

Romans 3:19-28 The Reformation Allows No Doubt! Pentecost 23 Reformation Nov. 1, 2015

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Free grace and eternal peace are yours from God your Father from your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

God's Word as we celebrate the Reformation of the church is written in Romans 3:19-28.

These are Your words heavenly Father. Make us certain of being saved by Christ alone. Your Word is truth.

Dear Descendents of the Reformation,

Did you know that you are a product of a Reformation that took place almost 500 years ago? It's not that you are related to Martin Luther or one of his co-workers, but you are privileged to hear the Gospel of God's free grace: that you are saved from God's judgment through Christ alone. This message before Luther's time was not clearly taught. The truths of the Bible were polluted by false teachings and traditions that focused on people's good works rather than Christ's works. The church of Luther's time had a system of works and donations that was supposed to enable people to be certain that they had favor with God.

Fortunately for Martin Luther, he had a sensitive conscience that was not convinced by teachings that his works were good enough to merit God's forgiveness. He knew that Jesus died for his sins, but he doubted that he could be worthy enough to receive His forgiveness. His doubts led him from being a law student, to a monk, to a traveler to Rome to see the holy sites, and finally to becoming a university professor. Yet, with all these "good" works, he still had no peace in his heart. Luther realized that if he fell short of even one of God's commands, he would suffer eternally in hell. But, through Luther's study of the Bible, God gave him a new perspective. What he learned has given generations of Christians down to our time the certainty of where they stand before God's judgment seat. Our theme is:

The Reformation Allows No Doubt!

There is no doubt that God is a holy judge and we are guilty sinners. Paul wrote, *"Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin."* (v.19-20)

Imagine that we have been arrested for crimes we have committed and are in God's court. Evidence is presented about our sinful nature that has lived in rebellion against God. There is also evidence of our lies and of our not telling the truth in love. There is evidence of how we have misused God's gifts, talents, and possessions instead of using them to help others and give God honor. We are saddened when we think of how we hurt others by our words and actions. We feel shame for all the evidence that convicts us of our sins. Blaming others does not erase our guilt before the Judge of all. No excuse will hold up in court.

We could wish that God would throw out His law so it wouldn't condemn us. But, the moral law is God's will and it will not change! And He demands justice. So we sit in court unable to defend ourselves, unable to call any witnesses to clear our name of crimes against God and people. Spiritually, this is God's ultimate purpose of His law: to help us, like it helped Martin Luther, to see that it is impossible to save ourselves. His perfect law condemns us as sinners. *"Every mouth will be stopped."* (v.19)

Already at the time of the Apostle Paul, people were confused about how to be saved. But, Paul made it clear that if people try to be saved by keeping the law or by doing anything good to earn God's favor, they will be condemned by law. If we try to be saved by faith in Christ and also by keeping the law, we will be condemned. If we want to be saved by faith and prayer, by faith and love, by faith and anything that we do, we remain under the judgment of God. That's the unmistakable message of God's Word.

Unfortunately, Martin Luther didn't know the Bible early in life. He only knew what others said. They told him to gain Christ's forgiveness by praying to saints to intercede for him. He was taught that he must have a priest to pray or say a Mass to God because he could not go to God directly to seek forgiveness. He was told that he needed to do works of service and love or God would not give him grace so he could help himself. That is what led him to become a monk, to live in poverty, and to beat himself thinking that it would please God. But it was never enough! Luther saw how in life it was terrible to have a person angry with him, but at least he could hope for God's mercy to help him. But if he offended God who was justly angry about his sins, there was no one left to show mercy. Luther despaired of his sins, which was exactly where God's law was meant to lead him.

Thankfully, rather than die in sorrow or forsake the church, God led Luther to His Word. He learned that the law was God's way to prepare him to receive God's gift of free mercy. The way to stand in God's courtroom of justice was to plead guilty and ask for the mercy of the Judge.

Second, the Bible leaves no doubt that God declares us not guilty in Christ. Paul wrote, *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."* (v.23-24) God did not change His standard of justice. He cannot deny Himself. But, God, our judge, appointed His eternal Son to become a man so that His innocent blood could be shed. Our salvation is complete and perfect because Jesus stood beside all of us in God's courtroom and freely offered to pay the penalty for all sins. Jesus became human so that, in addition to living a sinless life in our place, He suffered death as a payment for sins. When Jesus declared from the cross, "It is finished," He told God and the world that His saving work was accomplished. Due to the perfect work of His Son, God declares us innocent. Jesus has taken away our sins by His death so that we have no sins to condemn us! In God's court, Jesus stood beside all people and offered His life for theirs. God accepted His offer for all sinners!

Paul wrote, *"Now the righteousness of God apart from law is revealed..., even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all ... who believe."* (v.21-22) We receive Christ's holy life through faith alone. There is nothing more that we can add to Jesus' work. If you bought a classic car and spent hours of fixing it and then spent \$1,000's to have it perfectly painted, how would you react if someone came along and said I think the sides of the car should be a different color. And they spray paint it? He'd be in serious trouble! Jesus spent His whole life and died to give us complete salvation. What an insult to reject His way. Anything we add will destroy His work and God will cast us out forever.

We can only humbly receive the saving message of Christ by faith. The Bible states, *"By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."* (Ephesians 2:8) This truth is what Martin Luther learned and believed. It made him so certain of God's forgiveness, that even when threatened with death, He would not be moved from God's saving truth.

As sons and daughters of the Reformation let us be certain of where we stand! When God's Word states that people cannot be saved by works of the law, we admit that we are guilty and condemned in God's courtroom. When God's Word states that Jesus completely saves us, we believe that God has declared us innocent for the sake of Jesus. Luther's emphasis on God's saving Word has gone to many lands and many generations. By God's grace by faith in Christ we confidently stand before God ready for judgment. Amen.