

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We reach the half-way mark of my look through the five *solas* that emerged from the Protestant Reformation of the 16th Century and now consider SOLA GRATIA (grace alone). This is a foundational cornerstone that is critical to a right and biblical understanding the profound theological concept of salvation which is solely a gift of God's unmerited favour. In 'Bondage of the Will' Martin Luther clearly stated it this way...



"But no man [or woman] can be thoroughly humbled until he [she] comes to know that his salvation is utterly beyond his own powers, devices, endeavours, will and works, and depends entirely on the choice, will and work of another, namely of God alone... that he has come close to grace, and can be saved"

Sola Gratia has significant implications for the Christian life and is two-pronged. First it fosters gratitude and worship as the magnitude of God's love become apparent despite the Christian's unworthiness, and secondly, it also liberates believers from the burden of striving to earn God's good pleasures through their own efforts, for they cannot.

To understand *Sola Gratia* it's useful to know what it is not. First, it is not 'grace alone, mostly' and second it isn't that God accomplished salvation objectively but not subjectively. What do I mean by these?

First, it doesn't mean God has mostly achieved our salvation and there's a little bit for us to do to complete the job. It is fully all God and therefore is grace alone, not grace plus you.

Second, it doesn't mean Jesus 'purchased' salvation separately from you in a subjective manner. The redeeming grace of Christ is instead always particular and personal. In other words salvation is not subjective in the purchase of a thing, but objectively redeems a particular people, in other words, believers in Christ Jesus.

Also, *Sola Gratia* doesn't mean that only part of your salvation comes from grace alone, but rather it spans all of salvation from

beginning to end. We cannot argue correctly that believers can come to Christ of their own free will and THEN God will then preserve them in the faith. Neither can we say that believers are drawn to faith by God and can THEN later lose their salvation. Both of these views allow human agency as a factor either before or after in determining salvation, and therefore allow 'works' into the equation. The grace of God, as John Newton wrote, is *Amazing Grace*, because it does not originate within us, but wholly stems from God's mercy in all eternity as evidenced when Paul states in Ephesians 1.v4 "*For he chose us in him [Christ] before the creation of the world*"

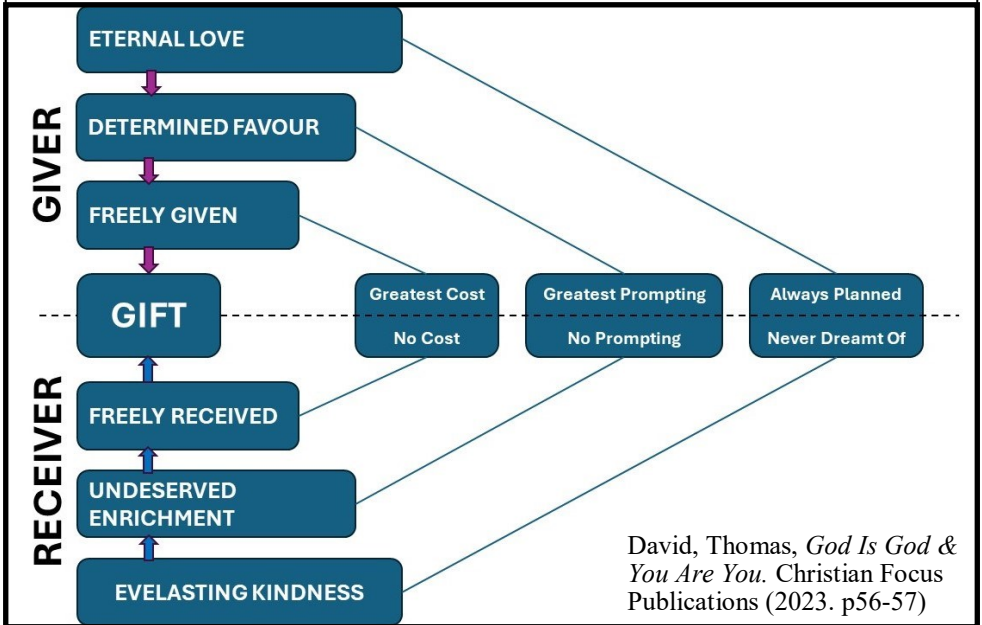
The principle of *Sola Gratia* also aligns tightly with the biblical teaching that salvation is by faith alone (*Sola Fide*—see March devotional), as faith is the means by which believers receive the gift of grace.

The word grace can mean a prayer before a meal and also be a given name. Gratia in Latin as well as meaning grace can be read as 'thanks', hence the derivation *gracias* means thank you in Spanish. But it is toward the Greek word for grace (favour/kindness) we should look, *charis* and its related term, **charisma** which means **free gift**. The emphasis on it being a gift highlights two crucial parts of the **gift of grace**, namely that **there must be a giver and also a receiver**.

At the time of writing preparation for this devotional letter, in my personal reading time I was engrossed in a recently purchased book by Thomas Davis, *God is God & You are You*. It's a book about sharing faith, but interestingly the evening before typing up this piece I read the fourth chapter, titled 'Grace is Grace'. God is nothing if not providential in His relationship to us, often delivering us what we need, just when we need it. So it was with this chapter. Thomas uses a diagram to capture the explanation of grace, and I shamelessly use his words to explain said diagram, which as I say is providential and a blessing of the Lord...

'Grace is a gift. It is from God, to us. For the receiver, it involves no payment; for the giver, it requires the greatest payment. For the receiver, we offer no prompting; for the giver, it is initiated by the greatest prompting. God's determination to show us favour results in our undeserved enrichment, His eternal love makes us the recipients of His everlasting kindness, Our endless

neediness is met by His amazing grace. Grace is never earned, Grace is never bought. Grace is never deserved. Grace is Grace.



And so you see, God has accomplished everything necessary for your salvation, and that salvation is based on His sheer love. From beginning to end, from your election to conversion and onto heaven, salvation is wholly and only by God's grace alone.

In a sense it is one of the sweetest, most fragrant of doctrines of the Christian faith, as the Father elects a people for the Son, the Son merits salvation through the cross for those elect people, and the Holy Spirit applies said salvation to that people. This is the whole will of the Godhead! The Trinity where God decreed salvation CONCERNING YOU, Christ Jesus the Son earned it FOR YOU, and Holy Spirit applied TO YOU.

Ephesians 2.v1-9 speaks well of the nature of humanity and God's intervention by grace into the disobedience and brokenness of our lives...

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are

following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. **But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ** even when we were dead in transgressions—it is **by grace you have been saved**. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, **in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace**, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. **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.

Martin Luther's word offer a response to those who come to Christ...
'What shall we say then? How can we respond to such great salvation? The only possible way is to fall on our knees before our gracious God in humble awe at His eternal purpose, We ought to cry with thankful tongues, "Lord, why was I a guest"'

Some Christians may grapple with questions of faith, of salvation and assurance, but in the midst of any doubt lies the timeless message of *Sola Gratia* as a beacon of light, guiding us all back to the heart of the Gospel, the unmerited favour of God bestowed upon sinners through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Your servant in Christ, *Pastor Mike* (Minister, GMC)

ANNUAL STATED MEETING—SUNDAY 12th MAY AFTER WORSHIP

Please join us for our report on 2023 at GMC and plans for the ongoing work of our church in 2024 and beyond. Any specific questions you might have can be sent ahead of time to the office, and comments will always be in order.

IT'S YOUR CHURCH—please fellowship with us and see what we're about.

Headline Financials for 2023

TOTAL INCOMING RESOURCES:	£117,411
TOTAL RESOURCES EXPENDED:	£127,962
DEFICIT:	(- £10,551)

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