

The Righteousness of Christ?

by Wayne Goff

Many of our religious friends believe in the doctrine of the imputed righteousness of the life of Christ transferred to the believer. Simply put, they believe that Christ's perfect life will be **substituted** for ours. When God looks on us as believers in Jesus, He does not see our sinful selves, He sees the perfect life of Christ. What a wonderful idea – but it is not true. Let me show you the difference.

Imputed Righteousness

The Bible clearly teaches the doctrine of “imputed righteousness” – that is, that God **will** impute to our personal account the state of being “**righteous**” based upon the **forgiveness** we receive from the blood of Christ applied to our souls.

Abraham is an example of this kind of imputed righteousness. “*For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham **believed** God, and it was **accounted** to him for righteousness’” (Romans 4:3).*

Paul quoted **Genesis 15:6** to show the saving faith which Abraham had. His faith was in God, and not in himself. He did not **earn** salvation, it was a **gift** of God, albeit a *conditional* gift. Abram worried that he did not have a son through whom to carry on the promises God had made to him in **Genesis 12:1-3**! God told him that he would have an heir from his body (**Gen. 15:4**), and that the descendants from him would be innumerable (**Gen. 15:5**). When God showed him the innumerable stars of heaven and said “*So shall your descendants be!*” – Abram believed God and He accounted it to him for righteousness.” Thus God’s promises were accomplished by God’s will, God’s purpose, and God’s power. Abraham was *literally powerless* to do anything to bring it to pass. Understanding his own helplessness, he believed with all his heart that God would do what God had promised. He didn’t know how, but he knew God was faithful!

Paul uses this event to *illustrate* that today salvation in Jesus Christ is *not by us* – we are **completely helpless** to accomplish our salvation, just like Abraham was **completely helpless**! But being unable to “earn” our salvation, we believe “*on Him who justifies the ungodly, (and) his faith is accounted for righteousness*” (**Rom. 4:5**).

The **mistake** some religious people make is believing that this “*accounting*” or “*imputation*” is **unconditional** – just believe in Jesus. But Abraham had to **obey** God’s commands to be in a covenant relationship in the first place! He had to (1) get up and leave Chaldea; (2) go to a place God would later show him; (3) trust that God would make of him a great nation; (4) believe that God would make his name great; and (5) know that in “you all families of the earth shall be blessed (saved)” **Genesis 12:1-3**. Abraham did all of that long before he asked God about his forthcoming son. Today we must **believe** the commandments Jesus Christ gives us in order to be saved, and **obey** them! **Faith** in Jesus as the Son of God (**Acts 8:37**), **repent** of our sins (**Acts 2:38**), **confess** our faith in Jesus as the Son of God (**Rom. 10:9-10**), and **baptism** in the name of Jesus for the remission of our sins (**Acts 2:38; 22:16**). These conditions do not earn us anything by personal merit. These conditions obeyed show our faith and trust is in God. “Lord, You command, and I will obey!”

What Is Imputed?

So **what** is imputed to us? **What** is put on our account to make us righteous? The one who believes that **Jesus’ own personal life** is *substituted* for ours thinks that God has imputed Christ’s life in our place! But read **Romans 4** further as Paul explains the truth: “*Just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: ‘Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin.’” (verses 6-8)*. God **DOES** impute righteousness to us apart from meritorious works, but the righteousness is based upon

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