

An Ocean of Grace – Eph 2:8-9

The Strong Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ #10

Introduction – The Reformation took the Church, wandering in the desert of works, and threw us into the ocean of God’s grace and mercy. Although there were many incidents that revealed the dry kindling of a Church that had terribly muddled the Gospel, on October 31, 500 years ago, Luther’s nailing of his 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg lit a fire that quickly transformed the world. It must be admitted that the Reformation which we are celebrating was anything but tidy (and we are still cleaning up messes from it). Nevertheless, the Reformation of the gospel of justification by grace alone through faith alone was a great work of the Holy Spirit, worthy of our glad-hearted praise, remembrance, and celebration.

The Amazing Grace of God – We were completely, hopelessly lost in our spiritual death – “...but God.” God, who is rich in mercy (rich: fully capable of paying for all of our transgressions/debts – and mercy: steadfast covenant love, sensitivity, and actions of lovingkindness), did something about it. He did so because He loved us with a great love and He did so even when we were His sworn enemies, dead in our transgressions and sins. In that state of death, He made us alive, and this is the doctrine of the new birth. The entire work of our salvation and our new life is by grace (v5b, 8-9) – God’s unmerited favor upon us. It is all a gift and there is absolutely no part of it, including our act of believing, upon which we can boast. If there was, then our flesh would go there and boast away and the display of the gracious glory of God would be lost.

He Loved Us – Why did He love us? People often ask why He did not love the non-elect, but that question is actually easier to answer (consider Eph 2:1-3). The question that is beyond us is why He loved us – and why with so great a love? Why me and why not someone else? This is a mystery (Deut 29:29) and God says that we are incapable of knowing; we would have to be God Himself to fully understand (Rom 11:33-36).

An Extravaganza of Grace – God did this and is doing this for a reason. He wants to show forth “*the exceeding riches of His grace*” in this Gospel Age and in all ages to come. He wants to show off His grace “*to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places*” (Eph 3:10). He wants you and everything in His creation connected to you (and everything is) to see how glorious His grace truly is – and He wants this to go on forever.

Tota et Sola Gratia – Salvation is all grace and only grace. It is all grace and no wages. It is all gift and nothing earned or added. It is all grace “*lest anyone should boast.*” The only wage we can earn is our damnation (Rom 6:23). Condemnation is being fair and just. Damnation is God showing no partiality. This is because “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Rom 3:23). When God pours out His favor on a sinner, “*the free gift of God*” is not like a parent choosing one of His children and not another. It is more like a governor pardoning one on death-row. The real problem with God saving is with God *saving anyone*. The answer given to this problem is the Cross. In the Cross, God is just and the One who justifies (Rom 3:26).

There is a terrible horror in the first part of Romans 6:23 (“*the wages of sin is death*”). Death is the natural result of sin (Gen 2:17). Death is not a ceasing to exist; it is not annihilation. Death is something one can abide in (1 John 3:14). It is also death to God and to Truth (1 Cor 2:14). Even when Christians sin, there is a sense of death, a separation from the power and communion with God. Outside of Christ however, this wage is eternal torment.

Tota et Sola Fide – Salvation is by the instrument of all faith and only faith. Romans was the book that brought Luther to life in Christ and Rom 1:17 was the fulcrum that God used to overthrow the shackles of condemnation in which Luther lay bound. The gift of salvation is apprehended and received by faith alone. “*The just shall live by faith.*” This is the doctrine of forensic justification and the work of justification at a point in time. One moment a man is unjustified and the next moment he is justified. And when he crosses over into the land of the righteous, the faith that enabled him to cross that border encompasses all of life, by necessity. It is a righteousness “*from faith to faith.*” Life is inaugurated by faith, it is continued by faith, and it culminates in faith – from first to last. But this is no sentimental appeal to “*just have faith.*” Faith requires an object; faith in Jesus Christ. Another way of looking at this is that faith is the natural and ordinary response to the perceived faithfulness of God. When God and His Word are seen as faithful, then faith cannot be kept from appearing (Rom 10:17).

And so... - The Reformation celebration isn’t about an event as much as it is about a message – a message to be believed or not to be believed. Back to our text. Salvation is by *grace alone* through *faith alone* – in the finished work of Jesus Christ and all the Word declares that happened in His work. And 500 years later He is still declared – to you. The Word of God draws two responses and two responses only. They are the response of faith (Rom 10:17) and of unbelief (John 10:25-26). It is always this way or that way. Believe the Word of God or believe the word of man. Faith or unbelief. Believe Jesus or refuse to believe Jesus.