

Grace, Life, Glory

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Well, we're going to look at Ephesians 3:21 and actually build off of that as we've done more than once. You know, the church needs to be together and one of the reasons we need to be together is we need to sing his praises together. You just can't really define it, can you, it just does something for you. There's a strengthening and the Bible says an admonishing, a teaching element in there too but, um, my goodness, how it helps me. I appreciate Brother Tom Clay and all of his minions, all of his helpers who serve and are faithful and guide us to worship our God together.

I've, we, I think we looked at this five years ago and I've repackaged it some. I never can leave anything alone and I want to look at it again. Ephesians 3:21 is really a theme verse, maybe the theme verse for Grace Life Church of the Shoals, but more important than that based on my understanding of the total of biblical truth, I think it could be God's theme verse. It focuses in on, it, it's, it's anchored on the central truth of what God's up to and what God's about.

21 to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus forever and ever.
Amen.

That's what God's up to. He's up to glorifying his name through his Son Jesus, through the building of his church for time and eternity forever and ever, and we get to get in on that.

I call this doctrine that's central to this verse and central to what we are and central to the church in general, "Grace, Life, Glory." Grace, life, glory. This doctrine's unchangeable and what I mean by that, you can't alter it or you cannot forsake it without forsaking God and forsaking the truth. It's not something you can toy with. You may can mess around a little bit with how you do the Lord's Supper and a number of other things, but if you miss the truth of grace and life for God's glory, you miss everything. It's essential.

It's also historical. To discard this doctrine would be to forsake our forefathers, and I mean particularly our Baptist forefathers, though it expands further than that and I'll tell you more about this in a few moments, but particularly those who were called the Baptists beginning in a formal way 500 years ago. They lived to proclaim this doctrine of grace and life for God's glory and they died by the thousands and thousands and

thousands rather than deny this doctrine of the grace of God that brings life, builds his church, and brings in glory.

So this doctrine really defines us I think more than any other doctrine. We proudly display on our two marquees out front the little phrase, "A church committed to historic Baptist doctrine." That means that historic foundational Bible truth of salvation comes to man by the grace of God and grace alone, a grace which changes us and births new life in us, therefore then and only then making us candidates for baptism and membership, and God works all of that to glorify himself. Grace, life and glory.

Now let's introduce what I'm going to say this morning by first defining the word grace. Grace defined simply means favor, God's favor to us, and we often add the phrase "His unmerited favor." By the way, since we are all sinners, any favor God shows us is truly unmerited, undeserved favor.

Now we talk about common grace. We use that a lot in our church very purposefully. Common grace is that goodness of God to all mankind equally. Well, I shouldn't say equally but generally. God brings the sunshine on the just and the unjust. God brings rain on the crops of the wicked and the good. God gives us air to breathe and the pleasures of children and, and the blessings of marriage life, and on and on and on we could go, these graces, these gifts, this unmerited goodness God bestows on all mankind.

But common grace as wonderful as it is and as amazing as it is, is limited. It's limited only to time. It doesn't last for eternity. That's where we come to what we call saving grace or sometimes it's called redeeming grace, and that's God's favor he bestows on those he purposes to save. God's good to all mankind but there is that unique and special goodness he gives to those he is purposing to save. This includes those doctrines of God's choosing, God's electing, God's predestinating, God's calling, God's sealing, God's justifying, God's sanctifying, and then glorifying his own.

So, again, let's remind ourselves grace is a favor God gives those who have no merit in themselves and grace is grace because no compensation is required to receive it. Did you hear that? No work, no merit, no achievement, no cost, nothing. If you add any of that to it, it's no longer grace. Aren't you glad God's not like you and I? It's completely unsought. You did not come into this world and say, "I, you know, I, I've got, I've got some good understanding of things, I have some inherited virtues, and I think I'm gonna seek this God and see if he might show me some grace." No, you don't. Grace comes to you by, as, as the initiative of God himself. You did not seek it or look for it. It comes unsought. It comes undeserved. It's a pure charity, if you will.

Grace is extended to objects who altogether have no attractiveness that caused it to be extended. God didn't look down and say, "But they're so precious and they're so lovely I'm going to extend My grace to them." Quite the contrary. The Bible teaches absolutely the opposite. The Bible teaches our very nature is so abhorrent and anti-God that we are by nature the children of wrath, Ephesians 2. But that's the way God is. Romans 11:6

reminds us, "But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace." It can't be bought, earned or won by the creature.

Now still by way of introduction, let's talk, let's hone in on a little more carefully saving grace or redeeming grace. Let's remind ourselves that this grace that this, this unmerited favor God extends to those he purposes to save is, first of all, it's eternal. It's not something God came up with in time. It's not something God developed because things played out on earth in a way he wasn't expecting them to play out. This is just part of the eternal nature of God. 2 Timothy 1:9 reminds us, "who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but," in other words, instead of any human work or merit or achievement you could do, "but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity." This part of God to give this wonderful favor to save us, is something that existed in the heart of God before time began, before man sinned. During that epoch when there was only God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, they were, if you will, oozing with grace.

Grace is not only eternal but saving grace is free. Romans 3:24, "being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." Again, Romans 11:6 reminds us if it involves works on your part, on man's part in any way, then grace is no longer grace.

It's eternal, it's free, and, thirdly, introducing saving grace, it is sovereign. If it's of God, it has to be sovereign. I, I remember, uh, David Miller tongue-in-cheek reminding me not too many years ago that the phrase "sovereign grace" is redundant. If it's God's grace, it's God, it's sovereign because God cannot not be sovereign, but I like to use it for emphasis. It's sovereign. Hebrews 4:16, let, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Grace reigns on the throne, that's because it is sovereign and the one who sits on the throne who has the grace is sovereign. Sovereign is the idea that it is God's perfect and righteous prerogative and totally proper that he acts on his own will outside of the influence of any other. God chooses to do as God chooses and no outside influence can affect him. That's his sovereignty. Grace is on the throne and grace is dispensed by sovereign decree. Brothers and sisters, grace is not, as it were, on the Walmart shopping rack to be examined and handled by us and chosen by us if it suits us. No, grace is on the throne of the universe and it is bestowed when and on whom the perfect, beautiful, sovereign one chooses and is pleased to do so. Saving grace.

Let's remind ourselves that all men are born unrepentant and unbelieving as rebels against God, all men are fully and absolutely deserving of eternal condemnation, and it's the sovereign one who sits on the throne who in his own love and goodness dispenses common grace to all. This common grace is an expression of his love and his goodness even on the most undeserving, and any of these – now listen to me – any person who has ever lived under common grace who will repent of sin and embrace Jesus Christ by faith will be eternally saved. Did you hear me? Any man, any woman, any boy, any girl, any senior adult of any age under common grace who will repent of their sin and place their faith in Jesus Christ, God will forgive their sin and make them his child. But none will.

God's Son stands with arms outstretched and pierced, bloody marks in his hands and a gaping wound in his side and nail prints also in his feet, and men look and go their own way. None, excuse me, none will choose, none do choose on their own to come to him.

So therefore God exercises his divine right as Sovereign and extends saving grace to some of these undeserving, unrepentant, unbelieving rebels which bestows on them spiritual and eternal blessings which manifest the love and goodness of God. This is what unfolds in the Ephesians in chapter 1 and beginning in chapter 2, as precept upon precept, truth upon truth, glory upon glory, Paul writes to the Ephesian church unfolding what this loving sovereign God of grace has done to save his own children, and then when you get to Ephesians, uh, chapter 2, verse 10, he comes to this crescendo and he says, "For we are His workmanship." The great scholars tell us literally it should say, "His workmanship we are. It's His work that makes us His children. His workmanship we are, created," by us? No, "in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

Well, that's my introduction, this grace of God, this great common grace for all mankind and then this unique, special, saving grace that existed eternally in the heart and mind of God, that, that is, is dispensed by the sovereignty of this one who sits on the throne. Now to my outline.

I. Grace existed eternally in the heart and mind of God. We've hit on this, let's elaborate on it. It's an attribute of God, the A in the outline. It's a part of who he is. You see, God is God, God is not what we think him to be. Now can you just stop right there and preach to yourself for a moment. Have you learned to talk to yourself and not listen to yourself? God is who God says he is, not who you feel he ought to be. So we come to church and we sit under the preaching of the word or we have our Bible study and God unveils something of himself and we think, "Oh, wow, I never thought of God that way," and God says, "Well, thank you. I appreciate you receiving what I say about Myself instead of imposing on Me your idolatrous assumptions of who I ought to be." God is who God is and his attributes, his qualities, you might say, are not separate from his essential nature but they emanate from his essential nature. In other words, grace is extended because grace existed as a part of who God is. He's just that kind of a God. It's a part of his essential essence or nature, and grace existed eternally in the heart and mind of God before it was ever displayed in the world through his Son Jesus Christ.

Let me just give you real quickly several parts of this attribute of grace. First of all, as we've said it's a part of his essence. It's a part of the very nature of who he is as the holy God. It's a part of what makes up the beauty and the glory of him, the one true God. But grace is also his desire, it includes that he desires to reach out to and bring this favor to unworthy sinners in love. It includes his wisdom, in other words, he has the omniscience, the wisdom to prepare a plan whereby the grace would be extended to us and save us. It includes the will, the initiative to initiate the plan. And it includes God's power, that he has the power – listen to me – to effectually execute what he initiates. Now that right there is a glory. That right there is security of the believer. That right there is once saved, always saved. That right there is perseverance of the saints, that he has the power and the

might to effectually conclude what he's set out to perform. Aren't you glad that he is such a glorious God that in his very heart and nature before he created anything or anyone, there was this part of him that wanted to give favor to those who are most undeserving and unworthy and unholy before Him, and that he has the wisdom to put a plan together and he has the power to execute it and get it performed perfectly. You're talking about security of your salvation. Old Bill Stafford used to say, "I'm so saved it's pitiful." And it is. It's a wonder beyond wonders.

Well, it existed eternally in the heart and mind of God. We've talked about it's an attribute of God. And secondly, well, let's talk about grace, B, in the counsel of the Godhead. Grace, and this is beyond our comprehension is God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit confer together about the glories of grace and how they're going to administer it and bless the children through it.

Ephesians 1:3-4, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places," this is in the counsel of the Godhead. Verse 4, "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love." He chose us in him, that is, through the person and the works, the merits of his Son, that we would be, not that we might be, not that we possibly could be but that we would be holy and blameless before him in love. This was the heart of the Godhead concerning grace for the children before time even began.

Fifty different texts tell us these following truths: in grace he chose us; in grace he foreknew us, these are Bible words; in grace he elected us; in grace he predestined us; in grace he called us; in grace he justified us; in grace he sanctified us; and in grace he glorified us. All coming out of the mind and the counsel of the Godhead. Grace. Saving grace.

Well, let's go to II. Not only this grace existed eternally in the heart and mind of God, secondly, this grace is manifested by the Son and applied by the Spirit. That's God's plan. Jesus comes as the captain of grace to demonstrate it before all. He came, if you will, out of eternity and stepped into time that first Christmas morning.

So A in our outline, manifested by the Son, the Son of God. In grace the Son of God was qualified, he had the qualification, first of all. That is, as God the Father said, "I have to have one to fulfill this office of grace called the Christ," this one who would be the Savior sent from God to save the children, one has to be fully qualified and, of course, he was sinless and righteous, he was God Incarnate, he had the qualification. Secondly, the Incarnation, excuse me, he became man. He had to become one of us to save us. And thirdly, he went to the cross in his crucifixion where he substituted in our place and where he satisfied the wrath of God that was against the children. And then fourthly, his resurrection. He was raised, the Bible says, for our justification, if you will, to show forth that the penalty has been paid. Now listen, now the children because of grace manifested through the person and work of Christ, now the children can stand before God justified, that is, as if they had never sinned. That's grace but through the merit and work of Christ

manifested by the Son, and today he faithfully is the intercession or is in intercession at the right hand of the Father on behalf of the children. A summarizing way to say it is John 1:17, "For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth come through Jesus Christ." Now who do you want to line up with, Moses and try to keep the law, or just dive into the rivers of Jesus and his grace? That's a great place to be. That's a great place to live. That's a great place to be found.

Well, first of all we said it's grace manifested by the Son but, secondly, it's grace applied by the Spirit. Where grace is manifested and exercised in the person and work of Jesus Christ – listen now – grace is extended and applied by God the Holy Spirit. It was manifested and exercised by Christ, it is extended and applied to us by the person of the Holy Spirit. You could summarize it this way: the Father is the fountain of grace, the Son is the channel of grace, and the Spirit is the bestower of grace. No wonder the songwriter wrote, "Just grace, grace, God's grace. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me." It's grace upon grace upon grace upon grace, this unmerited favor God poured out toward us.

Ephesians 2:5 reminds us that there is this regenerating, this life-giving work of the Spirit, "even when we were dead in our transgressions, [He] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)." Christ brings us to life through the agency of the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit.

Then Ephesians 1:13, this sealing work, "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of the truth, the gospel of your salvation," and this has to happen, "having also believed." This is where our Baptist forefathers were so accurate because they said there must be evidence that you are now a true believer before we'll baptize you. You see, that's something our, our Presbyterian and many Protestant forefathers left off. They got grace pretty good but they didn't get this thing of the new life and the change and they were missing it by doing that. It's the Spirit, the sealing of the Spirit, if you will. One way to think of the sealing of the Spirit is that it seals the deal. He comes into your life and it is his witness and the evidence of his working in your life that, that gives you the final seal and security, "I am one of God's children." Don't you dare – listen to me – don't you dare say, "Well, you know, God's sovereign in all of this and it's God chooses and God elects and God predestines, yes, the Bible teaches all of that, I will not shirk back one iota from preaching it," but listen to me, you cannot know you're God's child unless you yourself have turned to Christ in faith and the Holy Spirit of God is bearing witness to that change. We teach, we preach an experiential religion. It's not just some head knowledge, knowledge from some words in the book. It's an actual experience called the new birth.

So the regenerating work of the Spirit, the sealing work of the Spirit, and then also grace is applied through the Holy Spirit in a sanctifying work. 2 Thessalonians 2:13 reminds us, "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth." In grace when the gospel is preached, the Spirit applies the gospel in saving power to the soul. He brings life to the spiritually dead. He conquers our rebellion and melts our hearts, our affections begin to be turned to love God and want

to please God. He opens our blind eyes, and above and beyond all else he cleanses us from all sin and defilement.

A. W. Pink quotes G. S. Bishop in his book on the attributes of God and here's what Pink quotes as he quotes Bishop. "Grace is a provision for men who are so fallen they cannot reach the bar of justice, so corrupt they cannot change their own natures, so averse to God they cannot turn to him, so blind they cannot see him, and so deaf that they cannot hear him, and so dead that he, himself, must open their graves and lift them to resurrection." That's what the grace of God through the Holy Spirit does. He imparts this new life. You see, my friends, God's all about grace. God the Father is the King of grace. God the Son, Jesus Christ, is the Prince of grace. And God the Holy Spirit is the Ambassador of grace. It's all about grace.

Now, III. Grace produces spiritual life. Let's elaborate on this. We've hit on it, let's talk about it a little bit more and let me remind you that this is the element that separates our forefathers from both the Roman Catholic state churches of ancient Europe and the Protestant Presbyterian state churches of ancient Europe. The, the, the Catholic churches of ancient Europe like today miss grace altogether. They miss grace completely, installing this religious sacramental works system of salvation. And then though I, I esteem them and I've learned from their writings and I believe they're brothers in Christ, far far too many of our Protestant and Presbyterian forefathers who had their own state churches in ancient Europe would teach grace and election but they would sprinkle babies just like the Catholics would and they began to quickly lose the evidence of the impartation of new life. But our Baptist forefathers got it right. They believed in grace. They believed in the same gospel their Presbyterian and Protestant friends believed, but they said, "We are not going to accommodate sprinkling into state churches or sprinkling into any churches. You must show you have the new life. You must be old enough to testify and bear witness that there's been repentance developed in your heart and faith in Jesus Christ, and then and only then will we baptize you." Now you've gotta understand something, folks, that had not been practiced for hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years except maybe in a little tiny offshoot group here and there, and I do believe there's a line of faithful groups that history doesn't even know about most of them who were trying to practice true, grace, life religion, if you will, true, Bible grace, life religion.

It's this element of the spirit or grace rather produces spiritual life. Ephesians 2:5 again reminds us, "even when we were dead in our transgressions, [He] made us alive together with Christ." While we are declared just in our relation to the law by grace, the work of grace does far more than that, it also transforms us individually by imparting spiritual life. 2 Corinthians 5:17, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature," or a new creation, "the old things are passed away; behold, all things have become new." Life is bestowed by the Spirit. This is the key element of true religion that's so often missed. I don't care if you can write a thousand sound theology books on all the glories of the doctrines of grace, do you hold and do you embrace that when the gospel comes to a person and they're truly converted, they are changed, they're different? And therefore, as our Baptist

forefathers would teach, only then are they candidates for believer's baptism and church membership. The sprinkling of babies is to, of no avail and of no effect.

John 5:21, Jesus said, "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes." I've never done it but I need to do some expositions in Ezekiel. You know, the old, uh, narrative of Ezekiel 37 where you've got these dry bones, dry bones scattered everywhere, dry bones, no life, no animation, just dry bones. Ezekiel 37:3, "He said to me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' And I answered, 'O Lord GOD, You know.'" You know. Folks, that's our heritage. That's Bible doctrine that God can take these spiritual, dry, dead bones and make them live, and then we're baptized and become part of his church. Grace that gives life, that builds the church for the glory of God. That's about as foundational a Baptist doctrine as there is, period.

Well, the inward evidences of new life and I'll just be brief here. There is what I call repentance or primary repentance, first of all, a primary repentance is that repentance from looking to or counting on anything other than Christ to forgive you and save you. A person has to start there because almost everyone is looking to something instead of Christ. And then secondary repentance is that continual repentance that the Spirit of God taught by the word of God, God brings up to your heart and mind as you go through life and you're continually confessing and repenting of all the shortcomings and sins and transgressions in our lives. So inwardly we start becoming these repenters and inwardly we start rejoicing in God and we find this new love for God the Father, we find this new affection and clinging and longing and loving of God the Son, Jesus Christ, we begin to see a beauty in him and a love in him and a wisdom in him and we joy in him. We begin to find a new love for God's word. I remember after I was converted that night driving my car back to college, I began reading my Bible and couldn't stop reading it. What happened? New life. New life. Life came in me. And then, of course, a new love for God's people and that is a true local church, you're just drawn to it.

And then there's outward evidences. This can't just be bottled up, it sloshes over into our lifestyle. The fruits of the Spirit begin to increasingly be shown in our life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. We never arrive at those, do we, but those begin to be manifested when the new life comes in. And always a reforming lifestyle.

IV. Last point: the glory of God. This is all for the glory of God. Ephesians 3:21, "to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." God said, "I'm doing all this so that people might marvel over what kind of God I am and what I can perform. Look at these people I'm building. Look at this new creation I'm developing, this church, made up now of all these local churches."

Let's bear down for just a moment before I close on John 12:27-30, alright? John 12:27-30. Jesus is just beginning to unfold before the disciples what's coming for him in the cross, and, and we get this glimpse into the turmoil of his struggle at this point. In verse 27 he says, "Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour." Uh, we don't know exactly, we

can't, we gotta be careful trying to decide the motives behind Jesus but is he not saying, "As a human, I, I, I don't want to go to this point of violent separation from You, My Father, and bearing the sin guilt of all the children. There's a part of Me that don't want to do that but, heavenly Father, " understand that way back there, way way way back there, way way way back there, way back there in eternity past in the counsel of the Godhead he's saying, "Father, You and I determined and decided We would show this grace." This wasn't some plan that unfolded as God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit looked at the earth and said, "How we gonna fix this mess?" No! No! No! A thousand times no! God's plan was settled how he would work it all out before the first speck of dust was created by the active enunciation of his voice.

So Jesus said, "It's for this hour that I even came to earth, Father." This is good stuff, folks. This is good stuff. Verse 28, "'So, Father, let's get on with it. Here's what it's all about, glorify Your name.' Then a voice came out of heaven." I've referred to this verse many times but I just can't get over it. Have you gotten over it? If you have, I need to preach it more. A voice came out of heaven, "I have both glorified it," and can I just give a Southern Middle Tennessee amplified translation here? "And Son, you better bet I'm gonna glorify it again. My dear Son." Now when he says, "glorify Your name," it's, it includes God the Son, Jesus. "Son, You know, we set all this up for Our glory. We're executing all this plan and, Son, You're doing it perfectly just exactly what ought to be done for Our glory. Yeah, I've glorified Our name and We're going to glorify it some more." Are you listening to me? How shall I say this and be balanced? Your salvation has more to do with God's desire to glorify his own name than God's desire to save you from hell, though he does desire to do that. Don't misunderstand me, he does, but that does not compare with God's desire to glorify his name through the grace he saves you with.

Tom Clay gets up here and leads these songs and some of these grand truths begin to resonate in your heart and mind and you sing to Jesus with a compassion, with a joy, with a sweetness, with a treasuring, with an adoring that you didn't quite have before you began to grasp these things and God says, "That's what I'm looking for. I'm looking for you to adore Me for who I am and what I can do."

Verse 28 again, John 12, "'Father, glorify Your name.' Then a voice came out of heaven: 'I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.'" Verse 29, "So the crowd of people who stood by and heard it were saying that it had thundered; others were saying, 'An angel has spoken to Him.' Jesus said, 'This voice has not come for My sake, but for yours.'" In other words, "Me and the Father know what it's about. We're trying to get you up to speed. Me and the Father know it's all about Us and all about our glory, We're trying to get you there, though." And I've been trying to get there and I've been trying to get you there for 40 years. It's all about his glory. He gives grace that men might get new life. Those that get new life are baptized and become part of a true church and then it functions together until eternity all for his glory and then for his glory in eternity. It's all for his glory. Grace. Life. Glory.

Now next Sunday, I challenge you to bring a very special Christmas love offering. What we bring the Christmas love offering because it's good to retire the debt. Yes, that is good

but there's more than that. This is more than a team spirit of, "Look what we can do together." That's not all wrong but it's deeper than that. We come to bring our Christmas love offering that we might save money on interest, yes, and that's good but there's more than that. Can I remind you that God don't have any shortage on funds? He just wants to be glorified in the way you give the funds he's given you. It's not, God's not troubled about this thing. Retire the debt. Save money on interest, of course, yes, but more than that, well, we need to retire this debt so we can give more money for missions. That will happen, yes, and that's good but there's more than that. Grace Life Church of the Shoals, grasp afresh that God has called us to be about something bigger than ourselves. We are invited by God to get in on what God is doing in the world. We're invited to be on mission with God and let's remind ourselves afresh that you and I as Grace Life Church of the Shoals in 2020 are a part of a continuum, we're links in a long long chain of God's glorious purposes.

In 1525 in Switzerland, a godless rebel who was gloriously converted, his name is Conrad Grebel, and he began to study his Bible and he began to learn the doctrines of grace, life and glory, and the doctrines of the church, and he was troubled that though some were beginning in the Reformation of those days to teach that salvation is by grace, through faith alone, they were very troubled that after that they kind of put it in the background and they still attended the state run church and they still sprinkled their babies and they still took of the old Romanish Catholic Mass. And Conrad Grebel met up with a man called Felix Manz in Switzerland in 1525 and said, "This bothers me. Why are we not going all the way? Why are we not being fully biblical in the church that we're living in and joining and practicing?" Somehow in their conversations they said, "Well, do you know of a church anywhere that's baptizing only people who truly show they have new life in Christ, true believers?" And Conrad looked at Felix and Felix looked at Conrad and said, "There ain't one of them out there. Shall I say it? I shall say it." Conrad look at Felix and said, "I don't know of a grace life church anywhere. All we've got is these old Catholic systems and then the Protestants got some doctrine right but they're still, they're still practicing the old baby sprinkling system." And so Felix looked at Conrad and Conrad looked at Felix over at Felix' house one night in 1525 and said, "Tell you what, Conrad, would you baptize me by immersion as a believer in Jesus Christ and I'll baptize you by immersion as a believer in Jesus Christ?" And they did and as far as history records, that hadn't been done in 1,000-1,200-300 years. And there without even really realizing it, they constituted the first organized Baptist church in Switzerland.

Well, this went over like a lead balloon with the civil and church authorities. They were considered outlaws and there was a civil edict rendered that they could no longer teach or baptize. They didn't pay any attention to it. Conrad kept preaching and history records over the next several months he had 500 people who came to faith in Christ, and after hearing the gospel of grace and believing and having the new life evidenced in them, they were then baptized and became a part of that congregation.

Well, Conrad Grebel was arrested, put in prison by the state church authorities. He somehow escaped and he preached for several more months and then he died of the plague, but after Grebel's death in the next few dozen years, the church historian recorded

that more Baptists were martyred in those years than Christians were martyred in the first three centuries of Christianity as recorded in the New Testament, Baptists by the probably tens of thousands. Why? Because they held to the doctrine of grace, life and glory.

So when we bring our Christmas love offering this Sunday, this next Sunday, we actually are saying to our forefathers, "You did not die in vain. The strong Bible doctrine you lived to proclaim and died rather than deny, we embrace and support it today 500 years later." I'm looking forward to seeing Felix Manz and Conrad Grebel in heaven one day. And yet in the end of it all, we bring the Christmas love offering to the honor and glory of God, after all, it is God who extended this grace to Conrad Grebel and Felix Manz and to all of us, that changed us by giving us new life which made us true and the only true and rightful candidates for baptism and church membership, in which God is doing all of that all for his glory. If you look at our, our letterhead stationery here at the church it says, "The doctrines of grace, the life of the Spirit, for the glory of God." Grace, life, glory. You're giving to more than just an organization or a Christian thing, you're giving to something bigger than that. This retirement of debt will give us one more step in taking the baton that Conrad and Felix handed off to their next generation and we're gonna hand it off to another one for the glory of God. Grace. Life. Glory. Can I say resoundingly with stalwart conviction, "On these things we stand. We will never change."