**CR04 - Grace or Merit**

**Sermon Summary**

**Source:** <https://pastorbilllehman.org/audio-sermons/>
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**Main Point 1: The False Understanding of Justification by Faith**

**Time Stamp:** [00:01:03]

The speaker begins by addressing a common misunderstanding about justification by faith - the belief that while we are pardoned by God's grace, we must prove our righteousness through our actions over time. He shares his personal experience of believing this flawed theology for many years, thinking that justification meant being forgiven by grace but having to establish righteousness through prayer, Bible study, and trying harder. This led to frustration as he noticed his sinful habits persisting and sometimes worsening despite his efforts. He realized that many people, including himself, were trying to establish their own righteousness while claiming to understand justification by faith, not recognizing that Christ wants to be both salvation AND righteousness to us.

**Self-Introspection Questions:**

1. Do I find myself believing that while God pardons me by grace, I must prove my righteousness through my actions and behavior over time?
2. When I examine my spiritual growth, am I frustrated by persistent sinful habits despite my efforts to improve?
3. Have I been trying to establish my own righteousness while thinking I understand justification by faith?

**Main Point 2: Biblical Truth - Righteousness Comes Entirely by Grace**

**Time Stamp:** [00:11:44]

The speaker presents extensive biblical evidence that justification is entirely by grace, not works. He emphasizes Romans 3:24 ("justified freely by His grace"), Romans 11:6 ("if by grace, then it is no more of works"), and multiple other passages showing that righteousness comes from God to us, not from our efforts. He explains that righteousness is embodied in Christ, and we receive righteousness by receiving Him - not by trying to produce it ourselves. The speaker clarifies that this righteousness becomes "a living principle" in our lives that transforms character and controls conduct when we accept Christ as our righteousness. This is not about deserving or meriting God's favor, but about receiving His unmerited grace.

**Self-Introspection Questions:**

1. Do I truly believe that righteousness comes entirely from God as a gift, or do I still think I need to earn or contribute to it?
2. Am I trying to receive righteousness by receiving Christ Himself, or am I still attempting to produce righteousness through my own efforts?
3. How does understanding righteousness as "a living principle" that transforms and controls change my approach to spiritual growth?

**Special Insight: The Empty House Principle**

**Time Stamp:** [00:21:03]

Between the main theological points, the speaker introduces a crucial illustration from Matthew 12:43-45 about the man from whom an evil spirit was cast out. He explains that justification involves a dual action: not only emptying the heart of sin (pardon) but also filling the vacuum with Christ's righteousness. Many Christians are content with just having their sins removed, leaving their hearts like an "empty house" - swept and garnished but vacant. This makes them vulnerable to even worse spiritual conditions. The speaker emphasizes that we must not only be forgiven but also filled with Christ's presence and righteousness. Using gardening metaphors, he explains that poisonous plants must be uprooted AND good seeds must be planted and tended by Christ, the wise gardener.

**Main Point 3: The Practical Application - Christ as Both Salvation and Righteousness**

**Time Stamp:** [00:27:11]

The final main point focuses on the practical reality that Christ must be received as both Savior (for pardon) and Lord (for righteousness). The speaker warns against the Jewish mistake described in Romans 10:3-4 of being ignorant of God's righteousness and trying to establish their own. When we attempt to establish our own righteousness, we become self-centered ("I, I, I and me, me, me"), driving people away including family members. Christ is "the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believes" - meaning He perfectly fulfilled the law and offers that fulfillment to us. The speaker concludes with Luther's warning that if we lose this understanding of justification, we lose true Christian doctrine and fall back into confidence in our own works.

**Self-Introspection Questions:**

1. Am I allowing Christ to be both my Savior for pardon AND my righteousness for right living, or am I only accepting Him as Savior?
2. Do I exhibit self-centeredness and pride in my spiritual achievements that pushes others away from me?
3. Am I trusting in Christ's perfect fulfillment of the law, or am I still trying to establish my own righteousness through law-keeping?

**Closing Challenge**

The sermon concludes with a powerful appeal: Christ stands with outstretched hands filled with His righteousness, asking "Why will you die? Why do you try to establish your own when mine is so freely given?" The speaker challenges listeners to examine whether they are diminishing God's goodness by trying to be good enough to be accepted, when we are already accepted in Christ if we will receive Him in His fullness.

**Final Reflection Question:** Will you trust God's grace enough to stop trying to establish your own righteousness and instead receive Christ as both your salvation and your righteousness?

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

**Blessings,**
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