

“Lutherans, Hold Fast to Faith in Christ Alone!”
(Romans 3:19-28 – Reformation – October 25, 2026)

Romans 3:19-28 – 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. ²⁰Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. ²¹But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²²even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom 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, ²⁶to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. ²⁷Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.*

Dear Redeemed in Christ Jesus:

On this Reformation festival, we remember God’s great gift of restoring His truth in His Church through a reformer like Martin Luther. Reformation has always been needed among God’s people, from the beginning. For Satan is always trying to lead us away from the truth of God’s salvation by grace alone, through faith in Christ alone.

In the Old Testament, how often the prophets called for reform. False prophets kept leading people away from God’s Word to trust in false gods and feel secure in sinful ways. So God sent prophet after prophet saying, “Repent and return to the truth of God’s Word! Salvation is only by faith in the true God and the Messiah He is sending!”

In the New Testament, how often Jesus and His apostles called sinners to reform – to repent and believe in Jesus alone as their Savior. We think of Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians. False teachers were convincing believers that salvation was not by faith in Christ alone, but they had to add their own works under old Jewish laws. Paul warned that they were turning “*to a different gospel,*” which was no gospel (Galatians 1:6-7). Salvation is only through faith in the finished work of Christ for us.

In Luther’s day, there was a need for reformation. False teachers were preaching a gospel which was no gospel at all. They taught that to be saved, you needed more than just faith in Jesus; you had to add your own works. This is why, after hearing a sinner’s confession, priests did not just declare: “God forgives you by the finished work of

Christ for you.” But they assigned works of penance you must do to make up for sins. Sinners were told to pay for pardons to get themselves out of purgatory. The message was: “Salvation is not a free gift, received by faith alone; you must add your works.”

Today, the need for reform goes on. Satan has false teachers casting doubt on the authority and truth of the Bible. Preaching from many pulpits lacks the Gospel of Christ crucified for our salvation. It makes Jesus just an example to follow. So it is really no gospel at all. It is a message of law, pointing people to how they live instead of Christ’s salvation won for us. More and more churches are casting aside God’s truth to promote what is false and sinful. The devil knows every false teaching erodes that much more of our foundation in God’s Word, and thus our certainty of salvation in Christ alone.

We thank God that He continues to bring reform in the hearts of His people as He always has, by His unchanging Word given through His prophets and apostles. In our text, we hear how God has saved us through the finished work of Christ for us; and we are encouraged: **“Lutherans, Hold Fast to Faith in Christ Alone!” 1) This alone puts an end to all boasting; 2) This alone receives God’s righteousness.**

1) This alone puts an end to all boasting

It is common to think that if we do our part and try to live a good life, God will do His part and reward us with heaven. We are tempted to boast in our works of obedience to God’s laws and commandments. But Paul writes: *“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. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin”* (vs. 19-20).

The Law silences all self-righteous boasting before God. It makes us conscious of our sin and deserved condemnation. God’s Law says: “You shall have no other gods before Me.” But we make idols of money, things, and people we love more than God. We break the Second Commandment when we fail to honor God’s name, calling on Him in prayer, praising Him, sharing his saving name with others. We break the Third Commandment, too. For though we have God’s truth preserved in its purity, we do not always gladly worship Him, hear His Word with all our heart and apply it in our lives. We have broken all the Commandments in relation to our neighbor too – dishonoring parents and authorities, murdering by hatred in our heart, committing adultery by lust, giving false testimony by lying and slander, coveting by greed and envy.

Looking into God’s Law is like looking into a mirror. We like to think we will see a perfectly attractive person. But we see the imperfections and say: “Is that how I look? I need serious fixing up before I can be presentable!” The mirror of God’s Law silences all boasting. It makes us see our sin’s ugliness and how unpresentable we are to God.

The self-righteous person says: “I can fix myself up to look good under God’s Law.” But he tries to bend God’s Law to make it easier to follow, to make it less condemning. Many think, “If I just try my hardest, God will accept me. I do better than most people.” Or “A loving God won’t condemn me for living this way.” But this is like trying to bend a mirror one way or another to make yourself look thinner or more muscular, or taller or shorter than you are. God’s Law cannot be bent, only broken. God is not lenient toward any sin. As each of us stands before Him in judgment, His Law asks: “Have you been perfect, even as I am perfect?” (Matthew 5:48). Every mouth is stopped. *“For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (vs. 23).

As a monk, for years Martin Luther tried his hardest to fix his life under God’s Law, trying to get rid of sin by beating and depriving his body, trying to become righteous enough before God by his own works. The more he looked into the mirror of the Law, the more he despaired. He could only see a just God who must punish him for his sin. It was only when Luther began to read the Bible for himself that his eyes were opened to the true Gospel: *“that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law”* (vs. 28). He saw that he was saved, not by his own works of obedience, but through faith in Jesus’ perfect obedience for him. He was saved, not by his sacrifices to God, but by Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross that took away his sins. When Luther discovered the true Gospel, he said it was as if the gates of heaven were opened to him.

Lutherans, hold fast to faith in Christ alone! Satan designs every false teaching, in some way, to take our eyes off of Christ and His perfect life, death, and resurrection for our salvation. Satan tries to turn our eyes to ourselves, to our own way of getting right with God. But when God’s Law shows how far we fall short of His glory, faith clings to Christ alone and puts an end to all boasting.

2) Faith alone receives God’s righteousness

And such faith alone receives God’s righteousness. As it says: *“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”* (vs. 21-22).

God’s righteousness is not something we have to earn; it is His free gift to us. No one is left out, as it says: *“all have sinned...”*; yet all are *“justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”* (vs. 23, 24). To be justified means to be declared “not guilty.” God, the Judge of all, has declared every sinner pardoned of all charges in His court. How can a perfectly just God, who must punish sin, not punish us for our sins? It is because He has punished His own Son instead.

We are redeemed by the blood sacrifice of Jesus: *“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, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus”* (vs. 25-26).

God does not treat sinners as we deserve. If He had, He would have destroyed the world long ago. Instead He was forbearing, waiting patiently until Christ came to pour out all His wrath against mankind’s sins on Him. Every time a person has sinned in all history, God counted it as one more blow waiting to crush His Son. Before Christ came, sin’s punishment was pictured in blood sacrifices, as on the Day of Atonement. The High Priest would sprinkle blood on the mercy seat covering the Ark of the Covenant, in which the stone tablets of God’s Law were held. Thus God declared all sins against His Law covered by blood of sacrifice. Now in the fullness of time, Christ has given Himself as the once for all blood sacrifice (Hebrews 9). On the cross, God demonstrated His full justice before the world, punishing His Son. That is where our sins and the sins of the world have gone. That is why a just God declares us justified. Now we have His praise and approval; for He sees Jesus’ righteous life covering us.

God sends His free gift of salvation in Christ to all people, packaged in all its saving power in the Gospel. But faith alone receives His gift. It does a sinner no good if he boasts in his own works. It does him no good if he refuses to repent of sin and receive Jesus’ forgiveness. As it says, this righteousness of God is given: *“through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe”* (vs. 22).

Do you believe that nothing saves you from sin and damnation but Jesus’ finished work of salvation for you? Do you forsake all hope in your works or anything you do? Do you boast only in Christ crucified, whose blood cleanses you from all your sin? Do you plead only Jesus’ righteous life for you, trusting that in Him God declares you righteous? Then thank God for His gracious gift! His Spirit put this faith in your heart by His Gospel. God has baptized you into His Son and claimed you for eternal life.

Reformation has always been necessary among God’s people. As those whom God has called to faith and salvation in Christ, we want to live a daily reformation. With the prophets and apostles, with Luther and all faithful teachers, we cling to Jesus’ truth that alone sets us free. In this our Day of Reformation, we hold fast to faith in Christ alone. This alone puts an end to all boasting. This alone receives God’s righteousness.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. Amen.