

“Without This Teaching the Church Cannot Exist”

By Pastor Rand Lankheet, for New Horizon URC, April 23, 2017, first service

Catechism: Q 59-60 Bible illustration: Romans 3:21-4:8

Introduction: Martin Luther, the great 16th century church reformer (改教运动家), wrote this about the Bible’s teaching of justification (称义). [Quote] “Without ...[the teaching of justification] *the church of God cannot exist for one hour.*” You see, the doctrine of justification is not just one important teaching among others. No. Justification is actually the **MOST** important teaching. Because this teaching is the Gospel (福音), the good news about Jesus. Without it, the church cannot exist.

-Now, some of you know the doctrine of justification quite well. For you, much of this sermon will be a review. Others of you do not know this this teaching well; some of you might not know anything about it. Let me explain it from Romans chapter 3. I’m doing that *in 5 main points.*

1. *First point is simply the word “Righteousness.” (公义)*

That’s going to be **the key word** in the sermon this afternoon: “Righteousness.” Righteousness is a word we no longer use in ordinary speech. Can be difficult...What is “righteousness”? What does it mean to be a “righteous” person?

Think about it, a moment. Boys and girls, what does it mean to be a righteous person?

Well, the root of the word “righteousness,” is the word “right.” Not “right” meaning “correct”--the opposite of “wrong.” Instead, “right” in the sense of “being good. In Romans 3, being a righteous person is according to God’s standard of righteousness.

Of course, that’s a much higher standard that we use, as human beings. For God to judge someone “righteous” means that he regards a person as *perfectly* good--God regards him perfect in his heart and thoughts; good in all his desires and attitudes. Perfect in all thoughts, words, and deeds.

2. (No righteousness). But, by nature, none of us are righteous. *We have no true righteousness.*

Born into this world, *we are “unrighteous” before God.* That started with our first parents, Adam and Eve, as you may know. God had created them perfectly righteous. But they disobeyed God. And in that moment they became un-righteous. Being “un-righteous” is more than committing sins, doing immoral actions.

[Read Romans 3:10-12a.—there is no one righteous, not even one. Last part of vs. 11: In our natural condition, we do not even seek God. That is, by nature, we don’t look for God. Not the true God. No person, by nature, looks for the true God. Oh, many people are “spiritual” in some sense. They look for some kind of “higher power.” But no one, by nature, looks for the true God: the God of the Bible--Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

And it is true that unbelievers do some good things...outwardly. For example, unbelievers will

love their parents or their spouses; and their children. They will obey many of the laws of the country. They will drive at the speed limit, for example, conforming to the law. Outwardly, unbelievers will show some morality (道德感).

They will volunteer their time in hospitals, and in poor countries. And we should thank God for that. I’m thankful that many of my neighbours are very moral. I would rather have moral neighbours than immoral neighbours, wouldn’t you?

But, sadly, in their spiritual hearts, in their souls, they have no love for the true God.

They are not even looking for the true God. So even though outwardly they may be moral,

yet, inwardly, they have no true righteousness. So, even their outward goodness is corrupted, in the eyes of God.

Illus: Think of making scrambled eggs. You put 4 eggs into the frying pan. But the last egg you put into the mixture, is rotten. 4 good eggs and 1 bad egg. What then? Will the pan of eggs now be good or bad? It will be bad. The bad egg contaminates (玷污了) the whole pan of eggs. So even if unbelievers do a few good things, a few good works, they spoil everything by one sin. The one rotten egg corrupts the whole mixture of eggs. So in God’s sight, everyone is born corrupted. Rotten, like rotten eggs, we could say.

Heidelberg Catechism (海德堡教理问答) Q. 86 asks: “what is a good work?” And the answer is this: A good work is that which arises from true faith, It conforms to God’s law, and it is done for God’s glory. The seeming “good works” of unbelievers do not arise from true faith in Jesus. Nor are they done for God’s glory. Ordinary human beings, apart from God, are un-righteous in God’s eyes.

-So far, then, we have defined righteousness.

And secondly we learn from Romans 3 that by nature no one has righteousness.

3. *Third point: Yet,* the Bible says God expects us to live according to His standard of

righteousness. How can we? [Read Romans 3:21-22a. Vs. 21 says, this righteousness comes to us “*apart from*” the Law. That is, righteousness comes to us apart from our trying to obey God’s law. Why is that? Because we never can obey God’s law, not perfectly. We always have at least one rotten egg, so to speak, which spoils the mixture.

How can we? [Read Romans 3:21-22a. Vs. 21 says, this righteousness comes to us “*apart from*” the Law. That is, righteousness comes to us apart from our trying to obey God’s law. Why is that? Because we never can obey God’s law, not perfectly. We always have at least one rotten egg, so to speak, which spoils the mixture. So this perfect righteousness is from God, and it comes to us. How? [Read vs. 22. It comes to us “through faith.” That is, we must trust in Jesus, to receive this gift of righteousness.

Why trust in Jesus? Well, Paul uses many short phrases and sentences here, in chapter 3.

At times, he is writing in a summary way. In chapter 5, Paul gives more details. [Read Romans 5:17. “Gift of righteousness” You see, this is not **OUR** righteousness.

This is **GOD’S** righteousness. He gives righteousness to us as a gift. Now look at [Romans 5:19, read. The “obedience of the one man”---that is referring to Jesus.

You see, when Jesus lived on this earth he perfectly obeyed every one of God’s laws. So Jesus was judged by God the Father, to be perfectly righteous. Not merely in his actions, his works. But Jesus was judged to be perfect in his heart and thoughts; Perfect in all his desires and attitudes. The Bible says Jesus perfectly loved God His Father, with his heart, mind, soul, and strength. And Jesus perfectly loved all his neighbors, as much as he loved himself.

So, only Jesus fulfilled all of God’s laws—

God’s laws are summarized as complete love for God, and complete love for people.

That is our third main point, namely: *perfect righteousness*

The perfect righteousness of Jesus. His perfect love; His perfect obedience. Given to us as a Gift of God.

4. Now, turn back to Romans 3. [Read 3:24. Read.

We now we come to the somewhat difficult word, the word “*justification*.”

In Latin, French, and Spanish you can easily see something important. That the root of word “justification” is the same root as the noun “righteousness.” Sadly, in English, this is not clear.

We should say: “Righteous.” And Righteous-fication. Justification is God accounting us righteous. In Jesus. By faith in Jesus, by faith, God regards as “righteous.” How does that happen? Last week I used the illustration of an accounting book. With debts (负债) in red ink; and assets (资产) written in black ink. When Jesus died for us, the “red ink” of our sin is erased (被消除), blotted out. But there’s more... God then credits us with the assets of Jesus. The righteousness of Jesus. All his perfect love. All his perfect thoughts, words, and deeds. Credited by God to our spiritual bank account.

Well, *God credits Jesus perfect righteousness to us*, as we sincerely trust in Jesus.

Our righteousness, then, is **CREDITED RIGHTEOUSNESS**. That’s our fourth point...Credited r. You see, this righteousness is not from ourselves, produced by us. It is from *outside* ourselves....

Martin Luther called it “alien (外来的) righteousness.” Righteousness from another place, another person. In fictional (虚构的) stories, the writers imagine an “alien being” has come to earth. Maybe on a space ship. Or like the imaginary character of “Superman.” In that story, Superman came to earth from a far-away planet. He was an alien being. Not from earth.

-So this credited righteousness of Jesus is “alien” to us. This righteousness is not from us. It is not our doing. But it comes to us from Jesus. As we trust in Jesus.

It is wonderful to have our sin debt cancelled...and Jesus does that for us. But we need a positive credit in our spiritual bank account. In justification, God credits the positive righteousness of Jesus to our account. [Read A. 60. Credited righteousness.

5. (Assured righteousness.) Let me close with a **5th point**. This righteousness of Jesus is very practical for us today. Here’s one way it is practical:

All of us as believers still fall into sins, even after we have trusted in Jesus. We sometimes disobey God, or we fail to love him fully, completely, as we ought. When we fail in these ways, there’s a little voice inside our heads that says to us: “How could you, as a Christian, think that bad thought? How could you say that hurtful word? How could you do that sinful action?”

And the voice says: “*Maybe, just maybe, you are not really a Christian.*”

Have you ever heard that voice? It’s the voice of conscience. Sometimes it can even be the voice of the devil. That voice accuses us.

[Read the first part of A. 60. “Even though my conscience....

-When you hear that inner voice of accusation (控告), how should you respond? In this way: “Yes, I know that I sin. I sin daily. In myself I deserve God’s condemnation (定罪). But, listen you accusing voice: God has credited me with the full righteousness of Jesus. God has declared me innocent, in Jesus.” [Look at Q. 60 Answer: “As if I had never sinned; as if I had **ALWAYS** been obedient to God!” Here’s a good way to remember the meaning of “being justified.”

It means: “Just-As-If-I’d” never sinned. [Repeat. When we are credited with the righteousness of Jesus, God now looks at you, just as if you had never sinner. As if you had always been perfectly obedient to His laws.

So, you see, with Jesus’ perfect righteousness you have assurance (得救的) 确据. God assures you that he never sees you sin. He only sees Jesus righteousness covering you.

b) And here’s another application: Think of the church, the congregation (会众). How perfect are the members of the church? They are not perfect. How perfect is the pastor, how perfect are the elders? They are not perfect either. But is the

you sin. He only sees Jesus righteousness covering you.

b) And here's another application: Think of the church, the congregation (会众) . How perfect are the members of the church? They are not perfect. How perfect is the pastor, how perfect are the elders? They are not perfect either. But is the foundation of the church resting on human perfection, human goodness? No. The foundation of the church, the fellowship of imperfect believers, is only Jesus.

Remember what Martin Luther said: The church could not exist for one hour, without the biblical teaching of justification.

We have confidence in the church because the church is founded upon Jesus...upon His perfect righteousness. The church is not founded on the righteousness of the church members, or the elders, or even the pastor.

c) Let me make an application to those of you who are Christian parents of children. And teens. It is very easy for you to put many rules upon your children. And then to judge your children based on your rules. And, yes, rules are necessary for having an orderly home. But, parents, you must always be careful. Some children, some teenagers, will hear a wrong message. With all their faults and failures and sins...they can start to think God does not love them. They might think that Jesus can never be their Saviour—because they are not good enough. They will have no hope.

So, parents, teach your children the main message of justification. They need to know this:

that if they are trusting in Jesus, then they are found in Jesus as 100% righteousness.

With Jesus' credited righteousness: It is now "as if they had never sinned...; as if they had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for them." Teenagers: If you sincerely trust in Jesus as your Savior, God regards you as never being a sinner.

Credited with the perfection of Jesus, it is as if you have always obeyed all of God's laws./

Now...does that mean you don't have to worry about your sin?

Just keep on sinning? No! Paul answers that question in Rom 6, starting w vs. 1.

Once we are truly justified, there will be a change in us. Because once you receive the gift of God, the righteousness of Jesus, you will very thankful to God. In thankfulness, you will be motivated to want to live for Jesus, more and more.// But don't confuse thankful living, with the gospel.

Thankful living comes after justification. Thankful living comes as a result of justification.

Thankful living, is not the foundation of salvation.

The foundation of our salvation is Jesus alone. The assurance of our being saved, is that we are given the righteousness of Jesus. As a free gift.

Something we will never earn. Something we will never deserve (应得的, 配得的) .

May this biblical teaching of justification, give to all of us, young and old,

the encouragement that we need. **LET US PRAY.**