

Romans Chapter 5

Verses 1-11

On Oct. 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed a list of grievances against the Catholic Church onto the door of a chapel in Wittenberg, Germany. His “Ninety-five Theses” was the spark that ignited the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther was a Catholic monk in the German state of Saxony who became disillusioned with the corruption and greed he saw within the Church, and began to lose faith that the Church would lead him to salvation. Through his study of the Bible, he decided “that it is not the Church, but his own individual faith that will guarantee his salvation.” He took offense to the Church’s sale of indulgences, which became common in the early 1500’s, as the Church, under the leadership of Pope Leo X, needed money to fund the rebuilding of St. Peter’s Basilica.

Indulgences granted the buyer remission from the punishment of sin in this life. However, as the Church’s need for money grew, the sellers of indulgences began promising that they would absolve the buyers of sin and ensured that they would be released from purgatory. Luther was not the only man who objected to these indulgences. Frederick, the elector of Saxony, forbade the sale of indulgences within the state, consequently many people went to nearby Juterbog and Thuringia to buy them.

In 1517, Johann Tetzel, a Dominican friar, began selling indulgences in Juterbog while falsely promising, “As soon as the gold in the casket rings, The rescued soul to heaven springs.” Tetzel’s actions angered Luther, who began writing his grievances in a letter to the archbishop. Luther wrote a list of 95 propositions that he wished to discuss and nailed it to the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral. Part of that thesis was what is now called the five 'solas'. The “five solas” is a term used for five great foundational truths of the Protestant reformers and they are: “Sola Scriptura” (Scripture Alone); “Sola Gratia” (Grace Alone); “Sola Fide” (Faith Alone); “Solus Christus” (Christ Alone); and “Soli Deo Gloria” (To God Alone Be Glory). As we have seen, these “five solas” were developed in response to specific perversions of the truth that were taught by the Roman Catholic Church.

The Roman Church taught that the foundation for faith and practice was a combination of the scriptures, sacred tradition, and the teachings of the magisterium (In Catholicism, the magisterium is the authority that lays down what is the authentic teaching of the Church. For the Catholic Church, that authority is vested uniquely in the pope and the bishops who are in communion with him), and the pope; but the Reformers said, “No, our foundation is sola scriptura”.

The Catholic Church taught that we are saved through a combination of God's grace, the merits that we accumulate through penance and good works, and the luxury of merits that the saints before us accumulated; the Reformers responded, “No, sola gratia”.

The Catholic Church taught that we are justified by faith and the works that we produce, which the righteousness that God infuses in us through faith brings about. The reformers responded, “No, we are justified by faith alone, which lays hold of the righteousness of Christ that God freely credits to the account of those who believe”.

The Catholic Church taught that we are saved by the merits of Christ and the saints, and that we approach God through Christ, the saints, and Mary, who all pray and intercede for us. The Reformers responded, “No, we are saved by the merits of Christ Alone, and we come to God through Christ Alone”.

The Catholic Church adhered to what Martin Luther called the “theology of glory” (in opposition to the “theology of the cross”), in which the glory for a sinner's salvation could be attributed partly to Christ, partly to Mary and the saints, and partly to the sinner himself. The Reformers responded, “No, the only true gospel is that which gives all glory to God alone, as is taught in the scriptures.”

Today, the Catholic Church teaches the same essential distortions of truth; and Protestantism has seen a regression to many of the same corruptions, in many circles and denominations. (*see note below)

So, what has this to do with our text? Paul is addressing the very same issues here and is drawing out of his previous statements that our justification is by grace alone, through faith alone. We are brought from God's wrath into His grace which alters our experience of God. Instead of being strangers to God we are now transformed through our faith into sons and daughters of the living God who now acts as our loving Father. As Paul says in Vs.11, "*we have now received reconciliation,*" to God, and "*have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" (Vs.1). This peace has been established in the gospel and we now have access to God because the wall between us has been removed by the person and work of Jesus in His ministry on earth and His redeeming work on the cross. Through His works Jesus has not only ended the hostility of God toward us believers, but He has established an everlasting peace of fellowship and communion with God. The hope Paul speaks about in Vs.2 is the assurance of things to come. It is not wishful thinking but a guarantee from God that He puts in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. This hope produces character in us through our times of testing because it demonstrates our faith and belief in God. That faith perseveres through afflictions and suffering and confirms our confidence in God and His promises. The extent of God's love is seen on the cross where God acted "*at the right time,*" and it is this same love that meets us in our hour of need, while we are "*still weak*" (Vs.6), "*still sinners*" (Vs.8), and "*while we were enemies*" (Vs.10).

Verses 12-21

Paul now begins to compare the works of Jesus to the fall of Adam. He starts by pointing out that death is not a natural occurrence, it came through sin. Just as the righteousness of Jesus is imputed to us in salvation, death and sin are imputed to us through Adam who represented us before God in the garden of Eden, and the guilt and sin he incurred was passed on to all mankind, who are his descendants. As a result, we are all born into sin and are guilty before God even before we actually commit any act of sin. The phrase "*where there is no law*" refers to the period of time from Adam to Moses. Because Adam violated specific instructions of God sin became universal on all men even before the law was given through Moses. Before the law was given men were still liable to punishment because of Adam's sin. Adam served as a type or foreshadowing of Jesus, Adam was divinely appointed by God as the head of the whole human race (with the exception of Jesus), and Adam forfeited our righteousness by his sin. In the same way, God made Jesus the representative head of a new humanity, one that, through His obedience and death, would regain their righteousness and justification. In this way Jesus succeeds where Adam failed. The contrast in these two men is stark, the work of grace through the person and work of Jesus is far greater than the sin and judgement Adam brings. Adam brought man into ruin, Jesus brings man into restoration. If we compare these two men we see how condemnation and justification are the direct fruits of their actions. Paul goes on to say in Vs.18-19, how the actions of "*one*" led to condemnation for all (except Jesus), when Adam sinned. In contrast "*by the one man's obedience*" all men were "*made righteous.*" Jesus now stands as the representative head of the new humanity and through His resurrection we are given new birth and a living hope (see 1 Peter 1:3; Eph. 2:1-10). In Vs.20, Paul explains how the law was given to God's people "*to increase the trespass.*" Although sin was already in the world before the law was given (Vs.13), the law now reveals to us the nature of our sin, which is trespass. The law specifically highlights sin as trespassing and violating God's high standards. Because "*sin reigned in death*" as Paul says, "*grace also might reign*" through the person and work of Jesus. Our sin is a grievous offence to God but His grace outweighs the sin in our lives because the price paid for our sin was the sacrificial death of His Son.

*The Five Solas are five Latin phrases that represent the core positions held by those who adhere to the Protestant Reformation that happened in the 16th century. They are more commonly recognised as: Sola Scriptura, Sola Christus, Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, and Sola Deo Gloria.

Sola Scriptura: Scripture alone

This does not mean that tradition or councils are not considered. It means that the Scriptures alone are the final and the highest authority. Everything that the Scriptures address are to be used as the final word on that topic. All things that we learn from other sources must be compared to Scripture, and if they do not match Scripture or if they contradict Scripture, then we are not to affirm them. The Bible says not to exceed what is written, (1 Corinthians 4:6).

Solus Christus: Christ alone

This position means that Jesus is the only means of salvation (John 14:6), the only mediator (1 Timothy 2:5), and that Jesus is the only human revelation of God. In other words, God has revealed himself in the person of Jesus, and no other person who's ever lived is God in flesh as Jesus is, (John 1:1,14).

Sola Gratia: Grace alone

This means that we are saved from our sins and damnation by the unmerited grace of God alone without any of our works. Grace is the completely unmerited, undeserved favour of God that he bestows upon us. The grace of God is completely motivated out of his own character and is his kind intention and merciful action upon various individuals. Thus, we are saved from his righteous judgment by his unmerited and unearned favour, and there is nothing that we can or have done that can move God to be gracious to us.

Sola Fide: Faith alone

This means that we are saved from our sins by faith alone in Christ Alone and not by faith and anything we do whether it be baptism, church membership, good works, sincerity, or anything. God is the object of our faith. When we have faith in the work of Christ and his sacrifice on the cross, we are justified (Romans 5:1).

Soli Deo Gloria: the Glory of God alone

This means that God alone is the one who is to receive all the glory. He alone is the author and finisher of our salvation and works all good things through our lives. He has revealed himself in the person of Jesus, and in great humility and love died on the cross, bearing our sin (1 Peter 2:24). So that we might enjoy his presence forever. We are to live for him and glorify him (Isaiah 43:7).

These five solos were developed during the Protestant Reformation in response to the heresies found in the Roman Catholic Church:

Scripture: Roman Catholicism denied the sufficiency of Scripture and sought to consider sacred tradition is of equal value.

"...the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honoured with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence'," (Catechism of the Catholic Church, par. 82).

Christ: Though it did affirm that Christ was the only means of true salvation, it adds the intercession of the Saints and Mary as an additional means of accessing God.

"If any one saith, that it is an imposture (fraudulent) to celebrate masses in honour of the saints, and for obtaining their intercession with God, as the Church intends; let him be anathema, (cursed)" (Council of Trent, Canons on Justification, Canon 5).

Grace: Furthermore the Roman Catholic Church denied that a person's sins are forgiven by the unmerited grace of God alone. Catholicism teaches that salvation is merited by obedience to the commandments.

"...Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, we can then merit for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life," (CCC 2010).

“Moved by the Holy Spirit, we can merit for ourselves and for others all the graces needed to attain eternal life, as well as necessary temporal goods,” (CCC 2027).

Faith: In addition, Roman Catholicism condemns the idea of faith alone and says that salvation is dependent on faith and participation in the sacraments, among other things.

"If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be anathema," (Council of Trent, Canons on Justification, Canon 9).

Glory: The Roman Catholics largely say they seek the glory of God, it is unfortunate that too much of the glory and adoration given is focused on the Pope and Mary.

"By asking Mary to pray for us, we acknowledge ourselves to be poor sinners and we address ourselves to the 'Mother of Mercy,' the All-Holy One," (CCC 2677).

"After speaking of the Church, her origin, mission, and destiny, we can find no better way to conclude than by looking to Mary," (CCC 972).

"So no man goeth to Christ but by His Mother," (Vatican Website: Encyclical of Pope Leo 13th on the Rosary, Octobri Mense, Pope Leo 13th, 1903-1914).

(CCC stands for Catechism of the Catholic Church).

In light of the Roman Catholic errors, the reformers developed the five solas as a set of declarations that stood in opposition to the Roman Catholic heresies.