

The Principle of Faith

How are you all doing? Japan has the highest number of Covid-19 cases in the world and the whole society is still not functioning. How is everyone in Canada doing? Above all, I am thankful that we can worship together like this.

Now, I would like to start today's message. Please look at verse 9. "What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin." Today is the fifth message on Romans, and up to the fourth we have looked in detail at the sins of the Gentiles and the sins of the elect Jews. Each time I had exclaimed, "We are all sinners." Which some of you may have found a bit painful and uncomfortable to hear. I heard that Romans 1:18-3:18 has not fit so much for the Sunday worship because the sins of humankind are laid bare a lot. Therefore, I think that you have been uncomfortable from emphasis on sin repeatedly. And so did I every month as I prepared the message.

However, in today's message, we can find that beyond the dark and painful truth that we are all sinners, there is a delight of grace.

<Humanity Declared to be Sinners>

Now, look at verse 10. It says, "As it is written: 'There is no one righteous, not even one'". Summing up what the Apostle Paul has said so far, he declares, "No human being is righteous" (Psalms 14:3) Not the Gentiles, not the Jews, not the historically famous religious leaders, not the CEO of an IT company who shared his wealth with the poor, not the criminals, not the victims of crime, not the country pure girl and so on. None of them are righteous, the Bible declares. From a human perspective, it is tempting to throw up one's hands and say, "Objection!" But since the standard of "right" is God's standard, not ours. That is why none of us can object before God.

<The Fact of Sin>

Now let us look at the MRI of sin. Paul summarizes sin, quoting liberally from Psalms 14 and 53. Look at verses 11-18. "There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God (v. 11). All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one (v. 12). Their throats are open graves; their tongues

practice deceit. "The poison of vipers is on their lips (v. 13). "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness (v. 14)." "Their feet are swift to shed blood (v. 15); ruin and misery make their ways (v. 16), and the way of peace they do not know (v. 17)". "There is no fear of God before their eyes (v. 18)."

We have spent so many chapters now discussing that we can all agree that we are sinners. But here we should focus on how such sin came to abound. For example, when we get sick and you have many kinds of symptoms. And by looking at the symptoms, we can find the disease lurking deep within and treat it. Like this, the root of human sin is that there is no one who seeks God and no one who fears God, as in verses 11 and 18. The result of this comes in verse 23. Because we have sinned, fallen short of God's glory. Originally, we would have had an intimate relationship with God. To have this intimate relationship with God is the state of "receiving God's glory.

The biblical awareness of sin does not say that it is good if we correct what is morally and ethically wrong in human eyes. The consciousness of sin that God is asking us to have is saying 'to live apart from God, not to be conscious of God, and not to believe in God'. I want you to think in this aspect when you think about what the Bible says about sin.

<Every mouth is silenced to God's judgment>

Look at verses 19 and 20. "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God (v. 19). Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin (v. 20). So far, what the Apostle Paul has been examining is that we are sinners who have sinned. This was to prevent any one person from complaining or objecting to God's judgment. Our sin made God's judgment inevitable. The Law includes the five books of Moses and the prophets, but the entire Old Testament is a history of human failure to live up to God's righteousness, a history of human sin. For sinners, contact with the Law makes them more and more aware of what sin is.

<What is the righteousness of God?>

But now, here is the gospel. Look at verse 21: "But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify." The word "now" emphasizes that the times have changed since the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ occurred. And it emphasizes that the cross of Jesus Christ is as promised in the Old Testament, which means that it did not just happen one day,

but has historical continuity. God is just and true, and He has fulfilled through Jesus Christ the promises He made to Abraham. The "righteousness of God" has two aspects: His righteousness and His justification of sinners. What, then, are the characteristics of God's righteousness?

<"The righteousness of God recognized by faith">

See verse 22. "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus to all who believe. There is no difference (v. 22)." Just as this truth that we are sinners before God does not discriminate against all people, so there is no discrimination at all in the salvation of those who believe. It is only by believing that God's righteousness is imputed to us. I would like to discuss this a little more later in the "Principle of Faith" section.

<"God's righteousness is grace">

Look at verses 23-25. "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (v. 23), and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (v. 24). God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished (v25).

The "righteousness of God" was made through the atoning work of Jesus Christ. 'Redemption' is an ancient commercial term for buying someone back with a ransom. Jesus Christ made a great sacrifice by dying on the cross to atone for the sins of those who believe in Him. Because of this, He forgave the sins we believers have committed up to now. This is free grace. It is free because the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is too costly to put a price on it. We don't need to pay 30 million yen (about 200,000 US dollars) for a Bible for this gospel. We do not need to sell our homes to buy a jar. Last month one offender attacked Former Prime Minister Abe and due to this incident people experienced a huge social shock about religion, since the Aum Shinrikyo incident that attacked the citizens on the subway with Sarin gas in 1995.

But I thought that this is the time to tell people more about the right God. The Bible says that sinners can be forgiven and saved for free through Jesus! It teaches that we don't need to be a pastor or a missionary, we don't have to offer a lot of money, we don't even have to volunteer in the church. This love of the cross of Jesus Christ is simply a grace that we accept with one word 'thank you'.

For many years I was lacking understanding about this "grace". So, while preparing this message, I looked it up and would like to think about it together with you. In the Old Testament, there are two words for grace, 'hen and hesed' in Hebrew. 'Hên' is

commonly known as mercy or favor from others. The word "hesed" indicates, for example, joint indebtedness with relatives. It also has the meaning of a firm covenantal bond with God.

Other than this, the most notable word is the Greek word 'charis' in Greek which you have heard often. 'Charis' expresses the love that forgives the sins of those who have left God and welcomes us as His people. 'Charis' is not a 'thing'. That means 'God Himself, God's action and union with the Personality of Jesus Christ (John 1:17; 1 Corinthians 13:13, Galatians 1:6)'. **2 Corinthians 13:13, "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all,"** The pastor blessed us often with this word, grace after the service. I had been misunderstanding the meaning of "grace" that I was told every week. At that time, I thought grace were things to meet our daily needs. Sometimes I wondered what grace was! Even though I am still suffering with lacking. Have I really received grace from Jesus?

But the word "grace" in the Bible refers to 'the grace of the cross'. It refers to the grace that unites us with Jesus Christ after we have been forgiven of our sins. It was really eye-opening to realize this. How did you understand "grace"? If you know that your personal union with Jesus Christ is grace, don't you think you can live a happy and peaceful life from now on, no matter what? Even if we cannot find a job, if our marriage is in trouble, if we get divorced, if our children don't listen to us, if we get sick, if we get into a car accident, whatever the situation, union with Jesus Christ is possible, and this love has already been given to us from the time we believe Jesus. We are happy when we are embraced by the love of Jesus Christ, even when we are sometimes lacking or unsatisfied. Gratitude overflows. **Romans. 8:39, "Neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."**

By the way, sometimes we cannot understand why God gave us this grace, why He loves mankind so much. This is the realm of mystery, and God gives this grace to human beings because He is the righteous One. We can only thank God for His love and grace. **Psalm 8:4, 5: "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?"** King David would have been thrilled by God's love for people like himself, a sinner. There is nothing we can do except to be thankful for God's one-sided love for humankind. I pray that the grace of Jesus Christ will overflow into our hearts.

<The Principle of Faith>

Now this grace is given to those who believe, and the apostle Paul refers to this as the 'principle of faith'. See verses 26-28. He says, **"He did it to demonstrate his justice at**

the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus (v26). Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No but on that of faith (v. 27). For we maintain that we are justified by faith apart from observing the law (v. 28)."

The apostle Paul says that the Jews emphasize the law so much that we Christians have a principle like a law, too. It is called "the principle of faith". I find this expression very interesting. Some might question why limit salvation only to "those who believe" when God, being omnipotent, could just give faith to all at once. However, God has given free will to human beings since the time of the first man, Adam, in Genesis. God is not a pushy person, so He waits painfully for us to truly love and believe in Him. You may think, "Why is God like that?" But when you consider the reality that there are people who hear the gospel but refuse to believe it, it becomes a little clearer. However, God gives life to those who believe and those who do not believe alike by sending rain and shining His sun. In this way, God is waiting to open the way of salvation to all the nations and to all people, but we, as sinners, are not able to go that way. I pray that all of us will become believers.

Now, let us review what the "principle of faith" is. **Romans 1:17.** "For in the gospel 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." The word "faith" is spoken of throughout the Bible. I once thought that "faith" meant "self-confidence. But the Bible has a different meaning of course. People with weak egos, who lack self-confidence, can believe in Jesus. It is through this faith that we can be firmly united with Jesus. We all should remember this "Principle of faith" and try it every day.

When I sometimes panic these days, I pray to God with faith. The other day I prayed with faith for the Neufeld's cats. And I pray for my church's member and family. We can try the "Principle of faith" on a daily lives, and it make our life of faith more enjoyable. Through the faith, not only Christians can go to heaven and have eternal life after death, but also we can live with faith in every aspect of our real lives now. I pray that all of us can firmly follow this "Principle of faith" and meet and commune with the living God every day.

<The Principle of faith fulfills the law>

Then you wonder if faith alone does not require righteous deeds. **See verses 29-31.** "Is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too (v29), since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith (v. 30). Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith?"

Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law (v. 31)."

Faith values the spirit and motives of righteous deeds. Jesus says. **Matthew 5:17**, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." That we believe in Jesus is not to destroy the Law of God and that is perfectly fulfilled by God's side. And when Jesus taught the law against adultery, He also pointed out that even the sin in the heart that looks at a woman with a lustful heart is sin (Matthew 5:27). Jesus emphasized the spirit of the Law. And from the time Christians believe in Jesus, they are transformed into the holiness that God desires with the help of the Holy Spirit.

I stayed in Canada for a year in 2007. That was my first visit to Canada, but there was one episode that left a strong impression on me. As I think I have mentioned before, it was that the ticket gate of Sky train was not closed just opened. When I looked around, there were no station staff either. It might make people to try getting on the Sky train without buying a ticket. I realized that Canada government respected their citizens' morality. I was impressed that Vancouver was like a heaven on earth. On the rare occasions, young people mischievously attempted to board without paying and they were caught by the police. But most citizens followed the laws of the Sky Train turnstiles, which had no restrictions. How proud and how joyful it must be to have human free will respected without the laws! I was praising the citizens of Vancouver highly for being the best citizens they could be.

This "Principle of faith" that the Bible speaks of is far more voluntary and best than the law. A far higher quality is demanded of us than the law shows us. God wants us to reach His level, His glory and commune with Him. God's expectations for us are very high.

Thank you all for your hard work up to chapter 3. We have come to a very difficult point. But from chapter 4, we will start to see concrete examples of what is the "Principle of faith". Please look forward to it.

Prayer.

Beloved Heavenly Father. We were sinners who could not escape God's judgment. We thank you for the grace of being saved from this hopeless situation by God's unilateral love. We thank God for the grace that God's love has given us Jesus Christ as our Redeemer. We are saved simply by believing in the grace of the cross of Jesus Christ. We thank God that we can be firmly united with Jesus Christ through His grace by faith. Please give the grace of the love of Jesus Christ to our brothers and sisters who are suffering by illness and other problems. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.