

# “THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE MAN WHOM GOD IMPUTES RIGHTEOUSNESS”

(Romans 4:1-8)

## INTRODUCTION:

I want to preach this morning on the statement in verse 6, “**the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works.**”

In *The Pilgrim’s Progress* John Bunyan tells us that at the cross not only did Christian lose his burden but he was also given a change of clothing: his rags were taken away and replaced by a new outfit. Not long after that glorious exchange he was troubled to see two men come tumbling over the wall into the way that leads to the Celestial City. He soon discovered that these two characters, Formalist and Hypocrisy, believed that they were well on the way to Heaven although they airily dismissed any suggestion that they ought to have entered the Christian life by the strait gate.

Inevitably this led to controversy between Christian and the newcomers who began to comment on Christian’s clothes, saying.

*we see not wherein thou differest from us, but by the coat that is on thy back, which was, we trow, given thee by some of thy neighbours, to hide the shame of thy nakedness.*

Christian replied,

*As for this coat that is on my back, it was given me by the Lord of the place whither I go; and that as you say to cover my nakedness with. And I take it as a token of his kindness to me; for I had nothing but rags before. And besides, thus I comfort myself as I go: Surely, think I, when I come to the gate of the city, the Lord thereof will know me for good, since I have his coat on my back—a coat that he gave me freely in the day that he stripped me of my rags.*

In this piece of allegory John Bunyan shows his understanding of the doctrine of imputed righteousness. Bunyan knew the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from the works of the law. The blessedness is expressed by Bunyan as “*when I come to the gate of the city, the Lord thereof will know me for good, since I have his coat on my back—a coat that he gave me freely in the day that he stripped me of my rages.*”

## WHAT IS IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS?

Imputed righteousness. What is it? It is the righteousness of Christ placed on our account, reckoned to be ours, given to us freely when God strips us of the rags of our own self-effort at righteousness and takes the burden of our sins away.

The word for imputed is used nine times in this section of Romans. Sometimes it is translated in the NKJV, 'counted,' sometimes 'accounted,' sometimes 'imputed.'

In verse 3 the Greek word 'logisthemai' is translated 'accounted'

Verse 4 'counted'

Verse 5 'accounted'

Verse 6 'imputes'

Verse 8 'impute' and 'accounted'

Verses 11, 23, and 24 'imputed'

The word comes from the world of book-keeping or record keeping. So when God imputes righteousness to you He puts on your record righteousness. He makes a book-keeping entry. You now have perfect righteousness credited to your account. Whose righteousness is credited to your account? It is not your own righteousness that He adds, because you have none. No, it is the righteousness of Christ.

***“Oh the blessedness of the person whom God imputes righteousness apart from works.”***

## SOME HAVE PROBLEMS USING BOOK-KEEPING TERMINOLOGY

Because the word comes from book-keeping and it seems to be an impersonal or static transaction, some sections of Christianity don't like to talk about God imputing Christ's righteousness. Or at least they don't like to make God's imputed righteousness central to the understanding of God's great work of justification.

But this word, 'impute' is just one of many words that God uses to describe what great transaction took place in your salvation. Just consider some of the key words that give word-pictures of the great transaction of salvation:

**Redemption**, a word from the slave market which means to ‘set free through the payment of a price.’ We have redemption through his blood. We have been set free.

**Propitiation**, a word from the religious arena which means to satisfy or appease the wrath of God. Christ has been set forth as our propitiation. His death in our behalf satisfied the wrath and justice of God.

**In Union with Christ**, a picture of a wedding relationship. We are joined to Christ in an intimate union by which we accrue all that is Christ to us.

**Justify**, a word from the law court which means ‘to declare righteous.’ God declares us righteous in Christ.

All these words and word-pictures are needed to explain the great act of salvation God has done for us in Christ. But God imputing the righteousness of Christ to us is basic and central to a proper understanding of how God justifies us.

As I’ve already shown the word ‘imputed’ is embedded in the book of Romans. To discard it, or disregard it, is to diminish, if not destroy the blessedness of being justified by God. Part of understanding how God can declare the ungodly person righteous is that he imputes the righteousness of Christ to our account. When He sees our record, he sees the righteousness of Christ, not our sins. He declares us righteous because we are righteous, clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

*“Oh, the blessedness of the person to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works.”*

## **IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS VERSUS IMPARTED RIGHTEOUSNESS**

There are some distinctions I need to clarify in explaining the blessedness of imputed righteousness. One is the distinction between ‘imputed righteousness’ and ‘infused’ or ‘imparted righteousness’. This is the historical argument of the Reformation but it is just as relevant today.

To impute righteousness is something God does outside of us or that He gives us. And He does it once and for all. This is related to justification. To infuse righteousness is what God does in us. And this is a process which He does throughout our life. He makes us righteous through the work of the Holy Spirit and regeneration. This is related to sanctification. God’s desire is to make us righteous in our behavior, but the righteousness which qualifies us for heaven is the imputed righteousness of Christ.

What difference does this make on a practical level to keep this distinction? Without this distinction we can never have confidence that we will go to heaven. Let me ask, "How righteous does a person have to be to get into heaven?" "If it is based on infused righteousness it is perfection. A person has to be perfect. And even a Christians no one is perfect. Therefore if the righteousness of justification is infused righteousness, no one will never know if they are righteous enough to get into heaven. Therefore no one can have assurance of their salvation. We would have to live in fear of not making it. There is terrible. But the Scriptures are clear that we can know if we have eternal life. Our faith is in the sufficiency of Christ's righteousness, not ours, even what God works in our hearts.

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## **FORGIVENESS VERSUS IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS**

Another distinction to make is the difference between being a forgiven sinner and a person who has had Jesus' righteousness imputed to them. Both forgiveness and imputed righteousness are involved in justification. Paul quotes David in verse 7: "**Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered;**" It is a great blessing to be forgiven, but it is even more blessed when God imputes righteousness to us.

If justification only has to do with God covering our sin and forgiving us we would be like the criminal who was acquitted but everyone knew that he was guilty, only acquitted by a merciful judge. But a person who is declared righteous because he righteousness has been imputed to him, can walk down the street, not a criminal who just happened to get off for his crime, but like the person whose record never shows that he ever was charged with the crime. It is the difference between being an acquitted person like O. J. Simpson and a person who never did the crime and was declared righteous.

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## **OUR FAITH OR CHRIST'S OBEDIENCE**

One more distinction is between what is counted our righteousness: our faith or Christ's obedience as the imputed righteousness.

Because faith is emphasized in the Roman passage and the statement that "faith is accounted for righteousness" some see that it is not Christ's obedience that is imputed to us as our righteousness but our faith in God.

Now I admit that faith is the focus of this section in Romans. Paul is arguing that justification comes through faith. He uses Abraham as his prime example of faith. But faith cannot be the essence of the righteousness that God imputes to us for several reasons. One is that our faith is never perfect. It is sometimes weak, sometimes even wavering. But we need a righteousness that is sure and certain and is outside of ourselves. Another is that faith is something we do or supply, therefore it is in the category of work and God imputed righteousness to us apart from works. And when you take the scope of Scriptures into consideration it states in many ways that it is Christ's righteousness that is given to us as a gift

**(Rom 3:22 NKJV) even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;**

**(Phil 3:9 NKJV) and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;**

**(1 Cor 1:30 NKJV) But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God; and righteousness and sanctification and redemption;**

Faith is necessary but it is only the hand by which we lay hold of Christ's righteousness. The object of our faith is in Christ's righteousness imputed to us, not in our faith.

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## **CHRIST'S PASSIVE AND ACTIVE OBEDIENCE**

Finally there is the distinction between Christ's passive obedience and active obedience as being the righteousness imputed to us. Christ's passive obedience is his obedience in taking our sins on the Cross. When he took our sins on the cross in our behalf, this righteousness is imputed to us. Christ's active obedience is his obedience throughout his earthly life to the law and to the Father's will. Christ's life was sinless, therefore this sinless life is accounted to us as our righteousness. We receive both Christ's active and passive obedience recorded to our account which assures us of no condemnation in our life before God. Hallelujah!

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## CONCLUSION

Yes, when we look to Jesus in faith God justifies us. This means that He declares us righteous because He imputes to our account the righteousness of Christ. He not only removed the burden of the guilt of our sin but He takes off the rags of our self-righteousness and clothes us with a new garment, the righteousness of Christ. Jesus' righteousness will never wear out, grow old, or become out of date. His righteousness will be ours for eternity and will be in fashion forever.

***“Oh, the blessedness of the person to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works.”***

Amen? Amen!