

A Reformed Response to the Necessity of  
the Second Reformation by Righteousness:  
A Reformed Critique of the Concept of  
Righteousness in Minjung Theology  
Centering on Romans 9:30-10:13

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## [초록]

Minjung Theology represents a distinctive form of Korean theology, emphasizing the plight of the Minjung, or the common people, who bore the brunt of Korea's division and autocratic rule during the mid-twentieth century. As we transitioned into the 21st century, proponents of this theology have contended that Korean churches, profoundly influenced by the First Reformation's emphasis on "sola fide" or "faith alone" during the sixteenth century, prioritized individual faith, prayer, and grace within personal life contexts. Paradoxically, they seemed to display indifference towards the marginalized Minjung and their lived experiences. This has led to a perceived schism between theology and ethics within these religious institutions. Minjung theologians interpret the Christian concept of "Sin" as the Korean tradition concept of "Han" and suffering of Jesus Christ as suffering on behalf of the oppressed "Minjung." Minjung theologians assert that to address this discrepancy, there needs to be a second reformation, instigated by a renewed understanding of righteousness or *Fide Cum Opera*, moving away from the Reformation's *Sola Fide* framework. However, it's critical to recognize that the notion of righteousness, as construed by the reformers, was intrinsically linked to faith. The only route to true righteousness was through the justification of faith in Jesus Christ. The teachings of Paul, emphasizing faith, and James, emphasizing conduct, were not in conflict within the purview of the reformers. Instead, these teachings underscored that genuine faith and true righteousness were inseparable. Consequently, the Minjung theologians' proposition for a Second

Reformation predicated on righteousness might be interpreted as a misconception of the original reformers' understanding of faith and righteousness within the Reformation tradition.

**Key Words:** Minjung Theology, Reformed, righteousness, Reformation, Justification by faith, faith

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## I. Introduction

In the 1970s, “Minjung Theology,” the unique Korean indigenous theology, occurred during a unique political situation. The dictatorship and the division of the two Koreas led some Korean theologians to dream of “righteousness” centered on “Minjung” (the people). However, in the 1990s, South Korea’s dictatorship and the military regime collapsed, and Minjung Theology lost its power. In the early 21st Century, Minjung Theology insists that a new Reformation is needed, which consists of “righteousness” rather than “faith alone,” and turning the eyes focused on the state and politics to the church. What is their concept of “righteousness,” and why do they claim that the church needs a new Reformation? In this article, I will compare the understanding of “righteousness” from the Minjung theologians’ perspective and the Reformers’ perspective of it, focusing on the theme of righteousness in Romans 9:30-10:13. Furthermore, this article will address whether it is necessary to have a second Reformation centered on “righteousness” rather than “sola fide.”

## II. The Necessity of the Second Reformation by Righteousness

### 1. Problems of the Korean Church in the view of Minjung Theology

The Minjung theologians strongly condemned the Korean church's corrupt political actualities for not actively participating in the minjung affliction. Deug-Joong Kim criticizes the Korean church,

which focuses only on the quantitative increase of the church and neglects the participation of social reforms, as it suffers from obesity, the problem of eating much, and not wanting to move. He points out that the church members of the Korean church are very eager to attend worship and pray but fail to fulfill their grace in their own lives. He argues that this attitude brings the problem that Korean Christians do not emphasize “a life” but only “faith” in “a life of faith”; in other words, theology and ethics are separate.<sup>1</sup>

This view of the Church of Minjung theologians is rooted in Byung-mu Ahn’s interpretation of the Bible. Ahn finds the biblical rationale for “minjung” in the word “ὄχλος,” which is mentioned in the Gospel of Mark.

The biblical basis of minjung theology is found in Jesus’ ministry and crucifixion. Suh derives this part of his theory from the rather strange interpretations of ὄχλος (ochlos) in the Gospel of Mark by the name of Ahn and a couple of Japanese New Testament scholars. These scholars hold that Mark uses ochlos not merely to refer to a significant theological concept; as he uses the term, they say He did not love it all but showed it to a partisan love for him. He did not love him, the ochlos-minjung, accepting them unconditionally and protecting them without evaluating them.<sup>2</sup>

Ahn contrasts Pauline’s epistles with the Gospel of Mark by analyzing Biblical statements about ecclesiology. Based on Paul’s statement of the church as “the body” in 1 Corinthians 12, Ahn interprets Paul’s understanding of the church as a “minjung-centric

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1 김득중, “오직 믿음만’을 강조하는 신앙생활에 대한 성서신학적 반성,” 『민중과 신학』 통권10호 (2005년 10월호), 1-4.

2 Kim, “Is ‘Minjung Theology’ a Christian Theology,” 254.

organic community.” However, he points out that Paul did not focus on when, where, and why Jesus died, and on the other hand, emphasized only the resurrection of Jesus; based on this fact, Ahn evaluates Paul’s theology as not a historical but an abstract kerygma, so-called “doctrine.” He criticizes that this characteristic of Pauline theology has made us believe in the doctrine of Jesus, not Jesus himself. In contrast, He argues that there is no image of the church in Mark, but the relationship between Jesus and “*ὄχλος*” in the Gospel of Mark is an image of the true relationship with Jesus. In addition, he explains that the author of Luke consciously distinguished Minjung from the Church by using “*λαός*” rather than using the word “*ὄχλος*”<sup>3</sup> This evaluation of Minjung theologians about Pauline theology naturally leads to criticism of the Reformers, who focused much on Paul’s central theme, “solafide.”

## 2. Evaluation of Minjung Theology on Reformation

Deuk-Joong Kim argues that the Protestant theological tradition has focused more on God, faith, and grace than on humanity, morality, and ethics from the theological point of view. One of the roots of this problem is Korean churches’ religious tradition based on the Reformation; in particular, he claims it can be found in Martin Luther’s problematic view of the Bible.

It is well known that the main theological feature of the Reformation tradition is “sola fide,” or “sola gratia.” Luther’s Reformation rejected Roman Catholic Church’s “justification by

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3 안병무, 『전환기의 선교교육』(오산: 한신대학교 출판부, 1977), 323-29.

works” and emphasized “justification by faith.” He emphasized that man does not receive salvation through his deeds and good works but only by faith and grace. The best thing a human being can do before God is faith alone, and there can be no other good than that. The good deed done by a sinner is only a product of sin before God. This position naturally brings importance to grace alone on the one hand and the other to the exclusion of human free will and goodness.<sup>4</sup>

He points out that Luther places more weight on Romans and Galatians, emphasizing “justification by faith,”<sup>5</sup> while criticizing James, who emphasizes human behavior. Moreover, he asserts that Luther tends to absolutize only Paul among the authors of the New Testament and easily ignores or neglects the writings of authors. As a result, the Protestant theological tradition, under the influence of Luther, did not correctly reflect the New Testament, which is the absolute canon of faith.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, citing Anabaptism’s assertion, Ch’ung-gu Pak describes that Calvin’s notion of the bondage of the will and doctrine of predestination destroys human free will and ultimately results in a moral hazard or law abolition. According to Pak, since ethical practice is followed by grace for Luther and Calvin, Luther emphasizes the reality of human sin that requires grace rather than the need for a thorough ethical life. Calvin focuses on the active order of God’s love rather than the ethical life of the believer.<sup>6</sup>

As a result, Deug-Joong Kim evaluates Reformers as follows: (1) Luther had the wrong view of the Bible, emphasizing only “sola fide”

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4 김득중, “오직 믿음만’을 강조하는 신앙생활에 대한 성서신학적 반성,” 5-6.

5 김득중, “오직 믿음만’을 강조하는 신앙생활에 대한 성서신학적 반성,” 6-7.

6 박충구, 『기독교 윤리사』(서울: 대한기독교서회, 1994), 236-43.

and “sola gratia .” His emphasis on this has led to errors in devaluing other parts of Scripture that emphasize acting while raising Romans and Galatians as “the canon within the canon,” which best supports their ideas. Thus, although Luther emphasized “sola Scriptura,” the Scripture, he emphasized only the Pauline epistles, not all of the New Testament. (2) The Reformers emphasized only justification, and the emphasis on sanctification was relatively ignored. This emphasis leads to moral hazard or law abolition. (3) Their theology portrays God as an angry God or a monarchical God; however, God is a “merciful God,” demanding human beings’ decision for newness in universal grace.<sup>7</sup>

### 3. The Second Reformation by Righteousness

This assessment by the Minjung theologians about the Reformers leads them to claim “the Second Reformation of Righteousness and Love,” not “the Reformation by Faith.” In order to understand this claim, the historical background of Korea in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century should be considered. As I mentioned above, the engine of Minjung theology was a resistance against the dictatorial Park regime's political tyranny, the workers' economic exploitation, and the threat of infiltration of communism from North Korea. As a result of the democratization movement of South Koreans in the 1970s and 1980s, South Korea's military regime lost its power, and South Korea became a civilian government in the 1990s. Furthermore, in the early 2000s, the relationship between North and South Korea turned into peace through the Sunshine Policy of South Korea. These political changes

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7 김득중, “오직 믿음만을 강조하는 신앙생활에 대한 성서신학적 반성,” 9-15.



made Minjung theologians lose their impetus and turn their eyes on “the recovery of the world church and the weak.”<sup>8</sup> Arguing that “the Western church is going empty and dying,” Minjung theologians point out that the reason of the illness of the church is that the Protestant churches are based on the problematic theological base of the Reformation. As the answer to the problem, they suggest “the Second Reformation.”<sup>9</sup>

This change of interest can be confirmed by comparing each intention point of the second Reformation between the 1<sup>st</sup> generation and the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Minjung theologians. The 1<sup>st</sup> generation Minjung theologians such as Byung-mu Ahn and Nam-dong Sŏ stress that church and history should be viewed from a national perspective. Ahn argues, “In order for Korean Christianity to survive, it is necessary to open the door to participate in this national history. In order to do this, movements like the Reformation of the West from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century should be actively developed.”<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Minjung theologians, particularly centering on Tae-Soo Im, strongly emphasize the necessity of the Second Reformation by righteousness: “the idea of Luther’s Reformation, “justified by faith,” cannot overcome the crisis of world Christianity. Now we need a second Reformation. I think the third millennium should be the millennium of the Second Reformation. That way, the church and the world will be survive.”<sup>11</sup>

8 차요한, “민중신학의 교회론에 관한 연구” (신학석사학위, 한신대학교, 2013), 33-37.

9 임태수, “제 2 종교개혁의 구원론: 행함 있는 믿음(Fide Cum Opera)으로 구원.” 본헤럴드, March 18, 2017, accessed April 16, 2019, <http://www.bonhd.net/news/articleView.html?idxno=46>.

10 안병무, 『기독교의 개혁을 위한 신학』 (서울: 한국신학연구소, 1999), 411.

11 임태수, “제2종교개혁을 지향하며,” 『민중과 신학』 통권호 (2000년 봄호), 1.

Tae-Soo Im argues that the main reason for the global church crisis is based on the Western church's emphasis on salvation by faith alone. This overemphasis led Christianity to ignorance of deeds. Mentioning James chapter 2 and Matthew 7:21, he argues that Christianity is criticized as unethical and immoral worldwide because it misses the theme of justification in James. So, he claims that Luther's first Reformation, which has too much emphasis on faith alone, should be replaced through the second Reformation, being more focused on the justification by deeds.<sup>12</sup> Deug-Joon Kim also explains that in contrast to the Pauline epistles emphasizing justification by faith, James is a representative letter emphasizing justification by deeds. Citing W. Popkes, Andrew Chester, and G. Barth, he argues as follows:

“Certainly, opposing that Paul rejects (law's) deeds but emphasizes faith alone, it seems that James criticizes Paul. This point is also revealed in James 2:24, where James says “not by faith alone,” referring to the “justification by faith,” the core of the Pauline gospel. James's slogan, “not by faith alone,” is best understood only when understood in response to Paul's slogan, “by faith alone.”<sup>13</sup>

Even quoting H.J. Holzmann, J. Weiss, H.J. Schoeps, and M. Dibelius, he argues that, in Matthew 13:24-28, the author uses the expression “ἐκθρόδος ἄνθρωπος” for ultra-Paulinists because Paul has planted many followers in the church, emphasizing only faith and failing to bear fruit in moral and ethical terms. In sum, from the Minjung

12 임태수, “제 2 종교개혁의 21세기,” 『구약학회소식』 (2007년 6월호), 1.

13 김득중, “‘오직 믿음만’을 강조하는 신앙생활에 대한 성서신학적 반성,” 17-19.

theologians' perspective, the Reformation tradition has made Christians over-emphasize "faith alone" so that instead of tough precession and sanctification, faithful justification can be understood as a salvific doctrine of salvation. These people have exploited the doctrine of grace as an excuse for righteousness, an escape from punishment for crime and bad behavior.<sup>14</sup> Their claim, the necessity of the second Reformation by righteousness, makes us wonder what righteousness is in minjung theology.

### III. What is "Righteousness" in Minjung Theology?

As we have seen, the central theme of Minjung Theology is Minjung (the people). This view of Minjung Theology leads to interpreting several important theological themes from their unique perspectives. So, to analyze their understanding of righteousness, an understanding of the following topics in Minjung theology should be preceded: *Sin (and Han)*, *Justification (and righteousness)*, and *Christ*.

#### 1. Sin (and Han)

Minjung theologians point out that the problem of justification is that the sinner is the main object of justification; in other words, the main concern of justification-soteriology is sinners, repentance of sin, and forgiveness of sin. Nam-dong Sŏ argues that "Sin" is a label that the ruler attaches to the weaker when viewed socially, "so the so-called 'sinners' are 'those who are sinned against' and

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14 김득중, "오직 믿음만을 강조하는 신앙생활에 대한 성서신학적 반성," 22-30.

‘falsely charged people.’”<sup>15</sup> He explains that he should not think that man is not guilty of sin before God, but he should consider cases in history where it is used as a label attached to the powerless.<sup>16</sup> He criticizes the distortion of the Bible’s salvation that traditional theology treats the forgiveness of sin and sin only as a matter between God and the individual in a religious perspective. Moreover, indiscriminately demanding the repentance of sin to all may seem superficially neutral but eventually falls into a theology that serves the ruling class’s interests. Andrew S. Park links the traditional doctrine of justification with sin and criticizes it as follows:

The doctrine of justification by faith is a necessary part of Christian theology for the wrongdoer, yet it has three shortcomings. First, the doctrine views the matter of justification from the wrongdoer’s perspective. Second, it speaks little if at all to the salvation of the wronged. Third, it focuses solely on our relationship with God, diminishing the significance of our relation with our neighbor. ... (the doctrine of justification) delineates how the wrongdoer can be saved but omits how the wrong can be saved.<sup>17</sup>

In order to solve the problem of the doctrine of justification, Minjung theologians bring a unique Korean concept, Han (which means deep resentment). According to Sö, “‘Han’ is an emotional state that occurs when a weak and downtrodden person encounters immorality and his rights are being trampled, but there is no one who tries to solve the person. So, Han is the sound of the Minjung’s

15 서남동, 『민중신학의 탐구』(서울: 한길사, 1983), 107.

16 서남동, 『민중신학의 탐구』, 244.

17 Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 95.

ardent appeal to the sky (or heaven<sup>18</sup>).”<sup>19</sup> He argues that until now, Christian theology has focused on solving the problem of sin; the central task of Minjung theology is solving the problem of Han rather than sin. Park also claims that Han helps us consider the situation of victims; moreover, consideration of Han forms the doctrine of sin and salvation, making us focus on victims (theoppressed) rather than the sinner (the oppressor).<sup>20</sup>

This understanding of Minjung theologians about sin and Han shows that their understanding is significantly different from Reformers’ and most Protestant theologians’ understanding of sin. This difference in understanding of sin makes it possible to speculate that the Minjung theologians’ understanding of righteousness, a contrary concept of sin, would be quite different from the Reformers.

## 2. Justification (Righteousness)

Minjung theologians’ critical view of the “sola fide,” which is the foundation of the Reformation, led them to establish their understanding of Pauline theology. Chang-Nack Kim argues that since Paul opposes the righteousness of the law and the righteousness of faith, and since the righteousness of faith is the righteousness given by God based on the salvation of Jesus Christ, Paul finds justification in the righteousness of God. Therefore, to explain Paul’s justification, the righteousness of God (*δικαιοσύνη Θεού*) should be examined. He argues that it is very important to determine whether

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<sup>18</sup> The original word used by the author is 하늘. In Korean culture, 하늘 can be regarded with many meanings, such as sky, heaven, god, or a supreme thing.

<sup>19</sup> 서남동, 『민중신학의 탐구』, 44.

<sup>20</sup> Park, *The Wounded Heart of God*, 13.

the word “δικαιοσύνη” is an abstract noun that represents a property or attribute or whether it is an action noun that refers to an action or activity. According to him, if this word is interpreted as an abstract noun, “δικαιοσύνη Θεού” means that God’s attribute or existence is righteous. On the other hand, if the word is interpreted as an action noun, two interpretations are possible: (1) God’s righteous attitude, action, or behavior; (2) the righteous activity or event God does to man.<sup>21</sup> He argues that the “imputed vs. infused” righteousness controversy between the Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches is a misunderstanding arising from the use of “δικαιοσύνη” as an abstract noun. The word “δικαιοσύνη” is an action noun because whether the relationship of God’s righteousness and human being as an imputed righteousness or an imputed righteousness; the relationship can only be explained when the word is interpreted as an active noun. In addition, he asserts that if “δικαιοσύνη” is an action noun, “δικαιοσύνη Θεού” means the act of salvation performed by God or the event of salvation attained by God. This means that only God is the subject of the act of justification, and man is the object.<sup>22</sup> Through this logic, he reaches the following statement:

Paul, in the righteousness of God, changed the very existence itself. However, the change is not an existential personal but a practical one that changed the social position from being privileged in social relations to being persecuted and depressed. Paul’s confession, “that I may know him and the power of his resurrection,

21 김창락, “바울의 의인론: 무엇이 문제인가?” 『신학연구』 통권27호(1986년 9월호), 272-73.

22 김창락, “민중신학에서 본 칭의론,” 『헤르메네이아 투데이』 성서사랑방 13호(2000년 10월호), 65-66; 78.

and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, (Philippians 3:10, ESV),” does not mean that he will participate in mystic suffering or religious penance, but means a determination to participate in the work that Christ practiced until he crucified.<sup>23</sup>

“Righteousness comes from the grace of God.” “Righteousness comes from the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.” Since faith accepts God’s grace and the meaning of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, we can combine the above two sentences as “Righteousness comes from faith.”<sup>24</sup>

Here, we find the last puzzle piece for a correct understanding of “righteousness” in Minjung theology: Jesus Christ in Minjung theology.

### 3. The Passion of Christ

According to Chang-Nack Kim, it is Christ who has completely changed Paul’s life, and Paul has summarized the whole life of Christ and its meaning as the crucifixion of Jesus. Also, the death on the cross maximizes suffering by supporting the side of the weak, and thus Paul’s confession that he died on the cross with Christ is symbolic of a change from a self-centered, worldly life to a Christ-centric life.<sup>25</sup> This claim may seem somewhat similar to the interpretation of the Reformers. However, the meaning of the life and death of Jesus Christ, as Minjung theologians say, is significantly different from

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23 김창락, “민중신학에서 본 칭의론,” 75.

24 김창락, “갈라디아서-복음을 위한 투쟁(16): 의인론-무권자의 권리회복(5),” 『기독교사상』 통권 376호 (1990년 4월호), 197.

25 김창락, “갈라디아서-복음을 위한 투쟁(16): 의인론-무권자의 권리회복(5),” 193.

the Reformers.

Byung-mu Ahn argues that Paul was the first to ignore the events of the cross and theologize the event because he created a theological system centering on the cross's doctrine by extracting theological meanings from the crucifixion as a political event. He emphasizes that Minjung theology does not focus on the cross doctrine but on the crucifixion's historical context.<sup>26</sup> Based on the fact that Pilate condemned Jesus as the "King of the Jews" and chose the execution method to be a crucifix, which applies only to colonial political prisoners, Ahn argues that the execution of Jesus on the cross was rooted in the anxiety about the overthrow of the present system, caused by a political ferment of Jesus centered on Minjung.<sup>27</sup> Nam-dong Sŏ argues more explicitly: "Jesus was executed as a political prisoner. ...Jesus was not stoned to death for contempt of the Divine but was executed on the cross as a political offender. It was the religion of the poor, the crushed, the common people. Jesus shouted, "the voice of Minjung."<sup>28</sup> "In other words, Minjung theologians accept the suffering and death of Jesus Christ as a result of a social transformational and struggling life for Minjung.

According to Hi-Heon Kim, their theological goal is to cultivate the "Minjung of Jesus," hoping for "Jesus of Minjung," not "the golden crown of Jesus."<sup>29</sup> Their goal is expressed in the single word "Messianic Minjung." Ahn likens Minjung to a servant of suffering in Isaiah 53. Just as salvation has come to all mankind through the

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26 안병무, 『민중신학 이야기』(서울: 한국신학연구소, 1988), 30-31.

27 안병무, 『갈릴래아의 예수』(서울: 한국신학연구소, 1990), 262.

28 서남동, 『민중신학의 탐구』, 14.

29 김희현, "민중신학에서 본 장공 김재준의 진리론," 『한국기독교신학논총』 통권71호 (2010년 10월호), 157.



servent of suffering, salvation comes to the whole of mankind through Minjung's suffering and death. He claims that the death of Jesus Christ is also an event to announce this fact. Even Minjung not only saves himself as the subject of salvation but also leads others to salvation.<sup>30</sup>

Byung-mu Ahn insists on "self-salvation of minjung" to heal Christianity's illness, which has no practice and ethical values. ... (This) means that Minjung's salvation is not done by Jesus, but Minjung is saved by his strength. Ahn does not acknowledge the atonement idea of being washed away by the blood of Jesus. ... He refuses that Jesus is the subject of salvation and Minjung is the object of salvation. ... Moreover, Minjung appears as a clear messiah according to Byung-mu Ahn's soteriology. His soteriology is a soteriology based on thorough 'practice'. ... (His theology) has become a great witness to the existing church, which readily follows the tradition of the Reformation, "salvation by faith alone."<sup>31</sup>

Through these facts, we can evaluate that in Minjung theology, Jesus Christ is one significant model of a social reformer for the suffering minjung.

#### 4. Short Conclusion

As a result of examining the sin, Han, justification, and the passion of Christ in Minjung theology, we can confirm that all their interests and criteria are only "Minjung." Minjung theologians do not focus

<sup>30</sup> 김명수, "민중신학의 해석학(2)," 「기독교사상」 통권400호 (1992년 4월호), 193.

<sup>31</sup> 임태수, "안병무 박사의 서거와 민중신학의 과제," 「민중과 신학」 통권4호 (2000년 겨울호), 9-10.

on the relationship between God and human beings but just on the social recovery of Minjung. In examining the doctrine of sin, they discuss the social pressure on Minjung that the word sinner or sin has, rather than considering God's grace to save sinners. They talk about the cross of Jesus Christ when they speak of the righteousness of God. However, the redemptive event of Jesus Christ they understand is not the only gospel we should believe to be saved, but a social transformation struggle for oppressed Minjung. Therefore, we can confirm that the meaning of Minjung theologians' claim, the second Reformation by righteousness, is that dedication to solving Minjung's social oppression should be the central thought of Christianity.

#### **IV. Reformers' Understanding of "Righteousness"**

As we addressed above, Minjung theologians argue that existing religious reforms have failed because they emphasize "faith alone" and do not emphasize "righteousness." To properly evaluate their claims, we need to see what the Reformers' understanding of "righteousness" is. In this chapter, I will particularly address the understanding of the "righteousness" of the Reformers based on Romans 9: 30-10: 13.

##### **1. Martin Luther**

For Luther, the doctrine of justification is the most important because "God has declared no article so plainly and openly as this,

that we are saved only by Christ.<sup>32</sup> His *Lectures on Romans* explain and compare the law, the gospel, Christ, and faith. Luther says that “Christ is the end of the law (Rom. 10:4)” which means “every word in the Bible points to Christ.”<sup>33</sup> Although “the word of the old and the new law is the same,” the old law was imperfect and incomplete because “it signified something but did not actually display what it signified.”<sup>34</sup> In contrast, “the word of the gospel is complete because it actually makes available what it signifies, namely, grace.”<sup>35</sup> Luther also compares Paul’s two kinds of righteousness, revealed in Rom. 10:3-9. One is the righteousness of the law, and the other is the righteousness of faith. “the first kind of righteousness depends on the good work one does, but the second kind depends on the word one believes.”<sup>36</sup> Interpreting the passage in Rom. 10:6, “who will ascend into heaven,” he distinguishes what the righteousness of faith teaches from the righteousness of the law:

The word that one must believe is nothing else but this: Christ died, and he has risen. This is why these negative and questioning forms of expression contain very strong affirmations. For example, the question: Who shall ascend into heaven? means: Say constantly in your heart: Christ is ascended into heaven, and you will be saved. Do not doubt that he ascended, for this is the word

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<sup>32</sup> Martin Luther, *The Table-Talk of Martin Luther*, trans. William Hazlitt (Philadelphia, PA: Lutheran Publication Society, 1900s), 182. Leaver also describes that “Christ wants us to concentrate our attention on this chief doctrine, our justification before God, in order that we may believe in Him.” Robin A. Leaver, *Luther on Justification* (London: Concordia Publishing House, 1975), 20.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, trans. Wilhelm Pauck (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 288.1975), 20.

<sup>34</sup> Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, 279-80.

<sup>35</sup> Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, 280.

<sup>36</sup> Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, 288-89.

that will save you. This is what the righteousness of faith teaches. This is the short way to salvation, the way of the compendium! Nevertheless, the righteousness of the law is a long, winding, and roundabout, as it is symbolically represented by the people of Israel in the desert.<sup>37</sup>

So, he affirms that faith “is the consummation and abridgment and compendium of salvation. For the word that is abridged is nothing else but faith”<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, in his interpretation of Rom 10:10, he argues that “true righteousness comes about only if one believes the words of God with his whole heart. ...the faith that leads to righteousness does not reach its goal of righteousness or salvation if it does not arrive at confession. For confession is the principal work of faith.”<sup>39</sup> For Luther, there is no compromise in defining the righteousness revealed in the Bible, only faith.

Here comes the question of how Luther regards the relationship between righteousness and a deed. His statements sometimes make the impression that he treats a good deed as unnecessary. For instance, Luther argues that

Truly it is held for the presumption in a human creature that he dares boast of his proper righteousness of faith; 'tis a hard matter for a man to say: I am the child of God, and am comforted and solaced through the immeasurable grace and mercy of my heavenly Father. To do this from the heart is not in every man's power. Therefore no man can teach pure and aright touching faith, nor reject the righteousness of works, without sound practice and

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<sup>37</sup> Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, 289.

<sup>38</sup> Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, 281.

<sup>39</sup> Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, 293-94.

experience. ... [Paul] names the law, the ministration of death, the ministration of sin, and the ministration of condemnation; yea, he holds all the work of the law, and what the law requires, without Christ, dangerous and hurtful.<sup>40</sup>

His understanding of righteousness and a deed is revealed in his book, *Table-Talk*. Luther likens believers' justification before God in that he is entitled to inherit the Father's property. Being the heir of a son is not a meritorious deed but a natural qualification. However, the Father promises to give a good gift if he does good to his son or admonishes his son when he makes a mistake. This is just a way for the Father to teach his son what he should do. Luther explains that God treats us this way. God gives eternal life to those who believe in Christ by grace and mercy regardless of a meritorious deed, goodness, and eligibility. He also comforts us with infinite love. He promises the blessings of the present and the future. Therefore, there is no meritorious deed to obtain a believer's righteousness because "Christ gives a reward by reason of the promise."<sup>41</sup>

Luther's understanding of "justification by faith" is not an abstract or speculative concept but God's sovereign ministry and His excellent method of dealing with sinners. This understanding is well revealed in his *Preface to the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans*:

Faith is a work of God in us, which changes us and brings us to birth anew from God (cf. John 1). It kills the old Adam, makes us completely different people in heart, mind, senses, and all our

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<sup>40</sup> Luther, *The Table-Talk of Martin Luther*, 178-79.

<sup>41</sup> Luther, *The Table-Talk of Martin Luther*, 184-86.

powers, and brings the Holy Spirit with it. What a living, creative, active, powerful thing is faith! It is impossible that faith ever stops doing good. Faith does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before it is asked, it has done them. It is always active. Whoever does not do such works is without faith; he gropes and searches about him for faith and good works but does not know what faith or good works are. Even so, he chatters on with many words about faith and good works.<sup>42</sup>

In Short, as McGrath evaluates, “Luther excludes the possibility that sinful humanity can be justified by works of the law.”<sup>43</sup> However, for Luther, good deeds are in the way we have proposed to live by God, who has justified us. In other words, although the good deeds cannot affect our righteousness, those who are justified through Christ have a responsibility to live according to the good deeds God commands.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Martin Luther, *Preface to the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans by Martin Luther (1522)*, trans. Andrew Thornton (Manchester, NH: Saint Anselm Abbey, 1983), accessed April 24, 2019, <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/study/module/luther-romans>.

<sup>43</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough*, Reprint (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 122.

<sup>44</sup> Flesher explains Luther's understanding of the relationship between justification by faith alone and the good fruits emphasized in James: “Luther is also known for preaching the famous doctrine of justification by faith alone—so how does it all work together? Did Jesus teach that all we had to do was pray the sinner's prayer so we could go to heaven, or was there some ministry he had in mind? Is Christianity about nothing more than making it to heaven? James does not think so—he says that unless your faith exhibits an active merciful love for your neighbor, it is not saving faith. Christ has overcome evil through his work of suffering love on the cross: it is impossible to separate it from his merciful self-sacrificing commitment to setting the captive free. One without the other is meaningless.” LeAnn Snow Flesher, “Mercy Triumphs over Judgement: James as Social Gospel,” *Review & Expositor* 111, no. 2 (May 2014), 185-86.

## 2. John Calvin<sup>45</sup>

In his book, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John Calvin locates the doctrine of justification in book three, *How We Receive the Grace of Christ: What Benefits Come to Us from It, and What Effects Follow*.<sup>46</sup> This positioning reveals how Calvin significantly regards Christ in his doctrine of justification. He defines justification “as the acceptance with which God receives us into his favor as righteous men. ... [And, it] consists in the remission of sins and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness.”<sup>47</sup> The most important thing in his justification is that believers only imputed His righteousness by believing in Christ. He points out that what a sinner wants to be perfected by the merit of works or by himself by keeping the law is “contempt of God’s justice and ignorance of their own sin.”<sup>48</sup>

Calvin compares and contrasts two kinds of righteousness in Romans 9: 30-32. Interpreting the passage, “That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith (Rom. 9:30).”<sup>49</sup> Calvin explains that this sentence seems very paradoxical. However, by using this paradoxical expression, Paul emphasizes to “exalt the grace of God alone, that no other reason might be sought for in the calling of

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<sup>45</sup> In dealing with Calvin’s justification, as far as possible, I will focus on his interpretation of Romans 9 and 10. This is this article’s main text because it may not be enough to address every approach of his developing doctrine of justification, even if I spend all the pages.

<sup>46</sup> Jean Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), xiv.

<sup>47</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 727.

<sup>48</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1536 Edition*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub Co, 1995), 31.

<sup>49</sup> I quoted the Bible text that Calvin used in his commentary.

the Gentiles but this—that he [deigns] to embrace them when unworthy of his favour.”<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, he analyzes that even though Israel followed “the law of righteousness,” it has not attained the law of righteousness because it did not give up its merit of works. Calvin emphasizes that if we do not recognize ourselves as sinners with absolutely no righteousness, it means that “we obscure the dignity of Christ,” which emphasizes that he is light, life, resurrection, righteousness, and healing.<sup>51</sup>

Commenting on Romans 10:3-13, he once again contrasts two kinds of righteousness. He explains that these two kinds of things are never compatible, so the first step in obtaining God’s righteousness is to give up our righteousness.

To render it evident how much at variance is the righteousness of faith and that of works, he now compares them, for, by comparison, the opposition between contrary things appears more clear. He refers not to the oracles of the Prophets but Moses’ testimony, and for this reason, the Jews might understand that Moses did not give the law to detain them in dependence on works but, on the contrary, to lead them to Christ.<sup>52</sup>

Calvin asserts the legitimacy of “justification by faith alone” based on Romans 10:10. Here, he even warns not to conclude that “with the mouth confession” is the cause of salvation. He explains that the Apostle wanted to emphasize that this expression is a fruit of confession in true faith, which God implants in our hearts.<sup>53</sup> This

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**50** John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, ed. John Owen (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 376-78.

**51** Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, 379.

**52** Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, 385-86.



detailed emphasis on “faith alone” shows how crucially he considers the absolute grace of God and faith implanted by God in his understanding of justification.

### 3. The Answer of the Reformers to the Criticism of Minjung theologians

Now, we have to answer two more questions from Minjung theologians: First, do the Reformers, like Luther, really see James and Romans as confrontations? In other words, do the Reformers only emphasize deception and ignore sanctification and good deeds? Second, is “the second Reformation by righteousness” really necessary? In other words, did the Reformation ignore “righteousness” and emphasize only “faith alone”?

As we have seen above, the minjung theologians claim that Luther only emphasizes Pauline epistles and criticizes James as “an epistle of straw.”<sup>54</sup> It is also true that Luther suffered from Roman Catholics who attacked him based on James; moreover, he used the word “straw” to describe James. However, their assessment of Luther is not fair, for Luther is aware of those who argue that a good deed is preceded by faith based on James, not James. Even the argument that Luther’s intention of using “straw” has been misunderstood. Wengert argues that “his use of the word “straw” did not reflect a German insult but Paul’s picture in 1 Cor 3:12 about building upon the foundation of Christ with either straw or gold and precious stones. James uses straw in contrast to the gold of John, Paul, and Peter.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, 394.

<sup>54</sup> 김득중, “‘오직 믿음만’을 강조하는 신앙생활에 대한 성서신학적 반성,” 6-7.

<sup>55</sup> Timothy J Wengert, “Building on the One Foundation with Straw: Martin Luther

Furthermore, Luther confesses, “I praise James and hold it to be a good writing because it does not propose human teachings but drives God’s law hard.”<sup>56</sup> He contradicts the claims of those who emphasize overstatement of the works but have no faith as follows:

They which attribute so much to works, and do not accordingly esteem the worker, and sound justification, go so far, that they ascribe all merit and righteousness to works done before justification; making no account of faith, alleging that which James saith, that without works faith is dead. This sentence of the Apostle they do not rightly understand; making but little account of faith, they always stick to works, whereby they think to merit exceedingly, and are persuaded that for their work’s sake shall obtain the favour of God: by this means they continually disagree with God, showing themselves to be the posterity of Cain. God hath respect unto man, these to the works of man; God alloweth the work for the sake of him that worketh, these require that for the work’s sake the worker may be crowned.<sup>57</sup>

The understanding of the James of the Reformers is well summarized in the Second Helvetic Confession: “James says that works do justify, yet he is not contrary to Paul. ... And so do all the godly, who yet trust in Christ alone, not to their own works.”<sup>58</sup>

Next, as the minjung theologians insist, do the Reformers

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and the Epistle of James,” *Word & World* 35, no. 3 (2015), 258-59.

**56** WA DB 7.384, 4-6, quoted in Timothy J Wengert, “Building on the One Foundation with Straw: Martin Luther and the Epistle of James,” *Word & World* 35, no. 3 (2015), 259.

**57** Martin Luther, *A Selection of the Most Celebrated Sermons of Martin Luther* (New York: S. & D.A. Forbes, 1830), 31.

**58** Beeke and Ferguson, *Reformed Confessions Harmonized*, 102.

emphasize justification and deemphasize sanctification? This misunderstanding is because Luther does not distinguish between justification and sanctification like Melancthon or Calvin; nevertheless, he obviously has both of them, but for Luther, the concepts of justification and sanctification cannot be understood separately. This fact can be supported by Luther's saying that "God's acceptance of us must be described in the perfect tense: we have been made righteousness and we are now righteousness. The condition of being righteous in ourselves can be described in the present tense only as having begun, but its completion lies in the future: we are only becoming righteous."<sup>59</sup>

Calvin also highlights the importance of both justification and sanctification. In *the Catechism of the Church of Geneva*, he stresses that "for to believe in Christ is to receive him as he offers himself to us. Now he not only promises to us deliverance from death, and reconciliation with God, but at the same time also, the grace of the Holy Spirit, by which we are regenerated in newness of life. It is necessary that these things, [justification and sanctification], be united together, unless we would divide Christ from himself."<sup>60</sup>

In sum, there seems to be a contradiction between the lesson of Pauline epistles and James in the Reformers' understanding; however, since Paul's rejection is about pre-conversion deeds, and James's emphasis is on post-conversion deeds, these two do not conflict. Even more, in the Reformers' understanding, this relationship helps to prevent misuse of the concept of justification by faith alone; in other words, justification and sanctification complement each other.

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<sup>59</sup> Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1966), 236-37.

<sup>60</sup> Calvin, *The Catechism of the Church of Geneva*, 39-40.

Now, we are ready to meet the last question, “is it really necessary for the second Reformation not by faith alone but by righteousness?” Tae-soo Im suggests two reasons for the necessity of the new Reformation: First, the anti-minjung world domination of Western Christian countries causes people to have an aversion to Christianity. Second, Protestantism has been emphasizing “salvation by faith alone” and weakening or excluding a good deed, so the Christian life is becoming an unethical and immoral life.<sup>61</sup> The first is beyond the scope of this paper. Therefore, I will answer the second reason.

First, as we have seen above, the understanding of what righteousness is between Minjung theologians and Reformers is significantly different from each other. In minjung theology, righteousness is a dedication to Minjung’s recovery centered on Minjung. On the other hand, in the Reformed tradition, all human righteousness comes only from God, and God only justifies people by faith in Christ. Minjung theologians also address the righteousness of Jesus Christ and his redemption; nonetheless, their understanding of the passion of Christ is significantly different from the Reformed tradition. They regard the passion of Christ as one prominent example of a liberation movement for Minjung; furthermore, in minjung theology, Minjung is regarded as the messiah *per se*.

Second, although the understanding of righteousness between them is distinguished from each other, it does not mean that Reformers have no emphasis on the good deeds of converted believers. Unlike the claims of minjung theologians, Reformers regard good works as necessary under the understanding of justification. Moreover, unlike the argument of minjung theologians, Reformers not only

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61 임태수, “제2종교개혁을 지향하며,” 3.

acknowledge James as a canon but also consider it a significant part of Scripture. For the Reformers, justification is understood in “sola fide” and “sola gratia.” Therefore, although it can be said that the understanding of the “righteousness” of the minjung theologians and Reformers is different, it cannot be said that since the Reformers had no emphasis on “righteousness” and “good deeds,” the necessity of the brand-new Reformation is reasonable.

## V. Conclusion

In this paper, we confirmed the “righteousness and justification” of the Reformation tradition by looking at the understanding of the Reformers in Romans 9: 30-10: 13. We confirmed the understanding of “righteousness” and “good deed” through their 16th century Confessions and Catechisms, which are a summary of their theology. This confirmation provided a basis for positively responding to the criticism of the minjung theologians.

The criticism of Protestantism by minjung theologians is understandable in some ways. As they claimed, it is also true that although the Church should reveal its righteousness as the salt and light, and although the Church is obligated to protect the underprivileged, the visible Church sometimes fails to fulfill its duties faithfully. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the Reformation of “sola fide” is a failure. It is improbable that the minjung theologians will be convinced to change the meaning of their definition of socio-political righteousness since the essential theological understandings of the minjung theologians and the Reformers about

righteousness and justification are different. However, we can assert that while the Reformers did not make it the church's primary goal to implement social justice, they emphasized justification and righteousness as crucial as "sola fide." So, we cannot agree with the minjung theology, which insists on the necessity of the second Reformation not by faith but by righteousness.

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**[초록]****민중신학의 ‘의로 말미암는 제2종교개혁의 필요성’에 대한 개혁주의적 응답: 로마서 9:30-10:13을 중심으로 본 민중신학의 의 개념에 대한 개혁주의적 비평**김영래  
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민중신학은 20세기 중 후반 분단과 독재정권으로 말미암아 고통받는 민중에 집중한 한국의 독특한 신학이다. 21세기에 들어와 민중신학자들은 “오직 믿음”을 강조했던 16세기의 첫 종교개혁의 영향으로 한국교회는 개인의 신앙과 기도 그리고 개인적 삶을 위한 은혜에는 매우 집중하였지만 소외 받는 민중과 그들의 삶에는 무심하였고, 한국 교회는 신학과 윤리가 분리되었다고 주장하였다. 그들은 기독교의 “죄”의 문제를 한국의 “한”으로 해석하였고, 예수 그리스도의 고난을 억압받는 “민중”을 대표하여 받는 고난으로 해석하였다. 나아가 그들은 이러한 문제를 해결하기 위해서는 종교개혁자들이 주장했던 “오직 믿음”으로 말미암는 종교개혁의 틀에서 벗어나 행함 있는 믿음인 의로움으로 말미암는 제2의 종교 개혁이 다시 일어나야 한다고 주장하였다. 그러나 종교개혁자들이 이해하는 의로움의 개념은 믿음과 떨어질 수 없는 것이며, 참된 의로움은 오직 예수 그리스도를 믿는 믿음으로 말미암는 칭의로부터 나오는 것이었다. 종교개혁자들의 이해 안에서 믿음을 가르치는 바울의 교훈과 행함을 가르치는 야고보의 교훈은 서로 상충되는 것이 아니었으며, 오히려 참된 믿음과 참된 의로움은 서로 떨어질 수 없다는 가르침이었다. 따라서 민중신학자들이 주장하는 의로움으로 말미암는 제 2의 종교개혁에 대한 주장은 종교개혁자들과 개혁주의 전통이 가지고 있는 믿음과 의로움에 대한 잘못된 이해에서 기인한 것이라고 평가할 수 있다.

**키워드:** 민중신학, 개혁주의, 의, 종교개혁, 이신칭의, 믿음