

Romans 3:21-22, 3:28 and Martin Luther

As a young professor at the University of Wittenberg, Luther lectured on St. Paul's epistles to the Romans and Galatians from 1515 to 1517. As he studied these portions of the Bible, he came to view the use of terms such as penance and righteousness by the Catholic Church in new ways. He became convinced that the church was corrupt in its ways and had lost sight of what he saw as several of the central truths of Christianity.

"A righteousness of (from) God has been manifested apart from the law...through faith in Jesus Christ" (Romans 3:21-22). Luther referred to these verses as "the center of the whole Bible". The most important for Luther was the doctrine of justification—God's act of declaring a sinner righteous—by faith alone through God's grace. He began to teach that salvation or redemption is a gift of God's grace, attainable only through faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

Luther wrote that Christians receive such righteousness entirely from outside themselves; that righteousness not only comes from Christ but actually *is* the righteousness of Christ, imputed to Christians (rather than infused into them) through faith. "That is why faith alone makes someone just and fulfills the law," he writes. "Faith is that which brings the Holy Spirit through the merits of Christ."

He came to reject several teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church; in particular, he disputed the view on indulgences and subsequently excommunication. Luther proposed an academic discussion of the practice and efficacy of indulgences in his *Ninety-five Theses* of 1517. He insisted that, since forgiveness was God's alone to grant, those who claimed that indulgences absolved the buyers of indulgences from all punishments and granted them salvation were in error.

Luther taught that salvation and, consequently, eternal life are not earned by good deeds but are received only as the free gift of God's grace through the believer's faith in Jesus Christ as redeemer from sin. His theology challenged the authority and office of the pope by teaching that the Bible is the only source of divinely revealed knowledge, and opposed "sacerdotalism" by considering all baptized Christians to be a holy priesthood.

By 1526, Luther found himself increasingly occupied in organizing a new church. From 1525 to 1529, he established a supervisory church body, laid down a new form of worship service, and wrote a clear summary of the new faith in the form of two catechisms.

All of which is not very important if you don't count a total schism of the church, about 40 wars in Europe alone (most of which weren't really about the theology) up to and including our current times (think Ireland/England), countless lives lost, and other not particularly "Christian" actions all perpetrated in the name of the "church" over the years. But I digress.....

Romans 3:28

Interestingly, "by faith and faith alone" the oft quoted bible verse appears nowhere in the Bible (I think). Luther also made the first translation of the Bible into common German. In his *On Translating: An Open Letter*, written in 1530, he explained his translation of Romans 3:28: "I knew very well that the word *solum* [Latin=alone, only] is not in the Greek or Latin text...It is a fact that these four letters *s o l a* are not there....At the same time....it belongs there if the translation is to be

clear and vigorous." Luther acknowledged that the word "only" is not in the Greek text, but the idea certainly is (or is it?).

Also see James 2:14-18 and let the debates begin!!!