

Romans 3:19-28

The Lutheran Reformation began on October 31st **502 years ago**, when Martin Luther, a young monk in Wittenburg, Germany, nailed his 95 theses concerning the Roman Catholic church on the local **bulletin board** - the **door** of the Castle Church. This one seemingly insignificant event in history probably had a greater effect on us as **Lutherans** than any other event **since** that time. It was the **beginning** - not only of the **Lutheran** church, but of all the other **Protestant** church bodies as well. And it might never have happened at all, except for the fact that Martin Luther had a **problem** - a **big** problem - a problem with **righteousness**. No matter what he **did**, he felt it was **wrong**. No matter how hard he **tried**, he just couldn't please **God**. And he **had** tried - he had tried **very** hard. The history books tell us that Luther had even resorted to **beating** himself into an unconscious state with a **whip**, hoping that through such actions, God would see just how **sorry** he was for his sins. Luther wanted so much to believe that because of his **own** fervent actions, he would be considered **good** - and therefore, God would **reward** him with life in heaven. But Luther **couldn't** believe it. Why not? - because God's **righteousness** was blocking the way. You see, Luther knew that God is **perfect** - that's what makes Him **right** all the time - it's the **righteousness** which God alone **possesses**. And every time Luther **read** about God's righteousness, He thought of that **perfect** God who demands that **we** are to be perfect too. How **depressing!** How **hopeless!** Luther would look at himself and say, "I've **tried**, and tried, and tried - but I'm **still** not perfect - I'm **still** not good enough - I'll **never** get to heaven."

That was Luther's **problem**, but one day it all **changed**. As Luther was studying the text we have before us, by God's guidance he suddenly realized how **wrong** he had been about God's righteousness. It was as if a light had been turned on in Luther's mind, and suddenly he could see **clearly** what he had **failed** to see before. The righteousness of God is not **only** the perfect righteousness which God **possesses**, but it is **also** the righteousness which God **gives** to **us!** The realization of that one fact turned Luther's whole life around 180 degrees, and it prepared the way for what we now know as **The Reformation**. Let's take a look at our text again, so that **we** will be able to understand the role of **Righteousness And The Reformation**. First we will consider **righteousness** in relation to the **Law**, and then we will consider **righteousness** in relation to our **faith**.

Our text begins, "*Now we know that whatever the **Law** says, it says to those who are **under** the Law, so that every mouth may be **silenced**, and the whole world held **accountable** to God.*" What **purpose** does the **Law** serve? The Law of God was given to inform all people of the things which God **demands**. It shows us what He

wants, as well as what He does **not** want. The Law shows us that nothing short of **perfection** will be acceptable to God, and therefore, it closes the mouths of **all** people - showing them that no matter how **good** they are, they are still not good **enough** - they are still **unworthy** in **God's** eyes. These words were written especially for the **Jews** - for God's Old Testament people. **They** were the ones with whom God had made a **covenant** - a solemn **agreement**, at Mt. Sinai. He would be **their** God, and they would be **His** people. They would **show** that they were God's people by living according to the **Laws** which He had given them, and in this way, they would place themselves "*under the Law.*"

But strangely enough, it was the Jews who were **also** the ones who relied on the **Law** for their **salvation**. They had a tendency to **boast** about being **superior** to other people - after all, they had been given God's **Commandments**, and they worked hard at trying to **keep** those commandments. Indeed many of them may have come pretty **close** to **doing** that - but not close **enough**. Our text says, "*There is **no difference**, for **all** have sinned and fall **short** of the glory of God.*" Already 1,000 years earlier, King David had written, "*The **LORD** looks down from heaven on the sons of man to see if there are any who **understand** - any who seek **God**. **All** have turned aside, they have together become **corrupt**. There is **no one** who does good, **not even one**.*" In the beginning, man had been placed at the **head** of creation. He was to **rule** over the earth and **subdue** it, in order to **glorify God**. That's **why** God made us. But because of our **sins** day after day, we come up **short** of those expectations - we **dishonor** God instead of **glorifying** Him.

No wonder Luther was **depressed**! He had been trying to **please** God by being **good**, but **God** simply threw **aside** all the works which were short of **perfection** - including even the **finest** of Christian virtues. After going through this long and difficult struggle, Luther clearly understood what Paul was telling the **Romans** when he wrote, "*Through the **Law** we become conscious of **sin**.*" The Law strips away all outward **appearances** and strikes at the **heart**. It leaves us **devastated** by the guilt of our sins. And we have all **felt** that devastation, because we have all **committed** sins - and lots of them. In his first letter John wrote, "*If we say we have **no sin**, we **deceive** ourselves, and the truth is not in us*" - in other words, if we claim to be **sinless**, we're **liars**. The Law clearly **shows** us our sins, and it **closes** our mouths, leaving us **speechless** to try and defend our sinful actions before God. Once again our text says, "***No one** will be declared righteous in **His** sight by observing the **Law**.*" **No one** will - because no one can keep the Law **perfectly**, as God **demands**.

So, how **do** we get to be **right** with God, if we can't do it **ourselves**? Obviously, such righteousness must come from an **external** source. In our text Paul

goes on to say, “A righteousness from **God**, *apart from the Law*, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness **from God** comes through **faith** in **Jesus Christ** to all who **believe**.” What’s **this** - a whole **new** kind of righteousness - a righteousness which has nothing to do with the **Law**? Well, it’s not really so new. The **prophets** told us about it long ago - even **Moses** knew about it. Concerning **Abraham** he wrote, “**Abram believed the LORD**, and **He credited it to him as righteousness**.” The Prophet **Habakkuk** knew about it too. He wrote, “**He is puffed up; his desires are not upright - but, the righteous will live by his faith**.” Both prophets point out the fact that **righteousness** comes through **believing**, not through **doing**. Everything which a man thinks, desires, and does is **excluded** when it comes to righteousness. The only way a man can **obtain** righteousness is if God **gives** it to him - and He **does**, through our **faith** - a faith which grabs on to **Jesus** for deliverance, and which will not **let go** of Him.

Theologians speak of righteousness as being **forensic** - that is, that God simply **declares** us righteous. There is no essential **change** in us. We’re just as wicked and undesirable as we **ever** were, but God changed our **status** by **giving** us the righteousness of **Christ**. I suppose we could compare it to a man who robbed a bank in the presence of 20 witnesses, leaving his fingerprints all over the place, and who was apprehended by the police in a very short time, with the money still in his pockets. There could be **no doubt** about the **guilt** of such an individual - right? Yet, imagine this - when his trial came up, the judge pronounced the verdict, “**Not guilty**” and the man was allowed to go **free**. Why? because someone **else** had agreed to take all the **punishment** for that man’s crime. Although guilty people do go **free** at times in our judicial system, hardly **ever** would someone come in and offer to “do the time” for someone **else**. But Paul says that this is **exactly** what God did for **us**. He wrote, “**God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood**.” It is the sacrifice of **Jesus** which brings us back to God. It is the blood of **Jesus** which washes away our guilt, and bridges the gap between **sinful** man and our **perfect** God. In one act - the **crucifixion** of Jesus Christ - God **punished** every sin, and at the same time **rescued** all people from eternal damnation. The Gospel excludes **none** who do not exclude **themselves** through **unbelief**.

That’s the role of **Righteousness And The Reformation** - righteousness connected to us by **faith**. Our text says, “**A man is justified by faith - apart from observing the Law**.” When Luther finally realized that he was saved by **faith alone**, it was as though a 1,000 pound weight had been lifted off from his shoulders. Suddenly he didn’t need to be **afraid** anymore. He didn’t need to **worry** about the fact that he wasn’t **good** enough. And best of all, he knew with full **certainty**, that he would be in **heaven**, in **spite** of his many sins - because Jesus had **given** him eternal

life. And so, Luther could write in the hymn which we used to **open** our worship service today, *“The Word they still shall let remain, nor any thanks have for it; **He’s** by our side upon the plain with **His** good gifts and Spirit. And do what they will - hate, steal, hurt, or kill - though **all** may be gone, our **victory** is won; the kingdom’s **ours** forever.”* There is **no boasting** in those words - just complete **trust** in the goodness and merits of **Christ**.

We **can** and **do** have that same confidence and certainty which belonged to Luther. It’s **ours** through our **faith**. Oh it’s **true**, we were born under the **Law** - and it’s **true**, the Law clearly shows us that we have fallen short of the **perfection** God demands - and it’s **true**, we have nothing to **boast** about before our God. But it is **equally** true that we have been **given** a righteousness **apart** from the Law - and because of **that** righteousness, earned at the price of the blood of our **Savior** Jesus Christ, we shall live **eternally**. My dear friends, **cling** to Jesus with a **faith** that will not waver, and His Kingdom will always **remain** our eternal inheritance. Amen.