

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Eighth Sunday after Trinity, August 14, 2011

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 295, 278:1-2, 389, 373:1-5, 370.

Lessons: Proverbs 9:1-10, Romans 9: 20-33, Luke 18:9-14

Sermon Text: Romans 10:1-16

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear Friends in Christ:

The majority of people today come to many false conclusions in the matter of religion because they judge by outward appearances and externals. When a prominent man dies in a community most everyone speaks of all the good he has done and how good he was. It is very easy to say that the man has gone on to his eternal reward. Reward for what? How do men come to such a conclusion? Did they have reason to believe that the man died in faith in the only Savior? Or did they merely judge by outward appearances? Or perhaps this important matter did not even come to their minds.

By the same false reasoning men come to the conclusion that all religions are suitable, that all roads lead to heaven. Do the majority of people ever stop to think that the Bible teaches but one religion and one truth, and that there is only one way to salvation?

How very important it is to put aside all human opinions on this matter, and to know the one and only way to become members of Christ's Church – the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints – and in the end have eternal salvation. Let us today with the Holy Spirit's guidance ponder this question:

HOW ARE SINNERS MADE MEMBERS OF CHRIST'S CHURCH?

1. **Not by their own righteousness,**
2. **But by the righteousness of Christ which is received by faith; and**
3. **Faith comes by hearing the Word of God preached.**

1.

"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved." St. Paul is here speaking to the Roman Christians and telling them the sad story of his own Jewish brethren who did not believe. He wanted to assure the Romans that he had no feeling of ill will or hatred or resentment toward his brethren in the flesh. He had told them how the Jews rejected Christ and the messengers of the Gospel. But he did not hate them. Rather he says that it would give him the greatest pleasure and delight to see the Jews come to faith and be saved. And this was not only an idle feeling. He states that it is his prayer to God, his fervent petition, that Israel might be saved. Paul explains the reason for this prayer: *"For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness."*

St. Paul knew the Jews very well. He knew their thoughts and desires and way of life. He himself was a Jew according to the flesh. He had formerly believed in the righteousness by the law and had persecuted believers. The Jews had a certain zeal for God. They hated idolatry, they loved their temple, they had great emphasis on the Law of Moses and the traditions of the elders of the people. They did not shrug their shoulders and say with Pilate: *"What is truth?"* But Paul sadly reports that their zeal was *"not according to knowledge."* Their zeal was strong, but it lacked the knowledge of the divine truth. Their zeal carried them farther away from God instead of closer. The Jews had good intentions, but they had terrible results. With all their good intentions, Jews crucified the Savior, rejected the Gospel, and persecuted Christians. Many people today have such zeal and good intentions. But they consider it a matter of indifference what religion someone has, just so it is some form of religion. And many believe that all is well so long as one is sincere in what he believes. But sincerity without knowledge of the truth is absolutely worthless.

God had left nothing undone to place his righteousness before the Jews. But the Jews kept on setting up their own righteousness to their own glory and not God's. The two kinds of righteousness are well illustrated by the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. When the Pharisee went to worship in the temple, he proudly boasted of all his good works and claimed that he had done even more than was expected of him. He thought that he was so much better than his fellowman, the tax collector. In contrast to this the tax collector, when he worshiped God, could only say with humble heart: **"God be merciful to me, a sinner."** Luke 18:13 God justified the tax collector, and the Pharisee justified himself. The Jews, like the Pharisee, were so blinded by their self-righteousness that they could not see the value of God's righteousness or the foolishness of their own self-righteousness. And yet today the righteousness of the Pharisee in the temple is popular with man, and very common among men. Let us beware of that righteousness which glories in man's works, for that is a stubborn and wicked resistance to God, and will lead to eternal damnation, and can never make us members of Christ's Church.

2.

Having shown how man's righteousness does not save, Paul presents the righteousness of Christ, which is by faith. With such righteousness sinners are made members of Christ's Church

"Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." The Law of God has a purpose, namely, to show man his sin and how God punishes sin, and to tell man what he should do and what he should not do. It is not the purpose of the Law to make man righteous, for it is impossible by means of the Law to become righteous. Man need not try. Christ is the end of the Law, that is, through Christ the Law is put entirely out of force with regard to saving righteousness. Christ is the end of the Law because he has come to earth and satisfied all the claims of the Law by His holy life, suffering, and death in our stead. Christ's purpose was to show the only way to salvation, a way by which poor helpless sinners could be saved, a way of believing instead of doing. Christ is the end of the Law to everyone who believes, to all who accept His righteousness in faith. For us to have righteousness, therefore, does not depend on our ability to perform the Law but on Christ's righteousness.

Now our text tells of two ways of trying to become righteous before God, and shows us how only one way is successful. **"Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: 'The man who does these things will live by them.' But the righteousness that is by faith says: 'Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down)' or 'Who will descend into the deep?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? 'The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,' that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming:'"**

The first way of righteousness is by the Law. The Law requires a doing, a perfect fulfilling of every demand in thought, word and deed. Only then does it hold out the reward of eternal life. But who can perform the Law of God perfectly? We are born in sin and by nature are children of the devil. Have we always given all honor and glory to God alone? Have we never used His name in vain? Have we always gladly heard and learned His Word? We could go through all the requirements of the Law. Certainly we would find ourselves guilty beyond any doubt and without righteousness.

Thank God there is another way to salvation. The Gospel has a message for all those who despair of finding righteousness. It tells them not to think that someone will have to go up to heaven to find righteousness. Of course no one can. Christ already has come down from heaven to bring us righteousness. Likewise we are not to think that anyone has to descend into the earth to raise Christ from the dead. Christ has risen from the dead for our justification. Away with such despairing thoughts! Instead of such foolishness, let us heed the voice of this blessed righteousness of faith. It says that **"The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart."** This is not the word of the Law which makes us righteous, but Paul says it is **"the word of faith we are proclaiming."** Instead of being left hopeless and helpless with the Law, we have the blessed message of the Gospel which tells us what Christ has done for us. The Gospel bids us believe on Him and also gives us the power to do so. This Word, Paul says, is in the mouth of the hearers, for they discuss it and talk of it and it is also put into their hearts if they accept it by faith. This Word requires nothing but faith. It is simply preached by the servants of God, for people to hear and believe.

Paul continues speaking of this righteousness of faith: ***"For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."*** How can a sinner be made a member of Christ's Church? Here is the answer. If a sinner confesses Jesus as Lord, that is, as the Savior and Mediator, and if he believes that God raised Jesus from the dead then he will be saved. For if he confesses and believes thus it clearly shows that he has true faith, and faith saves. The Law promises 'You shall live if you can perfectly fulfill every demand of the Law.' The blessed assurance ***"thou shalt be saved"*** (Acts 16:31, King James Version) belongs only to the sweet message of the Gospel.

The faith that justifies always confesses. A faith without a voice is no faith at all. Our confessions say: "That faith, however, which does not manifest itself in confession, is not firm." (Defense of the Augsburg Confession, Paragraph 262) Faith which does not produce a confession is like a flower which does not bloom but withers and dies.

Now Paul brings Scriptural proof from the Old Testament for what he writes. ***"Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame. For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"*** All those who come before His throne without the righteousness of Christ by faith will be shamed and confused, and will have to flee from the presence of God. Whosoever believes will not be put to shame on Judgment Day before the throne of God. Whoever believes, no matter if he has been the malefactor on the cross or the greatest saint in the Church, he will find the doors of heaven open to him. However stern and strict some of the Scripture's sayings may seem, no one has yet found one which says that a repentant sinner is not justified and saved. As far as attaining salvation by faith there is no distinction between men. Differences in race or nationality mean nothing. The same Lord, the mighty and glorious exalted Savior, rules over all men. His grace and saving merits are never exhausted. He never reaches the end of Christ's blessings. Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord, trusting in the Lord Jesus with the plea of the tax collector ***"God be merciful to me, a sinner"*** Luke 18:13 will be saved eternally

Thus the apostle has taught us concerning the righteousness of faith, by which alone we are made members of Christ's Church here on earth and are assured of an eternal place in the glorious mansions above. Now the apostle instructs us as to how faith is produced, namely by hearing the Word of God preached.

3.

"How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'" Since everything depends on our faith, and no righteousness or salvation is possible unless we call upon the name of the Lord in faith, we must realize how faith is worked in our hearts. To call on Christ is one of the most necessary and vital functions of faith. But no one can call on Christ who does not believe in Him. As faith is necessary in order to call upon Christ, so hearing is necessary for faith, and hearing necessitates someone to preach or proclaim the gospel. It is necessary that there be a herald or messenger who can proclaim the Gospel. And finally it is necessary that the preacher be sent. Christ sent the apostles out to preach. And he has commissioned all Christians to proclaim the Gospel in all the world. Not all Christians have the office of the public ministry, but all have the work of proclaiming the Gospel in private and by supporting the preaching of the Gospel. Many people show that they do not love the preaching of the Gospel by their non-attendance at church services. But Jesus said ***"He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me."*** Luke 10:16

And Paul exclaims with the Prophet Isaiah ***"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'"*** Isaiah 52:7 Preachers of the Gospel are to be received joyfully because they bring the message of reconciliation with God, a message of true lasting peace, a message that alone can work faith in the heart. God grant that we never forget these three truths: That we become members of Christ's Church not through any righteousness of our own, but by the righteousness of Christ, which is received by faith. And ***"faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."*** Amen.

(Sermon by M. H. Eibs, first preached June 11, 1950. Edited by Robert Mehlretter)