

## “Grace Alone: Access to God, from God”

*Titus 2:11-13*

When Martin Luther nailed his 95 debate topics on the University of Wittenburg door, 500 years ago on Oct. 31<sup>st</sup>, 1517, he wasn't trying to rebel against the Roman Church. Since he discovered through studying the Bible that the Church had wandered from the authority of Scripture it was his desire to get them back to the Bible. He had already tried unsuccessfully to engage the Archbishops and priests and cardinals in open debates but no one had taken him up on his offer. And even challenging the church publicly through the 95 theses would have been ignored had some unknown friends not made copies and sent them throughout the region to various church leaders, and ultimately landed on the Pope's desk. And so he had to take action.

But what led Luther to go public was his frustration and disgust at how the people – mostly poor people of the Church – were being swindled out of the little money they had. The Roman Church had hired Johan Tetzel to do the job of raising money to help Pope Leo the 10<sup>th</sup> build St. Peter's basilica. One of the false teachings of the Roman church is that when people die they go to a temporal suffering place called purgatory. In purgatory people suffer for the sins they didn't get forgiveness for. So the Church taught that Jesus, Mary and the apostles did more good deeds than was necessary to ensure our salvation. So, the church encouraged people that they could buy these extra deeds called 'indulgences' which would pay for their sins and reduce their punishment in purgatory. What Tetzel pushed was that you could buy these indulgences for dead family members and he would use the jingle

*“As soon as the gold in the casket rings; the rescued soul to heaven springs”*

So essentially, the Church taught that you could pay for your sins without any need for repentance, a doctrine which Luther railed against, teaching that forgiveness of sin was only available through a repentant heart not because you bought a piece of paper with the Pope's signature on it. Luther understood that the Bible says you can't pay for your own salvation, it is only through grace by faith we are saved. So this was what drove him and others to publicly cry out against the selling of indulgences and the other false teachings of the Church that said salvation was by one's merits.

The reformers proclaimed that God has sole authority over any church rules or church authorities. Scripture is God's Word through which God's plan of salvation is revealed that is available to us only by the grace of God. Sola Gratia or grace alone became another pillar upon which the Reformers stood their ground against the false teachings of the Roman church. What did they mean by grace alone?

The Hebrew word for grace is *hanan*. It means a heartfelt response from someone who has something to give to someone in need. God obviously has something we need that He has the heart to give. So as we look at grace in Scripture we can see that grace is . . .

### **The Sacrificial Act of God to Give us What We Need**

What is it that God has that we need but He is willing to give to us based on His compassion?

***A relationship with God since we're separated by sin***

We see this from Genesis to Revelation. As the Bible opens up, God creates Adam and Eve, simply because He chooses to out of His love. He commands them not to eat of the tree in the middle of the garden otherwise they will die. But when they do eat of the tree, they don't die right away. Why not? Because God shows grace. They needed restoration with God so God delayed judgment and began to orchestrate the world around His gracious plan to redeem mankind.

The sad teaching in the Roman church was that man-kind is good and all they have to do to reach out to God is to show that by following the sacraments and doing good works. All of these, they taught, earn you merits that forces God to reduce the sins against you. But the more Luther read the Bible (and others) they saw that we've all sinned against God.

*Eph. 2:1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, <sup>2</sup> in 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. <sup>3</sup> All 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. <sup>4</sup> But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. <sup>6</sup> And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,*

Our sins separate us from God. All of us were dead in our transgressions and sins. That's what happened at the fall. Sin introduced death. Sin separates us from a holy, sinless eternal God. Only God has the power to restore our relationship. Elsewhere we read in Rom. 3:9-18 – and this is Paul's summary of what the Old Testament says:

*<sup>9</sup> What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. <sup>10</sup> As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; <sup>11</sup> there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. <sup>12</sup> All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." <sup>13</sup> "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips." <sup>14</sup> "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." <sup>15</sup> "Their feet are swift to shed blood; <sup>16</sup> ruin and misery mark their ways, <sup>17</sup> and the way of peace they do not know." <sup>18</sup> "There is no fear of God before their eyes."*

Both Jew and Gentile are under the curse of sin. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23) which means separation. So, Luther understood the Bible alone is God's authority and reveals that all mankind is under the curse of sin and in need of being restored to God. But God in His grace has what we need and sacrificially provides what we need to be restored

### ***That He alone initiates***

The false teaching that good works earns our salvation nullifies grace. It teaches that we need to initiate our salvation. The Bible teaches that salvation is by grace, that God alone initiates the return to relationship.

When Adam and Eve sinned God initiated the promise to save mankind from the penalty of sin by prophesying the seed of the woman will one day crush the head of the serpent. God initiated restoration when he covered their bodies with the skin of a slain animal. God continued to develop His plan to save mankind and He initiated the call to Abraham to leave Ur and come to the land of Canaan where God will bless Him and His descendants and through whom *"all the peoples of the earth will be blessed through you"* (12:3). Then as Israel grows and develops god rescues them out of Egypt. Why?

*Deut. 7:7* The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. <sup>8</sup> But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. <sup>9</sup> Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.

God chose them out of His love through grace, not of anything they had done to earn His favour. And what about us, the church? Did God choose to save us because we have a spark of goodness to us that warrants Him to do something?

*Eph. 1:3* Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. <sup>4</sup> For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blame-less in his sight. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—<sup>6</sup> to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. <sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace <sup>8</sup> that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, <sup>9</sup> he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, <sup>10</sup> to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

He chose us before the creation of the world, long before we were born so that we could not show God we're pretty good and deserve saving. He did it to the praise of His glorious grace.

*Eph. 2:6* And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast.

No one can claim they are good enough or have done enough good to earn salvation. No, God offers to reconcile us out of His pure grace. He's in a position to give us what we need. He doesn't have to, He chooses to. God initiates this reconciliation sacrificially,

## ***Through the blood of Jesus Christ***

When God commanded Moses to build the Tabernacle and gave Him the rules of sacrifice which enabled people to approach Him, whose idea was it? God initiated the way to have a relationship with Him through blood sacrifice. Why? Because God had a plan to send His One and only Son whom He loves and he would do it by sacrificing Him. And concerning Jesus we read in John 1:14

*<sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. <sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*

Jesus is full of grace and truth and grace comes through Jesus as God sent Him into the world. He was the sacrificial act of God that gives us what we need, restoration to God.

*2 Cor. 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*

Jesus gave His life for us, offering to be the way and the truth and the life back to God. It was because of grace He offered Himself to us.

*Col. 1:3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, <sup>4</sup> because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people— <sup>5</sup> the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel <sup>6</sup> that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace.*

In v.4 Paul says it is faith in Christ that saves you and then in v.6 he says it (faith in Christ) is the same as understanding God's grace. In Titus 2:11 Paul says of Jesus,

*<sup>11</sup> For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.*

Jesus is the grace of God. God sacrificed Him because He has something we need and wanted to give Him to us so we can be restored; an act that He alone initiated through the blood of Jesus . . .

## **Which we don't deserve**

Grace is the undeserved favour of God made available to us through the blood of Jesus which God has to initiate because we have no resources in and of ourselves to save ourselves and restore the relationship that sin broke. Listen to these verses about God initiating His sacrifice of Jesus to those who don't deserve it.

*Is. 53:4 Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup> We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

He did all that to us who deserve His wrath. Listen to Paul in Romans 5

*<sup>6</sup> You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! <sup>10</sup> For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! <sup>11</sup> Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

Listen to what Paul said of himself in 1 Tim. 1:13-14,

*<sup>13</sup> Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. <sup>14</sup> The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.*

The grace of our Lord is poured out on us who have believed – not in our own works- but in the work of God, His sacrificial act of to send Jesus offering us what we need most. Grace is all about God's initiating act of love to reach out to us to heal the broken relationship sin has caused.

But grace doesn't just save us it sustains us. Grace will

## **Equip us to Serve Others in God's Strength**

Just as we can't save ourselves we can't do what God wants us to do in our own strength. We still have a sin nature but when we accept Christ we receive our new nature through the Holy Spirit. He dwells in us. He is God's gift to us to now do the good works we were created to do not to try and earn salvation but as gratitude for His saving us who don't deserve it. Grace equips us to serve others

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### ***As we share the gospel with the unsaved***

*Rom. 15:5 Yet I have written you quite boldly on some points to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me <sup>16</sup> to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles. He gave me the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.*

Paul says it's God's grace that enables Him and equips Him to tell others about Jesus. That's not something we can do on our own. He said in 1 Cor. 15:10-11

*<sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. <sup>11</sup> Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.*

Paul said it was God's grace working through Him that equipped him to talk about Jesus. Paul was who he was and you are who you are. God created us all uniquely different and equips us completely according to what we need not only to be saved but to tell others how to be saved. To say 'I can't share the gospel' is to deny God can work His grace through us.

All of us have spiritual gifts. These are given by God to us because we need them:

### ***As we exercise God's gifts to each other***

By God's grace He offers us salvation and at salvation He equips us by grace now to serve others. No one has all the gifts. God gave each of us grace that we have that others need. So we offer each other grace by using God's gifts that He's given us.

*<sup>1 Pet. 4:10</sup> Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. <sup>11</sup> If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.*

Right after we're told in Eph. 2:8-9 that we saved by grace through faith not of ourselves, Paul says in Eph. 2:10

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

Once we're saved we now become God's instruments of grace to one another. We act most like God when we make sacrifices and use God's gifts to give to others what they need most at that time. It might be an encouraging word, a helping hand, a shoulder to cry on.

And just as God and Jesus are full of grace, as we have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us and God is committed to making us like Christ then He expects us to

### ***Mature in godliness through grace***

Titus 2:11-13 shows us how grace works at salvation and in our sanctification:

*<sup>1</sup> For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. <sup>12</sup> It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, <sup>13</sup> while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,*

It's Peter who commands us in 2 Pet. 3:17-18

*<sup>17</sup> Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. <sup>18</sup> But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.*

The more we grow in the knowledge of God through His Word, the more we understand who God is, what he's done for us and how He's equipped us in Christ by grace. Growing in grace will teach us to say no to ungodliness and yes to living for God. And then we take on more of His gracious characteristics and show it by making more sacrifices ourselves to give people what we have in God for what they need.

Luther and the believers in his day understood from Scripture that salvation is by God's grace. It is how He makes access to Himself by Himself – not through us. This is undeserving. This is what we need. He's in the position to give us what we need. When we accept His grace by faith (our part – next week) we not only become recipients of grace but sharers of grace. Now we are to act like God and His Son Jesus to initiate acts of service and love to reveal to people God loves them and Jesus died for them so that they can be restored to God. We are to extend that same grace to each other because none of us deserve God's grace and we still need to grow in grace to become the church God wants us to be.

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