

Reformation Sunday

““God’s absolutes!”

Romans 3:19-28

October 26, 2025

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our text for this Reformation Sunday is from our epistle reading, Romans 3:19-24. I reread the first 6 verses.

“19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. 20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. 21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. 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,”

So far the text:

Blessed Reformation Day! You’ve maybe been told, “I’ve got good news and bad news for you. Which do you want to hear first?” We might say, “I don’t want to hear any bad news today. Just give me the good news.”

Well, on this Reformation Day, we don’t get to pick what we want to hear first. God’s got good news and bad news for us, and for all the world. God gives us the bad news first. There’s no getting around this. Everybody has to hear what God tells us first and it’s not pretty. Ok, I’m ready. Let’s hear it.

First, we hear God’s absolute decree concerning the Law.

“Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.”

Wow, that hits us right between the eyes. The whole world is under the Law – God’s Law. Every mouth must be stopped. God’s Law is irrevocable. It’s absolute. It’s not relative. Man doesn’t get to decide his own rules to live by. God has given His moral Law to all people in His 10 commandments.

And the bad news is this: everyone has failed to live God pleasing, God approved lives. The Law tells each and everyone of us this simple devastating truth:
“all the world is guilty before God.”

We might try to fool ourselves into believing that my good works have to help me somehow get to heaven. We hear this all the time expressed in different ways:

“I’m not a bad person”. “Everybody is born with some good in them.” “Surely, I’ve done enough good things in life to earn my place in heaven.”

Have you thought these thoughts or something similar to them? Have you tried to downplay the bad that you do by balancing it out with what you perceive to be “good works”?

Well, we’re still talking about the bad news, so let’s hear all that God has to say. Because it’s His approval that counts, not my self-approval. And this is what God say:

“Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”

No flesh. Nobody. Not one person in the whole world is justified in God’s sight by the deeds of the law. Not you. Not me. No flesh. What does the Law do? Just the opposite. It tells us how we have fallen short. It tells us that we’re sinners. It tells us that we sick with the leprosy of sin and we can’t cure ourselves. As we heard two Sundays ago.

Justified means righteous, without guilt, without sin, 100% holy.

So there’s the bad news. It’s God’s absolute decree upon all people and there’s no escaping it. There’s no hiding it. There’s no watering it down or changing it. And the sooner one accepts this...the sooner a person is ready to admit this, accept this, own this, and cry out like the publican **“God, be merciful to me a sinner!”** in Luke 18, the sooner a person can then hear the good news.

You see in this parable that Jesus told about the Pharisee and the Publican, both went to the temple to pray. The Pharisees' prayer went like this:

“The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.’

The Pharisee prayed with himself. He tried to change God's absolute law by saying that it didn't apply to himself. He even “thanked God” that he wasn't like other men. He was in a category all by himself. He wasn't unjust like this tax collector. Oh, he only does good things like fasting and tithing. He's a charitable guy. He buys ticket to help with a fundraiser. That's proof that there's no evil in my bones. Well, I think there's a song with the lyrics “Bad to the bone”. And it applies to all people.

The publican accepted this didn't even raise his head as he prayed but beat his chest in anguish as he cried out. **“God, be merciful to me a sinner!”**

“I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

And now for the good news... After the Law has crushed our spirit and we haven't tried to wiggle, evade or relativize it, God has another absolute for us. The Gospel. And it's for all people. There is no difference. Are you ready to hear some good news?

“21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God,”

God's got something He wants to reveal to you. Where we have failed – God hasn't. God has something to give us freely that exalts us. It has nothing to do with our trying to keep the law. It's God's righteousness. It's His alone. And He gives it freely to the entire world. It doesn't cost you a thing. You can't earn it. It's by grace. And it's only through Jesus.

Listen again to the rest of this verse.

“even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;”

It's to all people. A gift. To Jew and Gentile alike. There is no difference. And you receive this righteousness, God's righteousness, through faith in Jesus Christ. It's as simple as that. A man is justified, declared righteous, forensically through faith in Jesus.

And now comes the verse that we know so well that gives us the good news of how Jesus did this for all people.

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,”

God's absolute decrees. All sinned. All have fallen short of being approved by God, of God's glory. No exceptions. So, God had to do something extraordinary to remove the death sentence of the law. He sent His Son Jesus, out of pure grace and mercy, and Jesus gave His life to pay for our sins, to redeem the world. All have sinned, but all have been redeemed. And no one can change this truth of the Good News!

This is the summary of the Good News that Paul wrote in the first chapter of Romans.

16 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. 17 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 all God's work, His power to remove sin through Christ, and give His righteousness freely to everyone. And whoever believes this absolute truth has what Martin Luther declared as the foundation of the Reformation –“the just shall live by faith”.

Back to our epistle reading in Romans 3. We hear how this all was worked out by God in beautiful detail!

“25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

Jesus was the sin offering – the propitiation. Once and for all. This is the good news of the Gospel. God's absolute decree that He must punish sin. He is just. But instead of

punishing us, which we deserved, He punished His Son Jesus. God forbore sin until the time was right and then Jesus was born. God in the flesh...perfect flesh that took on every sin of all the sinful deeds of the world. And that is how God justified the world and declared His love, and salvation, and reconciliation, and righteousness, only in Jesus, apart from the deeds of the law, apart from anything we could ever do!

Jesus did it all. That's the good news. The only good news for you and all people! And this good news, God's absolute, unchanging love is what Martin Luther rediscovered, and it began the Reformation. The Reformation continues today through you and me who know God's wonderful truth now have the privilege and joy to proclaim. You have good news to tell others. Paul couldn't stop telling it and neither can we. Amen!

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