

Part Three: The End of *Sola Gratia* —"By Grace Alone"

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Sola gratia was one of the Five Solas of the Reformation. They were: 1. *Sola Scriptura*—"By Scripture Alone," 2. *Sola fide*—"by faith alone," 3. *Sola gratia*—"by grace alone," 4. *Solus Christus* or *Solo Christo*—"Christ alone" or "through Christ alone," 5. *Soli Deo Gloria*—"glory to God alone." Over time, the Five Solas have been distorted or completely abandoned by many Protestant and Evangelical churches. In this article, we will see what *sola gratia* means, where it is taught in the Bible, and see some examples of how it has been abandoned.

In Ephesians 2:8-9, the apostle Paul writes, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." Clearly, this Scripture is teaching that we are saved by grace and not by works. That is *sola gratia*, by grace alone. There are many who teach that we are saved by grace. But their grace is laced with works. It is not grace alone. This is not just a dogma of Catholics; it is now the teaching of many Evangelicals and other Protestants. Since the way we are saved is at the heart of the Gospel, the straying from *sola gratia* corrupts the very Gospel itself.

Definitions

"Grace" in the New Testament is translated from the Greek word *charis*. *Charis* is related to the verb *chairō*, which means "rejoice," "be glad," and is even employed as a greeting, such as "hail." Among the many ways it is used, the noun *charis* can refer to looks or bearing, that is, physical beauty (of a person or thing) or beautiful way of doing things. It can also refer to favor shown to someone. It can refer to the recipient's sense of the favor received—thankfulness or gratitude. And it can refer to the favor itself—either as given or received: e.g. "I did him a favor because I like him," and, "I received the favor with delight."

Notice that *charis* is not worked for. It is given or received freely. Thus, when the Bible says, "For by grace are ye saved...", it is saying that we are saved by an unearned favor.

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Salvation by Grace Alone

By its very definition, grace cannot be accompanied by our works. If God saves us by grace, He is doing it by unearned favor, not as a reward for our works. When we receive salvation by grace, we receive it as a favor we have not worked for. Paul is writing of this concept in Romans 11:6: "And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work." In other words, as a means of giving or receiving something, grace and works are mutually exclusive. God is not looking at our works when He gives us salvation. Our works have nothing to do with our receiving salvation. Thus, according to both the definition of the word and its use in Scripture, grace must mean grace alone—*sola gratia*.

The Catholic Church's Position

Despite the fact that it is both self-evident and stated in the Bible that grace is grace alone without works, there have been and are plenty of Protestant and Evangelical theologians, some of them quite well-known, who teach the opposite. Before giving some examples of these, it might be helpful if we look at what the Roman Catholic Church teaches. It would be far too lengthy to discuss this in detail—Catholic dogma is anything but simple and straightforward. But I believe that looking at a few quotes from the Catholic Church will enable us to draw an accurate and fair conclusion about whether the Roman Catholic Church believes in salvation by grace alone minus any works on our part.



If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be anathema

Council of Trent, Canons on Justification, Canon 9

Baptism is the first and chief sacrament of forgiveness of sins because it unites us with Christ, who died for our sins and rose for our justification, so that "we too might walk in newness of life,"

Catechism of the Catholic Church, par. 977

Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, we can then merit for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, par. 2010

Christ instituted the sacrament of Penance for all sinful members of his Church: above all for those who, since Baptism, have fallen into grave sin, and have thus lost their baptismal grace and wounded ecclesial communion. It is to them that the sacrament of Penance offers a new possibility to convert and to recover the grace of justification. The Fathers of the Church present this sacrament as 'the second plank (of salvation) after the shipwreck which is the loss of grace.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, par. 1446

These points are explained a little more thoroughly and technically in the following:

Christian faith teaches us that the Incarnate Son of God by His death on the cross has in our stead fully satisfied God's anger at our sins, and thereby effected a reconciliation between the world and its Creator. Not, however, as though nothing were now left to be done by man, or as though he were now restored to the state of original innocence, whether he wills it or not; on the contrary, God and Christ demand of him that he make the fruits of the Sacrifice of the Cross his own by personal exertion and co-operation with grace, by justifying faith and the reception of baptism. It is a defined article of the Catholic Faith that man before, in, and after justification derives his whole capability of meriting and satisfying, as well as his actual merits and satisfactions, solely from the infinite treasure of merits which Christ gained for us on the Cross (cf. Council of Trent, Sess. VI, cap. xvi; Sess. XIV, cap. viii).

The second kind of satisfaction, that namely by which temporal punishment is removed, consists in this, that the penitent after his justification gradually cancels the temporal punishments due to his sins, either *ex opere operato*, by conscientiously performing the penance imposed on him by his confessor, or *ex opere operantis*, by self-imposed penances (such as prayer, fasting,

almsgiving, etc.) and by bearing patiently the sufferings and trials sent by God; if he neglects this, he will have to give full satisfaction (*satispassio*) in the pains of purgatory (cf. Council of Trent, Sess. XIV, can. xiii, in Denzinger, n. 923).

Joseph Pohle, "Merit." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 10
(New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911)
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10202b.htm>

In summary, Roman Catholic doctrine says that Jesus Christ gained an infinite treasure of merit for us but that they become ours only when we cooperate with grace by doing good works. Further, temporal punishments for sins can also be cancelled by good works. If this is not done, then satisfaction must be done in purgatory. Thus, even though they say that the merits were originally gained by Christ, according to Catholicism, our good works are necessary to our salvation. Thus, the Catholic Church teaches that salvation is obtained, not by grace alone without works, but by grace accompanied by works.

Some might say that the Roman Catholic position is what is taught in the Bible by James when he says, "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James 2:24). In fact, James does not at all mean to say that we must perform works to receive salvation. For more information, please read my article, "Does James Contradict Paul?" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/jamesworksqa.htm>).

The Position of the Reformers

In contrast to the Catholic position, Martin Luther (1483-1546) wrote,



The first and chief article is this: Jesus Christ, our God and Lord, died for our sins and was raised again for our justification (Romans 4:24-25). He alone is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29), and God has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6). All have sinned and are justified freely, without their own works and merits, by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, in His blood (Romans 3:23-25). This is necessary to believe. This cannot be otherwise acquired or grasped by any work, law or merit. Therefore, it is clear and certain that this faith alone justifies us ... Nothing of

this article can be yielded or surrendered, even though heaven and earth and everything else falls (Mark 13:31).

Martin Luther, "The Smalcald Articles," *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2005) 289, Part two, Article 1

In the *Small Catechism* prepared by Luther, we find this:

Of Sanctification.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; one holy Christian Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

What does this mean?—Answer.

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith; in which Christian Church He forgives daily and richly all sins to me and all believers, and at the last day will raise up me and all the dead, and will give to me and to all believers in Christ everlasting life. This is most certainly true.

Notice that Luther describes sanctification by first addressing our helplessness. He then speaks of sanctification as the work of the Holy Spirit, who "sanctified and kept me in the true faith" and "sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith," thus also associating sanctification with what the Holy Spirit leads us to believe. Our own works are nowhere in evidence here.

On a side note, I want to point out that Luther's idea of sanctification is so closely tied to justification that he has been accused of not properly distinguishing the two. Of Luther, John Wesley asked, "And who was more ignorant of the doctrine of sanctification, or more confused in his conception of it?" These paragraphs are from *Martin Luther On Sanctification* by Elmer L. Towns:

This misunderstanding of Luther's concept of sanctification might have arisen because he uses Paul's first-century message of grace as opposed to works to attack legalistic salvation found in the sixteenth-century church. Because of Luther's emphasis on grace and liberty, many might accuse him of a weak concept of sanctification or an antinomian basis for the Christian Life.

Actually, Luther's concept of sanctification is difficult to understand without looking at his doctrine of justification. Both doctrines for Luther are grounded in the Person of God. "But the fact is, that for Luther, justification and sanctification, although distinguishable in theory, are quite inseparable in factors" (Philip S. Watson, *Let God Be God*, p. 171). Luther goes on to state, "Justification and sanctification are related like cause and effect and from the presence of the effect we may conclude that the cause is at work" (Ewald M. Plass [ed.], *What Luther Says*, p. 723).

Where many people try to add something to grace is in their misconception of sanctification. They may understand justification as being by grace alone, but then they think the Christian must sanctify himself by keeping the law. There are times that Luther can also sound like this, but read here how he defines the law for a Christian:

First, we must receive the Holy Spirit, who enlightens and sanctifies us so that we can begin to do the Law, i.e., to love God and our neighbor. Now, the Holy Ghost is not obtained by the Law, but by faith in Christ. In the last analysis, to do the Law means to believe in Jesus Christ. The tree comes first, and then come the fruits.

Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*
(Translated by Theodore Graebner, December 1998, Kindle
Locations 1424-1426)

For Luther, the Holy Spirit sanctifies us and the law is to believe in Jesus Christ. Notice the similarity to 1 John 3:23-24: "And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us." This is salvation by grace alone accomplished freely by the Holy Spirit.

Commenting on Galatians 2:15-16, John Calvin (1509-1564) wrote,

When Paul says that we cannot be justified by the works of the law, he means that if we claim to merit grace and salvation because God has promised that those who observe the law will be accounted as righteous, we are completely mistaken; for no one keeps the law perfectly. We must realise that we all stand guilty before God and have the sentence of condemnation hanging over our heads...



We must, therefore, conclude that we cannot obtain righteousness by the law, and that if we believe we can make God our debtor, we will only provoke his wrath. The only option is to come as poor beggars, that we may be justified by faith. Not as if faith were a virtue proceeding from us, but we must come humbly, confessing that we cannot obtain salvation except as a free gift. This, then, is why the law is put in opposition to faith. Paul is showing us that all who claim to be acceptable to God by their merits are turning their back upon the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.... Every created thing has its function — and fire and water complement each other very well; however, if we were to mix them together, then they would indeed clash! This is true of the law and the gospel. Those who believe that we are justified by the law as well as the gospel are confusing everything; it is as if they are crashing heaven and earth together! In short, it would be easier to mix fire and water than to say this: that we can merit a measure of the grace of God and yet also need the aid of the Lord Jesus Christ.... May we learn so to magnify his grace, as it is shown to us in the Lord Jesus Christ, that we might be completely taken up with it; and may we not only do so with our lips, but place our entire trust in him.

"Justification is by Grace Alone"

http://www.the-highway.com/Calvin_Gal2a.html

Lest anyone think that Calvin taught merely that we are justified by grace alone but we must then go on to perform works, I quote the following:

We see that our whole salvation and all its parts are comprehended in Christ [Acts 4:12]. We should therefore take care not to derive the least portion of it from anywhere else. If we seek salvation, we are taught by the very name of Jesus that it is 'of him' [I Cor. 1:30]. If we seek any other gifts of the Spirit, they will be found in his anointing. If we seek strength, it lies in his dominion; if purity, in his conception; if gentleness, it appears in his birth. For by his birth he was made like us in all respects [Heb. 2:17] that he might learn to feel our pain [compare to Heb. 5:2]. If we seek redemption, it lies in his passion; if acquittal, in his condemnation; if remission of the curse, in his cross [Gal. 3:13]; if satisfaction, in his sacrifice; if purification, in his blood; if reconciliation, in his descent into hell; if mortification of the flesh, in his tomb; if newness of life, in his resurrection; if immortality, in the same; if inheritance of the Heavenly Kingdom, in his entrance into heaven; if protection, if security if abundant supply of all blessings, in his Kingdom; if untroubled expectation of judgment; in the power given to him to judge. In short, since rich store of every kind of good abounds in him, let us drink our fill from the fountain, and from no other.

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559),
2.16.19

It seems that many so-called Calvinists are among the greatest legalists, looking to the law for at least some part of their salvation. They did not get such thinking from what Calvin says here.

It is usually sanctification that is the sticking point for those who do not quite believe in salvation by grace alone. They will often acknowledge justification by faith alone, but they will say that sanctification requires our obedience to the law. But in 1 Corinthians 1:30-31, Paul says, "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." Baptist theologian and pastor, John Gill (1697-1771), commenting on this passage says,



Christ is the sanctification of his people, through the constitution of God, the imputation of the holiness of his nature, the merits of his blood, and the efficacy of his grace, he is so "federally" and "representatively"; he is their covenant head, and has all covenant grace in his hands for them, and so the whole stock and fund of holiness, which is communicated to them in all ages, until the perfection of it in every saint: this is sanctification in Christ, which differs from sanctification in them in these things; in him it is as the cause, in them as the effect; in him as its fountain, in them as the stream; in him it is complete, in them it is imperfect for the present: and they have it by virtue of union to him; sanctification in Christ can be of no avail to any, unless it is derived from him to them; so that this sanctification in Christ does not render the sanctification of the Spirit unnecessary, but includes it, and secures it: likewise Christ is the sanctification of his people "by imputation", as the holiness of his human nature is, together with his obedience and sufferings, imputed to them for their justification; Christ assumed an holy human nature, the holiness of it was not merely a qualification for his office as a Saviour, or what made his actions and sufferings in that nature significant and useful, or is exemplary to men; but is a branch of the saints justification before God: the law required an holy nature, theirs is not holy; Christ has assumed one not for, himself, but for them, and so is the end of the law in all respects.

And, indeed, those who reject *sola gratia* are, in one respect or another, legalists. And legalists deny at least some of the work of Jesus Christ, which makes them antichrists (see "Are You Following the Doctrines of Antichrists?" <http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/antichrist.htm>).

Denying *Sola Gratia*—the Cults

One of the most consistent characteristics of cults is that they teach that salvation is not by grace alone. Works always figure into what is necessary for salvation. For example, in *Mystery of the Ages*, Herbert W. Armstrong wrote:



The "salvation" in what is called traditional Christianity does not actually change one into a new and different person. Too often ministers and evangelists tell people that if they have just "received Christ," "accepted Christ," or "given their heart to the Lord," they are saved. They are already "born again." It is as if some mystic switch has been flipped and the person will be shot instantly up to heaven upon death, which so many believe is not really a death after all.

Herbert W. Armstrong, *Mystery of the Ages*, softcover edition, (Pasadena, CA: Worldwide Church of God, 1985) October 1985 printing, 197

The very basic teaching, belief and doctrine of God's true Church therefore is based on the righteousness of and obedience to the law of God.

Herbert W. Armstrong, *Where Is the True Church?*, 32

Armstrong was the founder of the Worldwide Church of God and clearly did not believe in salvation by grace alone. Many of his disciples now run their own churches and teach the same unbiblical doctrines.

The Jehovah's Witnesses are a cult that rejects salvation by grace alone. The following quotes are from their own publications:

[Belief] involves taking in accurate knowledge of God's purposes and his way of salvation. Then faith has to be exercised in Jesus Christ as the Chief Agent of salvation. This places the Christian in a saved condition, but he must now persevere in doing God's will and continue to adhere to all of God's requirements for the rest of his life. Only then will he be saved to eternal life."

Watchtower (December 15, 1989) 30

We have to do more than merely accept the Kingdom message in order to be saved.

Paradise Lost to Paradise Regained, 249

God requires that prospective subjects of his Kingdom support his government by *loyally advocating his Kingdom rule to others*.

Watchtower (February 15, 1983) 12-13; emphasis theirs

God's will is that, to make good his salvation to everlasting life, the believer must be a preacher in this world.

This Means Everlasting Life, 137

This sure explains why the Jehovah's Witnesses who come to our doors are so zealous. How sad that these people have been deluded to think that they must save themselves by their works.

Mormons don't believe in salvation by grace alone:

To be forgiven of our sins, we need to repent and increase our faith in Jesus Christ throughout our lives. We will not be saved simply because we get baptized or say we believe in Jesus Christ. It takes work, but the work we do doesn't only prepare us for heaven, it blesses us in this life too.

"Jesus Christ Is the Way" (<http://lds.org/plan/jesus-christ-is-the-way?lang=eng>)

You can find more information about Mormonism in my article, "Mormons Are Not Christians" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/mormons.htm>).

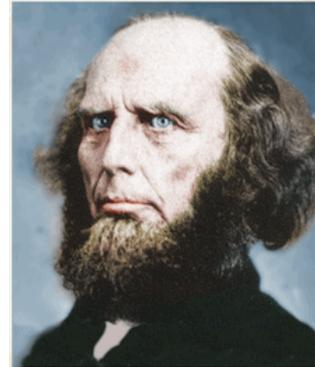
Denying Sola Gratia—Within the Church

One of the earlier Protestants to turn from the Five Solas was Jacobus (or James) Arminius (1560-1609). He is the namesake for the belief system known as Arminianism. In summary, Arminianism teaches that: 1) Election is conditioned on foreseen faith. 2) Christ's death is for all, but only those who believe on Him are forgiven. 3) Fallen man is unable to do good or exercise saving faith without first being regenerated. 4) Grace is resistible. 5) Grace is able to preserve one through temptation, but man may still fall from grace and lose his salvation.

Notice that this theology teaches that God looks ahead in time to see whether someone will exercise faith. This would make faith, not an instrument to receive justification, but a criterion for God electing someone in the first place. This makes our election, and therefore our calling, dependent on our work of faith. Scripture specifically denies this in 2 Timothy 1:9: "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." Arminianism also says that Christ's death is for all, that man may accept or reject grace, and that whether a man is saved or not

depends on his own actions. In short, salvation is dependent on the works of man, not God's grace. Thus, Arminianism denies salvation by grace alone.

Charles Finney (1792-1875) is often considered to be the father of modern revivalism, the creator of the altar call, and the idea of making a decision for Christ ("decisionism"). Of Finney, Dr. Michael Horton says, "He is particularly esteemed among the leaders of the Christian Right and the Christian Left, by both Jerry Falwell and Jim Wallis (*Sojourners* magazine), and his imprint can be seen in movements that appear to be diverse, but in reality are merely heirs to Finney's legacy.



From the Vineyard movement and the Church Growth Movement to the political and social crusades, televangelism, and the Promise Keepers movement, as a former Wheaton College president rather glowingly cheered, 'Finney, lives on!'" ("The Disturbing Legacy of Charles Finney" <http://www.mtio.com/articles/aissar81.htm>). In his *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 1851, Finney wrote,

Objection. Does a Christian cease to be a Christian, whenever he commits a sin? I answer:

1. Whenever he sins, he must, for the time being, cease to be holy. This is self-evident.

2. Whenever he sins, he must be condemned. He must incur the penalty of the law of God. If he does not, it must be because the law of God is abrogated. But if the law of God be abrogated, he has no rule of duty; consequently, can neither be holy nor sinful. If it be said that the precept is still binding upon him, but that, with respect to the Christian, the penalty is for ever set aside, or abrogated, I reply—that to abrogate the penalty is to repeal the precept; for a precept without penalty is no law. It is only counsel or advice. The Christian, therefore, is justified no longer than he obeys, and must be condemned when he disobeys; or Antinomianism is true.

3. When the Christian sins, he must repent, and "do his first works," or he will perish.

4. Until he repents he cannot be forgiven. In these respects, then, the sinning Christian and the unconverted sinner are upon precisely the same ground.

Lecture XIV

But again, to the question, can man be justified while sin remains in him? Surely he cannot, either upon legal or gospel principles, unless the law be repealed. That he cannot be justified by the law, while there is a particle of sin in him, is too plain to need proof. But can he be pardoned and accepted, and then justified, in the gospel sense, while sin, any degree of sin, remains in him? Certainly not. For the law, unless it be repealed, and antinomianism be true, continues to condemn him while there is any degree of sin in him. It is a contradiction to say, that he can both be pardoned, and at the same time condemned. But if he is all the time coming short of full obedience, there never is a moment in which the law is not uttering its curses against him. "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." The fact is, there never has been, and there never can be, any such thing as sin without condemnation. "Beloved, if our own heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart;" that, is, he much more condemns us. "But if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God." God cannot repeal the law. It is not founded in his arbitrary will. It is as unalterable and unrepealable as his own nature. God can never repeal nor alter it. He can, for Christ's sake, dispense with the execution of the penalty, when the subject has returned to full present obedience to the precept, but in no other case, and upon no other possible conditions. To affirm that he can, is to affirm that God can alter the immutable and eternal principles of moral law and moral government....

Whenever a Christian sins he comes under condemnation, and must repent and do his first works, or be lost.

Lecture XV

But if Christ owed personal obedience to the moral law, then his obedience could no more than justify himself. It can never be imputed to us. He was bound for himself to love God with all his heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and his neighbour as himself. He did no more

than this. He could do no more. It was naturally impossible, then, for him to obey in our behalf. This doctrine of the imputation of Christ's obedience to the moral law to us, is based upon the absurd assumptions, (1.) That the moral law is founded in the arbitrary will of God, and (2.) That of course, Christ, as God, owed no obedience to it; both of which assumptions are absurd. But if these assumptions are given up, what becomes of the doctrine of an imputed righteousness, as a ground of a forensic justification? "It vanishes into thin air."

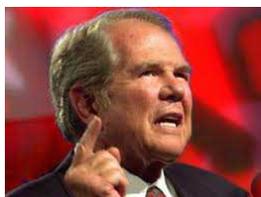
Lecture LVI

The atonement would present to creatures the highest possible motives to virtue. Example is the highest moral influence that can be exerted. If God, or any other being, would make others benevolent, he must manifest benevolence himself. If the benevolence manifested in the atonement does not subdue the selfishness of sinners, their case is hopeless.

Lecture XXXIV

It is obvious from this that Finney taught that Jesus Christ justified no one, and that Christ's righteousness is not imputed to anyone. Charles Finney asserted that the atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross was merely an example, a moral influence, a motive to virtue. He believed that our salvation was entirely dependent on our perfectly keeping the law. Charles Finney did not believe in salvation by grace alone.

A number of twenty and twenty-first century evangelicals also teach doctrines that are logically inconsistent with *sola gratia*. Televangelist and sometime politician, Pat Robertson, has this to say about salvation:



First, God says, "You are righteous by faith," then He gives you the Holy Spirit so that you can live righteously. Once you have been born again, you live the righteous demands of the law by the leading of the Holy Spirit. This is the process of regeneration that turns a sinner into a saint, fit for God's kingdom."

Pat Robertson, *Answers to 200 of Life's Most Probing Questions* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984) 208

In this quote, Robertson completely botches the *ordo salutis*, or order of salvation, and he incorrectly treats being born again as something different from regeneration (in reality, they are synonyms). But more to the point, Pat Robertson teaches that what turns a sinner into a saint fit for God's kingdom is living by the righteous demands of the law. Although Robertson gives lip-service to being "righteous by faith," he is really teaching a works salvation that makes a mockery of the justification and sanctification obtained for us by Jesus. Thus, Pat Robertson's teachings contradict *sola gratia*.

Pastor, writer, and radio broadcaster John Piper also promotes beliefs logically disagreeing with *sola gratia*. In his book, *The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in...Future Grace* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, 1995), he writes, "All the covenants of God are conditional covenants of grace—both the old covenant and the new covenant (248)." This statement has two major problems: 1) Not all of God's covenants are covenants of grace. The Old Covenant is a covenant of works based on obedience to the law. 2) The term "conditional covenant of grace" is self-contradictory. A covenant that is based on a condition—a work we do—is not a covenant of grace. So what is Piper really getting at concerning these covenants? He goes on to explain: "They offer all-sufficient future grace for those who keep the covenant" (*ibid.*). Notice that for John Piper, God will give grace in the future to those who are obedient to the covenant. But, as we have already seen, that would be a reward based on works. So-called "future grace for those who keep the covenant" is not grace at all because grace is favor that is freely given. It is not based on obedience or works.

In commenting on this same book by John Piper, John Robbins wrote:



In chapter 19, "How Many Conditions Are There?" Piper actually enumerates 11 conditions we must meet if we want any "future grace": loving God, being humble, drawing near to God, crying out to God from the heart, fearing God, delighting in God, hoping in God, taking refuge in God, waiting for God, trusting in God, and keeping God's covenant, which he says is the summary of the first 10. Piper proclaims: "I am hard pressed to imagine something more important for our lives than fulfilling the covenant that God has made with us for our final salvation" (249). Consider his words carefully. Piper does not mean that the work of Christ in perfectly

fulfilling the covenant on behalf of his people is the most important thing he can think of for our final salvation; he says that we personally, or as he says, "experientially," fulfill the covenant on our own behalf, and that our fulfillment of the covenant is the most important thing for our final salvation. We ourselves "fulfill the covenant that God has made with us for our final salvation." Furthermore, keep in mind his description of "future grace": "the heart-strengthening power that comes from the Holy Spirit....is virtually the same as what I mean by future grace." Therefore, if we fulfill the conditions required of us, if we obey the covenant, then God will give us "the heart-strengthening power that comes from the Holy Spirit," and we will be saved. This is not the Gospel. It is a pious fraud.

John W. Robbins, "Pied Piper," *The Trinity Review*, June-July 2002 (Unicoi, Tennessee: The Trinity Foundation) 7

Most Are More Subtle

I don't want to give you the impression that most who deny *sola gratia* do so openly. Aside from the more blatant cult leaders, most who teach against grace alone give open lip service to it but logically deny it in their teachings. Anyone who adds anything to grace is contradicting grace alone. For example, those who teach that one must be baptized to be saved, are obviously implying that salvation is not by grace alone. Those who say that any point of any law must be obeyed for salvation, are essentially saying that grace alone is not the means of salvation. If you look for this, you will find that it is common.

Our Legal Obligation Has Been Paid

To say that we are saved by grace alone means that we have no legal obligation to obey any law. It means that our entire salvation—our election, our regeneration, our justification, our adoption, our sanctification, our glorification, and so on—is all by grace, entirely free of any obligation or requirement or earning of merit on our part. Our entire salvation from beginning to end has been entirely accomplished by Jesus. He has done it all for us. It is very purposefully that Jesus called the cup of wine that symbolizes His blood in the Lord's Supper, "the new testament [or "covenant"—it is the same word in the Greek] in my blood." By spilling His blood and giving His life (the life is in the blood—Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 17:14), Jesus paid the penalty for all of our sins and placed us under the New Covenant, and under the New Covenant, there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1). The New Covenant has laws, but no condemnation. We conform to those laws voluntarily as we are led by the Spirit, but the fact that there is no condemnation allows us to be the flawed people we are without living under the threat of damnation every time we sin. It also allows God to do what He wants, which is to save us entirely by grace through His Son.

Sovereign Grace Baptist Henry Mahan, commenting on John 1:17 ("For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ") said this:



The Grace which saves a sinner is not moral weakness nor a mere sentimental invitation; but it is the Grace of God (Who cannot lie) which is established on the principles of a law honored and justice satisfied by our Redeemer. The Grace of Christ does not set aside the Law and its requirements. No! It establishes the Law! Grace establishes the Law because it has a Substitute who perfectly fulfilled every jot and tittle and endured the penalty of sin for all who believe. Law manifests what is in men—sin! Grace manifests what is in God—love! Law demands righteousness from men! Grace brings the righteousness of God to men! Law sentences men to death! Grace gives life to dead men! Law speaks of what men must do! Grace tells what Christ has done. Law gives a knowledge of sin! Grace puts sin away! Puts it away forever to be remembered no more."

Jesus obeyed His Father's commandments so that His righteousness could be imputed to us who believe on Him as our Savior and are thereby saved entirely by grace. Certainly, we show outwardly in our lives the salvation God is working in us. In Philippians 2:12-13, Paul writes, "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." This doesn't mean we are perfect in this, and sometimes we get frustrated with ourselves, wondering, "How can a wretch like me be saved?" Of course, the answer is, "By God's grace alone." One of the ways that God works His salvation in us is through His Word, the Bible. That's why Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth" (John 17:17). Reading or hearing the Bible is not a work that saves us. Otherwise, anyone who reads or hears the Bible would be saved, and that is certainly not the case. No, it is only when people who have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them hear or read God's Word that the Holy Spirit uses that to change their minds, sanctifying them, making them holy. As we become more holy, we may sometimes feel an increasing discouragement over our sins. This may cause us to turn from Christ to ourselves and doubt our salvation. But it may be, in fact, simply because we are becoming more sensitive to our sins. This is why we must not trust our salvation to our works or our feelings. We must trust our salvation to God who saves us by His grace alone, and we must keep our eyes focused on our Savior, Jesus Christ alone.

Solus Christus or *Solo Christo*—"Christ alone" or "through Christ alone" will be the subject of the next installment in this series.