

**CHAPTER VII:  
AN INQUIRY CONCERNING IMPUTATION.**

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IT has been the opinion of many, that in order for guilty man to be justified through Christ, it is necessary that his righteousness should be imputed to them, so as to be a ground on which they may be considered righteous in law. For it is added, there must be a perfect righteousness somewhere, to lay a foundation for justification; and hence, since mankind have no perfect righteousness of their own, the righteousness of Christ must be imputed to them. What is really intended by these things it is not easy to ascertain. If the sentiment be, that Christ's righteousness is transferred to the believer so as to become his righteousness, it is believed to be utterly, without foundation, Righteousness, as well as sin, must be entirely a personal thing, in such a sense that it cannot be transferred. The righteousness of Christ, like that of every other holy being, consists entirely in his actions, feelings, and attributes. Essentially it consists in his love to God and other beings, and is as unalienably his, as is any attribute of his nature. Is it even possible that the actions which Christ performed while here on earth, in which his righteousness in part consists, should be so transferred from him to believers as to become actions which they have performed? Could the righteous words which he spake be transferred from him to saints, so as to become the righteous words which they have spoken? The bare mention of the idea must be sufficient to evince that in the very, nature of the thing it must be impossible. Christ's exercises of holy love could no more taken from him and transferred to believers, so as to become their exercises of holy love, than his miraculous acts of walking upon the water, or raising the dead, could be transferred: in the same way; and both, for aught we can perceive, must be at least as remote from all possibility as the papal notion of transubstantiation.

If by Christ's righteousness being imputed to believers for their justification, be not meant that his righteousness is so transferred to them as to become their righteousness; but that God views and represents them as righteous, by virtue of the righteousness of Christ; then the inquiry which arises is, whether God do not view and represent things precisely as they are? Can he view things any otherwise than as they are in reality? If he can, what evidence have we that he does not view the bread and wine used in the sacramental supper as being the real body and blood of Christ? And if he ever represent any thing different from what it really is, what ground can there be for confidence in his representations? But if God do both view and represent things as they really are, he surely cannot view and represent sinners as being perfectly righteous; because this certainly is not their character. God does, indeed, view and represent Jesus Christ as being perfectly righteous; and the reason is, because he is perfectly righteous. But saints are not perfectly righteous. On the contrary, they have been totally sinful; and though now pardoned and justified, in point of strict, justice, they still deserve eternal punishment, and God will for

ever view and represent them in this light. The Scriptures nowhere teach either that God does now, or that he will in the day of judgment, view and represent believers as possessing in any sense a perfect righteousness. It is true, they lead us to believe that saints will finally be freed from all sin -, but they equally lead us to believe that even then it will appear that they, as well as the finally impenitent, have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and in point of merit really deserve damnation. How else will every mouth be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God? But if God will cause all this to appear, how can he with any propriety be mid to view and represent saints as being perfectly innocent or righteous, on account of the righteousness of another? Besides, if God were to view and represent guilty beings as righteous, only because some other being is righteous, he would certainly view and represent things very differently from what they really are, to suppose which would be blasphemous.

But if by the imputation of Christ's righteousness to saints for their justification, is not intended either that his righteousness is transferred to them and becomes their righteousness, or that God views and represents them to be righteous on christ's account, the inquiry must still remain, What does this language mean? Some have said that saints receive Christ's righteousness by faith, for their justification. But this assertion is really no more intelligible than the other. For it is difficult to see how saints can receive that righteousness of Christ which consisted in his own personal actions, affections, and properties.

We read in the Scriptures of different kinds of faith; as of a faith to remove mountains; a faith to be healed; faith which Paul preached; and faith in the blood of Christ. Now why cannot one of these kinds of faith receive the righteousness of Christ, as well as another? How can faith in the blood of Christ, any more than a faith to remove mountains, receive Christ's righteousness? Each of these kinds of faith, except that which Paul preached, is a mere exercise of the creature; and how can one exercise of a creature receive Christ's righteousness, any more than another? Faith in the blood of Christ, and repentance for sin, are both exercises of the same heart? The difference between these exercises consists merely in their object. Faith is an exercise of a good heart, in view of the sufferings of Christ as an atonement for sin. Repentance is an exercise of the same heart, in view of sin as being against an holy God. How, then, can faith receive the righteousness of Christ, any more than repentance? Can a believer's act of faith receive Christ's act of faith? Does the believer's exercise of faith receive Christ's exercise of love? Or is it the believer's love which receives that? How can the believer's faith receive Christ's love, any more than the believer's love mu receive christ's faith? Or how can the believer's faith receive Crossest love, any more than it can receive his walking on the sea?

It is confidently believed that neither Scripture nor reason affords any more warrant for the opinion that it is even possible for the believer's faith to receive Christ's faith, or love, than for the opinion that a believer's walking in the highway receives Christ's walking upon the water, If the meaning be, that saints, by faith, make the righteousness of Christ their own, the question still is, How can these things be? How is it possible that the

righteousness of one being can become the righteousness of another being? When Christ said to his disciples, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven," he certainly did not mean to teach that we must, somehow, obtain the righteousness of some other being.

Whatever the meaning of the language under consideration may be, if, indeed, it have any proper meaning, it must be liable, furthermore, to this capital objection, that, contrary to the whole tenor of the gospel, it supposes that the salvation of sinners is altogether upon the principles of law and justice. For if Christ has suffered the full penalty of the law, as a legal substitute for any part of mankind, then justice, in every sense, is satisfied; it has received its full demand; and, therefore, can require no further sufferings. Indeed, its demands must now be heard on the other hand; it must demand their exemption from all punishment, because the whole, which was ever due to them, has been inflicted on Christ, their legal substitute. It is very easy to see that, on this ground, no forgiveness or grace could be exercised in setting men free from punishment. This would only be treating them justly.

So if Christ, as a substitute for believers, has obeyed the law, so that God justifies them, and makes them happy, out of respect to the righteousness of Christ, considered as theirs, then saints, are really justified by works in a law sense; not, indeed, by their own works, but by the works of their legal substitute. If saints are justified by the obedience of their substitute, it is the same thing as if they were justified by their own obedience, so far as it respects their being justified by works. It is evidently all on the principles of law and justice; and there is no grace in the matter. If a man engage to perform a certain work, for a reward which is proposed, it makes no difference whether he do the work himself, or procure another to do it for him. Let the work be done, according to agreement, and he is entitled to his reward. So if Christ has done for believers the work which the law required them to do, God is now bound, on the principles of strict justice, to bestow the promised reward, eternal life. There is no grace, but stern, unbending justice here.

Should it be said that saints are still unworthy, in themselves, and so do not deserve happiness, it may be answered, that they are not unworthy, in the sense in which they are viewed, as possessing Christ's perfect righteousness. So far from it, that in this sense they merit eternal happiness, by their substituted perfect righteousness. However guilty they may be, in themselves, still, in the sense in which they are considered as having a perfect righteousness they must be made happy, according to strict justice. Besides, on this scheme, they have suffered, in their substitute, All they deserve to suffer; and, therefore, all their sin is, in a law sense, as though it had never been. And, since all their ill desert has been done away, and they now have a perfect righteousness in their substitute, they can make a legal demand of happiness. In the day of judgment they may say, "Jesus Christ has been accepted as our substitute; he has suffered for us the full demand of the law; and we have a perfect righteousness in him; we, therefore, demand deliverance from the curse, and eternal happiness on the ground of law."

Should it be said that it was grace in Jesus Christ to take the place of the transgressor, it may be answered, that this removes no difficulty; for, still, after Christ has suffered and obeyed, as a legal substitute, there can be no grace in delivering believers from punishment, and making them happy. This act of God must be as strictly an act of justice, as though there had been no grace in Christ's taking the place of transgressors. Upon this scheme, that Christ has suffered and obeyed as a legal substitute for the elect, there can be seen no forgiveness, grace, nor mercy, in their deliverance from punishment, or in their admission to happiness. All still proceeds on the principle of law and justice, contrary to the decided testimony of the gospel, which certainly is, that the salvation of sinners, from beginning to end, is all of grace. Not of works, not of law; but, entirely, by another dispensation. The law has nothing to do in the affair, otherwise than by teaching men their guilty and miserable situation, and thus leading them to embrace the new and gracious method of salvation made known in the gospel.

And, besides being contrary to Scripture, this scheme is absurd in itself. For, in a law sense, one being cannot suffer or obey for another. The voice of the law is, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die not another for him. Nor does the law require or admit of the obedience of one being in behalf of another; but it requires perfect obedience of every person for himself. "The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him; and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. [The opinion that there must be a perfect righteousness somewhere to lay a foundation for justification, probably originated in a mistaken idea that the term justification, as used in the gospel, must have much the same meaning that it has in law books. But why are we not as much bound to understand the word pardon or forgiveness, as meaning what they do in law books, as we are to understand justification in this manner? If, however, we understand both: pardon and justification according to their import in law books we shall make the Scriptures involve the most manifest absurdity and contradiction. For the Scriptures evidently speak of the same persons as being both pardoned and justified. But in the sense in which the terms are used in law, if sinners are pardoned they cannot be justified; and, on the other hand, if they are justified they cannot be pardoned. It would be nonsense to speak of a man as being both pardoned and justified, in respect to the same charge, according to law. To avoid this difficulty no one surely will feel disposed to say, that sinners are justified on one ground and pardoned on another; that their salvation is partly through the law by justification, and partly through the gospel by forgiveness. The truth is, if, instead of going to law books to learn what justification means, we would be contented with the account given of it in the gospel, we should find, no more necessity for a perfect righteousness somewhere to be a ground of justification, than we should to be a ground of forgiveness.

Every one must perceive that it would be folly to pretend that a perfect righteousness is necessary as a ground of forgiveness. Yet, according to the gospel, this would be no more unreasonable than, the other. For, according to the Scriptures, the ground of our justification is. nothing different from, the ground of our forgiveness. Indeed, forgiveness and justification are used in the gospel as synonymous terms. Hence, we read of "being

justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" - who was set forth - to declare God's "righteousness for the remission of sins." Rom. 3:24, 25. "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." Acts 13:38, 39.]

If the meaning of the language under consideration be, that Christ's righteousness or active obedience procures heaven for believers; that, as his sufferings were necessary to open a consistent way for the pardon of their guilt, so his obedience was necessary in order to open a way in which they might be consistently admitted into heaven; it may be answered, that, on this ground, there would be as much propriety in saying that the sufferings of Christ are imputed to believers, as in saying that his righteousness is imputed to them. If the necessity of his righteousness, in order to procure their admission into heaven, renders it proper to say that his righteousness must be imputed to them, must not the same or a similar necessity of his sufferings, in order to procure their pardon, evidently render it equally proper to say, that his sufferings must be imputed to them? But, it is not true that Christ's righteousness has the same, or a similar influence, in opening a consistent way for our admission into heaven, which his sufferings have in opening a consistent way for our pardon.

If the view which has been given of the necessity of atonement, in order to the pardon of sinners be correct, it appears evident that they may be admitted to heaven, as well as pardoned on account of the sufferings of Christ. The atonement did not consist in removing the ill deserts of sinners; nor was it necessary (had it been possible,) that their ill deserts should be removed, that they might be consistently pardoned. But if they might be consistently pardoned, notwithstanding their ill desert, unquestionably, after they are pardoned, they may be consistently admitted to heaven notwithstanding their want of personal merit. Had atonement been necessary to do away the ill deserts of sinners, and this had actually been effected by the sufferings of Christ, it is allowed that it would have been consistent to suppose that the active obedience of Christ was necessary to furnish them with positive merit. But in this way there could have been no grace in the sinner's pardon, or in his being admitted into heaven. In this case, Christ would literally have paid his debt, and purchased his inheritance of glory.

Another consequence must be, that since Christ has tasted death for every man, every man's debt is paid, and every man's heaven is purchased. So that every man may demand both a discharge from evil, and an inheritance of glory. It is true, probably, that few would be willing to acknowledge these consequences which fairly result from such a scheme; yet they seem to be unavoidable.

Besides, it may be pertinent to inquire, what reason can be assigned why such an interchange of persons between Christ and sinners, as some have supposed, was

necessary. What were the obstacles which stood in the way to prevent infinite goodness from bestowing pardon and heaven on those who had none to endure the punishment due to them, or to furnish them with a perfect righteousness?. Abundant reasons have been given why atonement was necessary, in order that the guilty might be pardoned. But none of these reasons apply, in the case before us. [It is unquestionably true, that Christ was set forth to be a propitiation to declare God's righteousness; and the great ends of righteousness required that there should be an atonement for sin, in order to prepare the way for its remission. But it is to be remembered, it was the righteousness of God, as it related to the execution of threatened and deserved punishment, that needed to be declared, in order to the exercise of pardoning mercy ; and not as it related to the bestowment of rewards: - Righteousness, as it respected rendering vengeance to enemies, not favor and protection to friends. God's favor for the righteous, and his approbation of their characters, would not have been rendered suspicious by a total neglect to execute punitive justice;-unless, indeed, his benevolent regards to their best interest, and his distinguishing approbation of their characters, should become suspicious by his neglect to avenge them on their adversaries. But the very supposition of a possibility that God's benevolent regards to the righteous should be rendered doubtful by his neglecting to punish the wicked, strongly implies that it was the righteousness of God, as it relates to the execution of punishment, that needed to be declared, in order to the pardon of the sinner." - West on Atonement, p. 30, 31.] None of these reasons rendered it in the least degree necessary, that their ill desert should be removed, or that their blessedness should be purchased. But what other reasons can be assigned which will apply? It is confidently believed that no one can tell. Nor will it be less difficult to show the consistency of such an atonement with grace in the pardon of sinners. And, besides, either partial atonement or universal salvation must be the result of the scheme.

If, to avoid these consequences, it should be said, that, although atonement was not necessary to remove personal ill desert in order that sinners might be consistently pardoned, it does not hence follow that there is no necessity of an imputation of Christ's personal righteousness, in order that the believer may be consistently admitted to heaven; it may be replied, that this is not the argument. If want of personal merit, or perfect righteousness is any barrier against a sinner's gracious admission to heaven, let the objector make it appear; and, when he has done this, let him have the goodness to show, that personal ill desert does not present a barrier against his pardon, which is equally insuperable. If a sinner, notwithstanding his personal demerit, may be graciously pardoned, it is believed it cannot be shown why a believer, notwithstanding his want of a perfect righteousness, may not be graciously admitted to heaven. "God commendeth his love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more, then, being now justified by his blood we shall be saved from wrath through him."

Much dependence is placed on certain passages of Scripture, which speak of Christ as being "our righteousness," for the support of the scheme in question. Christ is called "the Lord our righteousness." But how does it appear that, therefore, his righteousness is imputed to us? Why would it not be just as natural to infer, from his being called "our life," that his life is imputed to us? And, also, when we read that he is made of God unto

us wisdom, sanctification, and redemption, that his wisdom must be imputed to us, &c.

One passage which is much relied on to prove that Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer, is, Phil. 3:9. "And be found in him; not having on 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." This passage is thus paraphrased by Dr. Doddridge: "I am happy enough if I may be found in him, vitally united to him by a true faith and love, and so taken under his protection and favor; not having on mine own righteousness, which [is] of the law; such righteousness as only consists in observing the precepts and expiations of the Jewish religion which I was once so solicitous to establish; nor any confidence in any legal righteousness whatever, as my plea before God; but that I may be interested in that which [is] by the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God through faith; that which he has appointed we should obtain and secure, by believing in his Son, &c. Rom. 3:22, is also quoted, with much confidence: "Even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe; for there is no difference;" which Dr. Doddridge paraphrases thus: Even the righteousness of God, which he hath appointed us to seek, by the exercise of a, living faith in the power and grace of his Son Jesus Christ; to whom he commands us to commit our souls, with all humble and obedient regard.

This way of obtaining righteousness and life is now, I say, made manifest to all, and like a pure, complete, and glorious robe, is put upon all them that believe; for there is, in this respect, no difference at all between one believer and another." All similar passages may be explained in a similar manner. While it is nowhere explicitly asserted that the righteousness of Christ must be, or ever is imputed to believers, or that his active obedience procures heaven for them, the Scriptures do plainly teach, that heaven is procured for them by his sufferings and death; or, in other words, that his sufferings and death procure heaven for them, in the same sense in which they procure their pardon. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." John 3:14,15. This passage plainly teaches in, that the very object for which the Son of Man was lifted up [on the cross] was, that believers might have everlasting life. "For Christ, also, hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." 1 Pet. 3:18. The phrase "bring us to God" in this passage it is presumed, all will agree, implies that divine intercourse to which saints, in heaven, are admitted.

But, surely, this passage cannot be fairly explained without admitting that the purpose for which Christ suffered was, that he might open a consistent way, by his sufferings, for believers to be admitted to this intercourse. Indeed, if the reasons which have been already stated, showing why an atonement was necessary to open, a way for the pardon of sinners are correct, it must appear evident that no obstacles stood in the way of the admission of sinners to heaven, which did not stand in the way of their being pardoned; and, on the other hand, that whatever opposed their pardon, equally opposed their admission to heaven. It must follow that the same, and only the same atonement which

was necessary to render their being pardoned consistent, was necessary to render their admission to heaven consistent.

Hence we may safely conclude, that if it became God to "set forth Christ to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus;" it equally "became him, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Heb. 2:10. Indeed the Scriptures explicitly authorize the belief that "for this cause he was the Mediator of the new testament, that, by means of death, they which are called, might receive the promise of an eternal inheritance." Heb. 9:15. Hence we are taught to anticipate the very song which will be sung by all the redeemed of the Lord when they arrive at heaven, and surround the throne of the Lamb with the four living creatures, and the four-and-twenty elders, "Thou art worthy, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood." Rev. 5:9.