



WHY ONLY BY GRACE?

Whenever we share the Reformation Good News of salvation by grace alone (*Sola Gratia*), many people have great difficulty in believing and accepting it. It is hard for most of us to understand how God can give sinners eternal life without them doing something to deserve it. Human wisdom dictates that we must earn the good things that we want in life.

Success, prosperity and power are obtained through hard work. Advancement in our society and culture is based on merit. People don't really believe that the best things in life are free. In fact, the generally accepted rule is: "There ain't no free lunch." Those who disregard this quaint maxim will end up becoming the target of unscrupulous hucksters who entice their victims with free vacations and other attractive freebies.

Grace involves the giving of a favor to someone who needs it but does not deserve it. This kind of act is foreign to our human way of thinking. Our charitable deeds are offered only to "deserving" indigents. The recipients of our acts of kindness must somehow "qualify" so we can feel good about them. Even those with much resources to share do not want their donations to be squandered by the irresponsible and slothful of our society.

It's important to realize that when we speak of true grace, it is not about a human act but, rather, a divine initiative of our loving God. We must understand that, first and foremost, God's act of grace is rooted in who He is and who He created us to be. God is love (1 **John 4:8**) and He created human beings for a love relationship with Him (**Rev. 4:11**). Because God is perfect and He does not change, everything He does with us remains within His everlasting plan and purpose for our creation. This means that He will only relate to us with love for that is who He is. But it also means that He will only be satisfied if we respond to Him with love because that's what we were created for.

So, it is for this reason that sinful humans can only be redeemed by grace (**Eph. 2:8-9**). Any other way would fall outside of God's plan and purpose of a love relationship with man. God could only have one way – grace alone. I did not understand this before I considered the possible options for dealing with lost humanity.

One option would be for God to do nothing. This would leave humankind in self-destruct mode. This is not really an option for a God who is love and who is also omniscient. How could God still be God if He allowed His plan and purpose for creating man to be

thwarted by sin? If He knew that man would sin and just die, what would be the point of making him in the first place?

Another option would be to impose "covenants and conditions" on sinful humanity, putting them on "probation" until they conform to His prerequisites and satisfy His stipulations for restoration into His family. The problem with this plan is sinful man himself. The fall of Adam has totally disabled humankind from performing what a holy God desires for a love relationship. No amount of threats or manipulation by God could change this spiritual reality. Even if God were to drastically lower His standards, spiritually depraved humanity could still not offer satisfaction. Besides, the abandonment of God's love standard would mean the total failure of His plan and purpose for creating man.

One option that has become popular within many man-made religions is based on the concept of a cooperative venture between God and man. It involves a system of reward and punishment in which forgiveness and salvation are earned by man when they do good works through God's help. In this system, man still needs God to provide motivation and spiritual power to him so he could perform. There are serious problems with this option. Even though God provides help to man, his salvation is still based on his performance. In the end, if man fails, who is to blame? Man could say that God did not give him enough help. Or that God did not motivate him enough to ask for more of God's help. The greatest problem with this system is man's motive for his performance. If he works (even with God's help) in order to gain God's reward or to avoid His punishment, he would not be doing it for love. This would defeat the plan and purpose of God in creating man for a love relationship.

So you see, God's way of grace is the only way He could redeem sinful humanity. He gives us salvation as a gift – something we don't deserve. Our redemption from sin and death is a favor offered by a loving God who knows that it is impossible for sinners to earn salvation through their obedience to His law and their good works. He can offer it in love (not through threats of punishment or bribes of rewards) because His Son Jesus stood in humanity's place in perfect obedience to His Father's will and in complete payment for the penalty of our sins. When we respond by faith to this act of love, grace begets grace and we are restored to the love relationship that we were created for. It is only by grace that we are brought back to God's eternal circle of love. There's really no other way.