

***Romans 3: 21-25a, 27-28 But now, completely apart from the law, a righteousness from God has been made known.***

There are many situations in life that allow for what some call the “fudge factor.” For the chocolate lover ears that just perked up, I didn’t say fudge factory. I said fudge factor. You see, for many folks, in many situations, there is a “fudge factor” approach that says, “Ahhhhh, close enough. Just fudge it a little bit.” Go ahead, fudge the count, fudge the measurement, fudge the bill, it doesn’t matter.

But when it comes to being right with God, matter it does. The key is in the phrase itself: Right with God. There’s no fudge factor, there’s no “close enough.” Everything has to be...well, right...in line with God and his divine will. So, as we consider, today, the phrase: When it comes to being right with God..., please join me in prayer.

Back when people wrote religious statements in Latin, there was an important phrase that went like this: ***articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae***. In English, that reads: "the doctrine upon which the church stands or falls." In other words, there is one teaching in the Bible that is so central and so important to the Christian faith that, if we get it wrong, if we fudge it even a little bit, like a house built on sand, we lose everything in the storms of life. No, it has to be right, when It Comes To Being Right With God. But there’s a problem: How can any sinful person be right with the holy God?

Long before he created the world, God knew how it would all work out. The righteousness he had demanded of all people he would give to all people. He would make a great exchange, an even trade. The sins of all people would go to Jesus and the holiness of Jesus would go to all people. That arrangement was in place way back when

there was only God and nothing else, way back in eternity.

Some may think, then, “Why create us?” Yet his love for us and his commitment to us led the Creator to still go about his creating work. Even when our first parents, Adam and Eve, ate fruit from a forbidden tree, plunging the world into the darkness of sin, losing for themselves and us the holy righteousness in which they were created, God still loved them, still loved you and me. And his plan went into action - a plan realized in Jerusalem 2000 years ago. The righteousness God demanded of you and me to get into his heaven, he provided for you and me through Jesus Christ.

You see, when it came to being right with God, we had no idea. While some of you may consider yourselves old as dirt itself, being right with God was taken care of long before any of us was born. Before any of us ever took our first breath, it was already a done deal. We just didn’t know it nor could we have come up with it on our own. And so, in the Scriptures (specifically in the message of the gospel), God revealed to you and me that in Christ he us given us the very righteousness he demands.

Now that right there is a point you and I love to contest - that we have to have someone else’s righteousness to be right with God. After all, how do you think you rate compared to the world’s worst - Hitler, Jack the Ripper, Son of Sam, Attila the Hun, Jeffrey Dahmer, Charles Manson - how do you compare with them? And even if we see those ridiculous and obvious comparisons for what they are and set them aside, how many times haven’t we looked away from true and healthy Christ-esteem only to look into the despair of a desperate attempt at worldly self-esteem: I’m good enough, I’m smart enough, etc., etc.

No, an honest look at ourselves begins with a look at ourselves through the plumbing and squaring spectacles of scripture: ***All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God***. Whatever my sins have been, known or unknown, big, small or otherwise, I have completely disqualified

myself for heaven, cast off any hope of righteousness, and fully qualified myself for hell. There's no fudging the numbers, no claims of being "close enough." Even when I line up with the world's worst, I'm really no better before God than any of them. One flaw or a million flaws, I am still imperfect. I am guilty. I am one of them. I am guilty. In fact, God is clear: **All [of us have fallen] short.**

And yet, in his courtroom, the verdict rings out loud and clear: Not Guilty. Along with the worst sinners in world history, along with every sinful person ever in world history, he included you, me, the whole wretched lot and he acquitted all of us - dropped all charges against us. In the courtroom of heaven the gavel came crashing down and God, the almighty judge, declared all people justified, not guilty.

But before we run whoopin' and hollerin' out of the courtroom, basking in the glory of our new-found freedom, it is important for us to remember that there was only one way God could do that and still be both fair and forgiving, **both just and the one who justifies the person who has faith in Jesus.** On Good Friday one person appeared in God's courtroom - his holy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. On that day, in the courtroom of heaven, the gavel came crashing down and God, the almighty judge, declared *Jesus* guilty. Sentenced to hell and death, he went silently forth to cross and grave for love of sinners - you and me. God simply sacrificed his dearest treasure - his own Son - to make you and me right with him.

The Lutheran Reformer Martin Luther once caught some flack for his German translation of Romans 3:28. He was accused of adding the word "alone" after the word "faith" (**by the principle of faith...we conclude that a person is justified by faith without the works of the law.** ). While he technically added a German word that didn't have a word-for-word parallel in the original Greek, he provided a word that clarified the Greek word for "apart." In other words, he was simply making it easier to fully

understand the original language, "It's only through faith that we're declared innocent, not at all through anything that we do."

That word - alone, *sola* in the latin - has had a major place in the history of the Lutheran church. Since the days of Martin Luther, that word continues to remind us that we are, in fact, right with God. No extras, no fudging, no claims of "awe come on God, aren't I close enough?"

No, when it comes to being right with God, here is truth alone, and nothing but: When it comes to being right with God, we knew nothing until God brought *sola scriptura* into our lives. He rescued us *through the scriptures alone* where he assures us that Christ's righteousness is ours. When it comes to being right with God, we have been redeemed *sola gratia*, - only by God's grace in Christ. When it comes to being right with God, we are saved *sola fide*, through faith alone.

What confidence is ours, huh? I, a sinner, trust that I am not a sinner because my sinless Savior became a sinner to wash all my sins away. When God came to me with the greatest news in the world and his Spirit whispered, "Believe it, it's true," he awakened faith in my heart. Every time he repeats to me that all my sins have been washed away, he preserves and strengthens that faith in me. Every time Jesus feeds my soul with his body and blood, he preserves and strengthens that faith in me. Boasting in me...**has been eliminated. May I never boast** (as Paul wrote to the Galatians) **except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.** For through the scriptures alone (*sola scriptura*) by grace alone (*sola gratia*) through faith alone (*sola fide*) comes this assurance - you, my dear friend, are right with God. And if you'll permit me one more phrase in the Latin: ***solī Deo Gloria* - to God alone the glory! Amen.**