

**"Sola Gratia, Sola Fide"
(Ephesians 2:1-10)
Pastor Peter Yi
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¹ As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

All of us know the stresses that come with our final exams. There's so much pressure to do well on our tests and get good marks. When I was in school, when it was nearing the week before final exams, students would try to find out what was going to be on the exam. Over the course of a semester there is so much content to learn and retain, it's virtually impossible to know it all. So we ask the professor if this or that is going to be on the exam and if he's not too keen on revealing these things, then you have to try to find out for yourself. You may talk to a friend who took the same class before you. You may look over your notes and see what areas the professor emphasized. The worst thing you could do with the limited time that you had was to study for all the wrong things.

This is true in life too. We tell ourselves what is truly important and then we organize our lives in a way that matches those values. So if fame and success are the things that are most important to me, then my time, energy and resources will be directed in that direction. If getting a boyfriend or girlfriend, or getting married is top priority, then that is what will preoccupy our minds. I'm not making a moral judgment here, I'm just saying, this is how our lives work. We decide something to be important and then we organize our lives accordingly. But what if you got to the end of your life and you realized that you studied for all the wrong things, that you prioritized all the wrong things? It'd be tragic if when we were lying on our deathbeds, and we look back at our 70-80 years of life and determine that we had wasted it. And it'd be even worse, if after all is said and done, we meet our maker, and we find out that we've missed the mark. That would be infinitely more tragic.

That's what was going on during the Reformation in the 1500s in Europe. Certain key persons discovered that they were studying for all the wrong things and the result of that discovery was the truths about how a person is made right with God, how a person can have their sins forgiven, how a person goes to heaven instead of landing in hell. This is the test that no one wants to fail. This is what we'll be talking about today. A person is made right with God by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

To know how to be made right with God, we need to know what made us wrong with God. We need to find out what the problem is first. **What is wrong with me (personally) and with humanity (universally)? Our condition before Christ (1-3)**

Whether you are a Christian or not, I think we can all agree that on a personal and universal level, something is not right. Something has gone terribly wrong with the human race. Globally we look at massive problems like hunger and disease and natural disasters and war and the refugee crisis. Something has gone terribly wrong with our world. As well, when we look within ourselves we know something is not right. There is this overwhelming, overpowering self-centeredness that cares disproportionately about one person, me. As the Apostle Paul writes in Romans, our great problem is that we do the things we know we shouldn't do and we don't do the things we know we should do.

The Christian's answer to this question of what's wrong with me and what's wrong with the world is one word. Sin. Try to disagree with that. What is the world's greatest problem and what is the individual's greatest problem. And why have these problems persisted for all of human history. Our society tells us that people are generally good, with a few bad apples. The Bible tells us that there are no good apples. All the apples in the basket are rotten. Which statement better explains what's going on in the world?

This passage talks about sin in several ways.

1. It says that we are dead in transgressions and sins (1). To be a sinner is to be in a perpetual state of spiritual deadness. The deadness is the result of transgressions and sins. To transgress is to violate God's commands.
2. It also tells us that sin is to live according to a different worldview (2a), following the ways of the world. To become a Christian, to become right with God, one has to start changing their worldview. We all have a framework for how life works which includes our culture, values, and morals. It gives us the explanation of reality. When Christianity came into the world, it challenged almost every facet of our worldview. We don't have the time to go through it all, so I have to summarize by saying that the Christian worldview is defined by what God has written in the Bible. So if you are not a Christian, I would challenge you to read the Bible and see if you can come up with a more consistent and rational view of the world.
3. Sin is also following a different master (2b). What the Bible teaches is that human beings can follow one of two masters. Option 1. We can follow God, the only God, creator of the universe and redeemer of humanity in and through his only Son Jesus Christ. Option 2. We can follow the devil. Now to say that is not politically correct and very offensive. But I'm not interested in being politically correct, nor am I saying this to be controversial. No, I'm saying it because this is what the Bible teaches. Let me give you an example from the life of Jesus. In John 8, Jesus is in the midst of a heated battle with Jewish religious leaders who have rejected him. Now listen to how he responds.
⁴⁴ You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. Even to his own disciple Peter, he says, "Get behind me Satan!"

The Apostle Paul says similar things,
(1 Cor 10:20 NIV11-GK) "No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons."

4. living for our own sinful desires (3a). At the end of the day, sin is self-centeredness. It is living for ourselves rather than living for God and for others.

5. And because of our sins, Paul tells us that by nature we are the objects of God's wrath (3b) by nature = meaning we had no control over, we were born this way. We are therefore deserving on God's just

When you look at yourself what do you see? When you look at your former selves what do you see? Do you see a good person? Do you see a better than most person? Then you are deceived. You are the one living the fairy tale. If we are honest with God and honest with ourselves, we'll realize that we are sinners, that we have failed to keep God's moral commands and laws which are stated in two commands. We have failed to love God and we have failed to love people. This is our great problem.

How can this problem be fixed? What God did for us. (4-7)

So, many things need fixing. For every problem there is a place or a person to go to get the problem fixed. If I need a screwdriver, I don't grab a hammer.

So, what do I do about the problem of sin? How can it be fixed? The solution to this problem lies only within God. I don't want to sound trite, but centuries/millennia of human existence have proven that the solutions are not and cannot be found within us. Every vice known to humankind, done to humankind, including rape, war, poverty, injustice, slavery, exploitation, trafficking, robbery, violence, racism, has been done by fellow humans, save the odd natural disaster. We don't have a very good track record. And yet, and yet, we still keep trying to convince ourselves that the solution to all of these problems lies in, better politics, better policies, more education, more science, more technology. We are fooling ourselves. The solution can't be found within us because we, ourselves are the problem.

If you're floating on a raft or hanging onto a piece of wood in the middle of an ocean, the solution to your safety will not be found within you. It will be dependent on pretty much everything but you. Weather and wind, natural forces like ocean currents, a passing ship, the integrity of the raft. You can't look deeper inside of yourself or look at yourself from a different perspective for the solution. The solution to our problem will be found in a savior. This is what the next several verses addresses.

⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

1. He made us alive with Christ (5a). Many people mistakenly think that Christianity's goal is to make a bad person into a good person or a good person into a better person. So for example a young family might come to church, primarily because they want their children to be taught Christian morals in Sunday school. Hopefully, both the parent and the child, will soon discover that this is not the case. Christianity is not ultimately about becoming moral. Ravi Zacharias said this and I think it explains the goal of Christianity perfectly. *Jesus Christ didn't come and die and rise again to make bad people good. He came to make dead people live.* The language of the Bible uses phrases such as "Born Again," "New Life," "New Creation," "Saved." That's not the language of incremental self-improvement. That's the language of transformation.

The result of sin is that it keeps us in a perpetual, an eternal state or condition of deadness.

There is nothing that is as hopeless or irreversible or tragic than death. When my mother was suffering and dying of cancer, the day finally came when she died. I was at my brother's place and we received the call from my dad to hurry over as mom is going to die. We were ten minutes late and there she was on her bed, dead. The color from her face had faded. Her body had become cold.

Already the rigor mortis was taking affect. It was surreal. It felt like a dream. It had actually, really, irreversibly happened. Mom was gone. No more phone calls, no more of her prayers, no more of her tasty chicken wings. If you've been close to death you already know this to be true.

Yet because of our sin we were dead in the most extreme sense of the word dead—meaning we were dead spiritually. As awful as physical death is, spiritual death is by far the worst death because it is eternal. Physical death occurs once and it's over. Spiritual death is perpetual. This was the state we were or might still be in. And what God did for us is that he made us alive—spiritually alive. So, the Bible says, "God made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions." Here's what Paul is getting at. God looked at our sin problem and gave us the solution through his Son Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ came and died to pay the penalty for our sin. He took upon himself the punishment we were supposed to receive for our sins. We, the children of wrath, didn't receive God's wrath. Instead that wrath went to his one and only child, Jesus Christ. This satisfied God's justice.

Why did God go to such extremes measures for us? Couldn't he have allowed us to wallow and die in our sin? No, he could not. For two reasons:

1. The character of God. (4)
 - A) Because of his great love for us (4a)
 - B) Because God is rich in mercy (4b)
2. The purposes of God. God's purpose in our salvation is
 - A) 2:7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.
 - B) So that we might produce good works (10)

We talked about the seriousness of the problem in our sins. And we talked about the greatness of the solution in the person of Jesus Christ. Now what? I think the next important question is this.

How do I take advantage of this? How do I get in on this? (8-10)

In the book of Acts there's the story of Paul and Silas getting arrested and thrown into prison. Here's how the story goes:

16:25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. ²⁷ The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

16:29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

That's the most important question of the day. This is the most important question for every person in this room, in our city and for every citizen of planet earth.

Now, here's the answer:

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

It is by grace, through faith, (sola gratia, sola fide) that you have been saved.

First, Paul tells us what it is not. It is NOT by works. There is nothing that we contribute to our salvation, nothing. There is no collaboration, no synergism, no working together of God doing his part and me doing my part. Our salvation, our sin problem is not taken care of by our works.

It is instead by Grace through Faith. What does that mean? Grace means that our salvation is a gift from God, unearned, unmerited, undeserved. It is the purest form and example of a gift. Most of the gifts that we give are to people that we know, people we have a relationship with, people that we love. Think of those you put on your Christmas gift list. Not so with God. On God's gift list are his enemies. Before you got on that list you were a child of wrath and once you got on that list, you became a child of grace. There are murderers, adulterers, drug users, foul-mouthed people, thieves and liars are all on that list.

Do you want to get on that list? Then you have to let go of the theology of Santa Claus. What is Santa's theology? How does a person get on Santa's list? You have to be good, you have to be nice. You have to let of that kind of thinking. To get on God's list, you have to do almost the opposite, you have to confess and believe that you are not good, you are not nice, that you are a sinner, a child of wrath. You have to confess that only Christ is good and that he died in your place. That's what faith is. Faith in Christianity is to believe in two things. It's to believe that Jesus died and to believe why Jesus died.

Faith is to believe that 2000 years ago, in history, in time and space, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to this earth. He lived a life in perfect obedience to God and then he died on a Roman cross and three days later he rose again. That we must believe.

Faith is also to believe why Jesus died. He died because he loves you. He died because he wants your sins forgiven. He died because he wants you to know God like he knows God. He died so you could live forever. He died so you could be with Him. He died so that your life would be lived out for the very purpose that God created you. He died that you would have the fullest, most complete life that you could ever live. He died so that you could experience a peace and a joy that escapes all other people. He died for you. Will you put your faith in him?

Let's pray.