

# Grace Alone

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Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[ 0 : 00 ] 500 years since the Reformation, 1517. And to celebrate that, what we're going to do is, as well as having Reformer of the Week, we're going to look at five great gospel truths that re-emerged as a result of the Reformation.

They're called the five solas. It's a Latin word meaning alone. The five solas are this. These are Latin phrases, I'll explain them in a second. Sola gratia, solus Christus, sola scriptura, sola fide, sola de gloria.

So they mean grace alone, Christ alone, Scripture alone, faith alone, glory alone. And each week we're going to unpack one of these truths. So they emerged out of the Reformation. Now the question is, a good question is this, is what is the Reformation?

Like what are you actually talking about when you say the Reformation? So before I preach quickly on that passage just read, let me give you three minutes on what the Reformation is.

Right. 1517, Martin Luther, German monk slash sort of theological professor, nailed a piece of paper to a church door, had 95 things on it that he wanted to discuss, called the 95 Theses.

[ 1 : 11 ] Now back in the days, if you wanted to discuss something, you had theological differences with some of your colleagues, you'd write up your thoughts and you'd nail them to the church door. So when he's nailing them to the church door, that wasn't unusual.

The church door was like the bulletin board. So Luther wrote up his thoughts in Latin to debate with his academic colleagues. Latin was the academic language, right?

Some of his students, though, remember he was a professor, some of his students read it, loved it. Loved it. Galvanized by it. Took it. Translated it into English.

And started circulating his ideas. And how did they circulate it? It was a great cultural moment because something had just been invented. Anyone know what had just been invented? Printing press. Yes, printing press.

So his ideas just exploded around Germany, Switzerland, England, the rest of the world. The end result of just this thing, he's nailing a few ideas that he wanted to debate on this door at Wittenberg.

[ 2 : 11 ] It sparked the biggest reformation the church has ever seen. And it was the start of the Protestant church, which you're a part of. So that's the bare bones story. Dig slightly deeper, okay? So what did Luther write about that caused such a firestorm?

So we go back a few years before 1517. What led up to this? So the church was just the Catholic church around, right? That was it. And at this point in history, it was probably at its lowest point in terms of corruption and immorality.

For example, you could buy the position of bishop in a town, which you might think that doesn't sound very exciting. But remember, the church just ran the show. And being a bishop was a very powerful thing to be back in the day.

So you could just sort of buy that job. Another example, the thing that particularly angered Luther was the selling of indulgences. So what are indulgences?

Basically, you could pay money to the church and the pope would release your dead relatives from purgatory. So purgatory was a place in Catholic doctrine, which was a place of waiting and punishment before you got to go to heaven.

[ 3 : 20 ] It's not a Protestant doctrine. And so people were feeling really bad because their mom and dad were in purgatory for thousands of years or something. And they could write a check and the pope would make a statement and the person would be released from purgatory.

Big, big moneymaker for the church. And that was important because the church was building something in Rome. What were they building in Rome? Anyone? St. Peter's Basilica. Yes, they needed a lot of money for that.

So Luther became incredibly disillusioned by all this. And the 95 Theses actually were mostly about the indulgences, this practice. Because he just thought the whole idea was ridiculous.

Fast forward back to 1517. As Luther's ideas spread, the indulgence money dried up in Germany.

So the pope, unhappy about this, he sent somebody to Germany to debate Luther.

Now, the person he sent was one of his good men, his best man. And the guy's goal that the pope sent was not to defeat Luther in debate. The guy's goal was just to get Luther to admit that he disagreed with the pope, that the pope was wrong about something.

[ 4 : 32 ] Because if he could get Luther to do that, the church had grounds to excommunicate him. And it all went to plan. Had this big debate. Luther disagreed with the pope. He was excommunicated from the church.

Turned out, though, the Germans liked Luther more than they liked the pope. See, the pope was based in Rome, so he had all this sort of foreign influence in Germany.

And it wasn't just the peasants that liked Luther more than the pope. It was the feudal lords with their large armies. They preferred Luther as well. And so they sided with Luther and split with Rome.

And that's the roots of the Protestant church in Germany. Now, while all this was going on, Luther did some hard thinking. Hard, hard thinking. As he's thinking about indulgences, and he starts thinking about how people are saved.

How people come to know Jesus. How people get to be in a relationship with God. And he had this moment of awakening. And we'll talk about Luther in a couple of weeks in more detail. But he had this great awakening as he studied scripture.

[ 5 : 30 ] And he saw that scripture taught that we're justified by faith. We're made right with God by trusting in God's grace. And that wasn't the Catholic doctrine of the time.

The Catholic church taught that you're saved through a combination of God's grace and good works. And Luther studied the scripture and he said that's not what the Bible teaches. He said the Bible doesn't teach.

It's grace plus works. The Bible teaches we're saved solely by God's grace. And he wasn't saying that the Catholic church was denying grace. The Catholic church is huge on grace. He was saying he was denying.

He said the church was denying the sufficiency of God's grace. Hence the first solar. The first of the five we're studying. It's grace alone. And we're saved by grace alone.

Not grace plus works. Just grace. So while Luther was doing this thinking back in the days. And writing about it. And sending his thoughts out. Around the same time guys in Switzerland were doing the same.

[ 6 : 29 ] You've got guys called Zwingli and Calvin. Which we'll hear about over the next few weeks. They're doing the same kind of thinking. That country goes Protestant. Then you have the English situation.

Which was slightly messier. So the Reformation operated on two fronts. It operated on a religious front. People disagreeing with doctrine.

Operated on a political front. People did not want Rome influence in their country. And so that's the situation in England here. So you have Henry VIII. Desperately wants to divorce his wife.

The church won't give him a divorce. So he splits with Rome. Starts the Church of England. That's how the Anglican Church started. But what it did. Is that it opened the door.

For all this great good. Reformation theology to pour into. Which is why the Church of England. The Anglican Church is built on good reform theology. So there you go. That's the Reformation in a nutshell.

[ 7 : 27 ] Luther. Saw corruption. Hated the corruption. Developed into this huge theological shift in the church. But it wasn't like a shift into a new way of thinking.

It was just a return to just the gospel of the Bible. There you go. That's the Reformation. I won't repeat it. Remember it. So as I said.

Over time. These truths out of the Reformation. Sort of became distilled into five solas. That all connect with each other. And you can summarize them like this. How can a person be right with God?

Grace alone. How does this grace come to us? Christ alone. How do we find Christ? Scripture alone. What's our part in faith? What's our part in this? Faith alone.

Why does God do this? Glory alone. Now they're short phrases aren't they? Grace alone. Christ alone. Scripture alone. They're kind of like slogans. Now the downside of slogans is that they lack nuance.

[ 8 : 28 ] There's obviously a lot more to say about them than just two words. So each week we're going to unpack one. Now this week we're going to look at grace alone.

Ephesians 2. For by grace you have been saved through faith. This is not your own doing. It's a gift from God. Not a result from works.

Let's take a look at this. So grace alone. The first sola. Grace alone. This is kind of one of these passages you probably want to memorize I think. It's the heart of what we believe. It's the genius of Christianity and what separates it out from every other faith.

It says you have been saved by grace through faith. Okay. So grace. You've been saved by grace. What is grace? What does that word mean?

Scholars talk about this phrase. They use the phrase unmerited favor. It sounds a bit clinical I think. Grace. Grace is something. Is getting something wonderful you don't deserve.

[ 9 : 36 ] It's getting something wonderful you don't deserve. It's getting an A in an exam. Somebody else set the exam. You get the A. It's not that they passed along a few good answers for you.

To make up for the good answers you already had. No. They set the whole exam and you get credit for it. That's grace. And the passage says that we're saved by it.

So we're right with God. Not because of something that we've done. But because we can claim Jesus' good works and his life as ours.

And the passage has this beautiful way of explaining it. Just if you have your Bible open or your app open. A few verses before Ephesians 8 to 10. Verse 5 there has this quite unusual phrase.

It says this. We are seated up with Christ. We are seated with him in heavenly places. Now it's trying to explain what grace is. So what does that mean?

[ 10 : 36 ] We are seated up with Christ. We are seated with him in heavenly places. What does that mean? It's bizarre right? Clearly we're not literally in heaven right now. So what does it mean? Well this amazing statement.

It's talking about what it means to be united with Christ because of grace. So this means this. It means this. Because of grace. You are accepted like Jesus is accepted in heaven.

We're united with Jesus. It's like. Do you think Jesus is accepted in heaven? Do you think people are nice to him in heaven? You know? Do you think people think he's a good guy in heaven?

Is he respected? Is he honored? Is he in a good relationship with the Father? Of course. These are ridiculous questions. Of course. You are accepted by God as much as Christ is accepted by God in heaven.

We are so united with him. Everything that he has done becomes ours. You are accepted as his actions are. Not yours.

[ 11 : 41 ] Relationally with God, we get what his life deserves. Fantastic relationship with God. He set the test. We get the A.

That's grace. Now the other side of this, sort of the dark side of this, is this. This only happens. See, we get what Jesus deserves only because Jesus got what we deserve.

We get what Jesus deserves only because Jesus got what we deserve. So Jesus on the cross, he bore the weight of the sins of the world, the shame and the separation from God. God treated him like our lives deserve.

Jesus lost the Father on the cross. He was separated. Shame, the humiliation, the pain of it all. And I say that as a reminder of grace is not like this cool thing that God just sort of thought, I should just do that.

I'll just change my mind. I'll flick a switch and I'll just be cool with people. I'll just pretend they're Jesus. No. Like, there was a great cost to this. Back to the passage. You were saved by grace.

[ 12 : 46 ] All that stuff I just explained. Through faith. That's the next bit of the phrase. By grace. Through faith. Now you might go, ah, well, Aaron, look, there's something I have to do though. You said there's no works, but that's a work.

I have to do faith. I have to do that bit. And you do. You're right. You do. You have to trust. You have to trust. You have to trust in God. But we can't make the mistake of thinking that faith is this thing that I bring to the table, this thing that I generated out of the goodness of my heart.

It's not grace plus this really cool thing that I can produce, this wonderful faith. That's grace plus works, isn't it? So let me remind you of verse 8.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing. It's a gift from God. So your ability to respond to the grace of God, your faithful response, that is a gift from God as well. It's like being, this might sound unusual, but it's like being kissed awake. I don't know if you've ever had that experience. You've been kissed awake. You weren't looking for it. It happened to you.

[13:54] And now you're awake and it's wonderful. You weren't looking for God, but he gave you faith and he woke you up. Back to the passage. For by grace you have been saved through faith.

We've talked about that. And this is not your own doing. It's a gift from God. We just talked about that. Verse 9, not a result of works. Now why not works? Why not?

I think we like the idea of works. I think we like the idea of earning our way into heaven. I think we like to establish our own standings. You know, we like to like the right things on Facebook and Instagram.

We like to put the right things in our body. We like to be the right type of parents, etc., etc. You know, earning a way into heaven. I think that fits our cultural moment better than grace. Grace is difficult for us.

So why can't we establish our own works? Why don't works work? That's a good question. Imagine a plane goes down in the middle of the Atlantic.

[14:51] Three passengers survive and they're swimming. Let's call them Kermit, Ernie and Big Bird. Just because the idea of people dying in a plane crash is horrible.

And I kind of just want to take the edge off that slightly. So the survivors are swimming. They're like treading water. Kermit, Ernie and Big Bird. So they start swimming east to Spain.

It's a thousand miles. Kermit's an excellent swimmer, as you'd anticipate. Ernie, he's pretty good, but he's not in great shape. Big Bird, it's a disaster.

So much fluff, right? It's just tough. So they all start swimming. They're heading to Spain. They're going in the right direction. Big Bird, but he's gone, mate. He is gone in three minutes.

He is sunk to the bottom of the ocean. And it's really sad. But he's gone. Ernie, he's swimming his little heart out. He's trying to be pretty happy about it. But he's gone after about 40 minutes.

[15:50] Kermit, though. Kermit's an amphibian. He's fantastic. He's fantastic. 24 hours later, he's still swimming. He's still going. I think that's remarkable.

He's traveled 30 miles that day, but he's very tired. He has 970 miles to go. Is it going to happen? It's not going to happen, is it?

Why not? The distance is just too far. It's just too far. So why not work? That's the question. Why not work? The distance is just too great, folks. Even for the best of us, the distance between our goodness and God's goodness and holiness, it's just too far.

And we're just too flawed to make that up. In fact, we're not just flawed. Ephesians 2, earlier on in chapter 2, just before our verse that we read, it says this. You were dead in the trespasses and sins.

That's its assessment of you. Before grace got a hold of you, it says spiritually you were dead. Dead people can't help themselves. They can't pull themselves out of their dead situation.

[17:00] So grace has not taken you that were really pretty good and just enriching you spiritually a bit. No, grace is radical rescue from disaster. You were spiritually dead.

You were unable to help yourself. God woke you up. Okay, before we finish, let's look at verse 10 here. I love verse 10. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.

This is here to remind us that although we're not saved by works, the works do demonstrate that we are reborn. Where is workmanship, it says.

What does that mean? Well, I just think it's one of the most amazing ideas in the Bible. The Greek word for workmanship is *poema*, where we get the English word. Anyone? Poem.

Isn't that great? Do you see what it's saying here? God saves you not just to be useful to him, like this utility to get his stuff done.

[17:58] He saves you to make you beautiful, to make you an artwork. What is art? It's beautiful and it's valuable and it's an expression of the inner being of the person who produces it.

That's what you are. When Jesus died for you, it wasn't just so you know that you're loved and to make you into this useful person. He wants to create something amazing out of your life and something beautiful out of your life, something magnificent.

I'm not trying to be all poetic and, you know, soft. This is just what the Bible says here. You are God's poem.

You are his masterpiece. Peace. I'll finish here. Grace alone. Sola gratia. You're saved by this grace alone.

Saved. And God wants to make something magnificent with your life. God's grace is amazing, isn't it? It's amazing. Amen. Amen.