

THE “FIVE SOLAS” OF OUR FAITH

Session Four: Sola Gratia - By Grace Alone

(adapted from our 2013 study series, “Holy Words”)

Grace – Some Definitions

- **Online Dictionary:**

1. Seemingly effortless beauty or charm of movement, form, or proportion.
2. A characteristic or quality pleasing for its charm or refinement.
3. A sense of fitness or propriety.
4. A short prayer of blessing or thanksgiving said before or after a meal.

- **Oxford Dictionary:**

1. smoothness and elegance of movement
2. courteous good will; an attractively polite manner of behaving
3. (in Christian belief) the free and unmerited favour of God, as manifested in the salvation of sinners and the bestowal of blessings.

How would you define “Grace?” Which definition above do you think is most commonly used?

Theological Definitions of Grace:

- AW Tozer: Grace is the good pleasure of God that inclines him to bestow benefits on the undeserving.
- Grace is not merely unmerited favor; it is favor bestowed on sinners who deserve wrath. Showing kindness to a stranger is "unmerited favor"; doing good to one's enemies is more the spirit of grace.
- Harry Ironside: Grace is the very opposite of merit...Grace is not only undeserved favor, but it is favor shown to the one who has deserved the very opposite.
- Jerry Bridges: Grace is God's free and unmerited favor shown to guilty sinners who deserve only judgment. It is the love of God shown to the unlovely. It is God reaching downward to people who are in rebellion against Him.
- Matthew Henry: Grace is the free, undeserved goodness and favor of God to mankind.
- James D.G. Dunn: “In Paul ... grace is never merely an attitude or disposition of God (God's character as gracious); consistently it denotes something much more dynamic—the wholly generous act of God. It denotes effective divine power in the experience of men.” God doesn't simply view us with grace; he acts upon us with grace.
- Paul Zahl: Grace is love that seeks you out when you have nothing to give in return. Grace is love coming at you that has nothing to do with you. Grace is being loved when you are unlovable. It reflects a decision on the part of the giver, the one who loves, in relation to the receiver, the one who is loved, that negates any qualifications the receiver may personally hold.... Grace is one-way love.
- It is a liberating contradiction between what we deserve and what we get. Grace is unconditional acceptance given to an undeserving person by an unobligated giver.
- John MacArthur: Justice is when you get what you deserve. Mercy is when you don't get what you deserve. Grace is when you get what you don't deserve.
- Philip Yancey: Can you define grace? “I don't even try. Jesus talked a lot about grace, but mainly through stories.”

Grace in the stories of Jesus

What would be justice in each of these stories? What would be mercy? What is the moment of grace?

The Good Samaritan - Luke 10:30-35 - New Living Translation (NLT)

Jesus replied with a story: “A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road. By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side.

“Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, ‘Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I’ll pay you the next time I’m here.’”

The Woman Caught In Adultery – John 8:2-11

As Jesus was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd. “Teacher,” they said to Jesus, “this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?”

They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, “All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!” Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.

When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, “Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?”

“No, Lord,” she said.

And Jesus said, “Neither do I. Go and sin no more.”

The Prodigal Son – Luke 15:11-32

“A man had two sons. The younger son told his father, ‘I want my share of your estate now before you die.’ So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.

“A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.

“When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, ‘At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.’” So he returned home to his father.

While he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.’

“But his father said to the servants, ‘Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.’ So the party began.

Grace in the letters of Paul

Paul uses the word “Charis”

1 Corinthians 1:3 (NCV) Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 3:23-25 - Everyone has sinned and fallen short of God’s glorious standard, 24 and all need to be made right with God by his grace, which is a free gift. They need to be made free from sin through Jesus Christ. 25 God sent him to die in our place to take away our sins. We receive forgiveness through faith in the blood of Jesus’ death.

Romans 5:6-11 - When we were unable to help ourselves, at the right time, Christ died for us, although we were living against God. 7 Very few people will die to save the life of someone else. Although perhaps for a good person someone might possibly die. 8 But God shows his great love for us in this way: Christ died for us while we were still sinners. 9 So through Christ we will surely be saved from God’s anger, because we have been made right with God by the blood of Christ’s death. 10 While we were God’s enemies, he made us his friends through the death of his Son. Surely, now that we are his friends, he will save us through his Son’s life. 11 And not only that, but now we are also very happy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we are now God’s friends again.

Ephesians 1:5-8 (NLT) - God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. 6 So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. 7 He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. 8 He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.

Ephesians 2:8-9 - God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. 9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

2 Corinthians 6:1-2 (JB Philips) As co-operators with God himself we beg, you then, not to fail to use the grace of God. For God’s word is: ‘In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you’. Now is the “acceptable time”, and this very day is the “day of salvation”.

Galatians 2:20-21 (NIV) - I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

Max Lucado on Paul’s understanding of God’s Grace:

Saturate your heart in this, the finest summary of God’s greatest accomplishment: “God in his gracious kindness declares us not guilty. He has done this through Christ Jesus, who has freed us by taking away our sins. For God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and to satisfy God’s anger against us. We are made right with God when we believe that Jesus shed his blood, sacrificing his life for us” (Rom. 3: 24 - 25).

God didn’t overlook your sins, lest he endorse them. He didn’t punish you, lest he destroy you. He instead found a way to punish the sin and preserve the sinner. Jesus took your punishment, and God gave you credit for Jesus’ perfection.

God's Grace Elicits a Response

"For grace is given not because we have done good works, but in order that we may be able to do them."
AUGUSTINE

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. **Ephesians 2:8-11 (NIV)***

What are the moments of grace in the following story? What are the signs of grace?

Luke 19:1-10 (NIV)

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner." But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Sustaining Grace

Max Lucado on "Sustaining Grace" from "Grace: more than we deserve, greater than we imagine"

The words of "Amazing Grace" bring hope like today's sunrise. "Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home." You have his Spirit within you. Heavenly hosts above you. Jesus Christ interceding for you. You have God's sufficient grace to sustain you. Paul's life underscored this truth. He wrote, "There was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness'" (2 Cor. 12:7-9).

A thorn in the flesh. Such vivid imagery. The sharp end of a thorn pierces the soft skin of life and lodges beneath the surface. Every step is a reminder of the thorn in the flesh. The cancer in the body. The sorrow in the heart. The child in the rehab center. The red ink on the ledger. The felony on the record. The craving for whiskey in the middle of the day. The tears in the middle of the night. The thorn in the flesh. "Take it away," you've pleaded. Not once, twice, or even three times. But what you hear is this: "My grace is sufficient for you."

Grace takes on an added dimension here. **Paul is referring to sustaining grace. Saving grace saves us from our sins. Sustaining grace meets us at our point of need and equips us with courage, wisdom, and strength.** It surprises us in the middle of our personal struggle with ample resources of faith. Sustaining grace promises not the absence of struggle but the presence of God.

Take all your anxieties to Calvary, Paul urged. Stand in the shadow of God's crucified Son. Now pose your questions. Is Jesus on my side? Look at the wound in his. Will he stay with me? Having given the supreme and costliest gift, "how can he fail to lavish upon us all he has to give?" (Rom. 8:32 NEB).

Let God's grace dethrone your fears. Anxiety still comes, for certain. The globe still heats up; wars still flare up; the economy acts up. Disease, calamity, and trouble populate your world. But they don't control it! Grace does. God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.