

IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS

Jesse Morrell

(A section from the booklet "The Vicarious Atonement of Christ")

A term in the Bible which is used to describe forgiveness and justification is "imputed righteousness". King David and the Apostle Paul described in detail what imputed righteousness is, their description is the clearest presentation of imputed righteousness in the scripture. According to these inspired writings, imputed righteousness consists in being considered righteous, having your transgressions forgiven, having your sins covered, and as not having your iniquities imputed or accounted against you (Ps. 31:1-2; Rom. 4:7-8). In other words, to be imputed righteous is when God pardons our crimes, not giving us the treatment that we deserve, but rather treats us as if we were righteous, that is, giving us the treatment of law abiding citizens.

The New Testament word "logizomai" is translated as "think" (2 Cor. 3:5, 10:2, 10:7, 10:11, 12:6; Phi. 4:8), as "imputed" (Rom. 4:11, 4:22-24; Jam. 2:23), as "counted" (Rom. 2:26, 4:3, 4:5, 9:8), as "reckoned" (Lk. 22:37; Rom. 4:4, 4:9-10), as "accounted" (Rom. 8:36; Gal. 3:6), as "reckon" (Rom. 6:11, 8:18), as "suppose" (2 Cor. 11:5; 1 Pet. 5:12), as "account" (1 Cor. 4:1), as "accounting" (Heb. 11:19), as "conclude" (Rom. 3:28), as "count" (Phi. 3:13), as "esteemeth" (Rom. 14:14), as "impute" (Rom. 4:8), as "imputeth" (Rom. 4:6), as "imputing" (2 Cor. 5:19), as "laid" (2 Tim. 4:16), as "numbered" (Mk. 15:28), as "reasoned" (Mk. 11:31), as "thinkest" (Rom. 2:3), as "thinketh" (1 Cor. 13:5), and as "thought" (1 Cor. 13:11). When an individual is imputed righteous, it simply means that their sins are forgiven and they are thought of as righteous, esteemed as righteous, counted as righteous, reckoned as righteous, or considered as righteous. When a person is imputed as righteous they are treated as if they were righteous, treated as if they were never unrighteous.

The Old Testament equivalent word is "chashab" and it is translated as "counted" (Gen. 15:5-6, 31:15; Lev. 25:31; Num. 18:30; Jos. 13:3; Neh. 13:13; Job 18:3, 41:29; Ps. 44:22, 88:4, 106:31; Prov. 17:28, 27:14; Isa. 5:28, 40:15, 20:17; Hos. 8:12), as "thought" (Gen. 38:15, 50:20; 1 Sam. 1:13, 18:25; 2 Sam. 14:13; Neh. 6:2; Ps. 73:16, 119:59; Jer. 18:8; Mal. 3:16), as "think" (Neh. 6:6; Job 41:32; Isa. 10:7; Jer. 23:27, 29:11; Eze. 38:10), as "accounted" (Deut. 2:10-11, 2:20; 1 Ki. 10:21; 2 Chron. 9:20; Isa. 2:22), as "imagine" (Job 6:26; Psa. 140:2; Hos. 7:15; Zec. 7:9-10), as "esteemed" (Isa. 29:16-17; Isa. 53:3; Lam. 4:2), as "reckoned" (Num. 18:27, 23:9; 2 Sam. 4:2; 2 Ki. 12:15), as "count" (Lev. 25:27, 25:52; Job 19:15), as "reckon" (Lev. 25:50, 27:18, 27:23), as "counteth" (Job 19:11, 33:10), as "imagined" (Ps. 10:2, Ps. 21:11), as "imputed" (Lev. 7:18, 17:4), as "account" (Ps. 144:3), as "considered" (Ps. 77:5), as "esteem" (Isa. 53:4), as "esteemeth" (Job 41:27), as "imagineth" (Nah. 1:11), as "impute" (2 Sam. 19:19), as "imputeth" (Ps. 32:2), as "reckoning" (2 Ki. 22:7), as "regard" (Isa. 13:17), as "regardeth" (Isa. 33:8), as "thinkest" (Job 35:2), and as "thinketh" (Psa. 40:17). To be imputed righteous is to be counted as righteous, to be thought of as righteous, to be

esteemed as righteous, to be reckoned as righteous, to be considered as righteous, to be regarded as righteous, etc.

The word “imputed” does not mean transferred. It is a theological error to say that the righteousness “of Christ” is transferred to us. If imputed means transferred, when God imputed an uncircumcised individual as circumcised (Rom. 2:26), it means that someone else’s circumcision is transferred to them! The obvious meaning is that they are simply considered circumcised, reckoned as circumcised, or thought of as circumcised, but not that someone else loses their circumcision so that it could be transferred to another. Some of represented the doctrine of the imputed righteousness “of Christ” as the gospel itself. But if this is the Gospel, neither Jesus nor the Apostles ever preached it! The Scriptures abundantly talk about imputed righteousness, but it never talks about the imputed righteousness “of Christ”.

When a person is imputed righteous, that means that God considers them righteous and treats them as righteous, not that the righteousness of Christ is transferred to them. To say that we need the perfect obedience that Christ rendered to the Law to be transferred to our account in order to be justified is saying that we are in fact justified by the works of the Law. Christ needed to perfectly obey the Law in order to be a spotless sacrifice and qualify as a sin offering (Exo. 12:5; 2 Cor. 5:21; Php. 2:8), but justification is by Christ’s blood (Rom. 5:9) and by faith (Rom. 3:28; 5:1; Gal 3:24), but not at all by the works of the law, either ours or Christ’s (Acts 13:39; Rom. 3:20, 3:28; Gal. 2:16, 3:11, Gal. 5:4). Christ was under obligation to obey the Law of love for himself (Matt. 5:17; Gal. 4:4), just as God is under obligation to His conscience (Gen. 18:25), so Christ’s obedience to the Law cannot be a work of supererogation and therefore cannot be transferred to another. So if Christ was under obligation to the Law, His obedience to the Law cannot be transferred to another. And if Christ was not under obligation to the Law, there would be no obedience to be transferred. It was not His obedience to the Law, but His suffering on the cross which is credited to us. He suffered and died for us and His suffering was a work of supererogation.

Some has supposed that when God looks upon the Christian, God doesn’t see the Christian but see’s the righteousness of Christ instead. But God clearly saw the good and bad works of the Christians in Revelations (Rev 2:2, 29, 2:13, 2:19, 3:1, 3:8, 3:15), not the righteousness of Christ. Imputed righteousness is not some scheme that fools God so that He no longer knows reality as it is, or see’s individuals as they are. That would mean God is no longer omniscient. Whenever anyone is in sin, our omniscient God sees it clearly (Prov. 15:3).

Imputed righteousness is a gift of God (Rom. 5:17), it comes from God (Isa. 54:17; 2 Cor. 5:21) by His grace and mercy, not earned or deserved by anything that we have done. So it is “the righteousness of God” since it comes from God and is a gift from God. Christ is our righteousness (Jer. 23:6; 1 Cor. 1:30) because it is only through Him, what He did for us on the cross, that God is able to treat us as if we were righteous, treating us as if we were never unrighteous. Imputed righteousness is not the transfer of Christ’s righteousness, neither is it a scheme that blinds God the Father, but it is the same

thing as forgiveness and justification, it is when God set's aside the punishment that we deserve for our unrighteousness and treats us as if we had always been righteous, when God reckons or considers us as righteous. Forgiveness, justification, and imputed righteousness are expressions of the same event, when God forgives our sins and remits our penalty, letting our iniquities go as if they had not been committed (*forgiveness*), thus treating us as if we were just (*justification*), treating us as if we were righteous (*imputed righteousness*).

But let it be clear that forgiveness, justification, or imputed righteousness is conditional upon repentance (Isa. 55:17; Eze. 18:32; Mk. 1:4; Lk. 13:3, 13:5, 24:47), faith (Jn. 3:18; Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9; Eph. 2:8-9), and ultimately perseverance unto the end (Matt. 10:22, 24:13; Mk. 13:13; Acts 13:43, Acts 14:22; Heb. 3:6, 3:14;). Repentance is when a person changes their mind about sinning and makes up their mind to sin no more (Isa. 1:16, 55:7; Jn. 5:14, 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:34; Eph. 4:28), and faith is the hearts embrace and obedience to the truth (Lk. 24:25; Acts 8:37, 15:9, 26:18; Rom. 10:10; 1 Pet. 1:22). The notion of being righteous in our position but unrighteous in our practice is absolutely contrary to scripture (1 Jn. 3:7, 3:10); such a concept is false doctrine and damnable heresy (2 Pet. 2:1; Jude 1:4-5). Jesus is the author of salvation to all them that obey Him (Heb. 5:9), Christians are those who keep God's commandments (1 Jn. 2:3), so that only those who keep God's commandments will enter through the gates into the Heaven (Matt. 7:21, 19:17; Lk. 10:28; Rev. 22:14), while all sinners will be left outside the Holy City (Rev. 22:15). Remember, Christians are those who were formerly disobedient (Tit. 3:3; 1 Pet. 3:20) but are no longer disobedient (Rom. 6:17; Php. 2:12). Christians make the daily choice to obey God (Lk. 9:23; 1 Cor. 15:31). Christians are not sinners (Ps. 66:18; Jn. 9:31; 1 Pet. 4:18), all Christians are saints (Acts 9:13, 9:32, 9:41, 26:10; Rom. 1:7, 8:27, 12:13, 15:25-16, 15:26, 15:31, 16:2, 16:15; 1 Cor. 1:2, 6:1-2, 14:33, 16:1, 16:15; 2 Cor. 1:1, 8:4, 9:1, 9:12, 13:13; Eph. 1:1, 1:15, 1:18, 2:19, 3:8, 3:18, 4:12, 5:3, 6:18; Php. 1:1, 4:22; Col. 1:2, 1:4, 1:12, 1:26; 1 Thes. 3:13; 2 Thes. 1:10; 1 Tim. 5:10; Phm. 1:5, 1:7; Heb. 6:10, 13:24; Jude 1:3, 1:14; Rev. 5:8, 8:3-4, 11:18, 13:7, 13:10, 14:12, 15:3, 16:6, 17:6, 18:24, 19:8, 20:9). And as saints Christians are sanctified (Acts 20:32, 26:18; 1 Cor. 1:2, 6:11; Heb. 2:11, 10:10, 10:14; Jude 1:1), that is, Christians are free from sin (Jn. 8:34-36; Rom. 6:6, 6:18, 6:22, 8:2; Gal. 5:24).

When men turn from all their sins and put their faith in the blood of Jesus Christ which was shed for them, God forgives them of their sin, remitting the penalty of the Law, and God considers them righteous just as if they had never sinned.