

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

²¹ But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.

²⁷ Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. ²⁸ For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. **This is God's Word.**

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We are a country of laws. We live by laws and rules and that is a pattern for many countries throughout history. Laws help to maintain order and keep us safe. But when people have no regard for the law then lawlessness takes over and we have chaos. We saw some of that in the last few weeks as stores were looted and burned and people were injured and some even killed and at times it was not safe to be out on the streets.

The same applies to the rules which parents set in the home. They are meant to help the family function and to keep it safe. Many parents have rules about bedtimes and doing homework and screen time and activities on school nights and curfews and many more. When the rules are broken, then one must suffer the consequences – a loss of privileges or limiting some activity or grounding or whatever punishment that might be appropriate. And if the rules are constantly ignored then the home can become an unbearable place to be.

While we need laws and rules to keep order and to set boundaries for behavior, they are not a perfect system because not everyone keeps those laws or rules all the time. Everyone here has broken some law or some rule – whether you have gotten caught or not.

I. So what about our spiritual lives? Some people might say that the church is full of too many laws and rules but when it comes to our spiritual life, we need God's law and commands. They have a purpose in our lives of showing us God's will and guiding us but they also show us that we are the weak link in that system. The Law shows us that as it reveals our sins. God knows our every sin and he knows our every weakness, yet rather than condemning us he gives us the "Good News" of the gospel – something that doesn't rely on us and our actions when it comes to our salvation.

That's why God directed Paul to write, **"But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."**

If we can't be righteous by ourselves, it has to come from someplace else and it does. It comes from God! There is nothing *we can do* and nothing *we have to do*. God has done it all. And this righteousness we need is apart from the Law. It has no connection to how you or I obey

God's law so, once again, it doesn't rely on us and thus there is nothing we can do to earn this righteousness.

This is nothing new. Paul says that the Law and the Prophets testify to it. The Law and Prophets are another name for the Old Testament. St. Augustine once said, **“The New Testament is hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is explained/revealed in the New.”** In other words, the New Testament is hidden in all the prophecies about the promised Messiah – prophecies about Jesus and then the fulfillment of those prophecies is revealed to us in the New Testament.

Scripture testifies about Jesus who is the only one who can make us righteous in God's sight. Without Jesus, there is no righteousness. And faith is the hand that receives this righteousness. With these verses Paul tells us “How” God's plan of salvation works. It works through faith in Christ Jesus. But we also need to know “Why” we need this plan and “Why” this righteousness can't come through the Law.

II. That's why Paul continues with, **“There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”** We have mentioned it in the past, God doesn't show favoritism and here it is clearly stated that there is no difference between any of us – we all have sinned – every last person on earth. And because we have sinned we fall short of God's approval – that is God's glory or praise for us. We hate to admit it but all we deserve is God's wrath.

The good news though is that everyone is justified (declared not guilty) because of God's grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. In other words, Jesus redeemed everyone. Everyone's sins were paid for on the cross. Not just the sins of believers but every last sin that has ever been committed and ever will be committed was paid for by Jesus.

That doesn't mean that everyone will be saved – we know that some will reject God's grace and anyone that does not believe stands condemned. But it does mean we can share God's grace with everyone – it isn't limited. God sent Jesus to bring salvation to all people and God wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth..

Have you ever been reluctant to share God's Word with someone because they aren't like us or maybe you think they don't have enough money to give to the church? The Old Testament prophet Jonah didn't want to take God's message to the people of Nineveh because he didn't think they deserved it. Jonah thought God's Word was only for the Jews but God doesn't show favoritism and neither should we.

God reached out to us with his gospel and he expects us to do the same. Everyone needs to hear about God's grace. Not because the church needs more members and not because we need more funding. We want to reach out with the gospel because people need to know about Jesus and what he has done for them. There is no other way to be saved and God has given us the privilege to share his Word. He called us to faith not to create a huge congregation but to share the gospel.

So as we share the gospel we want to note that we don't preach universalism (that everyone is going to be saved) but we do preach universal justification (that Jesus paid for the sins of the whole world). And it is faith that brings us the blessings of Christ's work to us personally. Paul lays out God's plan of salvation pretty clearly for us in these verses:

1. We are justified *freely* – as a gift without payment; gratis
2. By his grace – God's undeserved love for us sinners
3. Through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus – literally through the payment of a ransom to free us from our sins and to buy us back from Satan.

That leads Paul to conclude this section then with, **²⁷ Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. ²⁸ For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.**

If a sinner had kept God's Law and earned salvation then they could boast about what they had done but that is impossible and that is why Paul points out that all boasting is to be excluded because there is nothing for us to boast about

Paul then comes back to the fact that we are justified by faith apart from the Law. Luther added the word *alone* after faith to emphasize that it is faith alone and nothing else that saves us. But we can't forget the object of that faith – it has to be faith alone in Christ Jesus alone. Many people have faith in a lot of different things but only faith in Christ Jesus justifies us or saves us from our sins.

Our synod seal has the Latin words: *sola scriptura, sola gratia and sola fide*. By scripture alone, by grace alone through faith alone to remind us of these words of Paul, that our salvation relies completely on Christ Jesus who comes to us through the Holy Scriptures and brings us forgiveness through faith. There is nothing we have to do because God has done it all for us.

Our church family is far from perfect and we prove it every day but we humbly come before God confessing our sins and we rejoice that He forgives us because Jesus has already paid the price for our forgiveness. That is the heart of our salvation that resides in our hearts through faith.

May the words of our sermon hymn, "*My hope is built on nothing less*" remind us of the solid foundation of our faith – Jesus Christ. And may the words of Paul in our sermon text remind us of God's gracious gift of salvation that is ours by faith alone in Christ alone through scripture alone. Amen.