

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

You Must be Born Again!

“Only the gospel reveals the righteousness of God, that is, who is righteous or how a person becomes righteous before God. The righteousness of God is the cause of our salvation. This righteousness, however, is not that according to which God Himself is righteous as God, but that by which we are justified by Him through faith in the gospel. It is God’s righteousness in contrast to man’s righteousness which comes from works.” (Martin Luther)

www.sermonaudio.com/crc

www.unholycharade.com (blog)

www.lightfordarktimes.com (blog)

Christ Reformation Church – YouTube Channel (Light for Dark Times)

Reformation Sunday 2024

*The Righteousness of God –
Romans 1:16-17*

October 27th, 2024

Sermon Text: Romans 1:16-17

Scripture Reading: Romans 4

Romans 1:16-17 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew

first and also to the Greek. (17) For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

The Protestant Reformation was a great revival of true religion which was a brilliant light which shone in the darkness which had held the world in blindness for centuries. The original brilliance of the gospel had gradually been dimmed by persecution and by the corruption of the visible church by the false gospel of Rome.

This was the darkness into which Martyn Luther was born in 1483.

There were precursors to the Reformation such as John Wycliffe who lived in the 1300's and is often called "The Morning Star" of the Reformation. But typically the Reformation's beginning is dated at October 31, 1517 when Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church doors at Wittenberg. The Lord's Spirit so moved that other Reformers were raised up as well – Calvin and Zwingli in Switzerland (Calvin originally in France).

The Reformation was primarily sparked as people, scholars initially, began reading the New Testament for themselves. Erasmus (1466-1536) was a Dutch Roman Catholic scholar who had made Latin and Greek editions of the New Testament. William Tyndale translated the Bible into English and paid for it with his life. All of this was a work of the Holy Spirit and is a plain example of the Apostle's words –

Heb 4:12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

This is the very thing that happened with Luther. As he read the Bible, these verses which we are considering this morning particularly struck him. Especially the phrase, *the righteousness of God*.

How can Paul call the gospel – good news? Luther had seen his sin and that heavy conviction almost killed him. He knew full well that God is holy and man is full of sin. How can it be good news to the sinner that God is righteous? That seemed to Luther to be nothing but bad news. You see his dilemma. How can the gospel be the power of salvation?

Rom 1:16-17 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew

first and also to the Greek. (17) For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

But eventually the lights came on for Luther. Here is R.C. Sproul's explanation:

He says, "Here in it," in the gospel, "the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, 'the just shall live by faith.'" A verse taken from the book of Habakkuk in the Old Testament that is cited three times in the New Testament.

As Luther would stop short and say, "What does this mean, that there's this righteousness that is by faith, and from faith to faith? What does it mean that the righteous shall live by faith?" Which again as I said was the thematic verse for the whole exposition of the gospel that Paul sets forth here in the book of Romans.

And so, the lights came on for Luther. And he began to

understand that what Paul was speaking of here was a righteousness that God in His grace was making available to those who would receive it passively, not those who would achieve it actively, but that would receive it by faith, and by which a person could be reconciled to a holy and righteous God." (Ligonier.org)

Luther finally saw, in other words, that a sinner is justified, declared to be righteous before God, not through his or her own works (as Rome had taught him his entire life) but by faith alone in the work of Christ alone, whereby a perfect righteousness has been wrought which is then imputed or credited to the sinner through faith.

And it is this gospel which was preached all through the Old Testament, as we read earlier in Romans 4 regarding Abraham:

Rom 4:3 For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."

Rom 4:22-25 That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” (23) But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, (24) but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, (25) who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Joh 14:6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Christian Science, Buddhism, Hinduism – go through the entire list and distill them down to their essence and you will always find the very same thing – man putting himself right with God through his own works.

The world hates this narrowness which we believe and which the Bible so plainly teaches. Man in his sin fights against God’s truth which says:

- Man is dead in his sin, totally fallen and having no ability whatsoever to make himself right with God
- God is perfectly righteous and holy
- The sinner therefore is under God’s wrath and condemnation

This is why Paul says he is not ashamed of the gospel –

There are only two religions in all the history of the world and at this present time. The religion of Cain and the religion of Abel. Cain approached God by the works of his own hands. Abel approached God by faith and it was credited to him as righteousness.

Put every religion in the entire world, from all the ages of human history, on one side and the gospel on the other. All that great myriad of religions without exception are the religion of Cain – of the works of man’s hands. That is what Rome is – a false gospel of works. But the true religion by which a sinner really can be justified before God, stands alone. Absolutely unique:

Rom 1:18-20 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. (19) For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. (20) For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

Some of the most furious reactions to this truth of the wrath of God and man in his sin being under God's condemnation comes from people who claim to be Christians. As a result, unfaithful pastors cave and fail to declare the wrath and condemnation of God lest they lose people and membership dwindles.

But the Bible is absolutely clear:

Rom 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, the man who is not in Christ Jesus is under condemnation. Condemned. Death. Hell. Wrath.

Luther knew this, but he was stalled. Seeing his own depravity and God's perfect holiness, he simply could not reconcile the two. He knew that what Rome was teaching just was not going to work. He fasted and fasted until it almost killed him. He went to confession so often and for so long that the priest hearing him dreaded to see him come. He wasn't crazy as some claim, the truth was that he saw God's holiness and his own sin with clarity and he knew that this system of Rome wasn't going to work.

Finally however, the Holy Spirit flipped a switch and the lights came on for him. He was struck with the realization that the righteousness Paul was talking about was not the righteousness by which God Himself is righteous, but a righteousness *established by God through Christ which comes to the sinner through faith alone. And*

THAT is why the gospel is good news.

Php 3:8-9 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ (9) and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

And this is why Paul says that the gospel he preached was the *power of God to salvation for all who believe*. It is how the saving power of God comes to the sinner. It IS the saving power of God.

And this is why *preaching the Word of God* is vital to the church. Hearing the Word of God preached is the power of God to save, to convict, to expose, to purify, and to encourage us. Where there is no faithful preaching of God's Word, there is no church. All that will

happened is a counterfeit monstrosity will be created – and that is what Rome is.

NOTE: The Lord has enabled us to hear the Word of God preached in t his church now for decades. Many have hated that Word and departed. But let me issue this challenge – if you are in this church and you have been hearing God's Word proclaimed for years, and you are still dead in your sins – do not blame God election. The only reason someone can hear the gospel over and over and over and not be saved *is because you are actively hardening your heart against it. You are still in the realm of Cain's religion.*

Heb 3:12-19 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. (13) But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

(14) For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our

original confidence firm to the end. (15) As it is said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.” (16) For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? (17) And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? (18) And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?

(19) So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

See it? If you are still unsaved, under God’s condemnation, it is not because God has not chosen you – it is because you are actively hardening yourself against Him. You see it in this passage. Why could most of the Israelites NOT enter into God’s rest? *Because of their own unbelief and disobedience and rebellion.*

What is the fundamental sin of man? What is the essence of sin which incurs God’s wrath and

condemnation? Someone listening might be thinking that they are quite a good person. That they are rather moral, certainly better than that drunkard or thief to pervert they read about in the news. But those sins are merely manifestations of the root sin which Paul has described here. Listen again:

Rom 1:18-25 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, **who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.** (19) For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. (20) For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. (21) **For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.** (22) Claiming to be wise, they became

fools, (23) and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. (24) Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, (25) because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Consider it. There is not a person in the world today who does not know God in this sense. God has revealed Himself to them. Clearly and plainly. They all know. They merely need look around them. The stars, the animals, their own body, the air they breathe and the food they eat. All of these things and more are screaming at them that God exists, that He is their Creator, and they are His creatures. As such, *they are obligated to acknowledge God and give Him thanks.*

But do they? No. What does man do with this knowledge? *He suppresses it. Pushes it down.*

Squelches the thought the second it begins to enter his mind.

Man's chief sin which incurs the wrath of God and is really the root of all other sins is this:

Man lives as if God were irrelevant to him. Atheist or agnostic – no matter. Both do the same thing. They suppress the plain and clear proof of God, they push away their knowledge of God, and refuse to give Him the thanks and glory which is His.

Then, if this were not heinous enough, in the insanity of his sin he creates his own god – a god which he prefers. This is madness of course because all idols are the work of man's own hands –

Isa 2:8 Their land is filled with idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their own fingers have made.

Whenever someone says “I think that God is...” or “I don't believe God is a god of wrath...” you know that you are speaking with an

idolater, a worshipper of a god which is the product of man's own imagination.

Luther knew, therefore, that the god of Rome was (and remains today) an idol. The Christ of Rome is an idol. Why? Because the Roman christ does not save by faith alone, rather, by works added into the mix. Rome's god is not the God of the Bible. The Roman god keeps sacrificing his christ. The Roman god creates a Mary who is not the Mary of the Bible. The Roman god has an entirely different priesthood than Scripture.

So Rome could not and will never be reformed. This is what Rome and every idolater does:

“because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator”.

What is a central result of truly grasping the doctrine of justification by faith alone? It is this, as Lloyd-Jones puts it:

The Christian is a man who should have assurance; it is the business of every Christian to have assurance....The Roman Catholic church not only does not teach the doctrine of assurance of salvation, *it preaches and teaches against it.* Why? The explanation is quite simple. As long as you are uncertain, you are dependent upon the Church. You are dependent upon the priests. If you have assurance of salvation you do not need a priest, you do not need the help of the Virgin Mary, or the works of super-erogation of the saints; you go directly to God through Christ.

Assurance of salvation militates against the whole policy and activity of Rome with its teaching about purgatory and need of indulgences and so on; so they denounce that doctrine. That is, of course, because they put their own tradition before the Scripture. They are thoroughly un-scriptural and they can only establish their whole system, and keep it going, in defiance of the Scriptures.

This was the grand discovery of Martin Luther. Almost as soon as he saw the doctrine of justification by faith clearly he saw the whole error of the Roman church and her tyrannical priesthood. There is only one great High Priest....I do not depend slavishly on the church, I do not need any human priesthood, I do not rely on some magical belief in transmissible grace received through the sacraments.

I go boldly through my great High Priest. I am sure, I am certain, I stand in His grace. As we grasp this great and blessed truth we shall be filled with this glorious consciousness of assurance of salvation. We shall know that we are in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ, who Himself said, ‘...neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.’” [Romans, Exposition of Chapter 5, Zondervan]

These are the things, the truths, which we must remember this Reformation Sunday and in fact, which we remember every single day.

One of the slogans of the Reformed church has been and remains today – *always reforming*. Robert Godfrey explains this:

We recognize, however, that every generation not only needs to learn again what it means to be Reformed, but every generation also needs to be about the business of always reforming. We need to be always reforming because we are sinners. We fail to understand and follow God’s truth as we ought.

We recognize that the Reformers were sinners, too, and did not understand everything perfectly. So, we want always to reform ourselves and the lives of our churches by turning again and again to the Word of God to allow it to reform us. Always reforming does not mean allowing our clever insights into the needs of our present world to change the biblical inheritance we have received from the Reformation. It means turning

as the Reformers did to the Word
of God to allow it to change us.

[<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/reformed-always-reforming>]