

**October 31, 2010  
Reformation Sunday**

*“Cheer Up, Christian, You Are Justified through Jesus’ Righteousness”*

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**ROMANS 3:19-28**

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**N**ow 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. <sup>20</sup> Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. <sup>21</sup> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup> This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. <sup>25</sup> God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- <sup>26</sup> he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. <sup>27</sup> Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. <sup>28</sup> For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

My name is Martin Luther. I was born in Eisleben, Germany on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1483. My father was copper miner. He wanted me to be a lawyer. I studied hard at University of Erfurt and received good grades. Then my life changed completely. During a terrible thunderstorm I became so afraid of dying that I prayed to Saint Anne and made a vow that if I was spared from death I would become a monk. I entered the Augustinian monastery at the age of 18. I subjected myself to hours of repetitious prayers. I beat my body and lay on the floor in the form of a cross. I volunteered to scrub the floors. I did everything I could to scrub the sin out of my body and make myself acceptable to God.

My mentor in the monastery recommended that I pursue a degree in theology at the local University of Wittenberg. It was then that I started reading the Bible. When they asked me to teach theology in the university, I began studying the Bible even more to prepare for my lectures and classes. It was in the Bible that I saw the words “the righteousness of God.” At first these words “the righteousness of God” filled me with fear. How could I ever be good enough for a God who is righteous and holy? Even the name of Jesus filled me with fear, because I knew that he would someday judge me and I would hear him pronounce me guilty and I would be lost forever in the fires of hell.

Then it happened. My whole life changed again when I discovered in the Bible, especially the book of Romans, that the almighty, pure and holy God who demands that I be righteous, is the same God who provides me with the righteousness I need by giving me his Son Jesus to be righteous for me. I spent the rest of my life telling people how they are justified or right with God, not by what they try to do, but through what Jesus has done for them.

Thank you, Brother Martin, for giving us this brief summary of your life. Today we are

privileged to be sitting here knowing and believing that we are justified or declared righteous by what you fondly called an alien righteousness. This is a righteousness we cannot find in ourselves, a beautiful righteousness that is ours in Jesus. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, let's turn our attention to these words of Romans 3 that changed the life of Martin Luther. Our message for you today is, "Cheer Up, Christian, You Are Justified through Jesus' Righteousness."

### **We cannot be justified through our righteousness**

What a shock it is to discover that we cannot be declared righteous before God on the basis of the righteousness we try to produce in our lives. Paul writes, "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God." God's law speaks to us on the pages of the Holy Bible. It tells us what God requires of us. It says that we are to love the Lord our God with all our hearts and all our minds and all our strength. It says that we are to love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves. The Lord does not say to us, "Try your best." God's law says that we must love him perfectly and love our neighbor perfectly if we are going to be saved and have eternal life with him.

God's law is not like some manual that I consult when I want to fix something such as this manual for my wife's car. God's law speaks to us every day, every hour and every minute because we are constantly under the law. It tells us where we do wrong and silences our mouths because we know we cannot offer any excuse to our God for our failings and shortcomings. Do you ever get tired of the ads on television where politicians try to make the other person look bad and make themselves look good? We have ingrained in our nature this idea that we can make ourselves look good before God, because we don't realize how far we fall short of God's glory, and how foolish we are to think we can make up for what we have done wrong.

Even if I commit only one little thing wrong in my lifetime, that small sin would still condemn me before God and cause me to put my hand over my mouth and say, "I am guilty." I remember watching in horror the Space Shuttle Challenger soared into the sky and then suddenly exploded. What caused the space shuttle to explode? It was a tiny o ring that caused a leak that caused the aircraft to malfunction. Even one small sin causes me to fall short of God's glory and my righteousness cannot save me.

Paul drives home this point about our righteousness being inadequate to save us by adding, "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather through law we become conscious of sin." The more Martin Luther tried to make himself acceptable to God by keeping God's laws and other laws the church had added to what God said, the more conscious he became of how far miserably he had failed his God. In one of his hymns he writes, "Yea, deeper and deeper still I fell, Life had become a living hell. So firmly sin possessed me."

God's law cannot save us. It can only show us how far we fall short of God's glory. "Through the law we became conscious of sin." The other day I watched in amazement as the assistant in the dentist office took x-rays of my teeth that were almost immediately projected on the screen that was in the corner of the room. The dentist walked into the

room, looked at the teeth, and could immediately show me if they needed to be repaired. I remember coming home from the dentist as a child and joyfully telling my mom, "No cavities." God's law reveals that there are large cavities of sin in every aspect of our lives and there is no way we can ever reach that point of declaring before God, "There is no sin." "I am clean." "I have redeemed myself."

What a glorious day it was when Martin Luther discovered that a perfect and holy God who demands that we be perfect, actually provided perfection or righteousness for us in Jesus. He said of that discovery, "All of heaven opened up for me."

### **We are justified through Jesus' righteousness**

Listen again to how the Apostle Paul describes this righteousness that comes to us from God as a free gift. "But now 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." This righteousness that God offers us as a free gift is apart from the law. It is not connected on any way to our feeble attempts to try and do what is right. It comes from a whole different place. It comes from the perfect death that Jesus died for us to expunge the sin from our record, and the perfect life he lived which is now put into your account. It is a righteousness that comes from God. The Revelation says, "Salvation comes from God and from the Lamb that sits on the throne." It is what Luther called "an alien righteousness." It comes from outside of us, from God himself. It comes to us through faith in Jesus.

To help us appreciate what our God has done for us, the Apostle Paul uses this word "justify." When you hear this word "justify" think of your self in a courtroom where the judge pounds down his gavel and pronounces us not guilty instead of guilty as we deserve. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." Here we are standing in the courtroom of God's law, guilty through and through. Then Jesus steps into the courtroom and says, "Father forgive them. Father, I have died to take away their imperfection and sin. I have given them my perfect life. Pronounce them not guilty because of what I have done."

This declaration of not guilty costs us nothing, but it cost Jesus everything. Think of the word "GRACE" as "God's Redemption At Christ's Expense." "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed before hand unpunished- he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus." The word "atonement" is a word taken over from the Old Testament and refers to the gold cover on the Ark of the Covenant. Once a year the high priest sprinkled blood on that cover made of pure gold to picture the precious blood of Jesus that would cry out to our God for our forgiveness. For years the Old Testament people waited patiently for God to do something about their problem of not being justified. Then that perfect moment came on the cross when Jesus cried out "It is finished." My hope of standing before God and being accepted by him depends on this sacrifice of atonement that Jesus made for me. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Cheer up Christian. You are justified or declared righteous through Jesus death, his life and his resurrection from the dead. You can sing joyfully with the hymn writer. "Jesus Your blood and righteousness, My beauty are my glorious dress. Mid flaming worlds in these arrayed. With joy shall I lift up my head." Our boasting is not in ourselves. Our boasting is in Jesus and his declaration of "Not Guilty." If Jesus comes in glory on this October 31, and the heavens open up, and we stand before him in the final judgment, we can stand before him and boast about being perfect and holy and righteous because of what he has done for us.

Martin Luther expended every bit of energy he could to let the whole world know we are saved by Christ and the forgiveness he won for us at the cross. Listen to him boast in Jesus and let this be our boast as well. "However since we are baptized and believe in Christ, we are holy and righteous in Christ and with Christ. He has taken our sins from us and has graced us, clothed and adorned us with his Holiness. Thus the whole Christian church is holy, not by itself or by its own work, but in Christ and through Christ's holiness." Cheer up, Christian, you are justified through Jesus' righteousness. Amen.