

## Romans 3:19-28

If you have been yelling at your television set lately, I'll take a guess that it's not because the Cardinals fell flat in their last three games; it's because of all the political advertisements. And we're not even a "swing state!" Imagine living in Ohio, or Colorado, or another state where the presidential race is close. Most people are surely tired of all the campaigning. Most are tired of seeing and hearing the same ads over and over. But to be fair, those who are running for office have no choice but to flood the airwaves with their rhetoric. They have to promote themselves, put their best foot forward, telling voters what a good choice they are so that they win in the November election.

In a very real sense we do this with God. We promote ourselves. We campaign for ourselves believing that God needs to hear over and over how great we've been, or at least how we've tried to be good. And even when we fail in life, we always have a good excuse for where we fall short.

Now when the campaign monster raises its ugly head, everything becomes an attack. You never see a political ad anymore which presents only the positive. All you see are negative ads. You see all the dirt on the other guy. Every politician running for office knows that he, or she, is not the perfect candidate. Somewhere in their past they've messed up in some way. So they attempt to convince the voters that we have to vote for them because the other candidate is so much worse.

This, also, is how we campaign with God. When a marriage goes bad, the attack ads begin. Both sides campaign for themselves by digging up all the dirt they can on their spouse. It happens when children argue. Neither side is willing to back down from telling the other one how terrible they are. It happens in congregations. When members get upset with each other, or with their pastor, they campaign against their opponent with as much dirt and negativity as they can muster.

We put on a good show for God with all this self-promotion. We are justifying ourselves. Okay, so maybe we have not been perfect. Sure, we've messed up in our life. We've either ignored His Commandments or disobeyed them on purpose. But others are worse. 'God will surely vote for me. He must be on my side because I'm better than my ex, or my sister, or the hypocrites in my congregation.'

Do you know what God says to all this campaigning? He says, 'Shut up already!' Okay, maybe not in just those words. But listen to His Apostle in Romans 3: *"Whatever the Law says, it speaks...so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God."* God is sick and tired of our campaigning. He is tired of our self-promotion. He is tired of our excuses, of our self-justification, of our attacks and negative ads against others. *"Stop looking at the speck in your brother's eye,"* He says, 'when you have a log in your own eye.' *"There is none who is good,"* He says, *"No not one."* *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*

Through St. Paul, God tells us to close our mouths not for His own sake, but for ours. The spouse who is so focused upon all the dirt in their ex, will never have a true grasp of their own sinfulness and will continue to harden their heart before God. The church member who cannot see past the sin in the person sitting in front of them will continue to live with an unrepentant heart. When you and I hear God's Law--and we're hearing it right now--God wants one thing to happen, and that is not for us to give excuses or blame others. He wants each one of us to humbly confess, "I have sinned. I am guilty. I am the chief of sinners. I deserve eternal punishment."

You see, God wants you and me to stop speaking so that He can speak. He wants us to close our mouths so that He can open His. And here is what He has to say: *“All (who) have sinned...are justified by His grace as a gift...in Christ Jesus.”* You heard correctly. God wants you to let go of your neighbor’s sin so that He can tell you that your sin is forgiven. He wants you to stop justifying your sinful actions so that He can tell you that He has already declared you to be justified for the sake of Jesus.

This is what the Reformation is all about. Martin Luther as a monk would not shut his mouth. He was forever trying to make himself acceptable to God by living right. Even by beating himself as punishment for his sins, Luther was hoping to win God over to his side. But there came a day when God closed Luther’s mouth so that he would listen to God speak. In the pages of Holy Scripture, God declared to Luther the very thing I am preaching to you. God is already on your side. He is already for you. It’s not Luther who made this happen. It’s not you. It’s Jesus. Jesus lived a holy life for you. You and I always fall short of the Law. So Jesus kept the Law perfectly in your place, and in your baptism He gives this life to you. Jesus allowed His mouth to be stopped. He opened not His mouth as He was condemned to die on a cross. He did this for you. Jesus was tormented in your place. He already suffered the punishment you deserve for your sins. God, therefore, is at peace with you. He is not against you, not even when you sin against Him. God forgives you day after day freely, as a gift, because of Jesus.

When we sing, *“Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word,”* it is this word that we mean. Not the word of Law which accuses us. That word shuts our mouths so that we listen with repentant hearts. We listen to the precious word of grace in Christ Jesus. The word that came into your life in your baptism and made you a Christian. The word that comes into your ears on Sunday mornings and keeps you in the Faith. The word that is placed into your mouth with bread and wine to nourish you on your journey to heaven. The word that declares to you--to you chief of sinners, to you who loves to give excuses to God, to you who is always blaming others--you, God forgives. Christ died for you. Every sin of yours is paid for. There is nothing you have to do, or can do, to gain eternal life. It’s yours now in Jesus as a gift.

This word, they out there, will still let remain. It is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to you who are being saved, it is the power of God. Martin Luther fought, with sweat and blood, to keep this word of the Gospel pure. May we also fight for this word today. And may God keep us steadfast in this word of Christ now, and on the day we die. Amen.