

Sola Gratia (Ephesians 2.7)

Five hundred years ago, on October 31 1517, Martin Luther, a young German Monk, nailed his 95 theses to the Bishop's door at Wittenberg. His paper was a declaration of abuses by the Roman Catholic papal authority. Much like the Pharisees in Jesus' day, religious leaders in the Church had sought opportunity to distort the beauty, the power & Truth of God's Word, turning it into a means of personal gain.

For a thousand years the Church was in "the dark ages". But God remains faithful to His Bride.

Beneath the sea level of sin, God was stirring in the hearts of men like Peter Waldo in the 12th century. In 1184 Rome excommunicated from the Church. Why? Because Peter translated the Scripture into a modern European language so common folk could better understand God's Word. In the fourth century, John Wycliffe frightened papal powers when he too translated the Scripture, this time into Middle English, providing commoners an opportunity to read God's Word for themselves. Wycliffe died in 1384, but he was so hated by religious leaders in the Catholic Church that nearly 45 years after his death orders went out to have his bones dug up, burned, and scattered into an English river. One of Wycliffe's disciples was a man named John Hus. Like Luther, Hus knew that the teaching of Roman Catholic authority was contrary to the Scripture. It wasn't long after raising his concerns that he was excommunicated & burned alive in 1415.

Despite all of Rome's efforts to silence the Word of God, the Lord would faithfully raise up a voice who wouldn't be silenced: Martin Luther.

Martin's father sent him away to become a lawyer. But Luther's heavenly Father had other plans for his education in matters of the law. One day during law school, Martin was caught out in a terrible lightning storm. Scared for his life, he swore to God that he would become a monk if the Sovereign Ruler would spare his life. Two weeks later, at great disappointment to his father, Martin kept true to his word and joined the monastery. Martin had hoped that a religious lifestyle would grant him a life of peace with God. But as he continued his training in Catholic dogma, he became obsessed with his efforts to fulfill God's Words, to please the Holy Judge, to satisfy God by his own obedience to the Lord's Law. But the more closely he tried walking in the Light of God's righteousness, the more his own darkness & sin was exposed. Martin would fast for weeks on end, slavishly reciting religious prayers, confessing his sins, punishing himself by sleeping in the cold without coverings. He was becoming increasingly aware of God's righteousness, and all the more aware of his inability to measure up.

Perhaps a pilgrimage to Rome would help? As soon as Luther arrived he joined myriads of other fearfuls, crawling up the Stairs of Pontius Pilate, reciting the Lord's Prayer on every step. Roman authorities had declared that whenever someone made it to the top of the stairs in prayer, the soul of a dead relative would be freed from the fires of purgatory. Church coffers lined the top steps. For a contribution to the construction of St. Peter's basilica, perhaps you could free another soul or two. However, when Luther mounted the top step, he looked about in disgust and said to himself, "Who knows if any of this is true."

Martin's depression worsened. The disciplines & dogmas that were supposed to offer him peace, only left him more stressed, fearful & worrisome. He knew he was supposed to love God, but how could he love a God who demanded perfection from such imperfect people like himself?

Luther was sent to seminary in Wittenberg. Perhaps the study of Scripture would do him some good, or at least get him out of the hair of the priests in the monastery confessionals where he spent countless hours confessing his sin. But God had plans for Martin's seminary stint: rather than more false doctrine, it was in Wittenberg that he began to read & study the actual Scriptures. In 1512 he earned his masters degree, and not long after, he began teaching the Scriptures to other seminarians. Psalms, Galatians, Hebrews... and Romans. The Word of God was transforming his understanding of who God is, and especially how the Scripture depicted God's Righteousness: very different than what he'd been led to believe in the RCC.

As Luther read God's Word he came to understand the Gospel: the Good News of God in the life, death & resurrection of Jesus Christ. Luther had grown up thinking of Jesus only as Judge, wielding the sword of

wrath, and in fury of God's divine judgement. But in the Scripture, Luther met the crucified Christ who cried out from His Cross at Calvary, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Had the Son of God really felt what Martin had felt? Why? What had this perfect Son of Man done to deserve to die? Luther learned that this blood-sweating Savior-Son was sent by God the Father, not to be served, but to serve: to give His life as a ransom for many; to die, in fact, in Luther's place, to take upon Himself the sin of man, to suffer God's wrath on Luther's behalf. *Amazing Grace, how can it be?* Can you imagine how such news must have rocked Martin's world, must have brought him to his knees after years of failed efforts, after months of fasting, penance, countless sleepless nights fearful of the fires of purgatory, of eternal damnation for his sin? Were it not for God's Spirit, the declaration of God's grace from Paul's pen would prove inconceivable. Day & night Luther sought to understand Paul's letter, until finally God opened his eyes to see the truth of the Gospel—the Good News—of God's righteousness: that "the righteous will live by faith". That's when the lights came on. Blinders fell from Martin's eyes. For the first time Luther was beginning to understand that the *Righteous*—those justified by God, pardoned of sin & set free in Christ—were those who lived trusting in God's righteousness, not their own. "Here," Luther wrote, "I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through." Ironically, it was the book of Romans that shed light on a completely different perspective of the Scriptures. Prior to, Martin had been led to believe that the way to become righteous was by one's *own* will power, determination & obedience. But the actual Scriptures was clearly stating something very different: justified, forgiven sinners were *made* righteous—not by their own will & obedience, but—by God's will & righteousness given them through faith!

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. -Jn1.12-13

Righteousness wasn't something that could be bought with a tithe, by doing enough penance or purchasing enough indulgences; righteousness—being made right with God—was only something God could grant, only something God could give. Righteousness was something God alone possessed, and, therefore, only something God alone could give; it simply couldn't be earned; in fact, the very thought of being able to earn God's righteousness only reveals our pride & arrogance, our desert of condemnation.

Through the study of God's Word, Luther experienced a major paradigm shift that led to his nailing of the 95 theses, a protest against the abuse of power & contradiction of God's Word by Roman papacy, and ultimately the RE-Formation of God's Holy Church.

From this Protestant Reformation came what is called the five solas:

Sola Gratia: by Grace alone (today)

Sola Scriptura: in Scripture alone

Sola Fide: by Faith alone

Solus Christus: in Christ alone

Soli Deo Gloria: for the Glory of God alone

How can sinful men be made right before our sinless God? If God is holy, and I am not, what hope do I have of anything but the just & eternal torment my sin deserves? In other words, how can I be *justified* before God? Scripture is clear, we simply cannot obey enough to do it:

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. -Ro3.20

What is *justification*? It is the opposite of *condemnation*: being found guilty & therefore condemned to pay the penalty. On the other hand, *justification* is to be declared innocent, just, righteous in the eyes of God.

For sinners to be declared righteous, two things must happen:

1) Sin must be removed: forgiveness. (–) And 2) Righteousness must be added: holiness. (+)

Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. -Ps32. 1

In the Gospel we are told that God has chosen—GOD has chosen—not to look on our sin, but to look on the blood of His Son instead: the propitiation or the payment for our sin. The *Justified* are those who have been shown by God what God did for them: putting forth His Son as they payment for their salvation. Those who have been saved by God trust—not in themselves, their own works, sacrifices, church attendance, obedience to the law, etc., but—in Jesus’ Righteousness.

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. -Ro5.1

Have you ever used white-out? It’s kinda like that with God: the foundation for our *peace with God* is not our efforts to *white-out* our sins, but God’s efforts to *red-out* our sin by the blood of Christ at Calvary.

Justification—being declared righteous by God—is not a process you & I work through for the rest of our lives. Justification was completed in Christ at Calvary when He declared, “It is finished!” At the cross, Jesus paid the full payment for our sins, one *divine* payment to remove the penalty for all *human* sin.

But! We don’t just need our sins taken out, we need Righteousness deposited within. Otherwise, the very sin that drove us desperately to Christ for salvation would remain in us, leaving us in such death & misery. Our own experience attests to the fact that we need more than our own righteousness: we need Jesus’ Righteousness given to us: we need His Holy Spirit living within us, conquering our sinful appetite, and granting us the grace to walk by faith in obedience to our Father’s righteous Word.

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. -2Co5.21

The Father made the Righteous Son what He never would be in order to make sinful sons what we never could be: R. These are the Truths of the Gospel, the GN that completely wrecked the life of little German monk, and rebirthed his life to the glory of God in JC. These core Truths are what make the GN such GN!

we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. -Ga2.16

“Am I good enough yet?” I’ve been pastoring in the Church for nearly 17 years and yet I still find myself wrestling those very natural legalistic thoughts from time to time. The natural man in us is so strongly bent toward legalism, toward measuring up, toward pride, and our worrying whether or not we’ve measured up enough yet: “Am I good enough? I’m not good enough... I’m not... I’m not... I’m not...” So tell me, when I’m so focused on what I’m not or what I am, how much of my focus is on Christ who loved me & gave Himself for me? “Whoa is me, wretched man that I am. Who can save me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through JC my Lord!” The Gospel of Sola Gratia, of God’s Grace alone! The Righteous Judge is the very One who justifies us! Our Judge who finds us guilty of such heinous, wretched sin, is the very same Judge who took upon Himself our sin, suffering the punishment we deserve: our Judge has become our Justifier! By God’s grace, the same faith that He has given to convict me of my sin & unrighteousness is the very same faith that convinces me of my desperate need for Him to save me, to intervene on my behalf.

Beloved, what is the basis of your salvation? Why does God forgive your sin & impute/impart His Son’s Righteousness to you through His HS?

[we] are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus -Ro3.24 **BY HIS GRACE!**

For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. -Ro5.17 **On what basis am I given eternal life? HIS ABUNDANT GRACE!**

Why set it up this way?

so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. -Ep2.7 **Soli Deo Gloria!**

BENEDICTION: *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.* -2Co13.14