

The Imputation Of Christ's Righteousness

Too much cannot be said or written about the greatness of Jesus Christ. To the Christian, He is the foundation and the expectation of a glorious resurrection (1 Corinthians 3:11). The scriptures present Jesus as God incarnate, one who was born of a virgin, lived sinlessly, and died triumphantly (Matthew 1:21-23; 26:28; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 4:15). Could it be, though, that man has focused so entirely on Jesus and His accomplishments in making possible man's salvation that he has diminished or removed man's part in obtaining his salvation?

The doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness is threefold. Most man-made doctrines have to come in a package. This is because one tenet or teaching necessitates another supportive doctrine. The imputation of Christ's righteousness tenet has two related and necessary doctrines relative to imputation. "The term 'imputation' has been used in theology in a threefold sense to denote the judicial acts of God by which the guilt of Adam's sin is imputed to his posterity; by which the sins of Christ's people are imputed to Him; and by which the righteousness of Christ is imputed to His people. The act of imputation is precisely the same in each case" (The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, vol. 3, p. 1463).

Some who have subscribed to the threefold doctrine of imputation limit the doctrine more in keeping with "impute" (*logizomai*), which means to "take into account" (Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words). Those who limit the action of imputation write, "It is not meant that Christ's people are made personally holy or inwardly righteous by the imputation of His righteousness to them, but that His righteousness is set to their account, so that they are entitled to all the rewards of that perfect righteousness" (ISBE., *Ibid.*). However, many do not so limit and qualify "impute." You commonly hear denominational preachers say, "When God looks at man, he does not see man, but the righteousness of his perfect Son." They further explain, "There is great comfort in this doctrine (imputation of Christ's righteousness, *dm*) because Christ has done it all, there is not anything for us to do!" The proof verses for the doctrine of imputation. Paul's statement to the Romans serves as proof for the transference of Adam's sins to all men and Christ's personal righteousness to His people (tenets one and three in the doctrine of imputation). Paul wrote, "Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life" (Romans 5:18). The proof often presented to teach that our personal sins have been imputed (actually transferred to Christ) is Paul's statement: "For he hath made him to be sin for us" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Moreover, it is explained regarding this second tenet in the belief system of imputation that the Father had to forsake Christ on the cross because our sins had been "imputed" to Christ and the Father could not come in contact with sin (Isaiah 59:2; Matthew 27:46).

The threefold doctrine of imputation stands or falls together. In other words, one cannot hold to one of these doctrines without consistently embracing the other two. As a rule, all three are espoused and taught in most denominations. Too many in churches of

Christ have attempted to embrace only the doctrine that our sins are transferred to Christ. Some, an increasing number, are now accepting the teaching that Christ's personal righteousness is transferred to the saved, making them righteous. These same ones will also imbibe the transference of Adam's sin to mankind thus making them sinners, given the time (in all probability).

Regarding 2 Corinthians 5:21, why cannot we say Paul is simply saying that Christ was treated as sin for us instead of our sins were actually transferred to Him? Jesus was arrested, tried, and underwent one of the most shameful forms of capital punishment ever known to man (crucifixion) — a form of death reserved for the vilest of sinners (Matthew 26-27). In this same verse, Paul added, "who knew no sin." Beloved, Jesus was sinless (Hebrews 4:15). He did not have personal sin which He Himself had committed (1 Peter 2:22). In like manner, Jesus did not possess sin which had been arbitrarily transferred to Him and which He absorbed in our behalf. He bore our sorrows and was bruised for our iniquities in that He "tasted death for every man" (Isaiah 53:4-5; Hebrews 2:9).

Paul in his writings to the Romans is discussing what was lost because of Adam is gained because of Christ (Romans 5:12-21). Death came through Adam. However, Paul immediately injects that all have sinned. Condemnation was introduced to mankind in that Adam set the example and created the atmosphere for disobedience. In this sense only is one man's disobedience the cause of many being made sinners. Jesus, in the converse, introduced the example of obedience. As a result of Jesus' obedience, there is grace, justification, and righteousness.

Speaking earlier of consistency, if the personal sin of Adam is unconditionally transferred to all men, thus making them sinners, then the personal righteousness of Christ is unconditionally transferred to all men, thus making them righteous. Hence, universal condemnation and salvation! If not, why not? All men are personally and individually amenable to God. The scriptures teach individual and personal responsibility. The scriptures also show that this individual and personal responsibility is essential to man's salvation (Romans 2:6).

Many, if not most, of the false doctrines of man attempt to remove man's responsibility and participation in his salvation. However, Jesus is the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him (Hebrews 5:8-9). Jesus asked, "And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). Yes, we are indebted in view of what Jesus has done regarding making our salvation possible, but the question should be, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30; Philippians 2:12). We marvel and emulate Jesus' personal righteousness, however, we ourselves work righteousness before God: "... he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous" (1 John 3:7; cp. Psalm 119:172).

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