

Kimmo Puolitaival

2019 LLC Summer Services - Ministers and Board Members Meeting – July 5

Therefore being justified by faith (Rom. 5:1)

Righteousness and Faith

Our Creed states that God has a holy congregation on this earth. The Holy Spirit, through the gospel, has called and preserved us in its unity and fellowship. In his Lecture on Galatians, Luther explains that the congregation is preserved only through the correct doctrine of justification. If it is abandoned, then the entire Christian doctrine is abandoned along with it. If we do not keep the doctrine of justification undefiled, we are not able to battle against anything that is deceiving. (Luther's Works, Vol. 26, p. 29; The Formula of Concord, Epitome, Article III. The Righteousness of Faith before God.)

According to Luther's teaching, the basis for sin-fallen man's justification is God's righteous being. God is the beginning of everything. Righteousness is God's basic characteristic. He is always absolutely righteous, trustworthy, eternal, almighty, omniscient, good and loving.

In His loving righteousness, God prepared righteousness in Jesus Christ for humankind whom He created. Paul speaks of this righteousness in the first chapter of Romans, naming it God's righteousness, which is made known through the gospel.

This righteousness, whereby God justifies us, is complete and holy. It is solely the righteousness that Christ gained for us. Humans contribute nothing in this righteousness. God alone is active in this, man is passive. Since its source is completely apart from man, it is a gift, it is grace. God grants faith as this grace- gift to all people born on this earth, faith which takes refuge in and owns righteousness in Jesus Christ. Our teaching concerning justification through faith, also the faith of children, is based on this (Matt. 18:6).

In the Formula of Concord, Article III, The Righteousness of Faith before God, there is mention of two contentious issues that had arisen among theologians of the time regarding the significance of Christ's divinity and humanity in justification. The text states that "one party has held that Christ is our righteousness only according to his Godhead. When he dwells in us by faith, over against this indwelling Godhead, the sins of all men are esteemed like a drop of water over against the immense ocean. Others, however, held that Christ is our righteousness before God only according to the human nature."

The text continues, "In opposition to these two errors just recounted, we believe, teach, and confess unanimously that Christ is our righteousness neither according to the divine nature alone nor according to the human nature alone. On the contrary, the entire Christ according to both natures is our righteousness solely in his obedience which as God and man he rendered to his heavenly Father into death itself. Thereby he won for us the forgiveness of sins and eternal life, as it is written, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by *one man's obedience* many will be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19). I interpret this to signify that the dismantling of undivided obedience of the person of Christ leads firstly to a doctrine in which falling away can't occur, a doctrine of freedom of the flesh, a trait of the kind that appeared in Pollarism (P. Nevala, *Unto This day the Lord has Helped*, pp. 42-48) Secondly it leads to a doctrine of works, in which the personhood of Christ constitutes an example to be achieved (cf. Catholic Church doctrine – The human contribution in justification/The Council of Trent, Decree On Justification).

Why are righteousness and faith required? Righteousness means being acceptable to God. According to Luther, justification is formed from two factors: 1) faith of the heart, and 2) the fact that God counts righteous (WA 40, 1, 34, 11). Paul teaches that, "a man is justified by faith" (Rom. 5:1; 3:28; 10:10). Faith is; therefore, imperative in human salvation: "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is" (Heb. 11:6).

Righteousness and the Law

The law has a specific important task in justification. The law demands righteousness, truthfulness, love toward God and neighbor. It reveals what God demands, but in itself it does not have power to justify. Luther says "trying to be justified by the Law is like counting money out of an empty purse, eating and drinking from an empty dish and cup ...laying a burden upon someone who is already oppressed to the

point of collapse..." (*Luther's works, vol. 26: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4.*) The picture of humankind revealed by the Law alone is actually deadly, lethal. It makes a person completely empty, meritless and without possibility before God. A person who is under the Law is an heir to the complete legacy of the Fall: death, perdition, and God's wrath. His heart is governed by the entire reality of the Fall. "Therefore everyone who falls away from the promise to the Law, from faith to works, is doing nothing but imposing an unbearable yoke upon himself in his weak and beggarly condition...until he finally despairs, unless Christ comes and sets him free." (*Luther's works, vol. 26: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4.*)

In summary we can say, as it is taught in our Christianity: the function of the Law is to drive an unbelieving person to Christ. This means that when God, through His Spirit calls an unbeliever to repentance, "He comes to see his true condition. He sees that he has broken God's commands. He begins to grasp that he not only has individual sins, but that the direction of his entire life is wrong. But in addition to distress over sin, in him awakens a drawing to the Savior and a hope that in spite of all the Savior will not reject him" (CD 70).

Luther writes, "between these two kinds of righteousness, the active righteousness of the Law and the passive righteousness of Christ, there is no middle ground. Therefore he who has strayed away from this Christian righteousness will necessarily relapse into the active righteousness; that is, when he has lost Christ, he must fall into a trust in his own works" (*Luther's works, vol. 26: Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4.*)

At times a certain criticism concerning our sermons emerges containing the thought that warning of the dangers of sin or rebuke is the law. It is entirely clear that the preaching of the gospel and the viewpoint of faith is in the core of Christianity's sermons, but God's Word in its entirety also includes, along with words of comfort and teaching, words of correction, rebuke and teaching (2 Tim. 3:16). Words of rebuke spoken in the spirit of the gospel are to Christians thus not the Law but the gospel.

Righteousness and Sin

The image of God in humans was corrupted in the Fall. Man took pleasure in evil and lost the desire and power to do good (CD 1948, 22). Sin is always rebellion against God. It is like a wedge which wants to

separate us from God. In its essence, sin is the heart rejecting God, it is transgressing God's will and his holy law (Ps 51:6, Jer. 3:25, Rom. 7: 7, 8). Unless sin is atoned for, it results in the punishment prescribed for sin, death (Rom. 6:23). God prepared this atonement in Christ.

Paul concluded on the basis of observations of his own behavior and the testimony of the Bible that all people are, by their nature, under the power of sin (Rom. 3:9). Quoting from the Psalms, he stated that God sees from heaven that there is no one on earth who does good, no not one. (Rom. 3:10–12).

According to this, sin is like a distinct power which tears us away from God. "Sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire" (Gen. 4:7). "Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" (Rom. 7:17). "For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me" (Rom 7:11).

Sin is not only the reality of a person living in unbelief, but also that of a believing person. The Confessional Books state: "This hereditary sin is so deep a corruption of nature that reason cannot understand it. It must be believed because of the revelation in the Scriptures (Ps. 51:5, Rom. 5: 2, 1, Exod. 33:20, Gen. 3:6.)" (The Smalcald Articles, Part III, Article I.) "They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." (Rom. 3:12) Paul testified of himself, "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7 15–18). This nature always strives to come forth in our thoughts, words, and deeds. This causes us to do deeds of sin. These deeds cause harm and sorrow. This sinfulness is so great that no person has any possibility to make it to heaven and during his or her lifetime to obtain unity with God and become His child, if their sins are not all forgiven through grace.

The magnitude of God's grace is difficult for a person to understand. The debt of ten thousand talents has been forgiven. As owners of God's grace, we —regardless of our sinfulness—are also righteous. We are at the same time completely sinful and completely righteous.

Righteousness, Obedience, and the Endeavor

A person who has received the grace of repentance and lives as a child of God is by faith a partaker of righteousness, free from the Law, under grace. In this faith Christ dwells in a Christian through His Spirit and causes the Christian to want to remain righteous and want to live in obedience to God's Word. The Holy Spirit guides the child of God to seek "first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:33).

“Jesus answered and said unto him, if a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23). “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you” (Rom 6:17).

Obedience is a fruit of faith. If there is no faith in the heart, outward or forced obedience does not help. Obedience of faith is a question of obedience to God’s Word, the Word which the Holy Spirit reveals in the midst of the congregation. This obedience generated as a fruit of faith, as well as the love produced as a fruit of the Spirit, bring us again and again to the instruction of God’s Word, to the center of the congregation. It affects a desire to own the gospel of the forgiveness of sins for the power of faith.

The endeavor is also a fruit of faith and the Holy Spirit. Sin which dwells in us always tries to separate us from God. At the same time, Christ’s Spirit dwelling in us prays unceasingly to Christ for help to battle against sin, to help us cling by faith to God’s Word and to own it. Paul compares the endeavor of faith to an athletic competition, “And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible” (1.Cor. 9:25). The endeavor’s destination is heaven. “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:7, 8).

There is reason to repeat that the endeavor is not a work, or a merit, but rather the desire flowing from faith to remain on the way to heaven and the desire to get to heaven. Simply put, we can say the endeavor is this: when we feel our sinfulness and weakness that we want to trust in the gospel.

Righteousness and Love

Jesus says that mutual love is a characteristic of His followers (John 13:35). Paul mentions love as the first of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22). God given love is that love which “seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth” (1Cor. 13). “When God in His grace forgives our sins, it gives birth to love, thankfulness, and the obedience of faith in our hearts. These cause us to serve God and our neighbors” (CD 1948, 85).

Questions about the basics of faith—regardless of the time, place, and culture— are always the same: sin, the gospel, faith, righteousness, the congregation, the Word and the sacraments. Whereas love seeks that which builds up and strengthens us in faith at this time. “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom. 12:2). Love guides us to take responsibility for each other. The Letter to the Hebrews instructs: “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works” (Heb. 10:24). The fundamental desire of love is that no one would give up their faith. The love affected by God causes the desire to give up that which entices a weak brother into sin and unbelief. Love guides us to the teachings of God’s Word and causes a desire to carry our travel friends with the gospel, encouraging and blessing them.

Christ’s church law, in which Jesus teaches how a brother or sister in faith who has fallen into sin is cared for in God’s congregation, can also be called the instruction of love (Matt. 18). Love is shown in Jesus’ exhortation in that the matter is initially handled between two. If further care is needed, several believers should be present, several gifts considering how it would be good to proceed. If even this does not help, Jesus instructs to tell the matter to the congregation. Thus, in matters between Christians and matters within the congregation, Christ ultimately gives the keys of binding only to the congregation. Instruction that is according to Christ’s church law is not in fashion nowadays. The individual’s unlimited freedom to choose for oneself is idealized in the world. According to this way of thinking, no outsider can say to another what is right and what is wrong. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that Christ’s church law is Jesus’ teaching and as such it is unchanging (Juhani Alaranta, Yearbook 2008).

Life in Christ, Righteousness of Faith

The counterforce to sin and the effects of original sin is God’s promise to humankind of the righteousness of faith. Luther has stated that Christ has brought grace in exchange for sin, life in exchange for death, and the forgiveness of sins in exchange for the curse of the law. Paul writes of this to the Galatians, “For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:19, 20). This opens to us a view of the righteousness of faith. “Our righteousness before God consists in this, that God forgives us our sins purely by his grace, without any preceding, present, or subsequent work, merit, or

worthiness, and reckons to us the righteousness of Christ's obedience" (The Formula of Concord, Epitome, Article III. The Righteousness of Faith before God). An individual, who in him- or herself is corrupted and sinful, and consequently deserving of the Law's curse, can travel as a partaker of the forgiveness of sins. Through the faith that God gives as a gift, a person can personally own the merit of Christ. Because of Christ's perfect obedience, a person can own all of God's grace promises, so that he or she could and would have strength to endeavor as a child of God on this earth as a partaker in the inheritance of eternal life. This viewpoint encapsulates the unrelinquishable legacy of the Reformation: God justifies man alone by grace, alone by faith, alone through the merit of Christ.