

Ephesians 2:8-9 Our justification is based on another. It based solely on the merits of Jesus Christ. He lived a perfect life. He died in our place. Our sins were placed upon Him, His righteousness is credited to us through faith in His atoning work on the cross. His blood cleanses us from all unrighteousness. We have nothing to give God but our rebellion and sin. If we had anything good to give Him we would boast about it. I know I would. We are wretched sinners, and we have a great Savior, who gives us His grace as a free gift. This is God's doing, there is nothing that man contributes to this. **We are saved by grace, grace alone is sufficient.** It is apart from works. We cannot add to our salvation. Romans 3:20 "No one will be declared righteous by observing the law." We cannot mend our relationship with God through our works. We cannot add works to our justification. If we try to, then we are saying that what Christ did for us on the cross is not good enough. We are saying that the plan of salvation that God ordained from eternity past is lacking something and that somehow, we are to contribute to our salvation. If you think you need to do good works to be justified before God then the grace that God has shown you is not effective. God freely gives His grace. There is nothing we can do to earn it. Read the strong words that Paul writes to the Galatians. We cannot have a biblical understanding of grace without submitting to this truth.

Ephesians 2:10

Once grace has been given to us, once we have been justified, once we have been born again, God gives us a new heart. He takes out our heart of stone and gives us a heart of flesh. He gives us a new nature, He gives us His nature. We are now "His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works." A faith that saves will create in us a heart that does good things. James (2:26) says faith without works is dead. These things do not add to our salvation, they are done out of a heart of gratitude and love for God and what He has done for me. These works are not meritorious. They do not earn us justification. They are done because we see who we were apart from God and what it is that God has done for us in Jesus Christ. So out of grateful hearts we love others as ourselves, we clothe the poor, we take care of the widow and the orphan in their distress. We no longer live for ourselves, but we live for the good of others. These things flow out of a heart that is justified, not out of a heart that is trying to earn justification.

The reformation matters. There were and still are major differences between Protestant and Catholic understandings of grace. These are real issues that affect where people spend eternity.

October 15, 2017

Pastor Matt Harder

Sola Gratia, why was this such a big issue in the time of the Reformation?

### **Roman Catholic View of Grace**

According to Roman Catholic teaching, when one puts their faith in Christ for salvation and are baptized they are made right with God at that instant, they are effectually pure. As that person continues to live, they sin and are then no longer pure. It is at this point that the person must now confess their sins to a priest and then the priest will prescribe some sort of penance that the person must do to be forgiven again. These penances are a means of grace. They have actual atonement value. A priest might have a person recite a certain prayer a prescribed number of times or do some other act of penance, but these will only take away a person's feelings of guilt. These are viewed as satisfying God's justice or atonement. If a person dies while not being "pure," they then go to purgatory. "Purgatory: "a state of final purification after death and before entrance into heaven for those who died in God's friendship, but were only imperfectly purified; a final cleansing of human imperfection before one is able to enter the joy of heaven." How sinful a person was, determined how long a person needed to stay in purgatory. The more sinful the longer they stayed in Purgatory. So, indulgences were sold to shorten the stay of those who were in Purgatory.

How did indulgences come about? Technical explanation: "The Roman Catholic Church teaches that because of the unity of the Body of Christ (the Communion of the Saints, including living believers, believers in heaven, Roman Catholic saints in heaven, Christ, Mary, and the imperfect believers in Purgatory), it is possible for the merit generated by the good works, prayers, almsgiving, sufferings, etc., of one or more of these members of the Body to be applied to the temporal debt of another. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the combined merit of Christ, the saints, and godly believers is stored in a place referred to as the Treasury of Merit. And through apostolic succession from Peter, it is the Roman Catholic Church alone that has the authority to withdraw merit from this treasury and dispense it to believers in this life or in Purgatory to atone for some or all of their venial sin. This it does through the granting of Catholic indulgences."

"An indulgence can be obtained through a good deed done, a Mass being offered on behalf of someone, prayer, abstinence, giving to the poor, or some other meritorious act performed in accordance with requirements set by a Pope or bishop having jurisdiction over that individual. In Luther's day giving to the building project of the pope was one sure way to acquire an indulgence. **A partial indulgence will reduce the temporal punishment a person has.**" The bottom line is that the Catholic church believes and teaches that grace is mediated through the church and the sacraments. **Jesus' sacrifice on the cross makes grace possible, but is not sufficient for salvation.** Apart from the church and the sacraments a person is

bound for hell. Which is eternal punishment. Indulgences do not help with those who are outside of the Catholic church or those who are in hell.

### What of Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross?

The Catholic view of Jesus death on the cross is one that states that Jesus death on the cross opens the door for God's grace. By accepting Jesus death on the cross and being baptized, according to Catholic teachings, a person is now in a state of grace, whereby they can now begin doing good works to earn merit before God. Roman Catholicism teaches the grace of justification can be gained then lost, gained then lost. Trent: *"Those who through sin have forfeited the received grace of justification can again be justified when, moved by God, they exert themselves to obtain through the sacrament of penance the recovery, by merits of Christ, of the grace lost..."*  
"Trent said that a person is justified by baptism; then the justified person does good works, works that have been done in God, and these works fully satisfy the divine law." These works are a part of their salvation, they are meritorious. If they continue in the good works they are justified and right with God. If a person falls into sin or willfully rebels, they are no longer in a state of grace. To regain their state of grace, they would have to confess their sin to a priest complete the penance the priest prescribes, then they can regain their state of grace. Catholic theologian, Dr. Ludwig Ott states, "By his good works the justified man really acquires a claim to supernatural reward from God." The Catholic Catechism states, *"2010 Since the initiative belongs to God in the order of grace, no one can merit the initial grace of forgiveness and justification, at the beginning of conversion. Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, we can then merit for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life."*

Protestants would agree that the initiative of grace belongs to God. Where we disagree, is that a person's works have any basis for our justification before God. The Catholic Church would argue that their system of justification is not a works-based-salvation. They argue that since the works are done in God's grace and in the Holy Spirit, then it is not works based. The issue is whether grace is sufficient. Does anything need to be added to grace to complete salvation? The reformers argued that nothing can be added to grace, not works of the law, not works of merit, not works of charity, not even indulgences. They argued, **grace that is earned is not grace**. Can grace by itself, accomplish the salvation of the human soul? The reformers argued that it could, while the Catholic church argued that grace alone could not save.

### What does the Bible teach about grace?

Ephesians 2:1-3 **All of us were dead in our sins**. We are born outside of Christ. There is nothing good in us that makes us deserve God's grace. In fact, we were the antithesis of good, we were evil. The only reason we were not as evil as we could have been is that God, in His mercy, had His restraining hand on us to keep us from

accomplishing the amount of evil we otherwise would have accomplished. Our problem, is that we don't see ourselves this way. So, grace does not seem as valuable to us as it should. We have a very high opinion of ourselves. We value our ability to accumulate wealth and live comfortable lives as more important than our moral character. We see our bad conscience as being a psychological problem, rather than a moral problem. I like how J.I. Packer states it, "Modern men and women are convinced that, despite all their little peccadilloes – drinking, gambling, reckless driving, sexual laxity, black and white lies, sharp practice of trading, dirty reading, and what have you – they are at heart thoroughly good people." Our problem is that we think God is like us. We think God will overlook our "minor" indiscretions and treat us like we treat each other. We don't like to think of ourselves as fallen creatures, who have rebelled against God's rule. We don't like to think of ourselves as guilty and unclean in God's sight, deserving God's condemnation. Yet, this is what is true of every one of us in this room. **We deserve God's wrath**. God would be just in sending everyone in this room to hell for eternity. God is the judge of all the earth, He will do what is right. He will punish the wicked. God is a good God and must punish sin. Unless we feel the weight of this truth, we cannot understand grace.

The last thing we deserve is Grace, yet what does God do for us? How does God treat us? Does He treat us as our sins deserve? No, He treats us with grace! **Grace is a pardon for sin**. We do not deserve it. Grace is not earned.

Ephesians 2:4-7 **Grace is a pardon for sin**. "But God" are two of the greatest words in all of Scripture. Paul just finished telling us what we deserved, but God intervenes. God justifies us in Christ Jesus. There are times we hear this and it sounds like just the same old thing. Think about this. We have just been declared criminals. As R.C. Sproul puts it, "We have committed cosmic treason." We have committed the greatest crime in all of the universe, we have rebelled against the God of the universe. We don't feel the weight of this, because everyone around us is doing the same thing, yet are guilty criminals awaiting our sentence and the One we have rebelled against steps in and offers us a pardon. He offers to make us alive with His Son. He offers to show us love and kindness in His Son who is seated at the right hand of the Father. If we will take His offer through faith in the atoning work of His Son, He will pardon us. God is the judge and He declares the believer to be righteous. God freely gives grace to whom He chooses. This grace is free to us, but it was not free to God. God did not spare His Own Son, but gave Him up for us all. (Rom 8:32) It was God's free choice to give us grace. Romans 3:24-25 We "are justified by grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith." "It was to show His righteousness at the present time, so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." This is something God does, it is not something we do. **Grace is not earned, it is freely given**.