

Sermon on Two Kinds of Righteousness (1519)

Brothers and Sisters, *“have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped”* [Phil. 2:5-6].

There are two kinds of Christian righteousness (just as there are two kinds of sin in man: original and actual). The first is *alien* righteousness, that is to say, the righteousness of another, instilled from without, from outside of us. This is the righteousness of Christ by which He justifies through faith, as it is written in I Cor. 1:30: *“...you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption...”* In John 11:25-26, Christ Himself declares: *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me...shall never die.”* Later He adds in John 14:6, *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”* This righteousness, then, is given to people in baptism and whenever they are truly repentant. Therefore those who have received it can with confidence boast in Christ and say: *“Christ’s living, doing, speaking, His suffering and dying are mine, as much as if I had lived, done, spoken, suffered, and died as He did.”* Just as a bridegroom possesses all that is the bride’s and the bride all that is the bridegroom’s – for the two are one flesh [Gen. 2:24], so Christ and the Church are one spirit [Eph. 5:29-32]. Thus the blessed God and Father of mercies, according to Peter, has given us the greatest and most precious gifts in Christ [2 Pt. 1:4]. Paul writes in 2 Cor. 1:3 [Eph. 1:3]: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our*

Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.”

This grace and inexpressible blessing was promised to Abraham: *“And in your seed (that is, in Christ) shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.”* Isaiah 9:6 says, *“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given.”* “To us,” it says, because He is entirely ours with all His benefits if we believe in Him, as Rom. 8:32 states, *“He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?”*

Therefore everything which is Christ’s is ours, freely and graciously given to us unworthy recipients out of God’s sheer mercy, even though we deserved wrath and condemnation, and hell also. Even Christ Himself, therefore, who says He came to do the most sacred will of His Father [John 6:38], became obedient to Him; and whatever He did, He did it for us and desired it to be ours, saying, *“I am among you as the one who serves”* [Luke 22:27]. Also He says, *“This is My Body, which is given for you”* [Luke 22:19].

Therefore, through faith in Christ, His righteousness becomes our righteousness and all that He has becomes ours - He Himself becomes ours! In Rom. 1:17, the Apostles calls it: “the righteousness of God” – for in the Gospel “the righteousness of God is revealed...; as it is written, *“The righteous shall live by faith.”* Hence, we hold that a man is justified by faith. This is an infinite righteousness, and one that swallows up all sins in a moment – for it is impossible that sin should exist in Christ. On the contrary, the one who trusts in Christ is united to Christ, is one with Christ, having the same righteousness. It is therefore impossible that the guilt of sin should remain in that person. This righteousness is primary; it is the basis, the cause, the source of any and all actual

righteousness. For this is the righteousness given in place of the original righteousness lost in Adam. In fact, it is a far greater righteousness!

It is in this sense that we are to understand the prayer in Psalm 31: *“In You, O Lord, do I take refuge; let me never be put to shame; in Your righteousness deliver me!”* It does not say “in my” but “in Your righteousness,” that is, in the righteousness of Christ my God which becomes ours through faith and by the grace and mercy of God. In many passages of the Psalter, faith is called “the work of the Lord,” “confession,” “power of God,” “mercy,” “truth,” “righteousness.” All these are names for faith in Christ, rather, for the righteousness which is in Christ. The Apostle therefore dares to say in Gal. 2:20, *“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”*

Therefore this alien righteousness, instilled in us by grace alone without our works – is set opposite original sin, which is likewise alien, inherited and caused by birth alone. The second kind of righteousness is our proper righteousness, not because we alone work it, but because we work with that first and alien righteousness. This is that manner of life spent profitably in good works, in the first place, in crucifying the fleshly desires, of which we read in Gal. 5:24, *“And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”*

In the second place, this righteousness consists in love of our neighbors, and in the third place, in humility and fear towards God. The Apostle is full of references, as is all the rest of Scripture. He briefly summarizes everything in Titus 2:12: *“In this world let us live soberly (pertaining to the crucifying our flesh), righteously (pertaining to our neighbor), and piously (pertaining to God).”*

This righteousness is the product of the first type, actually its fruit and consequence, for we read in Gal. 5:22, “*But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.*” For because the works mentioned are our works, it is obvious that in this passage a spiritual person is called “spirit.” In John 3:6 we read, “*That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*” This righteousness responds to the first [alien righteousness] for it ever strives to do away with the old Adam and to destroy the body of sin. Therefore it hates itself and loves its neighbor; it does not seek its own good, but that of another, and in this its whole way of living consists. For in that it hates itself and does not seek its own, it crucifies the flesh. Because it seeks the good of another, it works love. Thus in each sphere it does God’s will, living soberly with self, justly with neighbor, devoutly toward God. This righteousness is to follow the example of Christ and is made to conform to His image (2 Cor. 3:18). Just as Christ did all things for us, not seeking His own good but ours only – and in this He was most obedient to God the Father – He desires that we should likewise set the example for our neighbors.

We read in Rom. 6:19 that this righteousness is set opposite our own actual sin: “*For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.*” Therefore through the first righteousness arises the voice of the Bridegroom who says to the soul, “I am yours,” but through the second [righteousness] comes the voice of the bride who answers, “I am yours.” Then the marriage is consummated; it becomes strong and complete in accordance with the Song of Solomon 2:16, “*My beloved is mine and I am his.*”

Then the soul no longer seeks to be righteous in and for itself, but it has Christ as its righteousness and therefore seeks only the welfare of others.

This is what our Lesson says: *“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus”* [Phil. 2:5]. That is to say, have such a mind and affection towards each other such as you see that Christ has towards you. As the Apostle writes, *“Though He was in the form of God, He did not could equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant”* [Phil. 2:6-7]. The term “form of God” here does not mean the “essence of God” because Christ never emptied Himself of this. Neither can the phrase “form of a servant” be said to mean “human essence.” But the “form of God” is wisdom, power, righteousness, goodness and freedom. Though Christ was free, powerful, wise, subject to none of the vices or sins to which all others are subject – preeminent in such attributes that are particularly proper to the form of God – He was not arrogant in that form; He did not please Himself; nor did He disdain or despise those who were enslaved and subjected to various evils. He was not like the Pharisee who said, *“God, I thank You that I am not like other men”* [Luke 18:11], for that man was delighted that others were wretched. Men of this kind wish to be like god, sufficient in themselves, pleasing themselves, glorying in themselves, under obligation to no one, and so on.

However, Christ did not think this way. He relinquished that form to God the Father and emptied Himself, unwilling to use His status against us, unwilling to be different from us. Rather, for our sakes, He became as one of us and took the form of a servant, that is, He subjected Himself to all evils. And although He was free, He made Himself the servant of all [Mark 9:35], living as if all the evils which were ours were actually His own.

Accordingly, He took upon Himself our sin and our punishment, and although it was for us that He was conquering those things, He acted as though He were conquering them for Himself. Although He with respect to us is our Lord and God, He wanted to become our servant, as it is written in Rom. 15:3, *“For Christ did not please Himself, but as it is written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me’ [Ps. 69:9].”* The Apostle means here that individual Christians shall become the servants of one another in accordance with the example of Christ. If they have wisdom, righteousness, or power of which they can boast and excel others than they should not keep this to themselves, but surrender it to God and become as one of those who have nothing. Paul’s meaning is that when each person has forgotten himself and emptied himself, he should conduct himself as if his neighbor’s weakness, sin, and foolishness were his very own in order that he does not boast or get puffed up, nor despise or triumph over his neighbors as if he is their god or equal to God. Since God’s prerogatives ought to be left to God alone, it becomes robbery when a foolhardy prideful man ignores this fact.

It is in this way, then, that one takes the form of a servant, and that the command of the Apostle in Gal. 5:13 is fulfilled: *“Through love be servants of one another.”* Through the illustration of the body, he also teaches in Rom. 12:4-5 and 1 Cor. 12:12-27 how the strong, honorable, healthy members do not triumph over the weak, less honorable and sick members as if they were their masters and gods; but on the contrary they are to serve them all the more, forgetting their own honor, health and power. As Paul says, *“that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.”* From this it is now evident how one must conduct himself with his neighbor in each situation.

...For you have been made powerful, not that you may make the weak weaker by oppression, but that you may make them powerful by raising them up and defending them. You are wise, not in order to laugh at the foolish and thereby make them more foolish, but that you may undertake to teach them as you yourself would wish to be taught. You are righteous so that you may vindicate and pardon the unrighteous, not that you may only condemn, disparage, judge, and punish. For this is Christ's example for us, as He says: "*For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.*"

However, our sinful nature violently rebels, for it greatly delights in punishment, in boasting of its own righteousness and in the shame of our neighbors' unrighteousness. This perversity is wholly evil and contrary to love. It ought to feel pain that the condition of its neighbor is not better than its own and if its neighbor's condition is better than it ought to rejoice no less than it rejoices when its own is the better.

[And when our corrupt nature rebels and sins against the command to love one another than we must repent and turn to the our merciful Lord who graciously bestows upon us the free gift of forgiveness that He won for us, trusting in that alien righteousness that is now ours in Christ Jesus.] Amen.