

<sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. <sup>20</sup> For "no human being will be justified in his sight" by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. <sup>21</sup> But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, <sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, <sup>23</sup> since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; <sup>24</sup> they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; <sup>26</sup> it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus. <sup>27</sup> Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. <sup>28</sup> For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law. Romans 3:19-28 New Revised Standard Version

This text is the key text that changed a monk who then changed the religious landscape forever. It all started when he (although others had come to the same conclusion previously) he felt he could never be "good enough" for an all perfect holy God. Just when through the old system, he confessed his sin and received absolution from his confessor, another sin would be right there "knocking at the door". This preoccupation with the pursuit of "sinless perfection" drove his superior of the monastery to get this monk something else to do. So he sent him off to a new university to teach the bible.

It was in teaching, and growing in his own studies of the scriptures, he came across this passage from Romans. He said that once he understood this passage, he felt like he was free and he was lifted up to the gates of paradise. Luther finally came to the conclusion that, to paraphrase the late Mae West,; "goodness has nothing to do" with our standing before God, as well as our ultimate goal of heaven. God had accomplished this through Jesus' death and resurrection.

Luther's teaching caught on, since the organized church at that time, really kept folk on a continual treadmill. If you sinned you needed the churches forgiveness early and often. Heaven was an eventual destination, not the immediate one after death. You had to be "purged" in an intermediate place called "purgatory". So if you wanted to avoid it, or shorten yours or your loved ones time in purgatory, you had "pay to play" to get out of purgatory.

When Luther declared that folks were saved by faith alone by free work of God in Christ, assured of salvation and entrance into heaven, it changed the whole dynamic of the faith from being afraid of God and God's wrath, to embracing a God who was "for us" through faith in Jesus.

Albrecht Durer, a great artist of Luther's time, who suffered from depression and self doubt, declared that Luther was "the man who saved me from all my troubles". The old system of the church could indeed lead a individual to hopelessness and despair wondering if heaven was possible.

Even though this all took place about 500 years ago, the struggle is still the same for folk.

How can I know a holy God? Am I ever going to be good enough for God? I can't stop sinning, so how can God love me.? If you consider yourself on a spiritual journey I have to believe you at least have to come to these questions along the way The Reformation that we celebrate one Sunday a year answers those questions. Or as Luther himself puts it in a familiar hymn:

*Were we in our own strength confide,  
Our striving would be losing,  
Were not the right man on our side;  
the man of God's own choosing.  
Doth ask who that may be,  
Christ Jesus it is he!  
Lord Saboth his name.  
Forever and the same.  
And he must win the battle*