**CR02 - The Starting Point of Righteousness**

**Pastor Bill Lehman**  
*Source:* [*https://pastorbilllehman.org/audio-sermons/*](https://pastorbilllehman.org/audio-sermons/)

**Main Point 1: The Negative Side of Justification by Faith**

**Time Stamp: [00:01:35]**

Pastor Lehman introduces what he calls the "negative side" of justification by faith—a crucial aspect that is often omitted from modern preaching. He explains that justification by faith involves "laying the glory of man in the dust," which means recognizing that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. This doctrine declares that if Christ must be our righteousness, then we have none of our own. All our good works—Sabbath keeping, tithe paying, missionary work, preaching—are not righteousness when viewed apart from Christ. This truth was particularly difficult for the leaders during the 1888 movement because it stripped away their sense of personal accomplishment and revealed their complete dependence on Christ's righteousness alone.

**Self-Introspection Questions:**

1. What areas of my spiritual life do I take pride in, and how would I feel if told these accomplishments are "filthy rags" without Christ?
2. When I think about my relationship with God, am I more focused on what I've done for Him or what He's done for me?
3. How do I react when my spiritual achievements or character are questioned or diminished?

**Main Point 2: Human Nature's Resistance to Self-Depreciation**

**Time Stamp: [00:09:43]**

The sermon explores why people naturally resist the message of their own spiritual poverty. Pastor Lehman explains that humans gravitate toward anything that elevates self-worth and reject anything that depreciates it. He contrasts modern emphasis on self-esteem, self-love, and personal worth with the biblical teaching that we are nothing apart from Christ. Using Romans 10:3, he shows how the Jews rejected God's righteousness because they were seeking to establish their own. As long as we are satisfied with our own righteousness—even partially—we will never hunger and thirst for His righteousness. This resistance is natural because admitting our spiritual bankruptcy feels threatening to our identity and self-perception.

**Self-Introspection Questions:**

1. In what ways do I seek validation and worth through my own achievements rather than through God's love for me?
2. How comfortable am I with being completely dependent on Christ, with no personal contribution to my salvation?
3. What would change in my daily spiritual practice if I truly believed I could do nothing good apart from Christ?

**Additional Insight: The Comfort Found in Complete Dependence**

**Time Stamp: [00:27:45]**

Between the discussion of human resistance and the practical implications, Pastor Lehman offers a profound insight using Isaiah 40:1-2. He explains that when we accept Christ as our complete righteousness, "her warfare is accomplished"—the struggle to become righteous in ourselves ceases. This is the comfort God offers: we don't have to fight to attain righteousness because in Christ, we have already attained it. The warfare stops the moment we accept Him as our justification. This represents the transition from striving in our own strength to resting in His accomplished work.

**Main Point 3: The Necessity of Recognizing Our Utter Inability**

**Time Stamp: [00:25:24]**

Pastor Lehman draws from Patriarchs and Prophets (page 524) to explain why God gave Israel the Old Covenant—not to save them, but to teach them their "utter inability" to render obedience to God. Just as the Israelites had to learn they were totally incapable of righteousness in their own strength, we must come to the same realization. The pastor illustrates this with a powerful story of a church elder who, after 40 years of faithful service, realized that all his works were "no good" without Christ. This man's six-week period of silence and distress represents the painful but necessary process of letting go of self-righteousness. Only when we cease relying on our own efforts and wholly trust in Christ's merits can we be accepted by God and find true peace.

**Self-Introspection Questions:**

1. What would I lose if I truly accepted that I have "no good thing" in myself apart from Christ?
2. How has my understanding of my own spiritual condition changed over the years, and what resistance do I still feel?
3. Am I willing to experience the discomfort of having my self-righteousness exposed if it leads to a deeper relationship with Christ?

**Closing Reflection**

Pastor Lehman's message challenges us to embrace what may be the most difficult yet liberating truth of Christianity: we are nothing apart from Christ, yet everything in Him. The sermon's power lies not just in its theological precision, but in its honest acknowledgment of how threatening this truth feels to our natural self-perception. As Pastor Lehman notes, "Only needy souls will ever plead for the righteousness of Christ."

**Final Question for Contemplation:**  
If accepting our complete spiritual poverty is the starting point of righteousness, what keeps us from taking this first step, and what would we gain by finally letting go?

*I encourage you to listen to Pastor Lehman's audio sermons at https://pastorbilllehman.org/audio-sermons/ for keen insights, deeper nuggets, and delicate nuances that he has crafted into his message.*

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