

“You get 25 years of maintenance-free living.” These words of wisdom were shared with me when I was about 25, after dinner at a member’s home from my vicar congregation, Beautiful Savior, near Columbus, OH. Watching me politely eat – at his behest! – entirely too much, including seconds on dessert, must have prompted such wisdom from a guy a little further along in life to provide me with valuable perspective about beneficial habit forming when entering the long chapter of life called real, actual adulthood. I’ve thought about this truism and the guidance it contains, confessing also that I’ve only come to abide by it, I tell myself, in the last few years. Ha. Why is that? Because so often, even with such wonderful knowledge available for our use, we’d rather do what we want, what makes sense now, and deal with the fallout later. For me, this means that after failing to apply good advice in some key ways for a few years, I’ve had to reevaluate, make a couple of thoughtful decisions, and follow through on them. That’s what maintenance is. It’s giving care and consideration to something, determining it’s good and wise and necessary to put work into it to keep the thing in good shape.

What do we maintain? A whole list of stuff! House. Car. Physical and mental health. Relationships with coworkers, friends, and family. Hobbies and interests. We maintain these things because we consider them valuable and good, and if we have them, we are blessed!

What do we maintain that we shouldn’t? A nice, shiny sense of shame? Yeah. Some glorious guilt? Also, yes. A grudge? Maybe a just little one. Do we maintain a series of traditions and practices simply because we’ve always done them? Do we maintain a sturdy sense of superiority? Yes. I have contributed to this and witnessed it. I’ve also heard enough anecdotal evidence from those within and without our circles to have a good visual of the commonly drawn caricature. What is a caricature? A drawing which greatly exaggerates an observed feature. My caricature features a prominent 5-head, wannabe Dwayne the Rock Johnson eyebrow, and a bald spot that’s the envy of all the monks in the monastery. Hard to conceal these things.

When people tell me that their perception of us is that we’re faithful to the Word, have a high regard for it and have high expectations for knowing it but that every expectation can make us pompous, standoffish Christians. This does not make for a flattering sketch. When people say that our caricature to do evangelistic work and establish school but that it’s also to dismiss legitimate criticism as an attack or baseless complaint, we need to eat a slice of humble pie and listen with the intent to understand why they described us that way instead of rejecting it. I know people have come away from interactions with me thinking not always, “That Christian man was so loving!” but sometimes, “That guy really acted like he knew eeeeeverything.” I like to think about the times people have told me I’m loving and caring and pretend I know nothing about the times I was so arrogant they weren’t sure my head was gonna fit through the door. We are a reason someone thought ill of God.

In honest self-examination, we must say that we do not always think or act like we’re in the same position of desperately needing grace because of our guilt like everyone else, but that we’re just better. Maintain the knowledge that whatever the Word of the law says, it says to you and to me. When we’ve heard and know what God commands, we must do it, and we have failed. So we, too, like all people, are accountable to God. We are no better because the very Word and law we love and pride ourselves in knowing so well proves us breakers of it. All are alike.

We’re alike in more than one way. *“But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned*

and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” (Romans 3:21-24) God made righteousness in Jesus a very public, very free, and very for everyone gift to be had just by believing that he gave it by doing these things! The cross wasn't a hidden, behind closed doors event. It happened on top of a hill so people could see it. God let it be known publicly that Jesus, his life and his blood, is the thing of such perfectly pleasing value that, when offered up freely on our behalf, it makes us absolutely right with God because it completely removed sin and gave righteousness in full. Jesus redeems sinners. That's what he did because that's what God said he'd do. He was pierced and crushed for our transgressions and iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace happened to him, and that means we are healed. Isaiah wrote that about Jesus. **(Isaiah 53)** He cried out to the Father in pain when he was on the cross because of his suffering and because the Father had forsaken him. And even though he was utterly alone, he continued to perfectly trust in and rely on God because he was thinking about your salvation. David wrote that about Jesus. **(Psalm 22)**

As he was suffering and spilling his blood on the cross, he was also bringing it into the Father's presence in glory to obtain our eternal redemption. Think about that! Christ spilled blood to save me. I don't deserve that! It's mind blowing and completely true. I'm purchased by Christ for heaven. That's how precious I am to God! So the only boast I can have when I think about salvation isn't about how worthy I am of it, but about how enormous the love of God for me in Christ is! If we're gonna reform something, and as children of the Reformation that isn't a bad idea, let's boast that this is true, *“For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.” (Romans 3:28)*

We maintain, having been convicted by the power and grace of the Spirit through the gospel to believe that we are declared righteous by faith in Jesus, not by doing anything. We maintain that the same is true for everyone who believes. Such is the power of the gospel. Since we maintain that our lives, eternal in heaven and right now, are defined by this grace, let us live it. We maintain Jesus is the friend of sins, so let us maintain welcome for sinners of whom we're all the worst! Grace for the guilty. Mercy for those who doubt and question what the Bible says, and what and why the church does what it does. We maintain God is the Father of compassion, so we maintain compassionate hearts.

What you maintain and hold to, is the very grace of God that sustains and maintains you! These verses of Romans weren't written by the Apostle Paul with the Reformation in mind, but with the desire to give God's people peace. When problems are legitimate and huge, when faith feels thin, know that the promises of Romans are true for you because you have God's grace in Jesus. “What shall we compare with the glory that awaits us? What shall separate us from the love of Christ? We are more than conquerors!”

There is no such thing as maintenance free adulthood, but we do have a righteousness that we do not have to earn or maintain by our works or effort and Jesus has secured it for us. Let us maintain this confession, having heard our Savior's voice in his Word and, therein, having received the Holy Spirit to make us holy and forgiven children of the Father who are saved and will live forever. Believe it. Rejoice in it! The righteous, that's you, live by this faith. By faith you are righteous. So live. To God alone be glory. Amen.