

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

Imputation of Faith or Christ’s Righteousness?

By Joe R. Price

A key plank in the platform of Calvinism is the doctrine of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the sinner. It is the belief that Jesus’s perfect life is imputed to the sinner so that God no longer sees the sinner’s sins – He only sees the righteousness of Christ covering the sinner’s sins. We must be very clear that while the New Testament has some things to say about imputation in Romans 4:5-8, the Bible nowhere says the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the sinner. Such terminology finds its genesis in the doctrines of Augustine (354-430 AD) and later John Calvin (1509-1564) and has been championed since the Protestant Reformation. Some in churches of Christ have also been affected by this erroneous approach to imputation.

John Calvin taught the Augustinian view that man is completely corrupt in nature. As the Westminster Confession of Faith states the case, man is “wholly inclined to all evil” (VI:IV). In classic Calvinism, this assumed total depravity of man is coupled with the belief that God’s law must be kept perfectly by everyone in order to be justified. “...The law must be fulfilled so that not a jot or tittle shall be lost, otherwise man will be condemned without hope...” (Martin Luther, Luther’s Works, American ed.; Muhlenberg Press; Concordia, 1955-, Vol. 31, p. 348). “For the Lord promises nothing except to perfect keepers of his law, and no one of the kind is to be found” (John Calvin, Institutes of Religion, Book 3, p. 803). Working upon the assumption that justification demands perfect law-keeping (in this respect, Calvinists are the real legalists), the Calvinist concludes that the perfect life of Christ must be substituted for one’s sinful life for the sinner to be justified.

So, God is said to transfer the merit of Christ’s perfect life and death to the believer.

Mind you, the Calvinist believes a man is still a sinner, but now God only sees the righteousness of Christ when He looks at that person’s life. He is declared righteous, but he is not actually so. All this may sound rather convincing except for one thing, it is not found in the Bible. The Bible teaches justification by faith based on God’s grace; Then one is righteous before God (Rom. 6:17-18; 1 John 3:7; Eph. 2:8-9). We discover in the Bible that a person’s faith is accounted (imputed) to him for righteousness (Rom. 4:5).

Christ died for sinners. Romans 5:8 says that “*while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (cf. Matt. 20:28; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Tim. 2:6). We are redeemed by the death of Christ, not the life He lived before He died.

This is not to say Christ’s life is unimportant to man’s salvation. While we speak of the death of Christ as the means of our salvation, we also understand His death for our sins would have no value were it not for the sinless life that prepared Jesus to be a sinless sacrifice for sin. It is false to say Christ’s perfect life can be transferred to the sinner’s account (the Calvinist’s concept of imputation of righteousness). Instead, Christ’s sinless life equipped him to be the only adequate sacrifice for the sins of the world. Without Christ’s sinless life, there would be no sinless sacrifice to offer God on behalf of the sins of men (Heb. 7:26-27). Christ’s sinless life qualified Him to be a perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world (Heb. 5:8-9; 1 Pet. 3:18). This is the purpose given to Christ’s sinless life in the Scriptures.

To impute means “to count, to reckon” and thus, “to put down to a person’s account.” It does not mean “transfer,” as Calvinists and Neo-Calvinists use it. But if Christ’s sinless life is not imputed to man (thereby counting man righteous), what is? According to Romans 4:5, that which is “*accounted (imputed) for righteousness*” is one’s faith. “*But to him who does not work, but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted (logizomai, “counted,” KJV) for righteousness.*” God forgives the sins of the person who obeys Him in faith, thus counting that person righteous (cf. James 2:21-24). To illustrate this principle, the apostle reminds us of Abraham when he “*believed God, and it (his faith, JRP) was accounted (logizomai, “counted,” KJV) to him for righteousness*” (Rom. 4:3; Gen. 15:6). God imputes righteousness (counts righteous) and will not impute sin to the person

who has the same kind of faith Abraham had (Rom. 4:6-8).

Men have created a theological quagmire out of the straightforward truth that one's faith is imputed to him for righteous (cf. Noah, Heb. 11:7). Jesus lived a perfect life to be a perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world (John 1:29; Heb. 9:23-28; 10:10-14). When one turns in faith to Christ and obeys His gospel, it is his personal faith, not the personal righteousness of Christ, that is imputed to him for righteousness (Rom. 4:5; Matt. 7:21; James 2:17-24; Heb. 5:8-9). His sins are forgiven, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. **"Beware of false prophets"** teaching errors about the imputation of God's righteousness to sinners (Matt. 7:15). ■

How to Become God's Enemy

God's enemies have nothing to expect but his fierce wrath. The Hebrew writer states, **"31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"** (Heb. 10:26-27, 31). Here are three ways to become an enemy of God and experience his judgment of condemnation.

First, to become an enemy of God one must *not* read the Bible. Reading the Bible establishes faith, conviction, and understanding (Rom. 10:17 and Eph. 3:3). Knowledge and wisdom are depicted as the principal thing to obtain in this life (Prov. 4:7). When one reads the Bible, they gain strength to overcome the tempting vices of the devil (see Prov. 2:1-12). To not read the Bible is to not have faith, conviction, wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. In short, not reading the Bible is a sure way to live in sin and be God's enemy.

Second, to become an enemy of God one *must* forsake the assembly of the saints (Heb. 10:23-25). The assembly is where the saints are exhorted to gain knowledge, make corrections in life, and encouraged to keep pressing forward to the goal of heaven. To *not* attend worship services, or any of the assembly of saints where edification occurs, is to *not* be exhorted to continue in the faith. It is God's enemies that give up on him and return to the world.

A **third** way one may become an enemy of God is to accept the sinful ways of the world. James writes, **"4 Whosoever would be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God"** (Jas. 4:4). The apostle John writes, **"16 All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. 17 And the world passes away and the lust thereof: but he that does the will of God abides forever"** (1 Jn; 2:16-17). If you want to be an enemy of God, then accept and practice the ways of the world. You will fit in and not be hated (Jn. 7:7 and 15:18).

Hopefully, if you are reading this your objective is not to be God's enemy. Read your Bible for faith and strength. Attend the assemblies for exhortation. Do not be swayed by the ways of the world. Live for Jesus and He will grant you eternal life in heaven! ■

Judgment Day

Jerry C. Brewer

A Day of Judgment for all mankind is appointed by God (Acts 17:30-31). Contrary to popular belief, it will not be a day of **"trial,"** but a day of judgment assessed by Jesus Christ. Those who have been obedient to His will shall inherit life everlasting and those who have shunned His will shall inherit **"everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels"** (Matt. 25:34, 41). The **"trial"** of men is in this life. Men may go through life with little thought of God or His will expressed in the New Testament. They may heed the doctrines of men expounded by the denominational industry. They may go through life foolishly insisting, **"There is no God"** (Psa. 14:1). They may go through life seeking to amass material things, as the rich fool of Luke 12:20 did. Or men may go through life learning of God's will in the New Testament and obeying it. But for all these things, God shall call us to account (Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10). No pleas will be allowed at The Judgment. Our plea is being made here and now: Do not wait until judgment to plead your case. Make your calling and election sure by obeying the Gospel now in faith, repentance, confession, and baptism (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 8:37). ■

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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