

Introduction

Actually, there is little need to apologize to Martin Luther! His flash of insight, on the famous staircase, that the just shall live by faith, was indeed a major landmark in the Protestant Reformation. But the 95 theses that he nailed to the door of the church at Wittenberg were not primarily a further discussion of the subject of justification by faith. Instead, they dealt primarily with necessary reforms in the religious system of the day, insisting on freedom of conscience, condemning the sale of indulgences, and thundering against papal abuses.

The 95 theses in this volume are centered on the truths of righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ alone. It is a message of timeless application, ever on the crescendo, until the time when one interest prevails, one subject swallows up all other subjects—Christ our righteousness.

The purpose of this book is to encourage thought and study on the great theme of the righteousness of Christ received by faith. An earlier edition included a separate set of Bible lessons. In this revised edition the Bible lessons are included in the book so that the reader will be sure to have a strong Bible base for the theses. (The first four lessons include the answers to the questions as a sample of how you can fill in the answers to the rest of the lessons.)

This book is written for people of all faiths and of no faith. But be careful! If you find yourself agreeing with even the first thesis, you may be hooked. If you still find yourself in agreement after the first twelve theses, there's no escape! Anyone who really agrees with the first twelve theses is going to be hard pressed to disagree with the rest, because the first twelve form the basis of understanding for the whole package.

The theory of righteousness by faith is dynamite. Once you really understand it, you are never the same. But the theory is not enough. The real power comes as you *experience* it for yourself. I invite you today to the experience of a lifetime!

95 Theses on Righteousness by Faith

Righteousness

1. A Christian does what is right *because* he is a Christian, never *in order* to be one. John 15:5.

2. Righteousness equals Jesus. We have no righteousness apart from Him. Romans 1:16, 17.

3. The only way to seek righteousness is to seek Jesus. Romans 4:4, 5.

4. Christianity and salvation are not based on what you *do*, but on whom you *know*. Romans 3:28.

5. Doing right by not doing wrong is not doing right. Being good by not being bad is not being good. Matthew 23:27, 28.

6. Righteousness will make you moral, but morality will not make you righteous. Matthew 5:20.

7. Our good works have nothing to do with *causing* us to be saved. Our bad works have nothing to do with *causing* us to be lost. Romans 3:20.

Sin

8. Everyone is born sinful (or self-centered) because everyone is born separated from God. Psalm 58:3.

9. God does not hold us accountable for being born sinful. Ezekiel 18:20; John 1:9.

10. We sin because we are sinful. We are not sinful because we sin. Romans 7:14-17.

11. Sin (singular)—living life apart from God—results in sins (plural)—doing wrong things. 1 John 3:4.

12. Whoever lives life apart from God is living in sin. John 16:8, 9.

Faith

13. The best definition for faith is trust. Faith is depending upon another. Matthew 15:21-28.

14. Knowing God results in trusting God. If you don't know Him, you won't trust Him. If you don't trust Him, you don't know Him. 2 Timothy 1:12.

15. Faith is a fruit of the Spirit, not a fruit of the person. It is not something we work on, or work up. Galatians 5:22.

16. Positive thinking does not produce genuine faith, but faith will produce positive thinking. Romans 10:17.

Surrender

17. Surrender is giving up on ourselves, not giving up our sins. Giving up our sins is the result of giving up on ourselves and seeking God. Romans 10:3, 4.

18. Working to give up our sins can keep us from giving up on ourselves. Romans 9:31, 32.

19. No one can crucify himself or bring himself to surrender. Someone else must do that for him. Galatians 2:20.

20. We are controlled by God or Satan. The only control we have is to choose who will control us. Romans 6:16.

21. The surrender of the will is the surrender of the power of choice, but we use our power of choice to surrender it. We give up our power of choice toward behavior; we keep our power of choice toward relationship. Philippians 2:13; Romans 6:11.

22. The only *deliberate* effort in the Christian life is to seek God. Spontaneous effort toward other things will result. John 15:5; Philippians 4:13.

23. Growing Christians experience on-again, off-again surrender. Sometimes they depend on God, sometimes on themselves. Luke 9:54; Matthew 16:16, 17, 22, 23.

Conversion

24. Conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit, which produces a change of attitude toward God and creates a new capacity for knowing God. John 3:3-8.

25. Conversion leads to a changed life. Ezekiel 36:26, 27.

26. Conversion and repentance are continuing experiences, not once only. Luke 9:23.

Repentance

27. Repentance is sorrow for sin and turning away from sins. Repentance is a gift. Therefore, sorrow for sin is a gift, and turning away from sins is a gift. Acts 5:31.

28. We do not change our lives in order to come to Christ. We come to Him just as we are, and He changes our lives. John 6:37.

29. God gives us repentance *before* He gives forgiveness. Acts 3:19.

30. Worldly sorrow is being sorry we broke a law and got caught. Godly sorrow is being sorry we broke a heart and hurt our best Friend. 2 Corinthians 7:10.

Forgiveness

31. The only known sin that can't be forgiven is the one for which we don't repent and ask forgiveness. 1 John 1:9.

32. Forgiveness does the sinner no good unless he accepts it. Psalm 86:5.

33. God's forgiveness is not limited, but our acceptance of His forgiveness can be. Matthew 18:21, 22.

34. Those who are forgiven much will love much. Those who love much will obey much. Luke 7:41-43; John 14:15.

35. Forgiveness is free, but it is not cheap. It cost the life of God's dear Son. John 3:16.

The Cross

36. God forgives sinners, not sins, but the Bible calls this the forgiveness of sins. Jesus died because sins could not be forgiven. Isaiah 53:5, 6, 8.

37. Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture. 1 Corinthians 15:3.

38. The Cross made it possible for God to be just and yet to forgive anyone. Romans 3:23-26.

39. The death of Christ was necessary in order for us to be forgiven. John 3:14, 15.

40. We can add nothing to what Jesus did at the Cross, but God can add plenty. Hebrews 7:25; 9:11, 12.

Assurance

41. Staying with Jesus is just as important as coming to Him. John 15:4.

42. Assurance of salvation continues through the daily personal relationship with Jesus. 1 John 5:11, 12.

43. Christians should know that they have the assurance of salvation today. John 6:47.

44. The Bible teaches once-saved always-saved as long as you keep saved. Matthew 24:12, 13.

45. Peace does not come from victory, but victory comes from peace. John 8:11.

46. One reason we keep sinning is that we don't believe we are forgiven. Assurance leads to victory. Uncertainty leads to defeat. 1 John 3:2, 3.

Relationship

47. Righteousness by faith is an experience, not just a theory. Philippians 3:9, 10.

48. The Christian's devotional life is not optional. The relationship with God is the entire basis of the ongoing Christian life. John 17:3.

49. If we don't regularly take time for the Bible and prayer, we will eventually die spiritually. John 6:53.

50. Just because you read the Bible and pray doesn't mean you'll have a relationship with God, but if you don't, you won't. John 5:39.

51. The primary purpose of prayer is not to get answers, but to know Jesus. Revelation 3:20; John 17:3.

52. The primary purpose of Bible study is not to get information, but to know Jesus. Revelation 3:20.

53. Things often become worse when we pray until we learn to seek Jesus for His sake, not ours. Job.

54. Anyone who gets discouraged with his relationship because of his behavior is a legalist. Romans 7:14-24.

Obedience

55. True obedience is a gift from God. (The robe is free!) Matthew 22:11-14.

56. Real obedience comes from the inside out, not from the outside in. Matthew 23:25, 26.

57. Genuine obedience is natural and spontaneous. It comes only through the faith relationship with Christ. John 14:15.

58. One who is depending on God for power doesn't have to try hard to obey. He would have to try hard not to obey. 1 John 3:6.

59. Obedience that is only external is false obedience. Matthew 5:20.

60. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our lives will be lives of continual obedience. 1 John 2:3.

Law

61. Anyone who tries to live the Christian life apart from Christ is not a Christian. He is a legalist, whether conservative or liberal. Galatians 3:1-3.

62. There is no power for genuine obedience in the law. Mount Sinai is no good without Mount Calvary. Romans 8:3.

63. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness, but not the end of the law. Romans 10:4.

Works

64. Good works done apart from Christ are bad works. Matthew 7:22, 23.

65. The purpose of good works is not to save us, but to bring glory to God. Matthew 5:16.

66. When it comes to genuine faith and works, you can't have one without the other. James 2:17, 18, 26.

Growth

67. Faith grows in quantity, not quality. Growth is in the constancy of dependence upon God. Luke 17:5, 6.

68. You don't grow by trying to grow. Matthew 6:27.

69. Christians grow stronger by realizing their weakness. When they are weak, then they are strong. 2 Corinthians 12:9, 10.

70. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us, but without Him we can do nothing. Philippians 4:13; John 15:5.

Abiding

71. Satan has no power to cause those who depend on God to sin, but those who depend on themselves are easily defeated. 2 Corinthians 10:4, 5.

72. The abiding, daily relationship with God leads to an abiding surrender, moment-by-moment dependence on Him. John 15:1-5.

73. Looking to self is always the point of separation from God and breaks the moment-by-moment dependence on Him. Matthew 14:28-30.

74. God will never separate from us, but we can choose to separate from God. Romans 8:35, 38, 39.

Witness

75. The reason God wants us to witness is primarily for our good. Matthew 11:29.

76. The desire to share comes naturally for the genuine Christian (although methods may vary). 2 Corinthians 4:13.

77. The happiest person in the world is the one most involved in serving others. The most miserable person is the one most involved in serving self. Mark 8:35.

78. Christian service in the spiritual life corresponds to exercise in the physical life. Acts 3:6-9.

79. We cannot give to others that which we do not ourselves possess. Mark 5:19; John 3:11.

Temptation

80. The real issue in temptation is whether to live life apart from Christ. John 16:8, 9.

81. Temptations become sins when we consent to them in our minds. Matthew 5:21, 22, 28.

82. Jesus was tempted to do right, but in His own power, and so are we. Matthew 4:2, 3.

83. The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations, but not the ungodly. 2 Peter 2:9.

84. Temptations are not overcome at the time of temptation, but always before. Hebrews 4:16.

Victory

85. Victory is not something we achieve. It is something we receive. 1 Corinthians 15:57.

86. In the Christian warfare we are active toward the fight of faith and passive toward the fight of sins. Ephesians 6:10-18.

87. Real victory is getting the victory over trying to get the victory. 2 Chronicles 20:15, 17.

Perfection

88. Perfection of character is not our work. It is God's work in us. Hebrews 13:20, 21.

89. Perfection can be a dangerous topic if it focuses our attention on ourselves and our own works. Galatians 3:3.

Jesus

90. Jesus was like Adam before the Fall in that He had a sinless nature—He was not born separated from God. Jesus was like Adam after the Fall in physical strength, mental power, and moral worth (backbone). Luke 1:35; Hebrews 2:17, 18.

91. Jesus had no advantage over us in overcoming temptations. Hebrews 4:15.

92. Jesus overcame temptations the same way we can overcome: by power from above rather than power from within. John 14:10.

93. Jesus found sins repulsive. So long as we depend on God, we also find sins repulsive. Hebrews 1:8, 9.

94. We can never *be* as Jesus was, but we can *do* as Jesus did. John 14:12.

95. The problem of sin is a broken relationship between God and man. The goal of salvation is to restore the relationship between God and man. Revelation 19:7-9.

RIGHTEOUSNESS

Thesis 1

A Christian does what is right *because* he is a Christian, never *in order* to be one.

It happened during the first few weeks in a new parish. At this church, the incoming pastor's goal was to visit every family to begin getting acquainted. But it was easy to stop with just small talk. "Is that Aunt Minnie's picture up there on the mantle?"

"Yes."

So he came up with a gimmick: one question, the same question, asked at each home. "What is your definition of a Christian?" And he kept a careful record of each response.

"A Christian is one who lives by the golden rule."

"A Christian is honest."

"A Christian is someone who is kind and loving."

"A Christian is a good neighbor."

There were many different answers, but one common denominator. Every answer was a behavioral answer. The name of Christ was conspicuously absent.

You can read reports of newsmen interviewing the man on the street, asking similar questions. The pattern of answers is the same.

"A Christian does this, and does that. A Christian doesn't do the other thing." How often do you hear the response, "A Christian is one who knows and loves Christ"?

What is Christianity? Is it primarily based on behavior? Or is it primarily based on relationship? Here is the bottom line for understanding and experiencing salvation by faith in Christ. Christianity is a matter of knowing Christ. And the behavior which distinguishes the Christian from the non-Christian comes

as a result of the faith relationship with Jesus—it is never the cause.

Let's rephrase this thesis just a bit. An apple tree bears apples because it is an apple tree, never in order to be one. Jesus made the same comparison: "Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit" (Matthew 7:17, 18).

If you're interested in good fruit, the starting place is a good tree. Your task, then, is to water the tree, fertilize it perhaps, and allow the sun and rain and wind to do their work. There is no need to try hard to produce fruit. If you have a healthy tree, the fruit will come as a matter of course.

That's how it is in the Christian life. The one who tries to live the Christian life by working on behavior is on a dead-end street. It is by the renewing of the heart that the grace of God works to transform the life. No mere external change is sufficient to bring us into harmony with God. There are many who try to reform by correcting this or that bad habit, and they hope in this way to become Christians, but they are beginning in the wrong place. Our first work is with the heart.

No matter how upright your life may be, no matter how many good deeds you may perform, no matter how religious you may appear, you are not a genuine Christian until you know Jesus Christ personally, one-to-one. Doing what is right will never make you a Christian. It will only make you moral.

The early church focused so continually on the Lord Jesus Christ that He was the theme of their thought and conversation. "Christ did this, and Christ said that." Finally someone said, "Let's just call them *Christ-ians*."

What would you be called if you were named according to the things you speak and think of the most? Are you merely a good person? Or are you really a Christian? Think about it!