

Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 191

IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS

*“Abraham believed God, and it
was counted unto him
for righteousness.”*

Romans 4:3

Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

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#191

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THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

“This is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”—Jeremiah 23:6

MAN by the fall sustained an infinite loss in the matter of righteousness. He suffered the loss of a righteous nature, and then a two-fold loss of legal righteousness in the sight of God. Man sinned; he was therefore no longer innocent of transgression. Man did not keep the command; he therefore was guilty of the sin of omission. In that which he committed, and in that which he omitted, his original character for uprightness was completely wrecked. Jesus Christ came to undo the mischief of the fall for His people. So far as their sin concerned their breach of the command, that He has removed by His precious blood. His agony and bloody sweat have forever taken away the consequences of sin from believers, seeing Christ did by His one sacrifice bear the penalty of that sin in His flesh. He, His own self, bare our sins in His own body on the tree.

Still it is not enough for a man to be pardoned. He, of course, is then in the eye of God without sin. But it was required of man that he should actually keep the command. It was not enough that he did not break it, or that he is regarded through the blood as though he did not break it. He must keep it, he must continue in all things that are written in the book of the Law to do them. How is this necessity supplied? Man must have a righteousness, or God cannot accept him. Man must have a perfect obedience, or else God cannot reward him. Should He give heaven to a soul that has not perfectly kept the Law; that were to give the reward where the service is not done, and that before God would be an act which might impeach His justice. Where, then, is the righteousness with which the pardoned man shall be completely covered, so that God can regard him as having kept the Law, and reward him for so doing? Surely, my brethren, none of you are so besotted¹ as to think that this righteousness can be wrought out by yourselves.

Christ in His life was so righteous, that we may say of the life taken as a whole, that it is righteousness itself. Christ is the Law incarnate. Understand me. He lived out the Law of God to the very full, and while you see God’s precepts written in fire on Sinai’s brow, you see them written in flesh in the person of Christ. He never offended against the commands of the Just One. From His eye there never flashed the fire of unhallowed² anger. On His lip there did never hang the unjust or licentious word. His heart was never stirred by the breath of sin or the taint of iniquity. In the secret of His reins³ no fault was hidden. In His understanding was no defect; in His judgment no error. In His mira-

¹ **besotted** – intellectually stupefied, as with liquor; foolish.

² **unhallowed** – unholy; wicked.

³ **reins** – seat of the feelings or affections.

cles there was no ostentation.⁴ In Him there was indeed no guile. His powers being ruled by His understanding, all of them acted and co-acted to perfection's very self, so that never was there any flaw of omission or stain of commission.

The Law consists in this first: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart" (Deu 6:5; Mat 22:37; Mar 12:30; Luk 10:27). He did so. It was His meat and His drink to do the will of Him that sent Him. Never man spent himself as He did. Hunger and thirst and nakedness were nothing to Him, nor death itself, if He might so be baptized with the baptism wherewith He must be baptized and drink the cup which His Father had set before Him (Mat 20:22-23; 26:42; Joh 18:11).

The Law consists also in this: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Lev 19:18; Mat 22:39; Mar 12:31). In all He did and in all He suffered He more than fulfilled the precept, for "he saved others; himself he [could not] save" (Mat 27:42). He exhausted the utmost resources of love in the deep devotion and self-sacrifice of loving. He loved man better than His own life. He would sooner be spit upon than that man should be cast into the flames of hell and sooner yield up the ghost in agonies that cannot be described than that the souls His Father gave Him should be cast away. He carried out the Law then, I say, to the very letter. He spelled out its mystic syllables, and verily He magnified it and made it honorable. He loved the Lord His God with all His heart, and soul, and mind, and He loved His neighbors as Himself.

The day is coming when men shall acknowledge Him to be Jehovah, and when looking upon all His life while He was incarnate here, they shall be compelled to say that His life was righteousness itself. The pith,⁵ however, of the title lies in the little word *our*—"Jehovah *our* righteousness." This is the grappling iron with which we get a hold on Him; this is the anchor which dives into the bottom of this great deep of His immaculate righteousness. This is the sacred rivet by which our souls are joined to Him. This is the blessed hand with which our soul toucheth Him, and He becometh to us all in all: "Jehovah *our* Righteousness."

You will now observe that there is a most precious *doctrine* unfolded in this title of our Lord and Savior. I think we may take it thus: When we believe in Christ, by faith we receive our justification. As the merit of His blood takes away our sin, so the merit of His obedience is imputed to us for righteousness. We are considered, as soon as we believe, as though the works of Christ were our works. God looks upon us as though that perfect obedience, of which I have just now spoken, had been performed by ourselves. God considers us as though we were Christ—looks upon us as though *His* life had been *our* life—and accepts, blesses, and rewards us as though all that He did had been done by us, His believing people.

⁴ **ostentation** – pretentious display meant to impress others.

⁵ **pith** – central or inward part, hence the vital or essential part of anything.

I know that Socinus⁶ in his day used to call this an execrable,⁷ detestable, and licentious doctrine: probably it was because he was an execrable, detestable, and licentious man. Many men use their own names when they are applying names to other persons; they are so well acquainted with their own characters, and so suspicious of themselves, that they think it best before another can express the suspicion to attach the very same accusation to someone else. Now we hold, you know, that this doctrine is not execrable, but most delightful; that it is not abominable, but godlike; that it is not licentious, but holy.

Imputation, so far from being an exceptional case with regard to the righteousness of Christ, lies at the very bottom of the entire teaching of Scripture. How did we fall, my brethren? We fell by the imputation of Adam's sin to us. Adam was our federal head: he represented us. And when he sinned, we sinned representatively in him; and what he did was imputed to us. You say that you never agreed to the imputation. Nay, but I would not have you say thus, for as by representation we fell, it is by the representative system that we rise. The angels fell personally and individually, and they never rise. But we fell in another, and we have therefore the power given by divine grace to rise in another. The root of the fall is found in the federal relationship of Adam to his seed; thus we fell by imputation. Is it any wonder that we should rise by imputation? Deny this doctrine, and I ask you—How are men pardoned at all? Are they not pardoned because satisfaction has been offered for sin by Christ? Very well then, but that satisfaction must be imputed to them or else how is God just in giving to them the results of the death of another unless that death of the other be first of all imputed to them?

When we say that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to all believing souls, we do not hold forth an exceptional theory, but we expound a grand truth, which is so consistent with the theory of the fall and the plan of pardon, that it must be maintained in order to make the gospel clear...I must give up justification by faith, if I give up imputed righteousness. True justification by faith is the surface soil, but then imputed righteousness is the granite rock which lies underneath it. And if you dig down through the great truth of a sinner's being justified by faith in Christ, you must, as I believe, inevitably come to the doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ as the basis and foundation on which that simple doctrine rests.

And now let us stop a moment and think over this whole title—"The Lord our righteousness." Brethren, the Law-giver has Himself obeyed the Law. Do you not think that His obedience will be sufficient? Jehovah has Himself become man that so He may do man's work: think you that He has done it imperfectly? Jehovah—He Who girds the angels that excel in strength—has taken upon Him the form of a servant that He may become obedient: think you that His service will be incomplete?

⁶ **Faustus Socinus** (1539-1604) – anti-trinitarian theologian; taught that Christ became deity only after the resurrection and that Christ's death did not bring forgiveness of sins; born in Siena, Italy.

⁷ **execrable** – disgusting; bad beyond description.

Let the fact that the Savior is Jehovah strengthen your confidence. Be ye bold. Be ye very courageous. Face heaven, and earth, and hell with the challenge of the apostle. “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?” Look back upon your past sins, look upon your present infirmities, and all your future errors, and while you weep the tears of repentance, let no fear of damnation blanch⁸ your cheek. You stand before God today robed in your Savior’s garments, “with his spotless vestments on, holy as the Holy One.” Not Adam when he walked in Eden’s bowers⁹ was more accepted than you are—not more pleasing to the eye of the all-judging, the sin-hating God than you are if clothed in Jesus’ righteousness and sprinkled with His blood. You have a better righteousness than Adam had. He had a human righteousness; your garments are divine. He had a robe complete, it is true; but the earth had woven it. You have a garment as complete, but *heaven* has made it for you to wear. Go up and down in the strength of this great truth and boast exceedingly, and glory in your God. And let this be on the top and summit of your heart and soul: “Jehovah, the Lord our righteousness.”

From a sermon delivered on Lord’s Day morning, June 2, 1861, at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington. Available as a booklet from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892): Influential English Baptist preacher; history’s most widely read preacher (apart from those found in Scripture); born at Kelvedon, Essex, England.



⁸ **blanch** – cause to turn white or become pale.

⁹ **bowers** – covered places in a garden made with boughs of trees twined together.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD RECKONED TO US

Horatius Bonar (1808-1889)

EVERLASTING righteousness comes to us through believing. We are “justified by faith,” the fruit of which is “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1).

It is of this “everlasting righteousness” that the Apostle Peter speaks when he begins his second epistle thus: “Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (2Pe 1:1).

This righteousness is “reckoned” or “imputed” to all who believe, so that they are treated by God as if it were actually theirs. They are entitled to claim all that which such a righteousness can merit from God as the Judge of righteous claims. It does not become ours gradually or in fragments or drops, but is transferred to us all at once. It is not that so much of it is reckoned to us in proportion to the strength of our faith, or the warmth of our love, or the fervor of our prayers; but the whole of it passes over to us by imputation. We are “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6). We are “complete in him, who is the head of all principality and power” (Col 2:10). In its whole quality and quantity it is transferred to us. Its perfection represents us before God; its preciousness, with all that that preciousness can purchase for us, henceforth belongs to us (1Pe 1:7).

The Stone, the chief Corner Stone, elect and precious (1Pe 2:6)—this Stone in all its preciousness—is ours, not only for resting on, not only for acceptance, but for whatever its divine value can purchase for us. Possessed of this preciousness (imputed, but still *ours*), we go into the heavenly market and buy what we need without stint¹ or end. We get everything upon the credit of His name because not only has our unworthiness ceased to be recognized by God in His dealings with us, but our demerit has been supplanted by the merit of One Who is absolutely and divinely perfect. In His name we carry on all our transactions with God, and obtain all that we need by simply using it as our plea. The things that He did not do were laid to His charge, and He was treated as if He had done them all. The things that He did do are put to our account, and we are treated by God as if we had done them all.

This is the scriptural meaning of reckoning or imputing, both in the Old Testament and the New. Let us look at a few of these passages:

“It was *imputed* to him for righteousness” (Gen 15:6), i.e., it was so reckoned to him, that in virtue of it he was treated as being what he was not.

¹ **stint** – limitation; restriction.

“Are we not *counted* of him strangers?” (Gen 31:15). Are we not treated by him as if we were strangers, not children?

“Neither shall it be *imputed* unto him that offers it” (Lev 7:18). The excellence of the peace offering shall not be counted to him.

“Your heave-offering shall be *reckoned unto you* as though it were the corn of the threshing-floor” (Num 18:27). It shall be accepted by God as if it were the whole harvest, and you shall be treated by Him accordingly.

“Let not my lord *impute* iniquity unto me, neither remember that which your servant did perversely” (2Sa 19:19). Do not deal with me according to my iniquity.

“Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord *imputes* not iniquity” (Psa 32:2), to whom God does not *reckon* his iniquities, but treats him as if they were not (see also Psa 106:31).

“It was *counted* to him for righteousness” (Rom 4:3).

“His faith is *counted* for righteousness” (Rom 4:5), that is, not as the righteousness or as the substitute for it, but as bringing him into righteousness.

“Unto whom God *imputes* righteousness without works” (Rom 4:6).

“Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will *not impute* sin” (Rom 4:8).

“That righteousness might be *imputed* to them also” (Rom 4:11).

“To whom it shall be *imputed*, if we believe on him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead” (Rom 4:24).

“Not *imputing* their trespasses unto them” (2Co 5:19).

“It was *accounted* to him for righteousness” (Gal 3:6).

Thus the idea of reckoning to one what does not belong to him and treating him as if he really possessed all that is reckoned to him comes out very clearly. This is God’s way of lifting man out of the horrible pit and the miry clay, of giving him a standing and a privilege and a hope far beyond that which mere pardon gives and no less far above that which the first Adam lost. To be righteous according to the righteousness of the first Adam would have been much; but to be righteous according to the righteousness of the last Adam, the Lord from heaven, is unspeakably and inconceivably more.

“It is God that justifieth” (Rom 8:33), and He does so by imputing to us a righteousness which warrants Him as the Judge to justify the unrighteous freely.

It is not simply *because* of this righteousness that Jehovah justifies; but He *legally transfers* it to us so that we can use it, plead it, and appear before God in it, just as if it were wholly our own. Romanists and Socinians² have set themselves strongly against the doctrine of “imputed righteousness.” But there it stands, written clearly and legibly in the divine Word. There it stands, an essential part of the great Bible truth concerning

² **Socinians** – followers of the sect founded by Faustus Socinius, 16th century Italian theologian, who denied the deity of Christ and denied that the cross brought forgiveness of sins.

sacrifice and substitution and suretyship.³ It is as deeply written in the book of Leviticus as in the epistle to the Romans. It spreads itself over all Scripture and rises gloriously into view in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ where the “obedience unto death” which makes up this righteousness was completed. There He, Who as our Substitute took flesh and was born at Bethlehem, Who as our Substitute passed through earth as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, consummated His substitution and brought in the “everlasting righteousness.”

This is the righteousness of which the apostle spoke when he reasoned that, “as by the *disobedience of one* many were made sinners, so by the *obedience of one* shall many be made righteous” (Rom 5:19); when he proclaimed his abnegation⁴ of all other righteousnesses: “And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Phi 3:9). This is “the gift of righteousness” regarding which he says: “If by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:17). The one man’s offence rests upon all men “to condemnation” (Rom 5:18); so the one Man’s righteousness, as the counteraction⁵ or removal of this condemnation, is available and efficacious⁶ “unto justification of life.” The imputation of the first Adam’s sin to us, and of the last Adam’s righteousness, are thus placed side by side. The transference of our guilt to the divine Substitute and the transference of that Substitute’s righteousness or perfection to us must stand or fall together.

This righteousness of God was no common righteousness. It was the righteousness of Him Who was both God and man; therefore it was not only the righteousness of God, but in addition to this, it was the righteousness of man. It embodied and exhibited all uncreated and all created perfection. Never had the like been seen or heard of in heaven or on earth before. It was the two-fold perfection of creaturehood and creatorship in one resplendent⁷ center, one glorious Person. The dignity of that Person gave a perfection, a vastness, a length and breadth, a height and depth, to that righteousness which never had been equaled and which never shall be equaled forever. It is the perfection of perfection, the excellency of excellency, the holiness of holiness. It is that in which God preeminently delights. Never had His Law been so kept and honored before. Son of God and Son of Man in one Person, He in this twofold character keeps the Father’s Law, and in keeping it provides a righteousness so large and full that it can be shared with others, transferred to others, imputed to others; and God be glorified (as well as the sinner saved) by the transference and imputation. Never had God been so loved as now, with all divine love and with all human love. Never had God been so served and obeyed, as now

³ **suretyship** – the act of one undertaking responsibility for someone else’s debt.

⁴ **abnegation** – formal rejection; denial.

⁵ **counteraction** – defeating by contrary action; neutralizing an action.

⁶ **efficacious** – having power adequate to the purpose intended.

⁷ **resplendent** – splendid; dazzling in appearance.

He has been by Him Who is “God manifest in flesh” (1Ti 3:16). Never had God found one before who for love to the holy Law was willing to become its victim that it might be honored; who for love to God was willing not only to be made under the Law, but by thus coming under it, to subject himself to death, even the death of the cross; who for love to the fallen creature was willing to take the sinner’s place, bear the sinner’s burden, undergo the sinner’s penalty, to assume the sinner’s curse, die the sinner’s death of shame and anguish, and go down in darkness to the sinner’s grave.

From *The Everlasting Righteousness*, available as a paperback from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Horatius Bonar (1808-1889): Scottish Presbyterian minister whose poems, hymns, and religious tracts were widely popular during the 19th century; born in Edinburgh, Scotland.



OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS IS NOT IN OURSELVES

John Calvin (1509-1564)

LET us first explain the meaning of the expressions, *to be justified in the sight of God, to be justified by faith or by works*. A man is said to be justified in the sight of God when in the judgment of God he is deemed righteous and is accepted on account of his righteousness. For as iniquity is abominable to God, so neither can the sinner find grace in His sight, so far as he is and so long as he is regarded as a sinner. Hence, wherever sin is, there also are the wrath and vengeance of God.

He, on the other hand, is justified who is regarded not as a sinner, but as righteous, and as such stands acquitted at the judgment-seat of God, where all sinners are condemned. As an innocent man, when charged before an impartial judge who decides according to his innocence, is said to be justified by the judge, so a man is said to be justified by God when, removed from the catalogue of sinners, he has God as the witness and assertor¹ of his righteousness.

In the same manner, a man will be said to be *justified by works*, if in his life there can be found a purity and holiness which merits an attestation² of righteousness at the throne of God, or if by the perfection of his works he can answer and satisfy the divine justice. On the contrary, a man will be *justified by faith* when, excluded from the righteousness of works, he by faith lays hold of the righteousness of Christ and clothed in it appears in the sight of God not as a sinner, but as righteous.

Thus we simply interpret justification as the acceptance with which God receives us into His favor as if we were righteous. And we say that this justification consists in the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ.

Let us now consider the truth of what was said in the definition—viz.³ that justification by faith is reconciliation with God and that this consists solely in the remission of sins. We must always return to the axioms⁴ that the wrath of God lies upon all men so long as they continue sinners. This is elegantly expressed by Isaiah in these words: “Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isa 59:1-2). We are here told that sin is a separation between God and man; that His countenance is turned away from the

¹ **assertor** – champion; vindicator; advocate.

² **attestation** – testimony; proof.

³ **viz.** – from Latin *videcilet*: that is to say; namely.

⁴ **axioms** – universally recognized truths; well-established principles.

sinner; and that it cannot be otherwise, since to have any intercourse with sin is repugnant⁵ to His righteousness.

Hence the apostle shows that man is at enmity with God until he is restored to favor by Christ (Rom 5:8-10). When the Lord, therefore, admits him to union, He is said to justify him, because He can neither receive him into favor, nor unite him to Himself without changing his condition from that of a sinner into that of a righteous man. He adds that this is done by remission of sins. For if those whom the Lord has reconciled to Himself are estimated by works, they will still prove to be in reality sinners, while they ought to be pure and free from sin. It is evident therefore, that the only way in which those whom God embraces are made righteous is by having their pollutions wiped away by the remission of sins, so that this justification may be termed in one word *the remission of sins*.

Both of these become perfectly clear from the words of Paul: “To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.” He then subjoins⁶ the sum of his embassy:⁷ “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:19-21). He here uses “righteousness” and “reconciliation” indiscriminately, to make us understand that the one includes the other. The mode of obtaining this righteousness he explains to be that our sins are not imputed to us. Wherefore, you cannot henceforth doubt how God justifies us when you hear that He reconciles us to Himself by not imputing our faults.

In the same manner, in the epistle to the Romans, he proves, by the testimony of David, that righteousness is imputed without works because he declares the man to be blessed “whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered,” and “unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity” (Rom 4:6; Psa 32:1-2). There he undoubtedly uses blessedness for righteousness; and as he declares that it consists in forgiveness of sins, there is no reason why we should define it otherwise. Accordingly, Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, sings that the knowledge of salvation consists in the forgiveness of sins (Luk 1:77). The same course was followed by Paul, when in addressing the people of Antioch he gave them a summary of salvation. Luke states that he concluded in this way: “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Act 13:38-39). Thus the apostle connects forgiveness of sins with justification in such a way as to show that they are altogether the same; and hence he properly argues that justification, which we owe to the indulgence of God, is gratuitous.⁸

⁵ **repugnant** – contrary; contradictory.

⁶ **subjoins** – adds at the end of a written statement or discourse.

⁷ **embassy** – mission of being an ambassador or a message-bearing representative.

⁸ **gratuitous** – freely bestowed; granted without merit.

Nor should it seem an unusual mode of expression to say that believers are justified before God not by works, but by gratuitous acceptance, seeing it is frequently used in Scripture and sometimes also by ancient writers. Thus Augustine⁹ says, “The righteousness of the saints in this world consists more in the forgiveness of sins than the perfection of virtue.”¹⁰ To this corresponds the well-known sentiment of Bernard:¹¹ “Not to sin is the righteousness of God, but the righteousness of man is the indulgence of God.”¹² He previously asserts that Christ is our righteousness in absolution,¹³ and, therefore, that those only are just who have obtained pardon through mercy.

Hence also it is proved that it is entirely by the intervention of Christ’s righteousness that we obtain justification before God. This is equivalent to saying that man is not just in himself, but that the righteousness of Christ is communicated to him by imputation, while he is strictly deserving of punishment. Thus vanishes the absurd dogma that man is justified by faith inasmuch as it brings him under the influence of the Spirit of God by Whom he is rendered righteous. This is so repugnant to the above doctrine that it never can be reconciled with it. There can be no doubt that he who is taught to seek righteousness out of himself does not previously possess it in himself. This is most clearly declared by the apostle, when he says that He Who knew no sin was made an expiatory victim for sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2Co 5:21).

You see that our righteousness is not in ourselves, but in Christ; that the only way in which we become possessed of it is by being made partakers with Christ, since with Him we possess all riches. There is nothing repugnant to this in what he elsewhere says: “God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us” (Rom 8:3-4). *Here the only fulfillment to which he refers is that which we obtain by imputation.*

Our Lord Jesus Christ communicates His righteousness to us and so, by some wondrous ways in so far as pertains to the justice of God, transfuses its power into us. That this was the apostle’s view is abundantly clear from another sentiment which he had expressed a little before: “As by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (Rom 5:19). To declare that we are deemed righteous, solely because the obedience of Christ is imputed to us as if it were our own, is just to place our righteousness in the obedience of Christ.

⁹ **Aurelius Augustine** (354-430) – Bishop of Hippo, early church theologian known by many as the father of orthodox theology; born in Tagaste, North Africa.

¹⁰ Augustine, *City of God* XIX. 27 (MPL 41.657; tr. NPNF II.419).

¹¹ **Bernard of Clairvaux** (1090-1153) – best known theologian of his day; wrote mystical, theological, devotional works and hymns such as *O Sacred Head Now Wounded*.

¹² Bernard, *Sermons on the Song of Songs* 23.15 (MPL 183.892; tr. S. J. Eales, *Life and Works of St. Bernard IV*, 141).

¹³ **absolution** – remission or forgiveness of sins.

Wherefore, Ambrose¹⁴ appears to me to have most elegantly adverted to¹⁵ the blessing of Jacob as an illustration of this righteousness, when he says that as he who did not merit the birthright in himself personated¹⁶ his brother, put on his garments which gave forth a most pleasant odor, and thus introduced himself to his father that he might receive a blessing to his own advantage, though under the person of another, so we conceal ourselves under the precious purity of Christ, our first-born Brother, that we may obtain an attestation of righteousness from the presence of God. The words of Ambrose are [these:] “Isaac’s smelling the odor of his garments perhaps means that we are justified not by works but by faith, since carnal infirmity is an impediment to works, but errors of conduct are covered by the brightness of faith, which merits the pardon of faults.”¹⁷ And so indeed it is; for in order to appear in the presence of God for salvation, we must send forth that fragrant odor, having our vices covered and buried by His perfection.

From *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III. xi. 2, 21-23.

John Calvin (1509-1564): Father of Reformed and Presbyterian theology. During the course of his nearly 25 year ministry in Geneva, Calvin lectured and preached an average of five sermons a week, in addition to writing a commentary on nearly every book of the Bible, as well as numerous treatises on theological topics. His correspondence fills eleven volumes. Born in Noyon, Picardie, France.



¹⁴ **Ambrose** (ca. 340-397) – Bishop of Milan, early church theologian, and foe of Arianism (the heresy that Jesus is a created being); bishop who instructed and baptized Augustine; born in Trier (now in Germany).

¹⁵ **adverted to** – referred to; alluded to.

¹⁶ **personated** – impersonated ; deceptively pretended to be someone else.

¹⁷ Ambrose, *On Jacob and the Happy Life*, II.2.9 (CSEL 32.2.36 f.).

IMPUTATION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Charles Hodge (1797-1878)

BY the righteousness of Christ is meant all He became, did, and suffered to satisfy the demands of divine justice and merit for His people the forgiveness of sin and the gift of eternal life. The righteousness of Christ is commonly represented as including His active and passive obedience. This distinction is, as to the idea, Scriptural. The Bible does teach that Christ obeyed the Law in all its precepts, and that He endured its penalty, and that this was done in such sense for His people that they are said to have done it. They died in Him. They were crucified with Him. They were delivered from the curse of the Law by His being made a curse for them. He was made under the Law that He might redeem those who were under the Law. We are freed from the Law by the body of Christ. He was made sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. He is the end of the Law for righteousness to all them that believe. It is by His obedience that many are made righteous (Rom 5:19). We obeyed in Him according to the teaching of the apostle in Romans 5:12-21 in the same sense in which we sinned in Adam. The active and passive obedience of Christ, however, are only different phases or aspects of the same thing. He obeyed in suffering. His highest acts of obedience were rendered in the garden and upon the cross. Hence this distinction is not so presented in Scripture as though the obedience of Christ answered one purpose and His sufferings another and a distinct purpose. We are justified by His blood. We are reconciled unto God by His death. We are freed from all the demands of the Law by His body (Rom 7:4), and we are freed from the Law by His being made under it and obeying it in our stead (Gal 4:4-5). Thus the same effect is ascribed to the death or sufferings of Christ and to His obedience because both are forms or parts of His obedience or righteousness by which we are justified. In other words the obedience of Christ includes all He did in satisfying the demands of the Law.

The righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer for his justification. The word *impute* is familiar and unambiguous.¹ To impute is to ascribe² to, to reckon to, to lay to one's charge. When we say we impute a good or bad motive to a man or that a good or evil action is imputed to him, no one misunderstands our meaning. Philemon had no doubt what Paul meant when he told him to impute to him the debt of Onesimus.³

We use the word *impute* in its simple admitted sense, when we say that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer for his justification.

¹ **unambiguous** – clear; not open to more than one interpretation.

² **ascribe** – assign a quality or character to.

³ Philemon 1:18.

It seems unnecessary to remark that this does not and cannot mean that the righteousness of Christ is *infused*⁴ into the believer or in any way so imparted to him as to change or constitute his moral character. Imputation never changes the inward, subjective state of the person to whom the imputation is made. When sin is imputed to a man he is not made sinful; when the zeal of Phinehas⁵ was imputed to him, he was not made zealous. When you impute theft to a man, you do not make him a thief. When you impute goodness to a man, you do not make him good. So when righteousness is imputed to the believer, he does not thereby become subjectively righteous. If the righteousness be adequate, and if the imputation be made on adequate grounds and by competent authority, the person to whom the imputation is made has the right to be treated as righteous. And, therefore, in the forensic,⁶ although not in the moral or subjective, sense, the imputation of the righteousness of Christ does make the sinner righteous. That is, it gives him a right to the full pardon of all his sins and a claim in justice to eternal life.

That this is the simple and universally accepted view of the doctrine as held by all Protestants at the Reformation, and by them regarded as the cornerstone of the gospel...has never been disputed by any candid or competent authority. This has continued to be the doctrine of both the great branches of the Protestant Church, so far as they pretend to adhere to their standards.

It may be remarked in passing that according to the Protestant doctrine there is properly no “formal cause” of justification. The righteousness of Christ is the meritorious, but not the formal cause of the sinner’s being pronounced righteous. A *formal cause* is that which constitutes the inherent, subjective nature of a person or thing. The formal cause of a man’s being good is goodness; of his being holy, holiness; of his being wicked, wickedness. The formal cause of a rose’s being red is redness and of a wall’s being white is whiteness. As we are not rendered inherently⁷ righteous by the righteousness of Christ, it is hardly correct to say that His righteousness is the formal cause of our being righteous.

The ground of this justification in the case of the believing sinner is the imputation of the righteousness of Christ.

Dr. Shedd⁸ says, “A second difference between the Anselmic⁹ and the Protestant soteriology¹⁰ is seen in the formal distinction of Christ’s work into His *active* and His *passive*

⁴ **infused** – poured into; caused to be filled with something.

⁵ Psalm 106:30-31.

⁶ **forensic** – pertaining to or connected with courts of law.

⁷ **inherently** – in essential nature.

⁸ **W. G. T. Shedd** (1820-1894) – considered by some the greatest American proponent of grace theology next to Charles Hodge in the period between the War Between the States and WWI. Best known for his three volume *Dogmatic Theology* and two volume *History of Christian Theology*.

⁹ **Anselm of Canterbury** (1033-1109) – medieval theologian. Born in northern Italy and educated in the best schools of modern France. His theological treatises, prayers, meditations, and letters are considered literary masterpieces. His “satisfaction” view of Christ’s atonement has greatly influenced redemptive theology down to modern times.

righteousness. By His *passive* righteousness is meant His expiatory¹¹ sufferings, by which He satisfied the claims of justice, and by His *active* righteousness is meant His obedience to the Law as a rule of life and conduct. It was contended by those who made this distinction that the purpose of Christ as the vicarious¹² Substitute was to meet the *entire* demands of the Law for the sinner. But the Law requires present and perfect obedience, as well as satisfaction for past disobedience. The Law is not completely fulfilled by the endurance of penalty only. It must also be obeyed. Christ both endured the penalty due to man for disobedience and perfectly obeyed the Law for him; so that He was a vicarious Substitute in reference to both the precept and the penalty of the Law. By His *active* obedience He obeyed the Law, and by His *passive* obedience He endured the penalty. In this way His vicarious work is complete¹³...The distinction between the *active* and *passive* obedience of Christ is, in one view, unimportant. As Christ obeyed in suffering, His sufferings were as much a part of His obedience as His observance of the precepts of the Law. The Scriptures do not expressly make this distinction, as they include everything that Christ did for our redemption under the term *righteousness* or *obedience*. The distinction becomes important only when it is denied that His moral obedience is any part of the righteousness for which the believer is justified or that His whole work in making satisfaction consisted in expiation or bearing the penalty of the Law. This is contrary to Scripture and vitiates¹⁴ the doctrine of justification as presented in the Bible.

PROOF OF THE DOCTRINE

That the Protestant doctrine as above stated is the doctrine of the word of God appears from the following considerations:

1. *The word dikaioo, as has been shown, means "to declare dikaios [righteous]."* No one can be truthfully pronounced *dikaioo* to whom *dikaioo* [righteousness] cannot rightfully be ascribed. The sinner has no righteousness of his own. God, therefore, imputes to him a righteousness which is not his own. The righteousness thus imputed is declared to be the righteousness of God, of Christ, the righteousness which is by faith. This is almost in so many words the declaration of the Bible on the subject. As the question, "What is the method of justification?" is a Biblical question, it must be decided exegetically,¹⁵ and not by arguments drawn from assumed principles of reason. We are not at liberty to say that the righteousness of one man cannot be imputed to another; that this would involve a mistake or absurdity; that God's justice does not demand a righteousness such as the Law prescribes as the condition of justification; that He may pardon and save as a father without any consideration, unless it be that of repentance; that it is inconsistent with His grace that the demands of justice should be met before justification is granted; that this view of

¹⁰ **soteriology** – study of the doctrine of salvation.

¹¹ **expiatory** – making satisfaction for offense.

¹² **vicarious** – achieved by one in the place of another; substitutionary.

¹³ *History of Christian Doctrine*, Vol. II, p. 341.

¹⁴ **vitiates** – corrupts; perverts so as to lead to false judgments.

¹⁵ **exegetically** – by Scriptural analysis and interpretation.

justification makes it a sham, a calling a man just, when he is not just, etc.—all this amounts to *nothing*. It all pertains to that wisdom which is foolishness with God.

All we have to do is to determine, (1) What is the meaning of the word *to justify* as used in Scripture? (2) On what ground does the Bible affirm that God pronounces the ungodly to be just? If the answer to these questions be what the Church in all ages, and especially the Church of the Reformation has given, then we should rest satisfied. The apostle in express terms says that God imputes righteousness to the sinner (Rom 4:6, 24).

By *righteousness* every one admits is meant “that which makes a man righteous, that which the Law demands.” It does not consist in the sinner’s own obedience or moral excellence, for it is said to be “without works” (Rom 4:6). And it is declared that no man can be justified on the ground of his own character or conduct. Neither does this righteousness consist in faith, for it is “of faith,” “through faith,” “by faith.” We are never said to be justified on *account* of faith. Neither is it a righteousness or form of moral excellence springing from faith, or of which faith is the source or proximate¹⁶ cause because it is declared to be the *righteousness of God*, a righteousness which is revealed, which is offered, which must be accepted as a gift (Rom 5:17). It is declared to be the *righteousness of Christ*, His obedience (Rom 5:19). It is, therefore, the righteousness of Christ, His perfect obedience in doing and suffering the will of God, which is imputed to the believer and on the ground of which the believer, although in himself ungodly, is pronounced righteous and therefore free from the curse of the Law and entitled to eternal life.

The Apostle’s Argument

2. All the points above stated are not only clearly affirmed by the apostle, but *they are also set forth in logical order and elaborately sustained and vindicated in the epistle to the Romans*. The apostle begins with the declaration that the gospel “is the power of God unto salvation” (Rom 1:16). It is not thus divinely efficacious¹⁷ because of the purity of its moral precepts; nor because it brings immortality to light; nor because it sets before us the perfect example of our Lord Jesus Christ; nor because it assures us of the love of God; nor because of the elevating, sanctifying, life-giving influence by which it is attended. There is something preliminary to all this.

The first and indispensable requisite to salvation is that men should be righteous before God. They are under His wrath and curse. Until justice is satisfied, until God is reconciled, there is no possibility of any moral influence being of any avail. Therefore the apostle says that the power of the gospel is due to the fact that “therein is the righteousness of God revealed” (Rom 1:17). This cannot mean “the goodness of God,” for such is not the meaning of the word. It cannot in this connection mean His justice because it is a righteousness which is “of faith”; because the justice of God is revealed from heaven and to all men; because the revelation of justice terrifies and drives away from God; be-

¹⁶ **proximate** – coming next in a chain of causation.

¹⁷ **efficacious** – producing the intended or desired effect; effective.

cause what is here called the righteousness of God is elsewhere contrasted with our “own righteousness” (Rom 10:3; Phi 3:9); and because it is declared to be the righteousness of Christ, which is explained by His “obedience” (Rom 5:18-19) and elsewhere declared to be “his blood” (3:25; 5:9).

The question, “How shall man be just with God?” had been sounding in the ears of men from the beginning. It never had been answered. Yet it must be answered or there can be no hope of salvation. It is answered in the gospel, and therefore the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth (Rom 1:16), i.e., to everyone, whether Jew or Gentile, bond or free, good or bad, who, instead of going about to establish his own righteousness, submits himself in joyful confidence to the righteousness which his God and Savior Jesus Christ has wrought out for sinners and which is freely offered to them in the gospel without money and without price.

This is Paul’s theme, which he proceeds to unfold and establish...He begins by asserting, as indisputably true from the revelation of God in the constitution of our nature, that God is just, that He will punish sin; that He cannot pronounce him righteous who is not righteous. He then shows from experience and from Scripture, first as regards the Gentiles, then as regards the Jews, that there is none righteous, no not one; that the whole world is guilty before God. There is therefore no difference, since all have sinned.

Since the righteousness which the Law requires cannot be found in the sinner nor be rendered by him, God has revealed another righteousness, “the righteousness of God” (Rom 3:21), granted to everyone who believes. Men are not justified for what they are or for what they do, but for what Christ has done for them. God has set Him forth as a propitiation for sin in order that He might be just and yet the justifier of them that believe.

The apostle teaches that such has been the method of justification from the beginning. It was witnessed by the Law and the prophets. There had never, since the Fall, been any other way of justification possible for men. As God justified Abraham because he believed in the promise of redemption through the Messiah, so He justifies those now who believe in the fulfillment of that promise (Rom 4:3, 9, 24). It was not Abraham’s believing state of mind that was taken for righteousness. It is not faith in the believer now, not faith as a virtue, or as a source of a new life, which renders us righteous. It is faith in a specific promise. Righteousness, says the apostle, is imputed to us, “if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead” (Rom 4:24). Or, as he expresses it in Romans 10:9, “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” The promise which Abraham believed is the promise which we believe (Gal 3:14); and the relation of faith to justification in his case is precisely what it is in ours. He and we are justified simply because we trust in the Messiah for our salvation. Hence, as the apostle says, the Scriptures are full of thanksgiving to God for gratuitous¹⁸ pardon, for free justification, for the imputation of righteousness to those who have no righteousness of their own.

¹⁸ **gratuitous** – freely bestowed; costing nothing to the recipient.

The Parallel between Adam and Christ

3. Not content with this clear and formal statement of the truth that sinners can be justified only through the imputation of a righteousness not their own; and that the righteousness thus imputed is the righteousness (active and passive, if that distinction be insisted upon) of the Lord Jesus Christ; *he proceeds to illustrate this doctrine by drawing a parallel between Adam and Christ*. The former [Adam], he says, was a type of the latter [Christ]. There is an analogy¹⁹ between our relation to Adam and our relation to Christ. We are so united to Adam that his first transgression was the ground of the sentence of condemnation being passed on all mankind. And on account of that condemnation we derive from him a corrupt nature so that all mankind, descending from him by ordinary generation,²⁰ come into the world in a state of spiritual death. In like manner we are so united to Christ, when we believe, that His obedience is the ground on which a sentence of justification passes upon all thus in Him. And in consequence of that sentence they derive from Him a new, holy, divine, and imperishable²¹ principle of spiritual life. These truths are expressed in explicit terms. “For the judgment was by one [offence] to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification” (Rom 5:16). “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. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” (v. 18-19).

These two great truths, namely, the imputation of Adam’s sin and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, have graven themselves on the consciousness of the Church universal. They have been reviled, misrepresented, and denounced by theologians, but they have stood their ground in the faith of God’s people, just as the primary truths of reason have ever retained control over the mass of men in spite of all the speculations of philosophers. It is not meant that the truths just mentioned have always been expressed in the terms just given; but the truths themselves have been and still are held by the people of God, wherever found among the Greeks, Latins, or Protestants.

The fact that the race fell in Adam; that the evils which come upon us on account of his transgression are penal²²; and that men are born in a state of sin and condemnation, are outstanding facts of Scripture and experience...It is implied in every act of saving faith which includes trust in what Christ has done for us as the ground of our acceptance with God, as opposed to anything done by us or wrought in us.

Such being the real and only foundation of a sinner’s hope towards God, it is of the last importance that it should not only be practically held by the people, but that it should also be clearly presented and maintained by the [ministry of the pulpit]. It is not what we do or

¹⁹ **analogy** – similarity in some respects between things that are otherwise not similar.

²⁰ **generation** – physically begetting children.

²¹ **imperishable** – undying; perpetual.

²² **penal** – related to punishment for breaking the law.

are, but solely what Christ is and has done that can avail for our justification before the bar of God.

Other Passages Teaching the Same Doctrine

4. *This doctrine of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ*, or, in other words, that His righteousness is the judicial ground of the believer's justification, is not only formally and argumentatively presented as in the passages cited, but it *is constantly asserted or implied in the Word of God*. The apostle argues, in the fourth chapter of his epistle to the Romans, that every assertion or promise of gratuitous forgiveness of sin to be found in the Scriptures involves this doctrine. He proceeds on the assumption that God is just; that He demands a righteousness of those whom He justifies. If they have no righteousness of their own, one on just grounds must be imputed to them. If, therefore, He forgives sin, it must be that sin is covered, that justice has been satisfied. "Even as David also," he says, "describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered" (Rom 4:6-8).

In Romans 5:9, we are said to be "justified by his blood." In Romans 3:25, God is said to have set Him forth as a propitiation²³ for sin, that He might be just in justifying the ungodly. As to justify does not mean to pardon, but judicially to pronounce righteous, this passage distinctly asserts that the work of Christ is the ground on which the sentence of justification is passed. In Romans 10:3-4, he says of the Jews, "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." It can hardly be questioned that the word righteousness (*dikaioisune*) must have the same meaning in both members of the first of these verses. If a man's "own righteousness" is that which would render him righteous, then "the righteousness of God" in this connection must be a justifying righteousness. It is called the righteousness of God because, as said before, He is its author. It is the righteousness of Christ. It is provided, offered, and accepted of God.

Here then are two righteousnesses; the one human, the other divine; the one valueless, the other infinitely meritorious. The folly of the Jews, and of thousands since their day, consists in refusing the latter and trusting to the former. This folly the apostle makes apparent in the fourth verse. The Jews acted under the assumption that the Law as a covenant, that is, as prescribing the conditions of salvation, was still in force, that men were still bound to satisfy its demands by their personal obedience in order to be saved, whereas Christ had made an end of the Law. He had abolished it as a covenant in order that men might be justified by faith. Christ, however, has thus made an end of the Law, not by merely setting it aside, but by satisfying its demands. He delivers us from its curse, not by mere pardon, but by being made a curse for us (Gal 3:13). He redeems us from the Law by being made under it (Gal 4:4-5) and fulfilling all righteousness.

²³ **propitiation** – appeasement; sacrifice that turns away wrath.

In Philippians 3:8-9, the apostle says, he “suffered the loss of all things,” that he might be found in Christ, not having his “own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” Here again one’s own righteousness is contrasted with that which is of God. The word must have the same sense in both members. What Paul trusted to, was not his own righteousness, not his own subjective goodness, but a righteousness provided for him and received by faith.

The apostle says Christ “of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1Co 1:30). In this enumeration,²⁴ sanctification and righteousness are distinguished. The one renders us holy; the other renders us just, i.e., satisfies the demands of justice. As Christ is to us the source of inward spiritual life, so He is the giver of that righteousness which secures our justification...We are accepted, justified, and saved, not for what we are, but for what He has done in our behalf. God “made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21). As Christ was not made sin in a moral sense; so we are not (in justification) made righteousness in a moral sense. As He was made sin in that He “bare our sins,” so we are made righteousness in that we bear His righteousness. Our sins were the judicial ground of His humiliation under the Law and of all His sufferings; so His righteousness is the judicial ground of our justification. In other words, as our sins were imputed to Him, so His righteousness is imputed to us. If imputation of sin did not render Him morally corrupt, the imputation of righteousness does not make us holy or morally good.

Argument from the General Teachings of the Bible

5. *It is unnecessary to dwell upon particular passages in support of a doctrine which pervades the whole Scriptures.* The question is: “What is the ground of the pardon of sin and of the acceptance of the believer as righteous (in the forensic or judicial sense of the word) in the sight of God?” Is it anything we do, anything experienced by us or wrought in us? Or is it what Christ has done for us? The whole revelation of God concerning the method of salvation shows that it is the latter and not the former.

From their nature, grace and works are antithetical.²⁵ The one excludes the other. What is of grace is not of works. And by works in Scripture in relation to this subject is meant not individual acts only, but states of mind, anything and everything internal of which moral character can be predicated.²⁶ When, therefore, it is said that salvation is of grace and not of works, it is thereby said that it is not founded upon anything in the believer himself...The gift of His Son for the redemption of man is ever represented as the most wonderful display of unmerited love. That some and not all men are actually saved is expressly declared to be not of works, not on account of anything distinguishing favorably the one class from the other, but a matter of pure grace.

²⁴ **enumeration** – list.

²⁵ **antithetical** – diametrically opposed to each other; opposites of each other.

²⁶ **predicated** – affirmed; asserted.

When a sinner is pardoned and restored to the favor of God, this again is declared to be of grace. If of grace, it is not founded upon anything in the sinner himself...The Scriptures not only teach that the plan of salvation is thus gratuitous in its inception, execution, and application, but also insist upon this characteristic of the plan as of vital importance, and even go so far as to teach that unless we consent to be saved by grace, we cannot be saved at all.

From *Systematic Theology*, III, xvii, 4-6.

Charles Hodge (1797-1878): Influential American Presbyterian theologian; taught theology at Princeton Seminary; best known for his three volume *Systematic Theology*; born in Philadelphia, PA.



LAW, CURSE, AND CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

Ebenezer Erskine (1680-1754)

GOD, having made man a rational creature capable of moral government, gave him a law suited to his nature by which he was to govern himself in the duties he owed to God his great Creator. This law was delivered to man in the form of a covenant with a promise of life upon the condition of perfect obedience and a threatening of death in case of disobedience (Gen 2:17). Thus stood matters between God and man in a state of innocency.

Adam and all his posterity in him and with him, having broken the covenant, are become liable to the curse and penalty of it, so that our salvation is become absolutely impossible until justice be satisfied and the honor of the broken law be repaired. The Law and justice of God [admit no refusal] and stand upon a full satisfaction and [compensation], otherwise heaven's gates shall be shut and eternally barred against man and all his posterity. The flaming sword of justice turns every way to keep us from access unto the paradise that is above.

While man in these circumstances was expecting nothing but to fall, an eternal sacrifice unto divine justice, the eternal Son of God, in His infinite love and pity to perishing sinners, steps in as a Mediator and Surety, offering not only to take our nature but to take our Law-place, to stand in our room and stead, whereby the whole obligation of the Law, both penal and preceptive, did fall upon Him. That is, He became liable and obliged both to fulfill the command and to endure the curse of the covenant of works, which we had violated. And here, by the way, it is fit to [alert you to the fact] that it was an act of amazing grace in the Lord Jehovah to admit a Surety in our room. For had He stood to the rigor and severity of the Law, He would have demanded a personal satisfaction without admitting of the satisfaction of a Surety: in which case Adam and all his posterity had fallen under the stroke of avenging justice through eternity. But glory to God in the highest, Who not only admitted of a Surety, but provided one and "laid help upon one that is mighty" (Psa 89:19)!

Christ, the eternal Son of God, being in "the fulness of time, made of a woman, and made under the law" as our Surety (Gal 4:4), He actually in our room and stead, fulfilled the whole terms of the covenant of works. That is, in a word, He obeyed all the commands of the Law and endured the curse of it, and thereby brought in a complete Law-righteousness, whereby guilty sinners are justified before God.

This righteousness of the Surety is conveyed unto us by imputation. [This] is abundantly plain from many places of Scripture, particularly Romans 4:6, 11-12, 23-24. Now, this imputation of the Surety's righteousness runs principally upon these three things:

(1) Upon the eternal transaction between the Father and the Son, wherein the Son of God was chosen and sustained as the Surety of an elect world. Then it was that He gave bond to the Father to pay their debt in the red gold of His blood saying, “Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire...Lo, I come...I delight to do thy will” (Psa 40:6, 8). (2) It is grounded upon the actual imputation of our sins unto Him: “The LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa 53:6). There is a blessed exchange of places between Christ and His people: He takes on our sin and unrighteousness, that we may be clothed with the white robe of His righteousness: “He was made sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2Co 5:21). (3) This imputation goes upon the ground of the mystical union between Christ and the believer. When the poor soul is determined in a day of power to embrace the Lord Jesus in the arms of faith, Christ and he in that very moment do coalesce¹ into one body. He becomes a branch of the noble Vine, a member of that Body whereof Christ is the glorious Head of eminence,² influence, and government. And being thus united to Christ, the long and white robe of the Mediator’s righteousness is spread over him, whereby he is not only freed from condemnation, but forever sustained as righteous in the sight of God: “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1Co 1:30).

So perfect is this righteousness that the piercing eye of infinite justice cannot find the least flaw in it: yea, justice is so fully satisfied therewith, that God speaks of the soul who is clothed therewith, as though it were in a state of innocency and perfectly freed from sin.

From “The Believer Exalted in Imputed Righteousness” in *The Whole Works of the Late Ebenezer Erskine*, Vol. I, Free Presbyterian Publications.

Ebenezer Erskine (1680-1754): Evangelical divine; founder of the Secession Church of Scotland and popular preacher; born in Dryburgh (Scottish Borders).



¹ **coalesce** – come together to become one; unite.

² **eminence** – distinguished superiority.

RIGHTEOUSNESS BY SUBSTITUTION

Horatius Bonar (1808-1889)

THE objections against imputation all resolve themselves into objections against substitution in any form. Vicarious¹ suffering is even more *unreasonable* to some than vicarious obedience, and the arguments used in assailing the former apply with greater force against the latter. Yet human law recognizes both; the “laws of nature” show the existence of both; and the divine Law, as interpreted by the great Lawgiver Himself, acknowledges both. Man is willing to act on the principle of substitution or representation by another in earthly transactions—such as the payment of debt or the performance of duty or the descent of property.² But he is not so willing to admit it or proceed upon it in the great transaction between him and God as to condemnation and righteousness. That to which he objects not in temporal things—giving one man the benefit of another’s doings or another’s sufferings; treating the man who has not paid the debt as if he had done so because another has paid it for him; or recognizing the legal right of a man to large wealth or a vast estate, no part of which he had earned or deserved, but which had come to him as the gift and fruit of another’s lifetime’s toil—he repudiates in spiritual things as unjust and unreasonable.

Men do not object to receive any kind or amount of this world’s goods from another, though they have done nothing to deserve them and everything to make them unworthy of them, but they refuse to accept the favor of God and a standing in righteousness before Him on the ground of what a substitute has done and suffered. In earthly things they are willing to be represented by another, but not in heavenly things. The former is all fair, and just, and legal: the latter is absurd, an insult to their understanding, and a depreciation of their worth! Yet if they prized the heavenly as much as they do the earthly blessing, they would not entertain such scruples³ nor raise such objections as to receiving it from another as the result of his work. If God is willing that Christ should *represent* us, who are we that we should refuse to be represented by Him? If God is willing to deal with us on the footing of Christ’s obedience and to reckon that obedience to us as if it had been our own, who are we that we should reject such a method of blessing and call it unjust and impossible? This principle or theory of representation, of one man being treated far beyond his deserts in virtue of his being legally entitled to use the name or claims of another, runs through all earthly transactions. Why should it not in like manner pervade the heavenly?

Rejection of “imputed righteousness” because the words do not actually occur in Scripture is foolish and weak. Such terms as *Christianity*, the *Trinity*, the *Eucharist*, and

¹ **vicarious** – endured by one person substituting for another.

² **descent of property** – passing of property to heirs.

³ **scruples** – hesitations from the difficulties of determining what is right; doubts.

plenary inspiration are not to be found in the Bible. Yet, inasmuch as the thing, or object, or truth which these words truly and accurately cover is there, the term is received as substantially accurate and made use of without scruple. Such an objection savors more of little-minded caviling⁴ than of the truth-seeking simplicity of faith.

Refusal to accept the divine “theory” or doctrine of representation in and by another indicates in many cases mere indifference to the blessing to be received; in others, resentment of the way in which that doctrine utterly sets aside all excellency or merit on our part. Men will win the kingdom for themselves; they will deserve eternal life; they will not take forgiveness or righteousness freely from another’s hands or be indebted to a substitute for what they are persuaded they can earn by their personal doings. Because the plan of representation or substitution is distasteful and humbling, they call it absurd and unjust. They refuse a heavenly inheritance on such terms, while perhaps at the very moment they are accepting an earthly estate on terms as totally irrespective of their own labor or goodness.

The Judge must either be the justifier or the condemner: that Judge is Jehovah. It is His office to condemn; it is His office also to justify. He does not condemn by *infusing* sin into the person who appears before Him; so He does not justify by *infusing* righteousness into the sinner whom He acquits. It is as *Judge* that He acquits. But He does not merely acquit or absolve. He goes beyond this. The marvelous way in which He has met the claims of justice so as to enable Him to pronounce a righteous *acquittal* enables Him to replace, either on his own former place of innocence or on a higher, the sinner whom He absolves so freely and so completely. It was by representation or substitution of the just for the unjust that He was enabled to acquit, and it is by the same representation or substitution that He lifts into a more glorious position the acquitted man.

The representative or substitute being the Son of God and therefore of infinite dignity in His person, the excellency of that which He is and does, when conveyed or reckoned to another, gives that other a claim to be treated far higher than he could otherwise in any circumstances have possessed...that the man who believes in Jesus Christ from the moment that he so believes, not only receives divine absolution from all guilt, but is so made legally possessor of His infinite righteousness, that all to which that righteousness entitles becomes his, and he is henceforth treated by God according to the perfection of the perfect One, as if that perfection had been his own. “As he is, so are we in *this world*” (1Jo 4:17), that is, even now in our state of imperfection, though men of unclean lips, and though dwelling among a people of unclean lips. As it is elsewhere written, “There is therefore *now* no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). Not only are we “delivered from the wrath to come” (1Th 1:10), not only shall we “not come into condemnation” (Joh 5:24), not only are we “justified from all things” (Act 13:39), but we are “*made the righteousness of God in him*” (2Co 5:21).

⁴ **caviling** – finding fault unnecessarily; raising trivial objections.

The transaction is not one of borrowing. The perfection made over to us is *given*, not *lent*, by God. It becomes ours *in law*, ours for all legal ends, ours as efficaciously as if it had been from first to last our own in very deed.

The transaction is a real one between the sinner and God. [It] carries with it all legal consequences, just as if the sinner had personally discharged his own debts and obtained a judicial *absolvitor*⁵ from all further claims whatever, a receipt in full from Him to Whom the great debt was due.

The transaction is one to which all the parties concerned have consented as being fully satisfied that injury has been done to none; nay, that all have been greatly more benefited by this mode of settlement than by the more direct one of the parties punishable undergoing the punishment in their own persons. When thus not merely no injustice is done to anyone, but when *more than justice* is done to all; when no one is defrauded, but when each gets *far more than his due*; how foolish, how preposterous, to speak of imputation as a violation of law and a subversion of the principles of righteous government!

The transaction is not one of indifference to sin or obliterative⁶ of the distinction between righteousness and unrighteousness. It is one which, of all that can be imagined, is most fitted to show *the evil of evil*, the malignity of sin, the divine hatred of all departure from perfection, the regard which God has to His Law, His awful appreciation of justice, and His determination to secure at any cost—even the death of His Son—the righteous foundations of the universe and the sanctities⁷ of His eternal throne.

If the Christ of God in His sorrowful life below be but a specimen of suffering humanity or a model of patient calmness under wrong, not one of these things is manifested or secured. He is but one fragment more of a confused and disordered world where everything has broken loose from its anchorage, and each is dashing against the other in unmanageable chaos without any prospect of a holy or tranquil issue.⁸ He is an example of the complete triumph of evil over goodness, of wrong over right, of Satan over God—one from whose history we can draw only this terrific conclusion: God has lost the control of His own world; sin has become too great a power for God either to regulate or extirpate;⁹ the utmost that God can do is to produce a rare example of suffering holiness which He allows the world to tread upon without being able effectually to interfere; righteousness after ages of buffeting and scorn must retire from the field in utter helplessness and permit the unchecked reign of evil.

If the cross be the mere exhibition of self-sacrifice and patient meekness, *then the hope of the world is gone.* We had always thought that there was a potent *purpose* of God at work in connection with the sin-bearing work of the holy sufferer which, allowing sin

⁵ **absolvitor** – decision of the court in favor of the defender.

⁶ **obliterative** – wiping out, doing away with, leaving no trace.

⁷ **sanctities** – qualities of holiness.

⁸ **tranquil issue** – calm end or termination.

⁹ **extirpate** – totally destroy; pull up by the roots.

for a season to develop itself, was preparing and evolving a power which would utterly overthrow it and sweep earth clean of evil—moral and physical. But if the crucified Christ be the mere self-denying man, we have nothing more at work for the overthrow of evil than has again and again been witnessed when some hero or some martyr rose above the level of his age to protest against evils which he could not eradicate and to bear witness in life and death for truth and righteousness—in vain.

The transaction is, in all its aspects and in its bearings on all parties and interests, strictly and nobly righteous. It provides a righteous channel through which God's free love may flow down to man. It lays a righteous foundation for the pardon of sin. It secures a righteous welcome for the returning sinner. It makes the justification of the justified even more righteous than his condemnation would have been; while it makes the condemnation of the condemned not only doubly righteous, but at once a vindication and an exhibition of infinite and immutable¹⁰ justice.

There can be no justification without some kind of righteousness, and according to the nature or value of that righteousness will the justification be. That justification will necessarily partake of the value of the righteousness which justifies. If the righteousness be poor and finite, our standing as justified men will be the same. If it be glorious and divine, even such will our standing be. God the justifier, acting according to the excellency of that righteousness and recognizing its claims in behalf of all who consent to be treated according to its value, deals with each believing man—weak as his faith may be—in conformity with the demands of that righteousness. All that it can claim for us, we may ask and *expect*; all that it can claim for us, God will assuredly bestow. He by Whom, in believing, we consent to be represented puts in the claim for us in His name; and the demands of that name are as just as they are irresistible.

Our legal responsibilities as transgressors of the Law are transferred to Him; and His legal claims, as the fulfiller of the Law, pass over to us. It is not a transference of characters nor an exchange of persons that we mean by this, but a transference of liabilities, an exchange of judicial demands. Here is our thorough bankruptcy and God's full discharge. What can Law say to us after this? "It is God that justifieth" (Rom 8:33). We are bankrupts; our assets are nothing. God looks at the case, pities us, and clears everything.

The epithet¹¹ *fictitious* which some have applied to this representation need not trouble or alarm us. The question with us is not, "Can we clear up fully the abstract principles which the transaction embodies?" but, "Does it *carry with it legal consequences* by which we are set in a new standing before God and entitled to plead in all our dealings with God, the meritoriousness¹² of an infinitely perfect life, the payment effected in behalf of those who had nothing to pay, by an infinitely perfect death?"

Thus "grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 5:21). God's free love has found for itself a righteous channel along which it

¹⁰ **immutable** – unchanging.

¹¹ **epithet** – abusive, contemptuous word or phrase.

¹² **meritoriousness** – quality of gaining merit, of earning a reward.

flows in all its fullness to the ungodly. For while all that the believing man receives, he receives from *grace*, yet it is no less true, all that he receives, he receives from *righteousness*, from the hand of a righteous God acting according to the claims of a righteousness that is absolutely and divinely perfect.

He who refuses to be represented by another before God must represent himself and draw near to God on the strength of what he is in himself or what he has done. How he is likely to fare in such an approach, let his own conscience tell him, if he will not believe the explicit declaration of the Holy Spirit that “through him [Christ] we have access by one Spirit to the Father” (Eph 2:18); or Christ’s own affirmation concerning this: “I am the way” and “I am the door” (Joh 10:9; 14:6).

As for him who, conscious of unfitness to draw near to God by reason of personal imperfection, is willing to be represented by the Son of God and to substitute a divine claim and merit for a human, let him know that God is willing to receive him with all his imperfection because of the perfection of Another, legally transferred to him by the just God and Judge; that God is presenting to him a righteousness not only sufficient to clear him from all guilt and to pay his penalty to the full, but to exalt him to a new rank and dignity such as he could not possibly acquire by the labors or prayers or goodnesses of ten thousand such lives as his own.

“Christ is all and in all” (Col 3:11). He, who knows this, knows what fully satisfies and cheers. He who knows this *best* has the deepest and truest peace: he has learned the secret of being always a sinner, yet always righteous; always incomplete, yet always complete; always empty, yet always full; always poor, yet always rich. We would not say of that fullness, “Drink deep or taste not”; for even to taste is to be blest. But yet we say, “Drink deep”; for he who drinks deepest is the happiest as well as the holiest man.

Our *characters* are not transferred to Christ, but our *liabilities* are. And in our acceptance of God’s mode of transference, we make the complete exchange by which we are absolved¹³ from all guilt and enter into a state of “no condemnation.” Sin reckoned to Christ as our Substitute, and righteousness reckoned to us as the acceptors of that Substitute: *this* is deliverance, and peace, and life eternal.

From *The Everlasting Righteousness*, available as a paperback from CHAPEL LIBRARY.



“This is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS,” because He is the author of righteousness to His people, and is only so. No creature could be the author of it. Unrighteous man cannot be the author of righteousness; and the righteousness of an angel is of no advantage to man; and indeed neither of the other divine Persons is the Lord our righteousness; for though they are both Jehovah, the Father and the Spirit, yet not our righteousness. The

¹³ **absolved** – pronounced clear of guilt or blame.

Father appointed and sent Christ to work it out. He approved and accepted of it, when wrought out; and imputes it to His people; but is not the author of it. So the Spirit convinces of the need of it; reveals it, and brings it near; works faith to receive it; and applies it; and pronounces a person justified by it; but is not the author of it. That the Son of God only is, Who is become so by His obedience to the law, and by bearing the penalty of it, and Who, having been delivered for our offences, rose again for our justification. And this righteousness, which He has wrought out to the satisfaction of law and justice, becomes “ours.” It being signed for us, and wrought out for us, by a free gift of it is given to us—ours through the imputation of it to us by the Father, and in virtue of our union to Christ, and interest in Him; and through the application of it to us by the Spirit of God, Who puts it upon us, and clothes us with it, and enables us to lay hold upon it, and claim interest in it; and which may be meant by Christ being called “our righteousness.” For the meaning is, not that He should commonly go by this name; but only that He should be that unto us which it signifies; and that we should by faith, even every true Israelite, every believer, call Him our righteousness, say that we have righteousness in Him, make mention of that continually, and express our desires to be found alone in it. For so the words may be rendered, “and this is the name whereby he shall call him, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.” And a sweet name to a sensible sinner it is—to one that has felt the guilt of sin in his conscience, seen his need of a righteousness, and the worth of it. —*John Gill*

CONSOLATIONS FROM THE IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST

Thomas Brooks (1608-1680)

FIRST, let all believers know for their comfort that in this imputed righteousness of Christ there is enough to satisfy the justice of God to the uttermost farthing¹ and to take off all His judicial anger and fury. The mediatory righteousness of Christ is so perfect, so full, so exact, so complete, and so fully satisfactory to the justice of God that divine justice cries out, "I have enough, and I require no more! I have found a ransom, and I am fully pacified towards you!" (Eze 16:61-63; Heb 10:10-12, 14; Isa 53:4-6). It is certain that Christ was truly and properly a sacrifice for sin. And it is as certain that our sins were the meritorious cause of His sufferings. He did put Himself into poor sinners' stead; He took their guilt upon Him and did undergo that punishment which they should have undergone. He did die and shed His blood, that He might thereby atone² God and expiate³ sin (Rom 5:6-12). Therefore we may safely and boldly conclude that Jesus Christ hath satisfied the justice of God to the uttermost so that now the believing sinner may rejoice and triumph in the justice as well as in the mercy of God (Heb 7:25); for doubtless the mediatory righteousness of Christ was infinitely more satisfactory and pleasing to God than all the sins of believers could be displeasing to Him. God took more pleasure and delight in the bruising of His Son, in the humiliation of His Son, and He smelled a sweeter savor in His sacrifice, than all our sins could possibly offend Him or provoke Him (Isa 53:10).

When a believer casts his eyes upon his many thousand sinful commissions and omissions, no wonder he fears and trembles. But then, when he looks upon Christ's satisfaction, he may see himself acquitted and rejoice. For if there be no charge, no accusation against the Lord Jesus, there can be none against the believer (Rom 8:33-37). Christ's expiatory sacrifice hath fully satisfied divine justice. And upon that very ground every believer hath cause to triumph in Christ Jesus, and in that righteousness of His by which he stands justified before the throne of God (2Co 2:14; Rev 14:4-5).

Christ is a person of infinite, transcendent worth and excellency. And it makes highly for His honor to justify believers in the most ample and glorious way imaginable. And what way is that, but by working out for [them], and then investing them with a righteousness adequate to the Law of God, a righteousness that should be every way commensurate⁴ to the miserable estate of fallen man and to the holy design of the glorious God. It is the high honor of the second Adam that He hath restored to fallen man a more

¹ **farthing** – coin formerly used in Great Britain worth one-fourth of a penny.

² **atone** – reconcile or restore to friendly relations; appease.

³ **expiate** – make satisfaction for an offense, doing away with guilt.

⁴ **commensurate** – of corresponding extent or magnitude; proportionate.

glorious righteousness than that he lost in the first Adam. And it would be high blasphemy in the eyes of angels and men for any mortal to assert that the second Adam, our Lord Jesus Christ, was less powerful to save than the first Adam was to destroy! The second Adam is “able to save to the uttermost all such as come to God through him” (Heb 7:25). He is able to save to the uttermost obligation of the Law—*preceptive*⁵ as well as *penal*⁶—and to bring in perfect righteousness as well as perfect innocency. He is able to save to the uttermost demand of divine justice by that perfect satisfaction that He has given to divine justice. Christ is “mighty to save” (Isa 63:1); and as He is mighty to save, so He loves to save poor sinners in such a way wherein He may most magnify His own might. And therefore He will purchase their pardon with His blood (1Pe 1:18-19) and make reparation⁷ to divine justice for all the wrongs and injuries which fallen man had done to his Creator and His royal Law; and bestow upon him a better righteousness than that which Adam lost; and bring him into a more safe, high, honorable, and durable estate than that which Adam fell from when he was in his created perfection.

All the attributes of God do acquiesce⁸ in the imputed righteousness of Christ, so that a believer may look upon the holiness, justice, and righteousness of God and rejoice and lay himself down in peace (Psa 4:8). Christ has put His coat, His robe of righteousness, upon every believer (Isa 61:10), upon which account all the judicial anger, wrath, and fury of God towards believers ceaseth.

But, **secondly, know for your comfort that this imputed, this mediatory righteousness of Christ takes away all your unrighteousness.** It cancels every bond; it takes away all iniquity and answers for all your sins (Isa 53:5-7; Col 2:12-15). “Lord, here are my sins of omission, and here are my sins of commission”;⁹ but the righteousness of Christ hath answered for them all. “Here are my sins against the Law, and here are my sins against the gospel. And here are my sins against the offers of grace, the tenders¹⁰ of grace, the strivings of grace, the bowels of grace”; but the righteousness of Christ hath answered for them all.

O sirs! It would be high blasphemy for any to imagine that there should be more demerit in any sin, yea, in all sin to condemn a believer, than there is merit in Christ’s righteousness to absolve him, to justify him (Rom 8:1, 33-35). The righteousness of Christ was shadowed out by the glorious robes and apparel of the high priest (Exo 28). That attire in which the high priest appeared before God, what was it else but a type of Christ’s righteousness? The filthy garments of Joshua, who represented the Church, were not only taken off from him, thereby signifying the removal of our sins (Zec 3:4-5);

⁵ **preceptive** – pertaining to or conveying a command.

⁶ **penal** – pertaining to punishment, as for breaking the law.

⁷ **reparation** – amends; restitution.

⁸ **acquiesce** – consent; comply passively or without protest.

⁹ **sins of omission and commission** – A sin of omission is a failure to perform that which is commanded; a sin of commission is doing that which is forbidden, or doing something otherwise righteous in an evil manner or with an ulterior motive.

¹⁰ **tenders** – formal offers.

but also a new, fair garment was put upon him to signify our being clothed with the wedding-garment of Christ's righteousness. If any shall say, "How is it possible that a soul that is defiled with the worst of sins should be whiter than the snow, yea, beautiful and glorious in the eyes of God?" the answer is at hand: to whomsoever the Lord doth give the pardon of his sins, which is the first part of our justification, to them He doth also impute the righteousness of Christ, which is the second part of our justification before God.

Thus David describeth, saith the apostle, the blessedness of the man to whom the Lord imputeth righteousness without works; saying, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered" (Rom 4:6-7). Now to that man whose sins the Lord forgives, to him He doth impute righteousness also: "Take away the filthy garments from him," saith the Lord of Joshua, "and he said unto him, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment" (Zec 3:4). And what was that change of raiment? Surely the perfect obedience and righteousness of the Lord Jesus, which God doth impute unto us; in which respect also we are said by justifying faith to put on the Lord Jesus (Rom 13:14); and to be clothed with Him as with a garment (Gal 3:27). And no marvel if, being so appareled, we appear beautiful and glorious in the sight of God: "To her," that is, Christ's bride, "was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white, for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints" (Rev 19:8). This perfect righteousness of Christ, which the Lord imputeth to us and where-with as with a garment He clotheth us, is the only righteousness which the saints have to stand before God with. And having that robe of righteousness on, they may stand with great boldness and comfort before the judgment seat of God.

But, **thirdly, know for your comfort that this righteousness of Christ presents us perfectly righteous in the sight of God.** "He is made to us righteousness" (1Co 1:30). The robe of innocency, like the veil of the temple, is rent asunder. Our righteousness is a ragged righteousness; our righteousnesses are as filthy rags (Isa 64:6). Look, as under rags the naked body is seen, so under the rags of our righteousnesses the body of death is seen. Christ is all in all in regard of righteousness: Christ is "the end of the law for righteousness to them that believe" (Rom 10:4). That is, through Christ we are as righteous as if we had satisfied the Law in our own persons. The end of the Law is to justify and save those who fulfill it. Christ subjected Himself thereto: He perfectly fulfilled it for us, and His perfect righteousness is imputed to us. Christ fulfilled the moral Law, not for Himself, but for us. Therefore Christ doing it for believers, they fulfill the Law in Christ. And so Christ by doing, and they believing in Him that doth it, do fulfill the Law.

Or Christ may be said to be the end of the Law because the end of the Law is perfect righteousness, that a man may be justified thereby, which end we cannot attain of ourselves through the frailty of our flesh. But by Christ we attain it, Who hath fulfilled the Law for us. Christ hath perfectly fulfilled the Decalogue for us and that three ways: (1) in His pure conception; (2) in His godly life; (3) in His holy and obedient sufferings, and all for us. For whatsoever the Law required that we should be, do, or suffer, He hath per-

formed in our behalf. We are discharged by Him before God. Christ in respect of the integrity and purity of His nature, being conceived without sin (Mat 1:18); and in respect of His life and actions, being wholly conformed to the absolute righteousness of the Law (Luk 1:35); and in respect of the punishment which He suffered, to make satisfaction unto God's justice for the breach of the Law (2Co 5:21; Col 1:20)—in these respects Christ is the perfection of the Law and “the end of the law for righteousness to them that believe” (Rom 10:4).

The infinite wisdom and power of dear Jesus in reconciling the Law and the gospel in this great mystery of justification is greatly to be magnified. This righteousness presents us in the sight of God as “all fair” (Song 4:7); as “complete” (Col 2:10); as “without spot or wrinkle” (Eph 5:27); as “without fault before the throne of God” (Rev 14:5); as “holy, and unblameable, and unreprouceable in his sight” (Col 1:22). Oh, the happiness and blessedness, the safety and glory, of those precious souls, who in the righteousness of Jesus Christ stand perfectly righteous in the sight of God!

But, **fourthly, know for your comfort that this imputed righteousness of Christ will answer to all the fears, doubts, and objections of your souls.** How shall I look up to God? The answer is, “In the righteousness of Jesus Christ.” How shall I have any communion with a holy God in this world? The answer is, “In the righteousness of Christ.” How shall I find acceptance with God? The answer is, “In the righteousness of Christ.” How shall I die? The answer is, “In the righteousness of Christ.” How shall I stand before the judgment seat? The answer is “In the righteousness of Jesus Christ.” Your sure and only way, under all temptations, fears, conflicts, doubts, and disputes, is by faith to remember Christ and the sufferings of Christ as your Mediator and Surety. Say, “O Christ, Thou art my sin in being made sin for me; and Thou art my curse being made a curse for me” (2Co 5:21; Gal 3:13); or rather, “I am Thy sin, and Thou art my righteousness; I am Thy curse, and Thou art my blessing; I am Thy death, and Thou art my life; I am the wrath of God to Thee, and Thou art the love of God to me; I am Thy hell, and Thou art my heaven.”

O sirs! If you think of your sins and of God's wrath; if you think of your guiltiness and of God's justice, your hearts will faint and fail. They will fear and tremble and sink into despair, if you do not think of Christ, if you do not stay and rest your souls upon the Mediator, the righteousness of Christ, the imputed righteousness of Christ. The imputed righteousness of Christ answers all cavils¹¹ and objections though there were millions of them that can be made against the good estate of a believer. This is a precious truth—more worth than a world—that all our sins are pardoned, not only in a way of truth and mercy, but in a way of justice.

But, **fifthly, know for your comfort that the imputed righteousness of Christ is the best title that you have to show for a kingdom that shakes not, for riches that corrupt not, for an inheritance that fadeth not away, and for an house not made with hands,**

¹¹ **cavils** – criticisms for petty reasons; frivolous objections.

but one eternal in the heavens (Heb 12:28; 1Pe 1:3-5; 2Co 5:1-4). It is the fairest certificate that you have to show for all that happiness and blessedness that you look for in that other world. The righteousness of Christ is your life, your joy, your comfort, your crown, your confidence, your heaven, your all. Oh, that you were still so wise as to keep a fixed eye and an awakened heart upon the mediatory righteousness of Christ! For that is the righteousness by which you may safely and comfortably live and by which you may happily and quietly die.

Ah, that believers would dwell much upon this: they have a righteousness in Christ that is as full, perfect, and complete, as if they had fulfilled the Law...Yea, the righteousness that believers have by Christ is in some respect better than that they should have had by Adam...The first Adam was a mere man; the second Adam is God and man...Adam was a mutable¹² person. He lost his righteousness in one day, say some, and all that glory which his posterity should have possessed [if he had] stood fast in innocency. But the righteousness of Christ cannot be lost. His righteousness is like Himself, from everlasting to everlasting. When once this white raiment is put upon a believer, it can never fall off; it can never be taken off. This splendid glorious righteousness of Jesus Christ is as really a believer's as if he had wrought it himself (Rev 19:8). A believer is no loser, but a gainer, by Adam's fall. By the loss of Adam's righteousness is brought to light a more glorious and durable righteousness than ever Adam's was. And upon the account of an interest in this righteousness a believer may challenge all the glory of that upper world.

But, sixthly, **know for your comfort that this imputed righteousness of Christ is the only true basis, bottom, and ground, for a believer to build his happiness upon, his joy and comfort upon, and the true peace and quiet of his conscience upon.** What though Satan, or thy own heart, or the world condemn thee, yet in this thou mayest rejoice: God justifies thee. You see what a bold challenge Paul makes: "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth" (Rom 8:33). And if the judge acquit the prisoner at the bar, he cares not though the jailer or his fellow-prisoners condemn him. So here there are no accusers that a believer needs to fear, seeing that it is God Himself, Who is the supreme Judge that absolves him as just. God absolves, and therefore it is to no purpose for Satan to accuse us (Rev 12:10); nor for the Law of Moses to accuse us (Joh 5:45); nor for our own consciences to accuse us (Rom 2:25); nor for the world to accuse us. God is the highest Judge, and His tribunal-seat is the supreme judgment seat. Therefore from thence there is no appealing. As amongst men, persons accused or condemned may appeal till they come to the highest court. But if in the highest, they are absolved and discharged, then they are free and safe and well. [Because the believer is] absolved before God's tribunal-seat, there [are] no further accusations to be feared, all appeals from thence being void and of no force. The consideration of which should arm us and comfort us and strengthen us against all terrors of conscience, guilt of sin, accusation of the Law, and cruelty of Satan; inasmuch as these either dare not appear before God to accuse us or charge us; or if they do, it is but lost labor.

¹² **mutable** – capable of or subject to change.

Ah! What a strong cordial¹³ would this be to all the people of God, if they would but live in the power of this glorious truth! It is God that justifies them, and there lies no accusation in the court of heaven against them!

The great reason why many poor Christians are under so many dejections, despondencies, and perplexities is because they drink no more of this water of life: “It is God that justifieth.” Did Christians live more upon this breast, “It is God that justifieth,” they would be no more like Pharaoh’s lean kine,¹⁴ but would be fat and flourishing (Gen 41:1-3).

The imputed righteousness of Christ is a real, sure, and solid foundation upon which a believer may safely build his peace, joy, and everlasting rest. Yea, it will help him to glory in tribulations and to triumph over all adversities...Yea, you may be wonderfully cheered at this, and it is your greatest comfort that you have to deal with this just God, Who hath already received satisfaction for your sins.

Whilst Christians set up a righteousness of their own and build not upon the righteousness of Christ, how unsettled are they (Rom 10:3)! How miserably are they tossed up and down, sometimes fearing and sometimes hoping, sometimes supposing themselves in a good condition, and anon¹⁵ seeing themselves upon the very brink of hell! But now all is quiet and serene with that soul that builds upon the righteousness of Christ. For he being “justified by faith, hath peace with God” (Rom 5:1). Observe that noble description of Christ in Isaiah 32:2—“And a man,” that is, the man Christ Jesus, “shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.” When a man is clothed with the righteousness of Christ, Who is God-man, it is neither wind nor tempest, it is neither drought nor weariness that can disturb the peace of his soul. For Christ and His righteousness will be a hiding-place, a covert, and rivers of water, and the shadow of a great rock unto him. Being at perfect peace with God, he may well say with the Psalmist, “I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety” (Psa 4:6-8). The peace and comfort of an awakened sinner can never stand firm and stable, but upon the basis of a positive righteousness.

When a sensible sinner¹⁶ casts his eye upon his own righteousness, holiness, fasting, prayers, tears, humbling, meltings, he can find no place for the sole of his foot to rest firmly upon by reason of the spots, and blots, and blemishes, that cleave both to his graces and duties. He knows that his prayers need pardon, and that his tears need washing in the blood of the Lamb, and that his very righteousness needs another’s righteousness to secure him from condemnation. “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O

¹³ **cordial** – medicinal tonic which excites the heart or circulation; anything that comforts, gladdens, or exhilarates the heart.

¹⁴ **kine** – cows.

¹⁵ **anon** – suddenly; at once.

¹⁶ **sensible sinner** – a sinner awakened to the reality of his wicked condition, realizing his state before God.

Lord, who shall stand?” (Psa 130:3; 1:5). That is, “stand” in judgment...The best man’s life is fuller of sins than the firmament is of stars or the furnace of sparks. Therefore who can stand in judgment and not fall under the weight of Thy just wrath, which burneth as low as hell itself? None can stand. Were the faults of the best man alive but written in his forehead, he was never able to stand in judgment. When a man comes to the Law for justification, it convinceth him of sin.

When he pleads his innocence, that he is not so great a sinner as others are, when he pleads his righteousness, his duties, his good meanings, and his good desires, the Law tells him that they are all weighed in the balance of the sanctuary and found too light (Dan 5:27). The Law tells him that the best of his duties will not save him and that the least of his sins will damn him. The Law tells him that his own righteousnesses are as filthy rags, do but defile him, and that his best services do but witness against him. The Law looks for perfect and personal obedience, and because the sinner cannot come up to it, it pronounceth him accursed (Gal 3:10). And though the sinner sues¹⁷ hard for mercy, yet the Law will show him none, no, though he seeks it carefully with tears (Heb 12:17). But now, when the believing sinner casts his eye upon the righteousness of Christ, he sees that righteousness to be a perfect and exact righteousness, as perfect and exact as that of the Law.

The saints of old have always placed their happiness, peace, and comfort in their perfect and complete justification, rather than in their imperfect and incomplete sanctification...That text is worthy to be written in letters of gold: “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,” saith the sound believer, “my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isa 61:10). He hath imputed and given unto me the perfect holiness and obedience of my blessed Savior and made it mine.

But, **seventhly, then know for your comfort that you have the highest reason in the world to rejoice and triumph in Christ Jesus.** “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus” (Phi 3:3; Gal 6:14). We rejoice in the Person of Christ, and we rejoice in the righteousness of Christ: “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ” (2Co 2:14). [God’s grace] was ever in Paul’s mouth, and ever in Austin’s¹⁸ mouth, and should be ever in a Christian’s mouth, when his eye is fixed upon the righteousness of Christ. Every believer is in a more blessed and happy estate by means of the righteousness of Christ than Adam was in innocency and that upon a threefold account, which are just and noble grounds for every Christian to rejoice and triumph in Christ Jesus.

(1.) *That righteousness which Adam had was uncertain and such as it was possible for him to lose.* Yea, he did lose it (Gen 3), and that in a very short time (Psa 8:5). God gave him power and freedom of will either to hold it or lose it. And we know soon after, upon

¹⁷ **sues** – petitions; seeks to obtain.

¹⁸ **Austin** or **Aurelius Augustine** (354-430) – Bishop of Hippo, early church theologian known by many as the father of orthodox theology; born in Tagaste, North Africa.

choice, he proved a bankrupt. But the righteousness that we have by Jesus Christ is made more firm and sure to us. Adam sinned away his righteousness, but a believer cannot sin away the righteousness of Jesus Christ. It is not possible for the elect of God so to sin as to lose Christ or to strip themselves of that robe of righteousness which Christ hath put upon them (1Jo 3:9; Rom 8:35, 39). The gates of hell shall never be able to prevail against that soul that is interested in Christ, that is clothed with the righteousness of Christ (Mat 16:18). Now what higher ground of joy and triumph in Christ Jesus can there be than this? But,

(2.) *The righteousness that Adam had was in his own keeping.* The spring and root of it was founded in himself, and that was the cause why he lost it so soon. Adam, like the prodigal son (Luk 15:12-13), had all his portion, his happiness, his holiness, his blessedness, his righteousness, in his own hands, in his own keeping, and so quickly lost stock and block, as some speak.

Oh, but now, that blessed righteousness that we have by Jesus Christ is not in our own keeping, but in our Father's keeping. God the Father is the Lord Keeper, not only of our inherent righteousness, but also of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ unto us. "My sheep shall never perish," saith our Savior, "neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (Joh 10:28-29). Though the saints may meet with many shakings and tossings in their various conditions in this world, yet their final perseverance till they come to full possession of eternal life is certain. God is so unchangeable in His purposes of love and so invincible in His power that neither Satan, nor the world, nor their own flesh shall ever be able to separate them from "a crown of righteousness" (2Ti 4:7-8); "a crown of life" (Rev 2:10); "a crown of glory" (1Pe 5:4). The power of God is so far above all created opposition, that it will certainly maintain the saints in a state of grace. Now what a bottom and ground for rejoicing and triumphing in Christ Jesus is here! But,

(3.) *[Even if] the righteousness that Adam had in his creation [were] unchangeable, and he could never have lost it; yet it had been but the righteousness of a man, of a mere creature.* And what a poor, low righteousness would that have been, to that high and glorious righteousness that we have by Jesus Christ, which is the righteousness of such a Person as was God as well as man. Yea, that righteousness that we have by Jesus Christ is a higher righteousness and a more excellent, transcendent righteousness than that of the angels. Though the righteousness of the angels be perfect and complete in its kind, yet it is but the righteousness of mere creatures. But the righteousness of the saints in which they stand clothed before the throne of God is the righteousness of that Person which is both God and man.

Now what a well of salvation is here! What three noble grounds and what matchless bottoms are here for a Christian's joy and triumph in Christ Jesus, Who hath put so glorious a robe as His own righteousness upon them! Ah, Christians, let not the consolations of God be small in your eyes (Job 15:11). Why take you no more comfort and

delight in Christ Jesus? Why rejoice you no more in Him? Not to rejoice in Christ Jesus is a plain breach of that gospel command, "Rejoice in the Lord always," that is, rejoice in Christ, "and again I say, rejoice," saith the apostle (Phi 4:4). He doubleth the mandate to show the necessity and excellency of the duty.

That joy lasts forever, whose object remains forever. Such an object is our Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore the joy of the saints should still be exercised upon our Lord Jesus Christ. Shall the worldling rejoice in his barns, the rich man in his bags, the ambitious man in his honors, the voluptuous man in his pleasures, and the wanton in his Delilahs; and shall not a Christian rejoice in Christ Jesus and in that robe of righteousness with which Christ hath covered him (Isa 61:10)?

The joy of that Christian that keeps a fixed eye upon Christ and His righteousness cannot be expressed, it cannot be painted. No man can paint the sweetness of the honeycomb, or the sweetness of a cluster of Canaan, or the fragrance of the rose of Sharon. As the being of things cannot be painted, so the sweetness of things cannot be painted. The joy of the Holy Ghost cannot be painted, nor that joy that arises in a Christian's heart, who keeps up a daily converse with Christ and His righteousness, cannot be painted; it cannot be expressed! Who can look upon the glorious body of our Lord Jesus Christ and seriously consider that even every vein of that blessed body did bleed to bring him to heaven, and not rejoice in Christ Jesus? Who can look upon the glorious righteousness of Christ imputed to him and not be filled with an exuberancy¹⁹ of spiritual joy in God his Savior? There is not the pardon of the least sin, nor the least degree of grace, nor the least drop of mercy, but cost Christ dear: for He must die, and He must be made a sacrifice, and He must be accursed, that pardon may be thine, and grace thine, and mercy thine! And oh, how should this draw out thy heart to rejoice and triumph in Christ Jesus!

But, **eighthly, the imputed righteousness of Christ may serve to comfort, support, and bear up the hearts of the people of God from fainting and sinking under the sense of the weakness and imperfection of their inherent righteousness.** The church of old has lamentingly²⁰ said, "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa 64:6). When a Christian keeps a serious eye upon the spots, blots, blemishes, infirmities, and follies that cleave to his inherent righteousness, fears and tremblings arise to the saddening and sinking of his soul. But when he casts a fixed eye upon the righteousness of Christ imputed to him, then his comforts revive and his heart bears up. For though he hath no righteousness of his own by which his soul may stand accepted before God, yet he hath God's righteousness, which infinitely transcends his own. In God's account, [it] goes for his, as if he had exactly fulfilled the righteousness which the Law requires. According to the apostle, "What shall we say then? the Gentiles which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith" (Rom 9:30).

¹⁹ **exuberancy** – unrestrained enthusiasm or joy.

²⁰ **lamentingly** – expressing grief, deep sorrow, regret.

Faith wraps itself in the righteousness of Christ and so justifieth us. The Gentiles sought righteousness, not in themselves but in Christ, which they apprehended by faith and were by it justified in the sight of God. The Jews, seeking it in themselves, and thinking by the goodness of their own works to attain to the righteousness of the Law, missed of it. Being in no man's power perfectly to fulfill the [Law], only Christ hath exactly fulfilled it for all that by faith close²¹ savingly with Him. O sirs! None can be justified in the sight of God by a righteousness of their own making.

Now remember that this imputed righteousness of Christ procures acceptance for our inherent righteousness. When a sincere Christian casts his eye upon the weaknesses, infirmities, and imperfections that daily attend his best services, he sighs and mourns. But if he looks upward to the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, [it] shall bring forth his infirm, weak, and sinful performances perfect, spotless, and sinless, and approved according to the tenor²² of the gospel. They become spiritual sacrifices, [and] he cannot but rejoice (1Pe 2:5). For as there is an imputation of righteousness to the persons of believers, so there is also an imputation to their services and actions...so the imperfect good works that are done by believers are accounted righteousness, or as Calvin speaks, "are accounted for righteousness, they being dipped in the blood of Christ." They are accounted righteous actions; and so sincere Christians shall be judged according to their good works though not saved for them (Rev 11:18; 20:12; Mat 25:34-37).

And it is observable in that famous process of the last judgment (Mat 25:34-37), that the supreme Judge makes mention of the bounty and liberality of the saints, and so bestows the crown of life and the eternal inheritance upon them. Though the Lord's faithful ones have eminent cause to be humbled and afflicted for the many weaknesses that cleave to their best duties, yet on the other hand, they have wonderful cause to rejoice and triumph that they are made perfect through Jesus Christ, and that the Lord looks at them through the righteousness of Christ as fruits of His own Spirit (Heb 13:20-21; 1Co 6:11). The saints' prayers being perfumed with Christ's odors are highly accepted in heaven (Rev 8:3-4). Upon this bottom of imputed righteousness, believers may have exceeding strong consolation and good hope through grace, that both their persons and services do find singular acceptation with God as having no spot or blemish at all in them. Surely righteousness imputed must be the top of our happiness and blessedness!

But, **ninthly and lastly, know for your comfort that imputed righteousness will give you the greatest boldness before God's judgment seat.** There is an absolute and indispensable necessity of a perfect righteousness wherewith to appear before God. The holiness of God's nature, the righteousness of His government, the severity of His Law, and the terror of wrath call aloud upon the sinner for a complete righteousness without which there is no standing in judgment (Psa 1:5). That righteousness only is able to justify us before God which is perfect, and that hath no defect or blemish in it, such as may abide the trial before His judgment seat, such as may fitly satisfy His justice and make

²¹ **close** – come to terms.

²² **tenor** – general sense; the overall course of meaning.

our peace with Him. And consequently, [by this] the Law of God is fulfilled...such a righteousness as He requires, as will stand before Him, and satisfy His justice (Rom 10:3).

This is the crowning comfort to a sensible and understanding soul, that he stands righteous before a judgment seat in that full, exact, perfect, complete, matchless, spotless, peerless, and most acceptable righteousness of Christ imputed to him.

It is a complete and unspotted righteousness, an unblameable righteousness, and unblemished righteousness. And therefore God can neither in justice except nor object to it. In this righteousness the believer lives, in this righteousness the believer dies, and in this righteousness believers shall arise and appear before the judgment seat of Christ to the deep admiration of all the elect angels, to the transcendent terror and horror of all reprobates, and to the matchless joy and triumph of all on Christ's right hand, who shall then shout and sing, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels" (Isa 61:10).

Oh, how Christ in this great day will be admired and glorified in all His saints (2Th 1:10), when every saint, wrapped up in this fine linen, in this white robe of Christ's righteousness, shall shine more gloriously than ten thousand suns! In the great Day of the Lord, when the saints shall stand before the tribunal of God, clothed in the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ, they shall then stand, they shall then be pronounced righteous even in the court of divine justice, which sentence will fill their souls with comfort and the souls of sinners with astonishment (Rev 20:12; 12:10).

Suppose we saw the believing sinner holding up his hand at God's bar—the books opened, the accuser of the brethren present, the witnesses ready, and the Judge on the bench thus bespeaking the sinner at the bar (Rom 7:12, 14, 16; Gal 3:10): "O sinner, sinner, thou standest here indicted before Me for many millions of sins of commission and for many millions of sins of omission. Thou hast broken My holy, just, and righteous Laws beyond all human conception or expression, and hereof thou art proved guilty. What hast thou now to say for thyself why thou shouldst not be eternally cast?" Upon this the sinner pleads guilty. But withal he earnestly desires that he may have time and liberty to plead for himself and to offer his reasons why that dreadful sentence, "Go, you cursed," should not be passed upon him (Mat 25:41). The liberty desired being granted by the Judge, the sinner pleads that his Surety, Jesus Christ, hath by His blood and sufferings given full and complete satisfaction to divine justice and that He hath paid down upon the nail the whole debt at once, and that it can never stand with the holiness and unspotted justice of God to demand satisfaction twice (Heb 10:10, 14).

If the Judge shall further object, "Ay, but sinner, sinner, the Law requireth an exact and perfect righteousness in the personal fulfilling of it. Now, sinner, where is thy exact and perfect righteousness? (Gal 3:10). Upon which the believing sinner very readily,

cheerfully, humbly, and boldly replies, “My righteousness is upon the bench: ‘In the Lord have I righteousness’ (Isa 45:24). Christ, my Surety, hath fulfilled the Law on my behalf.”

His obeying the Law to the full, His perfect conforming to its commands, His doing, as well as His dying obedience, is by grace made over and reckoned to me in order to my justification and salvation. And this is my plea, by which I will stand before the Judge of all the world. Upon this, the sinner’s plea is accepted as good in Law, and accordingly he is pronounced righteous and goes away glorying and rejoicing, triumphing and shouting it out, “Righteous, righteous, righteous, righteous!” “In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory” (Isa 45:25). And thus you see that there are nine springs of strong consolation that flow into your souls through the imputation of Christ’s righteousness unto you.

From “The Golden Key to Open Hidden Treasures” in *The Works of Thomas Brooks*,
Vol. 5, Banner of Truth. This article available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Thomas Brooks (1608-1680): Nonconformist Puritan preacher; advocate of Congregationalism. His written works fill six volumes.



“Their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord” (Isa 54:17); for He, of God, “is made unto us...righteousness” (1Co 1:30). The transference is complete and eternal. From the moment that we receive the divine testimony to the righteousness of the Son of God, all the guilt that was on us passes over to Him and all His righteousness passes over to us. God looks on us as possessed of that righteousness and treats us according to its value in His sight. Men may call this a mere “name” or “legal fiction,” but it is such a “name” as secures for us the full favor of the righteous God. —*Horatius Bonar*

IS THE LORD YOUR RIGHTEOUSNESS?

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

*“This is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD
OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”—Jeremiah 23:6*

THE time is short. It is but a little while, and the Lord Jesus shall come in His glory. The judgment shall be set and the books shall be opened. “Before Him shall be gathered all nations...that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (Mat 25:32; 2Co 5:10). The inmost secrets of all hearts shall be revealed; “and the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man” will stand together on a level at the bar and will see each other face to face, and one by one will have to give account of themselves to God before the whole world (Rev 6:15). Thus it is written, and therefore it is true and sure to come to pass.

And what does each of you intend to say in that hour? What is the defense you are prepared to set up? What is the answer you propose to give? What is the cause you mean to show why sentence should not be pronounced against you?

Verily, beloved, I do fear that some amongst you do not know. You have not thought about it yet—you have resolved to think about it some day soon; or you are not quite clear about it at present; or you have made out some ingenious, plausible scheme, which will not stand the touchstone of the Bible. Oh, what a fearful case is yours! Life is indeed uncertain; the fairest or the strongest here may [perhaps] be taken next—you cannot make an agreement with death—and yet you cannot tell us what you are resting upon for comfort.

In the great Day there will be no [lack] of witnesses: your thoughts and words and actions will appear written in the book one after another. Your Judge is a searcher of hearts. And yet, in spite of all these facts, too many of you sleep on as if the Bible were not true; too many of you know not how or why you are to escape God’s wrath and condemnation.

I. First, then, I am to show you, you must have some righteousness. The Bible says plainly, “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Rom 1:18). “The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (1Co 6:9). “The cursed shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (Mat 25:46). “Have on the breastplate of righteousness,” says Paul to the Ephesians (Eph 6:14). And how shall any one presume to say that he can enter into heaven without it!

But I wish here to expose the folly of all those who talk in a loose and general way about God’s mercy. Men will often say, when urged to think about their salvation, “Indeed I know I am not what I should be; I have broken God’s Law very often; but He is

very merciful, and I hope I shall be forgiven.” Now, I am bold to say, beloved, this is an immense delusion, a refuge of lies that will not stand being compared with Scripture; and more than this, it will not last one instant in the fire of trial and affliction.

Have you not ever heard that God is a God of perfect holiness—holy in His character, holy in His laws, holy in His dwelling place? “Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel,” says the book of Leviticus, “and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev 19:2). “He is a holy God,” says Joshua (Jos 24:19). “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord” (Heb 12:14). And the book of Revelation, speaking of heaven, says, “There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth” (Rev 21:27). And will you tell us in the face of all these texts that man, corrupt, impure, defiled—as the best of us most surely is—shall pass the fiery judgment of our God and enter into the heavenly Jerusalem by simply trusting in the mercy of his Maker, without one single rag to cover his iniquities and hide his natural uncleanness? It cannot be: God’s mercy and God’s holiness must needs be reconciled, and you have not done this yet.

And have you never heard that God is a God of perfect justice, Whose laws may not be broken without punishment, Whose commandments must be fulfilled on pain of death? “All His ways are judgment,” says the book of Deuteronomy: “a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He” (Deu 32:4). “Justice and judgment are the habitation of Thy throne” says David (Psa 89:14). “Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets,” said Jesus, “I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Mat 5:17-18). I cannot discover any place which says the Law is now let down and need not be fulfilled; and how, then, can I teach you that it is enough to look to God’s mercy? I read of only two ways in the Bible: one is to do the whole Law yourself; the other is to do it by Another. I tell you then, God’s mercy and God’s justice must be reconciled; and this you have not done yet.

You tell us fairly you are not what you should be, but you say that God is merciful. I answer you this will not stand before the Bible: the wages of sin is death; he that offendeth in one point is guilty of all. God...will have His demands paid in full: your debt must be discharged by yourself or by someone else. Choose which you please, but one thing at least is certain—payment must be made. God is indeed all love: He willeth not the death of any sinner. But however small your iniquities may be, they cannot possibly be put away until the claims of His Law have been satisfied to the uttermost farthing. *By some means then, you must have righteousness, or else it is clear you cannot be saved.*

II. I promised in the second place to show you that we have no righteousness of our own, and therefore by ourselves we cannot be saved. Look at the Law of God and measure its requirements. Does it not ask of every man a perfect, unsinning obedience from first to last, in thought and word and deed, without one single failure in the slightest jot or tittle? And where is the son or daughter of Adam who can say, “All this I have performed”? I would even take the case of the best Christian among ourselves, and ask him

if he can name a single day on which he has not sinned in many things. Oh, how much he would tell you of wandering in his prayers, of defilement in his thoughts, of coldness toward God, of want of love, of pride, of evil tempers, of vanity, of worldly-mindedness!

Some tell us that repentance and amendment will enable us to stand in the great Day. But the Bible does not warrant it. No doubt, without them none of you will enter into the kingdom of heaven; but they cannot put away your sins nor endure the severity of God's judgment.

Some say they put their trust in well-spent lives: they never did anybody any harm. They have always done their best, and so they hope they shall be accounted righteous. Beloved, this is miserable trifling. Let them tell us of a single day in which they have not broken that spiritual law laid down in the Sermon on the Mount. What! *Never* thought an unkind thought? *Never* looked an unchaste look? *Never* said an uncharitable thing? *Never* coveted? Or let them tell us of a single hour in which they have not left undone something it was in their power to do...Is it not clear, then, that they do not read the Scriptures, or neglect their precepts if they do; and so at any rate, they are not doing their best?

Some tell us that they hope sincerity will carry them safe through their trial. They may not perhaps have quite clear views, but still they have always meant well, and so they hope to be accepted. I cannot find there is any place for them in heaven.

Lastly, some tell us that they go through all the forms and ordinances of religion and build their claim to righteousness on that. "Hath not God commanded us," they say, "to honor His Word, His house, His ministers, His sacraments? All this we do, and surely He will accept us." I cannot find it written.

Now, I wish to show you plainly that we have nothing of our own. The doctrine may seem hard and disagreeable, and yet there are few who do not allow it at one important period in their lives, if they never did before. I mean the hour of death. Mark then how anxious almost everyone becomes, whom God permits to keep possession of his senses. The Judgment Day appears then in its true light. Man feels naked and empty. He knows he is about to be asked that awful question, "What hast thou to say, why thou shouldst not perish for this long list of sins?" And if he has not furnished himself with the only answer that can be given, the view before his eyes cannot possibly look anything else than dreary, black, and hopeless. In short, both Scripture and your own experience prove most fully that nothing we can do will stand God's examination.

"But what are we to do?" perhaps you will ask. "You seem to have shut us up without hope. You told us first that we must have some righteousness, and now you have told us further that we have not any of our own. What are we to do? Which way are we to turn? What would you have us say? To whom are we to look?"

III. I promised in the third place to tell you how God can be a just God and yet show mercy and justify the most ungodly. The Lord Jesus Christ has done what we ought to have done and suffered what we ought to have suffered. He has taken our place and become our Substitute both in life and death, and all for the sake of miserable, corrupt,

ungrateful beings like ourselves. Oh, is not His name then rightly called, “The Lord our Righteousness”?

Christ was accounted as a sinner, and therefore punished for us; we are accounted as righteous, and therefore glorified in Him. He was accounted as a sinner, and therefore He was condemned; we are accounted as righteous in Him, and therefore justified.

God’s Law has been satisfied, and now we may be saved. Sin has been punished, and now sinners may go free. God has shown Himself a just God, and yet He can be the Savior of guilty men.

Beloved, are not these things wonderful? Are not these glad tidings to the laboring and heavy laden? The Lord Himself is our Righteousness...This shall be our defense and plea, when earth and its works are burned up, and the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and the Chief Shepherd shall appear to judge the sons of men. Who shall lay anything *then* to the charge of those who have laid hold on Christ? Shall anyone presume to say they have not done everything required? “The Lord,” we will answer, “is our righteousness.”

Now, I have preached to very little purpose, beloved, if you do not this very morning ask yourselves, “Is the Lord *my* righteousness, or is He not?”...I know not that I can put into your heads a more important inquiry; and yet, I sadly fear too many of you will not think I am in earnest, or else you will suppose the question may be useful to your neighbors, but not so very necessary for yourself.

I say this much by way of warning, and I now repeat to every man, woman, and child: “Is the Lord your righteousness, or is He not?” I know that there are here two parties. One would reply, if honest, “I fear He is not”; and the other would answer, “I trust He is.” I purpose, therefore, to conclude this sermon by a few words to each of these two classes.

First, then, I shall offer some counsel to those among you who are prepared to say: “The Lord Jesus is, we trust, our righteousness.” I say then—and I think it safe to do so—you have made a good profession, but I would have you daily search and see that you are not deceiving yourselves. See that your tongue does not lay claim to more than your heart has received and knows of. See that your life and lips are thoroughly agreed. Show all the world that He in Whom you trust is your example no less than your righteousness, and while you wait for His second appearing, endeavor daily to become more like Him. Study to be holy, even as He Who has called you and washed you in His own blood is holy. Beware that you give the Lord’s enemies no occasion to blaspheme. They are watching you much; you cannot be hid. Be always saying to yourself, “What shall I do, and how shall I behave, to show my gratitude to Him Who hath carried my sins and given me His righteousness?” But know ye for a certainty, if the world says, “What do these persons more than others?”; if those who live with you cannot take knowledge of you that you are much with Jesus; if you have no fruit to show of any sort; if you are not habitually and daily sober, just, holy, temperate, humble, meek, loving, watchful, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, hungering and thirsting after righteousness; if you have none of these things, you are little better than sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal, you are ru-

ining your own soul, and in the Day of Judgment you will plead in vain the name of Jesus. The Lord will say, "I know you not; you never really came to Me."

It only remains now to speak to all among you who cannot say, "The Lord is our righteousness." Indeed, beloved, I am distressed for your condition. I cannot understand, I never can, what arguments you use to quench the striving of God's Spirit, to stop the prickings of your own conscience. In truth, I do suspect you never argue, you never reason. You shut your eyes and try to forget your own perishing souls. But know ye not that verse of the Bible which declares, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God" (Psa 9:17)—not ridicule, or insult, but simply all who *forget*. And know ye not the verse, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" (Heb 2:3). It does not say abuse, or disbelieve, or deny, but simply *neglect*. And this, I fear, is a charge you cannot turn aside.

Oh, think of death: it may be near at hand. Your careless indifference will alter then, but without Christ you will find a sting in that hour which no power of your own will ever remove. *Think of eternity in hell:* no merry companions, no comfortable gossiping, no noisy reveling at night, nothing but unchanging misery, unceasing torment, and unutterable woe. *Think of thy judgment:* your name will be called in turn, and you will stand in the sight of assembled millions—ministers, father, mother, wife, children, relations, all will see you—you will have to give account of your actions, and you know you will be condemned. But who will then pass sentence? Not an angel, not even God the Father; but the Lord Himself! Oh, cutting and heartrending thought! The Lord Jesus, Whose blood and righteousness you now refuse, will pronounce your condemnation.

I know not anything that should prevent your salvation if you are willing...but mark, I will not promise you anything beyond today: "Now is the accepted time" (2Co 6:2). Thus far I can go, but one step further I cannot proceed upon sure ground. If you reject the counsel of God now, I cannot promise even the youngest of you another opportunity...tomorrow death may interfere, or Jesus may return to judgment, and it would be too late. Go home then, if you value your soul, and turn the words of the text into a prayer, and entreat the Lord to receive you and become your righteousness...Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly into every heart. Amen and Amen.

From "The Lord Our Righteousness" in *The Christian Race*, Charles Nolan Publishers.

John Charles Ryle (1816-1900): Anglican bishop; respected author of *Holiness*, *Knots Untied*, *Old Paths*, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, and other works; born at Macclesfield, Cheshire County, England.



Christ *for* us, the obedient in the place of the disobedient, is the first part of our message (see 1Jo 3:16). His assumption of the legal claims, which otherwise would have been made good against us, is the security for our deliverance. That deliverance becomes an actual thing to us immediately upon our consenting to allow Him to undertake our case.

Christ *in* us is the second part of our gospel (see 1Jo 4:13). This second is of mighty moment, yet is not to be confounded with the first. That which is done *for* us is not the same as that which is done *in* us. By the former, we are constituted righteous; by the latter, we are made holy. The one is properly the gospel, in the belief of which we are saved; the other, the carrying out of that gospel in the soul.

Christ *for* us is our justification (2Co 5:21). Christ *in* us, and we in Christ, is our holiness. The former is the external substitution; the latter, the internal energy or operation, taking its rise from the former, yet not to be confounded with it or substituted for it.

Christ the Substitute, giving His life for ours upon the cross, is specially the object of faith. The message concerning this sacrificial work is the gospel, the belief of which brings pardon to the guilty...It is not simply because of this righteousness that Jehovah justifies; but He legally transfers it to us so that we can use it, plead it, and appear before God in it, just as if it were wholly our own...Jehovah is satisfied with Christ's obedience. He is well pleased with His righteousness. And when we, crediting His testimony to that obedience and that righteousness, consent to be treated by Him on the footing of its perfection, then is He satisfied and well-pleased with us. —*Horatius Bonar*