

## ***“The Righteousness of God”***

(Romans 3:21-25a)

Rev. Dr. Alfonso O. Espinosa

### **Introduction: A Little History...**

- A. The doctrine of indulgences developed out of the medieval Roman Catholic Church. An “indulgence” = *permission to relax or commute the satisfaction or penance of a contrite sinner*. (Luther’s Works, vol. 31, 19)
  - 1. A penitent sinner who had been excommunicated should show sorrow for his sins (*contritio cordis*).
  - 2. They should then confess their sins orally (*confessio oris*).
  - 3. They should then render penitential acts [good works] (*satisfactio operas*).
  - 4. They would finally receive pardon (*absolutio*) and be reinstated in the congregation.
- B. Point A3 above – the rendering of penitential acts/good works – could supposedly reduce the amount of suffering in purgatory.
- C. The Roman Church, however, had developed yet another novel doctrine besides indulgences and purgatory: The Treasury of Merits. The Church was viewed as a storehouse of merits of Christ and the saints who had done more than Christ had required of them. The pope could draw upon this treasury when granting an ***indulgence***.

- D. If one gave money to help the visible church on earth, one could receive an indulgence and through this alternative means, have the amount of suffering due oneself reduced in purgatory. In addition, one could help obtain remission of all penalties for the dead in purgatory without confession or contrition.

### **Part I: An Age-Old Problem:**

- A. As Luther once called it: “The Presumption of Righteousness”...man assumes that he may in some way earn a right standing before God. That is, make himself right/good/acceptable before God.
- B. God corrects this presumption:

### **Romans 3:23: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”**

- 1. The meaning is that man hasn’t a leg to stand on per being able to glory in himself before God.
- 2. That is, there is nothing in man to allow him a legitimate good opinion of himself.
- 3. We miss the mark and prove ourselves to be sinful before God.
- 4. We can’t brag about ourselves in front of God...our bragging doesn’t hold water; none of it is legitimate. St. Paul is consistent with the rest of Scripture:

**1<sup>st</sup> Kings 8:46: “...for there is no one who does not sin...”**

**Ecclesiastes 7:20: “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.”**

C. The further problem, however, Luther points out:

*“Through such presumptuousness and pride it comes about that even the works of grace are turned into works of the Law and the righteousness of God is turned into the righteousness of men, because, when men in grace have done good works, they become pleased with themselves...(Luther’s Works, vol. 25, 246).”*

D. Christ turns the presumption of indulgences, the presumption of all works of men and imagined righteousness on its head: There is nothing man can do.

E. ***We do this constantly. We live as if we’re so good that we really don’t need God or we act as if our goodness merits God’s goodness to us. Either way, we are presumptuous...we look inward at ourselves and are proud.***

F. Christ, however, redirects us: He leads us ***outward...namely, to HIM!***

**Part II: An Augustinian Monk, A Catholic Priest, A University Professor...OR “Rebel, Genius, Liberator”:**

- A. This past decade, A & E and *Life* magazine listed the most influential people in the world in the last 1000 years. Martin Luther was ranked #3 on the list! Not only was he instrumental in reforming the church, but he was vital in contributing to the advancement of public education, the proper distinction between church and state, and the role of government for defending her citizens. However, it is sobering to learn that most Americans do NOT know who Luther was.
- B. He served the Roman church in the 1500’s in Germany as a priest and university professor. When the sale of indulgences was flourishing, he wrote against its abuses in what is known as the “ninety-five theses,” though the formal document is called *“Disputation ON The Power and Efficacy Of Indulgences.”*
- C. And here is why we celebrate the Reformation during this time of year: On October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1517 at about 12 noon, Luther first made his 95 theses public as he nailed a copy upon the Castle Church door that served as a bulletin board for the faculty and students at the University Wittenberg. Why at this time? Because the elector of the people, Frederick the Wise, was going to display his great collection of relics on All Saints Day, November 1<sup>st</sup>. The concept of earning blessings through indulgences was similar to earning them through the adoration of relics (e.g. praying before the bones of dead saints). Thus, while our society turned October 31<sup>st</sup> into “Halloween,” it is easy to forget that the word “Halloween” means “Holy Evening” or the

“Eve” of “All Saints Day,” and the eve that Luther chose to challenge the false and unbiblical religion that the institutional church was perpetuating.

D. Here is the first of Luther’s 95 theses:

***“When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’ [Matthew 4:17], he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.”***

E. Here is thesis #62:

***“The true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.”***

### **Part III: The Reformation Celebrates The True Gospel & The Righteousness of God:**

***Romans 3:21-22: “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it – <sup>22</sup>the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.”***

- A. Our being righteous as Christians is totally separate from our keeping the law, that is, doing good things. Apply to real life: No amount of acting kindly, being patient, speaking good words, trying to think good thoughts, giving to the church, helping our neighbor, reading our Bible...NOTHING we do makes us righteous before God.

- B. The righteousness here in Romans 3 is “of God” and “apart from the law” and is “through faith in Jesus Christ!”
- C. This is totally OUTSIDE of us. So many people seek peace with God, seek peace in their lives, seek answers but are frustrated, because they INSIST that they must CHANGE from the inside...NO! Romans 3 says that the change happened OUTSIDE of us; it happened within God toward us in Christ! This righteousness of God is based on God’s gracious will toward us which we receive from the OUTSIDE to us through faith in Jesus Christ!

Application: People search for love, meaning and peace insisting on holding onto the presumption of the world, our prideful sin, and the devil’s deceit: that the only way it can happen is if we change ourselves, if we make ourselves different, more appealing, more successful, better people. If we fix ourselves, then and only then will we find God’s peace for life. Get richer, get slimmer, get better looking, get more sociable, more likable, more educated, more, more, more...and all the while God says, “Listen to what I SAY -- and what I SAY is more important than what anyone else says -- you are now perfect in My sight, forgiven through My Son, loved, beautiful, complete, I declare it, I am yours, you are Mine. I make it happen...I don’t expect you to make it happen, because you can’t, but I can and I have in and through my Son...so have faith in Him and in Him alone!”

### **Conclusion: In Christ Alone! That's the Key to Peace!**

The great Lutheran theologian Stoeckhardt writes, *"This righteousness of God rests outside of us in God, in God's judgment, and so is as firm and immovable as God Himself...He whom God declares righteous is righteous..."*(Buls, *Notes On The Epistle To The Romans I-VIII*, 32-33)."

**Romans 3:24-25a:** *"and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup>whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith."*

- A. But what moves God to give us this righteousness?
- B. Answer: Jesus Christ! He is our righteousness outside ourselves!
- C. Two words to describe what Jesus did to make us righteous in the sight of God:
  - 1. Redemption
  - 2. Propitiation
- D. The first word means that He paid the price for OUR sin. You see, there is absolutely no need to be concerned about paying for your sins, since Christ has already paid for them and He did so with His blood (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:18-19).
- E. The second word means that He took upon Himself the wrath and judgment of God for your sins! He averts God's wrath from you to Himself. Not only did He PAY for your sins, but He took the full judgment for your sin UPON HIMSELF as your true substitute. So someone may ask you, "Has God dealt with your sin?" OR "Has

God poured out His wrath and judgment on your sin?" The answer is "Yes, He did, when Christ became my cover, my substitute, my representative. So my punishment is finished, it is completed, it is over, it is GONE! So though once I was considered a sinner, I am now considered righteous...this is why I have faith in Jesus Christ, there is no greater gift than this gift because it means that now God sees me on His side, I have eternal life! And I keep this gift in the same way that I first received it: by having faith in Christ!"

- F. THIS is what it means to be RIGHTEOUS, you are now right with God, Christ has won for you total peace with God! The righteousness of God is yours by faith in Jesus Christ!