

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

Php 3:9 ...not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

www.sermonaudio.com/crc

www.unholycharade.com (blog)

www.lightfordarktimes.com (blog)

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

A Righteousness From God

Sermon Text: Php 3:9

Scripture Reading: Philippians 3:1-11

The Apostle Paul identified the fundamental error of his fellow Jews, which had been his own error before Christ was revealed to him:

Rom 10:1-4 Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. (2) For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. (3) For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not

subject themselves to the righteousness of God. (4) For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

There it is – the religion of the natural man – *seeking to establish one's own righteousness, ignorant of God's righteousness.*

In his letter to the churches of Galatia, Paul elaborates on this very subject – the righteousness of God which is by faith, as opposed to that false righteousness which the sinner would create for himself.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) taught this letter of Paul's as a professor of Bible at Wittenberg University, and we have his lectures which are

now published as his commentary on Galatians. You all know at least some of Luther's history, how he was once a Roman Catholic priest and monk and how in God's perfect timing, he came to understand another of Paul's letters – that to the Romans – and specifically how this phrase exploded upon his mind –

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 to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

The righteousness of God by faith.
The righteousness of God.

This morning you are going to hear about this same subject – *the righteousness of God by faith*. You have already heard about it in our first class this morning –

Rom 9:15-16 For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION." (16) So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

A righteousness which is FROM God, not dependent upon anything in the sinner. It is through faith alone. As James Boice put it in his hymn – *a righteousness from God made known*.

I cannot put into words how important what you are about to hear is. I am going to explain to you what Martin Luther tells us in his preface in which he summarizes the Apostle Paul's argument in this Epistle to the Galatians. The subject is *the righteousness of God*. There is NOTHING in this world or in you life that is more vital for us all to clearly understand. Your eternal destiny depends upon this one truth. So whatever might be competing for your attention – *put it away*. Heaven is real and hell is

real. Every one of us is going to arrive at one of those 2 destinations, and it all rests upon this subject – *the righteousness which is from God.*

NOTE: A point of interest to emphasize how God has used Galatians is this – the first concerns John Bunyan-

“The God in whose hands are all our days and ways, did put into my hand one day, a book of Martin Luther. It was his commentary on Galatians...the which, when I had but a little way perused, I found my own experience profoundly handled, as if his book had been written out of my own heart. I do prefer this book of Martin Luther on the Galatians, excepting the Holy Bible, before all books that ever I have seen, as most fit for a wounded conscience.”

And then realize that Luther’s Galatians was instrumental in the conversion of both John and Charles Wesley as well as others in their circle.

It is to this mighty letter, so powerfully used by God, to which we now turn.

You MUST Understand – There is a Passive and an Active Righteousness – Only One Saves

The world, led by Satan, is mad in its hatred of the true righteousness of God “*inventing an infinite number of idols and strange religions by which people go their own way, trusting in works to please gods and goddesses without Christ’s help, and seeking by their own works to redeem themselves from evils and sins.*” [Luther]

The people of Israel were and are no different. They murdered their Messiah for the same reason Cain killed Abel and the prophets God sent – “*because all taught that people are accepted into God’s favor by grace alone and not by their own righteousness.*” [Ibid]

Some, perhaps many, of you may very well be robbed of the joy which is to be found in Christ all because through the schemes of the devil and the world and our own

sinful flesh, *you do not fully understand this righteousness which is from God.* It is the glorious good news of the gospel the origin of which is from heaven – it is not according to man.

Gal 1:11-12 For I would have you know, brethren, that **the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man.** (12) For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Listen very, very carefully now. Luther reminds us that *there are several kinds of righteousness, but that only one justifies us before God.* These are:

1. A political or civil righteousness. This concerns the laws which rulers and lawyers and courts deal with. The obedience to such laws.
2. A ceremonial righteousness which are according to human and societal traditions. Manners. Things which are to

be taught to children by parents and teachers. In itself this kind of righteousness is separate from religion.

3. The there is the righteousness which is concerned in the law of God – the 10 commandments. It is righteous and holy and good – this law – and reveals to us the will of God. And yet this law can only condemn. It is based upon obedience or disobedience, blessing or cursing.

But this righteousness of God with which we are concerned and which alone justifies the sinner, is what we might also call *Christian righteousness.*

Christian righteousness, the righteousness which is from God, must be carefully understood because it is entirely different from these other kinds of righteousness. The first three can be performed by us – the fourth is an impossibility in and of ourselves.

Christian righteousness is that which is imputed or credited to us because of Christ and by Christ completely apart from works. Now get a firm hold on this statement from Luther:

Christian righteousness is quite the opposite to every other kind of righteousness in that it is passive whereas the other are active.
[Ibid]

In other words, this means that in respect to Christian righteousness, justifying righteousness, *WE are passive. WE do nothing. WE offer nothing to God. We passively receive as a GIFT that which Someone else has done for us – namely Christ.*

Gal 2:21 "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly."

Gal 3:5-6 So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? (6) Even so Abraham

BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

The World Does not Know This Righteousness

This justifying righteousness, this Christian righteousness which is from God through the work of Jesus Christ, is not only something which the world does not and cannot understand – it is foolishness to the natural man – but “even Christians themselves do not thoroughly understand it and can hardly hold onto it when accused by conscience or some other temptation.”

This point is the chief thing I want us to be clear upon this morning – thought we speak much of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone, this righteousness which is from God is something we MUST be regularly taught and reminded of. Why? Because our sinful flesh – aided by the world and the devil – these remnants of the flesh in us – still work to drive us back to the works of the law.

Just as water finds its own level, our sinful flesh will, if left to itself, 'level' out and return to the mind of its own nature – a righteousness which is from man and not from God.

THIS is how the devil will rob us of the joy which is ours in Christ. Listen to Luther again:

“But human weakness and misery is so great that in the terrors of conscience and facing the danger of death we see nothing but our works, our unworthiness, and the Law. And when we are shown our sin, in time we remember the evil of our past life, then the poor sinner groans with great anguish of spirit and things, ‘Alas, what a dreadful life I have lived! Would to God I might live longer, then I would amend my life.’ Thus human reason cannot restrain itself from the sight of this active or working righteousness – that is, our own righteousness; nor can it look up to see the passive or Christian righteousness, but relies altogether on the active righteousness, so deeply is this evil rooted in us.

And the Satan abuses our natural (ie, fleshly) weakness and increases and aggravates these thoughts of ours. Our poor conscience becomes more troubled, terrified, and confounded, for it is impossible for the human mind to conceive any comfort, or to look only to grace in the feeling and horror of sin, for this is far above human strength and ability.”

At such times we might flee to the law and resolve to find peace with God by works of that Law, but what do we find? Simply that the Law has no ability to quiet a troubled conscience. The Law of God is true and excellent, and good – but its purpose is not to justify, but rather to condemn. It only makes our guilt and terror of judgment worse.

Rom 7:13 Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, so that through the

commandment sin would become utterly sinful.

Therefore, the object of our faith must be always and only Christ. HE alone is our righteousness:

2Co 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Listen again to Luther (he explains it so well) –

“Therefore, the afflicted and troubled conscience has no remedy against desperation and eternal death unless it takes hold of the forgiveness of sins by grace, freely offered in Christ Jesus – that is to say, this passive faith or Christian righteousness. If the conscience can take hold of this, then it may be at rest and boldly say, ‘I do not seek this active or working righteousness [ie, my own works] although I know that I ought to have it and that I ought to fulfill it. But I must abandon all active righteousness, both of my own (works) and of God’s Law, and

embrace ONLY that passive righteousness that is the righteousness from God, of grace, mercy and forgiveness of sins. I rest only on that righteousness that is the righteousness of Christ.” [Ibid]

Here is a wonderful illustration Luther provides us with:

Just as the earth does not generate rain and cannot of itself work to produce it, but receives it by the mere gift of God from above, so this heavenly righteousness is given us by God without our working for or deserving it. See, then, how much the earth is able by itself to do in getting showers of rain to make it fruitful; that much, and no more, are we able to do by our own strength and works in winning this heavenly and eternal righteousness. We shall never be able to attain it unless God himself bestows it on us, imputing it to us by his gift beyond words.

The greatest wisdom of Christians, then, is to have nothing to do with the law and works and the whole of

active righteousness, especially when the conscience wrestles with God's judgment.

On the other hand, the quintessence of wisdom among those who are not among God's people is to know and earnestly follow the law and active righteousness. Luther, Martin. Galatians (p. 16). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

Joh 1:17 For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.

Rom 10:4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Grace and Law must be taught properly. It is very easy for us to confuse the two. The Christian is taught the moral Law, *but only to be instructed of the leading of the Spirit as opposed to the lusts of the flesh:*

Gal 5:16-18 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. (17) For the flesh sets its desire against the

Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. (18) But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.

Now, listen once more to Luther and think very carefully on this. He is not saying that the Law has no place in the Christian's life, but that it has nothing whatsoever to do with Christian righteousness, this passive righteousness which comes to us from God through Christ for our justification.

“It is very strange to the world to teach Christians to learn to be ignorant of the law and to live before God as if there were no law. Yet unless you are ignorant of the law and convinced in your heart that there is now no law nor wrath of God, but altogether grace and mercy for Christ's sake, you cannot be saved, for knowledge of sin comes through the law.

On the contrary, works and keeping the law must be strictly required in the world [ie, preached

to the unregenerate] as if there were no promise or grace. [Because until the sinner feels his condemnation before God by hearing the Law, he is not ready to hear the gospel].

Because of the stubborn, proud, and hardhearted, before whose eyes nothing must be set but the law, so that they may be terrified and humbled, for the law is given to terrify and kill such people and to exercise the old nature, and both the word of grace and that of wrath must be properly taught, as the apostle teaches in 2 Timothy 2. Luther, Martin. Galatians (pp. 16-17). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

You see then the terrible error of announcing to sinners that God loves them all, thus detouring around the Law's condemnation of all who are without Christ.

These Galatian Christians, as you know, had been foolishly listening to false teachers who came in among them after Paul had departed those regions and introduced this false gospel of

Grace PLUS Law. Of them, and of all who would do the same today (Rome being a chief example) Paul commands us:

Gal 1:6-9 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; (7) which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. (8) But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! (9) As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

And this also explains why he said to all who listen to such lies:

Gal 5:4 You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

The Law Must be Kept Within its Proper Bounds

Let me conclude by simply reading Luther's summation to you, as I certainly cannot do better than he does.

“Therefore, when I see a person who is bruised enough already being oppressed with the law, terrified with sin, and thirsting for comfort, it is time for me to remove the law and active righteousness [ie, works] from his sight and set before him, by the Gospel, the Christian and passive righteousness. This excludes Moses with his law and offers the promise made in Christ, who came for the afflicted and for sinners.

Here we are raised up again and acquire hope; here we are no longer under the law but under grace (see Romans 6:14). How is it that we are not under the law? We live according to the new nature, to which the law does not appertain. As Paul says later on, “Christ is the end of the law” (Romans 10:4); since he has come, Moses ceases with his law, circumcision, sacrifices, sabbaths, and indeed all the prophets. This is how we teach

people to distinguish between these two kinds of righteousness, active and passive, so that manners and faith, works and grace, politics and religion should not be confused with each other. Both are necessary, but both must be kept within their rightful place; Christian righteousness belongs to the new nature, and the righteousness of the law belongs to the old nature, which is born of flesh and blood.

A burden must be laid on this old nature, as upon an ass; it will press down, and the freedom of the spirit of grace will not be enjoyed unless we first put on the new nature by faith in Christ (though this is not fully done in this life). When we do that, we may enjoy the kingdom and the inestimable gift of grace.

I say this so that no one should think we reject or forbid good works. Those who know nothing but the righteousness of the law may still judge this doctrine that is far above the law; yet it is impossible for unspiritual people to be able to judge it. Of course such

people take offense, for they can see no higher than the law.

But imagine two worlds, the one heavenly and the other earthly. In these there are two kinds of righteousness, quite separate from each other. The righteousness of the law is earthly and has to do with earthly things, and by it we do good works. But as the earth can only produce fruit if it is first watered and made fertile from above, so by the righteousness of the law, in doing many things we do nothing, and in fulfilling the law we do not fulfill it unless we are first made righteous without any merit or work of ours, by Christian righteousness, which has nothing to do with the righteousness of the law or with the earthly and active righteousness. This righteousness is heavenly—we receive it from heaven, we do not have it of ourselves; it is worked in us by grace and apprehended by faith, and by it we rise above all laws and works.

Therefore, as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:49, “Just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the

likeness of the man from heaven”—that is, the new man in a new world, where there is no law, no sin, no remorse or sting of conscience, no death, but rather perfect joy, righteousness, grace, peace, salvation, and glory.

So then, do we do nothing to obtain this righteousness? No, nothing at all. Perfect righteousness is to do nothing, to hear nothing, to know nothing of the law or of works, but to know and believe only that Christ has gone to the Father and is no longer visible; that he sits in heaven at the right hand of his Father, not as a judge, but is made by God our wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and redemption; in short, that he is our high priest, entreating for us and reigning over us and in us by grace.

In this heavenly righteousness sin can have no place, for there is no law; and “where there is no law there is no transgression” (Romans 4:15). Seeing, then, that sin has no place here, there can be no anguish of conscience, no fear, no

heaviness. That is why St. John says, “Anyone born of God does not continue to sin” (1 John 5:18). But if there is any fear or grief of conscience, it is a sign that this righteousness has been withdrawn, that grace is hidden, and that Christ is darkened and out of sight.

But where Christ is truly visible, there must be full and perfect joy in the Lord, and the conscience is at peace and thinks, “Although I am a sinner by the law and under the condemnation of the law, I still do not despair and do not die, because Christ lives, and he is my righteousness and my everlasting life.” **In that righteousness and life I have no sin, no fear, no sting of conscience, no worry about death. I am indeed a sinner, as far as this present life and righteousness are concerned, as I am a child of Adam; where the law accuses me, death reigns over me and wants to ultimately devour me. But I have another righteousness and life above this life—Christ the Son of God, who knows no sin or death but is righteousness and eternal life. By him, this body of mine that is dead**

will be raised up again and delivered from the bondage of the law and sin and will be sanctified together with my spirit. So both these continue while we live here....

Therefore, St. Paul, in this letter, teaches us in order to comfort us and to confirm us in the perfect knowledge of this most Christian and excellent righteousness, for once we lose our belief in justification, all true Christian doctrine is lost. **There is no middle ground between the righteousness of the law and Christian righteousness. Anyone who strays from Christian righteousness must fall into the righteousness of the law; in other words, when people lose Christ, they slip back into reliance on their own works.**

That is why we so earnestly repeat this doctrine of faith or Christian righteousness, so that it may be continually exercised and may be plainly distinguished from the active righteousness of the law. Otherwise we should never be able to believe the true theology. The

church is founded on, and consists in, this doctrine alone. So if we want to teach and lead other people, **we need to pay careful attention to these matters and to note well this distinction between the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of Christ.** This is easy to describe in words but hard to put into practice, for when we are near death or in other agonies of conscience these two sorts of righteousness come closer together than we would wish.

So I warn you, especially those of you who will become teachers and guides of consciences, to exercise yourselves continually by study, reading, meditation on the Word, and prayer, so that in time of temptation you may be able to instruct and strengthen both your own conscience and that of other people, and **to bring them from the law to grace, from active and working righteousness to passive and received righteousness, from Moses to Christ.** When we are afflicted, and our conscience suffers conflict, the devil makes us afraid by the law and accuses us with the guilt of sin, our wicked

past life, God's wrath and judgment, hell, and eternal death. Thus he drives us to desperation, makes us bond-slaves to himself, and plucks us from Christ. Furthermore, he brings against us those passages of the Gospel in which Christ himself requires works of us and clearly threatens those who do not perform them with damnation. **If we are unable to judge between these two kinds of righteousness—if we do not by faith take hold of Christ as he sits at God's right hand, interceding with the Father for us wretched sinners, then we are under the law and not under grace, and Christ is no more a Saviour, but a lawgiver.**

We have already seen that for a Christian **the law ought to have dominion only over the flesh.** When it is so, the law is kept within bounds. But if it presumes to creep into your conscience and tries to reign there, you must make the right distinction. Give no more to the law than is right, but say, "You want to climb up into the kingdom of my conscience, do you, Law? You want to reign over it and

reprove sin and take away the joy I have by faith in Christ and drive me to desperation? Keep within your bounds, and exercise your power over the flesh, but do not touch my conscience. By the Gospel I am called to share righteousness and everlasting life. I am called to Christ's kingdom, where my conscience is at rest and there is no law, but rather forgiveness of sins, peace, quietness, joy, health, and everlasting life. Do not trouble me in these matters, for I will not let an intolerable tyrant like you reign in my conscience, which is the temple of Christ, the Son of God. He is the King of righteousness and peace, my sweet Saviour and Mediator; he will keep my conscience joyful and quiet in the sound, pure doctrine of the Gospel and in the knowledge of Christian and heavenly righteousness." Luther, Martin. Galatians (pp. 17-20). Crossway. Kindle Edition.