

# ENJOY THE MEAL



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1 Timothy 3:16,  
Ephesians 2:8-10  
Reformation Message  
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1 Timothy 3:16, Ephesians 2:8-10

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther, a 33-year-old monk, protested what he considered to be the abuses of the Catholic Church by penning ninety-five theses and posting them, we think, on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. Thus began the Protestant Reformation. Emerging from the Reformation were what came to be known as “the three *solae*” (Latin), or “the three *solas*” (Anglicized):

- *Sola scriptura*: “By Scripture alone.”
- *Sola gratia*: “By grace alone.”
- *Sola fida*: “By faith alone.”

Today, in commemoration of the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, we will consider the three *solas*, particularly in light of what they mean for us today. Two other “*solas*” later emerged—*solus Christus* (through Christ alone) and *solus Deo gloria* (glory to God alone)—but the three *solas* will be more than enough to keep us occupied today.

## By Scripture alone

The reformers appealed to Scripture as their authority over against church tradition. “All Scripture is breathed out by God . . .” (2 Timothy 3:16). Nothing and no one else is breathed out by God in such a way: no tradition, no group, no individual.

Not as many today are arguing for the authority of church tradition. Many more, however, are arguing for the authority of the individual. We, however, appeal to Scripture not only over against any tradition but also over against personal feelings. How do we know what’s true and what’s not true? We hear many things in our culture, which exalts personal feelings over any so-called divine revelation. We don’t jettison everything that our culture preaches. Neither do we dismiss out of hand personal feelings. No, we evaluate what our culture preaches and our personal feelings in light of Scripture.

Consider human sexuality. Especially in the last fifty years, our culture has increasingly broadened its definition about what constitutes healthy expressions of human sexuality. Is our culture right? Is it right in some ways but wrong in other ways? How do you know?

In a survey of 230 young adults in the United States, these answers were typical:

– “I would do what I thought made me happy or how I felt. I have no other way of knowing what to do but how I internally feel.”

“I mean, I guess what makes something right is how I feel about it. But different people feel different ways, so I couldn’t speak on behalf of anyone else as to what’s right and wrong.”

“It’s just whatever makes you feel good about you.”<sup>1</sup>

Apart from the Scriptures, we would be at the mercy of our ever-changing culture and our ever-changing feelings. Thank God that he has given us the Scriptures.

We’re taking a break from our study of the book of Ezekiel today, and for that, perhaps, some of you are thankful. Up until Ezekiel 33, the prophet speaks mostly of the wrath of God, first against Israel and then against the nations. We’ve spent the last two months studying the wrath of God, working through the judgment oracles. Some of you may be more than ready for Ezekiel 33 and following. I know I am.

However, I also know that I must come to terms with all of what the Scriptures teach, including what they teach about the wrath of God. By the way, we have learned, among other things, that the wrath of God is also the heartbreak of God. I also believe that having gone through the book in the order that it was given to us, we have felt the weight of the wrath of God in the early chapters so that we will be all the more appreciative of the consolation of God in the final chapters.

I don’t stand in authority over the Scriptures; the Scriptures stand in authority over me.

Chuck Colson, the founder of Prison Fellowship, once received a letter from a donor who took issue with his belief in the authority of the Scriptures. How do you respond to that? “I replied to his letter by explaining that I do what I do precisely because the Scriptures command me to do so,” Colson said. “So, I wrote to him, the thing you don’t like about me is the thing that causes me to do what you do like.” The donor responded by doubling his annual contribution.

*Sola scriptura*: By Scripture alone. The two other *solas*, “by grace alone” and “by faith alone,” derive from the Scriptures.

## By grace alone

The reformers appealed to grace and faith over against merit and works.

### Ephesians 2:8-9:

**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.”**

Grace means gift. Grace means God takes the initiative. Grace means that God takes the initiative to give a gift. Grace means that God takes the initiative to give us the gift of salvation: “For by grace you have been saved . . .” The gift is unfathomably costly: It cost God his Son, who died for the evil in the world, including the evil that is in us.

What does it mean to be saved? In other words, what is salvation?

On the one hand, we are saved by the grace of God from evil, which includes Satan, sin, and death, including the evil that is in us. The angel of the Lord told Joseph that Jesus would “save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). Salvation from sin features victory over sin, which includes forgiveness of sins.

God is rightly angry because of evil: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth” (Romans 1:18). God is angry that humans have rejected him in favor of their own ways. He is angry that we are destroying ourselves, each other, and his creation. We are saved from the wrath of God, which is the other side of God’s love, of course, for if God loves, he must get angry (Romans 5:9). We are saved from human degeneration.

On the one hand, we are saved by the grace of God *from* evil. On the other hand, we are saved by the grace of God *for* relationship with God, both now and forever. We are saved for human renewal, in the context of relationship with God, so that we might begin the process of becoming what we’re supposed to be, what we deep down want to be, ultimately in the new and eternal creation.

Our world doesn’t speak much of salvation anymore. True, most people in the United States believe in something they call heaven. Seventy-two percent of Americans, in fact, believe in heaven, according to the Pew Research Center. But their concept of heaven has little to do with relationship with God and serving his perfect purposes in the new heaven and new earth.

We can’t begin to know what a great gift this is. Everything else, by comparison, is nothing, less than nothing. Every once in a while, perhaps, God allows us to see into reality for a moment—into the deep joy that comes from knowing God, from experiencing his love, from fulfilling his purposes. I have had a few such moments, and they’ve taken my breath away.

## An old hymn helps us:

Could we with ink the ocean fill,  
And were the skies of parchment made;  
Were every stalk on earth a quill,  
And every man a scribe by trade;  
To write the love of God above,  
Would drain the ocean dry;  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,  
Though stretched from sky to sky.<sup>2</sup>

Larry Crabb, with this story, also helps us:

*A friend of mine was raised in an angry family. Mealtimes were either silent or sarcastically noisy. Down the street was an old-fashioned house with a big porch where a happy family lived. My friend told me that when he was about ten, he began excusing himself from his dinner table as soon as he could without being yelled at, and walking to the old-fashioned house down the street.*

*If he arrived during dinnertime, he would crawl under the porch and just sit there, listening to the sounds of laughter. When he told me this story, I asked him to imagine what it would have been like if the father in the house somehow knew he was huddled beneath the porch and sent his son to invite him in.<sup>3</sup>*

Some of us grow up in angry families. Most of us probably experience the world, at least at times, as something like an angry family. To many of us, God seems like an angry father: impossible to please. Yet God, our heavenly Father, sends his Son to invite us in, so to speak. That's grace. *Sola gratia*: By grace alone.

What about faith?

## By faith alone

If grace means that God wants to give us the gift of salvation, then faith—that is, faith in Christ—means receiving the gift of salvation. Paul defines the Gospel message, which must be “received” and by which we are “saved,” in this way: “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures . . .” (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

Our world not only has an incorrect concept of heaven, it also has an incorrect concept of how one gets there. The seventy-two percent of Americans who believe in heaven also define heaven as a place “where people who have led good lives are eternally rewarded.” There are at least two problems with this view, however.

First, no one is good enough: “None is righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10). Or, to put it another way, the way Paul puts it in Ephesians 2:9, “no one may boast.” We're talking here about a holy God, not a kindly grandfather.

Second, and more importantly, God isn't interested in good people anyway, much less people who think they're good, much less people who think they're good enough for him. To try to lead a good life in the belief that you will, therefore, be rewarded at the end of it is to reject God, who wants to give you a gift: relationship with him. People reject the gift and instead choose to lead good lives, so-called because they don't want relationship with God: they don't want to submit to him and his vision for their lives. They deceive themselves into thinking that if there is a God, he wants them to be good people. Therefore, they will be good people so that they'll be all right in the end but also that they can mostly do whatever they please until then, without having to think too much about God.

Several years ago, I was studying in a coffee house, as I often do to this day. When I do, I'm often surrounded by books, and my Bible is usually open. Sometimes, I get curious looks. Other times, I get some affirmation from

passers-by. Still, other times, people who see me with a Bible want to talk to me. When I'm at a coffee house, I'm always open for business. On this particular occasion, a woman was troubled, saw me with my Bible, and began asking me some questions. I told her about Jesus.

Right about then another woman, who was sitting next to the first woman, jumped in. “Well,” she said to me in a huff, “I know a lot of Jews and Muslims and Buddhists who are very beautiful people.”

I told her, “I don't think God wants good people. I think most people do good deeds because they're afraid of God and want to avoid him.”

That pretty much ended the conversation.

God doesn't want good people. No, God wants you! He gave his Son because he wants you! Or, in keeping with Larry Crabb's story, God sent his Son to invite you in.

Remember, Crabb's friend, who was reared in an angry family, began excusing himself from dinner as soon as possible to crawl under the porch of a nearby house. Crabb asked him to imagine what it would be like if the father in the house sent his son to invite him in.

Crabb continues:

*I asked him to envision what it would have meant to him to accept the invitation, to sit at the table, to accidentally spill his glass of water, and hear the father roar with delight, 'Get him more water! And a dry shirt! I want him to enjoy the meal!'"*<sup>4</sup>

(Every time my children accidentally spill something at the dinner table, I remember that story!)

Grace: God sends his Son to invite you in. Faith: You accept the invitation. Enjoy the meal! Enjoy the Father!

*Sola fida*: By faith alone.

## Continue in grace and faith and the Scriptures

Salvation not only concerns what has taken place; it also concerns what continues to take place. Salvation is ongoing, and it will be complete when Christ returns. The writer of Hebrews says, “And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with

sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (Hebrews 9:27-28).

Ongoing salvation is sometimes called the process of “sanctification.” Ongoing salvation, like past salvation, is also by grace and through faith. The apostle Paul begins his letters by bidding saints, those who already have faith, “grace” from God. He also urges us to “continue in faith,” to “continue in the faith,” and to “continue in what you have learned and firmly believed” (Acts 14:22, 1 Timothy 2:15, 2 Timothy 3:14). He desires our “progress and joy in the faith” (Philippians 1:25). Grace and faith are not one-time experiences; they continue to be essential experiences for followers of Jesus.

So many people suffer from despair because they don’t feel as if they’re measuring up. Adolescents in our area are particularly vulnerable. Such despair is not unfamiliar to adults, either, nor is it unfamiliar to longtime followers of Jesus. Such despair is not unfamiliar to me.

Martin Luther, before he posted his ninety-five theses on the door of the Wittenberg Castle Church, used to spend long hours in the confessional, on one occasion confessing his sins for six-hour straight. Finally, his superior said to him, “Look here, if you expect Christ to forgive you, come in with something to forgive—murder, blasphemy, adultery—instead of all these peccadilloes.”<sup>5</sup>

Professor Jeff Louie described his experience in a 2014 sermon: “I have a great pedigree. I’ll tell you: for forty years of my ministry I was dying on the inside because I was searching for the wrong things.” What’s the answer? Listen to Jeff: “You need to put your confidence in Christ, and you will grow, my friend.”

Ah, so God wants us to “lead good lives” after all. He wants us to, in Jeff Louie’s words, “grow.”

### **Ephesians 2:8-10:**

**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. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**

Although God is not interested in the good works that keep him at arm’s length, he is very much interested in the good works that proceed from relationship with him. The good works that count are those that proceed from those who have received—and who appreciate—God’s grace. Peter admonishes us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

Are you dying on the inside? Receive God’s grace—once, twice, a thousand times, 10,000 times. Don’t live anxiously by your brains and talent and sweat, all of which will fail you in the end. Instead, open yourself as wide as possible and as often as possible to the all-forgiving, soul-transforming love of God. And you will grow, my friend.

Continue in grace and faith. Continue also in the Scriptures. They will “make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15). They will give you “endurance” and “encouragement” and “hope” (Romans 15:4).

Enjoy the meal!

### **Another meal**

Also, we have another meal to look forward to. John tells us about it in Revelation 9:6-9:

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

“Hallelujah!

For the Lord our God

the Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and exult

and give him the glory,

for the marriage of the Lamb has come,

and his Bride has made herself ready;

it was granted her to clothe herself

with fine linen, bright and pure”—

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.”

And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”

What a meal that’s going to be!

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Smith, Christian Smith. *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Lehman, Frederick Martin. “*The Love of God is Greater Far*” (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing Co., 1923, 1951)

<sup>3</sup> Crabb, Larry. *Connecting* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 1997), 14.

<sup>4</sup> Crabb, 14.

<sup>5</sup> Bainton, Roland, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Mentor Books, 1955), 41.