

*21But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, 22the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, 23since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; 24they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25whom 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; 26it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus. 27Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. 28For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.*

“Eyes on me!” Before us stood my high school choir director, Mr. Cefus. Behind him stood the audience. With a very loud whisper he sought to redirect our attention from searching for Mom and Dad out there to watching him. “Eyes on me!” Then we began.

On this Reformation Sunday as I want you to see and understand what God is doing in Christ, those three words of Mr. Cefus seem a good place to begin. “Eyes on me.” For that is where our God begins.

St. Paul writes: “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. For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”

The law: God's law, the Ten Commandments and all of God's other laws - no one is made right with God through the law. When I was young I thought the reason that Paul said that was because I wasn't quite good enough at keeping the law. “Nobody's perfect,” people said. Sooner or later you forget to dot an “i” or to cross a “t” and God throws the whole paper out. Kind of picky of him but he is God and he gets to make the rules. That's what I thought. One slip and you are guilty of everything and nobody's perfect. That's why we need Jesus.

Right now I want to shout at you, "That's not true." God is not concerned about our dotting the “i's” - getting it all right. The problem with the law is not a matter of being good enough for God, rather where there is law, our eyes are on the wrong one.

“Do this,” God says, and I start watching me. “Don't do that,” God says, and I am the focus of my attention. My eyes are on me, my heart is fixed on me, my life is centered in me, on how I am doing and what I am doing. I fear and I love and I trust in me above all things. I

make myself God. The better I am at crossing all the “t’s” and dotting all the “i’s” the more confidence I put in me. “You will be like God,” the serpent promised Eve if she would eat the forbidden fruit. When we live under the law, that is the curse under which we live, we end up fearing and loving and trusting ourselves above all else. Idolatry.

That is why Paul tells us no human being will be justified in God's sight through the law. Because in keeping every commandment we break the very first commandment, "I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other God's before me." “Eyes on me,” says our God.

Back in our high school choir Mr. Cefus had another battle to fight: dueling sopranos - one wanting to be heard above the others. So instead of blending into the whole, joying in what we were producing together, pride led to an unpleasant sound.

Wherever there is a law that promises a reward, the same happens. When my eyes are not focused on myself, I look at my neighbor to see how he is doing. I measure him against me so that I can be my own judge and his as well. The harmony that God desires is lost.

“No human being will be justified in his sight by the law,” for the law puts my eyes on myself and on my neighbor, and not on God.

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forth as an expiation by his blood to be received by faith.”

“Eyes on Jesus.” That is God's new directive. “Eyes on Jesus.” Not your deeds, not your standing out, but his giving his life for your redemption is the center. “Eyes on Jesus.”

In him God is doing what the law cannot do. In Jesus God has made for himself a holy people. As we keep our eyes and hearts on him, God will perform a glorious concert of loving deeds. The hungry will be fed, the lonely will be befriended, sinners will be forgiven. When eyes are on Jesus the world is blessed with a sound never heard before, the heavenly music of love come down to earth. No more striving to best our neighbors but joying in the harmony called forth by our director and Lord.

“Eyes on Jesus.” Amen.