

One of the truths that has impacted *me* the most in the past decade has been the grace of God. I used to sing about it, acknowledge it, and believe in it; but years ago His grace moved from being a concept to a bedrock foundation in my life.

I saw that this actually matters, not just a principle to be studied- but a way of viewing the world that potentially changes everything.

Grace has been changing lives for a long time;

The Apostle Paul, when reflecting on his life and conversion and his ministry said this”

“I thank Him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because He judged me faithful, appointing *me* to His service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord **overflowed** for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” (1 Timothy 1:12–14)

The overflowing grace of God in Paul’s life, not only converted him from unbelief to faith, the overflowing grace of God also gave him strength and fuelled a lifetime of service.

As we’ve been seeing in the book of Acts as we’ve been studying it for 2017 Paul was a man used by God to spread the good news of far and wide, and also clearly articulating the need for God’s grace for those living the Christian life.

Another person who was profoundly changed by the grace of God was a young German monk called Martin Luther. He was a loyal and faithful German monk and seminary professor, ordained into ministry in 1507 in _____, Germany. He was a very bright man, a student of the Bible as well as a teacher of it.

After a conversion experience he began reading the bible with fresh eyes.

He saw that God’s righteousness was unattainable through works, but was given as a gift to those who had faith in Jesus.

In his private study he began to see that what he had been taught, and what his church was continuing to teach was different than what the Bible plainly said about salvation. Rather than seeing a complicated series of steps and processes and merit and works that progressed a man or woman closer and closer to God and His saving power - He saw that salvation is by grace, and grace alone.

They didn’t line up, and he had to do something about it.

Martin Luther, realised that he could no longer keep quiet about the differences that he saw between what the Bible was telling him, and what his church was teaching others.

Oct 31 he nailed 95 objections to the door of the church in Wittenberg in hopes of starting a public discussion about the ancient teachings of the bible in contrast with the current practices of the church.

The church was a mess, and he had a message that he thought could fix things. Most historians use that event to mark the start of what we call the Protestant Reformation.

That period of time was very complicated some things were done well, and some things were done poorly. Faith and politics were very intertwined and I think we can all agree that not everything was handled well. Doctrinal mistakes, ethical disasters. Protestantism made some positive and some negative marks on the European landscape and the world scene since then. The point of today’s sermon isn’t to analyse the movement as a whole - but to look at its 5 key tenants; the doctrinal distinctives that sparked and sustained the movement.

Historical Reference -

October 2017 is an important anniversary.

Soon it will be the 500th anniversary of when

Last week we looked at Sola Scriptura (Scripture Alone) which states that since the Bible is God's very word, its authority is unrivalled.

Today we are going to look at Sola Gratia (Grace Alone) which states that Salvation and rescue from sin is not accomplished by our effort or works, but by God's kind initiative.

What is Grace?

God's kind initiative in salvation.

In this morning's readings from Titus and Ephesians we are carried along on an emotional journey as Paul describes us as "the walking dead", full of transgressions and sins, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. (Titus 3:3) Not knowing God, and not wanting to know God, unable to please Him and unwilling to please Him.

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by **grace** you have been saved — and raised us up with Him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For 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." (Ephesians 2:4–9, ESV)

God chooses to love rebels, and He brings us into His family.

Grace is the generosity of God towards abundantly selfish people.

the love of God shown to the unlovely
the peace of God given to the restless
sovereign favour to the ill-deserving

God's Unmerited Favour

1. God's:

1. Triune God is one of Grace

2. Unmerited:

1. It is undeserved - we don't do anything to deserve God's grace
2. He doesn't give it to us because we are wonderful, but because He is wonderful.
3. It's not because of any good in the past, present or promised in the future.
- 4.

3. Favour:

1. it tells us how God feels about those who receive His grace.
 1. *Charis* is a warm word, it isn't clinical.
2. He accepts them and approves of them; He sees them in a favourable light.
3. They are the opposite of disgraced; they are graced.
4. Grace is the love, beauty and favour of God acting on behalf of His people
 1. lets not think of it purely in terms of decrees, or or mandates, or statements from a throne. This is the loving Father making a way for His wayward sons and daughters to come into His arms.
 2. The illustration that Alice King chose to draw on the chalkboard for today's sermon is based on the prodigal son story that Jesus tells in Luke 15 - it is a good choice, because that captures some of the heart/emotion behind grace.
 3. Even someone with very limited Bible knowledge sees that image or hears that story and knows "that father loves that son"

What are the substitutes of grace / what are some wrong ways to think about Grace?

Roman Catholic view

don't get me wrong, the Catholic Church in Martin Luther's day didn't deny grace, they acknowledged that it is an important aspect of Christianity, and that the Bible speaks positively about it.

Grace + Works (this is a brief overview, not an exhaustive analysis - for a more thorough look I'd point you towards Greg Allison, Norm Geisler or James White)

Christians in the 1500s were asked to believe, to belong and to obey, and to work hard for their salvation. They needed merit (good acts) to make up for their sins. any sins that weren't cancelled out by merit at the point of someone's death, would have to be burned off in a place called purgatory.

The problem was: how do you get enough merit in your lifetime to cancel out the bad things that you've done?

The solution was - that the catholic church had this thing called "The Treasury of Merit" where the unused merit of saints went when they died. they had a surplus of good works, and if you participated in the sacraments of the church OR bought a certificate called an indulgence, some of that surplus went to you, and you would have less debt, and therefore less time in purgatory. So salvation is a combination of grace, plus works, plus merit.

And they still teach that to this day. It was not recanted, nor repented of.
You can get one down the street today.

That is the most obvious wrong way to think about grace:
that it is one ingredient among many.

but here is an error that might hit closer to home for Calvary Cork:

Grace is only for salvation, not for Christian Living

We totally affirm that salvation is by Grace Alone, it is entirely God's power and initiative, I am a Christian because of God's grace, I am Saved by Grace.

"Amazing Grace how sweet the sound
That Saved a wretch like me!"

But did you know that God's Amazing Grace does more than just save us?
it seems like modern Christianity's most closely guarded secret.

most people give the impression that it was Jesus's blood sweat and tears that got us saved in the first place, so its gotta be our blood sweat and tears that keeps us saved.

This false belief brings people into a performance oriented Christian life
we are only as good as our last performance, and that is exhausting.

A salesman is only as good as their last deal;
an actress is only as good as her last role;
an athlete is only as good as their last win.

So it's easy to think a Christian is only as good as their last quiet time, or victory over sin, or outreach opportunity taken

Right now: some of us are feeling quite good about ourselves, because we had a good quiet time this morning, or we have been having them this week; we've been reading a chapter a day of the Bible (sola scriptura, right?) we even got to share the gospel with someone the other day, so we are doing great! church on Sunday is like a victory lap for you! you're just hoping someone will ask you how you are doing so you can say "great!"

For others of us, we fail to live up to other people's standards, and even our own standards sometimes and it is crushing and a defeating experience for many.

Some people are here today, filled with guilt, shame and fear. expecting no blessing, because of their behaviour. They're in the sin bin.
Some people are here excited, they've done great that week. They is expecting blessing, because of their behaviour.

What both of them are saying / believing is this:
When I am good, God loves me more. When I am bad, God loves me less.
That is wrong, and that is devoid of grace.
Remember that it is God's Unmerited Favour.

the scandal of grace is that we are accepted by God because of Grace.
we aren't just saved by grace, we also stand in Grace.

As Sam Alberry puts it: "the wonder of grace is that we are actually only and always as good as our Saviour. That, right there, is security. We can rejoice by day and sleep by night."

we're able to get off the hamster wheel of performance and rest in God's grace. His unmerited favour.

The overwhelming focus of the bible is not the work of the redeemed,
but the work of the Redeemer.

How do we experience Grace in our lives?

First and foremost; you must believe in Jesus.
and we invite you to do that.

resist pride, and embrace humility
"But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6, ESV)