

The Five Solas of the Reformation, #3

Celebrating the Reformation:
"Sola Gratia: Grace Alone"

--CEFC 10/15/17

Readings: Psalm 51 [vv. 1-5; 10-12, 15
Luke 7:36-50
Eph. 2:1-10

Philip Yancey tells the story of a British conference on comparative religion,
in which experts from around the world were discussing whether
any one belief was unique to the Christian faith.

They began eliminating possibilities.
Was it incarnation?

Well, maybe, but there were other religions that had different versions
of gods appearing in human form.

Was it resurrection?

Again, other religions had accounts of a return from death.

The debate went on for some time,
until C. S. Lewis wandered into the room.

"What's all the rumpus about?" he asked,
and he was told that they were discussing
Christianity's unique contribution among world religions.

Then they asked his opinion on the matter.
In his forthright manner Lewis responded without hesitation.

"Oh, that's easy," he said. "It's grace."

After some discussion, the conferees had to agree.
The notion of God's love coming to us free of charge, beyond what we ever deserve,
seems to go against every instinct of humanity.

The Buddhist eightfold path,
the Hindu doctrine of karma,
the Jewish Mosaic covenant,
and the Muslim code of law--
each of these offers a way to earn God's approval.

Only Christianity dares to make God's love unconditioned on any worthiness in us.
That is, it is a matter of his grace.¹

Grace—that's what it's all about;

¹Quoted from CT 10/6/97 pp. 53,54. "What's So Amazing about Grace?" by Philip Yancey.

that's the core of it all.

Grace is the distinguishing characteristic of Christianity.
When we talk about the gospel--that good news revealed in Jesus Christ—
we have to talk about grace.

Deep down, it's what every person wants—
the experience of being loved, accepted,
and welcomed
despite their own weakness and failure and inner shame.

That's what the Christian gospel offers—grace.
Without some affirmation of God's grace
a person has no claim to be Christian. /

But what do people actually mean when they use that word?
This is the question that became fundamental and quite contentious
at the time of the Reformation of the 16th century.

For over the course of the Middle Ages the church had changed its meaning.
An understanding of grace had developed that made it seem like a thing,
almost a kind of divine substance,
that could be infused into a person
that would help them to do what they needed to do
to become acceptable to God.

One of the sources of this development came from
the Latin translation of the Greek text of the angel Gabriel's words
to Mary the mother of Jesus.

He calls her the "**favored one**" (κεχαριτωμένη).

But in Latin that expression was translated as one "full of grace" (*gratia plena*)—
On the basis of this translation,
Mary was seen as a sort of reservoir of some fluid called grace,
which could be tapped into and distributed as needed.²

This notion of grace became associated with the church's sacred ceremonies,
called sacraments.

A sacrament was an act that functioned as a visible sign of a spiritual reality,
and a theology of sacraments developed that saw them
as channels of this substance of grace.

Originally, there were only two sacraments--baptism and the Lord's Supper,
but over time the number increased to seven--
including penance, confirmation, marriage, ordination
and extreme unction or the anointing of the dying.

Simply by participating in these sacraments,
a person acquires the grace they need to be accepted by God.
This infused grace, in effect, bridges the gap
between what a person must do on their own
and the full righteousness that God requires.

² So McGrath, *Reformation Theology*, p. 57.

"Do your best and God will do the rest" was the idea.
Through its sacraments, the medieval church claimed the power and authority
to distribute its store of grace
to those who were worthy of it.

I call this "earned" grace—an oxymoron if there ever was one—
a contradiction in terms.

Grace was no longer a gift at all.
It essentially says that God's grace,
acquired through the sacraments,
helps those who help themselves.
In the end people are made acceptable to God by what they do.

Today, we still find this conception in religious circles
among those who think that their religious acts—in whatever form—
are what commend them to God.

Or more generally, it assumes the form of moralism—
If I just do what Jesus would do—
if I seek to help the poor or seek justice for the oppressed,
or if I am just a common, run-of-the-mill nice person—
then God will make up anything lacking in me
to satisfy any standard he might set
so that I can enter into his heaven.

"Earned" grace-- the Reformers rejected this understanding entirely.
God's grace can never be earned—
it can only be received as a gift—a "free" gift, we might say.
Our salvation is not based on what I do, but on what God has done for me.

But in contrast to this earned grace,
the Reformers quickly encountered another understanding of grace
that was just as misleading.

I call it "cheap" grace, following the lead of the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Instead of the distribution of some substance called grace,
cheap grace is just a sentimental disposition of God—
his unmerited favor.
God's grace is simply his intrinsic nature to be merciful.

Cheap grace says, "God will forgive me—it's his job."

Or as one cynic, W.H. Auden, put it,
"I like committing crimes. God likes forgiving them.
Really the world is admirably arranged."³

³ Cited in Brian G. Hedges, *Christ Formed in You*, p. 100.

Or as I read recently, in the words of the great American theologian Al Pacino,
"I asked God for a bike,
but I know God doesn't work that way.
So I stole a bike and asked for forgiveness."⁴

That's cheap grace.
Forgiveness as an entitlement,
grace given simply because that is what God likes to do.

But this grace is cheap because it fails to understand the cross.

There is nothing cheap about a grace that cost God the Father the life of his own Son.

In the cross of Christ, God is shown to take sin, our moral evil, seriously.
He doesn't condone it;
He doesn't just turn his head and look the other way
as if it didn't matter.

No, you can look at the cross--
at the nails in Jesus' hands and feet,
at his humiliation and brokenness as he hangs there alone,
and there you can see how seriously God takes our sin.
He substitutes himself for us, bearing the penalty we deserve.
There God shows himself to be just.

And at the same time God's forgiveness takes us seriously,
as moral beings, responsible for our actions.

Only, in Christ God shares our responsibility;
he enters into our condition,
and as a man, he takes our responsibility upon himself—
he represents us,
and our human dignity is magnified by the cross.

In a forgiveness without the cross,

- God would cease to be God.
He would destroy himself, by contradicting his own nature
as holy and absolutely just in all his ways,⁵
as the Righteous Lawgiver and Judge.

- and at the same time,
In a forgiveness without the cross,
we would cease to be fully human.
It would destroy us by contradicting our nature
as morally responsible creatures created in his divine image.

No, God's grace is not cheap.

⁴Jeremy Treat, TGC Blog post (10/28/14): "Grace Is Not a Thing".

⁵Cf. Stott, *Cross*, p. 211.

So you see, God's grace is not earned—
It is not a substance that be measured,
or a commodity that the church can distribute
to those who are deemed worthy of it.

Nor is God's grace cheap—
simply the disposition of his nature to forgive sinners.

To be sure, God's grace is his unmerited favor toward us.
But it is not just a disposition of God,
it is also a demonstration by God—
God's grace is the action of God to redeem and rescue moral rebels
through sending his Son Jesus
to die the death that we deserve.

God's grace necessarily takes the form of the gift of his Son,
applied to our lives by the gift of his Spirit.

God's grace is not a thing,
it is a Person—
For in the end, what God's gives us is himself, his own life, light and love
in Jesus Christ.

To become a Christian is not to receive the gift of salvation,
so much as it is to receive the Giver of salvation.

Jesus is not a Santa Claus,
pulling gracious goodies out of his bag to give to us;
No, he is a bridegroom
who gives himself to his bride.

To become a Christian is not simply a matter of believing certainly things about Jesus
or even believing in some doctrine of the atonement.

To become a Christ is to believe in Jesus himself—
It is to trust him
and to be united to him personally.
Jesus is God's grace embodied.

This points us to that necessary link between Christ alone and grace alone—
they amount to the same thing.

To be saved by Christ alone necessarily entails that we are saved by grace alone—
for the sending of his Son into the world as a crucified Messiah
is God's grace displayed and demonstrated.

This, you see, was Martin Luther's "Aha!" moment—
this was his transforming insight—
this was his rediscovery of the gospel.

He came to see that the "righteousness of God"
was not the demand of God upon him
to make himself acceptable to God by improving on the infused grace
obtained by virtue of his baptism and the sacraments.

Through his reading of the Scriptures,

Luther discovered that the righteousness of God was not a demand,
but a donation—a divine gift.⁶
The righteousness of God is what we are clothed with
when we are joined to Christ through faith by the Spirit.
It is ours "in Christ."

Luther came to see that all along he had been confusing law with gospel.

Don't make a Moses out of Christ, he would say.
Simply to ask "What would Jesus do?" is not to proclaim the gospel.
To discern the gospel in the Gospels means, in Luther's words,
**"that before you take Christ as an example,
you accept and recognize him as a gift,
as a present that God has given you and that is your own."**

It's what Paul talks about in Phil. 3—
I want to "**be found in [Christ]**," he writes,
**"not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law,
but that which is through faith in Christ—
the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith"** (3:9).

Grace is not about what we have done for God,
but about what God has done for us in Christ.

So we must get this definition of grace in our heads—
the grace of God is his act in bringing sinners into communion with himself,
and he does this by uniting them to Christ through the Spirit by faith.

To quote one of my favorite theologians,
**"Christianity is not primarily a system of ideas
but an account of how the Creator
has reached out with both hands Son and Spirit,
to lift up a fallen world in a loving embrace."**⁸

Christianity is about grace.

***Sola Gratia*--Grace alone.**

Our salvation is a gift from beginning to end—
it is the gift of Jesus Christ.

God gives us what we don't deserve—
receiving us freely in his Son by the Spirit—
justifying us, making us right with him,
through the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

This is good news—
it is amazingly good news.

⁶ So Vanhoozer, *Biblical Authority After Babylon*, p. 37.

⁷ Cited in Vanhoozer, p. 43 (Luther, "A Brief Instruction").

⁸ Kevin Vanhoozer, p. 62.

In fact, this word "amazing" (or something like it)
is just what so many hymn-writers have used to describe it—
"Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me."
"Amazing love how can it be that thou my God shouldst die for me."
"Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace"
"Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."

Is God's grace, his love, amazing to you—is it marvelous?
It should be!

So, how can we appreciate just how amazing it is?
To do that I want us to look at that passage we read earlier—Eph. 2:1-10,
in which Paul sets forth "*the incomparable riches of God's grace.*"

I want to highlight three themes from this passage that magnify
"the incomparable riches of God's grace."/

Turn with me to Ephesians 2.

First, we can magnify God's grace **when we appreciate the depth of our sin.**

**Eph. 2:1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,
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.**

These Ephesians had become followers of Jesus as their Savior
as converts from a predominantly pagan Gentile background.

We don't know what initially drew them to Christ,
what "felt need" that they believed that Jesus could meet.

Maybe they were the philosophical sort and felt that the Christian worldview
made better sense of the world than what they had known.

Maybe they lived in fear of the forces of the spiritual world
that seemed to haunt them,
and they sensed that Jesus had a power that could protect them
and overcome those powers.

Maybe they were anxious about the future
and were comforted to think that the God who had revealed himself in Jesus
could be trusted to care for them.

Maybe they were frustrated by their own personal weakness—

they knew that there is such a thing as a right way to live--
and they wanted to live that way,
but they couldn't seem to be able to do it.
They felt trapped by their own appetites.

And maybe they felt guilt—
guilt at their failure to live up to even their own moral standards.
They were guilty, and they didn't know what to do about it.
And they wondered if those rumors of some final day of judgment might be true.

These are all ways that people might feel some need for what Christ offers.

But when you turn to the Bible,
and you consider the saving message of the gospel,
you find little concern with how you feel.

The salvation Christians speak about is not an escape from feelings--
whether feelings of futility or emptiness or loneliness or anxiety or fear or even guilt.

All these are but symptoms of a much deeper disease—
a chronic condition that every person has, whether they feel it or not.
In fact, you may not feel any symptoms of this condition at all.

For what Paul tells us in our passage
is that the divine diagnosis of the condition of the human patient
is not simply that he is sick, but that he is dead.

v. 1--

"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins"

The spiritual EKG is flat-lined—
no signs of life.

And Paul wasn't just referring to pagan Gentiles
who were engaged in some particularly depraved behavior.

No, he says, this description fits "**All of us also**" --v.3.

All of us --even those like Paul
who was as religiously righteous as a person could be.

This is the divine diagnosis--all of us in our natural state are **dead**.

Now what could this mean?

I'm sure that if you asked the proverbial man in the street
what he needed to be saved from
he would never say, the condition of death —
death in the future, perhaps, but not a present state of death.

After all, dead people generally don't walk the street,
at least, outside of Georgia.⁹

So what is Paul talking about here?

⁹ A reference to the setting of *The Walking Dead* TV series about zombies!

To understand it you have to go back to the beginning--

What did God say to Adam in the garden? Gen. 2:16,17--

"You are free to eat from any tree in the garden:

**but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,
for when you eat of it you will surely die."**

Adam did eat from that tree in direct disobedience to God

And God keeps his word—

Adam ate from the tree and he did die—

eventually he died physically, that's true,

and all the sons and daughters of Adam since that time have died with him.

But more importantly, we see in the opening chapters of Genesis

Adam dying spiritually—

he is cast from the garden,

his relationship with God is broken,

and so he is separated from the source of all spiritual life--God himself.

And this has been the lot of humankind ever since.

Sin and death reign in our world.

"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live."

We are, as Paul says later in this letter, "**separated from the life of God**" (4:18).

There is a spiritual dimension to our lives that is dead.

There is a spiritual void, a spiritual vacuum within our souls.

We may appear to function quite well, but deep within us all is a fatal flaw.

The prophet Isaiah puts it like this:

"Your iniquities have separated you from your God;

your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear."

He has hidden from us because of our moral rebellion, our sin.

But are we really that bad?

The Bible is clear in saying that yes, we are--

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"

"And the wages of sin is death,"

This condition of spiritual death resulting from sin is universal—

Paul points no fingers at anyone that he doesn't also point at himself—

and that should always be the Christian's attitude--sin and death consume us all.

Notice, too, Paul's description of this state of death in which we lived--

1. First, he says, we "**followed the ways of this world**"—

Our minds were shaped by the culture around us—

its values became our values.

We worshiped the things the world around us worshiped.

Then Paul says we were under the sway of that personal center of evil—

the prince of this world, the devil,

whom he calls "**the ruler of the kingdom of the air,
the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.**"

We allowed his lies about God to sink into our minds—
that God is not to be trusted,
that he is not really concerned with our interests,
that he is not really good.
These are the lies of the devil.

But it wasn't just outside forces at work upon us—not at all.
Our moral rebellion against God also comes from within--
**"All of us also lived among them at one time,
gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts."**

We may immediately think of some hedonistic pleasure-seeker,
who is always looking for the next party.
But what Paul is talking about is much broader than that.

I could say, before I became a Christian,
this description certainly didn't seem to fit me at all.
I was pretty good guy—
I tried to obey all the rules.
I was teased as a kid for being a "goody-two-shoes."

I wasn't like those good-for-nothing scoundrels who are always getting into trouble,
the drunkards and druggies,
the sexually immoral.
No, not me—I lived as straight as an arrow.

But why?
Why did I try to live that way?
Did I live in obedience to the first and greatest commandment—
to love the Lord God with all my heart, soul, strength and mind?
Was my desire to please God and to honor him?

No.
I lived the way I lived so that I could be proud of myself—It was all about me.
I wanted to be better than everybody else—
I wanted to promote my own goodness.

In a sense, my god was my own ego, my own pride.
I was gratifying the craving of my own sinful nature
and following its desires and thoughts
just as much as the guys who went out partying on Saturday nights.

I was just as much a slave of sin as they were—
my own ego was turned in upon itself just as much as theirs was--
It was just that my sin just took a different form—
a more socially acceptable form, perhaps,
but one that was just as rebellious against the rule of God in my life
as theirs was in their lives.

"All of us lived among them at one time"—

You see, Paul includes himself—
though with regard to keeping the letter of the law of Moses he was faultless.
But from God's perspective
his religiosity was reprehensible.
In fact, it blinded him to what God was doing in Jesus Christ.
It was just an expression of his own pride.

And as a result Paul's religious self-righteousness
did nothing but arouse God's righteous anger.
v.3—"Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath," he says.

This is literally "children of wrath."—

Contrary to what most people believe
the Bible doesn't describe all human beings as being by nature
children of God.
Just the opposite—by nature and by choice we show ourselves to be
children of wrath—

Wrath--wrath is God's righteous response
to our moral rebellion against his rule in our lives.
Wrath is God's response to all that spoils and corrupts his good creation.

By nature we are the objects of God's wrath,
for he is a holy God.
In the end, he will have nothing to do with anything
that is contrary to his holiness.

The spiritual separation that we experience now
is but a foretaste of the separation that will be ours in eternity.

This is what hell is--as Paul writes to the Thessalonians
of those who don't know God
being "**punished with everlasting destruction**"
and being "**shut out from the presence of the Lord**
and from the majesty of his power" (2 Thess. 1:8,9).

Our sin had made us subject to the awful wrath of God.

Whatever your life may have looked like before you became a Christian,
we were all in the same desperate situation—
we were caught in the very grip of hell itself.
We were all spiritual zombies, the living dead,
liable to the holy wrath of God.

Our natural condition was spiritual death.
But this is what we need to be saved from.
Whether we feel it or not--
we need pardon,
we need release,
and, most of all, we need life.

This is the divine diagnosis.

Luther came to realize this—

he was imprisoned in sin and only God in Christ could set him free.
He must be saved by God's gracious work or not at all.

If you are to appreciate the grace of God in your life
then you need to see what the gospel tells us about ourselves—
**The gospel declares that we re more sinful and flawed
than we ever dared believe.**

This is the dark side of the gospel—

the bad news that makes the good news so *amazing*.

And that good news is where Paul now turns in dramatic fashion in v. 4—

This verse literally begins with the words, "**But God . . .**"

You see, the gospel is all about what God has done.

**"But God, because of his great love for us,
God, who is rich in mercy,
made us alive with Christ
even when we were dead in transgressions --
it is by grace you have been saved."**

When I was considering whether to become a Christian,

I listened to what people were telling me about Jesus—

I heard that he had come to bring life, abundant life, the life of God,
into our world,

and that he died for my sin, and that on the third day he rose again
as proof of who he was and what he had done,

and I heard that if I put my faith in him I would share in that life—that eternal life,
and I could come to know God as my Father in heaven.

I heard all this,

and I thought—that makes sense to me.

I wanted that new life in Christ.

I decided to turn from doing life my way,

I turned to Jesus as my Savior and Lord and I decided to do things his way.
It was as simple and straightforward as that.

That may be the way I experienced my conversion,

but Paul has a totally different take on it—

From God's perspective, what happened to me was not about what I had done,
but what he had done in my life.

and it was nothing less than a miracle—

Paul says that when I became a Christian

God saved me by breathing new life into a corpse--

He called me, like Lazarus, out of a tomb.
God raised me from the dead.

This, Paul says, is how God views my experience.
Such is the provision of God in his grace toward us—
he has raised us from the dead.

You see, there are several ways that people think of Christian salvation--

1. The first is the view of the ethicist--

I'm in the open sea, drowning, crying out to God for help,
and he throws me . . . a book--a book of instructions on how to swim.
All we need is some more knowledge on the proper way to live.

The Christian message is moralistic—

we must simply try harder to be good.
This is essentially what Islam is about.
And probably two-thirds of Americans think this is what Christianity is about, too.

2. The second is the view of the religionist--

I'm in the open sea, drowning, crying out to God for help,
and he throws me . . . a lifejacket—and he tells me to put it on.

God provides the means of salvation—
we simply do what is required of us, and we'll be alright.
He does his part and I do mine.

The Christian message is ritualistic—

just do your religious duties and you'll be OK.
That's often how we perceive our own Christian conversion.

3. But what Paul says here goes much further

and is far more profound than either of these—
not only in the diagnosis of the disease
but also in his understanding of the cure.

No longer am I in the open sea, flailing away, crying for help.

I'm in far worse condition than that—
I've already drowned—in fact, I'm lying on the bottom!

And God doesn't just throw me a life preserver

and leave me to take care of myself.
He comes in after me--he drags me up from the bottom,
he performs divine resuscitation,
he breathes new life into my lifeless lungs,
and he lifts me up onto the safety of the ship.

That is the kind of salvation Paul is talking about--

We are raised to new life with Christ.

The Christian message is not moralistic or ritualistic,

it is supernatural.

Christian conversion is nothing less than a miracle of God's grace—
we are saved by God's grace alone.

That's why becoming a Christian is not like becoming a member of the Rotary Club.

In becoming a Christian we don't just join a club,
we receive a new life.
To use the words of Jesus, "**You must be born again.**"
Paul even describes it as a "**new creation**" (2 Cor. 5:17).

By the work of God's Spirit, we are joined with Christ.
so that in union with Christ,
what is true of him becomes true of us, too.
We are now clothed with his righteousness,
we are raised to new life
and seated with him in heavenly glory.

And why has God exerted this resurrection power on our behalf in Christ?
On what basis are we saved in this way?

Again the answer couldn't be clearer--
v. 4—It was "**because of God's great love for us**"

In a mystery beyond our understanding,
even when we were worthy of his wrath,
God also chose to set his love upon us.

And in his love—
through the atoning death of his Son upon the cross,
God appeases his own wrath—
he satisfies it—justice is done
and his wrath is taken away.

He is "**rich in mercy**," Paul says—
mercy is not giving us what we deserve.
But God goes even beyond that—
he not only **doesn't** give us what we deserve,
but he also gives us what we don't deserve.

So if you tried to rob me, and the police caught you in the act—
I would show you mercy if I didn't press charges;
but I would show you grace if I then gave you my wallet.
The gospel is about grace.

Paul says it twice, just to make sure we've got it straight--
v.5--"**It is by grace you have been saved.**"
v.8--"**For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—
and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—
not by works, so that no one can boast.**"

We are saved **by grace and grace alone**—
even our faith is a gift from God.
How that works is a mystery to me,
and people try to understand that in different ways,

but Paul is saying that God accomplishes our salvation by his Son,
and he then applies that salvation to us by his Spirit.
And what is clear is that when we turn to Jesus Christ in faith,
we can't pat ourselves on the back for being so clever to figure all this out.
No, we thank God for his grace in giving us new life—
opening our blind eyes,
softening our hard hearts,
breaking the chains that held us captive to sin,
setting us free to cast ourselves onto our Savior.

We love because he first loved us.

We do not seek God;

we were lost sheep and we had wandered far away--

he is the one who seeks us out and brings us into the fold.

"**You did not choose me; I chose you,**" Jesus said.

The initiative is always with God.

The focus of the gospel is not on my decision to follow Jesus,
but on his grace in rescuing me.

We are justified before God by his grace—and by his grace alone.

This truth is the antidote to all self-righteousness.

You see,

**While the gospel declares that I am more sinful and flawed
than I ever dared believe,
the also gospel declares that God is more loving and gracious
than I ever dared hope.**

God's grace is amazing!

And why does God do this?

In other words, for what purpose does he act this way toward us?

The answer to that is found in vv. 6,7—

"God raised us up with Christ

and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,

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."**

Our salvation ultimately magnifies God's glory (we'll talk more about this in two weeks).

In saving a people for himself

God is displaying for all eternity

the incomparable riches of his grace.

And he wants to display his character not only in his grace in rescuing us from our sin,
but also in restoring us in his image—

The gospel declares that we are saved by God's grace, apart from our good works,
and we are saved by God's grace, for our good works.

Growing in God's grace is simply the process
of growing in our knowledge of Jesus Christ who is the grace of God embodied.
That's the Spirit's job—to magnify Jesus in our lives.

And the so-called sacraments, or ordinances, of baptism and the Lord's Supper—
they do not communicate some thing called grace into our lives—
they are simply means by which we draw near to Christ—
they reveal the gospel of Christ to us in a visible form.

In that sense, they are means of grace—
as are other Christian exercises—like worship and prayer and preaching
and Bible reading and fellowship with other believers—
all of these are means by which Jesus Christ is revealed to us—
so that, in Paul's words, "**his light shines in our hearts
to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory
displayed in the face of Christ**" (2 Cor. 4:6).

They are ways that the Lord shines his face upon us,
sharing with us his light, his love and his life..

**"And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory,
are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory"** (2 Cor. 3:18).

In the words of the Puritan John Owen—
**"Let us live in the constant contemplation of the glory of Christ,
and virtue will proceed from him to repair all our decays,
to renew a right spirit within us,
and to cause us to abound in all duties of obedience. . . ."**¹⁰

It's about grace--*Sola Gratia*—**grace alone**.
So God alone gets all the glory..

Prayer—

Closing Song: *Grace Alone*

Benediction:

Num. 6:24 ` "The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;
the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace." "

¹⁰ Cited in Brian G. Hedges, *Christ Formed in You*, p. 208.

The Five *Solas* of the Reformation, #3
Oct. 15, 2017

Celebrating the Reformation: *"Sola Gratia: Grace Alone"*

Anyone claiming to be a Christian would affirm in some way that we need God's grace, but what do they mean by that word? The Reformers of the 16th century rediscovered what the Bible means by grace and so rediscovered the truth of the gospel. We are saved by the undeserved self-giving of God through the gift of his Son Jesus Christ; that is, we are saved by *grace alone*.

I. Defining God's Grace

II. Appreciating God's Grace

A. Understanding Our Sinfulness (Eph. 2:1-3).

"you were dead in our transgressions and sins" (v. 1)

B. Understanding God's Provision (Eph. 2:4-9).

*"But because of his great love for us, God,
who is rich in mercy,
made us alive with Christ . . .
—it is by grace you have been saved" (vv. 4,5).*

C. Understanding God's Purpose (Eph. 2:7-10).

*"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" (Eph. 2:7).*

III. Growing in God's Grace:

Sola Gratia and "the Means of Grace"

Discussion Questions:

Celebrating the Reformation: "Sola Gratia: Grace Alone"

A word to Community Group Leaders:

Think for a moment about these three categories:

Convictions—beliefs that guide our behavior enabling us to walk in God's wisdom

Competencies—practices through which God shapes our lives for his glory

Character—moral qualities that conform us to Christ

As you lead the discussion of your group, ask yourself:

How can I help to deepen convictions,
develop competencies,
and encourage growth in character?

What do you want to see happen in your time together?

How will what you do in this meeting help people grow in Christ-likeness,
increase their love for God and others,
and encourage and equip them for ministry and mission?

- The slogan "Do your best and God will do the rest" sounds good to many people. What is wrong with it?
- What is "cheap grace"? What is wrong with it?
- What is God's grace? Why can we say that "grace is not a thing; grace is a Person"? What does this mean? How is Christ not like Santa Claus and more like a bridegroom?
- What is "grace alone" meant to protect us against? What truth is it meant to guard? Why is "doing what Jesus would do" not the gospel?
- What are ways that we can violate the notion of "grace alone"?
- Reread Eph. 2:1-10. What does that tell us about our spiritual state before our conversion? What role does grace play in our conversion?
- What helps you to appreciate God's grace as "amazing"?
- What is the purpose of God's grace in our lives?

