

# Imputed Righteousness

By Kyle Pope

**Introduction.** Imputation is a largely Protestant doctrine that teaches that the sins or good deeds of one may be accounted or credited to another.<sup>1</sup>

## A. Historical Development of the Doctrine of Imputation.

1. Although some aspects of its various forms date to the teachings of Anselm, the archbishop of Canterbury (c. 1033-1109), it assumed its most prominent form during the Protestant reformation.
2. *Imputation vs. Infusion.* Unlike the Roman Catholic concept that Christ's righteousness is gradually *infused* into a believer as he or she partakes of (what the Catholics call) sacraments, the Reformers argued that just as they believed Adam's sin was imputed to all men, Christ's righteousness is imputed (or credited) to the elect.
3. *A Reformed Doctrine.* While this is generally considered a Calvinistic doctrine, Luther did much to shape its prominent form among Protestants.<sup>2</sup>
  - a. In fact, there is some evidence that Calvin himself did not take it to the extremes that his Calvinistic followers would come to adopt. So in some cases Calvin was not a Calvinist.<sup>3</sup>

## B. Protestant Debates Regarding Imputation.

1. Since the Reformation imputation has remained a fundamental Protestant doctrine, but Protestants have differed over a number of things regarding its precise tenets.
  - a. This is seen in debates over whether Christ's active or only passive righteousness—that is His righteous acts *coram mundo* (“before the world”) or His righteous acts *coram Deo* (“before God”)—are both credited to the saved.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> English Bibles use various forms of the verb “impute” to translate Hebrew and Greek words that address what God *accounts* or *reckons* to human beings—KJV (16); ASV (6); NASB (3); NKJV (12); ESV (2). As we shall see in this study, there is no question that God sets terms by which He accounts or does not account sin to a person, thereby reckoning one as guilty or righteous before Him. That is far different, however, from saying that God accounts the sins or righteousness of one to another. We must acknowledge that some who speak of “imputation” use it only in the sense of forgiveness. Generally, however, when people speak of “imputed righteousness” they are advocating some type of transfer of Christ's righteousness to the saved. It is this doctrine that is the focus of our study.

<sup>2</sup> In a work on Psalm 22 Luther wrote—“That is the mystery which is rich in divine grace to sinners: wherein by a wonderful exchange (*admirabili commertio*) our sins are no longer ours but Christ's and the righteousness of Christ not Christ's but ours” (*Werke*, Weimar, 1883, 5: 608). Calvin used similar language but doesn't seem to go quite as far, writing—“...we cannot be condemned for our sins, from the guilt of which he absolves us, seeing he has been pleased that these should be imputed to himself as if they were his own. This is the wondrous exchange (*mirifica commutatio*) made by his boundless goodness. Having become with us the Son of Man, he has made us with himself sons of God” (*Institutes* 4.17.2).

<sup>3</sup> See Cornells P. Venema, “Calvin's Doctrine of the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness: Another Example of ‘Calvin Against the Calvinists?’” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 20 (2009): 15-47.

<sup>4</sup> The German Reformed Theologian Johannes Piscator, while Calvinistic in his leanings argued against the imputation of the active righteousness of Jesus to believers on the grounds that it would make the cross and obedience unnecessary. See Heber Carlos de Campos, *Johannes Piscator (1546-1625) and the Consequent*

- b. It is seen in questions regarding how far any imputation actually went. That is, did Jesus literally bear the guilt of sin or literally “exchange” and transfer His good works to the saved.<sup>5</sup>
  - 2. In recent years evangelicals have become embroiled in renewed debates over imputation.
    - a. In 2001 Robert Gundry, scholar-in-residence at Westmont College in Santa Barbara argued that the doctrine is unbiblical and should be abandoned.<sup>6</sup>
    - b. Although Gundry retains a belief that our sins were imputed to Christ, his rejection of positive imputed righteousness to believers has created a firestorm. Men like John Piper, chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary in Minneapolis, wrote a book the following year countering Gundry’s arguments point by point.<sup>7</sup>
- C. Debates over Atonement within the Restoration Movement.
  - 1. Among our own brethren the subject of substitutionary atonement has been a point of debate since the time of Stone and Campbell.
    - a. Out of fear that using substitutionary language would demand the acceptance of other tenets of Calvinism, Barton W. Stone argued against any sense in which Christ should be considered our substitute.
    - b. While Alexander Campbell rejected Calvinism he did not agree that this demanded the rejection of all substitutionary language in reference to Christ’s atonement.<sup>8</sup>
  - 2. Recent years have seen a resurgence of this debate among our brethren with the focus on the negative side of the issue we are considering in this study.
    - a. The question our brethren are asking is, “Did Christ literally become guilty of our sins?”—Imputed righteousness asks the question “How does Christ’s righteousness affect us?”
      - i. While the first question does not directly address the issue of imputed righteousness, it has a direct relationship to it. If Jesus literally bore the guilt of our sins, then it sets the stage for the necessity of imputed righteousness.

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*Development of the Imputation of Christ's Active Obedience* (Ph.D. diss., Calvin Theological Seminary, 2008). Some have argued from Calvin’s writings that he held a similar view.

<sup>5</sup> The Puritan Baptist preacher, John Bunyon wrote—“Our sins, when laid upon Christ, were yet personally ours, not his; so his righteousness, when put upon us, is yet personally his, not ours” (“Justification by an Imputed Righteousness or No Way to Heaven but by Jesus Christ”).

<sup>6</sup> Gundry, Robert H. “Why I Didn’t Endorse The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration . . . Even Though I Wasn’t Asked to,” *Books and Culture* 111 (January-February 2001) 6-9.

<sup>7</sup> Piper, John. *Counted Righteous in Christ: Should We Abandon the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness?* Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> The entire exchange between Stone and Campbell ran from June, 1840 to September, 1841 in the following segments in the *Millennial Harbinger* ran: I. 4.6 (June 1840) 243-250; II. 4.7 (July 1840) 289-298; III. 4.9 (Sept. 1840) 387-396; IV. 4.10 (Oct. 1840) 464-473; V. 5.1 (Jan. 1841) 12-24; VI. 5.2 (Feb. 1841) 59-69; VII. 5.3 (March 1841) 113- 122; VIII. 5.4 (Apr. 1841) 156-163; 5.5 (May 1841) 234-237; IX. 5.6 (June 1841) 248-258; X. 5.7 (July 1841) 295-304; XI. 5.8 (Aug. 1841) 369-373; 5.9 (Sept. 1841) 389-402. Volume numbers are from the “New Series” that began publication in 1837.

- ii. If He did, then it only follows that the saved must literally take on the righteous acts of Jesus if they are to meet the legal demands of the justice of God.
  - b. While our focus in this study is the positive side of this coin, we should recognize that how we answer one question affects how we answer the other.<sup>9</sup>
- D. *The Focus of this Study.* Does the Bible teach that Christ’s righteous acts are literally imputed to believers? How does Jesus’ life and death offer salvation to man? Is the doctrine of imputed righteousness sound or must it be rejected as unscriptural?

## I. Basic Principles of Human Accountability to God.

- A. Theories and Models vs. *Sola Scriptura*.
1. Students of Scripture can easily find their head starting to spin as they try to wade through all of the intricacies of these debates. As human beings have attempted to boil down the grandeur and glory of God’s revelation into concise models and theories quite often we see points that match biblical teachings interwoven with human ideas that are wholly unscriptural.
    - a. It is ironic that this is so often done by those who espouse the Reformation logo—*sola Scriptura* “the Scriptures alone.”
    - b. While the temptation is to try and construct our own better model or theory to improve upon such deficiencies, I am convinced that the best approach is to simply shape all faith and teaching by the parameters set by Scripture and be content to allow God’s word to form its own self-sufficient model for what we believe and teach.
  2. This demands that we humble ourselves like little children and accept and obey God’s words for what they say whether we fully understand every nuance or not. Jesus taught, “...**whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven**” (Matt. 18:4).
    - a. It also demands that we acknowledge that all we may know about God rests in the totality of what He has revealed to us in His word. “**The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children...**” (Deut. 29:29).
    - b. Some questions may remain unanswered, but we must trust that God has given us all that we need to serve Him and to be found acceptable in His sight.
- B. *Starting with Some Basics.* In that child-like spirit I think it is important to start with a few basic biblical principles and then turn to consider some key passages used to defend this doctrine in light of these principles.
1. *Personal Responsibility.* The Bible teaches in both Old and New Testaments the principle of personal responsibility before God.

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Hodge illustrates this in his claim, “In the imputation of Adam’s sin to us, of our sins to Christ, and of Christ’s righteousness to believers, the nature of imputation is the same, so that one case illustrates the other” (*Systematic Theology*, 2:194).

- a. The Mosaic Law prohibited holding parents guilty for their children's sins or children for their parents' sins (Deut. 24:16).
  - i. This was restated when Amaziah became king and refused to execute the children of those who killed his father, Joash (2 Kings 14:6; 2 Chron. 25:4).
  - ii. It is in this background that Ezekiel 18 teaches some of the most clear principles about this. Note two statements:
    - **“The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son...”**
    - **“The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself”** (Ezek. 18:20).
- b. You and I are personally responsible and accountable for our own sins or acts of righteousness. Guilt cannot be transferred nor can righteousness be exchanged.
  - i. Anything that is said about atonement or imputation must be understood in light of this principle.
  - ii. This drives a nail in the coffin of Calvinism because it destroys the notion of corporate sin and inherited depravity. It is no wonder that Calvin acknowledged that Ezekiel 18 raises a “difficult question” to the concept of salvation by faith alone (*Commentary on Ezekiel* 18:14-17).
- c. In reality Ezekiel 18 doesn't just challenge the Calvinistic understanding of faith and works, it hits at the very heart of the false premises upon which it is built.
  - i. If I am condemned because of Adam's sin *the son is put to death for the father!*
  - ii. By the same token, if Christ's righteousness is literally credited to me *the righteousness of the righteous is NOT upon Himself.*
- d. New Testament writers affirm this same principle of personal responsibility..
  - i. We will give account of ourselves before God (Rom. 14:12).
  - ii. At the judgment seat of Christ **“each one”** will receive the things done **“in the body”**—**“according to what he has done, whether good or bad”** (2 Cor. 5:10). We should note that this statement comes only eleven verses before a key passage used to defend imputation.
  - iii. We are each accountable to God for our own sins or good deeds.
- e. *Sacrifice and Redemption.* We should note that this does not negate what Scripture teaches about principles of sacrifice or redemption. While God holds us accountable for our own behavior God has also always offered provisions to remit guilt or fulfill moral obligations before God.
  - i. Animal sacrifices were a provision that offered forgiveness of sins. While we understand in Christ that these set the stage for what Christ would accomplish on our behalf, they were allowed to satisfy a responsibility before God whereby He forgave sin.

- These sacrifices never merited forgiveness—they were a provision of divine grace.
  - Sins were not literally transferred to the animal—they were figuratively placed upon the offering as a condition of forgiveness.
- ii. *Sometimes this took a substitutionary form.* The Levites and a redemption priced were accepted as fulfillment of the obligation the Israelites had to dedicate their firstborn to God (Num. 3:40-51).<sup>10</sup>
- In this substitution a satisfaction of personal responsibility was fulfilled but there was no literal transfer of behavior or relationship.
  - In other words a Levite didn't literally become a firstborn child through this process—it was an exchange that satisfied a debt that could not otherwise be literally fulfilled.
- iii. This is an important example to keep in mind in our own debates about substitutionary atonement. If we speak of Jesus taking our place we cannot think of that as a literal substitution.
- He did not receive the eternal punishment we deserved nor become literally guilty of sin—if that happened He would not have been a sinless offering.
  - Even so, He was accepted in our place as a sacrifice to redeem and satisfy the moral debt incurred by our sin.
- iv. All sacrifice is a type of substitution but it was never a literal exchange of guilt.
2. *“It is God Who Justifies...”* A second principle that we must understand is the fact that it has always been God who justifies human beings (Rom. 8:33).
- a. We have often viewed righteousness and justification in very narrow terms. In other words, we want to say, “God used to only save people based on their flawless adherence to law—now in Christ His mercy saves us.”
- i. Consider Exodus 23:7—**“Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not justify the wicked.”**
- Notice this: The warning is *don't do wrong*—but does God say their obedience will bring their justification? No, *don't do wrong, because* (God says) **“I will not justify”** you if you do.
- b. It is unfortunate that in English we distinguish so sharply the concepts of *justification* and *righteousness*. That leads the English reader to imagine that it represents different words in the original text. This unnecessarily complicates the issue.
- i. In the Hebrew and the Greek two root words lie behind virtually all instances in which the words *just*, *right*, *justify*, *righteous*, *righteousness*, or *justification* are found.

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<sup>10</sup> See my study of this, “Jesus and the Levite Redemption of the Firstborn” *Biblical Insights* 4.6 (June 2004) 22.” Online at <http://www.ancientroadpublications.com/Studies/BiblicalStudies/LeviticRedemption.html>

- In the Hebrew the root *tsedeq* (צדק) and in Greek the root *dikē* (δικη) form two families of words that convey the concept of *rightness*—what constitutes and makes one *right*.
  - Since Scripture exalts God as the One who is and defines what is *right*, scriptural concepts of *rightness* concern what God considers *right* and how one may be considered *right* before God.
- c. *Biblical Righteousness*. There are so many complex (and in many cases) manmade notions associated with words like “justification” and “righteousness” it unnecessarily confuses our efforts to understand Scripture.
1. I am not saying it is wrong to translate the original words in this way, but I want to suggest that it may simplify things for us if we just substitute in our minds the idea of *rightness* when we consider texts using these words.
  2. This will lead us to recognize at least two ways that the concept of *rightness* is used in Scripture.
    - *Rightness* in terms of one’s *legal status* before God.
    - *Rightness* in regard to *behavior* that is right before God.
  3. When sin enters our life it compromises our rightness before God. Since all accountable souls sin (Rom. 3:23), it is in this sense that Scripture teaches, “**there is none righteous**” (Rom. 3:10).
    - i. When our legal status of rightness is sacrificed there is nothing within our own merit we can do to change this.
    - ii. Only if God forgives our sin may we again attain a condition of rightness before God.
  4. But this must be distinguished from the sense in which human beings may be said to do works that are defined by God as right (1 John 3:12).
    - i. One who does right things may be counted “**righteous**” (Matt. 23:35; 1 Tim. 1:9; 2 Pet. 2:7)—in the fact that he or she does deeds that are right, but that does not (in and of itself) establish one’s legal *rightness* before God.
    - ii. Deeds that are *right* are a matter of duty before God. As Jesus declared, “**when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do’**” (Luke 17:10).
  5. Only if we understand these distinct ways *rightness* is addressed may we see there is no contradiction for the Holy Spirit to say, “**there is none righteous**” but also to call Abel or Lot “**righteous.**”
- C. This clarifies many issues...
- If we understand that only God can justify or establish our *rightness* before Him...
  - If we understand that *right deeds* are a matter of duty not of merit...
  - If we understand that God has the right to define and set all terms of *rightness* before Him...
  - If we understand that any conditions God sets do not merit *rightness* or change the fact that it is God who retains or remits sins...

...Much of the rationale that moves Protestants or Catholics to imagine that Christ's works of *rightness* need to be literally transferred, infused, or imputed to human beings crumbles away.

**II. Key Passages Cited in Defense of Imputed Righteousness.** Let's look at some key passages used to defend the doctrine of imputed righteousness. Do they truly teach this doctrine or not?

- A. **"He accounted it to him for righteousness"** Genesis 15:6. In response to God's promise to give Abraham descendants as the stars of heaven and the sand of the seashore Abraham believed in God's promise.
1. The word for **"accounted"** here is *chashav* (חָשַׁב) defined "to think, plan, esteem, calculate, invent, make a judgment, imagine, count" (BDB).
    - a. The Hebrew doesn't have a preposition here. Translators add the word "for"—but it is not necessary.
    - b. This addresses how God viewed Abraham's faith—He considered it, viewed it, reckoned it *rightness*.
  2. We should compare this to a parallel statement in Psalm 106:30-31.
    - a. The Psalmist recounts God's dealings with Israel and comes to the point where they committed fornication with Moabite women and engaged in idolatry until Phinehas executed an Israel man in the act of fornication with a javelin (Num. 25:1-9).
    - b. The Psalmist says **"that was accounted to him for righteousness"** (Psa. 106:31). Faith is not the focus here—it was Phinehas' act of divine vengeance. How did God view it? He considered it an act of *rightness*.
  3. The religious world has so mystified these concepts it can lead us to miss the simplicity.
    - a. God considered Abraham's faith and Phinehas' punishment of sinful behavior as *right*—and perhaps even more than that, He held them *right* with Him in connection with these things.
    - b. There is no exchange or transfer here. God does not infuse His own *rightness* into Abraham or Phinehas—He counts them *right* before Him.
  4. This sets the stage for the use of Genesis 15:6 in four New Testament passages.
    - a. *Romans 4:22* comes in the context of recounting the circumstances of Genesis 15:6. Abraham was **"fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform"** (Rom. 4:21). Such was the nature of Abraham's faith that God considered *rightness*. This follows Paul's first reference to it in...
    - b. *Romans 4:6*. In spite of what the so-called "New Perspective on Paul" argues, Paul here seems to confront an attitude that views *rightness* before God as wholly a matter of works of *rightness*. Paul cites Abraham as an example that faith may be counted *rightness*.
      - i. What does this show regarding imputation? Read: Rom. 4:1-8. The Greek word used in 4:3, 6, and 8 is *logizomai* (λογίζομαι) meaning "to reckon, count, compute, calculate, count over" (Thayer).

- This is an accounting term, but it is also a term that refers to what is thought or considered. It is also defined, “to consider, take into account, weigh, meditate on” (Thayer).
  - This is the word Paul uses in Philippians 4:8 after listing the noble thoughts concerning which he commands, “**meditate on these things.**”
- ii. From this passage to “account *rightness*” is equivalent to the divine willingness not to “impute sin.” It is a condition of being forgiven.
  - iii. Once again, there is no transfer of divine *rightness* here, Paul is emphasizing that trusting in Christ as the source of forgiveness is the way to be right with God.
- c. *Galatians 3:6*. Read: Galatians 3:1-7. Again, the point is Abraham’s faith as an example of faith being considered *rightness*, but also emphasizing how faith like Abraham’s makes one a child of Abraham.
    - i. Is there anything here about Christ’s works being transferred to believers? No.
    - ii. Faith in Christ no more infuses Christ’s righteous behavior to believers than having a faith like Abraham infuses Abraham’s righteous behavior to those considered his children.
  - d. *James 2:23*. Read James 2:21-23. Many of us are familiar with Luther’s struggle with this text. Likely because it has a different emphasis than Paul’s epistles he claimed it “has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it” and compared to John and Paul’s writings considered it an “epistle of straw” (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 35, Word and Sacrament I. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960, 362).
    - i. In reality the problem is not between James and Paul it is a problem with Luther’s concept of righteousness.
    - ii. Yes, there are works that God commands which must be obeyed. When one obeys he or she does *right* before God and in one sense is “**justified by works**” (Jas. 2:21). This is not *rightness* in the sense of one’s legal status—it is *rightness* with respect to behavior.
      - So, is James rejecting faith in Christ as the source of salvation? No. He is defining saving faith.
    - iii. Much as Paul explained the nature of Paul’s faith—he was “**fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform**” (Rom. 4:21)—James explains that his “**faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect**” (Jas. 2:22).
      - James is not saying works can merit forgiveness. If so, we don’t need Jesus’ death. He is saying that to accept the grace of God we must have an obedient faith.
    - iv. While Genesis 15:6 is also cited, again there is nothing said about imputed *rightness*.
- B. “**He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him**” 2 Corinthians 5:21.



1. This text illustrates that our view of imputation of sin affects how we understand imputation of righteousness.
    - a. Was Jesus literally guilty of sin?—Did He literally take our sins on Himself?—If so, He was not **“a lamb without blemish and without spot.”** (1 Pet. 1:19).
    - b. If so, we must assume that the only way we may become **“the righteousness of God in Him”** is to have Christ’s sinlessness directly transferred to us—but that is not what the Bible teaches.
  2. So, how do we explain this? Some want to take this to mean, **“made him...to be a sin offering.”**<sup>11</sup>
    - a. While that is true (Eph. 5:2), it may not be the necessary way to interpret this passage. Let’s compare this to Galatians 3:13—**“Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’).”**
      - i. Was Jesus literally **“a curse”**? If so, once again He would not have been a sinless offering. Did He represent that which was **“a curse”**? Yes, in a figurative and symbolic sense.
      - ii. In the same way, Jesus in His death is made to *represent sin* in a figurative sense—while remaining literally sinless.
  3. So how do we **“become the righteousness of God in Him”**?
    - a. Remember, **“the righteousness of the righteousness shall be upon himself”** (Ezek. 18:20).
    - b. Jesus is a sacrifice on our behalf (John 1:29). He is a propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:2).
      - i. Faith in Jesus’ sacrifice on our behalf is the way we may attain forgiveness of sins.
      - ii. In so doing **“in Him”** we attain *rightness* with God.
    - c. To read a literal imputation of Christ’s righteousness into this text is to make the same mistake Premillennialists do when they treat every figure or symbol as if it must be understood literally.
      - i. Let’s look more quickly at several other texts in light of these same principles.
- C. **“Found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ”** Philippians 3:9. Read Philippians 3:8-11. Paul desires to **“gain Christ”** (Phil. 3:8). The contrast is Christ vs. Moses. Of course He desires the *rightness* that comes through Christ—only that forgives sin. Is this a transfer of righteous deeds? No.
1. **“The righteousness of the righteous man shall not deliver him”** Ezekiel 33:12. Read Ezekiel 33:12-15. Can *right* behavior save from sin—can it save if one does not repent? Of course not! Does wickedness from which one has repented condemn—God justifies the one who accepts His grace. This is not imputation of divine *rightness*, it is forgiveness that allows one to stand before God *right*.

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<sup>11</sup> See Maurice Barnett, “The Vicarious Death of Jesus?? – 1.” *Gospel Anchor*, Sept. 8, 2011 [online] [http://www.biblebanner.com/ga\\_art/deity/vicar1.htm](http://www.biblebanner.com/ga_art/deity/vicar1.htm).

- D. **“The LORD Our Righteousness”** Jeremiah 23:6. Read Jeremiah 23:5-6. This is Messianic. Christ is the way all people can be *right* with God. There is salvation in no other name (Acts 4:12). God forgives sin through Christ. Our own acts of *rightness* cannot bring forgiveness. Praise be to God that He is **“our righteousness”**—Not because of imputed *right* deeds, because He considers us *right* with Him as we abide in Christ.
1. **“You are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness”** 1 Corinthians 1:30. Read 1 Corinthians 1:27-31. Christ is our **“righteousness”** but He is also our **“redemption.”** Remember, redemption doesn’t involve a literal exchange of nature—it pays a price that satisfies a debt. Christ’s sacrifice is the redemption price that allows us to be *right* with God.
- E. **“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ”** Galatians 3:27. Read Galatians 3:26-27. It is interesting that this is cited to defend imputed righteousness, but it is often cited by those who reject the necessity of baptism. That is ironic because those who do so see in this text a view of a literal unity with Christ’s right behavior, but we must note that this text tells us this unity comes through baptism. *Is this a literal unity with Christ’s righteous behavior?* Let’s note two other texts that speak of this union with Christ.
1. **“It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me”** Galatians 2:20. And...
  2. **“For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God”** Colossians 3:3.
    - a. Do these passages teach a literal exchange of sin and righteousness?—Is it truly that when God looks at us He simply sees the righteousness of Christ?—How does the Bible teach that Christ lives in us?
    - b. He lives in us **“through faith”** (Eph. 3:17) and faith comes through the hearing of God’s word (Rom. 10:17).
    - c. He lives in us as we **“keep His commandments”**—We may know that He is in us as we **“keep His word”**—We abide in Him as we **“walk as He walked”** (1 John 2:4-6).
      - i. Putting on Christ, letting Christ live in us, and allowing our life to be hidden in Christ is a choice. It comes as we submit ourselves to God in Christ and accept the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf.
      - ii. This is unity with Christ but not through an exchange of *right* behavior, but through a continued relationship with Him and behavior seeks to follow His example.
- F. **“My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities”** Isaiah 53:11. We have said from the beginning that it has always been God who justifies the sinner (cf. Rom. 8:33). Here once again we must consider what is said about Jesus’ relationship to our sin in order to understand how He justifies. Does He literally **“bear”** our sins? No. Consider the example of the Scapegoat (Leviticus 16:21-22)—It was said to **“bear on itself all their iniquities.”** Did this goat literally become guilty of sin? No. It was a provision by which God allowed forgiveness through a figure representing the removal of sin. The same is true of Christ. He figuratively *bore* our sins—this allows us the way to stand justified before God.

1. **“But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness”** Romans 4:5. This is (to a certain extent) hyperbole. Paul doesn’t devote three chapters to the problem of sin—and after this rebuke the idea that sin can allow grace to abound (Rom. 6:1)—only to say that works have nothing to do with accepting God’s grace.
  - a. He is contrasting righteousness by Mosaic Law with *rightness* that comes through faith in Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf.
  - b. Our works of *rightness* do not bring our forgiveness—faith in Christ—obedient faith in Christ allows us to stand *right* before God.
2. **“By one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous”** Romans 5:19. This text comes in a text often used to defend the false doctrine of total inherited depravity.
  - a. This does not teach inherited sin—**“death spread to all men, because all sinned”** (Rom. 5:12). This is talking about imitation, not imputation.
  - b. One of the strongest proofs against this is the nature of the comparison itself—a comparison is drawn between what Christ did and what Adam did.
    - i. Calvinists face a serious problem here—they want to argue that this teaches automatic imputed sin to all of Adam’s posterity, but they do not want to argue that it teaches automatic universal imputation of righteousness. You can’t have one without the other.<sup>12</sup>
    - ii. Adam’s disobedience influenced his posterity in such a way that it created the way that **“many were made sinners”** (Rom. 5:19a).
    - iii. In the same way, Jesus’ obedience—is not credited to anyone—it influenced mankind in such a way that it created the way that **“many will be made righteous”** (Rom. 5:19b).

**Conclusion.** Twenty-four years ago I was preaching in Birmingham and had the privilege of working with Bob Hutto and Steve Patton to help bro. Charles Andrews prepare for a four-night debate with an Orthodox Presbyterian preacher named Jon Smith.

- A. After the debate I tried to pursue some correspondence with Mr. Smith in the hopes of changing his mind about his views.
  1. Mr. Smith didn’t choose to engage me in correspondence but he did send me a book: *The Imputation of Adam’s Sin*, by John Murray (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1959).
  2. There is a statement made in that book I wonder if Mr. Smith had read. Murray writes, “When we speak of the sin of Adam as imputed to posterity it is admitted that nowhere in Scripture is our relation to the trespass of Adam expressly defined in terms of imputation” (71).
  3. Murray goes on to argue that it is inferred in Scripture—but doesn’t it tell us something that a doctrine considered so fundamental to denominational thought is not “expressly defined” in Scripture?

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<sup>12</sup> I explore this in greater depth in my workbook on Romans that is part of the *Bible Text Book* series. It is written as a mini-commentary on the text. Pope, Kyle. *Romans*. Athens, AL: Guardian of Truth, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition 2015.

- B. On the other side of the coin I want to echo Mr. Murray's words as it relates to our topic. I believe we can conclude—*When we speak of the RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST as imputed to THE SAVED it MUST BE admitted that nowhere in Scripture is our relation to the RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST expressly defined in terms of imputation!*
1. Beyond that, I would add that not only is doctrine not “expressly defined” in Scripture, but neither is it necessarily (or unnecessarily inferred).
  2. It is, in fact contrary to fundamental principles taught in Scripture and must be rejected as false, unsound, and unscriptural.