

Reformation Sunday  
October 31, 2021

“But now the righteousness of God is revealed – apart from the law!”  
(Romans 3:21-22)

By Rev. Ed Weber

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,  
Today’s text for this Reformation Sunday is from our Epistle reading –.

**“But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;**

Here ends our text.

Blessed Reformation Day to you! What a joy it is to be gathered and to hear once again what is revealed Reformation Sunday after Reformation Sunday, year after year, day after day - the righteousness of God!

Today is like Christmas day - gathered around the Christmas tree and opening the biggest and most beautiful present under the tree. For what is revealed as one opens this present is the best present that any man and every man could want to open – the righteousness of God through faith in His Son Jesus Christ! Yes, the name tag says, “From: God” “To: You”, for this gift is revealed to all and on all who believe. There is no difference! You too are included!

Yes, even the righteousness of God that was witnessed by the Law and the Prophets in the Old Testament, even this righteousness is now revealed to...you!

God saves all people through what He graciously reveals – His righteousness in Jesus Christ!

Today we especially take time to understand two very important things - what is this righteousness? And how is this righteousness revealed?

## I. First, what is this righteousness?

It is the absolute opposite of everything that Paul described from verse 18 of chapter 1 up unto the opening words of our epistle, “But now”.

The contrast is literally night and day, deeds of darkness contrasted with God’s work of righteousness in Christ.

To see and treasure the glory and beauty of God’s righteousness, Paul makes sure we see the very opposite first. For Paul gives in bitter detail what is the unrighteousness of fallen mankind and how God’s wrath is revealed against such unrighteousness. When one finally reads “But now” it comes as such an absolute relief for there is nothing but darkness, depravity and despair in the first 3 chapters.

Paul describes in short, the state of the fallen world who has rejected his Creator - the world of unbelief.

Paul begins by saying, **“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...” (Romans 1:18)**

**“Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.”**

The Egyptians worshipped their falcons and the Israelites their golden calf. They made statues of man and worshipped him.

**“who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.” (Romans 1:25)**

Then Paul goes on in the next verse to describe what happens when men and women reject their Creator. God gives them up to their unnatural ways of homosexuality.

**“For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. 27 Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one**

**another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.”**

Paul goes leaves no stone of unrighteousness unturned.

**“being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, 30 backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31 undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; 32 who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.”**

There is a lot of “un” this and “un” that. Unbelievers are undone by their sin with the righteous judgment of God being death!

And we sinners who are gathered here this morning are all deserving of the same, of God’s righteous judgment. For Paul quotes Psalm 14 in the verses right before our epistle in chapter 3.

**““There is none righteous, no, not one; 11 There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. 12 They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.”**

Thanks be to God that there is a “But now”. There is an incredible gracious gift from God that changes the hopeless lot of an unbeliever. But now, the righteousness of God, but now, the Good News! Look at it now. See what God has done!

**“For there is no difference; 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,”**

Yes, there is none who does good. Yes, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But now, God justified freely all people. There is no difference. How? Through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus! This was an act of God’s grace for we deserved nothing but punishment.

**“whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness”. (v.25)**

God’s righteousness demanded punishment! But God didn’t punish the guilty, you and me. He punished the guiltless, His Son. And by Jesus’ blood, by His death, God showed that He is righteous and at the same time merciful to us. For Christ’s righteousness becomes ours through faith. His atonement, His propitiation in appeasing the wrath of God is our salvation!

Apart from works, apart from any works on our part was the only way our salvation could be accomplished! It was accomplished in the work of Christ and Christ alone. The mercy seat of Christ’s atonement as the lid on the Ark of the Covenant closes the ark and the commandments. God’s mercy was revealed in His Son Jesus who fulfilled the law in our stead!

This righteousness of God that justifies all mankind freely in Jesus Christ is immovable. It stands alone. It is outside man and it is for all mankind. There is no difference.

## II. How the righteousness of God is given

But who can receive this righteousness and how is it given?

In the opening chapter, verses 16 and 17, the theme verses of the epistle, Paul describes how.

**“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”**

It’s the Gospel, God’s power of salvation that is revealed by faith. The gift of righteousness is made. It is for all people. But it is given only through faith. And that is how one becomes just. That is how one can stand before God as righteous, through faith alone.

Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone. These are the gems of the Reformation that were revealed once again to Martin Luther. He could not help but reveal how the righteousness of God is given to poor sinners. Like Paul, he was not ashamed of the Gospel for it is everything that all depraved men and women need - absolutely need.

All glory to God alone that He has done this work of conquering sin, death and the devil by Jesus' death and resurrection. All glory to God alone that He has revealed this gift to us in our time and our place. "But now" the righteousness of God is revealed to you and me through His word. He seals this gift of faith with His sacrament of Baptism for the forgiveness of our sins. And as we confess our faith and trust in Christ's righteousness alone, He offers us His forgiveness and reconciliation in the Lord's Supper. His very body and blood is given for us to eat and drink and receive God's righteousness by faith!

From start to finish, it is all God' grace that made our salvation possible. It was God's grace that moved Him to give us His Son Jesus as the sacrifice for our sin. God's righteousness in Christ justifies all men freely, apart from the law.

And it is God's grace that gives us this gift through faith so that a man is justified.

**"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law." (Romans 3:28)**

So, Paul concludes our epistle reading with the personal receiving of the God's righteousness and one's personal justification by faith. And this truth when received by faith indeed sets one free, again apart from the law!

All glory to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who gives us this faith and this power of salvation in the Good News of His Gospel. Blessed Reformation! Amen.

**The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus." Amen. (Philippians 4:7)**