

**"Soli Deo Gloria"
(Romans 11:33-36)
Pastor Peter Yi
November 19, 2017**

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- ³³ Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!
- ³⁴ "Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?"
- ³⁵ "Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay them?"
- ³⁶ For from him and through him and for him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Because 2017 was the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, we decided to spend the entire year looking at the major doctrines that came out of the Reformation. These doctrines are found throughout the Bible, but they were lost, ignored, and replaced by lesser truths and some non-truths. In case you forgot, those doctrines are known as the five solas: Sola Scriptura, Sola Gratia, Solus Christus, Sola Fide, and Soli Deo Gloria. They mean, Scripture alone, grace alone, Christ alone, faith alone, and the glory of God alone. Those of you who've been with us for any length of time know how much importance our church places on the Scriptures. Well we took it to another level this year by spending 23 weeks looking at Psalm 119, which is a chapter in the Bible that talks about the beauty, the trustworthiness and the power of God's word found in the Bible.

Earlier in the year, we held a study looking at the differences between Roman Catholic and Protestant beliefs. I personally learned so many things from that study and the sad thing is that those differences still exist 500 years later. And then this fall Pastor Woohyun is teaching a 16th C church history class on the time of the Reformation.

Why did we spend so much time on this? Because the Reformation is not over. One could look at what our church did this year and say, 'what a waste.' Why bother talking about something that happened so long ago? Wasn't it settled, wasn't it a done deal? Well, the answer is both yes and no. Yes, the Reformation came and went, but the effects of the Reformation are still alive today, because these truths still matter today. Another Latin phrase that Protestants talk about is *semper referendum* which means, 'always reforming'. Why does the church need to be always reforming? The reason is because of things like theological drift or theological apathy. Even within one lifetime, a person or a church or a denomination can experience theological drift, which is a drifting away from God and his word. We began well, holding fast to these timeless Biblical truths, but then for one reason or another, we loosen our grip on them, we begin to entertain ideas that are not in the Bible, or we get too influenced by the pressures the culture places on the church.

Now, please listen. Every one of us here is capable of theological drift. I've seen it so many times in the people that have come in and out of our church. I've seen it in my family members. I've felt the pull within my own heart. Theological drift is easy because it takes zero effort. Think of a canoe on a river or on a lake. How much effort does it require of the paddler to drift? Absolutely none. All you need to do is just sit there and you'll drift. Or consider pouring water on an uneven surface. That water will find the path of least resistance and begin to flow. No work is required. And that's how it is with theological drift, but to remain committed to God and his word and his gospel takes a ton of work. It takes work to paddle back upstream to the place you once were and even more effort to reach an even stronger goal or destination.

Another reason why the church needs to be 'always reforming' is because the Roman Catholic Church never changed their doctrine. You see, the five solas related to one of the most important doctrines for all of humanity. It's the doctrine of salvation. This doctrine asks and answers these kinds of questions:

- How can a person become rightly related to God?
- What can a person do with his guilt?
- How do you deal with the problem of sin?
- How can a person live forever in God's heaven?
- How can a person ultimately and finally be freed from all the consequences of sin?
- How does a person find his or her true identity?
- How can a person know for what purpose they are here on this earth?
- Or to put it most simply, What must I do to be saved?

The Bible's clear answer to this question is the doctrine of Justification by Faith alone. How does a person who is clearly guilty, when he or she stands in God's courtroom, come out of there with a 'not guilty' sentence, rather than a guilty sentence? That's a question we all need to ponder. Clearly we all stand guilty before God and in his court because of our sins. I don't think anyone will argue that. But the important question is, "How are you going to make it out of the courtroom?" The Bible teaches with no uncertainty that the answer is, Justification by Faith Alone. A person is saved by grace alone, in Christ alone, through faith alone.

This was the amazing truth that came out of the Reformation and it rocked the very foundations of the Catholic Church and all of Europe. So in 1563, 46 years after the beginning of the Reformation, the Roman Church held a meeting in Trento, Italy called the Council of Trent. In this council they looked at all the major doctrines that the Protestants brought forth during the Reformation and sadly, they rejected every one of them. And if that wasn't enough, they concluded each statement with the words, "let them be anathema" which means, let them be accursed or let them be damned.

Let me read to you a few of them, especially as it relates to Justification.

"If any one shall say, that the ungodly is justified by faith only, and that it is by no means necessary that he, should prepare and dispose himself by the motion of his own will; let such an one be accursed.

"If any one shall affirm, that men are justified, either by the imputation of Christ's righteousness alone, ... let such a one be accursed.

"If any one shall affirm, that justifying faith is no more than a reliance on the mercy of God as forgiving our sins for the sake of Christ; or that we are justified by such a reliance only; let such an one be accursed.

That's why the Reformation is still not over. Because the decisions at the Council of Trent are still the beliefs of the Catholic Church today.

Well today, we are going to be looking at the last Sola—Soli Deo Gloria. To God alone be the glory.

Turn with me to today's passage:

- ^{11:33} Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!
- ³⁴ "Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been his counselor?"
- ³⁵ "Who has ever given to God,
that God should repay them?"
- ³⁶ For from him and through him and for him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen.

This passage can only be appreciated when we know the context. The Apostle Paul is breaking forth in doxology in these verses. The topic that he's been discussing has been so invigorating, so simple, yet so complex, so beautiful, that it causes him to break forth in praise and worship. So what were those things that he was discussing? Well, it was the Gospel. The letter to the Romans you can say is Paul *magnum opus*, his masterpiece, his theological dissertation on the Gospel. One well-known pastor says that the letter to the Romans is the most important book in the entire Bible.

In the preceding chapters Paul refers to a very delicate aspect of the Gospel, which is the doctrine of election. But let's go back a little further. In Romans chapter 8 you can say that this chapter is the climax, the pinnacle of Romans. In Romans 8 Paul tells the incredible blessings that are ours in the Gospel. There are so many powerful verses such as,

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, **(Romans 8:1)**

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. **(Romans 8:16)**

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. **(Romans 8:28–30)**

He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? **(Romans 8:32)**

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. **(Romans 8:37–39)**

Paul could've ended the letter there. It would've been an amazing ending. But he has more to say. So, he spends the next three chapters, chapters 9, 10 and 11 talking about election, or more specifically God's sovereignty in election.

Paul begins his argument with God's election of Israel, which everyone knows was God's sovereign choice. Israel wasn't asked or consulted. God, in his sovereign love, chose them. But how? Paul takes us back to Jacob and Esau, who were the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah. Before the twins were born, God had already decided which of the two he would elect and choose to become the future nation of Israel. He chose Jacob. Now you need only look at God's choice to understand that on any playground, in any school on the planet, Jacob would have been the last kid picked for dodge ball. The point Paul is making is this. Did God hold a contest, may the best twin win? Or battle of the twins? No, God chose Jacob over Esau?

Why? Because God is sovereign. Paul says, God alone holds the right to say these words, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." That right belongs to God alone. Paul then says, "It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy." What doesn't depend? Being elected.

Then Paul anticipates the reader's objection. "Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will?" Here's how he answers. He answers the question with a question. He asks, "What right does the creature have to question the Creator?" "Does not the Creator have the right to do as he pleases with his creation?" Think about that. Aren't there inherent rights of the Creator that are his alone? And consider, aren't there the absence of certain rights for the creature? And of course the answer is yes.

He then gives a second answer. First let me read the verses and then talk about them. Paul says,

²² What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? ²³ What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory— (**Romans 9:22–23**)

Here's my summary of Calvin's explanation. God is holy. God is just. People are sinners deserving the immediate wrath and judgment of God. Yet God waits patiently to judge them. Why? For his elect. What does he want us, his elect to get out of this? Calvin says, that we would tremble before God's holiness and justice. And that we would stand in awe, that is glory in God.

Stay with me here. I think what Paul is getting at is this. We look at the world. We look at people, both distant and unknown and people that are really close and very well-known. Some go to heaven and many, many more go to hell. Some are elected. Many are not. Even if you knew nothing of the doctrine of election, you could observe the world and come to the same conclusion that many more are going to hell than to heaven. It's incredibly emotional and painful and confusing. Why is it like this? And Paul says this. First, the answer lies within the sovereign choice of the Creator, God himself.

And second he wants to say something to us who are already saved. What is that? You're saved because of God's free, sovereign, gracious, loving election and for no other reason. Not because you won the contest, not because of your heritage or lineage, not because of your talents, but you are saved by grace alone, in Christ alone, through faith alone.

There's more. God wants us, his elect, to realize this as well when we observe God issuing his judgment on sinners. What is that? He wants us to know that that should've been me. I should've been the one judged. I should've been the one condemned. I should've been the one sent to hell.

Listen to the verses again:

²² What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? ²³ What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory— **(Romans 9:22–23)**

In chapter 10 Paul continues the argument by directing our focus that salvation is by faith, that we are justified by faith, regardless of our religious heritage, whether the person is Jewish or a Gentile. In chapter 10 we find that famous verse about how people are saved. Yes, they are saved by God's election. But how? By what means?

¹⁴ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" **(Romans 10:14–15)**

What I find remarkable is that in the most dense and comprehensive section in all the Bible on the doctrine of election, you have this incredible call to missions. The only way people can be saved. Or the only way to draw out the elect, the only way to know who are the ones that God has chosen from eternity past, is if people hear the Gospel. A true Calvinist, a person who truly believes in the sovereignty of God, a person who holds close to their hearts the five solas, shares the Gospel with all who would listen. You cannot read the Bible, read Paul, read Romans and come to the conclusion that because God's already chosen who's going to heaven and who's not, that it doesn't matter if I share the Gospel. You just can't. Paul himself says, if I could trade my soul for the souls of my countrymen, I would.

Okay, so you get to chapter 11 and Paul says that he hopes that this great gathering in of Gentile peoples to Christ, would arouse a jealousy in Jews and that would result in more Jews being saved. Oh boy, I wish I could say more, but we don't have the time. 11 chapters dedicated to working out the Gospel, the final three chapters` looking into the difficult doctrine of election, and how does Paul end it? Worship!

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To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Remember that the five solas were doctrines were about salvation. If we were to expand those five solas it would go like this. The doctrine of salvation is found in one place, in **Scripture alone**. That doctrine is this—a person is saved by **grace alone**. A person is not saved by grace plus works. The person contributes nothing to his or her salvation. The person is saved **in Christ alone**. It's only through the perfect life that Jesus lived and the death that he died, that we are saved. And how do we get this? It's **through faith alone**. Not faith plus something else, not faith plus merit, but by believing, trusting in Jesus, in the Gospel that we are saved.

How then does this connect with the final sola—soli Deo Gloria? Well, quite logically, quite naturally. If salvation is by grace alone, in Christ alone, through faith alone, which means that I contribute nothing to it, then who gets the credit, who gets the glory? If all I deserve is wrath, punishment, judgment and hell, but instead I get forgiveness and adoption and union with Christ and heaven forever, who gets the glory? God does. Look at the last verse.

For from him...the Gospel, salvation comes from God.
And through him...it's through Christ alone that we are set free....
And for him, or to Him are all things, that is glory forever and ever Amen.

Let's pray.