

# St. Paul: On The Same page

10.20.13 Week #269

**Day One:** 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. <sup>20</sup>For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*

*<sup>21</sup>But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— <sup>22</sup>the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.*

Does God's law tell you to shut up?

That's what it sounds like Paul is saying, doesn't it? And in a way that's true.

Every child reacts differently to correction, but I remember my own responses quite well. I was very skilled at arguing. Here is why I am not to blame: my brother hit me first; it wasn't my idea; I didn't really mean it; I only did it once; you didn't make the rule clear enough; I didn't hear you; the sun was in my eyes!

*“Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”*

Luke 18:17

Any excuse will do! And we have many more that, even if we won't say them out loud, we mutter under our breath to God. It's not fair that he expects us to love him with our whole heart and love our neighbor as ourselves! But, the law shuts us up.

Thank God, literally, that the Law is not all we have. On the contrary, we live by the Gospel, the good news that our righteousness is the gift of God through faith in Jesus, our Savior. We don't need to keep making excuses. We can pray prayers of thanksgiving instead.

*Prayer: Father, Judge of all things, you know the truth about me. And I know the truth about you, that you are loving and merciful. Amen.*

**Day Two:** 2 Tim. 4:6-8, 16-18

*For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. <sup>7</sup>I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*

*<sup>8</sup>Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.*

*<sup>16</sup>At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! <sup>17</sup>But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. <sup>18</sup>The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

I've heard some people quote this passage in a self-congratulatory kind of way. They have finished the race! They have won a fight!

That's not Paul's attitude at all. He even says explicitly here, a few verses later, that "the Lord stood by me and strengthened me." Paul was unable to carry on alone. He was not strong

enough to fight and defeat his enemies. He could never have persevered in this race.

After all, this isn't just a 5K, or even a marathon. Even an ultra-marathon, a race of 100 miles or more, would be nothing compared to the race we are running. We are called to fight against powers to great for us to resist. We are called to run a race against sin and death and the Devil himself. And in the process it may well be that no one will stand beside us.

But our Lord is able to do all things, even in us.

We celebrate the anniversary of the Reformation, not because Martin Luther was such a remarkable man. There have been many remarkable men. But we remember this time because we saw once again that through weak and flawed men and women God has been able to preserve the wonderful message of the Gospel. He has been able to build his kingdom. And he has been able to lead us to life eternal.

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are the Victor. Let me share in your victory, now and forever. Amen.*

**Day Three:** Luke 18:9-17

*“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup>The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup>I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ <sup>13</sup>But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ <sup>14</sup>I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other.*

I’m sure that you have \*never\* prayed a prayer like the Pharisee in Jesus’ story! Certainly not in church. No, you would only pray such a prayer when reading the newspaper and seeing how terrible some people can be. “Thank God neither I nor my neighbors are like that!”

No, you would never pray such a prayer in church. Only when you are watching politicians and you can shake your head at how corrupt or petty or divisive they can be... especially those who are not of your party. Or when you’re watching television and you can be scandalized at all the

immorality and greed you see there – the scantily clad woman, the abusive men, the love of material things. It’s a wonder you can stand to watch it night after night.

No, we don’t pat ourselves on the back during our prayers, but we do at other times. “I thank you heavenly Father that I was not born in a poor 3<sup>rd</sup> world country, but I was born here where I could be clean and eat well and have a nice home and car.” But I won’t use my nice things to bless those who have less than I do. (End sarcasm here.)

The point of Jesus’ story is not just to condemn our hypocrisy or self-righteousness. The larger point of his story is to invite us to pray in honesty. We can come to him \*as we are.\* No pretending. No posturing. No disguise.

He knows us, and he loves us anyway. So we can bring our prayers for ourselves and others without fear.

*Prayer: Father in heaven, hear my prayer. Help me to pray, not in pride but in love, not in smugness but in confidence. Teach me to bring to you my sins and the sins and needs of others. Amen.*

#### **Day Four: Reformation...**

*Now they were bringing even infants to [Jesus] that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. <sup>16</sup> But Jesus called them to him, saying, "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. <sup>17</sup> Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it."*

My daughter was in a store with her two small children, and her 4-year-old daughter started telling a stranger about her day. A woman told my daughter, "Don't you think you should stop her from talking to strangers?"

It was not just Jesus' disciples who had a problem with children in adult society. We can't seem to make up our minds. We dote over children. We want to care for them. We give them everything, and we seem to push them towards an early adulthood, exposing them much too soon to adult sexual and violent themes.

But we also restrict their participation in adult things. We want to be able to attend our adult events without children. We are leery

of which adults can talk with our children.

Jesus cut through all our struggles with this idea: that we are ALL children. And more than that, we NEED to be children.

We strive to be adults – to be independent. But Jesus says that in the end we will have to be dependent upon him because we will be as incapable as a baby in our efforts to win eternal life.

Like an infant, we must be fed by him. Only he can feed us the food we need the most. And we're strengthened in ways we don't understand through his body and his blood.

Like an infant, we must be carried by him, trust in him, turn to him, listen to him, look to him for all things. If we want eternal life, there is no other way.

Don't keep your children away from Jesus. Don't keep yourself at a distance, trying to act cool as if you are not in need. Step forward and trust!

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, I've worked so hard to be an adult. Now help me to grow into childhood, and find my rest in you. Amen.*