

The Insanity of Luther – Holiness of God – Lesson 4

Bible Study

The passage of Scripture which God used to open Martin Luther's understanding of righteousness by faith was Romans 1:17: "For in the Gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith'." A more complete statement of the doctrine of righteousness or justification by faith is found in Romans 3:19–31. Study this passage along with 1:17 and answer the following questions.

1. The law of God is often considered to be the law of the Old Testament applicable only to Jews and of no relevance to us today. How does Paul's statement in Romans 3:19 show the universal application of God's law to all people? What additional light does Romans 2:14–15 shed on this question?

2. From Romans 3:19–20, Galatians 2:16, and 3:19–25, write a paragraph describing the function of the law of God in a person's salvation.

3. The original Greek words which Paul wrote in Romans 1:17 and 3:22–23 are the righteousness of God. In a strictly grammatical sense, that term could mean either the righteousness which is descriptive of God's own character or a righteousness which God gives to others. Martin Luther originally understood the term to refer to God's character. Dr. Sproul said in his lecture that when Luther came to Romans 1:17, he suddenly saw that Paul was referring to a righteousness which God gives. Realizing that the Holy Spirit opened Luther's understanding, what would Luther have seen in the text of these two passages to change his view?

4. There are three key words in verses 24–25 that Paul uses to describe salvation:

- Justified—declared righteous
- Redemption—to redeem from bondage
- Propitiation or sacrifice of atonement—to appease the just wrath of God

Who is the subject (person acting) and object (recipient of the action) for each of those three words? What do your answers teach you about salvation?

5. Another key word in verses 21–25 is faith. Write out the statements where this word occurs. Who is the subject and object in these instances? What do your answers teach you about salvation? Write a definition of faith as Paul uses it in this section of Scripture.

6. What statement in this passage of Scripture shows that we need a righteousness which God gives?

7. Draw upon what you discovered about the doctrine of man in the previous lesson as you read Romans 3:9–20. Write three biblical conclusions from your study.

8. What is your own personal response to Romans 3:19–31? Have you appropriated the teaching of this passage to your life?

Think About It

1. Respond to this statement: Jesus Christ saves us by making up for us whatever deficiencies we may have in obeying the law of God. Do passages such as Galatians 3:10 and James 2:20 support or refute this statement?

2. How can God be consistent with His own justice while declaring guilty sinners to be righteous?

3. Propitiation is not a word that is in most people's vocabulary. It means to appease the just and holy wrath of God by offering a sacrifice of atonement. What is it about the concept of propitiation that is offensive to most people today?

4. Explain the following statement: Propitiation must precede justification.

5. If justification, or the righteousness of God, is received by faith alone, why don't more people take advantage of God's gracious offer?

6. Analyze the following statement: Faith is the only thing man contributes to his salvation. Do you agree or disagree? Discuss in light of Ephesians 2:8–10 and 2 Thessalonians 3:2.

7. Does the church in our day understand the doctrine of justification by faith alone? If it is as R.C. quoted Luther as saying, "the article upon which the church stands or falls," what is your assessment of the church locally, nationally, and worldwide? Can there be revival and/or reformation in our day without strong teaching of this doctrine?

8. If you are going to share the Gospel with a non-Christian, what is the first truth you would want the person to understand? How would you present that truth?

A p p l i c a t i o n

1. To what extent should we confess our sin? Should Luther be viewed as an extremist or a realist? Consider your prayer life in light of what you have experienced in this lesson. Indicate how you plan to incorporate this into your personal devotional life.

2. Luther was shockingly honest when, prior to his conversion experience, he admitted, “Love God? Sometimes I hate Him.” Following his conversion he enjoyed a particular delight in God and exhibited great love for Him. Reflect upon your relationship with God and list those descriptive words that communicate your heartfelt response to Him. Risk being honest with yourself and God.

3. In the Evangelism Explosion method of sharing the Gospel, it is reported that the vast majority of people—church members and non-church members alike—are found trusting in good works for salvation. Given the extent of the problem and the eternal consequences of trusting in works, write out a concise statement of your conversion. Emphasize in particular your understanding of justification by faith. Distinguish it as clearly as possible from a theology of works. Ask a friend to read it for clarity and theological accuracy.

F o r F u r t h e r S t u d y

The corresponding sections of R.C.’s book, *The Holiness of God*, include pages 101–126.