

Imputed Righteousness

Bible Doctrine vs. Human Tradition

Introduction:

A. Imputed righteousness as set forth by Paul is a Bible doctrine (Romans 4:3-23).

B. Imputed righteousness as set forth by John Calvin is an erroneous doctrine.

1. Some brethren, especially in the late 1970's and early 1980's, revived this erroneous doctrine: R.L. Kilpatrick, Edward Fudge, Arnold Hardin, Clyde Goff, etc.

2. For a review of Calvin's imputation among brethren, see *Neo-Calvinism in the Church of Christ* (1980, Gogdill Foundation) and *The Christian and Sin* (1993, Faith and Facts).

I. Imputation Defined.

A. Impute (Gr. *logizomai*) found 41 times in the NT means "to reckon; to put down to one's account" and is translated "number," "count," "reckon," and "credit" (NIV).

1. Occurrences of the word in the NT relative to the subject of righteousness: Romans 4:3,4,5,6,8,9,10,11,22,23,24; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Galatians 3:6; and James 2:23.

2. Sin is put to one's account in God's mind when the person commits his own sin (Rom. 4:8).

3. Righteousness is put to one's account in God's mind when he exercises his own obedient faith (Rom. 4:3,5,9,11,22-24).

B. Impute does not mean "transfer" or "attribute what belongs to another."

1. Calvinism introduces a false definition of imputation and then imposes this new (false) definition in place of the Bible usage.

2. Nowhere in the NT is "impute" (reckon) used for the perfect life of Christ! Only once is this word used in connection with Christ and it refers to his being numbered with the thieves in death, not in connection with his life on earth (Mk. 15:28; Lk. 22:37; compare Isaiah 53:12).

3. Where is the scripture for the imputation of Christ's life to the sinner?

a.) Faith is imputed (Rom. 4:3,5,9,22,23,24; Gal. 3:6; Jas. 2:23)

- b.) Reward is imputed (Rom. 4:4)
- c.) Sin not imputed (Rom. 4:8)
- d.) Righteousness is imputed (Rom. 4:6,11)
- d.) Personal righteous life of Christ is imputed (scripture) ?

II. Why This Study?

A. Calvinism states that sinful man cannot be righteous; therefore, imputed righteous from Christ is the only kind of righteousness he can have.

1. Calvinism's three-fold imputation: first, Adam's sin / guilt is imputed (transferred) to mankind (compare Ezek. 18:20; 1 Jn. 3:4; 5:17); second, man's sin is imputed (transferred) to Christ on the cross (compare Heb. 9:26; 1 Peter 2:22; 3:18); third, Christ's perfect life is imputed (transferred) to mankind (compare Romans 4:3-23).

2. According to Calvinism, the perfect life of Christ ("his doing and dying") is imputed to the sinner.

a.) John Calvin: "the righteousness of Christ is credited to us, entirely as if it were really ours, while our iniquity is not charged to us..." "For the righteousness of Christ ... must be summoned for us, and as a surety represent us judicially" (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 3, Chapter 13, Section 12).

b.) Westminster Confession of Faith: "... by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on his righteousness by faith: which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God."

c.) "Christ kept the law for us..." and "Christ is our representative law-keeper" are phrases used by Calvinists.

d.) God does not see the sinner's sinful life because the righteousness of Christ imputed to him acts like an umbrella or robe to cover him. According to Calvinists, sinners / Christians are under "God's umbrella of grace" or clothed with "the robe of Christ's perfect righteousness." Thus, God does not see their sin.

3. Calvinism's erroneous doctrine of imputation was built upon errors (total depravity, saved by grace alone, etc.) and leads to further errors (see II. C. below).

B. NT Passages Misused.

1. Romans 5:10 – “His life” refers to his resurrected life (Rom. 4:9,25), not the perfect obedience of his earthly ministry.
2. 1 Corinthians 1:30 – Jesus is the source of all these things: wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. These things come from Jesus, but they are not imputed (transferred) to mankind.
3. 2 Corinthians 5:21 – Jesus was made to be a sin-offering (metonymy), not our sins were transferred to Jesus and made his own sins.

C. Some Results of Neo-Calvinism Among Brethren.

1. Continual (automatic) cleansing for continual sinning (including sins of ignorance) and once-saved-always-saved.
2. Salvation without works leading to a de-emphasis on baptism, etc.
3. A so-called “gospel – doctrine” distinction.
4. Unity and fellowship with those in sin and (denominational) error.

C. What Is and Is Not the Issue.

1. There is no question that Jesus lived a perfect life (Jn. 8:46; Heb. 4:16; 1 Pet. 2:22). The question is: Is Jesus’ perfect life imputed (transferred) to sinners? No.
2. Jesus lived to fulfill righteousness (Mt. 3:15). He was tempted without sin (Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15). He was subject to law (Gal. 4:4-7). He obeyed perfectly (Heb. 5:8-9,14-16; 7:26-27; 9:11-14, 23-26; 10:1-20). Jesus lived and died to provide a perfect sin sacrifice, not to provide a perfect life transferred to mankind.

III. How and When Is One Righteous?

A. One Is Righteous When He Meets God’s Terms / Conditions of Forgiveness And Is Forgiven (Rom. 4:7-8; 2 Cor. 5:19).

1. Abraham’s own obedient faith, not the faith of Jesus, was imputed for righteousness (see also Gen. 15:6; Gal. 3:6; James 2:21-23). In Romans 4:22, “for righteousness” (*eis dikaiosunen*) means that one is truly righteous, not just pretended righteousness.

2. Abraham's own faith, not the life of Jesus, was imputed for righteousness and is set forth as an example for all people (Rom. 4:11,16,22-24). Abraham, not Christ, is set forth as the example of imputation!

3. What are the terms / conditions of forgiveness? One must obey: hear (Rom. 10:17), believe (Rom. 10:10), repent (Rom. 2:4), confess (Rom. 10:9-10), be baptized (Rom. 6:3-4), and live righteously (Rom. 6:18ff). Note: "obedience unto righteousness" (Rom. 6:16).

4. Man is made upright (Eccl. 7:29), sin destroys this upright condition (Isa. 59:1-2; Rom. 3:23; 6:23), but forgiveness restores this upright condition (Rom. 4:7-8).

B. One is Righteous When He Works Righteousness (Acts 10:34-35).

1. Works of righteousness to be obeyed are given in the gospel of righteousness (Rom. 1:17; 3:21; 10:3-4).

2. Sin comes from an act of evil that one does (1 Jn. 3:4; 5:17), not what is transferred to him from Adam. Additionally, righteousness comes from an act of good that one does (1 Jn. 2:29; 3:7,10,12; 3 Jn. 11), not what is transferred to him from Christ.

3. Saints are clothed with their own righteous acts (plural, Rev. 19:8), not the perfect life of Christ.

IV. Conclusion.

A. Calvinism's imputation is 1) theological "passing the buck;" 2) "coat-tail righteousness;" and 3) "pretended righteousness."

B. Biblical imputation, following the example of Abraham, places an emphasis on man's personal responsibility to repent of his own sins, to exercise his own faith in obedience to God's gospel, and to live righteously by his own godly actions in compliance with God's righteous standard.

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