



SOLA GRATIA - Grace Alone

Clarity on God's Grace Providing all we have in Christ

And can it be that I should gain
An int'rest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain—
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

He left His Father's throne above—So free, so infinite His grace—
Emptied Himself of all but love, And bled for Adam's helpless race:
'Tis mercy all, immense and free, For, O my God, it found out me!

Long my imprisoned spirit lay, Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray—I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread; Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;
Alive in Him, my living Head, And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th' eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

Refrain:

Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?ⁱ

The author of that hymn was a man named *Charles Wesley*. It's a powerful poem that asks at least 2 questions:

- #1 How can it be that I am offered the incredible benefits found in the shed blood of Christ?
- #2 How can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

Charles Wesley was a great-grandson of the Reformation of Jesus' Church. But he didn't start out that way.

- He had been raised as a pastor's kid, son of Anglican cleric Samuel and Susanna Wesley, their 18th child.ⁱⁱ
- Charles attended Oxford University, where he (and eventually joined by his brother John) would start an on-campus prayer group in 1727, a group that regularly challenged its members to live a holy life by regularly studying the Bible. They even devised a bible study "method" which they used when they met, and the undergraduates at Oxford would deride them, call them pejorative names like the "holy-club, Bible-moths," and "the Methodists," which was the name that stuck.ⁱⁱⁱ
- After graduation, Charles even followed his father in being ordained as a priest by the Anglican Church
- In 1735 Charles sailed to the English colony of Georgia in the America, to serve the governor (James Oglethorpe) of that colony to serve as "Secretary of Indian Affairs" as well as a chaplain to the penal colony there (England sent its convicted criminals to serve time in Georgia). But Charles found himself to be a square-peg in a round-hole, and returned to England from the Carolinas in 1736.

The truth is that despite all his upbringing and all his religiosity, his heart wasn't right. He had no

peace, no assurance that he was actually right with God. A heart not right until on a street called Aldersgate, in London, he encountered Peter Bohler, a “young Moravian (gospel) preacher” who shot straight with him and his brother John. “Justification by faith,” said Bohler, “is not *merely* a doctrine. It is a personal experience of God’s forgiveness.” Bohler explained GRACE and forgiveness to him, and the first of the two Wesley brothers that Peter Bohler led to personal faith in Christ was Charles Wesley,^{iv} on May 21, 1738.^v John’s conversion followed 3 days later. To celebrate what God had done in his life, he wrote this poem...which has become a great hymn in Jesus’ church!

It’s a hymn about SOLA GRATIA – “grace alone” – the 3rd pillar conviction of the Reformation.

- **Sola Scriptura** – Scripture alone... is God-breathed and our only, final, clear authority
- **Sole Fide** – Faith alone...we are declared righteous simply by trusting in Christ’s death on our behalf, without any “good works” whatsoever
- **Sola Gratia** – grace alone...that our salvation comes to us for no other reason but God’s immense love, (his surprising) mercy, and (his utterly) free giving.

Sola Gratia. Why did the Reformers identify GRACE as the 3rd truth not only to recover, but worth dying for? No passage is clearer than...

Ephesians 2:1-10

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ²in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

⁴But God, **being rich in mercy**, because of the **great love with which he loved us**, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—**by grace** you have been saved— ⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the coming ages he might show **the immeasurable riches of his grace** in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

⁸**For by grace** you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is **the gift of God**, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

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

So what does this passage teach? 3 life-changing truths.

FIRST, IT’S GOD’S GRACE THAT ADDRESSES MY UTTER SPIRITUAL DEADNESS

Ephesians 2:1-3

¹And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ²in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

You know, you may be like me. These are the kind of verses I'd like to just skip over sometimes. I don't like seeing myself in deadness. But God knows more about me than I do. And the truth is, I'm like everyone else in this world. God sizes us all up in Romans 3 with these words,

As it is written: *"There is none righteous. No, not one."*
Romans 3:10

So, let's not sugar coat it. Let's admit that the HS speaking through Paul is correct.

- (vs.1) We **begin spiritually dead** in our **transgressing** (ESV "trespass," Gk. παραπτώμα "to step/fall beyond") God's word/law (e.g., Romans 5:15, Adam's *trespass* – he stepped beyond God's word and fell) **and sin** (αμαρτια "every action and result which departs from God's perfect righteousness" BAG, p.42, 1. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, "The metaphor behind the word is *missing the mark*, but in OT this is not only a negative idea, but the positive idea of hitting some wrong mark"^{vi}).
- (vs.2) We **follow "a course" (or "the times") of this world**, directed by "the prince of the authority of the air" (a reference to Satan). One scholar put it that the present age we live in is "the era of the Fall."^{vii} Before God's grace, before Christ we are naturally wired to "go along with what is fashionable and acceptable and are not out of step with the rest of the world."^{viii}
- Which is why before God's grace and before Christ, (vs.3) **we live to gratify our selfish cravings** (vs.3), by our very nature "children of wrath" like the rest of mankind.

Harold Hoehner sums it well: *The Apostle chooses not to explain the grace of God until he makes inescapably clear the desperate need of human beings.*^{ix} Isaiah nailed it.

Isaiah 53: 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way;

As one young man said to me this past week, "I have been so lost." When I heard that, I thought to myself, "All right...he's got a chance to be changed by God's grace." The truth is, we ALL are – it's our biggest problem.

SECOND, IT'S GOD'S IMMEASURABLE GRACE THAT MAKES ME ALIVE

Ephesians 2:4-7

⁴But God, **being rich in mercy**, because of the **great love with which he loved us**, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, **made us alive** together with Christ—**by grace** you have been saved—⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the coming ages he might show **the immeasurable riches of his grace** in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Notice the 4 key phrases... "even when we were dead..."

- God made us alive with Christ
- God raised us up with Christ
- God seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.
- God will show in the coming ages the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us

If we ask the question, “Why? and How?” or “How? And Why?” it all comes back to one of the most remarkable attributes of God. He loves us! He loves dead sinners. He loves those who trespass His law. He loves those who run away and think and do anything and everything that is offensive to His holy Character. God is absolutely holy and righteous, but he is ALSO absolutely loving and merciful. And thus the only reason we can be rescued and saved is because of SOLA GRATIA – “grace alone.”

When the renowned theologian Karl Barth visited the University of Chicago, students and scholars crowded around him. At a press conference, one asked, “Dr. Barth, what is the most profound truth you have learned in your studies?” Without hesitation, he replied, “Jesus loves me. This I know. For the Bible tells me so.”^x

An Irish priest purposed to take a walking tour of a rural parish, and along the way, he was intrigued to find an old peasant, kneeling by the side of the road. Impressed, the priest said to the man, “You must be very close to God.” The peasant looked up from his prayers, thought a moment, and then smiled. “Yes, He’s very fond of me.”^{xi}

Philip Yancey understands “sola gratia” –

Grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us more—no amount of spiritual calisthenics and renunciations, no amount of knowledge gained from seminaries or divinity schools, no amount of crusading on behalf of righteous causes. *And grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us less*—no amount of racism or pride or pornography or adultery or even murder. Grace means that God already loves us as much as an infinite God can possibly love....it means that I, even I who deserve the opposite, am invited to take my place at the table of God’s family.^{xii}

THIRD, IT’S GOD GRACE THAT SAVES THRU FAITH AND RECREATES ME INTO GOD’S WORKMANSHIP

Ephesians 2:8-10

⁸**For by grace** you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is **the gift of God**,⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰**For** we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

The “for” explains the HOW of the change my life really needs! “For by grace!” (absolutely unmerited, undeserved favor)...two things happen.

1st – As I simply believe BY HIS GRACE I am SAVED by His gift (vs.8-9)

Please look and understand...there are involved. The Spirit urges Paul to repeat it – this is NOT your own doing. This is NOT a result of works. No one before the throne of God will boastfully said, “I climbed and crawled and earned my way in.”

2nd – As I simply believe, **BY GRACE I am RECREATED** in Christ for great things. (vs.10)

SAVED by grace through faith; RECREATED by grace through faith. This is the outward display of the inward reversal.

God by **His** grace addresses my biggest problem
God by **His** grace vaults me out of death into life
God by **His** grace rescues & recreates me to live
For lasting impact and eternal purpose

Martin Luther: “God’s grace is not divided into bits and pieces, as are the gifts, but grace takes us up completely into God’s favor for the sake of Christ, our intercessor and mediator, so that the gifts may begin their work in us... This kind of trust in and knowledge of God’s grace makes a person joyful, confident, and happy with regard to God and all creatures. Faith is a living, unshakeable confidence in God’s grace; it is so certain that someone would die a thousand times for it.”^{xiii}

TAKE AWAYS...

Of course...in the days of the Reformation, someone did. She was a 16 year old girl, and her name was Jane Grey. For 9 days, she was the Queen of England.

It was Edward VI who preceded her on the throne, *just* a boy of 9 when he was crowned king in 1547, **the first monarch to be raised “a protestant.”**^{xiv} [p.s. You read about Edward VI in the *Reformation ABC’s book*] But his life would end in 1553 when at 15 he succumbed to a terminal illness. And his untimely death hurled the English court into a scramble – who would step onto the throne? Princes Mary, Edward’s half-sister, who hated the protestant reformation, or Jane Grey, the 16 year old niece of King Henry VII – a young girl who was surprisingly and deeply committed to the Lord Jesus Christ, to the Sola Scriptura and Sole Fide and Sola Gratia.

Jane Grey would reign on the throne of England but for 9 days, until her forces were overwhelmed by those of Mary. Mary incarcerated all those who had been instrumental in putting Jane on the throne, and Jane herself, in the tower of London. Jane was offered a chance to live if she would publicly repudiate her reformation convictions, and openly return to the church and participate in its ceremonies.

Queen Mary’s chaplain, Feckenham, grilled Lady Jane in the chapel of the Tower of London before an audience of her adversaries. Stephen Nichols writes,

In [their] exchange over justification (before God), Feckenham tried to trip Jane up by accusing her of rejecting good works, so clearly required of the Christian. *It is necessary unto salvation to do good works also; it is not sufficient only to believe*, he told her.

She returned, *I deny that, and I affirm that faith only saves; but it is meet [i.e., fitting] for a Christian to do good works, in token that he follows the steps of his Master, Christ, yet we may not say that we profit to salvation. For when we have done all, we are unprofitable servants, and faith only in Christ’s blood saves us.*^{xv}

On February 12, 1554, two days after her interview with Feckenham, she was executed for her beliefs. Her last words on the scaffold were, "I here die a true Christian woman, and I trust to be saved by the blood of Christ and by none other means."^{vi}

We finish in

Titus 2:11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

There are 3 "ing" words the Spirit of God uses to apply God's GRACE to our lives. First, God's grace calls for

A Response of FAITH – "bringing salvation for all" for by grace you are saved through faith

Over and over and over again, Jesus called on people (Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the Pharisees, the Roman centurion – people from all walks of life, from every background, no matter where you came from or what your past – to believe in Him. To choose to stop trusting yourself, and repent, and start trusting Him.

A Readiness for PERSONAL RENEWAL - ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,

An Eagerness of EXPECTATION - ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

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¹ From David Cain, <http://songscoops.blogspot.com/2013/02/and-can-it-be-that-i-should-gain.html>, He was feeling a renewal, a sensation that he hadn't quite felt before, and was pondering the import of its source. He marveled, and had an outpouring for the remainder of his life that could not be contained from the summit of this experience. It must have been a pretty powerful moment. How could one describe it in secular terms... maybe like winning the lottery's biggest accumulated sum, or the entire pile of brilliant gold bars from Fort Knox (see picture)? That's how someone might think of an incredible acquisition, if they had never before heard of Charles Wesley's "And Can It Be That I Should Gain" written in 1738.

Charles Wesley had tried to follow a calling, but he'd just returned to his homeland from a depressing experience abroad as a 31-year old. Although he had a discipline (and hence the name 'Methodist') that earned him a reputation and a college education, which seemed to culminate and affirm his upbringing and compel him toward the Anglican Church's work abroad, Wesley was in fact not a committed believer until many years after his initial efforts in spreading the Christian message. After graduating from Christ College and signing up for duty in the Anglican Church, he and brother John (a preacher) went to the American continent to work in the Georgia colony. Charles' authoritarian ways did not sit well with the colonists, however, leading to a short tenure in the new world. Soon after his return to England, Wesley had a faith- and life-altering experience at Aldersgate in London with Moravians, who showed him the void in his beliefs. Its effect was so far-reaching that his brother John also made a commitment to God soon after Charles did. One doesn't have to wonder what the message was that transformed the Wesleys, for it is contained in the hymns Charles wrote, particularly "And Can It Be...". Historians believe this may be one of two that he wrote soon after his conversion on 21 May 1738. His thoughts convey how stirred he felt, realizing that the Christ's life intersected with his own. It was from the valley of depression, lifted to the peak of existence, which spurred Wesley to write the words that Spring of 1738.

Wesley wrote six verses to express his elation in his hymn. It hardly needs more exposition than its own words express clearly. But, Wesley's poetry flows effortlessly, giving voice to what happened in this English gentleman's heart 275 years ago. That someone, who had been seemingly an active believer for years, could write words as if he'd only just made a decisive breakthrough is enlightening. He felt the novelty of his discovery. Others might have hesitated to admit their actions prior to this had been empty, in light of the fresh news only just uncovered. Not so with Wesley. This news bulletin was indeed 'good' news, although the words Wesley uses indicate 'good' may have been too tame to describe his feelings. How about great? Awesome? Breathtaking? Use any superlative you want. His words still resonate today.

² John Hannah of Dallas Seminary suggests that Charles was the 17th of 19 children. (DTS Lecture notes, 1977).

³ "This little group soon attracted attention and some derision from the lax undergraduates. 'Enthusiasm' at Oxford? HJoly Club, they called them; and Bible moths, Methodists, and Reforming Club. The Methodist lab le is the one that stuck. The members of the little society were ardent but restless souls." Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Word, 1992, 1995), 334.

⁴ Shelley, 335.

⁵ Charles Wesley experienced a conversion on 21 May 1738 — John Wesley had a similar experience in Aldersgate Street just three days later. A City of London blue plaque at 13, Little Britain, near the church of St Botolph's-without-Alders, off St. Martin's Le Grand, marks the site of the former house of John Bray, reputed to be the scene of Charles' evangelical conversion on 21 May 1738. It reads, "Adjoining this site stood the house of John Bray. Scene of Charles Wesley's conversion by faith in Christ on May 21st 1738". Wesley felt renewed strength to spread the Gospel to ordinary people and it was around then that he began to write the poetic hymns for which he would become known. It was not until 1739 that the brothers took to field preaching, under the influence of George Whitefield, whose open-air preaching was already reaching great numbers of Bristol colliers. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Wesley

⁶ Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Victor Books, 1986), 210-211.

⁷ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians—An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 310, citing Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, p.60.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Hoehner, 307.

¹⁰ Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing about Grace?* (Zondervan, 1997), 67.

¹¹ Ibid., 69.

¹² Ibid., 70-71.

¹³ *Martin Luther in His Own Words: Essential Writings of the Reformation* (Kindle Locations 671-672). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

^{xiv} https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_VI_of_England

^{xv} Cited in Paul F.M. Zahl, *Five Women of the English Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001) 109-113. Included In *The Reformation: How a Monk and A Mallet Changed the World*, there is a wonderful chapter – chapter 8 – entitled “Women in Black Too – The Untold Story of Women and the Reformation.”

^{xvi} Stephen J. Nichols, *The Reformation—How a Monk and A Mallet Changed the World* (Crossway, 2007), 120-122. Nichols cites *Voices of the English Reformation, A Sourcebook*, ed. John N. King (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 324.