

GRACE

By Dennis Cornish

Grace, a word that we are all familiar with, but perhaps we are so familiar with it that its full meaning has been lost in the complacency that is borne out of, and within, the casualness of familiarity. Regarding grace, Charles H. Spurgeon, in the simplest of terms, asks his readers “to observe adoringly the fountainhead of our salvation, which is the grace of God.”¹ He poetically speaks of the grace of God as a pure river of life as it proceeds out of the throne of God and the Lamb. He goes on to say that grace is the fountain and source of even faith itself, with faith being the work of God’s grace within us.

In an attempt to grasp the depth and breadth of grace, I went through the pages of the Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms and there are several pages that briefly define thirty-two terms associated with the word grace, starting with grace itself and then further delineating it in terms such as cheap grace; common grace; the covenant of grace; efficacious grace; free grace; glorifying grace; irresistible grace; justifying grace; the means of grace; sanctifying grace; special grace; the Theology of grace, and on and on. The obvious conclusion from this brief exercise is that God’s grace is boundless.

As you read through this paper and wrestle with defining grace and you come upon many of the terms outlined above and can’t yet see how they fit neatly together, please keep reading and by the end of this article it is my prayer that these seemingly different expressions or terms will finally be seen as a cohesive and beautiful picture of God’s grace as you begin to put each piece of the puzzle together.

God’s grace is the only answer to several biblical questions that may have come out of a reading of Habakkuk’s statement, (1:13a), where he proclaims “*You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong...*” From this the Prophet Nahum asked, “*Who can stand before His indignation? Who can endure the heat of His wrath? (1:6)*” Or Job’s probing question: “*...how can a man be in the right before God? (9:2)*” It is only

¹ From Spurgeon’s book, *All of Grace*, (Copyright 2017 by B&H Publishing Co., Nashville, Tennessee, Chapter 7)

God's grace that has clothed us in the righteousness of Christ, and as Paul teaches us in Romans 8:28-29: *"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"*. God's mercy and grace are sufficient for those that have been made co-heirs with Christ. Our lives are filled with sinful wickedness, and Paul teaches that neither the life that we live, the faltering life that we are truly repentant of when the presence of sin and disobedience overcome us, (nor anything else), will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. This is an essential component of God's redemptive plan in action, and in our lives it is being played out in real time.

The Reformed theological stance, which is based upon Scripture (Romans 8:29-30), is that regeneration precedes faith. All semi-Pelagians reject this order of salvation. They instead hold to the idea that in their fallen condition of spiritual death that they, on their own, exercise faith and then are born again. In their view, God's grace is not effectual and therefore such grace, in the final analysis, is not really a saving grace. Ephesians 2:8-9 counters their assertions and clearly states that: *"By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast"*.

It is the intent of this article to bring to life the truth, beauty, meaning, and wonder of the significance of God's irresistible grace in whatever form of His saving grace that it is perceived or assessed. This of course, assumes that the interpretation and understanding of God's grace is biblically sound.

As a necessary caution, words matter and there is an adage that states that whoever defines a word wins the battle. I remind us of this in that although many religions believe in Jesus, their concept of Jesus is generally very different from ours. The same is true of the word grace. The early church had already condemned Pelagius as a heretic because he had taught that grace facilitates salvation but that it was not essential to salvation. Semi-Pelagianism, since that time, has always taught that without grace there is no salvation. But the grace that is considered in all semi-Pelagian and Arminian theories of salvation is not an efficacious grace. They limit it to a grace that makes

salvation possible, but not a grace that makes salvation certain. In their logic, that although they were drawn through God's calling, they believe that their salvation was due to the meritorious and efficacious act on their part to answer that calling. They somehow ignore Scripture which tells us that we are dead in our trespasses and that dead people cannot make the choice to choose God. In their fallen condition their choice is always dependent on the strongest desire of their hearts at the moment of their having made any choice, and those who are dead in their sin have no desire to choose God unless He has graciously drawn them by the means of His effectual calling.

As I alluded to earlier, my prayer is that this paper will bring the grace of God into the clear light of day, the light of His truth as it is found in Scripture. It remains God's initiative, and His alone, it is He who must change our hearts and give us the ability to have faith.

As we begin to sort out how we should consider grace, I would like to start out by reviewing the ordinary means of grace that God has provided for us, and in doing so we will touch on many of the various components that delineate grace. But before we do so, now would be a good time to remind ourselves that the grace of God is a priceless gift from our heavenly Father, it cannot be bought, nor can it be earned through any meritorious work of our own.

We know that we are saved by His grace alone, but just what are the means that we can employ to obtain the grace that is ours only through God's blessing? How do we, as believers, obtain the benevolent mercy that we need to navigate through the consequence of being fallen sinners? In God's redemptive plan for the salvation of those that He has called, He has mapped out the path that we are to take, and that path starts by entering through the narrow gate that is Christ alone.

The means of grace are God's specified tools or mechanisms through which the Holy Spirit enables believers to receive Christ and the inestimable benefits of redemption. If we know from Scripture that these tools are the means that the triune God has given us, then shouldn't we study and faithfully incorporate them into our struggle to live the Christian life that we have been called to? An example of how tenaciously we should

cling to any means of grace that has been given to us, the Puritan Thomas Watson in his book *The Body of Divinity*, described the covenant of grace “as a plank after shipwreck”. This fitting description was probably better understood by those of his day who traveled the seas in wooden boats and when they sank those abandoning ship would grab hold of any floating board or plank in the hope that it would preserve their lives in the midst of the sea, (see Acts 27:43-44). Still today we make a shipwreck of our lives in the stormy seas of temptation and sin, and it is only by taking hold and clinging tightly to the ‘plank’ of grace that God alone can provide, are we able to obtain a means of salvation, a means that only requires that we have faith without the need of any other alleged condition. Anything we might try to add to the mercy and grace of our Lord and Savior would be antithetical to God’s grace being the precious gift that it is.

“The ordinary means that God has appointed for our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace are the Word, prayer, and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. These means have been chosen by God, are empowered by the Holy Spirit, and they point us to Christ, and together they sustain and nourish us in our union with Christ as we rest in the sovereignty of our triune God”.² We see a wonderful example of this in Acts 2:42 where we read:

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

The word used here for their devoting themselves has the meaning of, or the sense of “persevering in” or “continuing in.” By this we see that the four practices described were, and still are, essential to the ongoing life of the church.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism provides a like response where they have written:

The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.

² Paraphrased from a *Tabletalk Magazine* feature article by Nick Batzig (Sanford, FL, Ligonier Ministries, Inc., June 2020).

The conclusion of the above statement says, “all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation”, and we go again to the Westminster Catechism 91 which goes on to explain that:

The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in him that does administer them; but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them.

It also should be observed that the members of the Westminster Assembly did not believe that all the means of grace are equally efficacious by clarifying that:

“The Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching, of the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation” (WSC 89).

To this end, the Reformed Theologian Gerhardus Vos gave a rationale for the priority of the Word over the sacraments when he wrote:

“If necessary, we can think of [the] Word as a means of grace without sacrament, but it is impossible to think of sacrament as a means of grace without [the] Word. The sacraments depend on Scripture, and the truth of Scripture speaks in and through them”.

Elsewhere, this same Confession of Faith explains through another answer, that once we have focused upon Jesus as our only hope for our salvation we do so in that we might:

“... escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin, God requires of us faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life, with the diligent use of all the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption”.

Although imperfect in our human nature, we must strive to obtain a full and uncompromising obedience to God’s Word that would enable us to justly devote ourselves to His Sovereign means for our salvation.

One example of our being disobedient to His Word would be participating in the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner. This unworthiness could manifest itself in several ways,

one being a Christian who remains unrepentant in their sinfulness and yet still participates in the Sacrament of Communion, and another would be a person participating in the Lord's Supper even though never having been saved and remain habitually persistent in their living a life of sin. These sinful acts of disobedience will likely subject both persons, in light of their unrepentance, to God's judgment.

Looking to Scripture as a means of grace we can easily recognize that in our culture, and much of the world, the value of God's Word is not only underrated, it has also become deprecated to the point of absurdity. This is true not only for the world at large, but the Word has become increasingly denigrated by many schools of higher learning as well as within a great number of seminaries under the guise of what they ascribe to as critical thinking, which often boils down to their efforts to remove anything supernatural from the pages of Scripture.

We as Christians must ensure that the Word of God is faithfully preached in our churches and taught to our children in our homes. Romans 10:17 proclaims that: "... *faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ*"

In his article, *The Word of God as a Means of Grace*, Robert VanDoodewaard wrote: "When you read the Bible or listen to faithful preaching, there is more happening than mere communication of ideas. The Word is more than ink and paper, and preaching is more than a speech. The Word is living, as the Lord is working effectually by His Holy Spirit through it".

In Scripture, there are immutable truths to be found by those who hunger and thirst for God's righteousness. Some of these precious truths are more evident than others as they seem to be a recurring theme throughout the pages of the Bible, others must be sought after with the effort of a miner with pick and shovel relentlessly mining a claim while tirelessly searching for the treasure that will be ours if we persevere in our effort to understand and abide in God's Word. We must be like the merchant and diligently search God's Word to find the pearl of great price (Matthew 13:45-46). These parables are representative of the immeasurable value of heaven which suggests that every

sacrifice that we make to obtain a right understanding and knowledge of God, and then to abide in Him, is worth more than anything else that we might desire.

We can only praise God in gratitude that we today can confess the same Word as has been proclaimed by the church throughout the ages. His Word does not return void and it has not lost its significance or its power as a means of grace. Like the parable of the mustard seed, His Word continues to grow and spread to every nation and tribe, and as Isaiah 40:8 reminds us: *“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever”*.

In Romans 10:17 Paul teaches that: *“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ”*, and this verse explains that faith is generated by hearing the message of God, or the gospel of Christ. With Paul’s last words to the Ephesians, as seen in Acts 20:32, he leaves them with this: *“And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified”*.

The question we might ask is how is it that we can apprehend the word of His grace, and this leads us back to the means of grace that He has provided for us. We have His Inscripturated Word that we are to be in daily, meditating upon it and committing it to memory. We also have faithful shepherds who, in a spirit of love and grace, preach God’s unadulterated Word to us each week. This is the *“word of grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified”*.

The means of grace, the hearing of God’s Word, highlights the necessity of the church in the Christian’s life. Ryan McGraw in an article³ that he wrote states that: “Public worship is the place where we enter into the special presence of the omnipresent God (Psalms. 113:4; 139:7). When the Father gathers His family together, Christ speaks to them through the preaching of the Word (Romans 10:11–17; Ephesians 2:17) as we offer our prayers by the Spirit and enjoy God’s presence in the sacraments.

³ Ryan McGraw’s article in *Tabletalk Magazine* (Sanford, FL, Ligonier Ministries, Inc., June 2020).

The mandate to not forsake the assembling of ourselves, (Hebrews 10:25), the word 'assembling' means more than simply being with other Christians. The public gathering of the church under its officers is where we receive the means to sustain us in salvation. We must appropriate and use the means of grace by faith, preparing ourselves to receive them and studying their nature and use from Scripture. We should also not fall into the trap of making the assumption that the preaching of God's Word is only for unbelievers, although it will benefit them greatly because faith comes by hearing, but the point I want to make is that preaching is the means God uses to give His people, those who possess the faith that is theirs through their having been born again, the continued assurance of their salvation and the ability to persevere in their trust of His faithfulness to keep His promises to those who are His.

It is because our churches are made up of believers and non-believers, the saved and the reprobate, that our pastors must preach both the law and the gospel, and in this way all who are in attendance will be encouraged and blessed by God's Word of truth.

Daniel Hyde, in his book *Welcome to a Reformed Church*, wrote on these two components of preaching. He said that: "...the law does two things. First, it humbles the believer, constantly exposing his sins before the Lord. Second, the law either causes the unbeliever to see his or her sin, (if it is accompanied by the work of the Spirit) or it hardens the unbeliever who will not acknowledge his or her sin."

For believers it pricks our conscience and exhorts us to grow in the grace of the Lord, which is both pleasing to Him as well as it being infinitely important to our eternal soul. We are to be nurtured in the strength of our faith and open ourselves to a deeper spiritual mindedness as we flourish in the power of God's presence as Christ's righteousness becomes ever more core to our very being. This growth in grace is imperative to our spiritual well-being, as well as to our being an effective witness to the saving grace that we have in Jesus, and in addition it testifies to the fact that we have been set apart because of the increased holiness that is evident in our lives. As we are seen as becoming more Christ centered, it gives us an opportunity to tell others of the love of Jesus that they see as evident in our lives. This highlights another fact, and that is we must continue to grow in our faith because God gives us new mercies and grace

each day, and we must strive to intentionally mature in the faith and draw ever closer to the fountain of His grace.

Moving to the Sacrament of Baptism, which is an outward sign of grace that both assures and strengthens us in our relationship with God. We as believers, who have made a conscious and truthful confession of faith in our union with Christ, by this public declaration in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are fully immersed in water which symbolizes the death of the believer's sinful life and their burial with Christ. It represents dying to our old sin nature that kept us in bondage to our sin.

Our re-emergence from the water signifies the believer's resurrection to a new life with Christ. This symbolizes a spiritual rebirth and the adoption of a new identity and purpose in Christ, moving us from death to life. It is an important distinction to note that Baptism is a symbolic act where in obedience we publicly display and declare the divine gift of Regeneration that God has already graciously bestowed upon us. It is a symbolic washing away of our sin, a visible right of purification and spiritual cleansing which became ours at the point of our regeneration and set us squarely on the path of sanctification through the work of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. Baptism does not save us, Scripture is clear in that Christ has cleansed His church and as Paul wrote: *“that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, (Ephesians 5:26)”*. John similarly said in 1 John 1:6-7 that if we walk in God's light that: *“...the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin”*.

It is noteworthy to remember that every grace that is ours is a direct gift from the Godhead in which each person of the Trinity is fully God and therefore they each possess the same exact essence and attributes. The important take away is that our baptism symbolizes our union with Christ, who Himself, although sinless, became one with us and He identified with us in His baptism.

Regarding the sacraments, Augustine stated that they are “visible signs of invisible grace.” This of course is also true of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

At the Passover Supper that Jesus shared with His disciples He initiated what we as Christians now call the Lord's Supper. It is a symbolic representation of Christ being the

Holy Lamb of God who sacrificed Himself for our sin. Christians partake in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in remembrance of the atoning sacrifice that He endured on the cross to assuage the Holy wrath of God that we rightly deserve for the entirety of our sins, past, present, and future.

He alone was sinless, the spotless Lamb of God, and in His purity, He was the only sacrifice worthy of being offered as a propitiation for our sin. His death on the cross paid the price for our sin, and upon that cross His final words before the culmination of His crucifixion were "It is finished" (from the Greek word *tetelestai*), by which He declared the completion of His earthly mission and the payment of the debt for humanity's sins. This phrase is multi-faceted in its meaning, signifying that the work was complete, the price for our sin was "paid in full," and the battle against sin and death was won.

There are many New Testament passages that outline all that occurred during this last supper before Jesus' crucifixion. In our church, before we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we often go to 1 Corinthians 11:23–29 for instructions on how the sacrament is to be instituted. In these passages we are reminded of Jesus' instructions when Paul wrote the following:

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me". ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. ²⁷ Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Let a person examine himself, then, and so eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

These words of Christ clearly show the holiness and sanctity of this sacrament, and we solemnly partake of it in reverence and remembrance of the mystery of Christ's

humiliation as He set aside for a time His heavenly glory to be born a man, to preach His gospel message, and to die on a cross for our sake. And now we have a risen Savior who has conquered death and after His ascension, He sets in session at the right hand of God the Father as He continues to mediate on our behalf. Praise God for all the mercy and grace that He steadfastly bestows upon us as we continue to proclaim His death until He returns. Scripture says that in celebrating the Lord's Supper by receiving the sacrament that the very act of our partaking in the elements actively proclaims His finished work and looks forward in faith to His return.

One other importance of the grace that we have in actively partaking the Lord's Supper is that it engages each of our senses, and in doing so we become fully emersed in the experience. We hear the word being spoken from the pulpit, and the Scriptures that are being used to explain and prepare us to receive the elements. We see our brothers and sisters in Christ as we gather the elements and return to our seats; we use our minds as we remember details of the occasion that is celebrated by our partaking of the elements; we communicate through prayer as we ask for God's forgiveness for any unrepentant sin; we physically touch the elements prior to taking them; and we taste and smell the fragrance of them as we consume them. There is a reverential awe in performing this Holy Sacrament, one which brings with it an assurance that we belong to Jesus and that He gave His life for us.

I caution us to remember, the sacraments, while important, do not impart or replace the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Christ alone is our only means of salvation, He alone can declare us to be cloaked in His righteousness. The sacraments are only signs that complement the preaching of the Word, and they in and of themselves must never supplant the reading and teaching of God's Holy Word.

Prayer as a means of grace is crucial to our life in Christ. Prayerful repentance inspires the believer to fully trust Christ without the fear of rejection, for it calls us to understand who we are as sinners and that our sins desecrate the divine love that prompted Jesus to pay the inestimable cost that He paid to ransom us so that we would never be rejected. It reveals Christ to us, the one who alone captivates our hearts and is the

center of our devotion and adoration, in recognition of the irrefutable fact that He and His atoning work on the cross are the true heart and soul of the church and His people.

Spirit filled prayer, in the name of Christ, draws us into closer communion with our Triune God. It is the means of grace that allows us to come before our heavenly Father and know with confidence that He will hold out His scepter and invite us into the Holy of Holies so that standing before His throne, we can bask in the radiance of His glory. Prayer puts us in our rightful place in that we acknowledge our sin in the light of His holy majesty, and we can do so knowing that Christ sits in session at His right hand and continues to mediate on our behalf.

In recognition, and in prayerful repentance of our sin, we know that we have been truly blessed in that we worship the only true God, the God of second chances. In our acute awareness of our own sin, and in the Spirit filled perception that we possess, we see the mystery and incomprehensibility found in the fact that the forgiveness we have is solely based upon the work of Christ, and that His act of redemption is the only saving grace that allows us to stand before our Father without the fear of rejection and the damnation that we deserve. The Father looks at us and sees the righteousness of Christ that we are cloaked in, a foreign righteousness that is not our own.

Our awe of God and the unrelenting mercy and grace that He freely applies to our lives each day leads us to reflect upon the Psalmists prayerful question to God when he prayed: *“O Lord, what is man that you regard him, or the son of man that you think of him?”* (Psalm 144:3). We can only continue to go to Him in prayerful worship, praising Him for deigning to bequeath upon us the unmerited favor of His love even in our disobedience.

We can conclude that grace is such an important aspect of the Salvific work of God that the early church Reformers included it in their defense against the Roman Catholic Church's position that church tradition and the Pope's edicts were on an equal standing with Holy Scripture. The response by the Reformers came in a formal declaration that is known as the five pillars of the Reformation. One of those five pillars was Sola Gracia, or Grace Alone.

Years ago, I wrote a paper outlining a brief history of the writing of these five pillars of the Reformation and to conclude this writing I am going to insert the pillar, or Sola, that pertains to grace alone. However, it needs to be understood that although each of these five pillars state that each of them stands alone, such as Grace Alone, the Reformer's make a clarifying statement on the interdependence of them in that they are an interconnected and cohesive system of belief that work together, not in isolation. Together they define the gospel of salvation. Each "sola" addresses a different aspect of salvation and authority, and each depends on the others to form a complete picture.

Sola Gracia - Grace Alone

It is by grace alone that we are saved, none of our efforts, none of our works contribute anything to our salvation. This, by definition, means that grace and works are at odds, and as instruments to achieve justification, they are mutually exclusive concepts. Romans 11:6 says: *"If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace."* It must be remembered that works are merely the fruit of what God does in us, and not the means of obtaining eternal life. Salvation, from beginning to end, is the sovereign gift of unmerited favor from God to the unworthy and undeserving. Our efforts can never be an acceptable basis for justification; works righteousness is a lie of the devil and is antithetical to salvation by grace alone. In Ephesians 2:8-9 Paul writes: *"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."* Paul tells us that we have been saved through faith, but we must remember that the faith by which we are justified is a gracious gift from God which we are granted at the time of our regeneration, no longer dead in our sin, but born again to a new life in Christ.

Unregenerate mankind, being dead in their sin, has no ability, nor any desire, to save themselves. Augustine argued that the Fall was so disabling that man was placed into a condition of spiritual death and this resulted in the moral inability to do the things of God.

The heart of a fallen man is a heart of stone, and only God's grace, through the work of the Holy Spirit, can give us a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26). God's sovereign prerogative, His divine will, is the only instrument that can initiate salvation and Paul tells us: "...even when we were dead in our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, (Ephesians 2:5-6). John Calvin said of these verses that "everything connected with our salvation ought to be ascribed to God as its author." This would include our decision to believe, which has been made as a direct result of the Lord's saving-grace wherein He effectually and irresistibly calls us to salvation. Jesus taught that "*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him... (John 6:44).*" God's saving-grace overcomes the resistance of all those whom He has chosen to redeem, and they are brought to new spiritual life that cannot be lost. Grace enables and it compels.

Everyone to whom saving grace is shown perseveres to the end and dies in faith, and because God's grace is effectual, His promises guarantee our final redemption. Philippians 1:6 is one such promise: "*And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*" Romans 8:29-30 tells us that everyone who is justified is also glorified; there is no such thing as a person who experiences conversion and justification but then falls away finally and fully from grace.

That being said: we must not confuse this with someone who has made a false profession of faith and then falls away because he was never truly saved to begin with. 1 John 2:19 reminds us of this truth: *“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”*

Saving grace, unaided by our efforts, is the necessary, sufficient, and efficient means for our being justified before God. Justification is God’s legal declaration that we are righteous in His sight, and it is only by the merit of Christ that we receive grace. We cannot do enough works to meet God’s holy standard for righteousness. It cannot be said enough; justification by grace alone through faith alone, apart from our works, is central to the gospel.

With the reading of Titus 3:4–7, it is easy to understand why the Reformers were so insistent on the gracious character of justification. As verse 5 tells us, God saved us *“not because of works done by us in righteousness,”* As justification is by grace alone. If justification is by grace, it cannot involve any of our own deeds of obedience, no matter how pleasing to the Lord they may be. “To look to the works done by us in righteousness as the root of justification and not the fruit of justification is to take grace off the table. Our righteousness before God is wholly a gift. The righteousness of Christ is a perfect righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21), so not even our best works can be added to it. To try to add any works to the righteousness of Christ is, in fact, to take away from the righteousness of Christ”.⁴

⁴ This is a paraphrase of an unknown author’s statement.

God demands perfection for our justification. Therefore, justification must be by grace alone as we have no personal righteousness, we have no perfection of our own. Upon our regeneration we gain a new legal standing of righteousness, but we also have a new heart, one that is more inclined, albeit not perfectly, towards a holy obedience. This is the grace of God. Paul tells us in Romans 6 that *“sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”* It is important to note that he is not saying you won’t fall into sin, but that sin is no longer the ruling master over your life; on the contrary, it is God’s grace that reigns supreme. The grace of God is a sanctifying grace.

For grace to remain grace we must come before God with the empty hand of faith, releasing any claim of our own righteousness. We bring nothing to the Lord’s table, but by His grace we receive freely the Sacraments in remembrance for what He has done for us through His finished work which culminated in the enduring grace of the cross. We must recognize that our good works are merely the fruit of the gift of our salvation, done out of obedience and gratification of what God has done for us. We must confess our utter reliance on divine mercy and God’s holy grace. This is Sola Gracia, by Grace Alone.

As we conclude the reading of this article, keep in mind that the very last words found in the bible read: “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen” (Revelation 22:21).