

not good with God because we of anything we did to get on God's good side. It's not about us, what we did or didn't do: it's about what Jesus did on our behalf.

Over the past 50 years, there's been a lot of talk about rights: civil rights, women's rights, gender rights, children's rights, victim's rights, criminal rights. But the apostle Paul is much more interested in our *righteousness* than in our *rights*, and he wants to teach us how to be square with God. Surprisingly, Paul does not link righteousness to the works of the law. Instead, he connects righteousness to our faith in Jesus Christ.

A person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, argues Paul (v. 16). This was a radical concept to the people of the first century, especially to Jews who had grown up assuming that they remained right with God as long as they did good works in accordance with God's law. Paul insists that our faith in Jesus is enough to knock us into line with God.

Centuries later, Martin Luther and the other Protestant reformers rediscovered Paul's insight and preached *sola fide* (Latin for "faith alone"): it means we are made righteous by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. This discovery was very personal for Martin Luther. Before the Reformation, Luther was a Catholic monk who tried to earn his salvation through good works. He worked as hard as he could, starving himself and even beating himself. And yet none of this extreme effort brought him any closer to God. Day after day, he wondered what he must do to be saved.

One day, Luther was sitting in the monastery library, reading the Bible. He came across a passage that would change his life forever: *The one who is righteous will live by faith* (Rom. 1:17). This verse was a breakthrough for Luther, bringing tears to his eyes. He realized that he did not have to earn his salvation because the price had already been paid by God. All that Luther had to do was believe that Jesus had

earned salvation for him by suffering in his place. He would be justified through his faith in Jesus.

Both the apostle Paul and Martin Luther were correct to put emphasis on having faith in Jesus. When we take an honest look at our own efforts, we realize that we can never do enough good works to become completely righteous. We know we need help, and, fortunately, God offers us assistance through Jesus Christ. Getting right with God or being right with God - what Paul calls justification - comes to us as a gift from the God who loves us and wants to be in right relationship with us.

In a sense, God reads us our rights: "You have the right to be judged by what you say and do. Anything you say or do may be used against you when you face your final judgment. You have the right to a Savior. If you request one, a Savior will be provided for you." That's truly good news: God provides a Savior for us. The key to being made right with God is trusting Jesus to save us.

But there's a twist to all of this talk about faith in Christ. The original Greek of the New Testament can be translated in one of two ways: either a person is justified "through faith in Jesus Christ" or a person is justified "through the faith of Jesus Christ" (*pistis christou*). In English, translators have to choose one or the other in order to make sense of the verse, which is a shame, because both meanings are absolutely correct and critically important.

It is important to have faith *in Jesus* as the One who has the power to save. It is also important to have the faith *of Jesus*, our faithfulness to him reflects his faithfulness to us. So what is the key to our righteousness? The faith *of Jesus*. And how do we receive this gift? Through our faith *in Jesus*. Both are needed in order to be made completely right with God. Paul stresses both when he says that *we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by the faith of Christ* (v. 16, NRSV, alternate translation). Believing in Christ

Jesus and being justified by the faith of Christ are what give us righteousness in the eyes of God.

Paul is convinced that all of this comes to us as a gift. *I have been crucified with Christ*, he says to the Galatians, *and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me* (vv. 19-20). Paul's old life is dead, and his new life is defined by his faith in the Son of God. But even Paul's faith comes to him as a gift from the living Christ who now lives inside him.

The *faith of Christ* and our *faith in Christ* are both gifts of God. They start and end in God. God is not any richer for the transaction, but these gifts of faith are incredibly enriching to us: they make us right with God.

We can be thankful that Jesus loves us and gave himself for us. When our attempts to follow the law fall short, God in God's righteous love gives us the right to have a Savior. Jesus is the right that leads to righteousness.

Prayer: Righteous God, we are eternally grateful for Jesus who imputed His righteousness to us, just as You imputed our sin into the sinless Lamb of God who poured out His life for us on the cross. Through this merciful and selfless sacrifice of Christ we are justified. Jesus truly paid the price for our salvation and removed the penalty of sin for all who truly repent and believe. Thank You for this gift paid in full by the atoning work of Your Son, Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

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Miranda Rights and Righteousness

Sunday, June 26, 2016

The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Galatians 2:15-21

In a cartoon in *The New Yorker* (April 23, 2001), a donut shop clerk reads a policeman his rights: "You have the right to a glazed doughnut and a cup of coffee. If you can't afford a glazed doughnut and a cup of coffee, a glazed doughnut and cup of coffee will be provided for you."

The caption alludes to perhaps the most well-known aspect of our constitutional rights: our Miranda rights. You know these rights, since they have been recited in virtually every cop show since the 1960s: "You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be provided for you." These words were established 50 years ago, on June 13, 1966, when the U.S. Supreme Court in *Miranda v. Arizona* ruled that police officers must inform suspects of their rights before questioning them.

Miranda warnings have had a significant effect on law enforcement, guaranteeing that suspects always know their rights. Of course, not everyone who knows their rights is actually able to put them to use. In the movie *Shrek 2*, the donkey says, "What about my Miranda rights? You're supposed to say, 'You have the right to remain silent.' Nobody said I have the right to remain silent!" Shrek responds, "Donkey, you *have* the right to remain silent. What you lack is the capacity." We all know people like that.

So *Miranda rights* are important, but what about *righteousness*? Rights and righteousness are not the same thing. In his letter to the Galatians, the apostle Paul writes: *We know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ* (v. 16). In

Paul's eyes, to be "justified" is to be considered right with God. The thing is, we're