Romans 5:15-19 *The 5 Solas: Solus Christus*

***Spiritual Tourism***One of the more interesting religious practices of the middle ages in Europe was the veneration of relics. A relic was thought to be the physical remains of Christ, Mary, one of the apostles, or a saint.

Usually, relics were bones or skeletons. But objects which once belonged to a particular individual—such as clothing, jewelry, or books—could also become quite revered. In the case of Jesus and His Mother Mary, both of whom were believed to have ascended into heaven, no skeletal remains existed but items associated with them—such as vials of blood, locks of hair, the Crown of Thorns, or pieces of the True Cross--were very popular and much sought after.

Not only were relics prized because of their connection to a famous saint, they were usually credited with possessing miraculous powers for healing or protection. Thus, a sort of spiritual tourism occurred in which people would go on pilgrimages to visit the sites of some of the most famous relics. Some of the largest cathedrals in Europe were built to house these relics, and also financed in no small part by their popularity.

Possessing notable relics became a point of pride for various communities. The more powerful the miracles credited to your relic, or the closer its connection to the events in the Bible, the more people who would visit your town and the more money would pour in. But it’s not like a city could just go out and buy the best relics. After all, why would anyone willingly sell or part with a miracle-performing item? Presumably they would only do so it if it no longer possessed its powers, meaning that the relic was worthless. Instead, towns would openly and boastfully steal the relics they desired. One of the more famous examples is the Italian town of Bari, which in 1087 commissioned a team of thieves to steal from the Turkish town of Myra the remains of Saint Nicolas. For decades they basked in the glory of being the town that had stolen the bones of Santa Claus.

The problems with the veneration of relics seem, today, rather obvious. For one thing, there was no way to authenticate that the objects in question really were connected to the religious figure as claimed. Who can really believe, for example, that anyone had the foresight to collect Jesus’ blood as he died on the cross? The abundance of claims to possessing the same objects were enough to demonstrate that some—if not all—were blatant forgeries. The reformer John Calvin observed that there were enough so-called pieces of the True Cross to build a ship. And Martin Luther caustically asked: “And how does it happen that eighteen apostles are buried in Germany when Christ had only twelve?"

Another problem was theological. The thought-leaders of the Catholic Church were careful to teach that relics were not to be worshipped as gods or idols. A distinction was made between the word “worship” and “venerate.” According to official dogma Christians were to worship only God while venerating the saints and their relics for the virtue God displayed in them.

It was a nuanced argument, the finer points of which were lost on the general population. Overwhelmingly illiterate and very superstitious, Medieval Europeans thought of the relics as magic talismans that could heal their illnesses, grant personal revelations from God, or better their lives financially and romantically. Thus they worshipped the relics like idols and spent great amounts of money to visit them. Many felt a closer affiliation to a certain relic or saint—upon which they depended for salvation--than they did to Jesus.

It is not surprising, then, that when the movement to Reform the church began, the veneration of relics became a target of criticism. For Luther, relics--like indulgences--were another form of corrupt fundraising being used to control the people and profit from them without conveying any real spiritual benefit.

Ultimately, the big problem with relics is that they promote dependence on something other than the saving work of Jesus. In a sermon about John the Baptist, who constantly pointed to Jesus as the only one we should trust in, Luther said:

We humans are weak and stubbornly perverse and are more likely to become attached to saints than to Christ.  Within the papacy they have preached about the service rendered by these beloved saints, that one ought to rely on their merit…

For this reason it is necessary constantly to persevere and adhere to John’s testimony concerning Christ.  For it requires toil and effort to continue with word and testimony, for a person at death to be able to say, I must die, but I have a Savior concerning whom John the Baptist testifies; on him and on no other creature, either in heaven or on earth, do I rely.

However, that a person can die as cheerfully by believing in St. Barbara, in an indulgence, or in a pilgrimage to Rome, as in the man to whom alone John the Baptist points, is out of the question…

What I am telling you is that it is easier for us humans to believe and trust in everything else than in the name of Christ, who alone is all in all, and more difficult for us to rely on him in whom and through whom we possess all things. (These quotes are taken from volume five of [**Baker Publishing’s 7-volume set of Luther’s sermons**](http://www.amazon.com/dp/080101199X/ref%3Das_li_ss_til?tag=reforreade-20&camp=0&creative=0&linkCode=as4&creativeASIN=080101199X&adid=01Q20VHA1TYT2B9AE4CG) (page 79); credit: <https://reformedreader.wordpress.com/2012/03/24/martin-luther-on-solus-christus/>)

***5 Solas, One Grand Point***This brings us to today’s Sola: ***Solus Christus***. Christ alone. The Medieval church had clouded the gospel by adding assistants and helpers into the mix of salvation.  Rome preached a gospel of “*Jesus and*:” Jesus and Mary, Jesus and purgatory, Jesus and the saints, Jesus and works of charity.  Luther and the Reformers cleared the fog by ridding the church of helpers in salvation.  They preached the gospel once again in all its clarity: Christ and Christ alone is sufficient for salvation.

*Solus Christus.*

We are in the midst of a series where we are looking at the 5 pillars of Protestantism. 5 fundamental claims of the Reformation that are summarized in Latin phrases all using the word “Sola” or “alone.”

At this point, I hope you have noticed that these *5 Solas* are somewhat repetitive. They are not meant to be distinct from one another but all point to the fundamental truth that our salvation comes from outside of ourselves. It is a gift of grace alone, obtained through faith alone, in the work of Jesus Christ alone. In many ways, today’s sermon is just restating the same major point of the last two sermons.

The emphasis today, though, is on the work of Jesus. Jesus Christ really is at the center of the Reformation. He is the center of the Bible. And He is the center of our faith. We are saved by Christ and Christ alone.

The scripture I want to look at today—at least to start—comes from Romans 5:15-19. Romans is the Apostle Paul’s *Magnum Opus*. It is the book of the Bible that most precisely lays out the gospel—sometimes in agonizingly specific detail. And in these two paragraphs in Romans 5 Paul lays out the essential difference between Adam and Jesus.

Adam and Jesus. Two very influential people. Adam is our first parent. He is representative of our need for salvation. Jesus is the new Adam. He is the means of our salvation. Paul’s intent in this passage is to show us how much better—his phrase is “how much more”—Jesus is than Adam.

Romans can be difficult to read, but I think it is helpful to read this passage as **a chart with two columns**. On one side we’ll put Adam, and under his name we’ll list all the things that come from him. On the other side we’ll put Christ, and under His name we’ll put all the things that come from Him.

Adam’s column will be bad. Christ’s column will be good. Everything bad flows out of Adam’s column. Everything good flows out of Christ’s column. And our goal will be to see how much more comes from Christ.

***Sin Met with Grace***Let’s start with **verse 15**:

**15**But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!

Let’s start with the Adam column. When Paul says “many died by the trespass of the one man” he’s talking about Adam. I’ll show you that in a moment. So what do we put in Adam’s column? Let’s put **“trespass”,** which is another word for sin. Adam is the source of sin.

We’ve kind of jumped in mid-thought here. This section actually begins with verse 12, before Paul goes off on a brief tangent about the law. Let’s **put verse 12** up so we can see how it begins:

**12**Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned—

That’s what comes from Adam: sin. The Bible includes the descendants of Adam in the sin of Adam. When Adam failed to obey God and protect his family from the lies of Satan and he gave in to the temptation and ate the fruit, it’s like we all were right there with him. That introduced the Fall into the world and the whole world has been under the curse of sin ever since.

Theologians call this “inherited guilt.” We all inherit the guilt of Adam. The Bible is comfortable with corporate grouping. Humanity is seen as a corporate whole, with Adam as our representative head. So when Adam sinned, we all sinned. We all fall under the curse of Adam’s failure.

And if you say: “Well that doesn’t seem fair. I didn’t vote for Adam to be my representative. I don’t see why his failure should be counted as my failure” keep in mind that not only did we inherit guilt, we also inherited corruption. That is, as the end of the verse says “all have sinned.” When Adam fell he opened the door to sin entering the world so that every descendant of his has also committed sin, for which we all stand rightly condemned. We all have sinful spiritual DNA inherited from our first father Adam and passed down from generation to generation.

And, more importantly, if we object to the first Adam representing us in the fall, we risk missing out on having the second Adam represent us in salvation.

Let’s go back to **verse 15**, so we can see what goes in the Christ column:

**15**But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!

If the many are affected by the trespass of Adam, then “how much more” did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man overflow to the many!

Here’s what I’ll put in Christ’s column: **super-overflowing grace**! I know that sounds a little corny, but we need something that gets at the superlative nature of this. The “how much more-ness” of this.

I set this up like a comparison. We put one thing in the Adam column, and then we put something else in the Christ column. And they’re supposed to correspond to each other. And they do. But I don’t want you to think that they are equal. Or equivalent. Paul is comparing Christ to Adam, but he wants us to see how much more there is in Christ. There is a magnitude of difference.

Sin goes into the Adam column. And that’s a lot. “the many died by the trespass of the one man…” That’s a lot.

But the Jesus column is greater. How much more. God’s grace. The gift. Grace. Overflowing. Paul just keeps repeating grace words.

God’s grace in Jesus is overflowing. The Greek word is “*eperisseusen*.” It’s the same word the gospel writers use to describe the bread spilling out of the baskets after Jesus feeds the 5000. It’s a picture of a bucket being left under a wide-open spigot.

Adam may have introduced sin to the world, but Jesus GIVES AWAY His grace which cancels sin in abundance. Super-overflowing grace.

***Condemnation met with Justification***But there’s more. **Let’s go to verse 16**:

**16**Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man’s sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.

Another comparison that’s not really a comparison. The curse which comes from Adam is met and exceeded by the gift found in Christ.

What do we put in the Adam column from this verse? “The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation.”

**Judgment and condemnation**. Adam’s sin brought the just and righteous response of a Holy God. When Adam broke God’s command, God had to pronounce a sentence of punishment on him. To not do so would have been a violation of His own perfection and would have opened Him to the accusation of condoning sin.

So Adam’s sin brings judgment and condemnation into the world. The sentence of death. God’s righteous wrath must be satisfied through the death of sinners.

But what goes into Christ’s column? What is the gift? “the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.” I’ll put it like this--again so that we can see the superlative nature of what is happening--in Christ’s column goes: **super-effective justification.**

Super-effective justification. We think it is something that Adam sinned and we all fell down. We are all condemned by Adam’s one sin. Think of all the countless trespasses—trillions upon trillions--that have followed that one act of disobedience.

That is something. But it’s really nothing.

Because despite all those trillions of sins—past, present, and future—they are paid for by the death of Jesus. Jesus’ death on the cross was sufficient to pay for them all.

Justification is a word we talked about last week. It describes the way that God applies the righteousness of the sinless savior to those who put their faith in Him. I used that other Latin term: J*ustitia alienum*, alien righteousness. A righteousness that comes from outside of ourselves but is effectively applied to us because of the perfect obedience of the God-man Jesus Christ.

Again, this what makes Jesus the second and better Adam. If Adam’s sin and condemnation is applied to us, then how much more will the sinless perfection and justification of Jesus be applied to us who believe? How much better to have Jesus standing in for us?

How much more effective is the gift of Jesus than the sin of Adam!

***The Reign of Death met with the Reign of Life***Then, one more comparison. **Verse 17**:

 **17**For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!

So far, in the Adam column, we’ve put sin and condemnation. These are the things we inherit from Adam. Sin that results in condemnation which means, here in verse 17, **the reign of death.**

Because of Adam, death reigns. This is the one fundamental, inescapable constant in the human experience: death. The one universal constant is that we all live with the inevitability of our coming death. The death rate is 100%. Our lives are lived under the dominion of death.

All out of the one man Adam and his one big sin.

Death reigns.

But that’s nothing compared to this! “…how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!”

Here’s what we’ll put in the Christ column: **super-living reign.**

I know that’s not great English, but please forgive me. I can’t find words amazing enough to get it across. Adam means death. Christ means life.

Notice that in the Christ column, it’s not that life reigns, though Paul could have said that, but that WE will reign! “Those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life.”

That’s us!

Through Jesus Christ, we will reign in life! When Christ returns, we will reign forever! We will live forever and share in Christ’s reign!

Everything that Adam was supposed to be and do as the ruler of the Earth but lost for himself and for humanity will be restored to us in the End. Death will no longer reign. We will. Not on our own, but “through the one man, Jesus Christ.”

How much more!

I’ve said it before: I’m so tired of death. We live under the specter of death. Death reigns right now.

One of the things that makes this pandemic so frustrating is that it just doesn’t seem like the sort of thing that should be happening in our modern world. We have such smart doctors. We have such good medicines. It’s so hard to believe that in this day and age we would run into a virus that can wipe out a million people in a little more than half a year.

Death is undefeated. It bats 1.000. For all our advances, we haven’t defeated death and we shouldn’t be surprised that it can still assert itself in such a profound way.

But life has broken through! As strong as the things in the Adam column are, the things in the Christ column are stronger. As bad as the curse is, the victory in Jesus is that much better. The power of Christ’s resurrection is such that it promises a coming victory over the grave for all who belong to Him.

Notice that you have to receive it. You have to receive God’s abundant provision of grace.

To be included in Adam, you only had to be born. But to be included in Christ, you must believe.

And if you believe, you receive the gift of righteousness, justification by faith. And then you will reign and rule in life. A bit now and fully to come.

***Jesus the One and Only***Then, in **verses 18 and 19**, Paul summarizes what he has just said and emphasizes the unique and unrivaled position of Jesus in our salvation:

**18**Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. **19**For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

This is the “Christ Alone” point of this passage. What stands out to me is Paul’s use of the word “one.” Adam’s one act of trespass put us in the soup; but only Christ’s one act of righteousness gets us out. Adam was one man whose disobedience led to the sin of many; Christ is the one and only man whose act of obedience makes us righteous.

The whole point, through this whole passage, is that only Jesus can save. Only Jesus can reverse the curse and free us from the mess begun with Adam. Only Jesus is the new and better Adam.

And this is our story. We were in Adam and we were getting all that Adam’s column offered: trespass, judgment, death. But if we receive Jesus’ and His gift, then we get all that His column offers, as well. Grace, justification, life. And His column is so much more!

And Christ alone is all over the Bible! It’s a point repeated again and again. To wrap up this morning, I just want to hit you with some verses that emphasize Christ alone.

**Acts 4:12:**

 **12**Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.

This is Peter and John before the Jewish council shortly after Pentecost. They’re being told that if they just stop talking about Jesus they’ll be left alone. But Peter and John can’t do it. They won’t be silent. To stop talking about Jesus would be to stop talking about mankind’s only hope of salvation. There is no other name. Salvation is found in no one else.

Or, again, **Hebrews 10:10**:

**10**And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

The emphasis here is on the phrase “once for all.” One of the arguments of the book of Hebrews is that the Old Testament sacrifices needed to be repeated over and over. They weren’t really sufficient to pay for the sins of humanity; but pointed to the need for a greater sacrifice. The point here is that Jesus is that greater sacrifice. His death was sufficient once and for all. Now there is nothing that can be added to what He has done for us. We don’t need to recreate or repeat His sacrifice. It was a one-time cosmic event that offers the perfect solution to our problem.

**1 Timothy 2:5:**

**5**For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.

This gets at the issue created with the veneration of relics and saints. For some reason, there grew up in the church a belief that Jesus was difficult to approach. People began to identify more closely with Mary or one of the saints. The notion grew that Jesus needs helpers. That the merit of the saints somehow opens additional access to God.

But this verse is clear: there is only one mediator between God and mankind. Christ doesn’t need any help. We don’t need any other representative before the Father. Christ is enough. Christ alone.

Finally, **John 14:6:**

**6**Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

To me, it doesn’t seem that it can be any clearer than this verse. No one comes to the Father except through Jesus. There is no other way. No other truth. No other life that will be effective in our salvation. Our hope is found in Christ and Christ alone.

Jesus is the only name, the only sacrifice, the only mediator, the only way to salvation. He is the new and better Adam. The things in his column cancel out and far surpass everything in Adam’s column. We don’t need magic relics or interceding saints or acts of pilgrimage and almsgiving. What we need is Jesus. All we need is Jesus.

I urge you, come to Jesus. Put your hope in Him alone!