

**Reformation Sunday – November 3, 2013**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

*Pastor Charles Heup*

**Romans 3:19-28 (NIV 84)**

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. 20) Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. 21) **But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22) This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, 23) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24) and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. 25) 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-- 26) 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. 27) Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. 28) For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.**

Dear Friends in Christ:

Have you ever dreamed about discovering a hidden treasure? Children love to pretend that they are digging for gold. Mystery novels with just that theme have helped authors to strike it rich. From time to time we even hear about someone who discovers a treasure hidden away in an old box in an attic or in the garage.

Here's an example of just such an incident. A gentleman was sorting out things he had stored in a box in his garage when he re-discovered a large beer stein that he had received from his grandmother years ago. As far as he was concerned the stein had more sentimental value than anything else – he remembered that his grandmother used to save string in it. He had no real use for the stein and at one point had thought about getting rid of it but he never did. On a lark he decided to take it to an antique show just for the fun of it. As the appraiser dusted off the stein – he noticed a sticker with the marking, “.50” as well as several unique characteristics of the jar which allowed him to determine its true value. The antique dealer asked about the sticker and the owner explained that he had intended to sell the stein for 50 cents at a garage sale but that he never had the sale. When the appraiser informed him that this “string jar” was actually worth about \$20 thousand dollars the owner could hardly control his emotions. He wept tears of joy. It may well have been that even the grandmother did know what a special treasure she had.

In somewhat similar fashion of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ was passed on from one generation to the next – and sadly with the passing of time its true value was not truly appreciated or understood. By the time of Luther the wonderful news of salvation through faith in Christ Jesus was covered with the dust of church laws and regulations and the Latin language which the common man could not even understand. One of the real blessings of the Lutheran Reformation came because the Lord led Luther to dust off the Scriptures and to rediscover some wonderful treasures including the fact that God provides the righteousness he demands through Christ Jesus and that all are justified freely (declared not guilty before God) without the works of the Law just as our text explains. Filled with joy Luther did all he could to share this wonderful message in a language the people of his day could read and understand – the message spread like wild fire and filled sinners with joy and thanksgiving.

As we celebrate Reformation Day – it is important for us to realize anew the treasures which God's Word holds for us. There are lots of people who regard God's Word as being out of touch and out of date.

Others have come to take it for granted. Still others never ever really had a proper understanding of the Word and its power to change our lives to begin with. It's quite obvious that most people have a feeling that somehow the Bible is important but they just don't understand or appreciate it fully. It becomes quite easy for us begin to feel that same way – especially if our use and knowledge of the Bible is fairly limited. May the Holy Spirit fill our hearts with joy as we consider again the wonderful blessing the Lord Jesus has provided for us as we learn of it from the portion of the Bible which serves as our text today!

**Dear Christians, one and All Rejoice.**

- 1. We were guilty in sin**
- 2. We are now declared not guilty in Christ**

Have you ever noticed how people like to make excuses and to try to defend themselves whenever someone tries to hold them accountable for doing something wrong? We've probably all done that probably in more ways than one. Maybe we tried to claim ignorance of the law. "I didn't realize what the speed limit was." Perhaps we suggested that we didn't know the law applied to us. "I thought the teacher meant that the other students should be quiet." Or we've attempted to underestimate our guilt by pointing out others who are worse violators. "How come he didn't get caught?" Maybe we've tried to point out that the times we have done what is right far outnumber the times we've done something wrong in an effort to deny our accountability. "One time I forgot to do my assignment and now I'm in trouble. Doesn't it matter that I turned in all the other ones on time?" Or maybe we will try to shift the blame to someone else. "Well she told me to do it." Our sinful nature would like to treat God's laws in the same way but as our text reminds us -- God's law has the ability to silence our denial and our excuses and point out our accountability to God. The Law of God with its requirement of perfect and absolute holiness is driven home forcefully by the prophet Isaiah who proclaimed: **all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. (Is 64:6)**

God's law condemns even the very thoughts and desires of hearts. Every single spot, blemish, flaw and imperfection is magnified by God's law. That law silences our boasting and pride and takes away all our excuses and defenses and leaves us standing helpless and condemned before God. **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. 20) Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.**

Our sinful nature may try to ignore the law of God. It may try to deny it -- but ultimately through that law we become conscious of our sin. We are like everyone else. **There is no difference, 23) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.** We too have missed the mark of God's absolute requirements and deserve condemnation. And there is nothing we can do about it!

The simple fact of the matter is we desperately need a Savior who will wash away the dirt of our sin and who will endure the punishment we deserve and provide us with righteousness and holiness.

**Dear Christians, one and All Rejoice.**

- 1. We were guilty in sin**
- 2. We are now declared not guilty in Christ**

Listen to the wonderful revelation of our text: **21) But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.** Since our righteousness acts are as filthy rags God has taken the initiative and provided us with a righteousness which is perfect – free from every spot, blemish, flaw and imperfection – perfectly acceptable to him because it is not in anyway dependant upon

us. This righteousness God has revealed to us in the Law and the Prophets. That's the term Paul used to describe the Old Testament Scriptures. The righteousness that God provides for us shines forth even more clearly in the New Testament Scriptures in which God speaks to us through his Son.

The knowledge of this righteousness is not something we could discover on our own by solving some formula or inventing some new concept. It comes to us only through the Scriptures in which God has spoken so plainly that even a little child can believe. (John 3:16) **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**

God's Son, Jesus, provides the righteousness we need. **This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.** Our text also explains how this happened. **God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.**

There might be those who think that because of God's patience that there really is no accountability before God for sin. However God demonstrated clearly that the wages of sin is death when He punished Jesus. Because of this act God is able to be true to his word which says that the wages of sin is death and also true to his word which declares that he will remember our sins no more. **God presented [his Son Jesus] 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-- 26) 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.**

Jesus' death was the perfect sacrifice for all sin. For those sins committed from the beginning of time until his death as well as for those sins that would be committed following his death until the end of time. His blood purifies us from all unrighteousness. God no longer demands the shedding of our blood for our sins. This is the wonderful news of the Gospel – news which sparkles even more brightly because the God's Law has exposed our sin and need for a Savior. Here we have a treasure so valuable that it can not be purchased with gold or silver.

Dear Christians One and All rejoice **for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24) and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.**

This is the wonderful treasure which Luther strove with all his might to share and teach. It's a treasure that we need to share anew over and over again because of man's natural tendencies to think that somehow, somehow he can gain favor with God. There's no way anyone can boast and set themselves above others because in the sight of the law all are equal – all are condemned. Christ alone is our pride and glory. In Christ all have been redeemed – set free from the curse of the law and declared not guilty so that there is salvation for all who believe. **For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.**

That is one of the truths God brought to light through the Lutheran Reformation – may that truth shine brightly as we share it with others and as we rejoice in the gift of God's righteousness.

**Dear Christians, one and All Rejoice.**

- 1. We were guilty in sin**
- 2. We are now declared not guilty in Christ**

Amen.