

The Righteousness of God Through Faith

The Epistle for Reformation Sunday is Romans 3:19-28. This text was central to Martin Luther's Reformation work.

Verse 19 pictures a defendant in a court of law. The suspect is given the opportunity to speak in his own defense. But, he is speechless because the preponderance of evidence brought against him is overwhelming. He will be held accountable. That's us and everyone before us and after us. The purpose of the Law is to show us our sin and need for a Savior.

The "but" at the beginning of verse 21 changes the main emphasis from Law to Gospel. Paul revealed our unrighteousness; now he reveals the righteousness of God, which is Christ Jesus. (TLSB) God demands nothing of man in the preaching of the Gospel but he only promises, gives and presents the NT blessing of righteousness.

This righteousness through faith is for everyone who believes. It is given to us by grace through faith. The "how is this done" phase can be explained by the words "redemption" and "propitiation." The word "redemption" comes from the idea of "buying back." Here it is used to refer to release from guilt.

In the OT "propitiation" was used in connection with sacrifice, when in some way blood covered sin and effected atonement. Jesus by His blood exercised propitiative function and effected atonement between God and men. Jesus bought us back by his suffering, death and resurrection.

Verse 28 puts a strong finishing touch to our text when it states: *For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.*

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, Redeemer of the world, thank You for Your salvation. Empower me to share Your gift with others. Amen. (TLSB)