

Written Copy: The Standard of Perfection-Romans 3:21-25

Reformation Sunday
Sunday, October 27th, 2019

Text: Romans 3:21-25

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.

Exegetical Statement

Whether a person is one who is observing the laws given by Moses or is living according to the laws written on the hearts of all men, no amount of obedience to these laws can earn any favor. Therefore both Jew and Gentile have no grounds upon which to declare they are right and pleasing in the eyes of God. What the Law does for both is to provide a firsthand and intimate knowledge of the sin that controls and fills one's life. God's Law reveals what a person must be and how a person must live in order to be in right standing with Him and no longer be declared an enemy of God and worthy of His wrath against sin and eternal punishment. But this right standing has now been revealed and made available apart from the keeping of the Law as testified by God's Word in the Old Testament. Although all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God Christ has earned forgiveness and salvation for all men. He became the atoning sacrifice on the cross that appeased God's righteous wrath over mankind's sin and His blood was shed in the place of mankind's blood so that no human being need owe anything to God including their own suffering and eternal death. The gift that is His sacrifice is given through the free gift of faith by which a man trusts and believes that what Jesus earned on the cross is "for me". Christ's work as the atoning sacrifice covers the sins of all men throughout all time, even those committed before He was born. God delayed punishing these sins awaiting the coming of Christ and the gift of faith given in the Gospel.

Focus Statement:

Christ met the standard of perfection for all men. And as the only perfect man His suffering and death is worthy to be the atoning sacrifice for all men. Faith appropriates Christ's sacrifice of atonement and makes it the sacrifice that forgives my sins, saves me from the devil and eternal hell and gives to me the gift of eternal life. I am declared to be in right standing with God-meeting the standard of perfection necessary to be included in His kingdom because of what I receive from Christ by faith

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

I can look at the life of a believer who seems to have it all together and assume that he has earned favor with God that I lack. On the other hand I can assume that the blessings I have received mean I have earned merit with God beyond what others have. Neither are true since I cannot meet the standard of perfection necessary to earn merit with God, all men are in the same boat-falling short of God's standard for perfection

What the hearer should do as a result:

Realize that nothing I do on my own lives up to God's standard of perfection. But the works that I do are considered worthy when done in faith toward Christ. I should live in praise and thanksgiving of this most precious gift I have in Christ and seek to keep it alive and active through the Spirit working in the means of grace

Subject Sentence: Christ met God's standard of perfection for me

One of my all-time favorite episodes in Luther's life, besides his dramatic speech before the Roman Emperor and the Cardinals of the Roman Church where he boldly stated "I cannot, and I will not recant.." is when he was almost struck by lightning. It happened as the young Luther was on his way back to the University of Erfurt after a visit home. He saw it as a message from God that he was not living a life that pleased the Lord and that he better work on getting right with him. So he left his study of law that had begun at the University and sought to adopt the lifestyle that most people thought was truly pleasing to the Lord: he entered the monastery and became an Augustinian Monk. At the time he believed that there whole life was one dedicated to earning favor with God since it met his standards for the God-pleasing life. It was a life filled with prayer, with study and memorization of the Scriptures, of silent meditation, of worship, and of good works done to benefit the community. The only problem was his decision was not met with any kind of favor in the eyes of his parents who had sacrificed much to give him an education that would allow him to have a career that would benefit his future as well as theirs.

Now, I personally have never had a lightning bolt experience like Luther. But I did have a God orchestrated miraculous change in my life when the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel message called me back to faith. It was every bit as much as a miracle as what Luther experienced and even more so. It was a work only the Holy Spirit could do. And it changed my life. It resulted in me becoming a member of Living Word Lutheran Church and becoming active in the various ministry opportunities available. I expected that it would also mean a change in my life, my personal life and the life of my family. And that did happen. But not in the way I expected. I thought that everything would now come easier and that all my family did and was would be more blessed. But problems still arose. We struggled financially to keep our three kids in the Lutheran School System K-12th grade. And I was hoping that many of the temptations that I faced as a teenager would be spared them. But I was wrong. We all struggled through the same problems that families outside of the church face as well as some of those within the Church.

I assumed it was because I was doing something wrong. Somehow, I was not winning the favor that some other families at our Church enjoyed. In particular I looked at the family of

a friend that I shall call "John". He was a teacher for a while at our Church's school and was very good at it. He led Bible Study on Sunday morning that was very well attended. Many people looked up to him as a leader in the Church. And his family seemed to be impervious to the problems my family was dealing with. They worshiped together both on Sundays at Church and with family devotional times at home. His kids were well liked, good in sports, and stayed away from trouble. All of them were college bound with some kind of scholarship. He and his wife were life-long Lutherans. I began to think that my time outside of the Church, and because I started my family when I was outside of the Church, that I fell short of the same favor John's family enjoyed in the eyes of God. Not that He didn't love me or forgiven me, He just didn't love me and my family as much as He loved John's family because we failed to earn God's favor as they did. I think that in many ways Luther would've understood how I felt.

Perhaps you've found yourself thinking the same thing, that your life just doesn't please God as much as the lives of other people in the Church do. Or maybe you fall victim to the opposite view. Perhaps deep down you felt that the many blessings you have are proof positive of the favor you earn in the eyes of God. That your life in substantial ways conforms to God's standard of perfection better than many others and therefore you have opened the floodgates to blessings that others only wish were theirs. And you can find proof of this in your life when you look to God's Law. You worship faithfully every Sunday the Triune God-covering the first three commandments. You haven't been convicted of stealing anything, you haven't murdered anyone, you have never cheated on your spouse, never murdered anyone, and you've never given false testimony but have been truthful with everyone-even to the point of raising the anger of others. You're not perfect, but you hold up to God's standards pretty well nonetheless, enough to earn His favor and blessings anyway. You would be right up there with John's family in the eyes of most.

But then how is it that Paul can state in **Romans 3:9-12** ⁹ **What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin,** ¹⁰ **as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one;** ¹¹ **no one understands; no one seeks for God.** ¹² **All have turned aside; together they have**

become worthless; no one does good, not even one”? Perhaps if we were to take a closer look at Luther’s explanations of the commandments and consider what we do or fail to do is just as important as what we refrain from doing. Sure, you worship regularly, but do you view worship as a sacrifice of praise as well of your time, talents, and treasure? We are to worship God with our whole being and demonstrated that He takes first place in our lives by our willingness to give up some of what we claim to be ours for the good of His kingdom. How are you doing on that? You may have never stolen anything material from another person, but have you ever stolen time from your employer by doing personal business on company time? Have you ever refused God’s demand of your time for personal selfish reasons? You have never murdered anyone but has there been anger in your heart toward another that prevents you from forgiving them 70 times 7 as Jesus instructed His disciples to do? You may never have lied or even gossiped about another person, but have you failed to speak up in their defense when no one else would? You may never have committed adultery or coveted your neighbor’s possessions in your words and deeds, but what about in your mind and heart? Have you ever been jealous of the blessings of your neighbor that you wish were your own? The standard of God by which we are all judged is the standard of perfection. The Law is the God’s explanation of who He is as the Holy sinless one. It is God’s expectation of how all His people are to live. And it requires the absolute perfection that is His holy sinless nature. Paul hit the nail on the head when he says in **Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**” All. Everyone. You, me, and even John’s family.

But the same all who have fallen short and deserve eternal punishment are the same all that (**Romans 3:24**) **“are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”** Justified: declared to be in right standing with God. Declared to be in keeping with God’s standard of perfection. Declared to have nothing worthy of separation from Him nor or forever in eternal death. Declared to be something that we are not. All because of the free gift we have been given called grace: unmerited favor that you and I could never earn but comes from Jesus Christ. Because of all He has done we have been redeemed, saved from eternal death and punishment, not by the work of our hands, but by the work Christ has done for you, for me, and for all people.

How could He do this? The Father chose His only Son and set Him aside at the beginning of time to be the One **“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. (Romans 3:25)**. A propitiation: the sacrifice of blood that appease all the anger of God over your sin, my sin, and the sin of every man and woman that ever has lived, lives now, and will live in the future. Jesus suffered, bled and died because He took upon Himself the sins of the whole world, including yours and mine, and in doing so took upon Himself the anger our sins earn as disobedience to our God and His demand we be perfect. Jesus did this not requiring or demanding anything from you or I in return. It's His free gift of love.

And it is applied to you and your life through the free gift of faith. Faith that comes through these very words that describe what Christ has done for all men. The free gift that the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of men who hear this Gospel Message. The message that changes hearts and lives forever. The message that changes who you are declared to be in the presence of God. God Himself is the source of this righteousness, this divine standard of perfection. And only God in human form could earn it for you. And He did. Not just you, but even those who sinned before Jesus was born, as well as those who are yet to come to faith. God in His love and righteousness held back the judgment deserved for our sin so that Christ might be our perfect sacrifice. And all who cling to Him by faith receive what He has earned for them: forgiveness of sins, salvation from eternal death, life with Him now that will become life eternal lived with Him and His Church in the New heaven and New Earth.

What should this mean for you and for me right now? It means that even the lives of those we believe to meet God's standard of perfection fall short. It means that each one of us needs to take an honest look at what our own actions declare us to be before God. Poor miserable sinners. But then to grasp and hold firmly to what Jesus declares us to be through our faith in Him and His work on our behalf: righteous children of God. Declared perfect through all the work that Jesus has done on your behalf and mine. So that even when our attempts to live up to God's perfect standards fall short, they are declared to be

good enough when done in the name of, in faith toward, and in service to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the mission of His Church.

Eventually Luther came to understand that the life of a monk did not meet the standard of perfection that God required. Instead it was a life that sought to earn favor from God apart from faith in Jesus Christ. As time went by and I learned more about John and his family I began to understand that their life was not the standard of perfection that I once thought. They had their troubles and hang ups; not the same as my family had but they were there, nonetheless. And because of what I'd experienced in the life of my family I was able to listen with an understanding and attentive ear when he needed someone to speak to. My family certainly doesn't meet that standard of perfection just as your family does not either. All of us have fallen short of God's demand for perfection. But we are declared to be in right standing with Him, nonetheless. We are declared to be forgiven of sin and worthy to be in His kingdom now and for eternity. All this comes to us as the free gift from Christ by our faith. The faith He grants to all through the Gospel Message. You don't have to be perfect to receive His special favor. Christ was perfect for you. And His gift of faith makes you His special child now and will keep you until the day He returns. Amen