

Holy Cross, Daggett and St. Mark, Wallace Lutheran Churches, Michigan
The First Sunday of End Time (Reformation)
October 30, 2016
Romans 3:19-28

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. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

But now a righteousness from God, apart from 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. There is no difference, 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. 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--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. Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

We recently talked about the seventh commandment in catechism class. The seventh commandment, along with the ninth and tenth, deals with God's gift of possessions and the proper way to use them. It says, **"You shall not steal. What does this mean? We should fear and love God that we do not take our neighbor's money or property or get it by dishonest dealing, but help him to improve and protect his property and means of income."**

One of the questions we explored as a class was, "How do we usually get things in our life?" The first thing we learned is God always provides for us. However, we also learned God doesn't magically rain food and possessions on us, but he usually provides for us in one of three ways. He provides for us through work. He provides for us through gifts people give to us. He provides for us through inheritance our relatives or friends leave for us when we die.

The same ideas we talked about with the seventh commandment can be applied to the way we look at salvation. Many people try to turn God into some kind of an eternal paymaster. They think if they live the right way, say the right things or try their best that God the eternal paymaster will pay out the reward of heaven at the end of their lives. There might be a slight variation here and there, but this is the way a lot of people generally picture God.

Other people believe God's righteousness becomes ours because it is God's gift to us. We didn't do anything to deserve God's righteousness, but God gives it to us because of his love and mercy which he has for us. What about us? Do we believe God's righteousness is ours because God is some sort of eternal paymaster who will pay us our just rewards when we die? Or do we believe God's righteousness is ours because it is a gift which comes to us through faith?

I'm sure many of you know the answer to my question. Today is the day we celebrate the Lutheran Reformation. Because of the Lutheran Reformation we celebrate how the light of the true gospel was restored to the church. We know God's righteousness isn't ours because of something we do. We know it is ours because it is God's free gift to us. We know God gives us this gift of righteousness by the miracle of faith which the Holy Spirit works in us.

How do we know this? Our reading today tells us the reason why. It says, **"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. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God, apart from 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. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law." These verses clearly state there is no way for us to gain heaven on our own.

They point out we will be silenced by God's law if we picture God like he is an eternal paymaster who owes us heaven. We understand boasting about our ability to gain salvation is excluded because it is

God's free gift to us. We treasure and hold dear Paul's words which say, **"But now a righteousness from God, apart from 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."**

"There is no difference, 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. 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—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."

We get and understand God's righteousness is ours because it is a gift of God. This is a fact we can rattle off and not think about. We understand Jesus has won us salvation. We get the Holy Spirit has created faith in our hearts and gives us the ability to enter heaven. These are all facts which are locked away in our brains. They are wonderful and amazing facts, but I wonder how often do they simply remain facts in our heads and not part of our hearts?

What do I mean? How can something be head knowledge rather than heart knowledge? Try this illustration out once and see if it helps. Head knowledge goes like this: I can say I know about starving people in Africa. I can tell you that I read about starving people every day. I can tell you there is a famine going on in certain countries. I could tell you about the corrupt government or pirates who rob the starving people.

I could list off any number of things about starving people in Africa, but what good does my head knowledge do for those people? It does absolutely nothing for them. My knowledge about their situation doesn't help them put food on their table. It doesn't make it rain in their country. It simply shows I know a lot about starving people in Africa. Compare this to what I would call heart knowledge.

Heart knowledge not only knows about starving people in Africa. Heart knowledge does something about starving people in Africa. Heart knowledge prays for the people who are starving. Heart knowledge gathers food supplies to get to people. Heart knowledge is willing to go to Africa and help these people. It isn't satisfied with sitting on the sidelines. Heart knowledge fights to be living and active. It works to make a difference for these people.

What kind of knowledge do you have about God's righteousness? Is it head knowledge or heart knowledge? Do you proudly profess to know your savior? Can you rattle off the reason you are saved and not think about it? Are you satisfied with your relationship with Jesus being simply head knowledge? You know what loves head knowledge? Our sinful nature loves head knowledge. Our sinful nature loves to keep God's love for us as a fact rather than believe it.

Why? Because our sinful nature hates God's gift of free salvation. It wants to make God's righteousness something we earn rather than what God gives us. What does our sinful nature need to hear? **"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. 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 needs to hear the law and be crushed. It needs to be reminded we cannot be saved by simple head knowledge about Jesus' love for us. How can we be saved? **"But now a righteousness from God, apart from 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. There is no difference, 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. 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—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."

"Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law." We are saved because the Holy Spirit uses this gospel message to create faith in our hearts. The Holy Spirit uses the power of the gospel to restore our fallen and broken hearts. He transforms the knowledge we have about Jesus from being head knowledge into heart knowledge.

How does he do this? He crushes us with the law and shows us that knowing about God's righteousness isn't good enough. He uses the gospel to make God's righteousness ours. Our faith latches on to and will not let go of this righteousness. It rejoices and gives God thanks since this righteousness is ours because faith creates a new self inside of us. The new self, which has been created in us, longs to show how God's righteousness is ours.

How can this new self show the righteousness of God is ours? Our new self can show we belong to God by making our knowledge about Jesus heart knowledge. Heart knowledge isn't satisfied with simply knowing God's righteousness is mine. Heart knowledge longs to grow in faith. It wants to increase how my understanding of my beloved savior. Heart knowledge knows there is more to learn about Jesus than we do in confirmation class or Sunday School.

Heart knowledge isn't satisfied spending one day a month with Jesus. It isn't satisfied with spending an hour a week with Jesus. Heart knowledge longs to be fed every day by Jesus. How is this growth possible? Heart knowledge grows when we spend time with Christ whether we spend time with him at church, Bible study or personal time. What will all of this growth do for us? It will help us understand God's righteousness is more than facts to learn. It is a way of life for us to follow.

Our study of God's righteousness will remind us we have failed in a lot of ways and our failure hurts, but it will also remind us God still showers us with his righteousness. He loves us even though we have failed him and feel like we don't deserve his love at all. God's righteousness reminds us our salvation isn't based on us. It is based on the fact Jesus has given his life to save us. May this righteousness always serve as a comfort to our hearts. Amen.