

**Written Copy: Romans 3:21-25 Keeping Salvation Jesus' Gift to Me**  
**Reformation Sunday (Celebrated)**  
Sunday, October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020

**Text: Romans 3:21-25**

<sup>21</sup> But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it--<sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> 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.

**Exegetical Statement**

The Jews of Paul's day looked to the Law and believed it spoke to declare them right with God by their obedience to it. But to these Jews who lived out the tenants of the Law it only spoke to silence their claim on favored status with God, just as it spoke to the Gentiles who didn't recognize it as the expression of God's will. All men, Jew and Gentile stood before God with the judgment of guilt and the sentence of eternal punishment declared to them. The only thing the Law could speak to any man was to show him how far short he fell from the expectation and demand of perfection that comes from the holy and sinless God. But now, with the coming of Christ the way to be right with God has been revealed and is now openly declared in the Gospel. This way is not completely new but finds its source in the testimony of Old Testament Scripture. It declares that all who believe in Jesus Christ as their atoning sacrifice for sin are declared in right standing with God, with nothing that speaks against them. In Jesus death the perfect justice of God has been served: our sin calls for the shedding of blood and the eternal death of the sinner. But in place of my blood Christ shed His own. And as the divine Son of God His death satisfies the eternal death of not just me, but for every human being. His shed blood was the payment price to buy me back from eternal suffering and instead award me with eternal life. All those before Christ were declared free from eternal death as the sacrifices of animals in their place looked forward to the sacrifice of Christ. And all who sin today are declared to be free from the sentence of eternal death as they look back and hold by faith Christ died in their place. This gift of declared righteousness was earned for all men but must be delivered to each person through the Spirit's work in the Gospel by the gift of faith. This is the same faith that the Old Testament revealed to be the source of Abraham's righteousness and all who like him trusted in the promises of God, not because they could see, touch, taste, or feel the truth of them; but simply because God declared them to be true. Now, just as then, I am declared in right standing not because of what I have done, not because of my obedience to the commands of Christ for His followers, not because of any decision I made to regard Christ as my Savior. I am made right only because of what Christ has done for me which has been given to me as His free gift of faith through the Gospel by the work of the Holy Spirit.

**Focus Statement:**

Christ earned our right standing with the Father. He became the sacrifice that atoned for my sin and the reason that all charges of sin have been dropped against me. Not because God overlooks them, but because Christ satisfied the just and perfect demand of God by becoming sin for me, dying for me, taking from me the death I owed and giving to me the right standing and eternal life that His perfect life, obedient death, and resurrection earned for me and all men. He gives all that to me by faith

**Function Statement:**

**Why it's important to know:**

Our works earn us nothing in our relationship with God. They don't make us right with Him or keep us right with Him. The righteousness that Christ earned for all men must be applied to each person individually by the gift of faith. One who doesn't believe is not right with God and is not forgiven of sin or welcomed into eternal life

**What the hearer should do as a result:**

Recognize and hold fast to the necessity of faith to deliver to me all that Christ won for me. Understand that I am right with God only because of Jesus work in my place. Realize that those without faith do not have that right standing with God nor His gift of life now and eternal life to come.

**Subject Sentence: You must be right with God from His free gift**

## **Introduction:**

Well, here we are celebrating the 503<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation. And just as we said 3 years ago, it's still all about Jesus. It's still all about the "four solas", which translated from Latin mean salvation is by Scripture Alone, By Grace Alone, By Faith Alone, and Through Christ Alone. And I would expect most of us here are in agreement with this. It's what we preach as the Gospel every Sunday. So why do we need to dedicate a Sunday in observance to rehashing the old formula again? Because even though we might say we agree, confess, and believe in it, we struggle to live it out. It goes against what our human logic dictates and what our heart sometimes yearns for.

Take for example Jim and Cheryl. Jim forgets his anniversary. Instead of coming home on time from work to be surprised by the special romantic dinner his wife Cheryl has made, the night she arranged for the kids to sleep over at grandma's house, he chooses to work late. He stays voluntarily to try to finish up a project. When he comes home and realizes his error he works hard to apologize to Cheryl and ask her forgiveness. But no matter what he says, he can't seem to make it to her. Not only did he forget and work late, but he completely forgot it was their anniversary. He came home with nothing to give his wife in return. He promises to make it up to her: a night out at her favorite restaurant, a new dress to wear for this occasion, he even promises to drive her there in that new car that she has been hinting they should buy. That last thing seems to soothe her anger and cover over her disappointment. At least for now. But the next time Jim forgets something important, Cheryl will be ready to bring up this mistake again, and again. Just as Jim does whenever Cheryl forgets something important, he will bring it up again and again. There doesn't seem to be anything either can do to make up for the times they disappoint and anger each other.

But what if Jim didn't have the means to do these things in order to make it up to Cheryl? What if he didn't have the money to take her out to that nice restaurant? What if he couldn't get off work in time because his boss makes him work overtime unexpectedly? What if there were no grandparents or anyone around to watch the kids for any kind of romantic date? Shouldn't he be given a free pass on his mistakes and shortcomings? Shouldn't we be given a free pass when there seems no good way to keep from offending someone or no good way to make it up?

## What Our Works Can't Do

Now, since you may be a husband or a wife who has disappointed your spouse, or a child that has disobeyed your parents, you might be able to come up with ways that you might atone for your shortcomings, just as Jim did. And they might work, at least in theory. But no matter who we've offended on this earth, the one we have truly offended, and are liable to, is the LORD. All sins against one another are sins against Him. No matter what we've done against one another, we have offended the LORD God. **Romans 3:23** "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," All, everyone, you and me; we have all missed the mark of perfection that our holy God requires of us.

And if we desired to come up with a short list of how to make it up to God, where could we look? The 10 Commandments to start with, as well as all the other statements found in Scripture of what God expects us to do. They are the expression of His perfect will for all human beings. They are what He commands of all people, believers and unbelievers alike. So we just need to start doing them, right?

Wrong! **Romans 3:20** **For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.** No matter how hard you try to make it up to God you can never do enough. When we turn to His commandments, His Law, and try to be obedient, what we find is that we can't obey them perfectly enough to make up for our sinfulness. To be right with God, to be declared justified-just and without offense in His sight, we have to be perfectly obedient. And that is impossible. Even as a Baptized Christian your works do nothing for your right standing before God. And that's hard for us to accept.

We see our relationship with God to be like our relationship with our loved ones. We imagine it to be like Jim and Cheryl. They love each other. But they do things that make each other angry. But if Jim just continued to work at it, continued to make Cheryl the center of his attention, did loving things for her, showered her with affection, continued to gracefully put up with her words of angry reproach without responding in kind, it is possible that Cheryl's anger and disappointment might fade. Jim's hard work would account for something in their relationship.

But what happens when we Christians try to apply the same principal to our relationship with God. We know we have been forgiven by faith in Christ. We know that we continue to slip up and disappoint Him. We know we continue to do things that anger Him. So naturally we look for ways to make it up to Him. Not necessarily to be forgiven, but to get on His right side once again. We attend Church regularly, we pray daily, we read our Bibles, we serve at Franklin Mission, we help out our neighbors in need. Through these things we might think that even though we anger God, we can win back His approval. We can make sure He still loves us, and maybe even loves us more today than yesterday. The problem is that each one

of these things is works. And as Romans 3:20 tells us there are no amounts of works that can earn us anything in the sight of God. That's why we still desperately need Jesus.

## **What Jesus' Work Has Done for You**

**Romans 3:23-25** <sup>23</sup> **for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,** <sup>24</sup> **and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,** <sup>25</sup> **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.** Here is the Gospel that saved one certain Augustinian Monk named Martin Luther from depression, despair, and possible suicide. The Gospel that saved him from eternal death and brought him a life lived with Christ now and eternal life to come. Here is the message that changed the course of history and returned the Church to proclaiming the one true Gospel. You can't be any clearer on what it takes to receive God's approval no matter who you are or what you've done. It's never about what you have done or could do. It's all about what Jesus Christ has done for you.

Knowing that we poor miserable sinners could never do enough to earn His love and forgiveness, our Lord came down to earth to earn it for us. The Father sent the Son to earth. He lived the life that the Law demands of us which we can never do. Jesus was always obedient in every way to the Father's will and Law in what He thought, said, and did. He never once sinned. As a human being He earned the right to live in God's presence now and for eternity. But instead of enjoying what He earned, He chose instead to take upon Himself all that you and I earn by our continued disobedience to God's will and Law. He took upon Himself our sin. **2 Corinthians 5:21** **For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.** Out of a love whose strength and depth is beyond our understanding, the Father made His Son to become sin for us. The Son willingly laid upon Himself everything you've ever done or will do that opposes God's will and commands and died so that you would never be charged with them.

Jesus Christ took upon Himself the suffering and death you earned and deserved. He became for you the propitiation: the atoning sacrifice on your behalf. God's holy law proclaims that the wages of sin is death. Your continued disobedience earns for you death. But Jesus satisfied God's holy law, His call as the righteous judge that all sin be punished. And someone was punished for your sin, just not you. Jesus stepped in and took your place on the cross of suffering. He took your sin and your death, and in return gives to you His life. Life now and eternal life to come. Not because you had done or would do anything that would remotely make up for your sin. But simply because of that great undeserved and unearned love. His wonderful free gift we call grace. Given to you by faith, so that Jesus becomes **your propitiation, your atoning sacrifice, your means to be right with God** now and forever. Even though you continue to sin He continues to make you right with God. He declares you to be right with Him right now, this very minute, because of the faith He has given you so that you believe in Him.

## **Why This is Still Important Today?**

Why is this still important today? Because we still want our works to account for something. We want to see what we do as earning God's favor. We understand that our continued sinning angers and disappoints God. We confess that because of Jesus we are forgiven. But we assume that just as we can forgive each other, and yet hold a grudge, that God is the same way. We feel we need to do something to appease Him as we continue to disappoint Him. We need to somehow wine and dine Him, do little works of love and obedience, attend Church, read our Bibles, pray, and show love for others.

These are all good works. And are we called to do these things? Yes. God commands to do these things as Christians. He commands us to gather together and worship Him in **Hebrews 10:24-25** <sup>24</sup> **And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,** <sup>25</sup> **not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.** He commands us to read His and study His Word in **Deuteronomy 11:18-20** <sup>18</sup> **"You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.** <sup>19</sup> **You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.** <sup>20</sup> **You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates,** He commands us to pray in **Romans 12:12** **Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.** He commands us to love one another in **John 13:34** **A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.** He commands us to show that love through our works.

**Ephesians 2:8-10** <sup>8</sup> **For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,** <sup>9</sup> **not a result of works, so that no one may boast.** <sup>10</sup> **For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.** Here in this passage we not only see God's command to do good works but we see the proper place they have in our lives lived out in faith toward Christ. We are not saved by our works. We are saved and forgiven only by the work of Christ. And that work comes to us by the gift of faith that is from God in the Gospel Message. We do good works because that is the reason why He saved us and left

us here. We do good works as our response to God's gift of grace that continues to be poured out as the ongoing work of your baptism. It is the way we show God our love for Him and show His love to those around us.

The Gospel of the Reformation is still important today because it's under attack as it was in Luther's day. The leading voice of the largest Christian denomination today, Pope Francis, in a letter written in 2015 declared that non-believers would be forgiven by God if they followed their consciences: ***"You ask me if the God of the Christians forgives those who don't believe and who don't seek the faith. I start by saying – and this is the fundamental thing – that God's mercy has no limits if you go to him with a sincere and contrite heart. The issue for those who do not believe in God is to obey their conscience."*** It's the Pope's way of reaching out into culture so as not to exclude or offend anyone. But if they don't believe it means they are not trusting in Jesus. They are not trusting in Scripture Alone, By Grace Alone, By Faith Alone, and Through Christ Alone. They can't trust in these things without the gift of faith. The Pope is telling them the answer is works, to obey their consequences. But there is no free pass when it comes to our offending God. All who lack faith in Christ lack a conscience that would do anything for them except condemn them to eternal hell. **Romans 3:20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.** He is telling unbelievers to do something that will never work. It will only drive them farther away from salvation. **Romans 3:23-24 <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.** Only the gift of grace given by faith will save them. It is the gift that saved you and I. And it is this Gospel Message that Luther fought to bring back as the message preached by the Church. And it's the message that still needs to be preached and shared by us to the lost. Now more than ever.

## **Conclusion**

We naturally do things that anger each other, disappointment each other, and cause each other frustration. And we naturally look for ways to make it up to each other. We want to do the same thing for God when we feel like we've anger Him and disappointed Him. We want to earn His favor, but we cannot. We want to add something to our right standing with God, but we cannot. The only work that matters in the eyes of God is the work that Christ has done for us. He gave His life as the atoning sacrifice for all our sins, even those we continue to commit. Because of Jesus God continues to love us, even though we continue to sin. That's why He sent the Spirit to you and to me in the Gospel Message. That's why He saved us before we ever did anything to deserve it. You are already in right standing with God. You are declared just: free of all charges of sin, declared innocent and will never have to suffer the eternal death your works have earned. That's the Gospel Message of the Reformation. Salvation comes by Scripture alone: through the Gospel Message. It comes by Grace alone: the free gift of God that you cannot earn and do not deserve, and yet receive. It comes by Faith alone, given by the Spirit, the gift that makes all that Christ did on the cross

and in His resurrection for you. And it comes through Christ alone: His works save us and no one else's. It's the message that is being twisted and corrupted by the leading voice of the Catholic Church. The pure Gospel Message of Romans still needs to be shared today. We still need to hear it. And those who don't believe desperately need to hear it from us. Amen.