

## Week 4 - Sola Gratia

### By Grace Alone

#### Learning Objectives

- See how we are delivered from deserved judgment only by God's grace.
- See how God's gracious character helps us live humbly and confidently in our identity as his sons and daughters.

#### Exodus 34:4-7 (NIV)

<sup>4</sup>So Moses chiseled out two stone tablets like the first ones and went up Mount Sinai early in the morning, as the Lord had commanded him; and he carried the two stone tablets in his hands. <sup>5</sup>Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. <sup>6</sup>And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup>maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."

This is the second time God had Moses cut these tablets. The first pair was thrown on the ground and broken in outrage at Israel's idolatry of the golden calf (Exodus 32).

? What attributes of God's character do you see revealed here?

*Possible answer: We see God's compassion, grace, kindness, forbearance, lovingkindness, forgiveness, justice, wrath, anger.*

? How is God interacting with "the guilty"? What kind of reaction do you have to that?

*Possible answer: God interacts with the guilty by promising their punishment. However, as we see Paul say in the book of Romans, it is the kindness of God that we see in Scripture that should bring us to seek reconciliation with Him: "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?" (Romans 2:4, NIV)*

#### Optional transition:

Hold onto the concept of grace & justice, and let's see how it plays out in Scripture. Inevitably the tension that seemingly exists in God's graciousness and justice is reconciled on the cross, but it's helpful to reflect a bit on our own perspectives before landing there.

### Jonah 4:1-4,11 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. <sup>2</sup> He prayed to the Lord, “Isn’t this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. <sup>3</sup> Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

<sup>4</sup> But the Lord replied, “Is it right for you to be angry?” ... <sup>11</sup> “And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”

Previously in Jonah: Jonah was told by God to go to Nineveh and call the city to repent, but instead intentionally went in the opposite direction. After a three-day stopover in the belly of a great fish, he went to Nineveh; after the city responded with repentance, God relented of the punishment for their evil.

**?** What is Jonah’s conflict with God?

*Possible answer: Jonah’s conflict was with regard to God’s kindness in promising mercy to the people of Nineveh if they repented. This angered Jonah because he had the expectation of God’s “not leaving the guilty unpunished.” It is, oddly, God’s mercy that upsets Jonah because he isn’t able to see how an all-powerful, just, wrathful God who hates sin could pardon those who relish it.*

**?** How do you experience opposition or resistance to God’s grace, either your own or that of others?

*Possible answer: Answers will vary depending on personal experience, but, as Tim Keller notes in Prodigal God, there are far more older brothers than younger brothers (from the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32) in the church today. As an older brother, I struggle with God’s mercy and kindness to unbelievers and toward people who “trample underfoot the blood of Christ.”*

### Optional transition:

Let’s see how the dynamic of how people resist or oppose grace plays out in the New Testament with Jesus.

### John 1:9-14 (NIV)

<sup>9</sup> The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup> He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. <sup>11</sup> He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. <sup>12</sup> Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— <sup>13</sup> children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

<sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

? How does it encourage you that Jesus “came from the Father, full of grace and truth”?

*Possible answer: To see that our Lord and Savior was sent from the Father full of grace and truth gives me confidence that I’m designed to receive his promises (salvation, justification, adoption, forgiveness, etc).*

? What does it look like to refuse to receive Jesus?

*Possible answer: We refuse life. We refuse light. We refuse adoption as God’s children. We refuse eyes to see the Glory of God as revealed in Christ Jesus.*

? What does becoming children of God imply for us?

*Possible answer: We are brought into a loving relationship with the creator, sustainer, and owner of the universe as God’s children. We are beholders of the Son’s Glory and walk in the light of that Glory.*

Optional transition:

As we continue, we’re going to reflect on why we need to receive grace and what the implications of receiving grace are.

### **Ephesians 2:1-10 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup>As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, <sup>2</sup>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 disobedient. <sup>3</sup>All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. <sup>4</sup>But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup>made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. <sup>6</sup>And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— <sup>9</sup>not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup>For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

? What does this passage teach us about grace and the human condition?

*Possible answer: Grace that saves is a free gift given to humans who were as good as dead in their transgressions (sinfulness).*

? How can we practically live in grace in our daily lives?

*Possible answer: Recognizing salvation is by grace and not by works frees us up to serve, live, and work from a position of security in Christ. We are made new in salvation for the sake of carrying out God's will & good works that are prepared in advance for us to live out.*

? What does not living in grace offer? What does God's grace, in Jesus, offer to us?

*Possible answer: Not living in grace left us gratifying the deadly desires of our flesh (might be a good time to revisit Jonah's morbid perspective on grace) while grace offers us life in Christ. We become seated with Christ in the heavenly realms and we receive the incomparable riches of kindness in Jesus.*

? What should be our response to God's grace?

*Possible answer: To live as God's handiwork, saved and made new in Christ's gracious salvation without boasting (humility), and to do the good works that he has prepared us for.*

You know you don't understand God's grace when you:

- Live with a vague sense of God's disapproval
- Feel sheepish bringing your needs before Him when you've just failed Him
- Think of His grace as something that makes up the difference between the best you can do and what He expects from you
- Feel you deserve an answer to prayer because of your hard work and sacrifice
- Assume that you've sinned so many times that you've used up all your credit of forgiveness
- Feel more confident before God if you've been "faithful" with your quiet times, prayer, witnessing, etc. \*Can't honestly say that you see yourself as "blameless" in His eyes
- Fear that the day may not go as well as expected because you missed your quiet time
- Assume you can do something to make Him love you more or less."

*Jerry Bridges, Transforming Grace: Living Confidently in God's Love*

### For Discussion and Accountability

? From Jerry Bridges' quote, what are some of the ways you are resisting grace?

? What are the good works (Ephesians 2:10) that God has called you to that you are currently putting off or ignoring?