

GRACE ALONE
Sermon Series: Distinctiveness of Presbyterians
June 14, 2015 – Ephesians 2: 1-10
The Church of the Covenant

Of the “5 Solas” of Presbyterianism we have so far covered “Christ Alone” (*Solus Christus*), “Scripture Alone” (*Sola Scriptura*) and today we address “Grace Alone” (*Sola Gratia*). To summarize: By SCRIPTURE ALONE it testifies to the fact that through CHRIST ALONE we are saved by GRACE ALONE; Christ alone saved us and forgives us and reconciles us to God; through the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ we receive life, new life, abundant life and eternal life through GRACE ALONE and CHRIST ALONE. Nothing need be added. Our scripture from Ephesians which ignited the Protestant Reformation of which the Reformed Tradition and the Presbyterian Church is a part states this: “*Christ has made us alive together with HIM (and) BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED.*” (*Ephesians 2: 5*) Christ alone has done this, not we, ourselves. HE, through His life, death and resurrection has made us ALIVE. And we are made alive together with Him; He alive in our heart has made us alive together with HIM. And because it is alone His doing, it is the free gift of God in Jesus Christ that has done this. By GRACE ALONE we have been saved. Praise God I don’t have to do it; Christ Alone has already done it for me!!!!!!

In Jesus’ central story of GRACE in the Bible, the story of “The Prodigal Son”, what is referred to as the “Gospel in miniature”, Jesus interprets what is meant by GRACE ALONE. And how often in the story we focus on the Prodigal Son, the one who takes his inheritance early, goes off into a far country, squanders and dissipates his inheritance and then is received back into the loving arms of his heavenly Father. But today, I ask, which of these actors in this story are you? Are you the prodigal? Are you the “other brother”, the older brother? Or are you the loving Father?

I am the older brother in the story. I am an only child. So I am by nature responsible. Even when little, I tried to be the adult in the room. I always wanted to please my parents, and I still do. I have never wanted to rebel, never wanted to go away into a far country and squander what I have by loose living, to throw away what I have been taught and believe. I was born into the church. Baptized into the church. I was raised in the church. Sunday school and church worship every Sunday. I never sought to leave the church and wander far away from God. Even in college, much to the bemusement of my friends, I would put on my little navy blue blazer and striped tie and toddle off to a beautiful Methodist Church with white Georgian woodwork to hear a great sermon and wonderful music. How quaint. How old fashioned you are, Stu. Why don’t you sleep in like the rest of us? “Good people go to church and I am a good person”, I would think. I wanted to be good; I tried to be good; I wanted to please my teachers and my parents; I wanted to be held in good esteem by good people. I’m a people-pleaser. I never left the church. I never stopped going to church. I have always tried to be “the good son”. I am the *Presbyterian* in the room; because that’s who we are, generally speaking. “Shame, shame, shame, prodigal son.” I don’t even understand you, can’t relate to you, shame on you, because it makes me feel better, superior, because indeed out of my own personal goodness I *am* superior and I *am* better than the rest of you hangdog prodigals and sinners. I am a good person. I’ve tried my whole life to be a good person. And I certainly am better than the rest of you mangey, low down, no good derelict sinners. I am the other brother. I am the older brother. I am the *Presbyterian* in the room. (Obviously, I am overstating this for rhetorical affect!).

But here’s the sad part in the story of the other brother. It is clear from the story that while he has always stayed at home and never left, nevertheless he has no personal relationship with his loving Father. He doesn’t really know God. And God really doesn’t know him. You can be right next to the

loving father and not know Him. You can come to church every Sunday and try to be a good person without actually knowing the love of God. Indeed, when you see someone else receive the love of God, when God pours out love and mercy on a prodigal it angers you and it offends you. No, no, no we shake our fist at heaven and remonstrate –I am the one you are supposed to love, Lord God. I have proven to you how much I love you by trying to be the GOOD SON. Why are you lavishing your love on him? Why do you love the broken and the fallen and the hurting and the sinful just as much as you love me? I have earned the right to be loved MOST by you. I have done this, not you. I am good, not him.

As the other brother I have struggled with the most grievous sin of spiritual pride my entire life. It is thinking somehow we will ever be good enough on our own to please God. The truth is --we will never be good enough apart from Christ. It is thinking I can somehow figure this all out and when I do then I will have perfect knowledge that saves me. The truth is --I will never be smart enough to figure out the mysteries of the grace of God. It is thinking somewhere deep in my soul that somehow I really do believe if I work at it enough, if I try a little harder, I can work myself up to God and into heaven. “that good people apart from Christ really can enter into heaven on their own. I can storm the gates of God’s love and earn it.” Remember the actor John Houseman in the broker commercial? Older brothers think: We get to heaven the old fashioned way. We EARN IT. No we don’t. It is a gift. It is GRACE. It is a free gift of love given freely by a loving Father. We don’t do it –Christ already did it. We don’t earn it –it has already been earned by the perfect work of Jesus Christ on the cross. We don’t deserve it –because if we think we do then we suffer from the worst of all sins, the sin of spiritual pride, the sin that kept the Pharisees away from Jesus and out of heaven. Long before we were even born Jesus Christ has already accomplished it. Long before we ever did even one good thing for God, Jesus had already gone to the cross in perfect obedience and done what we can never do, live the one perfect, sinless, holy life and die in love for us all who are all grievous and fallen sinners. Either we are the prodigal son who has gone into the far country and squandered the gifts of love of the Father. Or we are the other brother who while in close proximity to God nevertheless does not know or understand the love in the heart of God, that we are indeed saved BY GRACE ALONE, and this is not our own doing, it is a gift of God’s love poured out at Calvary.

And there is nothing uglier than a “good Christian” thumping their Bible, shaking their fist at heaven, their face suffused with blood and anger, frustration and concern and negativity, believing themselves to be right, believing themselves to be gooder than good, but who so obviously do not know the heart of the loving Father. Been there. Done that. Bought the T-shirt. Ashamed of that. Demonstrated my spiritual pride and sinful fallen nature too many times. Was angry instead of Christ-like. Showed I didn’t know the heart of the loving Father. Angry frustrated Christians are an oxymoron.

Are you the prodigal? Then come to the loving heart of the Father by GRACE ALONE through CHRIST ALONE. Are you the angry other brother? Then come to the loving heart of the Father by GRACE ALONE through CHRIST ALONE. Or are you more like the Loving Father? Then love the prodigal just as much as you love the other brother. Because it really is about Grace Alone.

I have a dear friend from a prior church. And there are prodigal parts of his heart, where he is sure he has done things that exclude him from heaven. And there are “Other brother” parts of his heart, where he has always tried on his own to be “The Good Son”. I get it. I understand. And the conundrum that he is in is that he thinks God will reject him because of his failings and simultaneously he thinks it is by his own good works or lack thereof that he enters into the presence of God. You see the dilemma he is in. In December he was diagnosed with inoperable brain cancer and has poured his heart out to me in a whole series of Emails, basically which just state that he is in fear when he dies that God will reject him

and consign him to hell. He can't let it go, somehow. You set yourself up for failure when you think it is about you, instead of knowing it is about CHRIST ALONE through GRACE ALONE. You realize finally in the light of your own mortality that if you base your salvation and where you spend eternity on the basis of your own good works you are in a heap o' trouble. I spoke with him on the phone last week. He told me the doctors had given him at most 4 weeks to live. And I told him this. "My dear friend, it really is about GRACE. If you do not believe it then would you believe me when I say that I believe it? I believe that in that day when you go to meet the Lord that He will greet you at the gates of heaven with arms wide open. He will greet you just as the loving Father greeted the prodigal home. He will greet you just as He wants to greet the other brother home. Same love. Same grace. Same Savior. You will see Jesus standing before you and He will look at you in love and bid you into the embrace of the loving Father and for all eternity. The prodigal parts of your heart, He will embrace. The Other brother parts of your heart, He will embrace. " Why have you, prodigal, why have you "other brother", why have you **both** run away from that embrace and for so long? Why have you doubted? Why have you tried to do this on your own? Why are you so angry? Why are you so sad? Why are you so sure God will reject you?

No. In that day He will make us "*alive together with Him*". For indeed, BY GRACE ALONE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED. Through Christ Alone, attests Scripture Alone, through Grace Alone...to the glory of the heart of the loving Father Alone. Because in the end, my dear friend, who one day I shall see in heaven, it really is about GRACE ALONE. Thanks be to God! Amen!

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*