

“Righteousness of God, Disclosed”

Self-introduction

My name is Junichi Fujino. I was a pastor of a Mennonite Brethren church in Hirakata, Osaka for 35 years. Then, after I retired. I still live in Hirakata and now I am a part-time pastor of a same denomination church in Komaki City, north of Nagaya, for four years. Thank you for inviting me again. This is my third occasion to share a message of the Bible with you.

Now let me pray.

Father, I thank you that you have led me to share your Words again at OIC. I pray that you would speak to us and teach us to know Who You are and how You should reveal Yourself among us.

I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

The Bible teaches that God is righteous. The righteousness of God is, of course, must be the perfect righteousness. The Bible promises that God's righteousness is to be revealed to us, humans. How can that grave thing happen? And if God's righteousness is manifested, how would that change us?

Let me read Romans 3:20-24 in New English Translation (all the other verses also in NET)

²⁰For no one is declared righteous before him by the works of the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. ²¹But now apart from the law the righteousness of God (although it is attested by the law and the prophets) has been disclosed— ²²namely, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction,

1. No one is declared righteous by the works of the law 3:20

Romans 3:20

²⁰For no one is declared righteous before him by the works of the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

The law is the correct standard that God ordained and revealed to us so that we might live accordingly. However no one can say that “I have accomplished the law. So I am righteous.” And also, with the law as a standard, we can well come to know that we are nothing but sinners.

Then, what is the core of the law?

Jesus answered to this question:

Matthew 22:36-40

³⁶ “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”

³⁷ Jesus said to him, ““Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’

³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.

³⁹ The second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

⁴⁰ All the law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.”

This is the core of the law. Then let's just take the beginning portion of the first commandment. Can you love God with all your heart? May be with 80% of your heart, you can love God if you try hard. But the commandment requires to love God with all your heart. Now 20% of your heart does not love God. If you work harder and love God with 90% of your heart. Still 10% of your heart does not love God. And you work even harder and with 95% of your heart you might be able to love God. But 5% is not with love. The commandment is with all your heart, love your God. Then you may be so tired of trying to love God. Now you might say, “I am tired of trying to love God. I don't want to love God.” After all you might have to say is that “I cannot keep God's commandment. I am a sinner. I am impossible.”

Romans 3:20b

^{20b}for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

The purpose of the law is, to set the right standard that God requires to us, humans and also to show that humans cannot reach that goal however hard they may try.

In Matthew chapter 22, the verb “Love” is expressed in imperative mood in English and Japanese Bibles. But in the original Greek New Testament, “love” is expressed simply in the future tense. The Greek future tense sometimes has the meaning of command, so it is correct that they are translated in imperative. But Jesus did not mean to say, “Now you must love your God with all your heart. It's your duty. You need to do it.” But Jesus talked in the nuance that, “You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” How can we then become to be able to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind?

If God fills our heart with His Holy Spirit, it is quite possible that we can love God with overflowing love in our heart, soul and mind. God can make us to be able to keep this commandment.

2. Righteousness of God attested by the Old Testament. 3:21

Romans 3:21

²¹But now apart from the law the righteousness of God (although it is attested by the law and the prophets) has been disclosed—

“But now,” means, since Jesus came and accomplished the redemption of our sin on the Cross.

“apart from the law,” that is, not by our keeping the law.

“attested by the law and the prophets.” The Hebrew Old Testament is divided into three parts. The first is called “the law,” the second, “the prophets,” and the third division does not have a particular name on it. So, with the name, “the law and the prophets,” the whole Old Testament is meant. Therefore, this verse means, not by keeping the law, but “attested by the whole Old Testament, the righteousness of God has been disclosed.”

The righteousness of God is God's righteousness. So it is 100% righteous. Now this righteousness

has been disclosed. What does it mean? How has it been disclosed?

This is explained in the next verse, 22.

3. Righteousness of God, Disclosed 3:22

Before we deal with the content of verse 22, let's check if the English or Japanese translation is appropriate.

3-1. Recent Bible Translations

Romans 3:22

²²namely, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction,

Today, for this message, as for the English Bible, I selected the New English Translation (2019). (As for the Japanese Bible, I selected Seishokyokai Kyodoyaku, or Japan Bible Society Interconfessional Version for Romans Chapter 3.)

There is a reason to do so.

In the NET, they revised the translation from A to B in 2019.

A. “namely, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.”

B. “namely, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe.”

This change from A to B has been taking place quite recently.

In NIV, in the revision of 2011, they adopted A as before, in the text but introduced B in the footnote as the alternative translation.

I do not know of any other recent revisions in the English translations.

In the Japanese translations, the “Shinkaiyaku 2017” adopted A but introduced B in the footnote as the alternative translation.

Then, the “Seishokyokai Kyodoyaku” adopted B in the 2018 revision from the “Shinkyodoyaku.”

A or B, which translation is correct?

As a conclusion, as you see in the trend that B is regarded to be more appropriate than A.

Then, A and B, what is the difference?

A. “namely, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.”

This gives the impression that by our faith, believing Jesus Christ firmly, we, believers can have the righteousness of God. The emphasis is on our faith in Christ.

B. “namely, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe.”

Jesus Christ is faithful in all He does and all His being. So, by our simply trusting that Jesus is faithful, we are endowed with the righteousness of God. The emphasis is on the faithfulness of Jesus, not so much on the amount or strength of our faith.

3-2. Faith Jesus Expects on us

What sort of faith does Jesus expects us to have?

When the disciples failed to cast out the demon, they asked Jesus.

Matthew 17:19b-20

^{19b}“Why couldn’t we cast it out?”

Probably, the disciples must have mustered their faith and shouted, “Demon! Get out!” But nothing happened.

²⁰He told them, “It was because of your little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; nothing will be impossible for you.”

I think what Jesus meant was, “You relied on your faith. So it was void and of no value. Just trust me. If you trust me with a small faith like a mustard seed, it is enough. I am faithful. I will do what I should for you.”

We are on the way to seek how the Righteousness of God was revealed.

3-3. What is the righteousness of God?

After I became a Christian, I heard of a word play that the word “Justified” is the short form of “Just as if I had never sinned.” In other words, since Christians are being justified by the Cross of Jesus, God sees them as if they have never sinned. Let’s just assume that a sinner who is destined to perish is scored at -100. Then if the sinner believes in Christ and is justified, he or she is seen by God to be just as if never sinned. So should be scored at 0. Then the process of justification is figured this way:

-100 → 0
Sinner → justified, forgiven

A sinner who was scored at -100 is now, because of the grace of God, sins are all forgiven and scored at 0. This is a great miracle.

But the righteousness of God brings about something even more superior.

Romans 3:21b-22a

^{21b}The righteousness of God ... has been disclosed--

^{22a}namely, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe.

Jesus has the perfect faithfulness. The righteousness of God disclosed through the faithfulness of

Jesus Christ for all who believe is more than just sinless.

Since God is 100% righteous. So let's just assume that the righteousness of God should be scored at +100, no higher figure. The righteousness of God disclosed through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe brings about the same righteousness with God to us. That is:

-100 → 0 → +100
Sinner → justified → righteousness of God, disclosed

God is not going to disclose to us something less than Himself.

3-4. Righteousness of God disclosed to the disciples

How was the Righteousness of God revealed to the disciples after the Cross?

Jesus' disciples at night before the cross, prided themselves saying, "Who among us is the greatest?" After they went through Jesus' Cross, Resurrection and the Pentecost to receive the Holy Spirit, then there appeared a loving community. God revealed His love, His own personality in them.

Acts 2:46-47

⁴⁶Every day they continued to gather together by common consent in the temple courts, breaking bread from house to house, sharing their food with glad and humble hearts,

⁴⁷praising God and having the good will of all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number every day those who were being saved.

When Peter and John healed the lame person from birth, Peter said to the people.

Acts 3:12c

^{12c}Why do you stare at us as if we had made this man walk by our own power or piety?

The disciples no longer relied on their own faith or power. And,

Acts 3:16

¹⁶And on the basis of faith in Jesus' name, his very name has made this man—whom you see and know—strong. The faith that is through Jesus has given him this complete health in the presence of you all.

They simply trusted on Jesus and relied on Him that He should do whatever He wishes. This faith, simply relying on Who Jesus was spread to the people around. This way, God's righteousness that had been predicted in the Old Testament was revealed.

Matthew 22:37,39

³⁷ Jesus said to him, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'

³⁹ The second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

The nuance that Jesus talked was

You will love your God with all your heart. You will love your neighbor as yourself. Because you will have the Holy Spirit Who reveals the Father and the Son.

3-5. Righteousness of God Disclosed in our Daily Life

Righteousness of God is to be disclosed to us every day.

Ephesians 2:10

¹⁰For we are his creative work, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so we can do them.

After we believed in Jesus Christ, we are God's creative work. God created everything in the world. God also created or prepared the good works we ought to do every day and even every minute. So the best thing we are to do is to trust God. God leads us to do good works that He has prepared for us. He will make it possible.

What is required for us is simply to trust God.

I was asked to preach for this morning about a month ago. At that time I felt that this was of God's leading. And I thought of preaching from today's passage.

However preparing a message in English is a big job for me. I have to first write in Japanese, then I translate it into English.

I usually preach with a rough script, but speaking at OIC needs perfect verbatim scripts both English and Japanese. So I need several times more hours for preparation. I started weeks before. Then, since I spent more time close with the Bible passages, I felt I was soaked in the Word, and deeper insights have revealed onto me, which was truly a blessing.

I promised to bring the English and Japanese scripts to the OIC office to have my English checked on Tuesday last week. I kept working toward the deadline, but I was not sure if I could make it in time. But the core of today's message is "Righteousness of God has been disclosed, through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe." So I did not have to finish it up by my working too hard. I did not feel that I had to spurt. I kept thinking of the faithfulness of Jesus. On Monday night, I thought that I could not make it by tomorrow's appointed time. I was thinking of asking to postpone the meeting appointment. But I thought that Christ is faithful, so I should just follow Him. I just kept going with Him. I printed out the scripts and went to the office. I arrived at the office, five minutes before the appointed time, 1pm. It was a miracle to me.

Just trusting on the faithfulness of Jesus and keep on going with Him. This is the message of the Bible.

Shall we pray.

Father, You want us to walk just trusting on the faithfulness of Jesus, rather than simply doing our best, so that Your righteousness should be revealed to us and to many people around us.

I pray in Jesus' Name. Amen.