**Romans 3:19-28**

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. **20** For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. **21** But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— **22** the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: **23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **24**  and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, **25** whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. **26** It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. **27**  Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. **28** For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

**“Righteousness Right For You”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. It is amazing what can happen in only a few seconds. For instance, the recent game with Michigan State winning against Michigan made football history by a fumble in the last seconds of the game. Looking back further, the Wright brothers taking flight for a mere twelve seconds opened the door to airplanes and no one blinks much at that today. Likewise, Johannes Gutenberg watching those pages coming off his first printing press in 1440 did not see the contribution he made to the Reformation later in Germany.

When thinking about the time it took Martin Luther to nail his 95-thesis to the castle church in Wittenberg on Oct. 31st, 1517. It really did not mean that much to him, more of passing moment. It was a small gesture in a very large and busy world. Of course, we now celebrate those fleeting minutes as life changing for the Church and world. A seminary professor notes, “Luther was the catalyst through which the feudal world was transformed into the modern one…Behind his worldwide greatness was his firm conviction that God justifies sinners on account of Christ through faith. Everything else, including his role as reformer, was only as an expression of that.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Here is what goes throughout time. God is our mighty fortress who is just and the justifier of sinners by grace through faith in Jesus.

God is a fortress of justice that no sinner can breach. When Adam and Eve ate of the tree, God’s holiness barred them and all of humanity from the Garden of Eden because of their sinful condition. When after forty years Israel was in the wilderness Moses sung of God saying, “The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he” (Deuteronomy 32:4). Not only is God holy and right, but in His goodness He also gave the Law. Except, this justice for life is poison to sinners every last one. As Paul said, “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20).

During Reformation times, the justice of God was lacking. People were scared to the point of wanting to do something about their life and so they did. Works were the center of attention not Christ. Some like the mighty scholar Erasmus went so far to promote the, “Freedom of the Will.” Fallen man and his will was crooked, but not lost or condemned. People had the free choice to follow God making salvation a work of their hands. In the same token, the sale of indulgences had the sales pitch of time off from purgatory to get into heaven faster for you or a loved one. Certainly, the upper ranks of society could make a better invest for salvation than compared to the less fortunate. This unjust system only insulted the justice of God that let no one off the hook.

Many today have no clue that God is a fortress of justice that no sinner can breach. Rather than just making excuses, some think there is nothing to excuse because they are not sinful. Matter a fact, the growing climate among colleges, “…is to turn campuses into ‘safe places’ where young adults are shielded from words and ideas that make some uncomfortable.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Trying to censor the Law is what sinners do because we finally want to shut up God. However, we need His call of repentance in our life so that, “every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.” Likewise, others want to breach God’s justice by making faith their choice. Such faith is not a gift from God, but man determines it by his own strength and standard. In other words, it is just another work to do. Another Law that keeps asking, “Do you have enough faith in your faith?” So this fortress of justice is fit for God, but not us “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Yet, God in His justice has built a fortress fit to justify sinners. It was always a growing promise that would surpass the Law. Adam and Even heard this good news of a Savior before they went into a world cursed with sin, death, and the Devil. Moses left Israel remembering more than the value of God’s holiness before entering the Promised Land. He said, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—“ (Deuteronomy 18:15). In Jesus Christ, the justice of God met sinners to justify them by His Name. St. Paul says, “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law…” (Romans 3:21). God could not go against His justice, so Jesus came under judgment by the cross. However, His holy life could justify any because the Law could not silence Him in the grave.

The Reformation was not a campaign to change the world, but centered on the justice of God for sinners by faith alone. This righteousness made things not right by men, the Law, and works, but by God, His promise, and forgiveness. Luther declared, “And all the people in the world who do not hold to this justification are either Jews or Turks or papists or heretics; for there is no middle ground between these two righteousness: the active one of the Law and the passive one which comes from Christ” (Plass 703:2193). It does not mean God is tolerant of sin or anybody can live as he or she pleases. Instead, all of the injustice and blame fell on Jesus. Every thought, word, and deed He has satisfied by His sacrifice. What God built in His love sinners could receive by faith, “…justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus…”

This fortress we still find today in what God gives by His Word and Sacraments. Without the means of grace, without these gifts from Christ, what value is faith? Faith can only look to the righteous that God alone provides for sinners. This has come by way of baptism where abiding in Christ’s Word and by water the truth has known you and He has set you free. St. Paul says, “…you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God” (Romans 7:4). Since we still carry that sinful nature until death, guilt and shame need not even drag us down into the darkness. Rather than discomfort, confession lets the repentant hear Christ who speaks sins forgiven. At last, Holy Communion promises the same life giving blood of Christ’s sacrifice. This is God’s righteousness at the present time, Christ serving us and He will not fail.

Certainly, the Reformation was more than for a time. God is our mighty fortress who is just and the justifier of sinners by grace through faith in Jesus. May this righteousness prevails over all others for it alone saves, alone gives peace, and alone is our only hope. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.

1. http://blogs.lcms.org/2009/the-man-luther-reformer-10-2009 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/09/the-coddling-of-the-american-mind/399356/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)