

Righteousness of Faith and Righteousness of Life - Outlook 2004

SLIDE 1

The introduction for this year's Summer Services youth discussion is entitled, Righteousness of Faith and the Righteousness of Life. The LLC board asks for God's guidance in selecting presentation topics, and I'm sure that this theme was chosen because of the primary importance that righteousness of faith has to salvation, and that we would have an opportunity to revisit this important doctrinal principle in our time, and with our younger generation.

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The terms righteousness of faith and righteousness of life may be familiar, perhaps especially to some of the older ones here. On this slide, the two aspects of righteousness are in specific order for a reason. Why would one be listed first? Hint: ROF is not listed first simply to put them in alphabetical order.

Righteousness	
Faith	Life

It is because, according to the Bible, salvation is possible only when correct faith first exists in the heart. And when faith is correct (in other words, faith that is founded on God's word, by grace), then righteousness of life follows as a result of that faith. Let us look at some brief definitions:

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Righteousness of Faith

A living faith that is...

- "...not an idle thought, but frees us from death, brings forth a new life in our hearts, and is a work of the Holy Spirit.
- "...brings forth good fruits"¹

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The Bible establishes that correct faith in God comes only as a grace gift. Paul wrote this way:

- *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God. Not of works lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them"* (Eph 2:8-10).
- *Correct faith clings to the righteousness of Christ as it's only salvation.*
- *Wrong or false faith clings to something else; deeds, a combination of deeds and Christ, a false prophet or a false Christ, etc.*

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Righteousness of Life

Righteousness of life can be defined basically as:

- Doing deeds or actions in life that are good and correct according to God's word, and according to wholesome and traditional values.
- Examples: Trying to keep a good conscience before God and men, avoiding foul language, avoiding worldly music, alcohol, drugs, cheating people, etc. Unbelievers can do these outward deeds also – in other words, they can live a good outward life, but it is not the righteousness of life that justifies, but only correct faith and therefore, condition of heart.
- *True* righteousness of life as God would see it, comes only as a fruit of correct faith.

In his book The Treasure Hidden in a Field, Juhani Uljas explained:

"Good deeds are not a prerequisite of justification, but are a result of it. A person must be righteous in order to do good deeds." Uljas p.34.

¹ BC, Apology of the Augsburg Confession: 'Faith in Christ Justifies'

Paul described the effect of faith concerning Gentiles in his time:

- “That they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance” (Acts 26:20).

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There is a second concept related to righteousness of life, but more accurately termed “righteousness of works”, that is important to consider. Righteousness of works is the opposite of the righteousness of faith, and stems from a heart of self-righteousness and unbelief. It can be described as:

- Performing or attempting to perform actions, or outward deeds, but even including thoughts, that are considered good based on traditional, wholesome values – and believing that performing the right outward deeds or actions can be basis for salvation.

The heart possessed by this type of understanding feels that man must first do something to merit grace. God, however, does not justify by man’s own works. The prophet Ezekiel wrote: “The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression” and ...“if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousnesses shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it” (Ezek 33:12,13).

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These concepts and definitions of righteousness of faith and life and righteousness of works lead to a question or a discussion of human nature.

Behold, it was very good

SLIDE 8

The Bible relates that when God performed His creation work, He “saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good” (Gen 1:31). This description included man, whom God had created on the sixth day. But then something happened: Man fell into sin. He became corrupt, and began to fear, and to design his own righteousness – his own basis for justification. In reality, man needed a redeemer. And God promised that redeemer.

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Often sin-fallen man, as part of his human nature, still strives on his own to please God, and to thereby become justified. Cain, presented a sacrifice that would have seemed, in human terms, to be good and acceptable. God nonetheless rejected Cain’s sacrifice because his heart was not right. He did not have correct faith first. Abel’s sacrifice, a little lamb, was made through correct faith and correct condition of heart – it was therefore acceptable to God.

In our world, there are many people who endeavor in an outward sense to do good (a specific current example is Mother Theresa), and that of itself is not a bad thing; in fact, it is a good thing for society. But it is not a basis for salvation. It is not a basis for justification. Isaiah wrote: “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Is. 64:6). Cain and Abel were mentioned earlier. The writer of Hebrews clarified: “By faith Abel offered unto God a sacrifice more excellent than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous” (Heb. 11:4).

Prior to his conversion, Apostle Paul had this false perception of righteousness. He wrote about his life in this way:

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“Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung” (Phil 3:4-8).

The works themselves were worthless, as he related to the Romans: "whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Ro. 14:23). Paul needed the promised savior. By God's grace he was called into the kingdom.

But like Paul when he was in unbelief, there still are many people in our time who know the Bible, study the Bible, and try to follow the Bible. We could say millions of people. In fact, looking at the multitude of cultures and people that exist in creation, scholars have noted a peculiar thing about humans – they possess an innate desire to worship.

Humans' innate desire to worship

SLIDE 11 The author of a recent book documenting world faiths describes the irresistible urge of humans to worship and how this irresistible urge "has created, and still creates, endless forms of religious behavior". He continues, "Indeed so powerful is this force within human beings that it has produced a mosaic of beliefs, attitudes, and practices".²

Clearly, in our time, rapid changes in society have not curbed man's innate desire to worship, and new forms of religion continue to arise – New Age religions, outward forms of so-called "Christianity" that are completely outside of scripture, even neo-paganism.

Africa represents a graphic example of this phenomenon, where "new religious movements' [are] the product of synthesis drawn from Christianity, Islam, and African religions."³ The same author writes: "The most dynamic modern phenomenon has been the emergence of a wide range of new religious movements that draw on local African traditions and one or both of the introduced faiths. These new movements represent the creative attempts of African peoples to adapt religion to African conditions and needs by synthesizing in varying degrees all available religious and cultural resources."⁴

SLIDE 12 Are there many of these new religions, that man has created? In the example of Africa alone, there probably are "about ten thousand [new religions] spread over eastern, southern, western, and central Africa."⁵

The point is simply this: Even though man with his own mind desires to worship God and become justified through a newly created religion or even by following a set of rituals prescribed by God (e.g., Old Testament self-righteous Jews) man's endeavors are not acceptable when his condition of heart is not correct... when he has not found God's kingdom. What does God say of false worship? He

SLIDE 13 says in Isaiah: "Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear" (Isa. 1:13,15).

This staggering number of "new religions" etches a vivid image of man's desire to worship and to create a "righteousness". But even in the midst of this religious turmoil and change we have marveled

SLIDE 14 how God has accomplished His salvation work. He's been able to awaken and call and find His own few – those who have felt the burden of sin pressing them to the earth. The prophet Isaiah said: "Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth" (Isa. 43:5-6).

² Nigosian, S. A. *World Faiths*. New York: St. Martin' Press, 1994. p. 483.

³ Nigosian, S. A. *World Faiths*. New York: St. Martin' Press, 1994. p. 27.

⁴ Nigosian, S. A. *World Faiths*. New York: St. Martin' Press, 1994. p. 34.

⁵ Nigosian, S. A. *World Faiths*. New York: St. Martin' Press, 1994. p. 51.

Man wants to be justified

SLIDE 15 Within this multitude of created religions, man most often concludes that his or her own works and actions serve as justification before God – i.e., doing good to others, trying to avoid wrongdoing, etc. Paul acknowledged that the Jews had "a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge" (Ro. 10:2). Jesus also reminded about this kind of outward righteousness when He said: "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20). Jesus and Paul were referring to a different kind of righteousness – the righteousness of faith.

When righteousness of life and of works is seen as basis for salvation, there exists a great contradiction with God's word. In a work-righteousness, the most able-bodied, the ones with the best outward deeds are first. They are better than the others. There is no room for the poor. There's no room for grace-beggars. Such is contrary to God's Word. The Bible says the last shall be first, and the first shall be last. No man can approach God on his own – not with good works or in any other way. Jesus said: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44).

Prayer and Fasting (or Work Righteousness)

SLIDE 16 Luther points out that human reason will never believe, but always seeks to earn or merit salvation. He wrote in his House Postil (p. 336) that reason cannot comprehend that we are saved by grace, and not by works. Reason argues thus: "If God is to be appeased, something more is needed than this; good works and penances must do it."

I recently had the opportunity to teach at an English Language camp in Russia with four other believing friends. My brother Tomm had already, a few years earlier, visited this certain university, in a town about an 8½-hour train ride from Moscow. On his previous trip Tomm became familiar with some of the Russian culture and he knew that it was important to let our Russian hosts know ahead of time that we didn't use alcohol or vodka or anything like that. During part of our time in that university town, we had a chance to visit some historic sites, some old churches, and so on. Our host was a young English professor at the university and I recall vividly one morning as we walked down the stone steps of an ancient Russian Orthodox Church, he turned to me and asked, "Are you the same religion as Tomm?" I was perhaps a little surprised, but I answered, "Yes, all five of us guys believe the same way." He asked, "In what way... how do you believe? What's different?" I proceeded to explain that our belief concerning the nature of God's kingdom on earth is different – that there is one small holy flock on earth, as the Bible teaches, of course as Christ taught, and as Luther echoed later." Then I said, "We also believe that we are justified only by faith". He said, "Yes... faith and prayer and fasting." I said, "Well, we believe that justification is only by faith and nothing else". It was clear that his basis for salvation included prayer and fasting, i.e., works. Our discussion was quite friendly. This young man later had some related questions for Tomm. Here's the point: It is natural, it is common for man to think that he can please God through good works, through prayer and fasting, for doing good to people and thereby become heaven-acceptable. This makes sense to the human mind. The Psalm writer makes clear however, that no sinful flesh and blood is saved by works or deeds: "Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Ps 53:3). With their own strength, power or wisdom, humans are not capable of good, meritorious work. Jesus clarified that even the work of drawing one to the grace kingdom is completely God's when He said, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, that ye go and bring forth fruit" (John 15:16). Luther summarized man's condition when he paraphrased the first few verses of Leviticus 6 into a simple, clear statement about human nature: "Humans make it a habit of sinning"⁶.

⁶ Luther, Martin. Luther's Works Vol. 27, p. 109.

By their fruits ye shall know them

SLIDE 18 The doctrine of righteousness by faith (where it is comprehended that one is saved only by faith) is founded on scripture – God’s Holy word, which is our highest authority. An inseparable aspect this doctrine, is that those who are believing correctly, finding themselves poor and weak, nonetheless battle against sin, endeavoring to keep faith and a good conscience. John wrote: “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 John 3:9). John does not mean that we as believers never sin, but rather the child of God doesn’t want to live in sin or carry sin on the conscience. That’s why the grace privilege of confession is so precious to God’s child. We’ve been able to speak of our matters... we’ve been able to hear the gospel, and believe the gospel. And that burden that so easily beset us and slowed the journey has been removed. With a good conscience the footsteps on the way to heaven have been light and happy.

In living faith, doctrine (what we believe, according to God’s word) cannot be separated from how we live. Therefore we live according to the teaching of the master, our Lord Jesus. He said: “Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance” (Matt 3:8). It wasn’t the fruits that came first; it was the repentance, then the fruits follow as a result of faith.

Sadly, Apostle Paul noted in his time that there were some who associated with God’s kingdom, but were not believing – for example in his letters to the Corinthians, the Galatians, and others. Unfortunately we’ve seen the same sorrowful situation in our time – that some people, even individuals from believing families, socialize with God’s people but they do not have the fruits of living faith. Maybe it’s with such temptations and sins as worldly music or movies or unacceptable videos... alcohol, drugs. It can be easy for corrupt flesh and blood to begin rationalizing with human intellect and reason. The mind says, “It’s no big deal” or “Other people do it.” Jesus warned, “Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt 7:21). Jesus also taught, “By their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt 7:20). The Formula of Concord says, “that those who intend to remain in their sins and continue committing them do not have true saving faith.”⁷

If there are those, even among you listeners here this evening who find that their life has not been such that righteousness of faith is first, but it has been pushed into the background and a lifestyle has followed that’s either self-righteous, or more likely, permissive of sin. Our service motto again echoes the beckoning call of a Father who is love. A father that wants all to come unto repentance, saying: “To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts” (Heb 3:15). Jesus, who took upon Himself your entire sin-burden, and my entire sin-burden called: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find

SLIDE 20 rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt 11:29-30).

I think also among us this evening, is a great number of young who are precious believing, but find themselves to be poor and weak travelers: so often tempted, so often stumbling. Listen dear young! It is to the poor that the gospel is preached. (Close remembering the gospel – it is our source of strength). Paul reminded, “...I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16).

SLIDE 21

John Stewart
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⁷ Uljas, Juhani. Treasure Hidden in the Field. p. 30.