

“Sola Gratia” // Ephesians 2 //
SOLAS

If you have your Bibles begin turning to Philippians 3. If you're using one of the Bibles in the pew rack you'll find our text on page 976.

Noyon to Paris

On July 10, 1509 (nearly 30 years after Martin Luther) a baby boy was born to Gerard and Jean Calvin in the French city of Noyon some 60 miles north of Paris. His name was John. His father was a notary and financial administrator for the Roman Catholic Bishop. His mother died when he was only 3.

At age 14 he entered the leading education institution in Europe, the University of Paris. There he studied theology with the hopes of entering the priesthood.

But due to his father having a falling out with the Bishop, John was transferred from studying theology in Paris to studying Law in the University of Orleans. While at Orleans his father died and John returned to Paris to study his first love, theology.

Reading Contraband

It was there at Paris that John studied the writings of the great Christian thinkers before him, and read the Scriptures. And he even attended the secret meetings of students who read and studied the recently published writings of Martin Luther. It was through his quiet and personal study of the Bible that John learned how his sins might be forgiven. In the Scriptures, he didn't see anything about the priests of the church being given the power to forgive sins. He realized that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. He realized that Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and men. His righteous life and sacrificial death paid the debt we all owed God— and that God would welcome us into communion with himself if we would repent of

our sins and trust what Christ had done for us.

As he trained for the ministry, Calvin hoped to live a secluded life writing for the church. He wanted to live the life of a scholar, helping to reform the church through his writing. But God had different plans.

On the Run

Because of his calls to reformation in the church Calvin was forced to flee Paris. His plan, was to make his way to Strasbourg. The Reformation was well underway in Germany and Strasbourg would have provided him the life of solitude he desired and to pursue his writing career.

But a war between Francis I and Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor who excommunicated Luther, prevented him from taking a direct route so was forced to detour in Geneva, Switzerland. He only intended to spend one night in the city. He stayed 28 years.

The Pastor Theologian

While in Geneva, a man named William Farel, who had led the protestant movement in Geneva for the last 10 years begged Calvin to stay and preach the Word of God to this new Reformation city. And that's what Calvin did. He stayed. And he did become a great Christian thinker and writer. He was a scholar. But he did all of his scholarship as a pastor of a local church. Week in and week out he prepared sermons and disciplined his congregation. He shepherded his people.

And one of the primary doctrines that he taught his people in Geneva is the doctrine that we are studying today: salvation by grace alone.

We believe that our relationship with God begins with him and his grace, and is accomplished by his grace.

If you have Ephesians 2 open begin reading with me in verse 1:

2 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, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

...now here's our focus...

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.

Saved by grace. It's something we say all the time. It's a word we use all the time. Grace.

- We name our children "Grace."
- We say "grace" before our meals.
- Most people who have never set foot in a church have heard the song "Amazing Grace."
- The word appears close to 200 times in the Bible.

It's a word that is so familiar to us that we might not even understand it. So, our passage today is all about God's grace.

The first half of the passage tells us why we need grace. The second half tells us what grace accomplishes in our life. So, let's begin in verse 1 and ask the question, "Why do we need grace?"

1. WHY DO WE NEED GRACE?

2 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.

The first reason we need grace is that we are caught in a universal condition:

Spiritual Death is a Universal Condition

v. 2 "you were dead" & v. 3 "like the rest of mankind"

These verses dispel some of the most deeply ingrained myths that our culture believes. One of the biggest myths is that the main problem in the world is other people.

Everybody recognizes that the world has evil in it. But we assume other people are the primary problem. We put locks on our doors or filters on our internet to keep evil out.

Or we think that people unlike us are the main problem. Conservatives think liberals are the problem. Liberals destroy family values and undercut the backbone of society and they try to remove gluten from everything we eat.

Liberals think conservatives are the problem. They are prideful and they don't recycle.

This passage doesn't say that conservatives are the problem. This passage doesn't say that liberals are the problem. This passage says that all of the human race is under the same problem.

You were dead. There's only one category of people: Sinners.

**We need grace because...
We are Dead, Not Just Sick**

2 And you were dead

No one would deny that this world is troubled. We wouldn't deny that we have problems. This world is filled with problem solvers. Last week I was in a large books store and the largest section in the store was on self-help.

- Educational Problems
- Economic Problems
- Psychological Problems
- Social Problems
- Racial Problems

I would say that all of those problems are the fruit of our biggest problem. We are spiritually dead. Our problem is not that we are good people, who occasionally lose our way and do bad things; we are spiritually dead.

You see, many people think of sins as bad actions that we do: stealing, lying, etc. But the word dead shows us that sin is not so much an action as it is a condition.

“Alienated from the life of God.” Ephesians 4:18

What does it mean to be dead? It means to be lifeless. Responses. So, in Ephesians 2, a dead man has physical life—but he is spiritually dead. We are born into a living death.

We don't know God. We don't understand God. We are not sensitive to God. We can't have a relationship with God. We can't do God's will. We can't fulfill God's Word.

The picture that Ephesians is giving you is someone who is totally shut off from God.

One of my favorite movies is *The Princess Bride*. Wesley, the hero of the story, has just escaped the torture chamber and it looks like he's dead. So, they take him to Miracle Max. And, if you remember the movie, Miracle Max says, “It just so happens that your friend here is only MOSTLY dead. There's a big difference between mostly dead and all dead. Mostly dead is slightly alive.”

And that's how the world apart from Christ thinks of itself. I'm sick. I'm injured. I'm still living. I just need some help. I need someone to help. I need a hand.

But you don't need some help—according to Ephesians 2 you need a resurrection. You don't need to turn over a new leaf, you need a new life.

John Piper says, “You came into this world dead. Not sort of “hard of hearing” towards the gospel, not simply crippled in good works, not struggling to keep your head above the waters of sin. You were dead: spiritually lifeless and unmoving.”

**We need grace because...
We are Dead in Sin**

2 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world

Because we are all dead in our sins, no amount of religious behavioral change can fix us. Behavioral changes only affect the outside—but they don't deal with the core issue.

I've told you before how weird it would be if you bought a rose bush from the store and never planted it and never watered it. Imagine that you waited till it turned black and then you took it outside and put it in the ground. Then you took out your scissors and some construction paper and started cutting out blossoms and stapling them to the tree.

That's what it looks like when a spiritually dead person just tries to add some religious behavior to their life in the hopes that God would be pleased with them. The problem isn't in the branches—the problem is in the roots—it's dead.

Or imagine that you see that Tupperware container in the back of the fridge. And you ask the question that I ask my wife... how long ago did we make that meatloaf?

So, you pull it out and there's some green fuzz growing on the top of it and it just about puts you in a coma.

Now imagine you say, "You know what this meatloaf needs? It needs some spices. If I can just cover up the smell with some oregano then it'll be fine! A little ketchup should take care of that."

We are, in our nature, already spiritually dead, and we are rotting: we may smell ok for a while, and we may learn to cover up the areas of stench in our lives with religion, or manners, or family values—but what every single human who lives needs is to be resurrected out of death.

I realize this is a blistering first half of a sermon, but just wait...

Apart from Christ We are Followers of Satan

2 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

The core of Satan's rebellion was self-worship.

- "I will" According to Isaiah he said it 5 times:
- I will ascend into heaven
- I will set my throne on high
- I will sit on the mount of assembly
- I will ascend above the clouds

- I will make myself like the most high.

You and I, apart from Christ have a Satanic problem—it's the worship of self.

That's what he means when he says:

— 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.

Instead of God being our master, we decided to be our own masters. We were designed to carry out God's will, and instead we carry out our own impulses.

A while back my daughter asked if she could have a few coins. When I asked her what she wanted them for she told me that she knows I always have a few coins in my pocket that I jingle, and she wanted to have some coins to jingle as well.

Children are just like their fathers and mothers. They watch and they act. That's what Paul is saying. You and I are born into sin and we are sons and daughters who take after our father, Satan. That's why we need to be adopted into God's family.

Now, I know what you are thinking here. You're tempted and I'm tempted at this point to push back on what Paul is saying. We can't be really all that bad. I mean, dead? A follower of Satan?

Jonathan, this is Veteran's day.. what about the soldier who throws himself onto a grenade to save his buddy?

What about a woman who sacrifices to give her children a good education? Aren't those good things?

Sure, they are. But, in light of the biggest sin in our heart—replacing God's authority with our own rule

This passage tells us that we are guilty of cosmic treason and you

think that giving up your seat on the bus will commute your sentence?

Do you ever wonder why Christians talk about grace so much? It's because of passages like this. Passages like this make grace so essential and so appealing. That's because this passage tells us that we have nothing to contribute to our salvation except for the sin that made it necessary.

As Louie Giglio says, "Sin didn't knock me down to God's JV team or put me on probation, or put me on the slower track." Sin wiped us out.

And therefore, I don't need a life coach who can help me make some good decisions, I need a resurrected savior who can give me new life.

Do you see why the Reformers like Luther and Calvin were so fired up? If what Paul is saying is true then how could you ever confess enough sin? How could you ever purchase enough indulgences? How could you ever perform enough good works?

You can't! You're dead! That's why you need grace.

Let's look for a moment at what grace is and what it does:

2. WHAT DOES GRACE DO?

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. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

"But God" some have said those are the two greatest words in the Bible. Can you just rest in those words for a moment?

You were dead. But God.

You were lost. But God.

You were a child of wrath. But God.

Yes, you were helpless. But you weren't hopeless.

God was rich in mercy. Thank God that he wasn't rich in judgement. Thank God that he wasn't rich in retribution. He is rich in mercy. And he loves us. Why does he love us? Because he purposes to love us. It's nothing we've earned. It's freely and unconditionally given.

Now look what happens:

5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ... verse 6...and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

The beauty of the gospel is that God was owed a debt, and God himself paid the debt.

God required punishment of sin, and God absorbed that punishment.

Here's a word for you: propitiation. The hammer of God's justice against our sin was going to fall—and the message of the Bible is that God didn't withhold the hammer. It fell—but it didn't fall on us. It fell on Jesus.

The reason that God's justice is satisfied is that it was all poured out on Christ.

This is the center of the Christian message. This is the heart of the gospel. You can summarize the gospel in 4 words: Jesus in my place. Jesus in my place. His death was our death, and we are

raise with him. His life is our life.

Now, in verse 8 Paul gets to the heart of how this resurrection takes place. It's all by grace.

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.

Notice that Paul says you have been saved. This is the passive voice. You don't save yourself. God does it.

Grace means that there was nothing meritorious about you; it was a gift of God. Grace is God's unmerited favor.

I said this last week, but I'll say it again. God's grace isn't a reward for your faith. Some people think, "I had faith so God shows me grace!"

But Paul says, "and this is not your own doing." This applies to both your salvation and even the faith that you profess. Even your faith is a gift of God.

Go back to the earlier illustration. You are dead. Can dead people profess faith? No. Even your faith is a gift of God.

It's like when a baby is born, they cry. The crying is not what births them. The crying out is the evidence that that they have been born.

It's the same with faith. Your crying out to God in faith is the evidence that God has called you by his grace. Our faith is a response to grace.

Why am I making a huge deal out of this? Why spend all this time to convince you that salvation is by grace?

Here's why—until you understand that your salvation is entirely in God's hands you will never be able to rest in any kind of sustained confidence and assurance in your salvation.

As long as you believe that some portion of your salvation rests in you and your faith and how strong that faith is and how good you behave you will fall into the same trap as the church fell into leading up to the reformation.

Oh, you won't buy indulgences, but you'll attend church out of guilt. You'll put money in the offering plate out of fear. You'll work for something that only God can give you.

If you ask whether your faith or your works are strong enough to save you the answer will always be, "No!" But if you ask whether God's grace was strong enough to saved you the answer is eternally, "Yes!"

Friend, do you want to be assured of your salvation? Then stop thinking of it as your salvation, but as God's salvation which comes to you as a sheer gracious gift!

Most of John Calvin's life can be described as ill and persecuted. Calvin suffered life-long illnesses. He was a frail man. One of the great saddnesses of his life was when his own son was taken from him only a few days after his birth. Soon after that his wife, Idelette, dies as well.

Many of Calvin's enemies use this personal grief as a way of discrediting his ministry. "See? We told you he wasn't teaching the truth. God has obviously punished him."

Calvin responded by saying, "God gave me a son, God took him away. But I have myriads of sons throughout the Christian world."

He spent the final years of his life preaching and writing, preaching and writing, preaching and writing. He had a school in

which he trained pastors and sent them out.

In early 1564, Calvin became seriously ill. He preached his final sermon in the pulpit of Saint Peter's Cathedral on Sunday, February 6. On April 25, 1564, Calvin dictated these words: "I render thanks to God, not only because he has had compassion on me, His poor creature, to draw me out of the abyss of idolatry in which I was plunged, in order to bring me to the light of His gospel and make me a partaker of the doctrine of salvation, of which I was altogether unworthy, and continuing His mercy He has supported me amid so many sins and short-comings, which were such that I well deserved to be rejected by Him a hundred thousand times—but what is more, He has so far extended His mercy towards me as to make use of me and of my labour, to convey and announce the truth of His gospel."

He died on May 27th. His last words—"How long, O Lord?" – were the very words of Scripture. He died quoting the Bible he had loved and preached for 3 decades.

And though it was written nearly 2 centuries after his death, these words fit his life so well:

Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;

(fleeing for his life, sickness, loss of loved ones, mocked by his opponents)

**'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.**