food or water for 3 days. Self-flagellation was common, and since those acts of a monk most pleasing to God were the wearing of chafing underclothes and sleeping without blankets in the winter cold, he would frequently deprive himself of proper shelter from the cold until his extremities had frozen. He later wrote that, "If ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery, it was I."

But the more he did, the less his soul was satisfied. At first, he was troubled about his ability to remember and confess his sins. Sins could only be absolved by the priest if they were confessed, and they could only be confessed if they could be remembered. Luther feared he might be missing some due to lapses of memory. He often spent as many as six hours in the confessional booth scouring his soul for any trace of sin that remained unconfessed while wearying his confessors with his lengthy and meticulous confessions. One confessor sent him away and told him not to return until he really had something worth confessing.

Second, Luther began to realize that while his actions might have met the external standard, his heart was far from what it should be. He began to analyze his motives and concluded that all of his practice of monkery arose from a heart of self-love. He was performing for God but all for his own sake. All those prayers he prayed in the chapel weren't coming from a heart of devotion to God. He knew he had to mean them when he prayed them, but therein lay the rub. As he analyzed his heart, he

concluded that the pressure of having to attain such a high standard of merit before God was driving him from God rather than to Him.

Question: The question that plagued Luther's soul was this: On what basis would God declare a man such as Luther justified? What would cause God to declare a man righteous before Him? What is the operative force of a man's salvation? What is its cause?

For the reformers, this was the central question of the Reformation. This was the big *Sola*. **Carl Trueman** writes, "Luther's conviction was that his Reformation was fundamentally about the nature of grace" (113). **R. C. Sproul** writes that "the underlying foundation of the issues that provoked the Reformation" (*Willing to Believe*, 9). The thesis of this message is exactly the answer that Luther came to in his struggle to appease the seemingly unquenchable wrath of God. Man is saved by the grace of God alone. The grace of God alone is the cause of any man's salvation and justification.

Compare *Sola Gratia* and Ephesians 2:5, 8 (*we are saved by grace*).

Catechism of the Catholic Church (1962)

- 1996 Our justification comes from the grace of God
 - Do we agree with this?
- 1993 Justification establishes cooperation between God's grace and man's freedom
 - Justification is God's action of making you righteous so that you can perfect that righteousness to merit eternal life. The two work together in cooperation.

"Rome was ready to make copious use of the word grace, but the *sola* must be yielded." --Engelder.

The doctrine of *Sola Gratia* is that man is saved or justified by the grace of God alone. Is the use of the word *alone* justified? Are we right to use a word where the Scripture text does not?

Thesis: For a man to be saved apart from the grace of God alone is impossible.

I. The nature of grace demands the doctrine of *Sola Gratia*. Salvation is available to mankind on the basis of grace alone because of the nature of grace.

A. What is "grace"?

1. Fundamentally, grace is a favor done by one to another.
2. Aristotle wrote "Let grace then be taken to be the feeling of goodwill which causes a man to render a service to another who needs it, not in return for something nor in his own interest, but in the interest of the recipient." Grace is an inclination of goodwill toward another that prompts an action in the interest of the other.
3. In Luke 1:28, the angel Gabriel greets Mary as "favored one," telling her that she will enjoy the special benefaction of the presence of God (the Lord is with you), and in vs. 30, the angel says, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." Mary was the recipient of a great kindness of God—in her womb, the Son of David, who would be called the Son of the Most High, would be conceived. Though there were many virgins in Israel who longed to be the one to carry in her womb the Messiah, Mary was the chosen one. She was the favored one, the object of the favor of God. Mary was the object of the

grace of God. Yet, there was nothing she had done to solicit this favor. Perhaps she had prayed to be the favored one, but so had many other virgins. The prayer itself was not the cause of her favored status.

4. Contrast with other words

- a. Reward is caused by and called forth by actions that have merited it.
- b. Mercy is caused by and called forth by the miserable state of another.
- c. Yet, grace is called forth from its source by nothing in the object. Nothing in its object compels it. It finds its only motive in the bounty and free-heartedness of the giver. Scripture fills out this understanding of grace and confirms that when grace acts, it acts alone. Grace operates “monergistically.” For grace to be grace, by its very nature, it acts as an exclusive actor. Scripture makes explicit two other possible forces we may be tempted to think grace would share its role as an actor in salvation.

B. Not by human works

Romans 11:6; 4:4 - Paul is answering the question in vs 1: Has God rejected His people? Paul answers with an emphatic No!. There is a remnant according to God’s gracious choice, or election, and those people whom He foreknew, God has not cast them away! In arguing for the existence of the remnant, Paul tells us something about the nature of grace. Notice vs. 5. From God’s perspective, grace comes to mankind not because of anything he has done or has not done. Grace does not come on the basis of works, be they good or bad. Grace is completely apart from works. God does not take works into account when He bestows grace. There is never a time when grace and works operate together.

C. Not by human will

1. Exodus 33:19 qtd in Romans 9:15. Moses intercedes for the people after God has disowned them. God responds to Moses in words that reserve to God alone the option of showing or withholding the favor of His continuing presence among these sinful people.
2. Inspired interpretation of that verse is in Romans 9:16. Human will or effort has nothing to do with God’s bestowment of grace. They do not cooperate. God is sovereign in His bestowal of His grace, completely uncoerced by human will.
3. John 1:13 says that we are born as children of God, “not of blood (or natural descent) nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God”
4. The Reformation itself is an illustration of this very thing. In the generation before the Reformation, religion was more popular than ever. In a show of just how secure the church had become, popes had even become the brunt of comedy in Dante’s *Inferno*, and people laughed at the caricatures precisely because it appeared that the Church was secure enough to take the hit. Sure, there were matters to improve upon, but no one on the eve of the Reformation was looking to overturn the whole system. Luther himself, in posting his thesis was following the standard scholastic practice of his day. He posted them in Latin, the language of learning. He wasn’t trying to start a revolution. Yet, the Reformation came on much to Luther’s amazement. The Reformation was not the product of human will. It was the favor of God bestowed upon a world benighted under an oppressive system of error and darkness.

- D. Romans 3:21-25 – justified *without a cause* (John 15:25 – they hated me without a cause). Yet, the cause of our salvation is the grace of God (Eph 2:8 – for by grace you have been saved; and Rom 3:24 – having been justified as a gift by His grace)

Summation: If grace is God's favor to man, and he bestows it sovereignly apart from human will or work, then the ONLY cause of a man's salvation is the grace of God. To say that salvation is the working of the grace of God is to say that there are no other operative forces at work in our salvation. Grace never acts cooperatively or synergistically.

Transition: Why is it that grace always operates on its own? The reason is that grace's operation to bring us salvation occurs in realms that man cannot enter.

II. The nature of salvation demands the doctrine of *Sola Gratia*. Salvation is available to mankind on the basis of grace alone because of the nature of salvation.

A. Here, we see that the **objective basis** for our salvation is the work of the grace of God alone.

B. Romans 3:21-25

1. Redemption – the act of freeing a slave by the payment of a ransom. Christ Jesus is the one who pays the ransom of His life and His blood. Did any man influence God to send his Son to pay the ransom for our sins? Can any man ever obtain for himself the purchase price of his own redemption? God has demanded the life of the flesh-the blood. Can any man obtain for himself the purchase price of his own redemption?
2. Setting forth Christ – Incarnation, birth, life, death, resurrection of Christ. The minute details of predictive prophecy shows us that the setting forth of Christ was the work of God alone. He was the cause of it all.
3. Propitiation – Propitiation occurs in the most inaccessible of places: the Holy of Holies, the court of the temple where no man was permitted to enter. Further, the temple in which Christ made propitiation is in heaven where no sinful man has ever ascended. Propitiation did not occur and cannot be added to by the will or works of any man. God set forth Christ to be a propitiation of His own wrath. God is the actor, and the propitiation of His wrath, the cornerstone of our salvation, is the result of the sovereign grace of God alone.
4. Justification - The sinner's case has already been tried in the court of heaven and the verdict has already been handed down. Guilty! How will a man escape the sentence of God considering that there is no court higher than God's to which to appeal the verdict unless God and God alone determines to favor the man with a reversal of the verdict.
5. Imputation – where does imputation take place? It occurs in the bank of heaven.
6. Ephesians 2:5-6 - Resurrection

Summation: In other words, there is not one aspect of our salvation that occurs on the basis of the will or work of man. Salvation by its very nature is all the work of the sovereign favor of God alone. The nature of salvation justifies the inclusion of the word *alone*. We are saved by grace alone.

Transition: Now, WHY is it like that? Why has God set it up that way? There are two answers. The primary answer is what Dr. Talbert will deal with next week: God set it all up to exclude human effort so that salvation would be to his glory alone. The second reason is the nature of man. It is impossible that salvation would be by anything other than the grace of God alone because of man's nature.

III. **The nature of man demands the doctrine of Sola Gratia. Salvation is available to mankind on the basis of grace alone because of the nature of man.**

- Here, we see that the **subjective basis** for our salvation is the work of the grace of God alone.
- A. In Ephesians 2, Paul's main goal is to explain the position a saint has in Christ. In chapter 1, Paul has shown that God raised Christ up and seated him high in the heavenlies at his own right hand far above every earthly and demonic ruler. Ephesians 2 shows that God has done the same things for those who are saved. He has made us alive and raised us up and seated us with Christ. These are the main verbs, and all of this is the result of the operation of the grace of God (vs. 8). Yet, Paul digresses in his original intent in order to address the nature of man (vs. 1-3). Thus, Ephesians 2 connects the work of God in His grace (vs. 4-10) with the nature of unregenerate man (vs. 1-3). Why does he do that and what is the connection?
- B. If you had asked Luther about the connection, Luther would have told you that the connection was the heart of the Reformation. The question of the relationship between the nature of man and the grace of God was the nub of the whole controversy in the Reformation. Considering what Rome taught and still teaches helps us to make the connection and to understand the relationship. Justification establishes cooperation between God's grace and man's freedom. Rome teaches that baptism justifies an infant or infuses into him the grace and righteousness he needs. This places the infant on the path of cooperating with God in his salvation. The grace of baptism sets the infant free to pursue his own salvation before God accompanied by the grace of God.
- C. In the face of Luther's initial attacks upon Rome, the Church contracted Erasmus, a Dutch humanist scholar of the day to write a treatise on *The Free Will of Man*. Erasmus argued that man is able to participate with God in his salvation because following baptism, each man is set in a position to be able to merit the salvation he desires. Thus, the Christian life for Rome is a synergism between the grace of God and the free will of man. Both operate in tandem to counteract the deadly influence of sin so that Rome can say that a man is saved by grace and works.
- D. Luther responded to Erasmus's Treatise with his own treatise: *The Bondage of the Will*. In that treatise, Luther argued that because of the fall of Adam, man's will is no longer free. Man is unable to cooperate with God in his own salvation because man's will is unalterably twisted and corrupted by the Fall of Adam and he is unable to choose in God's direction.
- E. We tend to think of humanity as possessing a free will. Man is free to make his own way in the world and to determine his own destiny. Man can choose his goal and achieve what he wills. Very few today would agree with Luther's proposition that man's will is bound. How is it that Luther could write a treatise titled the *Bondage of the Will*?
- F. There was a genius to what Luther was doing. Remember, the Church believes that salvation is the result of a synergism between God's grace and man's own free will choosing righteousness and thus coming to merit salvation before God. Luther realized that by striking through the freedom of man, by demonstrating that man's will is not free to choose toward God, he would effectively disable the teaching of Rome. By striking through the doctrine of man's freewill, the grace of God alone would be left as the means whereby a man is saved.
- G. Luther was convinced this was the heart of the Reformation. At the conclusion of his discourse concerning the bondage of man's will, Luther wrote to Erasmus:

I praise and commend you highly for this also, that unlike all the rest you alone have attacked the real issue, the essence of the matter in dispute, and have not wearied me with irrelevancies about the papacy, purgatory, indulgences, and such like trifles (for trifles they are rather than basic issues), with which almost everyone hitherto has gone hunting for me without success. You and you alone have seen the question on which everything hinges, and have aimed at the vital spot; for which I sincerely thank you, since I am only too glad to give as much attention to this subject as time and leisure permit.

Is a man saved by a cooperation between his own freewill and God's grace, or is man's will so bound in sin that he cannot cooperate with God at all? Is a man free to aid God in His salvation or is man so bound in sin that salvation is and can only be by the grace of God alone?

- H. Luther was looking at passages of Scripture such as Ephesians 2 and discovering in those passages that man actually does not possess within himself the ability to cooperate with God in his own salvation. He was finding that what freedom the natural man supposes he possess is actually freedom to choose between two equally sinful options: self-righteousness or self-gratification. He has within him no power to move his will toward God and thus, in the final analysis, no man truly seeks for God. It is the nature of man, specifically that he is dead in trespasses and sins that means salvation must be by grace alone.
- I. Let's look at Ephesians 2 and notice several things. Paul begins by describing men as dead. There is a lot of confusion about what Paul means by the word dead. But, Paul himself has not left any question about what he means by the word "dead" because he takes a detour of three verses before coming back around to his original statement (compare vs. 1 and vs. 4) to explain what he means by dead. Let's look closely at his explanation of what he means when he says that we were dead.
- J. We did not walk "*according to*" our own choosing. We walked "*according to*." The words "according to" denote a certain standard that defined and shaped our walk. Men walk not according to their own choosing but according to the course of this world and according to the prince of the power of the air. How else do you explain the great sameness of the course of all men's lives? No matter where you go in the world, all men are seeking their own interests. How do you explain that what Romans 3:11 says that there are none who seek for God except that it is as 2 Timothy 2:26 says that mankind has been *taken captive by the devil to do HIS WILL*. Men walk according to the ruler of the domain of the air. Who is that?
- K. What are these standards according to which we walked:
 - 1. The course of this world – Eadie says "they walked in entire conformity to the reigning sins of the times."
 - 2. The ruler of the authority (*exousia* = domain in Luke 23:7) of the air.
- L. Ephesians 2:3 explain that no man is coerced into walking this way. A man chooses it willingly. Among all these who were walking according to the world and the devil, we too all formerly walked. The life we lived was the fulfillment of our own desires and our own will. Bunyan paints the picture well in *The Holy War* when the three prisoners, Understanding, Conscience, and Will are brought before Emmanuel and await his judgment. Emmanuel questions them and they respond this way:

Emmanuel: Did you suffer yourselves to be corrupted by Diabolus?

Prisoners: We did more than suffer it. We chose him, Lord, of our own mind.

Emmanuel: Would you have been content to continue under his tyranny for as long as you lived?

Prisoners: Yes, Lord, yes, for his ways were pleasing to our flesh and we were grown alien to a better state.

Emmanuel: And you did not want me to get the victory over you?

Prisoners: No, Lord, we did not.

Emmanuel: What punishment do you think you deserve at my hand?

Prisoners: Death, Lord!

- M. And, that is exactly what Ephesians concludes. The result of this is that by nature we were children destined for wrath.
- N. Adam was created with the ability to choose between living to God and living to himself. But that first fatal misstep affected not only his standing before God but also polluted his whole nature, enslaving it to sin and corruption. Now, man walks according to his depraved nature, the course of this world, and the will of the devil. Augustine has a good illustration of this in *Confessions*. Alypius at the games who is transformed by the sight of violence (taken from Trueman, *Grace Alone*, 62).
- O. How can we explain the fact that so many men seem to do so much good in the world? **Andrew Fuller's** illustration of a group of men onboard a ship is helpful here.
- P. This is why Paul can write in 2:8-9 that even **faith itself is not the product of the will or heart of man**. It cannot be. The natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2:14). His understanding is darkened (Ephesians 4:18). Faith is something a man exercises but never something he produces. God favors a dead man with the faith required to trust in Christ alone by faith for salvation, He shows the man the loveliness of Christ and causes him to incline toward Christ in faith. And then God turns around and responds to such faith by making that man alive again, raising him up with Christ and seating him in the heavenlies with Christ. This is why Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8-9 that it is by grace that we have been saved through faith and that none of that is of ourselves. Not the grace, not the salvation and not the faith. It is all a gift of God so that no one can boast. We are saved by the grace of God alone.

Uses:

- 1. Titus 2:11-14 – meditate on this one. Grace has much to teach you about how to live.
- 2. Assurance – “In our fluctuation of feeling, it is well to remember that Jesus admits no change in his affection; your heart is not the compass Jesus saileth by.” - Samuel Rutherford. Salvation is not of human works and it is not of human will.
- 3. Boldness in preaching the Gospel – In Corinth, Acts 18:9-10 - “Do not be afraid *any longer*, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.”
- 4. Praise to God for His glorious grace – Ephesians 1:6 – All that God has done by His grace, he has done *to the praise of His glorious grace*. You can praise God that while you were hoisting the sail on the ship, God reached down in His grace, and saved you. Your salvation is an act of the grace of God alone. We are saved *Sola Gratia* and *Soli Deo Gloria*!

Conclusion: I have a great question for you. It is a question that will divide this congregation into two groups. Do you accept what Luther found about himself? Do you accept what Ephesians 2 says about you? Have you concluded that there is nothing you can do to merit salvation? Have you concluded that the reason you can do nothing to merit salvation is because your heart is not even toward God in the first place? You are corrupted and bound in your sins. You are dead. You need a resurrection, and resurrections are never performed autonomously. Luther was trapped by his own inability to choose to act in God's interest alone, and he hated God for the predicament he was in. Yet, through that despair, God brought him to see that the first thing God does to a man before he saves him is to damn him—to bring that man to see his own damnable state before Him. That was Luther's own testimony. He spoke and wrote those words time and again. Before God saves a man, he first damns him. If you have seen even a glimmer of the hopeless state in which you are before God, give God thanks that he has lavished upon you the grace to see what most men never realize about themselves. The first step to obtaining salvation is to collapse in humbled and resistless despair over your own sin before an inflexibly righteous God. You can do nothing to save yourself because you are bound a sinner *by nature*. If you have accepted that about yourself and humbled yourself before God on this point, Peter gives some of the most hopeful words to you when he writes that God resists the proud, but he gives grace to the humble. All of the despair and trouble Luther encountered in his quest for God's grace was God's resistance of a proud, self-righteous soul and it was God's means of humbling him. God resists the proud until they are humble. And, to the humble, He gives grace. God's grace can bring to you the repentance you need to repudiate your sins, and it will generate in you the faith you need to embrace Christ and rest your entire case before God on the merits of Christ's life and death. And, by God's grace, and God's grace alone, you will be saved. In all of life you are either humble or getting humbled. *Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you in due time.*