

Reformation 2024

"I Didn't Know!"

Text: Romans 3:19-28

May the *fact* of the Reformation, which we commemorate this week, fill you with confidence that our heavenly Father will *never* abandon his Church, and that he will never abandon any one of *you*, his sons and daughters – members of that same beloved Church. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, they just disappeared, as if by magic, one after another. There one moment, gone the next. Bright white, instantly enveloped in inky blackness. It was almost as though they just suddenly ceased to exist – swallowed up into nothingness. They hadn't, of course, but it sure looked that way to a six-year-old boy. Bright white rocks don't just cease to exist when a boy drops them into a five-gallon bucket of well-used motor oil. Oil, by the way, that his grampa was fully intending to pour back into the crankcase of his tractor when he was done repairing it.

My first clue that I was participating in something other than the collision of matter and antimatter came when I heard my brother ("The Snitch") yell, "*Grampa, Mike's putting rocks in the oil.*" Followed, after the briefest of pauses, by the bellowed, "*He better NOT be!*" In an effort to forestall the love that was about to be applied to that particular spot designed to receive it, I summarized my defense: "*I didn't know!*" Though I had seen more than a few Perry Mason court scenes by that time, I opted against adding, "*The defense rests.*" The jury of one returned a unanimous verdict of guilty, and the sentence was carried out without delay and with no discernable mercy. I subsequently appealed the case to grandma and as compensatory damages was awarded a popsicle.

"I didn't know!" You've all heard it; you've probably all used it. Sometimes it works, most of the time it doesn't. It *never* works in court. "*Ignorantia juris non excusat*" ("ignorance of the law excuses not") predates even Roman law. It would have to, wouldn't it, or pretty much everyone would make the claim, and all law made pointless.

Yet there are certainly instances where "*I didn't know*" is both true and valid, and the results catastrophic. Every year people die because they "didn't know" that mixing chlorine and bleach creates deadly chloramine gas. Every year visitors to Yellowstone die because they "didn't know" that wild buffaloes don't like to be petted and "didn't know" that grizzly bears aren't warm and cuddly and will eat almost anything.

What then makes anyone imagine that "*I didn't know*" will work with God on the Day of Judgment? Does anyone really believe that they will be pardoned by a just God on the basis of "I didn't know"? "*I didn't know that Jesus really was your Son.*" "*I didn't know that all that stuff that my Christian friends were telling me was actually true.*" "*I didn't know that you actually meant it when you said, 'He that believes not will be damned.'*"

This is part of the reason we continue to commemorate and celebrate the Reformation. Demonic forces were withholding the truth of God's Word. Countless souls truly *did not know* the truth of how alone man can be saved. God mercifully restored the truth through his 16th Century Reformation. We celebrate because now we do possess the truth as revealed in our text for this morning, found in the 3rd Chapter of the Book of Romans:

^{ESV} **Romans 3:19-28 Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. ²¹ ¶ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it-- ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. ²⁷ ¶ Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.**

This is God's Word – restored to God's Church through the Reformation. Thank God for his Word of truth, and for the gifts of faith and understanding that he has also given you. That this same God who gave us these words would continue to bless us through their study this morning, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth.**" Amen.

A significant part of true Christianity is not so much learning what you can one day receive as it is learning to appreciate and be thankful for *what you already know and have*. You will not one day receive saving faith; you already have it. That also therefore means that you will not one day receive forgiveness for all your sins; you already have forgiveness for every one of your sins, full and complete, through faith in Jesus Christ. You will not one day receive eternal life; you have it even now. Jesus himself said, **"Everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."** Clearly there are some great things that lie in the future – like heaven and the end of all that is bad or evil – but so much is ours *right now*. These things we know, right now.

That's how our text begins, isn't it: **"Now we know..."** It's an interesting little phrase. Seems simple enough, but it's actually hard to know how to read it. Does it mean "now, as opposed to earlier" – as in *"We didn't know before, but now we do."*? Should we read it as though there's a comma after the "now" – as in *"Now then, we know..."*? The Greek word translated here as "now" is actually a conjunction that can at times mean "and" but most often means "but" – an adversative. That's how we are to read it here, **"But we know..."** In the preceding verses, Paul condemned unbelievers, including those who believed that they could earn their way into heaven through their works. What follows is our little verse: **"But we know..."** What is it that we know? ***We know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.*** ²⁰ ***For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.***

Far from earning heaven through our works, we now know the exact *opposite* to be true. The law doesn't save us, it shows us how miserably we have failed. It **stops every mouth** because it robs us of any and all justification for our sin. It reveals failure to every human soul. When we are honest, **through the law comes knowledge of sin**. The law cannot therefore save me, since it just reveals to me (provides me knowledge of) just how often and how grievously I have sinned.

Put that into its proper context in your own life. Does hearing that God's law forbids stealing, or gossip, or adultery, or evil thoughts, or any other part of his holy will tell you that you are just and righteous, or does it condemn you for breaking those commandments? It condemns, of course. That's how it **"stops every mouth,"** because we have no excuse. The *"I didn't know"* defense is destroyed, because we *do* know. That's exactly what the law does for us. Everyone who tries to enter heaven based on their own works will hear an even more intensive form

of *"I didn't know"* from the Righteous Judge himself: ***"I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."*** ^{ESV} (Matthew 7:23)

Now imagine that this was all that you had, that this was the sum total of the information that was available to you. Imagine being taught, by those in whom you placed your trust for time and eternity, that your hope for salvation depended upon your own actions, your own works. In your heart you would know the terror of the law, with its rigid demands and uncompromising condemnation, and you would know that you have failed to keep that law, but then you would also have been taught that you must somehow fix what you had already irreparably broken, and you must somehow fix your broken life with more of the same – more sin, more broken promises, more impure thoughts.

That's exactly what was offered by the Roman Catholic Church prior to the middle of the 16th Century. It was a time of terror and hopelessness, when souls were tormented with the fear of hell because they had no means, no way, to provide what God demanded. What was withheld from them was the second half of our text.

That second half of our text not only clearly contradicts what the people had been taught, it identifies that which sets true Christianity apart from every other religion in the world. It begins: ***"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested (made known) apart from the law..."***

"The righteousness of God" is the key phrase here. It reveals the *source* of righteousness, which is God himself. Man does not, cannot, provide this righteousness because sinful man is fatally flawed. As God the Holy Spirit informed us through the Prophet Isaiah: ***We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.*** ^{ESV} (Isaiah 64:6) Only Christianity teaches that God himself, not man, provides the required righteousness to pay the debt of our sins. All other religions require that payment of man.

Nor could the unbelieving Jews claim that they *"didn't know."* Paul in our text ruled that out when he added, ***"although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it."*** The Old Testament wasn't changed by the New Testament. The Old Testament was *completed* by the New. God's rescue plan has always been the same – by faith – faith

in the Promise of the Savior who would come, and faith in the Savior who has now come. One Savior, one faith, one hope – all a gift from God himself.

This saving truth was so important, so critical, that the Holy Spirit through Paul went on in our text to spell it out so clearly that no one in all creation who hears these words could ever stand before their God and claim “*I didn’t know.*” Our text continues: “...***the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.*** This righteousness provided by God is not earned, it is *received* by man through faith in Jesus Christ. That’s why our sins, revealed to us by God’s law, no longer terrorize us. That debt was paid by Jesus, who was punished in our place. The only thing that can now condemn us is unbelief – rejection of the righteousness Jesus has already earned.

Back and forth our text takes us from where we were to where we are, from the law to the gospel: ***For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (pure law) and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*** (Pure gospel).

But the Holy Spirit is still not done here. This is just way too important to leave any room at all for misunderstanding, so every last shred of “*I didn’t know*” is hacked away: “***Christ Jesus...whom God put forward as a propitiation (a satisfactory payment) by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness (note – God the provider) because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. ²⁷ ¶ Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.***

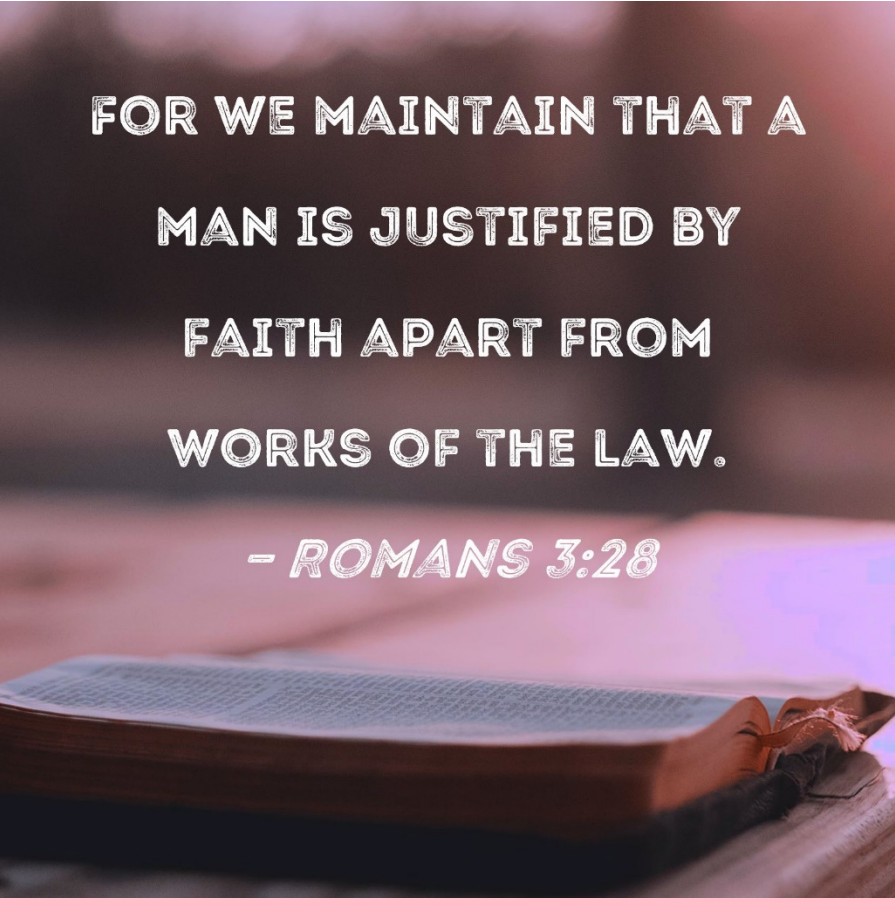
To “justify” means to “declare righteous.” Who then does God declare to be righteous? “***The one who has faith in Jesus.***” Do you believe that Jesus died on Calvary’s cross to pay for your sins? Then you too have received Christ’s perfection, his righteousness. You do not have to earn it; it is God’s gift to you.

This was the life-saving truth God himself restored to his Church through the Reformation. Because he has done so, you will never have to stand before your God with nothing but the futile plea, “*I didn’t know!*” God has declared you to be righteous, *you* - “***the one who has faith in Jesus.***” Amen.

ESV **2 Corinthians 4:1-7** Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. ² But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. ³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. ⁷ ¶ But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

ESV **John 8:31-36** So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." ³³ They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?" ³⁴ ¶ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵ The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

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- ROMANS 3:28

**ST PAUL LUTHERAN
CHURCH**

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Reformation Sunday – October 27, 2024

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 774 (*Brown Hymnal*)
"A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (*Brown Hymnal*)

The Scripture Lessons: (*Printed on the back page of this bulletin*)

The Epistle Lesson: (2 Corinthians 4:1-7) Conservative Christians are often amazed that those Bible teachings that seem so clear and so obvious remain "hidden" to so many. The root problem is unbelief, which acts as a veil on the human heart, preventing the unbeliever from recognizing even the most obvious truths. In humble thanksgiving we need to recognize that our ability to see and believe the truth is a gift from our God – a gift he wants us to share with those who suffer from the blindness of unbelief.

Psalms 91 (*Supplement page 33*) (*Brown Hymnal*)

The Gospel Lesson: (John 8:31-36) Jesus here outlines how the gift of faith is preserved in his children. That power comes, of course, from God, who works through the power of his Word to preserve saving faith in the hearts of his people. Jesus also warns us here not to take comfort in outward associations (like church membership or lineage). God judges the heart of each *individual* Christian. Faith is always and only *personal*.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5 (*Brown Hymnal*)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 775 (*Stanzas 1-4*) (*Brown Hymnal*)
"Thy Strong Word"

The Sermon – Text: Romans 3:19-28 (*Printed on the back page of this bulletin*)
"I Didn't Know!"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 775 (*Stanzas 5-6*) (*Red Hymnal*)
"Thy Strong Word"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (*Brown Hymnal page 17*)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (*Brown Hymnal page 20*)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 261 (*Red Hymnal*)
"Lord Keep Us Steadfast In Thy Word"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!
To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (31) Average (38)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Monday	-10:00 a.m.	– Study Conference in Pierre
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-1:00 p.m.	– Loeb Baby Shower

CLC News – Pastor Matthew Hanel has returned the call to St. Stephen of San Francisco. Pastor Frank Gantt is considering the call to Faith of Manchester, MO. Pastor Timothy Daub has returned safely home and is resuming his pastoral duties after a serious health scare.

Allison Loeb Baby Shower – A baby shower is planned for Allison Loeb next Sunday, November 3rd at 1:00 pm. Please see the announcement on the bulletin board for more information.

Christmas Flower Order – The Christmas flowers sign-up sheet is on the mailbox table. Address any questions to Sandy Roehl.

Shirt Order Payment – Those who ordered shirts are reminded that payment can be placed in the offering box and labeled "Shirts" to differentiate those funds from regular offerings.