

October 30, 2016
Romans 3:19-28

Reformation C
Justified By Works?!

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

You are justified by works! <lengthy pause> Wait a minute! Did I just say that? I did! That's not a Lutheran statement! Our text tells us that we justified by faith through Christ. Indeed, we are and we thank God for that.

Martin Luther in his days as a monk and the early days of discovering the truth in the Scripture, beat himself up over trying to earn his salvation by what he was doing! He literally beat himself up over it. He knew he was never doing enough good to stand up to a HOLY GOD! Luther struggled with this, he struggled with what the church of Rome was teaching at the time. Paying for your salvation by actually buying indulgences! The church of Rome taught that the more penance you do, the less time off in purgatory you had. The church of Rome taught Christ...but it was Christ plus yourself, plus your own actions, your own good deeds, and the like.

As Luther read His bible he was discovering something different about God. He was discovering that God wasn't just a vengeful and wrathful God. Luther was seeing that God loves all people and that He desires all to be saved. He came across the book of Romans, which played a huge part in the Holy Spirit's active role in Luther's life to changing Luther's heart and bringing him to the gospel. Luther read this: *For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* Luther knew that...he knew that he sinned, he knew that he fell short of God's glory every day. But he also tried to justify himself by his actions and his works.

You read these words from Paul to the Romans and you agree wholeheartedly...all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But do we really agree wholeheartedly? Let me explain! You see we will take credit for our successes. But our failures, no matter what they are we tend to blame others for them. That blame game that's been going since Adam blamed Eve for his sin. It comes even at silly moments, perhaps you are a scrabble player...you will take credit for a win by your knowledge of building words with obscure letters, but if you lost...it means you got stuck with the Q and Z without the letter "U".

We try to self-justify ourselves all the time – especially in our morals. We try to self-justify ourselves by keeping the law. Many American Christians, no matter their denomination. They focus on morals quite a bit more than salvation through Jesus Christ. Many people, even some friends of mine believe that all religions are the same, that all religions will get people to heaven and all the gods are the same. Many even believe that the reason we raise our families and ourselves in the church is to instill good morals. I've had conversations about the reason parents send their children to church activities or even Christian Day Schools is that they surround themselves with good people, people with good morals...with no mention of hearing the message of Jesus Christ! Because of this many American Christians even Lutherans,

perhaps even you believe that salvation does come through Christ, but also at least partly depending on your good works!

We also try to self-justify ourselves all the time – by trying to dismiss the laws of God! Romans tells us that every human being has the law written on their hearts! So how can we dismiss God's laws...we can't but we try to silence it. Many people believe, even some of your children and perhaps yourselves believe that there is no moral absolute. I've been told before that "I would never consider having an abortion, because it is wrong for me! But if someone else wants one, I can't judge them!" Other common ideas is that, "Homosexuality is wrong! I would never do that! But who am I too judge someone else if they really do love each other." Or perhaps, "I'd never have sex before I am married, but someone else, as long as they truly care for each other."

Political correctness is a way that people try to dismiss the laws of God. People are redefining marriage and committing murder in the name of fairness or love or even human freedom? Churches across the country and world are starting to preach a new gospel...which isn't really gospel at all. Instead of preaching the fact that Christ forgives your sin and liberates you from the condemnation of the law...many are preaching the liberation from the law altogether. There are churches that teach to discard the Law altogether. The permissiveness of churches today is done in the "name" of the Gospel...but now this justifies sin! This is troubling and you and I fall into it. We are all tempted by it. We see heterosexual sin a bit better than homosexual sin. Obviously we'd never marry a homosexual couple, but a heterosexual couple living together...we'd pressure pastor to marry them!

You and I are guilty of self-justifying ourselves. But Scripture is clear you cannot do it. You are by nature sinful and unclean! ALL HAVE SINNED AND FALLEN SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD! That means YOU Have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Paul doesn't stop in his writing to the Church in Rome or to you today! He continues, "*and (All) are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.*"

This gift that you have is manifested apart from the Law...but the Law and the Prophets – the Old Testament Scriptures bear witness to it! The Old Testaments give to you the promise of the Gospel that comes to through faith in Jesus Christ. Now we live in the day where you have the already now completed work of your salvation in the life, death, resurrection, and life again of Jesus Christ!

This historic event happened nearly 2000 years ago, but you have received it by faith. You have received it through faith! You have received it by hearing the message of God's Word – both his accusing, demanding, and damning law, and the sweet sound of the gospel message. You have received salvation by faith which is given to through Christ Jesus. You received it at your baptism, you continue to receive it when you receive the absolution, you receive it in the eating and drinking of the Lord's Supper. God gave it to you at your baptism, God continues to give it

to you through the absolution, the forgiveness of sins, God gives it to you when rightly receive the Body and Blood of Jesus!

This gift received by faith is yours...but yes, some day reject it. You possess it! It's a gift! It's your gift! It's your free gift! It's free to you because God paid it all. It's free to because God sacrificed His only begotten son for you. It's free because Jesus Christ did it all for you. It's free because of the atonement by his blood!

Salvation is yours not because of anything you have done or have not done. Salvation is yours because you are justified by works...the works of Christ given to you through faith. Yes, you are justified by a work, but it isn't yours and never can be...it's the great work of Christ on the cross and coming out of the tomb that justifies you.

And yes, Martin Luther picked up on that, and we give thanks to God that the gospel was discovered again by Christ's servant and that he boldly proclaimed it to all...and many rejected it, but because of the Holy Spirit's work in Luther's life and the proclamation of the gospel over the last 499 years, and the proclamation for over 2000 years, you have the forgiveness of sins freely. You have your salvation, because yes, you have been justified by a work, the work of Christ.

In Jesus name! Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.