

THE RADICAL GOSPEL
ACC INTERACTIVE CONFERENCE
MAY 20th, 2017

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH

1. **WE FORGET FORGET THE ESSENTIALS.**

a. **A domestic story of forgetfulness.**

b. **We forget the grace that justifies us through faith.**

“The Uniting Church continues to learn of the Holy Scriptures in the obedience and freedom of faith, . . . from the witness of the Reformers She will commit her ministers and instructors to study these statements, so the congregation of Christ’s people may again and again be reminded of the grace which justifies them through faith, of the centrality of the person and work of Christ the justifier, and of the need of constant appeal to Holy Scripture”. (Basis of Union).

The grace which justifies, or the righteousness of faith is an essential and indispensable ingredient of the Gospel. It proclaims the incarnate Son of God’s royal saving work and is the ground from which we commence our thinking, and it affects every other topic.

c. **The righteousness of faith.**

Romans 4:5 “To one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness”, Cf. 4:13; 3:23: 1:16-17; Gal. 2:16. That such righteousness is wholly God’s work within us is not caused by any power of our own. Being God’s doing and not ours makes it radical.

d. **Substitution is the most dangerous force facing the UCA.**

A pragmatic message of “try harder” has bewitched the churches: Psychologism, human potential-ism, and gnostic spiritualism has seduced progressives and conservatives alike. “Subjectivism”, Gerhard O. Forde says, “might be called ‘decadent pietism’”.

Is the Gospel the power of humanity or the power of God?

Forgetfulness substitutes the Gospel for a gospel which is no gospel. Gal. 1:6-7.

2. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH IS NO MARGINAL MATTER.

a. **Relevance for today?**

"It's a medieval/reformation doctrine involving concepts too hard to understand".

"It's a peripheral matter of abstract doctrine".

b. **Ontological.**

Oswald Bayer will not allow the righteousness of faith to be relegated to a sideline matter. He makes it central by relating justification to creation, Rom. 4:16-19.

The faith which alone justifies is placed on the same level as creation out of nothing. He who raised Jesus from the dead is the same God by whom the dead are raised, 1 Cor 15:20; 2 Cor. 4:6.

Luther makes this connection in his Large Catechism. On the first commandment he says:-
"We are to trust God alone, look to him alone, and expect only good things from him. For he is the one who gives us our body, life, food, drink, health, protection, peace and whatever we need for this life and the next . . . So God alone (as I've now said often enough) is the only one from whom we get everything good and who gets rid of every thing bad".

The righteousness of faith embraces the totality of all reality.

3. LIVING AGAINST THE TRUTH (ROM. 1:18FF).

a. **Sin is living a lie, John 8:44ff.**

Living in untruth is to live as self authenticating individuals making ourselves by what we do, i.e. *"A human being becomes what we make ourselves to be as we create ourselves and the world by our work"*.

b. **The Unholy Trinity.**

"Me, myself, and I", (Michael Lockwood, Concordia 2016)

Where my ego is orientated towards myself my defiant mind will be trapped in the prison of myself. I will not be able to see the world or God from any other light than my defiance, and from this perspective *I* will hold the world to account.

c. **Kingdom of God business**

P. T. Forsyth spoke of mission as becoming “a kingdom of God business”. Instead of relying on the Gospel as the power of God for salvation we rely on our self-made plans and human activity alone for mission.

d. **Example: running a series of rapids in a canoe.**

e. **If we are to be justified by human activity alone:**

“then we must face the question whether we are not condemned through our planned action to bring about the revival of the congregation and peace to the community” (Bayer, ibid pp.18)

4. COMPELLED TO JUSTIFY OURSELVES.

a. **Those not justified by God:-**

Are forced to prove their self effectiveness. There is no escape. We have to justify our very existence as men and women in the creation.

b. **We cannot reject the questions put to us:**

“Why did you do it that way?” “What were you thinking of?” We are forced to answer complaints made against us and to seek recognition, affirmation and acceptance by others.

c. **Am I what others say I am, or am I what I say I am?**

“To be recognised and justified; to cause ourselves to be justified or to justify ourselves in attitude, thought word and action; to justify our being; or simply be allowed to exist without needing to justify our being – all this makes for our happiness or unhappiness and is an essential part of our humanity”. (Bayer, Living by Faith, pp. 2).

d. **Who am I?**

Bonhoeffer answers that if I am who others say I am or what I say about myself and these questions are intertwined with what I say about others, then; “Person is a forensic term”. (ibid pp. 4)

c. **Self justification disorders relationships.**

In order to be recognised and to justify his existence Cain murdered his brother Abel, Genesis 4.

Our differences, including sexual, will lead to deciding who is superior?

Vindicating ourselves against others brings abuse, domestic violence, exploitation and bad conscience; all in the battle ground for recognition. Harmony goes out of the world, relationships are torn and perverted; injustice and unrighteousness prevail. When a congregation ceases to live by faith in God's justifying grace, Paul says, life becomes dog eat dog, Gal. 5:13-15.

5. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH IS PASSIVE

a. **Justification, righteousness, justice and judgement are leading terms.**

*"The basic meaning, which we find in biblical Greek, is to put in the right, to put in the truth. Thus, if a man is guilty he is put in the right by being condemned, for that is the truth of the matter; if he is innocent he is put in the right, by being declared guiltless and set free. Justification always involves a fulfilling of the righteousness, or the enacting of the truth. The Gospel teaches 'the justification of the ungodly', and the astounding thing about it is that it means such a putting of the ungodly man in the right that through fulfilment of his condemnation he is justified, justified in both senses: judged and acquitted, condemned and vindicated, exposed as guilty and made righteous – but that is truth, concrete reality, only in Jesus Christ."(T. F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, SCM 1965, pp.153).*

b. **The righteousness of faith is a reordering of relationships.**

"Righteousness" is a forensic term. Yet we know God's righteousness through his only Son Jesus Christ and through him the relationship he has with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Righteousness is the nature of the Triune God:-

*"God's threefold humble and self giving – that is the giving of the Father through the Son by the Spirit – in promise, and the faith that corresponds to it, constitutes God's righteousness". (Bayer, *Public lecture Melbourne 2016*).*

Jonathan Edwards testifies of the harmony and beauty of the relationships within the Trinity as:-

“The best, most beautiful, and most perfect way that we have of expressing a sweet concord of mind to each other, is music. When I would form . . . an Idea of a society in the highest degree happy, I think of them . . . sweetly singing to each other. . . .In a very complex tune, where respect is to be had to the proportion of a great many notes together”, (Robert W. Jenson, America’s Theologian, pp. 20, Oxford).

God’s righteousness is his well ordered relationships in which he has created us to live.

b. The righteousness of faith is passive.

“The righteousness of faith is passive – in the sense ‘that we let God alone work in us and that in all our powers we do nothing on our own”, (Bayer, Living Faith, quoting Luther, pp.19)

“For Luther, ‘forensic’, justification means a complete break with thinking in terms of scheme and processes – and necessarily so because the divine imputation is fully opposed to human ‘righteousness’ as it is to unrighteousness”, (Forde, Justification is For Preaching pp. 74).

Passive righteousness is the opposite of an active righteousness produced through a process of sanctification, or fasting in all night prayer, or gaining advanced spiritual gifts. Passive righteousness is what is credited to us by the transcendent, objective God who has freely rectified our mangled relations with each other and made our dead relationship with him alive.

c. The happy swap.

Karl Barth asks;

“Has God after all let himself be persuaded, has God out of some capricious kindness allowed himself to be bargained with? Does God’s love consist in this: that his wrath is after all not quite as dangerous as it may appear at first, that in reality he may act otherwise? Is it the secret of the Gospel, the soft centre in the hard shell that perhaps things are not so bad, that God can also act otherwise? We must note that it does not speak of a suspension, nor of an amnesty, nor of an indulgence, but of God’s judgement, as it has actually taken place and as it is proclaimed in its entirety”. (A Shorter Commentary of Romans, pp. 42-3).

We are justified by God, not by averting judgement, but by passing through judgement. Christ must go through the judgement of the cross in order to rise. In his life and judgement Christ exchanges places with us, 2 Cor. 5:16-21.

The incarnate Son gives us his ordered relationships and takes our disordered relationships into the judgement of the cross.

Bayer says, quoting Luther:

“the joyful exchange Because Christ is at once God and human (who has never sinned), and his righteousness is invincible, eternal, and almighty, he makes the sin of the believer’s soul his own. He acts in no other way than if he himself had done it So in him the sins must be swallowed and drowned, for his invincible righteousness is too powerful for any sin Is that not a happy transaction, where the rich, noble, righteous bridegroom Christ marries the poor, despised, wicked little whore and frees her from all evil, adorns her with all goods? So it is impossible that the sins condemn her; for now they lay on Christ and are devoured with him. Now she has such a rich righteousness from her bridegroom that she again can stand against all sins, (based on Song of Songs 2:16, Bayer; Justification is for Preaching pp. 43).

6. FAITH IS ENTIRELY GOD’S WORK.

a. **We are justified by faith.**

We must not abandon this pastorally, for it is in trusting the promise of God that we are born anew and made entirely different persons.

Faith is not a human work, not the exercise of the human muscle of our will, or our interpretive ability, but the divine work of God within us, John 1:12-13.

b. **Here the battle rages.**

Determination to justify ourselves prevails. We continue to want to to make things ourselves and expect to find faith in ourselves.

c. **Faith comes by hearing the creative Word of Christ, Rom. 10:17.**

Contrast the example of the white dog in the wood heap.

Trapped in the world of our experience we mistakenly confuse our religious consciousness for the voice of God.

We hear the Word of Christ through listening to the voice of a human preacher of the Gospel. Usually we are surprised by it. It seems to come from out of the blue. But the same Word which created the world out of nothing powerfully kills our determination to justify ourselves, Gal. 2:19-20. The grace of God recreates us out of nothing, Rom. 4:17f.

“The whole work of man’s salvation is effected by God’s sovereign grace alone”, UCA Basis of Union.

6. JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH. A MATTER OF DEATH AND LIFE.

According to Gerhard O. Forde in his publication of this title, this is a radical assertion.

“Full and complete justification *is* death and resurrection”, (pp. 17).

a. **God kills and makes alive, Deut 32:39, 2 Cor 4:6; 1 Sam. 2:6, Romans 6:5-11.**

James Denney somewhere said we cannot begin a new life until the old life is terminated. In Gal. 2:19-20 “crucified” is in the aorist tense. The law condemned the old “I” in the crucifixion of Christ and a new “I” lives out of the risen Christ. When the risen crucified Lord Jesus crossed the path of the old self-justifying life of Paul the self-justifying Pharisee was killed and he began the new life of faith.

“A man becomes a theologian by living, by dying, and by being damned, not by understanding, reading and speculating”. (John R. Loeschen, Wrestling with Luther, p.37)

b. **Righteousness of faith is not a patch up job on our old corrupt humanity.**

It is not a metaphor worked out in a legal transaction nor an attempt to extend our old Adamic humanity with the aid of the Holy Spirit.

c. **The life of faith is trust God, Rom. 1:17.**

Living by faith is already the new life. The life of sanctification is living in the dynamic of justification. (Sanctification is also a passive gift of being set aside to belong to God). We live by faith in Christ as we obey his commands and not by the letter of the law which kills, 2 Corinthians 3:6.

Pietism, in its emphasis on progress in holiness, has had the effect of undoing and contradicting justification by grace and making believers very uncertain.

d. **The gift of self forgetfulness.**

Our identity is not made by the judgements of others in conflict with our conscience, 1Cor. 4:4. The righteousness of faith is not our own, it is always imparted by God's judgement which tells us who we are and his is the final judgement.

Bayer says:

"Those who are born anew are no longer entangled with themselves. They are solidly freed from the self-reflection that always seeks what belongs to itself. . . . The passive righteousness of faith tells us: You do not concern yourself at all! In that God does what is decisive in us, we may live outside ourselves and solely in him. Thus we are hidden from ourselves. And removed from the judgement of others or the judgement of ourselves about ourselves as a final judgement. "Who am I?" Such self-reflection never finds peace in itself. Resolution comes only in the prayer to which Bonhoeffer surrendered it and in which he was content to leave it. "Who am I? Thou knowest me. I am thine, O God!". (Living by Faith, p25).

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