

## Five Solas: Grace alone

*Scripture alone, Christ alone, faith alone, grace alone, and glory to God alone* – called the Five Solas - is a helpful summary for knowing God and ourselves. In the coming months, it would be helpful to look at each of these five *solas* briefly (“sola” means “only” in Latin).

The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. <sup>7</sup>It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, <sup>8</sup>but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers...

- Deuteronomy 7:6-8

### It is because the LORD loves

In order to understand the *Solas* we must realise that *Christ alone, faith alone* and *grace alone* are like three strands of a single rope. They bind together so tightly that to unravel any of them would unravel all of them. Grace alone refers to God taking us from being in Adam to being in Christ, thereby justifying us and adopting us into His family. We didn't cooperate with God on this – otherwise this would not be grace – but from the riches of His free, unmerited kindness He has done it.

### Unfolding covenants of grace

The Bible unfolds in a series of covenants between God and His people, such that He always relates to His people through covenants. Generally, in a covenant there are two parties, promises, conditions and penalties. In Genesis, the word “covenant” is not used (although see Hosea 6:7), yet God had promised blessing to Adam and Eve conditional on their obedience to Him. Thus, it was a Covenant of Works.

Sadly, they broke the covenant. Despite this, God did not abandon humanity, and throughout history He has made further covenants with His people, such as through Noah, Abraham, Moses and David. Each of these successive covenants was on the basis of His grace, until the final covenant, or New Covenant, in Christ Jesus, His Son, whereby He freely offers to sinners life and salvation, and gives the seal of His Spirit upon them.

### The love of God creates; not responds

Another way of describing God's covenant of grace is according to love. In fact, in the verses above, Moses explains to Israel that God did not set His love upon them because of anything within themselves, but He loved them because He loved them, and had promised to bless them. In 1518, Martin Luther wrote twenty-eight statements for the Heidelberg Disputation. The final one stated:

The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it. The love of man comes into being through that which is pleasing to it.

In contrast to human love which reacts, God's love creates or initiates. We don't do something that triggers off the love of God for us, because all that we bring to Him is the muddiness of our sin. In this way, grace is truly grace, and not conditional.

God's grace is received through faith in all that Christ Jesus is, and has done.

### Remove the stone heart; give a heart of flesh

The impossible nature of grace is seen in Ezekiel 36. There, God promises to do what we could never do for ourselves, nor nobody else could ever do for us: remove our natural heart of stone, and give us a heart of flesh (v.26). In addition, He promises to “sprinkle clean water on you” and cleanse from all uncleanness (v.25), and put His Spirit with us (v.27). Such radical work could only ever be grounded in His grace.

### The fresh air of grace

In many ways, grace is unfair, and therefore it often offends. In the Lord Jesus’ parable, *the Labourers in the Vineyard*, in Matthew 20:1-16, some of the worker begrudged the Master His goodness towards some of the other workers.

Such a response reveals a legalistic heart. We naturally think that we must do something to earn God’s favour, but legalistic thinking is stifling, and it twists the character of God. The symptoms of legalism can be different in different people, ranging from a proud superiority to a brow-beaten defeatism. Yet, either way, the heart of the problem is the same: God will accept me, or not accept me, based upon my performance or having done certain things.

The grace of God in Christ Jesus frees us from such bondage and comes as fresh air into our souls. As Paul makes abundantly clear: “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 (Eph. 2:8-9).”

### Grace undercuts pride

It ought to be obvious that grace undercuts pride. What place can there be for arrogance or boasting before God, or others? Luther wrote *The Bondage of the Will* in 1525 in which he said:

God has promised his grace, with certainty, to the humbled... a man cannot be thoroughly humbled till he knows that his salvation lies altogether beyond and out of the reach of his own strength, counsels, desires, will, and works: till he depends absolutely upon the counsel, will, and work of another — that is, of God only.

### Grace from first to last

John Newton had it right:

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound  
that saved a wretch like me!*

He was additionally right to say that the God’s grace not only brings us to faith in Christ and is the grounds of our salvation, but His grace also grows us to become more like Christ:

*That grace first taught my heart to fear,  
and grace my fears relieved.*

Titus 2:11-12 explains further how the grace of God that saves, also instructs: “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.” In this way, we need never fear God’s grace, for such is His power and goodness that grace leads to obedience and holiness, and properly understood, never to more sin.

In fact, God’s ongoing grace is the only guarantee that we will ever continue in the Christian life. Again, Newton was right to see that His grace sustains us every day, until we will see Christ face to face in heaven:

*His grace has brought me safe thus far,  
and grace will lead me home.*