

**26.09.21**

**Solas Part 1**

**Grace Alone** by Mike Cole.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel famously said, "The only thing we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history." I believe we learn from our mistakes but so often we don't take action on what we have learnt. In the church we may hold onto tradition because that's the way we have always done things. If not kept in check tradition becomes part of our belief system. Tradition slowly but surely becomes the object and means of faith. The result is that God is lost, Christ is lost and the Spirit of God is nowhere to be seen. The simple gospel is replaced with works. It is lost in the catechisms of rites and rulebooks that are void of any true grace. Salvation is placed entirely in the hands of my own works. To lose the gospel is to lose all hope of salvation. If my salvation depended on my ability to influence God I would still be lost in my sin. We would become ineffectual little gods in charge of our own destiny. How can we save ourselves when it is so often hard to just get out of bed and get our socks on.

The good news is that the gospel is never actually truly lost. The word of God is living, with power to bring change to the life of the one who will hear. Men and women like by Martin Luther and his many friends who knew the power of the gospel decided to challenge the religious practises and traditions of indulgences, masses and penitence of the sixteenth century Roman Church. Five crucial points arose from this challenge. The points are: Sola scriptura ("by Scripture alone") Sola fide ("by faith alone") Sola gratia ("by grace alone") Solus Christus ("through Christ alone") Soli Deo gloria ("glory to God alone") These principles are as much a challenge today as they were two thousand or even five hundred years ago. Be alert to error and take action. That's not to wag a finger at others it is to impress truth on our own hearts Ephesians 2:8-9 reads "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast." Jesus rescued us and we know that we have a continuing free gift of grace for every day. "While we were still sinners Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

"Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me" The singing of this song is sweet not only to my soul but to God. The sweetness of it can never be soured by your singing voice. Never be ashamed of your voice as you 'make a joyful noise to the Lord'. Psalm (100:1) His grace goes far beyond misgivings about our voice. There are good indicators of my salvation like my recent baptism, my church attendance record or my first communion or my collection tally but they are not salvation in themselves. Discipline in our daily Christian walk is essential. Even if you use one of those apps that 'track your daily worship progress' at the end of the day you are still a wretch. You're just a wretch with an app. We do make progress through his word and the gracious presence of the Holy Spirit. It took thirty odd years for the writer of this hymn, John Newton, to publicly renounce his part in the slave-trade. "It will always be a subject of humiliating reflection to me that I was once an active instrument in the business of which my heart now shuns," God changed him slowly but surely. Do our hearts shudder at our sins too? Through true repentance and through faith in Christ for our forgiveness we are made right before God but until we die and those former things are no more, we are being made more like Christ as we travel the narrow path with him and towards him.

By God's grace you already have all that you need: his precious gifts, the word of God, the Holy Spirit, your church family, and the joy of eternal life. "His divine

power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us to his own glory." (2 Peter 1:3) We have an intimate relationship with the God of the universe, a security in salvation that will last through all eternity. The world does not have this. The world does not recognise it has something to lose so it doesn't recognise that it has something to save. We look to the world or to our own hearts and think there may be some way of making God love us more. If only we could take hold of what is so amazing about his grace and how great his love is. God calls us by his son. "I once was lost but now I am found." Things stay lost until they are found. You didn't go looking for Christ. Christ came looking for you. "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:10) We run from him. The prodigal son only returned to the father when he was brought to his knees and understood his need. The son was prepared to work his way back into his father's favour, totally unaware of his father's true love and grace. While the filthy pig-feeding, brothel-going degenerate was still a long way off his father saw him, felt compassion and ran towards him, embraced him and kissed him. This is how Christ seeks out and redeems the repentant sinner. Our God has compassion for the lost. He is a God of grace who wants all to come to him. Our father is willing to run from Heaven to earth, from riches to poverty, "... who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all; the testimony that was given at just the right time...." (1 Tim 2:4-6~) The one and only mediator is the lord Jesus Christ: no priest or other man.

The darkness of the cross brought light and sight and life to a dying world. "I was blind but now I see." The lord said, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoner and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free". (Luke 4:18) Did this not bring peace and joy to the ones who were called the people of God? No. They did not hear and they did not see. They did not know or acknowledge their great need for Jesus. They did not seek him with all their heart. Instead, their hearts were filled with furious hot anger at the very notion that God's hand of grace might be extended to the Gentiles by the likes of Jesus. It was their choice to be blind deaf and foolish.

The promise of grace is offered to all who will believe. All can be set free from the bondage of sin whatever that sin is. Grace is not offered to the one who deserves it but to the one who will receive it. You can push aside the hand of grace but it will one day swing back in judgement. The foundation of his grace is the love that breaks all bonds. If we truly grasped the truth of John 3:16 and lived in the light of it many more lives would be changed. The efficacy of the blood of Christ has no limits of power. The warning is that those who don't believe will perish. To receive and know this gift of grace means that it is by grace alone that we see the ugliness of hell and the beauty of Jesus Christ. It is to know that at this moment we may be lost and perishing but we are invited to come in fear and trembling to him who has triumphed over sin and death. The Lord will run to you, gather you up in his arms and give you forgiveness and eternal life. "

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear and grace that fear relieved.  
How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed."

It is my prayer that this will be the hour of grace to you.