

How Is a Sinner Forgiven?

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Introduction

- Our goal in this lecture is to deal with forgiveness and righteousness for the Christian.
 - How are we “made” righteous?
 - What does it even mean to be called righteous in scripture?
 - What role does the perfect life of Christ play in that picture?
 - If our participation is required, then can we have assurance?
- The answers to the questions get to the heart of the differences between what Calvinists (and those influenced by Calvinism) say and what the Bible says.
 - Too often we swallow assumptions from the Reformation and shave off the edges to try and make it fit with our other doctrinal commitments.
 - If we are not careful, we end up saying essentially that Calvinist views are true, we just have to add an element of obedience.
 - But in this lecture we hope to show that the Calvinistic view is wrong in its very roots and so the fruit that comes from it is also rotten.

A Common Approach

- God is righteous by right moral behavior.
 - "God's righteousness means that God always acts in accordance with what is right and is himself the final standard of what is right. In human terms, we must reflect this righteousness in our moral character, but

ultimately our righteousness comes through faith in Jesus Christ." - Wayne Grudem *Systematic Theology*

- That righteousness is lived out in the flesh by Jesus and becomes a perfect record that can be transferred to others.
 - "The righteousness that sinners need in order to be acceptable to God is the righteousness of God — the righteousness that God has, and that He gives to us freely through faith in Christ. This righteousness is imputed, not infused. It is counted as ours, not worked in us by ourselves." - John Piper *Counted Righteous in Christ*.
- We are all unrighteous and don't even have the capacity to do right ([Rom. 3:10, 23](#); [Isa. 64:6](#)).
- God offers the righteous record of Jesus to sinners who have faith ([Phil. 3:9](#); [2 Cor. 5:21](#)).
 - Our sins are likewise transferred to Jesus.
- Good works only come as a result of this and play no part in it.
- There are variations here:
 - Some will deny the double imputation.
 - Some will say that the work of baptism is necessary.
 - Some will say that we are simply forgiven because Jesus paid the price for our sins but they will still maintain that works are the result of salvation and not in any way a cause of salvation.

Works and Salvation

- "But here's the difference. Old law, we're keeping a resume of your righteousness. New law, only God's righteousness is in view. And that's gotta make you smile. Not mine, not my record, not my ups and downs, nope. All of that has been taken away and replaced with the righteousness from the Lord." - Kris Emerson, *A Word of Faith*
- It is true that good works ought to be a result of our salvation ([Eph. 2:10](#)).

- But what if the works are not produced.
- The answer is typically that that means we weren't saved.
- But then that basically means that we have to have the good works to be saved.
- Will God consider my works in judgment ([Rom. 2:5-10](#); [2 Cor. 5:10](#); [1 Pet. 1:17](#); [Rev. 2:5, 10, 16-17, 26](#); [3:4-5, 10-11](#))?
 - This is not to say our works "save us."
 - But they are a necessary part of the equation.
 - We cannot just dismiss these verses as we draw conclusions about how salvation works.
- Abraham's justification is said to be by the works he actually did ([Jas. 2:21](#)).
- Whatever we say about salvation, we can't say it isn't about what I do.
 - It certainly is about what Jesus did, but that doesn't exclude the consideration of what I do.
 - Grace and work are not antithetical ([1 Cor. 15:10](#)).

Righteous Deeds

- "[Romans 10:3](#) mentions God's righteousness, are you familiar with God's righteousness? God's righteousness is the goodness of God that you don't have. You can't have it. We're told in [Romans 3](#), on your best day, with your best effort, "there is none righteous, not even one." – Kris Emerson, *A Word of Faith*
- "For we repeat again – Imputed Righteousness (perfect life and death of Christ) is the only kind there is! What is imputed righteousness once again? It is the righteousness that Christ possesses by his perfect life as lived under God's laws. Every sinner coming to Him by faith was credited to his account that precious righteousness" - Arnold Hardin, *The Persuader*, Vol. XIII, No. 1
- "Such blessings are not possible through works of righteousness which we may do, but by the grace of God. They do not come because of our perfect

conduct or understanding, but because God understood our plight and His Son lived a perfect life in our stead” - Edward Fudge

- “It produces no change in the individual to whom the imputation is made; it simply alters his relation to the Law” - James R. White, *The God who Justifies*
- Consider the context of [Romans 3:10](#) and all of the quotes that follow:
 - ([Rom. 3:10-12](#); [Psa. 14:1-3](#))
 - ([Rom. 3:13](#); [Psa. 5:9](#))
 - ([Rom. 3:13](#); [Psa. 140:3](#))
 - ([Rom. 3:14](#); [Psa. 10:7](#))
 - ([Rom. 3:15-17](#); [Isa. 59:7](#))
 - ([Rom. 3:18](#); [Psa. 36:1](#))
- Consider the context of [Isa. 64:6](#).
 - Verse five shows us that righteousness is the goal and not an impossible one.
 - *Their* righteous deeds were filthy...but they didn't have to be.
- Consider this word applied to men ([Matt. 1:19](#); [Mk. 6:20](#); [Lk. 1:6](#); [2:25](#); [Acts 10:22](#), [34-35](#); [Rom. 6:16](#); [Jas. 5:5](#) ; [2 Pet. 2:7-8](#); [Rev. 22:11](#)).

“The Righteousness of God”

- The “righteousness of God” refers to God’s faithfulness to His promises.
 - "God's righteousness in Paul is not an abstract attribute of moral perfection but His faithfulness to the covenant He made with Israel. It is God’s active intervention on behalf of His people, His loyalty to His promises." - James Dunn (*Word Biblical Commentary*)
 - "The righteousness of God is not a quality of moral perfection but a relational term, referring to God’s steadfastness and faithfulness in fulfilling His covenant promises. God reveals His righteousness in bringing

about salvation for His people, as He had pledged." - Mark Seifrid (*Paul's Theology of Justification*)

- "For Paul, the righteousness of God is best understood as God's covenant faithfulness. God's righteousness is about God's commitment to save His people and fulfill His promises, now available to all through the faithfulness of Christ." - Michael Gorman (*Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology*)
- "God's righteousness is His covenantal fidelity, His unwavering commitment to uphold the promises He made to Israel. It is a dynamic, relational concept that culminates in God's redemptive work through Jesus, fulfilling His promises to save." - Sam K. Williams (*The Righteousness of God in Romans*)
- "In a now-classic essay, Sam Williams wrote, "most Pauline scholars now agree that in the OT and in Paul 'righteousness' designates conduct or activity appropriate to a relationship rather than an inherent quality, static attribute or absolute moral norm."¹⁹⁹ In Romans, Williams argues, the phrase refers to the fidelity and faithfulness of God to his promises to Abraham and his descendants.²⁰⁰ This understanding—that "the righteousness of God" refers to the trustworthiness of God's promises to Abraham and the confidence his people can have in those promises²⁰¹—differs strongly from the view that "the righteousness of God" refers to the righteousness that God requires from his people (an ethical righteousness in contrast to the moral depravity Paul described in [Rom 1:18–32](#)) or that God grants to his people (righteousness as a status that God grants his people despite their inability to maintain the ethical righteousness already mentioned)." - Rafael Rodriguez (*If You Call Yourself a Jew*)
- Consider the righteousness of God throughout the Old Testament ([Deut. 32:4](#); [Ezra 9:15](#); [Neh. 9:8](#); [Psa 36:10](#); [71:15](#); [96:13](#); [119:138](#); [143:1](#); [Zech. 8:8](#); [Isa. 11:5](#)).
- In the septuagint the connection grows ([Ex. 15:13](#); [34:7](#)).
- Bring that idea back to the New Testament and see how it fits ([1 Jn. 1:9](#); [Rom. 3:3-5](#), [21-26](#)).

- This idea of righteousness puts the focus on reciprocal participation and makes transference nonsensical.

Salvation by Participation

- God is gracious and demands that we participate in grace ([Tit. 2:11-13](#); [Heb. 12:28-29](#)).
- God is faithful and demands that we be faithful ([Heb. 10:23](#)).
- God is righteous and demands that we be righteous in response ([1 Jn. 3:7-10](#)).
- But how does that “work”:
 - God is gracious, and faithful, and righteous to people who have been none of these things.
 - Because we have sinned in all of these ways, we cannot be reconciled to God unless sin is removed.
 - God has graciously, faithfully, and righteously offered payment for our sins through the cross and made possible our resurrection from death by the resurrection of His Son.
 - We participate in this death burial and resurrection through baptism.
 - Our debt is paid and we come into a relationship of grace, faith, and righteousness.
 - We continue in that relationship by continuing in all of those things including making appeals to that debt payment through confession and repentance.
 - When our sins are paid for, what is left is a record of faithfulness, graciousness, and righteousness.
- So why do they say God’s righteousness needs to be imputed or transferred to us.
 - Because, they believe that even “on your best day, with your best effort, ‘there is none righteous, not even one.’”

- They think if you took away all of our deeds that are tinged with sin, there would be no deeds left.
- Ultimately they do not believe what God says in [Deut. 30:11](#).

Boasting and Confidence

- Where then is boasting ([Rom. 4:2](#); [Jas. 2:21](#))?
 - Obviously there are different works under consideration here.
 - There are works that *set aside* the work of God (God's righteousness) and there are works that participate in it ([Rom. 10:3-4](#)).
 - When we are responding to God in all that we do, we have no room for boasting even though we are working ([1 Cor. 15:10](#)).
- How can I be confident if my salvation depends on me?
 - How can you be confident if your salvation has nothing to do with you?
 - Is it so difficult to determine whether or not we are being faithful ([2 Tim. 4:7-8](#))?

Conclusion

- The idea of imputation is rooted in false notions about human capacity and the nature of sin.
- I know there is far more to say on this subject but I hope we have done enough to show not only that "imputed righteousness" is a false doctrine with false hopes, but also to point in the direction of a better understanding of how our relationship to God works.