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EDITORIAL

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Chancellor of The Master’s University and Seminary
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* * * * *

Calvin famously referred to the doctrine of justification by faith as the principal hinge on which true religion hangs.¹ Luther called it the article by which the church stands or falls.² They did not overstate the case. The principle of *sola fide* (faith as the sole instrument of justification) is the heart and soul of biblical soteriology. It is an essential tenet of gospel truth, stressed repeatedly in Scripture from Genesis 15:6³ to Revelation 17:14.⁴

Justification by faith is the main precept the apostle Paul systematically explains in the first eight chapters of Romans. It is the primary doctrine he defends in his epistle to the Galatians, the singular truth that defines historical *evangelicalism*, the material principle of the Protestant Reformation, and the very anchor of biblical orthodoxy. The doctrine of justification distinguishes biblical Christianity from every other religion.

Just as justification by faith is the centerpiece of soteriology and the very marrow of the gospel, the principle of *imputed righteousness* is the necessary center and soul of the doctrine of justification. Put simply, this indispensable article of faith means that righteousness is imputed (or credited to the account of) all who lay hold of Christ by faith. This is done by a *forensic reckoning*—meaning a legal transaction, like a courtroom verdict. It entails a transfer of credit. The apostle Paul repeatedly uses the Greek expression *logizomai* to speak of the righteousness imputed to believers. In the New American Standard Bible, this verb is most often translated as “credited,” but it is also occasionally rendered “reckoned,” “take[n] into account,” “regarded,” “suppose[d],” and other near synonyms. It evokes the idea of an accounting—specifically a transfer from one ledger to another, or the relocation of an asset from one agent’s account to another’s.

¹ John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 1:726.

² In his work *Iustitia Dei: Vol. II: From 1500 to the present day* (Cambridge: University Press, 1986), 1:7, Alistair McGrath quotes from “the writings of Luther himself e.g., WA 40/3.352.3: ‘*quia isto articulo stante stat Ecclesia, ruente ruit Ecclesia.*’” Translation: “If this article stands, the church stands; if this article collapses, the church collapses.”

³ Abraham “believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.”

⁴ “Those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful.”

Of course, when a believer is justified, that person's sins are fully forgiven, and the slate is wiped clean of every offense—past, present, and future. “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). “Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:1). But justification is much more than that. Believers also receive full credit for a perfect righteousness that they have done nothing to earn; it is provided for them. They are declared righteous not for any merit of their own, but because of a spotless righteousness that they receive. It is an alien righteousness, in that it comes from a source outside of them.

In Old Testament terms, they are “clothed ... with garments of salvation”; “wrapped ... with a robe of righteousness” (Isa 61:10). Or in the words of the apostle Paul, “God credits righteousness [to them] apart from works” (Rom 4:6). It is a *perfect* righteousness, “the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe” (3:22, NKJV).

Where does this righteousness come from? Scripture is clear that it is the righteousness of the incarnate Christ, “who became to us ... righteousness” (1 Cor 1:30). One of His messianic titles is “The LORD our righteousness” (Jer 23:6). Believers are brought into a right standing with God “by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:1).

The Savior's perfect, lifelong obedience as one “born under the Law” (Gal 4:4) was as vital to His substitutionary sacrifice as the shedding of His blood. It was necessary to demonstrate that He is the spotless Lamb of God, a suitable sacrifice for the sins of His people. But Jesus did not only shed His blood to obtain forgiveness for all who would trust in Him, He also lived His life in order “to fulfill all righteousness” on their behalf (Matt 3:15).

There was, of course, no lack of inherent righteousness in the eternal Son of God. By definition, He is perfect in every possible way. But at the start of His earthly ministry, when he came to be baptized, he stated His intention to “fulfill all righteousness” *as a man*. For whose sake did He deem baptism fitting in order to fulfill righteousness? After all, John's baptism was a public declaration of repentance. But He had no sins to repent of, nor would He ever have need of such an ordinance. He was submitting to John's baptism for the sake of others, identifying with His people, acting already as their Substitute, pursuing the perfect human righteousness they would need for full justification before God. Thus, “through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous” (Rom 5:19).

In other words, the whole doctrine of vicarious atonement depends on the principle of imputed righteousness. Those who want to do away with this aspect of justification are invariably forced to reimagine the atoning work of Christ in a way that undermines the substitutionary nature of His sacrifice.

Nevertheless, in recent years several influential voices in the evangelical academic community have challenged the principle of imputed righteousness. N. T. Wright, for example, claims, “It makes no sense whatever to say that the judge imputes, imparts, bequeaths, conveys or otherwise transfers his righteousness to either the plaintiff or the defendant. Righteousness is not an object, a substance or a gas which can be passed across the courtroom.”¹

¹N. T. Wright, *What St. Paul Really Said* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 98.

The faculty of The Master's Seminary object to all such attempts to do away with the principle of imputed righteousness, and this edition of *The Master's Seminary Journal* will explore what Scripture teaches about the subject, demonstrating why this doctrine is so fundamental. It is (and always has been) one of the vital points affirmed in the TMS doctrinal statement:

We teach that justification before God is an act of God (Rom 8:33) by which He declares righteous those who, through faith in Christ, repent of their sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 11:18; Rom 2:4; 2 Cor 7:10; Isa 55:6–7) and confess Him as sovereign Lord (Rom 10:9–10; 1 Cor 12:3; 2 Cor 4:5; Phil 2:11). This righteousness is apart from any virtue or work of man (Rom 3:20; 4:6) and involves the imputation of our sins to Christ (Col 2:14; 1 Peter 2:24) and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us (1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21). By this means God is enabled to “be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Rom 3:26).

Here, more precisely, is what is meant by this confession:

- **We affirm** that the perfect righteousness of Christ is far more than mere innocence; it entails perfect compliance with all God's commandments and absolute conformity to all His moral virtues (Matt 5:48).
- **We affirm** that the lifelong obedience of Christ was necessary in order for Him to be a suitable sacrifice for sin and “the source of eternal salvation” (Heb 5:7–9; 9:14). In other words, apart from His full and active obedience, we could not be saved.
- **We affirm** that Christ “fulfill[ed] all righteousness” as a man by rendering perfect obedience to the law's commandments (Gal 4:4); by publicly submitting to a rite that signified repentance (Matt 3:15); and by suffering the full penalty of sin on the cross—not merely physical death, but also the outpouring of an incomprehensible measure of divine wrath against Him (Isa 53:10; Rom 8:32; Phil 2:8).
- **We affirm** double imputation. Just as the price of our sin was charged to Christ's account (Isa 53:4–6; Heb 9:28; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18), so the full credit of His righteousness is reckoned to our account (Isa 53:11; Rom 5:19; 2 Cor 5:21).
We affirm that justification supplies believers with a more perfect righteousness than Adam could ever have attained, even if he had not fallen (1 Cor 15:47–49). This gives the redeemed a secure standing before God and elevates them to a higher position of spiritual privilege than Adam ever enjoyed (Eph 1:3).
- **We deny** that justification is remission of sins only, apart from the imputation of any positive credit, merit, or virtue (Isa 45:24–25; Rom 4:22–25; 5:18–19; 1 Cor 1:30; Phil 3:9).
- **We deny** that God abrogated or abridged the law in order to justify us; rather, Christ fulfilled it perfectly for our sake (Isa 42:21; Matt 5:17; Rom 3:26, 31; 10:4).

- ***We deny*** that “the imputation of Christ’s righteousness” speaks merely of a change in status, the erasure of guilt, or anything less than the full credit of perfect obedience reckoned to the account of the one who believes (Rom 5:19).
- ***We deny*** that Jesus merely paid the penalty the law demands for our sin without also fulfilling the law’s righteous requirement on our behalf (Rom 8:3). A payment for sin’s guilt is no substitute for obedience (1 Sam 15:22); therefore truly *perfect* righteousness requires perfect obedience (Deut 6:25; Matt 5:48; James 2:10).
- ***We deny*** that forensic imputation in any way diminishes or subverts the truth of our spiritual union with Christ (Rom 6:3–5; Eph 2:5–6; Phil 3:9–11).²

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² In *TMSJ* 31, no. 2, Alan Quiñones was incorrectly identified as a Ph.D. candidate at The Master’s Seminary.

IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS: THE APOSTLE PAUL AND ISAIAH 53

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* * * * *

The Heidelberg Catechism asks the question: “How can man be righteous before God?” To answer this question, most would refer to New Testament passages, likely in Romans or other Pauline epistles. But the New Testament writers developed their understanding of justification by reading their sacred texts—what is now referred to as the Old Testament. While the doctrine of imputation can be found throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, there are few texts as clear and rich as Isaiah 53—the song of a coming Servant, “the righteous one” who would “make many to be accounted righteous” (53:11). This article contends that when Paul was writing critical New Testament passages on the doctrine of imputation, he was likely doing so while pouring over Isaiah 53.

* * * * *

The doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ is a chief component in the historic Protestant understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith alone.¹ Numerous Reformation-era confessions attest to the doctrine, though the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) provides a common expression. When it asks, “How are you righteous before God?” the catechism responds that one can only lay hold of Christ’s righteousness by true faith in Him. Even though man has sinned against God’s commandments, God grants and “credits” to sinners “the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ,” as if the sinner had never sinned and as if he had been perfectly obedient.² In other words, when God declares sinners righteous before the divine bar, He imputes, accredits, or counts the obedience and suffering of

¹ This essay is updated material originally presented in J. V. Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption* (Fearn: Mentor, 2016), 245–315.

² For the Heidelberg Catechism, q. 60, see *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss, 3 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

Christ to the believer by grace alone through faith alone. Historically, discussion about imputation has rightly focused upon key Pauline passages, such as Romans 4:1–8, 5:12–21, and 2 Corinthians 5:17–21. Equally important, however, are the Old Testament roots for the doctrine of imputation. There are a number of passages to consider for the doctrine of imputation, such as Achan’s sin (Josh 7), the Day of Atonement (Lev 16), David’s sinful census (1 Chron 21), or Joshua’s installment (Zech 3:1–5). This essay, however, will focus upon Isaiah 53 and the fourth Servant Song.³ The thesis of this essay is that Isaiah 53 serves as a significant Old Testament text for Paul’s doctrine of imputation. Paul does not create the doctrine *ex nihilo*, but draws it from Isaiah’s fourth Servant Song and employs it at several points in his letters. This essay begins with an examination of the fourth Servant Song, and then explores the connections to four Pauline texts: Romans 4:25; 5:12–19; 8:1–4; and 2 Corinthians 5:19–21. The essay then concludes with observations about the Old Testament roots of Paul’s doctrine of imputation.

The Fourth Servant Song

Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. (Isa 53:10)

ויהוה חפץ דכאו החלי אם תשים אשם נפשו יראה זרע יאריך ימים וחפץ יהוה בידו יצלה

Isaiah states that the Servant would be an “offering for guilt” (אשם). This is a unique category of offering within Israel’s sacrificial system. The term אשם occurs in several places in the Levitical code, but most notably in Leviticus 5:17–19, which addresses unconscious violations against Yahweh’s commands, and in 6:1–7 (MT 5:20–26), with instructions to make amends for violated oaths. Initially, such sins may not seem relevant to Isaiah’s context and the Servant’s mission—to break the claim of the law, offer an אשם, and somehow end the exile. How does this concept relate to imputation? An אשם was a multifaceted remedy for breaches of the covenant that were committed specifically against Yahweh. The אשם was a remedy for a מעל, or for a violation of the sanctity of anything that Yahweh designated as holy (Lev 5:15; 6:2; Num 5:6; Ezra 10:10, 19; Josh 7:1ff; 20:20; 1 Chron 2:7).⁴

A מעל was a significant breach of the covenant that required exile from the community, or from that which was holy. It was a sin specifically against God (cf. Num 5:6).⁵ When Achan, for example, took forbidden plunder in the opening campaign to conquer the promised land, his מעל required both his and his family’s death because he broke the covenant.⁶ When Miriam challenged Moses’s leadership,

³ For explanation of these passages, see J. V. Fesko, *Death in Adam, Life in Christ: The Doctrine of Imputation* (Fearn: Mentor, 2016), 175–96.

⁴ Jacob Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience: the ASHAM and the Priestly Doctrine of Repentance* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 7, 13, 16, 20–21, 125; cf. idem, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 339–45.

⁵ Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 345.

⁶ Joel K. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 92.

she committed a מעל and was therefore struck with leprosy and exiled from the camp (cf. Num 5:5–7; 12:1–16; Lev 14:12, 21).⁷ Isaiah invokes the term אשם to convey the idea that Israel had breached the covenant and desecrated the sanctity of the land and Yahweh's holiness. This required their expulsion from the land, which contained God's dwelling place, the temple (cf. 2 Chron 36:14–21).⁸ But in this case, the nation's מעל is repaired, not by a vicarious animal substitute (e.g., Lev 5:15–17), but by the Servant. That Isaiah invokes the category of אשם means that Israel has breached the covenant; they have committed a מעל. And now, the Servant brings reconciliation as covenant surety. The Servant stands in the gap and reconciles Yahweh to the covenantally unfaithful Israelites. The one Servant acts as covenant surety for the many confederated individuals.

In this respect, the individual-corporate dynamic appears, which is a key element in the doctrine of imputation. The actions of the one impact the lives of the many—whether negatively, as with Adam's sin, or positively, as with Christ's obedience. In this case, the individual Servant suffers, as “he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors” (Isa 53:12). The Servant alone poured out his soul unto death, and He alone bore the sin of the רבים (“many”) for the פשעים (“transgressors”). The one-and-the-many dynamic is operative in the fourth song, a point confirmed by Christ's own invocation of this language. Arguably alluding to the third and fourth Servant Songs, Christ tells His disciples: “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Here Christ, the One, offers His life as a ransom for the many. Moreover, He characterizes his sacrificial activity in Isaianic Servant-terms. Jesus serves; He does not come to be served (cf. Luke 22:27).

But what of imputation? The first important element of exegetical data appears in the latter half of Isaiah 53:12, “He bore [נשא] the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.” This language points back to the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16 when the high priest placed his hands upon the scapegoat and transferred Israel's sins to the sacrificial animal (Lev 16:22).⁹ The imposition of the hands upon another, depending upon the context, symbolized the transfer of something from one person to another, such as with the transfer of authority from Moses to Joshua (Num 27:18).¹⁰ But in this particular case, the text clearly states that the “goat shall bear [נשא] all their iniquities on itself” (Lev 16:22). Isaiah's use of the term נשא has roots in the Day of Atonement with its transfer of sin from Israel, through the high priest, to the goat, which would then bear the sin and carry it into

⁷ Milgrom, *Cult and Conscience*, 80.

⁸ Richard E. Averbeck, “Christian Interpretations of Isaiah 53,” in *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012), 48–58; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 346, 356; William Johnstone, “Guilt and Atonement: The Theme of 1 and 2 Chronicles,” in *A Word in Season: Essays in Honor of William McKane*, ed. James D. Martin and Philip R. Davies (Sheffield: JSOT, 1986), 113–38, esp. 117, 119, 121, 124–25.

⁹ John Goldingay, *The Message of Isaiah 40–55: A Literary-Theological Commentary* (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 510–11; Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 235; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 1041.

¹⁰ Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 1043; cf. David P. Wright, “The Gesture of Hand Placement in the Hebrew Bible and Hittite Literature,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106, no. 3 (1986): 432–46.

the wilderness never to be seen again.¹¹ In Isaiah 53, the sins of the many are transferred to the Servant, the One.¹² Of specific interest is how the Septuagint translates this phrase: καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἀνόμοις ἐλογίσθη (“and was numbered,” or “reckoned,” “with the lawless ones,” trans. mine). The Septuagint employs λογίζομαι, the same term Paul later uses in key texts concerning imputation (e.g., Rom 4:1–8, 22–24; 2 Cor 5:19; cf. Luke 22:37).

Isaiah 53:11 states: “By his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.” Once again, the Day of Atonement language appears with the Servant bearing the iniquities of the many, but the prophet also states that the Servant is righteous (קַיִם). The Servant is not merely innocent of wrongdoing, but is positively righteous (cf. Deut 6:25). That is, He has positively fulfilled the law.¹³ His perfect law-keeping is evident given the Servant’s reward. The Servant bore the iniquities of the many—that is, He was obedient to Yahweh—and therefore (לְכַן) Yahweh will divide the Servant’s portion and spoils with the many. The inferential particle (לְכַן) establishes the cause and effect relationship between the Servant’s obedience unto death and His reception of His reward. This connection between obedience and reward appears in earlier Old Testament Scripture, particularly in Deuteronomy 17:14–20, where the king’s representative (dis)obedience either resulted in curse or blessing for the people, the many (cf. Ps 2:7).¹⁴ And this interconnected web of texts provides the likely sub-text for Paul’s famous statement from his epistle to the Philippians: “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name” (Phil 2:8–9).¹⁵

¹¹ J. Alan Groves, “Atonement in Isaiah 53,” in *The Glory of the Atonement*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James, III (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 78, 86; J. Alec Motyer, “Stricken for the Transgression of My People,” in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 258; Antti Laato, *Who Is The Servant of the Lord? Jewish and Christian Interpretations on Isaiah 53 from Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (Turku, Finland: Åbo Akademi University, 2012), 31; Baruch J. Schwartz, “The Bearing of Sin in the Priestly Literature,” in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, ed. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 3–21; Mary Douglas, *Jacob’s Tears: The Priestly Work of Reconciliation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 49–52.

¹² David L. Allen, “Substitutionary Atonement and Cultic Terminology in Isaiah 53,” in *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53*, 175–76.

¹³ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 403–4; Goldingay, *Message of Isaiah*, 514.

¹⁴ Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 19:59–60; W. H. Brownlee, “Psalms 1–2 as Coronation Liturgy,” *Biblica* 52 (1971): 321–26; J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 206; M. G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 98; Peter C. Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 256; J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, AOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 296; Aubrey R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (1955; repr. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 11, 22.

¹⁵ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 232–33; Ralph P. Martin, *A Hymn of Christ: Philippians 2:5–11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 231–35; G. K. Beale and D. A.

The manner by which the Servant, therefore, makes “many to be accounted righteous” (יצדיק) is by His representative obedience. The fact that the prophet employs the hiphil imperfect form of the verb צדק (“to be righteous”) reflects the causative of the Qal verb stem form, is unique in the Old Testament, and is usually followed by a direct object. For example: “If there is a dispute between men and they come into court and the judges decide between them, justifying the righteous [והצדיקו] and condemning the guilty” (Deut 25:1, trans. mine; cf. 2 Sam 15:4). But in this case, the verb is followed by an indirect object governed by a prepositional *lamed* (ל), which conveys the meaning of bringing or providing righteousness *to* or *for* the many (לרבים).¹⁶ The many “transgressors” (פושעים) receive the Servant’s righteous law-keeping status. They are no longer transgressors, but righteous. The many receive the legal status and righteousness of the One. In a word, the imputation of the Servant’s righteousness to transgressors was part of the eternal plan of the Father, and Isaiah had the privilege of eavesdropping on this conversation. Indeed, the prophet himself was stunned, as is made clear by his own statement, “Who has believed what he has heard from us” (Isa 53:1)?

Paul’s Use of Isaiah 53

A number of New Testament texts draw upon and directly quote the prophetic wellspring of Isaiah 53 (e.g., Matt 8:17; Luke 22:37; John 12:38; Acts 8:32–33; Rom 10:16; 15:21; 1 Pet 2:6, 22, 24; Rev 14:5). In fact, the fourth Servant Song is one of the most frequently cited Old Testament texts.¹⁷ Beyond this, a number of other texts allude to Isaiah 53.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Paul draws upon Isaiah 53 in four different places in his letters that specifically bear upon the doctrine of imputation: Romans 4:25; 5:12–19; 8:1–4; and 2 Corinthians 5:19–21.

Romans 4:25

“It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Rom 4:24b–25). Several key features connect Romans 4:25 to Isaiah 53, such that it can

Carson, *New Testament Commentary on the Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 836–37; cf. Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, 2nd ed., BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 108–9; Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 220–21; John Calvin, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians*, CNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 25.

¹⁶ Alec J. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 442; also E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 356–58; cf. Oswald, *Isaiah*, 404–05; Goldingay, *Message of Isaiah*, 515. Brevard Childs notes that the verb can be both declarative and causative (Brevard Childs, *Isaiah*, OTL [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001], 419).

¹⁷ Laato, *Servant of the Lord*, 165.

¹⁸ Michael J. Wilkins, “Isaiah 53 and the Message of Salvation in the Gospels,” in *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53*, 109–32; Craig A. Evans, “Isaiah 53 in the Letters of Peter, Paul, Hebrews, and John,” in *The Gospel According to Isaiah*, 145–70.

be said that this one verse concisely summarizes the fourth Servant Song.¹⁹ The first connection appears when we compare Romans 4:25 with the Septuagint text of Isaiah 53:

Romans 4:25a	Isaiah 53:12 LXX
<p>παρεδόθη διὰ τὰ παραπτώματα ἡμῶν</p> <p>(“delivered up for our trespasses”)</p>	<p>διὰ τὰς ἀμαρτίας αὐτῶν παρεδόθη</p> <p>(“delivered because of their iniquities”)</p>

In both cases, Paul, echoing the Septuagint, states that the Christ was παρεδόθη (“handed over” or “delivered up”) for the sins of the many. The second line of Romans 4:25 continues to reflect the Septuagint’s text of Isaiah 53:11:

Romans 4:25b	Isaiah 53:11 LXX
<p>ἠγέρθη διὰ τὴν δικαίωσιν ἡμῶν</p> <p>(“raised for our justification”)</p>	<p>ἀπὸ τοῦ πόνου τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτοῦ, δειξαι αὐτῷ φῶς</p> <p>(“from the travail of his soul, to show him light”)</p>

The idea is this: after the Servant’s death, He will see light, or be raised from the dead, hence Paul’s phrase, “raised for our justification.”²⁰ The Septuagint’s insertion of φῶς (“light”) to the Masoretic Text’s phrase, “Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see [הָאֵלֹהִים נִפְשׁוֹ יִרְאֶה],” is an amplification of the idea of resurrection. In a number of Old Testament texts, the expression “to see light” is a metaphor for “to live” (Psa 36:9; 49:19; Job 3:16; 33:28–30; cf. Ps 56:13).²¹

Paul’s use of these Isaianic phrases demonstrates that Christ substitutionally bore the sins of the many in His death, that He is their vicarious representative. Combining the two texts (Rom 4:25 and Isa 53:11–12), the causative force of the prepositional διὰ indicates the cause of Christ being handed over, and in the second line the purpose and end goal is in view: “[He was] delivered up for [because of] our trespasses, and

¹⁹ Otfried Hofius, “The Fourth Servant Son in the New Testament Letters,” in *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources*, ed. Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 180; Morna Hooker, “Did the Use of Isaiah 53 to Interpret His Mission Begin with Jesus?” in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1998), 101–2.

²⁰ Hofius, “Fourth Servant Song,” 180–81.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 181 n. 68; cf. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 399–400, 483–84, 527; David J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1989), 17:95; idem, *Job 21–37*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 18a:740.

raised for [*the purpose of*] our justification.”²² Within the broader context of Romans 4, Paul echoes the themes of the fourth Servant Song, that Isaiah’s “transgressors” are “accounted righteous” (Isa 53:11) and the justification of the “ungodly” (Rom 4:5).²³ Noteworthy is the fact that both Paul and Isaiah employ λογίζομαι in their respective passages. Isaiah states that the Suffering Servant was τοῖς ἀνόμοις ἐλογίσθη (“numbered with the transgressors”), and Paul explains in Romans 4:24b, ἀλλὰ καὶ δι’ ἡμᾶς, οἷς μέλλει λογίζεσθαι (“it will be counted to us who believe”). Paul employs Isaiah’s imputation language.

Romans 5:12–21

The same imputation themes from Romans 4:25 continue with a fuller explanation in Romans 5:12–21.²⁴ This Pauline text exhibits the Isaianic one-and-the-many pattern in both negative and positive directions. Through one (ἑνός) man, Adam, sin entered the world and “death spread to all men because all sinned” (Rom 5:12). Paul labels those affected by Adam’s sin as τοὺς πολλοὺς (“the many”). Conversely, echoing Isaianic themes, Paul explains: “For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification” (Rom 5:16). In contrast to Adam’s disobedience, Christ, the last Adam, offers His representative righteousness, or obedience, which brings justification. Paul oscillates back and forth between the actions of one and the effect upon the many, whether unto condemnation or justification. The fact that Paul mentions that the οἱ πολλοί “will be constituted righteous” (δίκαιοι κατασταθήσονται οἱ πολλοί, Rom 5:19, trans. mine) likely arises directly from Isaiah 53:11b (LXX).²⁵

Romans 8:1–4

Romans 8:1–4 is a third Pauline text where the apostle contrasts the (dis)obedience of the two Adams and connects Jesus, His obedience, and the law. At the beginning of Romans 8, Paul invokes the concept of justification: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). Condemnation is the antonym of justification, which means that Paul’s statement can be glossed as, “There is therefore now justification for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Paul then states the following:

²² Hofius, “Fourth Servant Song,” 181; cf. Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 289.

²³ Hofius, “Fourth Servant Song,” 182.

²⁴ Hooker, “Use of Isaiah 53,” 102.

²⁵ Hofius, “Fourth Servant Song,” 182; cf. Brian Vickers, *Jesus’ Blood and Righteousness: Paul’s Theology of Imputation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishing, 2006), 122; Moo, *Romans*, 345–46; Albrecht Oepke, καθίστημι, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 3:445; Charles Hodge, *Romans* (1835; repr. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1989), 173–74; Ben C. Dunson, *Individual and Community in Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 148–54; Sang-Won (Aaron) Son, *Corporate Elements in Pauline Anthropology: A Study of Selected Terms, Idioms, and Concepts in the Light of Paul’s Usage and Background* (Rome: Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 2001), 61, 77.

For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Rom 8:2–4)

Common explanations of these verses argue that Jesus has justified and freed redeemed sinners to fulfill the law through Spirit-motivated obedience, that which fulfills the law.²⁶ In technical terms, commentators argue that Romans 8:2–4 addresses the doctrine of sanctification. The grammar of the text, however, suggests a different interpretation.

Some contend that Paul transitions from discussing justification in verse 1, evident by his use of judicial language (i.e., *κατάκριμα*), to matters pertaining to sanctification in the following verses. There is a sense in which Paul descends from redemptive history (*historia salutis*) to matters pertaining to the *ordo salutis*. Yet when Paul writes that the law of the Spirit has set sinners free in Christ from the law of sin and death, sanctification is not primarily in view. Instead, Paul speaks of realm transfer. That is, those who are in Christ are under the aegis of the last Adam, not the first. In terms of Romans 5:12–21, believers are not under the representative disobedience of Adam with all its negative consequences, but rather the representative obedience of Christ with all its benefits. The Spirit’s liberating work only occurs within the redemptive space opened by Christ (e.g., Gal 3:13–14).²⁷

Paul explains in the next step of his argument how Christ has created this context in which the Spirit works to free sinners from death and the condemnation of the law. There are challenges regarding the proper translation of verse 3, *Τὸ γὰρ ἀδύνατον τοῦ νόμου ἐν ᾧ ἡσθένει διὰ τῆς σαρκός* (“For what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do,” trans. mine). Among the various alternatives, the best solution appears in most English translations. That is, the verse highlights what *God* has done, and this stands in contrast to what the law could not do.²⁸ Romans 8:3–4, therefore, is not about what redeemed sinners might do, but about what *God* has done in Christ to fulfill the requirements of the law: “God has done what the law ... could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us,” that is, in humanity. God sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to fulfill the law vicariously for sinners. Christ did not Himself sin, but rather entered into the sin-fallen human condition, hence Paul’s use of *ὁμοιώματι* (“likeness”) to qualify “flesh.”²⁹ When Christ entered this condition, God then condemned sin in the flesh, which parallels the substitutionary and vicarious suffering categories that appear in

²⁶ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 283–84; N. T. Wright, *Romans*, NIB (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 10:577–81; idem, *Climax of the Covenant*, 203, 211; Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (1975; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 280–88; similarly Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans* (Lander: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), 207 (§613).

²⁷ Moo, *Romans*, 477.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 477–78 n. 37.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 479.

Isaiah 53. In this sense, to borrow words from Paul's second letter to Corinth, Christ "was made to be sin" (2 Cor 5:21).

When Paul writes that God sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh *καὶ περὶ ἁμαρτίας* ("and for sin" or "and concerning sin"), he echoes Isaianic imputation themes. Paul may simply intend to say that Christ's mission dealt with sin.³⁰ On the other hand, the phrase frequently means "sin offering" in the Septuagint. Forty-four of 54 occurrences of the phrase *περὶ ἁμαρτίας* refer to sacrifice, and it translates *זָבַח* in Isaiah 53:10 (cf. Lev 7:37).³¹ At a minimum, Paul has in view the idea that Christ was sent to be a sin offering, and he indicates this by the common Septuagint phrase *περὶ ἁμαρτίας*. But a maximal reading, warranted by Paul's engagement with Isaiah throughout his epistle, but especially in Romans 4:25 and 5:12–21, is that Paul still has his copy of Isaiah's scroll sitting before him as he reflects upon Isaiah 53 and employs these imputation categories in his explanation of Christ's work.

To what end did Christ enter into the fallen human estate? Paul answers this question with a purpose clause (*ἵνα*) in verse 4: "that the righteous requirement [*δικαίωμα*] of the law might be fulfilled in us." What does Paul mean by the term *δικαίωμα*? The term *δικαίωμα* has the suffix *-μα*, which suggests that it refers to the consequences of "establishing right." This meaning frequently appears in the Septuagint where the plural form occurs numerous times to refer to statutes and ordinances of God's law (Deut 4:1; cf. 5:1; Ps 2:7; 105:8–10). Paul therefore states that the purpose of Christ coming in the likeness of sinful flesh was "in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled." Paul has in view covenantal-legal categories. Paul connects *δικαίωμα* to Christ (Rom 5:18–19) and His obedience, not to the obedience of those whom He redeems.

But some might object to this imputation reading because of what follows in Paul's statement: "In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled *in us* [*ἐν ἡμῖν*], who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom 8:4). Based upon the concluding portion of the statement, some have argued that Paul has in view matters related to sanctification and the law as it has been written upon believers' hearts, which enables them to fulfill the requirements of the law.³² But two considerations point away from this interpretation. First, the verb "might be fulfilled" (*πληρωθῆ*) is an aorist passive, which indicates that it is not something that believers do, but something that is done for them. The main thrust of Paul's argument is to contrast what the law could not do with what God has done. Second, given the demands of the law, how can Christians fulfill the law in any sense? How can their imperfect obedience constitute a *δικαίωμα*?

Instead, Paul's point pertains primarily to the *historia salutis*—what Christ has done through His substitutionary suffering and representative obedience—which

³⁰ E.g. Murray, *Romans*, 280.

³¹ Moo, *Romans*, 480; see also James D. G. Dunn, "Paul's Understanding of the Death of Jesus as Sacrifice," in *The Christ and the Spirit: Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 1:198–99; N. T. Wright, "The Meaning of *περὶ ἁμαρτίας* in Romans 8:3," in *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 220–25.

³² E.g., Wright, *Romans*, 577–81; idem, *Climax of the Covenant*, 203, 211. Note that Romans 8:1–4 was a key text in debates over the imputed active obedience of Christ in the late sixteenth-century. See Herber Carlos de Campos Jr., *Doctrine in Development: Johannes Piscator and Debates over Christ's Active Obedience* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018).

transfers elect but fallen sinners into the realm of the new creation.³³ Paul does discuss the Spirit-empowered obedience of those who are united to Christ in the verses that follow (Rom 8:5ff), but his primary point in verses 1–4 is christological. As Francis Turretin (1623–1687) explains:

Being made like to sinful flesh (yet without sin), he offered himself for us as a victim for sin and having made a most full satisfaction condemned sin (i.e., perfectly expiated it) in the flesh for this end—that the condemnation of sin might give place to our justification and the righteousness of the law (*to dikaoma nomou*) (i.e., the right which it has) whether as to obedience or as to punishment is fulfilled in us (not inherently, but imputatively); while what Christ did and suffered in our place is ascribed to us as if we had done that very thing. Thus we are considered in Christ to have fulfilled the whole righteousness of the law because in our name he most perfectly fulfilled the righteousness of the law as to obedience as well as to punishment.³⁴

This passage, therefore, is about Christ’s representative, vicarious suffering and obedience, which propels those who are in Him into the new creation, where they then produce the fruit of holiness and obedience. In other words, Romans 8:1–4 is about the imputed obedience and suffering of Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:21

The fourth and final text for consideration is 2 Corinthians 5:21: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” One of the most recent challenges to citing this text in support of the doctrine of imputation comes from N. T. Wright.³⁵ Wright contends that Paul’s statement does not teach imputation. Instead, Wright argues that Paul’s statement comes within the context of a defense of his ministry, and that Paul does not have soteriology in view but God’s covenant faithfulness, His righteousness. Wright’s argument is that when Paul says that Christ became sin so that “we might become the righteousness of God,” it should be understood that he and the other apostles have become a manifestation of God’s covenantal faithfulness, which they carry out in their apostolic ministry. Another recent challenge comes from Michael Bird, who claims that if forensic realities are in view, such as imputation, then Paul’s word-choice is odd, since he states that in Christ “we become” (*γενόμεθα*) the righteousness of God.³⁶ In Bird’s assessment, this is not legal-forensic nomenclature (e.g., *λογίζομαι*).³⁷ Rather than treating the subject of imputation, Bird believes the statement addresses the fact that believers “experience the status of

³³ Moo, *Romans*, 482–83.

³⁴ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1992–97), 16.3.19.

³⁵ Wright, “On Becoming the Righteousness of God,” 68–76; idem, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 881–85.

³⁶ Michael F. Bird, “Progressive Reformed View,” in *Justification: Five Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 149.

³⁷ Cf. Harris, *Second Corinthians*, 451, 454–55.

‘righteousness.’”³⁸ In dogmatic terms, the contested verse is not about imputation, but instead is a broader statement about soteriology.

Once again, the Old Testament background to this text is vital to determining Paul’s meaning. As with the above-examined Pauline passages (Rom 4:25, 5:12–21, 8:1–4), this text also rests upon the literary complex of Isaiah 40–66.³⁹ That Paul operates within the orbit of Isaiah 40–66 is evident from 2 Corinthians 5:17, with his invocation of the concept of new creation: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (trans mine). Paul not only speaks of the new creation, but he uses a phrase that is evocative of two different passages in Isaiah, evident by the following terminological parallels:⁴⁰

<p>Isaiah 43:18–19 Μὴ μνημονεύετε τὰ πρῶτα καὶ τὰ ἀρχαῖα μὴ συλλογίζεσθε. ἰδοὺ ποιῶ καινὰ</p> <p>(“Remember not the former things, and do not consider the ancient things. Behold, I do new things,” trans. mine)</p>	<p>2 Corinthians 5:17 εἴ τις ἐν Χριστῷ, καινὴ κτίσις· τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρῆλθεν, ἰδοὺ γέγονεν καινά</p>
<p>Isaiah 65:17 ἔσται γὰρ ὁ οὐρανὸς καινὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ καινή, καὶ οὐ μὴ μνησθῶσιν τῶν προτέρων</p> <p>(“For there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and they will not remember the former,” trans. mine)</p>	<p>(“If anyone is in Christ, he is new creation. The old has passed away, behold, the new has come”)</p>

Paul echoes the Isaianic ideas of new creation contrasted with the old, evident in the repetition of the terms τὰ ἀρχαῖα (“the old”) and καινὰ (“new”). This echo continues as Paul uses the same emphatic ἰδοὺ (“behold”) as Isaiah. Yet, how does this statement fit within Paul’s overall argument? Wright is correct to claim that the chief function of 2 Corinthians is Paul’s apology for his ministry.⁴¹ But contra Wright, Paul does not merely state that God’s covenant faithfulness is manifest in Paul’s ministry (note Wright’s much-controverted definition of δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ).⁴² There is another covenantal concept to describe God’s fidelity—namely, His ἰσχύς.

³⁸ Bird, “Progressive Reformed View,” 149.

³⁹ Mark Gignilliat, *Paul and Isaiah’s Servants: Paul’s Theological Reading of Isaiah 40–66 in 2 Corinthians 5:14–6:10* (London: T & T Clark, 2007), 45–50, 57.

⁴⁰ G. K. Beale, “The Old Testament Background of Reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5–7 and Its Bearing on the Literary Problem of 2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1,” in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts: Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 219–20.

⁴¹ Wright, “On Becoming the Righteousness of God,” 72.

⁴² For a critique of Wright’s definition of God’s righteousness as covenant faithfulness, see C. Lee Irons, *The Righteousness of God: A Lexical Examination of the Covenant-Faithfulness Interpretation*, WUNT (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

God keeps His covenant promises, and in this vein, He is covenantally faithful (e.g., Deut 7:9; cf. 1 Cor 1:9, 10:13; 2 Cor 1:18–20).

As much as God’s covenant faithfulness undergirds Paul’s ministry, this is not the specific subject under consideration. Rather, Paul invokes the concept of God’s righteousness. In this particular case, Paul urges the Corinthians to be reconciled to him, and not to evaluate his ministry *κατὰ σάρκα* (“according to the flesh”) (2 Cor 5:16)—that is, the standards of this present, evil age. They must instead evaluate Paul and the other apostles according to the standards of the new creation: “the old has passed away; behold the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17). If they understand this tectonic shift in redemptive history—the in-breaking of the eschaton and new creation—then they will evaluate Paul’s ministry in the proper light.⁴³ Paul appeals and alludes to the literary complex of Isaiah 40–66 both to announce that the new creation has burst onto the scene of history with the ministry of Christ, and because the Isaianic text originally dealt with the reconciliation and restoration of Israel.⁴⁴ Paul desires that the Corinthians would be reconciled to him. Reconciliation in the church is not simply a matter of conflict resolution, but is based upon the reconciliation wrought by God in Christ. Hence Paul appeals to this Isaianic passage that deals with reconciliation.

How precisely did God accomplish this reconciliation? He accomplished it through the representative obedience and intercession of His Servant. His Servant ushered in the new creation by breaking the grip of sin and death through His vicarious representative obedience and suffering. Hence Paul states: “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:19). Paul appealed to the Corinthians to embrace this reconciliation, which meant embracing Paul and his ministry because he was God’s ambassador. To reject Paul and his message was to reject God’s reconciliation (2 Cor 5:20).⁴⁵ In this instance, Paul’s description of the exchange—Christ becoming sin and those who are united to Him becoming righteousness—reflects the categories that lie at the heart of Isaiah 53: the one and the many and the vicarious, representative work of the Servant. Isaiah 53 stands in the background not only because of these elements but also because of Paul’s phrase, “he made him to be sin” (*ἁμαρτίαν ἐποίησεν*) which echoes Isaiah 53:9, “although he had committed no sin [*ἀνομίαν οὐκ ἐποίησεν*]” (LXX, trans. mine).⁴⁶

Due to the absence of legal-forensic language in 2 Corinthians 5:20–21, the question likely arises whether Paul had in mind representative obedience and suffering, let alone the doctrine of imputation. As noted above, Bird objects to appealing to this text as a basis for the doctrine of imputation because Paul uses the verb *γίνομαι*, “so that we might *become* the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21; emphasis mine).⁴⁷ Hence, Bird argues, Paul has something other than forensic categories in mind. But as others have observed, Paul’s allusion to Isaiah 53 is general

⁴³ Beale, “Background of 2 Corinthians 5–7,” 219; Scott J. Haffemann, *2 Corinthians*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 243.

⁴⁴ Beale, 222; Gignilliat, *Paul and Isaiah*, 54, 60.

⁴⁵ Beale, 223–25.

⁴⁶ Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians* (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 32a:340; Haffeman, *2 Corinthians*, 247.

⁴⁷ Bird, “Progressive Reformed View,” 149.

and free, and at verse 21 he adheres neither to the language of the Masoretic Text nor the Septuagint.⁴⁸ The general nature of Paul's statement applies in the terminology he uses to discuss not only Isaiah's justification of the many ("so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"), but also the manner by which Christ bore the sins of the many ("he made him to be sin") (cf. Rom 8:3).⁴⁹

Bird offers an unsatisfactory explanation:

So Paul does not say that "God imputed our sin to the sinless one, and imputed God's righteousness to us." We can say what the text says, no more and no less: Christ was made sin probably in the sense of carrying, bearing and taking sins upon himself, and those who are in Christ share in the "righteousness of God."⁵⁰

Ironically, Bird does not follow his own rule—namely, saying only what the text states. Paul says God *made* Christ to be sin. On the ground of Bird's objections, Paul's use of the verb ποιέω becomes equally problematic. The verb, like γίνομαι, is not strictly legal nomenclature. In fact, the Septuagint employs the term ποιέω to translate the Hebrew ברא (to create or make). According to Bird's analysis, it would be necessary to conclude that God actually made Christ to be sin, meaning that it was not a legal imputation but an ontological transformation. Yet Bird invokes imputation categories—"carrying, bearing and taking sins," (terms used in Leviticus 16 and Isaiah 53 associated with imputation)—which are not reflected by the verb ποιέω. As others have noted, exegesis does not merely involve repeating the language of the biblical text, but interpreting what it means.⁵¹

How to interpret Paul's statement, consequently, cannot be decided merely by a lexical appeal and definition of individual words or one isolated statement. Rather, how does Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 5:21 fit within the broader context of his argument, and how does it sit within the larger canonical context? In this case, the immediate surrounding context presents strong evidence to suggest that Isaiah 40–66 is the subtext of Paul's argument, and that he focuses on Isaiah 53 in 2 Corinthians 5:21. These connections can be safely concluded both because of the similarities between the two passages mentioned above (Christ's impeccability and the one-and-the-many) and the exchange of sin and righteousness, key subjects in the fourth Servant Song. Regarding the issue of Paul's terminology (ποιέω and γίνομαι), the answer appears in the nature of his appeal to Isaiah 53.⁵² Paul clearly does not quote Isaiah 53; he alludes to it. An allusion is when an author offers a brief expression and is consciously dependent upon an Old Testament passage without reproducing the exact wording of the text. The text need only present parallel wording, syntax, or

⁴⁸ John Hoad, "Some New Testament References to Isaiah 53," *Expository Times* 67 (1957): 254–55.

⁴⁹ Murray Harris suggests the possibility that when Paul invokes the term *sin* (ἁμαρτία), that he does not intend the category, but the LXX rendering of sin- and guilt-offering, hence Paul has Isaiah's ששם in view (Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005], 452).

⁵⁰ Bird, "Progressive Reformed View," 149.

⁵¹ Dunson, "Imputation as Word and Doctrine," 256.

⁵² Οερκε, καθίστημι, 445

concepts to qualify as an allusion.⁵³ In this instance, therefore, Paul’s terminology is inconsequential against the broader Isaianic backdrop. He alludes to the fourth Servant Song, and the reader should understand that they receive Christ’s righteousness in the same manner as Christ receives their sin, namely, through imputation.⁵⁴

There is one further possible objection to consider: Paul specifically states that we become the δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ (“righteousness of God”), thus how can we speak of *Christ’s* imputed righteousness if Paul states that it is *God’s*?⁵⁵ Two simple points sufficiently answer this query. First, within the Isaianic subtext, the suffering figure is *Yahweh’s* chosen Servant (Isa 43:10; 44:1–2; 44:21; 45:4; 49:3, 6). This point especially comes to the forefront at the beginning of the fourth Servant Song: “Behold, *my* servant shall act wisely” (Isa 52:13, emphasis mine).⁵⁶ Second, Paul states that we become the righteousness of God ἐν αὐτῷ (“in him”), that is, in Christ, the Servant. Paul repeats this Isaianic idea: “God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself . . .” and, “In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself . . .” (2 Cor 5:18–19). God’s righteousness does not come immediately to sinners apart from Christ. In this sense, sinners receive the imputed righteousness of Christ, which ultimately comes from God, because God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.

What, however, does Paul specifically mean when he writes that ἐν αὐτῷ (“in him”) we become the righteousness of God? Paul’s use of the preposition with the dative has three possible readings.⁵⁷ It could refer to realm transfer, as it does in 2 Corinthians 5:17—anyone who is “in Christ” is part of the new creation. But Paul’s use of the verb γίνομαι mitigates this possibility because Paul does not describe believers as entering into a realm of righteousness, but becoming the righteousness of God. The “in him” could be instrumental, which would mean that Paul intended to convey the idea that God accomplishes redemption by the agency of Christ. This idea is certainly in view in verses 18–19, as Paul states that God reconciled διὰ Χριστοῦ (“through Christ”).

The third and most likely reading, however, is that the “in him” refers to union with Christ. Believers are justified by the representative obedience and vicarious suffering of Christ, benefits they enjoy through union with Christ. This is the most likely reading given the symmetry between Christ being made sin and sinners becoming the righteousness of God. This symmetry weakens the instrumental reading, because if believers became righteous instrumentally through Christ, it is not clear how this parallel would work with Christ being made sin. Christ’s sharing in the condemnation of sinners means that sinners are made righteous by sharing in

⁵³ G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 31.

⁵⁴ Gignilliat, *Paul and Isaiah*, 104–5; Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 455.

⁵⁵ Bird, “Progressive Reformed View,” 149; also, Robert H. Gundry, “The Nonimputation of Christ’s Righteousness,” in *Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 41–42.

⁵⁶ Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 455 n. 207.

⁵⁷ For what follows, see Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 185–88.

His right standing, and this occurs through imputation. On this point, note Paul's similar use of the ἐν αὐτῷ construction in his letter to the Philippians:

I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him [ἐν αὐτῷ], not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith. (Phil 3:8–9)⁵⁸

Once again, Paul does not rest in his own law-keeping, but in the imputed representative law-keeping of Christ, the Servant of Yahweh.

Conclusion

The doctrine of imputed righteousness of Christ rests on a firm foundation of Scripture, not a few misread and misunderstood Pauline texts. The doctrine of imputation stretches from Paul's letters back to Isaiah's fourth Servant Song, through the Day of Atonement and to Abraham when God justified him by faith: "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness" (Rom 4:3). When God removed the scales of unbelief from Saul the Pharisee's eyes, he looked to the work of the promised suffering Servant, the one who made an "offering for guilt," who was "numbered with the transgressors," who would bear "the sins of many," and "make many to be accounted righteous" (Isa 53:11–12). The Messiah's representative obedience and suffering gave Saul the Pharisee hope that his sins were no more because the Servant was "delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom 4:25). Because of the one man's obedience, many were constituted righteous (Rom 5:19). God did what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in human beings (Rom 8:3–4). Paul read of the hope of the Servant's imputed suffering and obedience and rejoiced that God "made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). Or in the words of the Heidelberg Catechism, "God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, and as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me. All I need to do is accept this gift with a believing heart" (q. 60). Or in the words of John Milton (1608–1674), praise God that

To them by faith imputed, they may find
Justification towards God, and peace
Of conscience, which the law by ceremonies
Cannot appease, nor man the moral part
Perform, and not performing cannot live.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Silva, *Philippians*, 159–63; cf. O'Brien, *Philippians*, 391–400.

⁵⁹ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. John Leonard (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 279 (12.295).

IMPUTATION AND ITS IMAGES IN THE PREACHING OF CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON

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The cross was ever at the center of the preaching of Charles Spurgeon. He was fixated upon the reality that “as the Lord looked upon Christ as though he had been a sinner, though he was no sinner, and dealt with him as such, so now the Lord looks upon the believing sinner as though he were righteous, though indeed he has no righteousness of his own.” And as a result of that dark day upon the cross, God sees the one in whose place Christ stood and “he loves him, and delights in his perfect comeliness, regarding him as covered with the mantle of his Redeemer’s righteousness, and as having neither spot nor wrinkle nor any such thing.” This is the beauty of the doctrine of imputation. And it pervades the thinking and preaching of Charles Spurgeon, as will be demonstrated in this article.

* * * * *

Spurgeon’s preaching on the cross of Christ never veered from the doctrinal realities involved in imputation. He believed in the reality of the imputation of Adam’s sin and condemnation to the entirety of the human race. As mankind’s federal head, his disobedience was man’s disobedience in the Garden of Eden. The punishment of corruption descends to man from Adam and must be dealt with upon the cross. Spurgeon also affirmed that on the cross, the sins of the elect were imputed to Christ. He placed himself under debt to the justice of God by taking humanity’s cause in the covenant of Redemption and taking their place in the sentence of condemnation unexceptionally placed on lawbreakers. Though not made a sinner, Jesus the Christ was reckoned as one, voluntarily (through His eternal will perfectly expressive of the will of the Father) assuming mankind’s position under merited wrath, and dying in their stead. As a result of His complete obedience, including His death on the cross, Jesus finished the course of obedience which Adam failed. Jesus did this under severely trying circumstances, while Adam failed under the most ingratiating circumstances. Jesus persevered in obedience in a fallen world among

hateful, obscene, violent, deceitful, hypocritical people. Adam failed in an unfallen world, in the most pleasant of environments, having to deal only with one fallen creature with a test of positive obedience isolated to one specific, easily discernible command. Jesus had the knowledge of the entire law in its perfection as the content of His obedience with the test of positive obedience being His propitiatory death, dying “the just for the unjust.” His complete righteousness, sealed by His resurrection then, by imputation, becomes the meritorious vestment of the believing sinner. Sinners are justified before God by imputation of righteousness. Spurgeon believed these three categories of imputation. This article, while not omitting the other two, will focus on the imputation of man’s guilt and, thus, punishment to Christ.

Spurgeon saw the very purpose of preaching to be the setting forth of the Word of God. He did this by expositing extended passages of Scripture in each worship service, making pertinent comments on selected verses as he read the larger text. He also did this by preaching more concentrated sermons on smaller texts, from which he developed a doctrine which he would explain and apply under two to five points of emphasis. Only with the most extreme rarity would Spurgeon omit some urging of the death of Christ as central to every doctrine of Scripture and aspect of the Christian life. He could refer to his preaching on the cross as “an old truth to which you have listened many and many a time, but it is a truth which should be and will be exceedingly delightful to all those whose consciences are troubled with sin.”¹

Among many clear explanations of imputation, Spurgeon’s sermon on “Peace: A Fact and a Feeling,” probes the meaning of imputation as the foundation for the state of peace enjoyed by the believer. Peace is established objectively by “the abounding mercy of *God, who in order to our peace, finds a substitute to bear our penalty, and reveals to us this gracious fact.*” Sin has been laid on Christ, and He has carried it away. Faith accepts His death as a substitute. He was just, but died; and sinners are unjust, but live, because the One who died under the curse now lives. By imputation of Adam’s sin, fallen man is conceived in condemnation before any voluntary act on their part; so that by the payment of another they can be absolved of the punishment of guilt through no voluntary righteousness of their own. When God devised the “plan of substitution the full penalty demanded of the guiltless surety” brought exemption from punishment for the guilty. “That Jesus should suffer vicariously and yet those for whom he paid the quittance in drops of blood should obtain no acquittal could not be.” He has both obeyed the law and suffered the penalty of the law in humanity’s stead, so they must be declared perfectly righteous and free from any susceptibility of punishment. “According to the infinite purpose and will of God the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer.” The sinner now is “covered with the mantle of his Redeemer’s righteousness.” Peace may now come to the heart, and those who trust in Christ may say with perfect verity in light of an objective, historical reality, “Soul, thou art free from sin, for Christ has borne thy sin in his own body on the tree. Soul, thou art righteous before God, for the righteousness of Christ is thine by imputation.” The payment of “quittance in drops of blood” meant

¹ “The Putting Away of Sin,” in *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 63 vols. (repr. Logos Research Edition, 2012), 16:37. Hereafter referred to as *MTP*, the *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* consists of 63 volumes, begun at the new *Park Street Pulpit* and changed to *MTP* at volume 7, 1861. The titles of sermons will be given at the first reference.

that the sinner “has borne the utmost penalty of the law by his Substitute, which penalty God himself has accepted.” How was such justice served through a substitute? “He took our sin, but he has our sin no longer, for on the cross he discharged and annihilated it all so that it ceased to be, and he has gone into the glory as the representative and the substitute of his people, cleared from their imputed liabilities—clean delivered from anything that could be brought against him on their account.” Christ is the manifestation of the Father’s eternal love and is thus, the “object of divine complacency.” Also, He is loved for He has fully accomplished the Father’s will. United with Him by faith, therefore, believers receive that love with which Christ was loved before the foundation of the world, and, because also embraced in the love of a fully accomplished righteousness, “Sin is forgiven. What is more, righteousness is imputed.”²

In describing Paul’s meaning in the phrase: “There is no difference,” Spurgeon summarized, “All have forfeited every claim to personal righteousness, all must be made righteous by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to them.”³ Expanding on this idea, he defined the entire “plan of salvation” in terms of the transfer, the imputation, of man’s sin to Christ and His righteousness to man.

The plan of salvation is this,—that we do confess and acknowledge that our own righteousness is but filthy rags, that there is nothing in us that can merit anything of God; and, next, that we apprehend that the Lord has put his dear Son into our place, has laid on him our sin, and smitten him with the strokes that ought to have fallen upon us; he, on his part willingly becoming our Surety and Substitute. We must believe this if we would be saved. That being done, we must accept what Christ has endured as being borne for us, and trust in it with our whole hearts. We must, in fact, change places with Christ;—let him stand, as he did stand, and be reckoned as the sinner, that we might stand here, and be looked upon by God as if we had been like his Son, perfectly righteous and without sin. He clothes himself in our rags, and he puts on us his royal robes. Faith appropriates to itself the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and so is clothed with what is called in our text “the righteousness of God.”⁴

In “The Putting Away of Sin,” Spurgeon surrounded the idea of imputation with several defining concepts. When Christ came into the world, the sins of all His people were “made to meet in one tremendous mass.” Since for this very purpose He came, “Jesus Christ suffered all this to be imputed to him,” for according to the terms of the covenant, the Lord—that is His Father—“laid on him the iniquity of us all.” In this transaction “he was accounted as if he had committed it all.” His sufferings, therefore, were endured as “the penalty due for all the sins of his people, or rather the death which God had stipulated should stand as an equivalent for the sufferings of all the guilty ones for whom he stood.” This mountainous mass of sin was completely and

² “Peace: A Fact and a Feeling,” in *Spurgeon’s Expository Encyclopedia*, 15 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1977), 10:107–110. Hereafter referred to as *SEE*, this publication contains sermons by Spurgeon on 118 topics over the course of over 600 sermons and close to 150 expositions.

³ “There is No Difference,” *SEE*, 13:330.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 13:332.

everlastingly put away for “all those for whom he stood as a substitute, and for whom he suffered the penalty.” The result of this imputation of the mass of sin to Christ is that those for whom He died, though each had abundant iniquity, “it is no longer imputed to him.”⁵ Sin imputed to the Substitute means that no longer can it be imputed to the perpetrator.

Spurgeon believed strongly, as the reader can discern, in the effectiveness of concentrated, pithy synopses of the gospel. Often he would give a synopsis early in a sermon and then extrapolate a more discursive explanation from the ideas present in the summary. In “The Lamb of God,” Spurgeon said, “Listen, my dear hearer, and I will tell thee the gospel in a few sentences.” Note the climax of the entire argument resting on the concept of imputation:

As God is just, it is inevitable that sin should be punished. If he would pardon thee, how can this be righteously accomplished? Only thus: Jesus Christ, his Son, came to earth and stood in the room, and place, and stead of all those who believe in him; and God accepted him as the substitutionary sacrifice for all those who put their trust in him. Under the Jewish law, the Lamb was put to death that the man might not be put to death; and, in like manner, Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour suffered the pangs of death by crucifixion and the greater agony of the wrath of God that we might not suffer the pang of hell and the wrath eternal which is due to sin. There is no other way of salvation under heaven but this. God cannot relax his justice, and he will by no means clear the guilty; but he laid upon Christ the full punishment that was due to sin, and smote him as though he had been the actual offender, and now, turning round to you, he tells you that, if you trust in Jesus, the merits of his great atoning sacrifice shall be imputed to you, and you shall live for ever in glory because Jesus died upon the cross of Calvary.⁶

The power and fullness of Spurgeon’s doctrinal explanation gives full sway to three imputations mentioned above: the imputation of Adam’s sin to mankind, the imputation of man’s sin to Christ, and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to man. This article will examine how Spurgeon explained imputation in the context of some large theological ideas: covenant, the immutability of the law, and the person of Christ. Spurgeon used a variety of words and images for the sake of clarity and conceptual fixedness. His auditory would hear of different aspects of covenantal arrangements, representation, substitution, clothing, covering, accounting, satisfaction, and propitiation—all in the service of imputation.

Integrated Theological Ideas

Spurgeon’s view of imputation operated coherently in the framework of certain pervasive biblical ideas that sustain the need for and the effectuality of the ideas of imputation. This section will focus on three of these: the Person of Christ, the eternal covenant, and the perpetuity of moral law.

⁵ *MTP*, 16:42.

⁶ “The Lamb of God,” *SEE*, 12:484–85.

The Person of Christ

“The power of Jesus Christ to cleanse from sin must lie, first, in the greatness of his person.”⁷ Undergirding Spurgeon’s explanations of imputation, substitution, transfer, and satisfaction always was the theology of the person of Christ: he necessarily is both God and man in one person. That is, as Emmanuel, the Godhead and the manhood is “indissolubly united in one person.”⁸

In contemplating the cries from the cross, Spurgeon affirmed that “there is such a wonderful blending of the human and the Divine in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ that, though it may not be absolutely accurate to ascribe to the Deity some things in the life of Christ, yet is he so completely God and man that, often, Scripture does speak of things that must belong to the humanity only as if they belonged to the Godhead.”⁹ In explaining the forsakenness of Christ upon the cross, Spurgeon used the classic theological construction of the incarnation called *communicatio idiomatum*. Some words and actions of Christ may be ascribed only to His divine nature—like forgiving sin—and some may be ascribed only to His human nature. All of His words and actions, however, are from the one person: Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God. He forgives as God and creates bread and fish as God and raises the dead as God, but He hungers, thirst, bleeds, suffers and dies as man. The unity of the person, however, is so richly attested in Scripture that sometimes an action that is fitting only for one nature is attributed to the other. Spurgeon illustrated this with the phrase in Acts 20:28, “Shepherd the church of God which he purchased with his own blood.” God does not have blood, but the man who was God does have blood, and He shed it abundantly in His passion. By this fellowship in idioms (traits fittingly isolated to only one nature), what was true explicitly of the man, was by unity of person expressed of God. Spurgeon believed that Jesus’s cry of forsakenness, however, must be ascribed solely to His humanity, for it was as He stood in the stead of His people that He experienced a deeper forlornness than even the residents of hell. This forsakenness was elemental to substitution and “the doctrine of substitution is the key to all the sufferings of Christ.”¹⁰

In “Individual Sin Laid on Jesus,” Spurgeon pointed to the humanity and deity of Christ as necessary for Him to be an effectual representative. The covenantal arrangement within humanity—that is, Adam stood in the stead of all his progeny in the test of righteousness in the garden—establishes the legal logic by which God saves sinners through one act of obedience. Through this divinely wise arrangement, God can “bring in salvation for us, by virtue of our union with another man, who is also more than man, the Son of God and yet the son of Mary, the Infinite who once became an Infant, the Eternal who lived, and bled, and died as the representative of all who put their trust in him.”¹¹ Because of this sovereign arrangement of the creation of a race in one man, Jesus, “under the law by his birth, and being found as a man loaded with the guilt of all his people, he was visited with its penalty.”¹²

⁷ “The Wordless Book,” *SEE*, 12:498.

⁸ “The Saddest Cry from the Cross,” *SEE*, 4:317.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 4:316.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4:321.

¹¹ “Individual Sins Laid on Jesus,” *MTP*, 16:209.

¹² “The Perpetuity of the Law of God,” *SEE*, 10:187.

“Christ is man,” Spurgeon reiterated in an extended chorus of amazement from the beginning of his ministry to its end. From that fact as a constituent element of His complex person, Christ embodied “his fitness and adaptation to be a substitute for man.” The sinning creature must be the suffering creature, and the lawbreaker must be the one in whose nature the law is honored. By man death came, so by man must resurrection come. In all these requirements, Jesus, conceived of the Spirit but “of the substance of his mother,” was “fit to be our substitute because he was a pure man.”¹³ Begotten of the Father eternally in the mysterious relations within the Trinity, the Son was sent in time to take on all that it meant to be man. He was “born into this world” and “took upon himself our manhood.” For all intents and purposes, He was like us, tempted like us with the exception of the assaults of a corrupt nature. He shared all “our sinless infirmities, with all our tendencies to suffer, with everything human in him except that which comes to be human through human nature having fallen.” In brief, “he was perfectly man; he was like ourselves, and God sent him in the likeness of sinful flesh.”¹⁴

So it had to be, if for man He would suffer. If vials of wrath were to be poured on His head, then it must be on one whose moral responsibility is identical to the one for whom He suffers. To represent and substitute for those who were to be forgiven, He must be of their nature and share their obligation to the law. And so He did. When He volunteered as the substitute, and the Father viewed Him in that position taken voluntarily in time as a perfect outworking of the eternal covenant of redemption, the Father says, “I cannot suffer sin, I cannot pass by sin, even if it lies on the innocent one; I must smite even my own Son if sin be imputed to him.”¹⁵ The perfect person, Jesus the Christ, by imputation made the perfect atonement.

But not just a man could serve to satisfy the full requirements, for the man’s death must also match the full honor and infinite worth of the violated standard. In addition, His condescension to save must match the infinite distinction between the offender and the offended. Also, if death were truly to be conquered, His suffering must have the element of absolute perfection that can give full satisfaction to divine wrath and produce the hope of eternal life. Spurgeon expressed these requirements on one occasion in this way:

Once, more, his being God as well as man, gave him the strength to suffer, gave him the power to stoop. If he had not been so lofty as to be fellow with the eternal God, he would not have stooped so low as to redeem us, but—

From the highest throne in glory
To the cross of deepest woe,

was such a descent that there was an infinite merit in it; when he stooped, even to the grave itself, there was an infinite merit by which justice was satisfied, the law was vindicated, and those for whom he died were effectually saved.¹⁶

¹³ *MTP*, 16:210.

¹⁴ “How God Condemned Sin,” *MTP*, 16:291.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 16:294–95.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 16:210.

Spurgeon related Christ's deity to the concept of "infinite merit" also in "The Putting Away of Sin." When Christ gave "himself," He gave Himself in singularity of person so that His deity contributed what was fitting to that nature. As "God over all, blessed forever," the giving of Himself involved "infinite merit." Had He been merely a man, His death might have accounted for the salvation of one other person as a substitute. Spurgeon also expressed doubt that even one salvation could be accomplished by a mere man, innocent though he might be. But given the infinite value of Jesus's person as a unity of God and man, "it was only because he was infinite in his nature that there was infinite merit in his sufferings."¹⁷

Jesus's deity related not only to the infinite merit of His suffering, but to justification. Imputation, for Spurgeon, involved not only an imputation of Christ's perfect obedience as a human born under the law, but also another aspect of righteousness. Because of the unity of His person as God and man, believers benefit both from the perfected and achieved righteousness of Christ who was obedient to every aspect of the moral law and even to the positive command to die, the "just for the unjust," but also those who trust in Him are clothed in the immutable righteousness of the deity of the Savior. The unity of Christ's person meant that "we have a better righteousness than ever his law demanded, for that demanded the perfect righteousness of a creature, but we put on the absolute righteousness of the Creator himself, and what can the law ask more?"¹⁸

The Eternal Covenant

The entire scheme of redemption, including all elements of imputation and propitiation arise from the covenant of redemption. Spurgeon contended, "He who understands the two covenants has found the marrow of all theology, but he who does not know the covenants knows next to nothing of the gospel of Christ."¹⁹ The two covenants, according to Spurgeon, were the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.²⁰ The covenant of works promised life through perfect obedience to God's law. It had no provision for life apart from absolute obedience and justly demanded death for those who failed to keep the covenant of works. It promised no redemption, but demanded full execution of its provisions, both of promises and of threats. The covenant of grace was designed from eternity to grant life through the redemption of sinners. It was not opposed to the covenant of works, but assumed its fulfillment by an acceptable and legitimate substitute. In brief, Spurgeon described the representative of sinners in this way: "On our behalf he [the Lord Jesus] made a covenant with the Father upon this tenor, that we having sinned, full recompense should be made to injured justice, and that law of God should be fully honoured."²¹ The covenant was fixed in eternity with each person of the Godhead assuming a particular function fitting for the personal relations, but necessarily involving the perfect infusion of cooperation of all three Persons.

¹⁷ *MTP*, 16:46.

¹⁸ *SEE*, 10:187.

¹⁹ "The Blood of the Covenant," *MTP*, 20:444.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 20:433–34.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 20:434.

This covenantal foundation in eternity also involved a covenantal foundation on earth. Concerning those whom the Son of God represented in the covenant, Spurgeon pointed to the historical outworking by preaching, “Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the great covenant head, came under death, in their place and stead.” Remarking that “it was a glorious thing that such representative death was possible,” Spurgeon also understood the eternal covenant as manifesting its historical outworking “because of the original constitution of the race as springing from a common father, and placed under a single head.” This arrangement necessarily involved the creation of the race in one man. Spurgeon argued, “Inasmuch as our fall was by one Adam, it was possible for us to be raised by another Adam. ‘As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.’ It became possible for God upon the principle of representation, to allow of substitution.” As the seed of the woman, the Son of God “came under the law by his birth, and being found as a man loaded with the guilt of all his people, he was visited with its penalty.”²² The covenant of which Christ was the head, as a result of the immutability of the moral law, made the death of Christ necessary.

Spurgeon culminated an argument of the necessity of the substitutionary death of Christ with a cogent and pungent summary demonstrating the commensurate relation of law to the covenant, “The law demanded death, and death has fallen upon our great Covenant Head.”²³ Spurgeon had opened the argument with the statement, “The death of Christ by blood-shedding was absolutely necessary to make him an acceptable sacrifice for sin.” As he continued describing the character of the sacrifice that must be offered by shedding its blood, Spurgeon reiterated, “Even so, Jesus must *die*: his perfect nature, his arduous labour, his blameless life, his perfect consecration, could avail us nothing without the shedding of his blood for many, for the remission of sin. So far from his death being a mere adjunct and conclusion of his life, it is the most important matter connected with him ... it is the head and front of his redeeming work.”²⁴

The covenant character that Jesus sustained meant that “he was not slain as a private individual, but he was put to death as the representative man.” Before the foundation of the world, as the representative of the elect, “God had entered into covenant with Christ, and he was the surety of that covenant.” His death was the “blood of the everlasting covenant” and “the blood of the covenant wherewith we are sanctified.” When Jesus offered Himself, “he was accepted in that character and capacity, in which God has regarded him from before the foundation of the world; so that what he did he did as the Covenant-head of his people.”²⁵

Jesus had assumed the “position of the second Adam, being constituted our federal Head and Representative. The chastisement of our peace was upon him because he condescended to be one flesh with us; and with his stripes we are healed because there is a covenant union between us.”²⁶ Covenantal reality supports all the doctrines of the gospel for “faith comes into contact with pardon” upon one’s belief

²² *SEE*, 10:186–87.

²³ “Slaying the Sacrifice,” *SEE*, 1:346.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:343.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:349.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

“that the Son of God did come and stand in the sinner’s stead, and when faith accepts that substitution as a glorious boon of grace.” In this, sinners find God to be both just and the justifier. In the first Adam, all mankind fell and were destroyed, and in the last Adam, the elect all rise and are restored. He condemned men before personal sin, and He justifies them apart from personal righteousness. “I see how he can absolve me, though I have no righteousness, because of Christ’s righteousness.”²⁷

The Perpetuity of Moral Law

Imputation expresses the immutability of the moral law and the justness of God’s moral government. In staking out the claims of redemption on the people, transcending infinitely those of creation and providence, Spurgeon pointed to the fulfilled demands of the law. Those who trust in Him are redeemed from the “avenging justice of God,” for by the merit of the death of Christ, He has “forever rendered compensation to the injured honour of divine justice.” For “he has magnified the law and made it honourable, so that the law itself can ask no more of a sinner for whom Christ has died, for Christ has paid to the law all that justice could demand.”²⁸ “By his death,” Spurgeon preached, Jesus “has vindicated the honour of God’s moral government, and made it just for him to be merciful.”²⁹

Not only does God’s law call for such satisfaction, but the human conscience cannot rest if its release from penalty comes at the expense of real justice. “If we had to preach to you that God forgave you irrespectively of an atonement, no awakened conscience would welcome the tidings. ... We should be unable to see how the law could be vindicated, or the moral government of God maintained. We are quite at rest, when we see that there is as much justice as there is mercy in the forgiveness of a believing soul.”³⁰

Salvation by imputation is central to the perfect consonance between justice and mercy. Imputation honors perfect righteousness; perfect righteousness assumes an unchanging standard of righteousness that flows from the very character of God Himself. That standard does not remain secret, but is revealed in the law. God expected, and expects, the creatures made in His image to love righteousness as He loves righteousness, for, as morally responsible beings, their affections should approve the beauty of the holiness of their Creator. Man, however, did not follow the single revelation of law that would denote His absolute dependence of mind and heart on the Creator. Instead, the deceit of a fallen creature intervened and ruined the simple obedience required. Eve, and then Adam, submitted to the creature instead of the Creator—Eve to the serpent and Adam to the wife made from his rib. In so doing, they infused one element of the fallen nature into the soul of humanity; they “worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (Rom 1:25).

This rebellion brought the race into what Spurgeon called, a “great and universal outlawry proclaimed by God against us all, as members of a rebel race.” Now God has given a more detailed revelation of what obedience entails in a law that has two

²⁷ *SEE*, 10:106.

²⁸ “Redemption and Its Causes,” *MTP*, 20:161.

²⁹ *SEE*, 10:182.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 10:107.

tables—one that governs man’s approach to God and the other that governs man’s relationship to fellow image bearers. To that more delineated revelation of God’s immutable prerogatives and standards, humans reveal their unity with Adam’s rebellion by their own violation of law. Humans are outlaws, manifest by their falling short of every item of detail in both tables of God’s revealed moral law. Spurgeon confirmed, “We have all broken his law, wilfully and wickedly have we rebelled against the majesty of heaven; we are, therefore, in our natural estate, banished ones, expelled from his love and favour, waiting the time when the sentence of his wrath shall be fulfilled.”³¹

Through the expedience of the covenant, however, and the provision of a perfect, thorough, exuberant, and irreversible obedience to God’s law and an honoring even of its curse for disobedience, by imputation the rebels are saved by being accounted both punished and righteous. “Inasmuch as the Lord Jesus Christ came voluntarily under the law, obeyed the law, fulfilled the law, and made it honorable,” Spurgeon explained, “according to the infinite purpose and will of God, the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer. While Christ stands in the sinner’s place, the believing sinner stands in Christ’s place.” Spurgeon then explained the idea of double imputation in terms of the cross and justification. “As the Lord looked upon Christ as though he had been a sinner, though he was no sinner, and dealt with him as such, so now the Lord looks upon the believing sinner as though he were righteous, though indeed he has no righteousness of his own.” The result is, that as the Lord loves what is truly beautiful and holy and filled with righteousness. He sees the one in whose place Christ stood and “he loves him, and delights in his perfect comeliness, regarding him as covered with the mantle of his Redeemer’s righteousness, and as having neither spot nor wrinkle nor any such thing.”³² As Spurgeon preached throughout every sermon from the beginning of his ministry to its end, “This is a method worthy of our God. Jesus died instead of us, Jesus suffered the death-penalty on our behalf; our faith makes his substitutionary sacrifice to be ours.”³³

In considering how the death of the high priest freed the “manslayer” from vengeance, Spurgeon applied that principle to sinners under the condemnation of God’s law:

We know that “There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus;” we are certain that we are clear before the judgment seat of God, and shall stand without fear before the great white throne, when in full blaze of holiness divine justice shall be revealed. We are emancipated from the bondage of the law through the death of our ever-blessed High Priest.”³⁴

Vocabulary That Expresses and Expands Imputation

Spurgeon often showed how intertwined were all the nuances of concepts expressed in the great work of saving sinners. Each denotes a part of what is

³¹ “Means for Restoring the Banished,” *MTP*, 16:506.

³² *SEE*, 10:106.

³³ *MTP*, 16 507.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

contained in the whole of imputation. He called it “God’s great expedient of wisdom, by which he, by the same act and deed, condemns sin, and lets the sinner live.” In the process of accomplishing that, He “honours his law, and yet passes by transgression, iniquity, and sin.” In the unfolding of this wise plan through preaching, Spurgeon’s hearers had “come to hear, not of the shedding of your own blood, but of the shedding of his blood who, in his infinite compassion, deigned to take the place of guilty men—to suffer, that they might not suffer, and die, that they might not die.” In short, their ears were blessed “that they hear of the perfect sacrifice: Happy are your spirits, since they are found where free grace and boundless love have set forth a great propitiation for sin.”³⁵

A conglomerate of language finds full and challenging employment as a means of defining this divine wisdom, inextricable love, infinite moral beauty, condescending mercy, pervasive holiness, and governing righteousness that finds perfect harmony and expression in the work of Christ imputed to sinners. The words used often are interchangeable. Sometimes they are nuanced to open a neglected dimension of the subject. Sometimes they necessarily isolate distinct elements of the sum of God’s saving purpose and operation in Christ. The overlapping aspects of Spurgeon’s torrents of rhetoric press all these ideas together on occasions, but at other times he establishes careful relationships between the words.

Representation

Spurgeon frequently utilized the idea of *representation*. As a representative, Jesus carried out for His constituency the required actions and negotiations. In His relation to the immutable standard of righteousness revealed in the law, “That which Jesus did is counted as though we did it, and because he was righteous God sees us in him and counts us righteous upon the principle of substitution and representation.”³⁶ In the matter of the law’s call for death of its transgressor and the infliction of perfectly measured and eternal punishment, “Infinite love has devised the expedient of representation and substitution.” Then, in speaking of mankind’s representation in Adam, he affirms that by representation also came the solution to man’s plight: “The principle of representation wrecked us, the principle of representation rescues us.” All of this is an element of the great mystery of God’s moral government of the universe. Redemption extends the “principle with which the very system of the universe commenced, namely, that of representation.” If an objection is raised, Spurgeon replies, “If Jesus our representative joyously consented to bear our sins as our representative, who are you and who am I that we should enter any caveat against what God the infinitely just One consents to accept?”³⁷

Satisfaction

Imputation involves *satisfaction*. The moral order that reflects the perfect holiness and righteousness of God must necessarily be inviolate. A perfectly

³⁵ “The Blood of Sprinkling,” *SEE*, 1:355.

³⁶ *SEE*, 10:187.

³⁷ *MTP*, 16:209.

righteous order calls for perfect retribution that will satisfy the unerring moral government of God. “The Lord is so just, that we dare not think of examining his verdicts, so infinitely pure and holy, that what he does we accept as being necessarily right.” The plan for the forgiveness of transgressions, if indeed mercy is to be shown through forgiveness, must fully satisfy the moral perfection of God. This satisfaction depends on the elements of substitution and representation. “Jesus was accepted as the natural substitute and representative of all those who trust him, and all the sin of these was laid on him, so that they were freed from guilt.” As true believers in Christ for His worthiness both in person and atoning sacrifice, the elect have, in their substitute, satisfied the wrath of God. “They have satisfied justice through the sufferings of their substitute.” So worthy was He both in person and in obedience that “there was an infinite merit by which justice was satisfied.”³⁸

Propitiation

Perfect satisfaction involves *propitiation*. Spurgeon unhesitatingly asserted, “The putting away of the sin of the most moral person who ever lived requires the propitiation of the Son of God.”³⁹ Spurgeon crystallized this idea in the lines that followed: “We apprehend that the Lord has put his dear Son into our place, has laid on him our sin, and smitten him with the strokes that ought to have fallen upon us; he, on his part willingly becoming our Surety and Substitute.”⁴⁰

Propitiation conveys the idea of the execution of wrath on a sacrifice set forth for that purpose, with the result that the sin is removed (expiated) from consideration. It is annihilated. There is no expiation apart from a foundational propitiation. As Spurgeon summarized, “But the worst of his sufferings must have been when his Father’s wrath was poured out upon him as he bore what his people deserved to bear.” He does not diminish the intensity of this transaction when He added, “This was the tremendous draught of wrath which our Saviour drank for us to its last dregs so that our cup might not have one drip of wrath in it for ever.”⁴¹

The word is employed in Scripture by Paul and John. It appears in three pivotal passages: Romans 3:25, 1 John 2:2, and 1 John 4:10. The word is intimately connected with law, redemption, justification, righteousness, forbearance of wrath, and, consequently, as the supreme manifestation of love. Spurgeon connects it potently with the concept of substitution. The apostle John presents it in that the wrath manifest in it is commensurate with the eternal, immutable justice of God. John defined and measured love to the sinner by the degree of humiliation involved in the sending of His Son to bear sin’s curse (1 John 4:10). God sent His Son for that purpose and then set Him forth at the proper time. Commenting on 1 John 4:10, Spurgeon said, “The gift of Christ, the needful propitiation for our sins, was all of love on God’s part. Justice demanded the propitiation, but love supplied it. God could not be just if he pardoned sin without atonement; but the greatness of the love is seen

³⁸ *MTP*, 16:210.

³⁹ *SEE*, 13:331.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 13:332.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 12:499.

in the fact that it moved the Father to give his Son to an ignominious death, that he might pardon sinners and yet be just."⁴²

He expanded this idea and answered the apparent disharmony between propitiation and love in a sermon on the words from 1 John 4, "Herein is Love." Spurgeon argued that the text pointed to Christ, not only as reconciler, but as reconciliation, and not only as one making propitiation, but Himself as the propitiation. His sacrifice constituted the atonement "through which mercy is rendered possible in consistency with justice." Addressing those who scorned the requirement of a sacrifice, particularly a propitiating sacrifice, as requisite to reconciliation, Spurgeon countered with a whisper in their ears, "God required it, it is true, for he is just and holy; but God found it in himself." In the mysterious ontology of the Trinity, the Father found a ransom, of one essence with Himself but distinct in person—the Son of God Himself. This one of divine essence, beloved as the eternal Son, "became the propitiation and the reconciliation." This indicated no unkindness or conflict in the Godhead, but "that God the Father was so kind that he could not be unjust, so supremely loving that he must devise a way by which men could be justly saved." An unjust salvation would be no real salvation at all. The reconciliation was found in the sufferings and the death of Christ, supremely in Christ Himself, for sufferings and death would mean nothing for salvation had they not been those of this unique and infinitely glorious complex person. "'He'—that is, Jesus himself—'is the propitiation for our sins.' The sent one in himself, as well as in all that he did and all that he suffered, is the reconciliation between God and man."⁴³ But founded on this expression of infinite justice in the vicarious death of the Son, the door is opened for an infinite display of love. "There was no other way by which you could be reconciled to God, for had he reconciled you to a part of himself and not to his justice, you had not been in very truth at all reconciled to God." Through Christ, the holy and just God "whose anger burns against sin," the sinner finds reconciliation by propitiation.

Spurgeon used a variety of images to convey the particular targeting of Christ by divine wrath in pursuit of God's redemptive justice. "The great millstone of Jehovah's wrath crushed his spirit as in an olive-press, till his heart was broken and his spirit melted within him like wax." As a result of this, "There is no single pang of suffering required from you to perfect the atonement."⁴⁴ Spurgeon described the propitiation as the suffering of "the greater agony and the wrath of God" and as the "pangs of hell and the wrath eternal which is due to sin."⁴⁵ Spurgeon called this a "perfectly legal way in which Jesus has made an end of sin by suffering its penalty." By propitiation, "Justice has been satisfied, punishment has been meted out for every sin of mine and yours if we are believers." This involves no evasion of the law or of due punishment for its violation, but has accomplished justice by "satisfying

⁴² "Exposition of 1 John 4:9–21," *SEE*, 6:42.

⁴³ "Herein Is Love," *Spurgeon's Sermons*, 20 vols. (New York: Funk & Wagnall's Company, 1857–1892), 14:58. Hereafter referred to as *SS*. Volume 20 is a biography of Spurgeon written by G. Holden Pike.

⁴⁴ "Redemption and Its Claims," *MTP*, 20:162.

⁴⁵ *SEE*, 12:485–86.

vengeance and putting away sin.”⁴⁶ When Christ “offered up his great expiatory sacrifice,” the result was that “he put away sin as a whole for his chosen.”⁴⁷

Spurgeon invoked the substitutionary death of Christ as the sole reason that believers “might not feel the sword of vengeance on account of your sins.”⁴⁸ Why no vengeance for His elect? Because “God himself has set forth Christ to be the propitiation for human guilt, then he cannot reject the sinner who accepts the propitiation.” God has “appointed him to die as the Substitute for sinners” and accepted the sacrifice. He calls, therefore, from the throne of glory saying, “Believe thou on my Son, whom I have set forth as the propitiation for human sin; trust thou in him, and thou shalt be eternally saved.” This propitiation serves as the evidence that believers’ sin was surely imputed to Christ: “When Jesus Christ was put into our place, our sin was laid on him ... my sin was laid upon Christ ... he there endured all the punishment that was due to us. ... All my indebtedness to God was transferred to Christ, and he paid all my debts.”⁴⁹

Covering

In his exposition of Psalm 32, in verses 1 and 2 Spurgeon explains the close relation between propitiation, covering, and imputation. David wrote, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity and in whose spirit there is no guile.” Spurgeon wrote that sin is “covered by God, as the ark was covered by the mercy seat.” After other instances of covering, Spurgeon continued, “Christ’s atonement is the propitiation, the covering, the making an end of sin.” He multiplied the words that coalesce around the idea of imputation as he reflected on the second verse. “Non-imputation is of the very essence of pardon: the believer sins, but his sin is not reckoned, not accounted to him.” Again, recognizing that in a false display of an outraged ethical sensitivity, “Certain divines froth at the mouth with rage against imputed righteousness,” Spurgeon unflinchingly counseled, “be it ours to see our sin not imputed and to us may there be as Paul words it, ‘Righteousness imputed without works.’” He continued, pointing to the most egregiously offensive element of imputation, “He is blessed indeed who has a substitute to stand for him to whose account all his debts may be set down.”⁵⁰

Spurgeon illustrates imputation as a great, flawless covering from head to foot. “He can cover the unrighteous man with a spotless robe of righteousness, so that he shall be accounted fair and lovely, and whiter than the newly-fallen snow. ... Oh, what a blessing it is that God is able to pardon the guilty, and both to impute and impart righteousness to those who have none of their own!”⁵¹ Covering the sinner with Christ’s righteousness constitutes justification; impartation of righteousness constitutes sanctification. Both show that conformity to righteousness constitutes the moral and legal end of God’s saving work. The one is perfect and complete at the

⁴⁶ *MTP*, 16:45.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 16:44.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 16:46.

⁴⁹ *SEE*, 12:485.

⁵⁰ Charles Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, commentary on 32:1, 2.

⁵¹ “False Justification and True,” *SEE*, 10:96.

moment of its application, which is by imputation, and the other is begun and continues throughout this present life to be realized in spirit at death (“the spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb 12:23)) and fully in the whole person at the resurrection (1 Thess 5:23, 24; 2 Cor 5:4, 5).

The image of clothing is used also in “Peace: A Fact and a Feeling.” In this sermon, Spurgeon introduced the source of peace as “the power of faith, and the way in which, like a hand, it puts upon us the matchless garment of the Saviour’s righteousness.”⁵² In “God’s Writing Upon Man’s Heart,” Spurgeon invited his hearers to “Come now, and leave thy virtues, and all thy boasted deeds, and look away to where he hangs who has woven a garment without seam from the top throughout, and has dyed it in the crimson of his own blood.” He advises them to put it on as “heaven’s court-dress” in order to “stand among the peers of Paradise.” Apart from such a garment, you are “naked, and poor, and miserable.” Urgent counsel he gives “to buy of him fair raiment, the fine linen which is the righteousness of the saints.”⁵³

In a sermon on the wedding garment, Spurgeon identified the garment with imputed righteousness based on substitution. In what way does one wear the garment? The requirement is that “you with your heart believe on the Lord Jesus, and that you take his righteousness to be your righteousness.” Would one refuse it by preferring his own clothes? “If you will not accept the Lord Jesus as your substitute, bearing your sins in his own body on the tree, you have not the wedding garment.”⁵⁴

What of the man who refused to wear the garment, who viewed such a requirement as irrational? Spurgeon preached this sermon in May of 1888, a few months after he had resigned from the Baptist Union and a month after the Union had adopted a loosely constructed statement of faith. One element of doctrine that he saw as under attack in the Union was imputed righteousness. He aimed this point at those who sneered at the doctrine.

The next person who has not on the wedding garment is *the man who refuses the righteousness of God* because he has a righteousness of his own. He thinks his work-day dress good enough for Christ’s own wedding. What does he want with imputed righteousness? He scouts it as immoral. He who is himself immoral! What does he want with the precious blood of Jesus? He does not need to be washed from crimson stains. He writes a paper against the sensuousness of those persons who sing—

There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins.

His own righteousness, though it be of the law, and such as Paul rejected, he esteems so highly that he counts the blood of the everlasting covenant and unholy thing! Ah me, the insolence of self-righteousness!⁵⁵

⁵² *SEE*, 10:103.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 10:192.

⁵⁴ “What Is the Wedding Garment?,” *SS*, 19:203.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 19:205.

Substitution

It has been made apparent how closely aligned are *representation* and *substitution*. In addition, the dependent interaction between *substitution*, *propitiation*, and *covering* both in Scripture and in Spurgeon's preaching has been made clear. This becomes evident in a passage in "Slaying the Sacrifice." Christ's death was rendered necessary because of the evil of sin, and sin cannot be forgiven apart from an atonement that satisfied divine wrath in order to render God just in His forgiveness. Christ alone could provide such an atonement. In order to effect this, "God himself in human form took human guilt upon him: the sin was none of his, it was only imputed to him, but when he was made sin for us, and bare our iniquities, there was no help for it, he must die!" Then in the same paragraph where Spurgeon repeats the idea, he preached, "So unflinching is divine justice that it will not, cannot spare sin, let it be where it may; nay, not even when that guilt is not the person's own, but is only taken up by him as a substitute."⁵⁶ In "The Curse Removed," Spurgeon emphasized that Christ endured "the selfsame pains and sufferings which we ought to have endured," and then exploded in this rhetorical exclamation, "Oh the glorious doctrine of substitution! When it is preached fully and rightly, what a charm and what a power it hath!" Although God has declared that sinners must die, "their maker has himself bowed his head to death in their place, and thus God is able righteously to pardon all believers in Jesus because he has met all the claims of divine justice on their account."⁵⁷

The idea of "on their account" specifically includes the idea of imputation: Christ was accounted as a substitute to shoulder the responsibility for sinners' debt—the debt thus imputed to Him. That Spurgeon shades all these words into a single picture of the atoning work of Christ, summarized in the idea of imputation, may be seen in an introductory comment he made before an exuberant defense of the concept of representation. "Infinite love," he averred, "has devised the expedient of representation and substitution."⁵⁸ Spurgeon insisted that "substitution is the very pith and marrow of the revelation of God." By the legal logic of substitution, Jesus "stood in place of the sinner, and was made a bloody sacrifice for sin." Saving faith arises only by "considering his painful substitutionary death." Substitution involves a double imputation in that "he was made sin for you, though he knew no sin, that you might be made the righteousness of God in him."⁵⁹ Jesus came to die, pointed to His death throughout His life, and claimed it as the fulfillment for the end to which He was sent. He was surely given life as a man that He might die, for "there was no necessity for our blessed Lord and Master to die except the necessity which he has taken upon himself in becoming the Substitute for his people."⁶⁰

Again, it is apparent how closely aligned substitution is with imputation and other images of covering when Spurgeon says, "The whole wondrous plan of salvation can be summed up in a single word—substitution." He described this in

⁵⁶ *SEE*, 1:350.

⁵⁷ "The Curse Removed," *SEE*, 10:208.

⁵⁸ *MTP*, 16:209

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 16:46.

⁶⁰ "The Last Words of Christ on the Cross," *SEE*, 4:331.

terms of the federal headship of Adam and Christ, who “kept the law of God in every jot and tittle, and so has woven a righteousness which covers the sinner from head to foot when he is enabled to put it on; and then, when the law of God examines him, it cannot find a flaw, or a rent, or even a faulty thread, in that matchless robe which is woven from the top throughout.”⁶¹ In summarizing that description of imputation, Spurgeon uses another word that expresses the ideas of substitution and imputation: “It is thus that God can *reckon* the sinner to be just, because Jesus has taken his place, and borne the penalty that was due for his sin” [SEE 10:96, 97]. Another word employed by Spurgeon was “accounted.” For those who believe, their sins are laid on Christ, and “he has so completely borne the penalty for it that it has ceased to be, and his righteousness is accounted thine, seeing that thou art a believer in him.”⁶²

Conclusion

The rationale for God’s special revelation to sinners is found in the divine act of grace in imputation. The revelation of creation, of the internal relations of the triune God, of the fall, of the course of endless and relentless evil on the part of all men since the fall, of the establishment of a covenant people, of the promise and coming of the Messiah, of the obedience and death of the Messiah, of the resurrection, ascension and intercession of the Messiah all culminate in the righteousness in imputation. God shows Himself as just and justifier, immutable and merciful, unflinching and longsuffering, jealous and filled with lovingkindness, vengeful and forgiving, and transcendent and condescending in the full operation of the principle of imputation.

Near the end of his ministry, two years after he had unveiled the Downgrade Controversy in *the Sword and the Trowel*, Spurgeon tied all the biblical doctrines together in a “Dirge for the Down-grade.” Without the atoning blood of Christ resulting in the possibility of the non-imputation of sin and the saving imputation of righteousness, all the other revelation would seem to be but taunting. Seeing, however, that all is given for the glory of God in the salvation of sinners, this dirge can just as easily apply to the early twenty-first as well as the late-nineteenth century. He issued it in the face of a confident and waxing modernism. The twenty-first century faces a cynical and dismissive secularism. The same truth applies to all challenges in any age. Cowper’s poem at the end shows the vital place of the gospel ministry in the battle for truth and righteousness in every age:

The Deity of our Lord and His great atoning sacrifice, His resurrection and His judgment of the wicked were never moot points in the church, but they are questioned at this time. The work of the Holy Spirit may be honored in words, but what faith can be placed in those to whom He is not a person but a mere influence? God Himself is, by some, made into an impersonal being, or the soul of all things—which is much the same as nothing. Pantheism is atheism in a mask. The plenary inspiration of Holy Scripture as we have understood it from our childhood is now assailed in a thousand insidious ways! The fall of Adam is treated as a

⁶¹ SEE, 10:96

⁶² Ibid., 10:97.

fable, and original sin and imputed righteousness are both denounced. As for the doctrines of grace—they are ridiculed as altogether out of vogue, and even the solemn sanctions of the law are scorned as bugbears of the dark ages! For many a year, by the grand old truths of the gospel, sinners were converted, and saints were edified, and the world was made to know that there is a God in Israel. But these are too antiquated for the present cultured race of superior beings! They are going to regenerate the world by Democratic Socialism, and set up a kingdom for Christ without the new birth or the pardon of sin. Truly the Lord has not taken away the seven thousand that have not bowed the knee to Baal, but they are, in most cases, hidden away—even as Obadiah hid the prophets in a cave. The latter-day gospel is not the gospel by which we were saved. To me it seems a tangle of everchanging dreams. It is, by the confession of its inventors, the outcome of the period—the monstrous birth of a boasted “progress”—the scum from the caldron of conceit. It has not been given by the infallible revelation of God—it does not pretend to have been. It is not divine—it has no inspired Scripture at its back. It is, when it touches the cross, an enemy! When it speaks of Him who died thereon, it is a deceitful friend. Many are its sneers at the truth of substitution—it is irate at the mention of the precious blood. Many a pulpit, where Christ was once lifted high in all the glory of His atoning death, is now profaned by those who laugh at justification by faith. In fact, men are not now to be saved by faith but by doubt. Those who love the Church of God feel heavy at heart because the teachers of the people cause them to err. Even from a national point of view, men of foresight see cause for grave concern. Cowper sang, in his day, words worthy to be remembered now—

When nations are to perish in their sins,
 It is in the church the leprosy begins—
 The priest, whose office is with zeal sincere,
 To watch the fountain, and preserve it clear,
 Carelessly nods and sleeps upon the brink,
 While others poison what the flock must drink.
 His unsuspecting sheep believe it pure,
 And, tainted by the very means of cure,
 Catch from each other a contagious spot,
 The foul forerunner of a general rot.
 Then truth is hushed, that Heresy may preach,
 And all is trash that Reason cannot reach.⁶³

⁶³ “A Dirge for the Down-Grade and a Song for Faith,” *MTP*, 35:266–67.

IN MY PLACE OBEDIENT HE LIVED: IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS IN ROMANS 5:18–19

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The overwhelming majority of Christians would readily affirm the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness. But when pressed as to the substance of this righteousness, many would point to the transmission or imputation of an attribute of God or merely the forgiveness of sins alone with no positive imputation. These are misguided responses which produce a truncated gospel. At the center of this question is the person of Christ, who claimed to have come to "fulfill all righteousness" (Matt 3:15). This article will contend that the righteousness that is imputed to believers is Christ's human righteousness—which is His lived-out, practical law obedience. This reality is captured in the words of Isaac Watts when he wrote: "Come naked, and adorn your souls / In robes prepared by God, / Wrought by the labors of his Son, / And dyed in his own blood."

* * * * *

The doctrine of active obedience is one of the great wonders of Protestant soteriology. The last words of the great J. Gresham Machen to his dear friend and co-laborer John Murray were, "I'm so thankful for the active obedience of Christ. No hope without it!"¹ By "active obedience," Machen meant that Christ's life of perfect obedience to the law of God was vicarious in man's justification. In other words, active obedience is the substance of the Lord's imputed righteousness to the believer.

John Murray also cherished the doctrine of the active obedience of Christ. He said, "No category could more significantly express the execution of His vicarious work than obedience."² Charles Hodge also affirmed, "The whole course of Christ

¹ Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 508.

² John Murray, "The Obedience of Christ," in *Collected Writings of John Murray: Select Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1977), 2:151.

on earth was one of voluntary obedience.”³ Recently, Robert Culver added, “To describe in detail Jesus’ unflinching obedience to the will of His Father would be to tell the story of the life of Christ.”⁴ And Robert Reymond said:

Undergirding all the rich and variegated terminology that the Scriptures employ to describe Christ’s cross work, there is one comprehensive, all-embracing, unifying feature of His entire life and ministry, which is so essential to His cross work that without it none of the things that the Scriptures say about it could have been said with any degree of propriety. The feature is the obedience of Christ.⁵

While many throughout church history have affirmed the doctrine of active obedience, this doctrine has not always been given its proper place. Herman Bavinck noted, “In theology this rich idea has frequently not come into its own. Often Christ’s suffering has been separated from the act of obedience expressed in it.”⁶ Moreover, in recent years active obedience, along with the doctrine of imputed righteousness, has received much criticism. For example, Larry D. Pettigrew writes, “It is better to understand that justification provides the forgiveness of sins, but does not include the imputation of Christ’s law-keeping righteousness.”⁷ Similarly, Robert Gundry

³ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 2:613.

⁴ Robert Duncan Culver, *Systematic Theology: Biblical and Historical* (2005; repr., Scotland: Christian Focus, 2008), 517.

⁵ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 629.

⁶ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 3:377.

⁷ Larry D. Pettigrew, “An Assessment of Covenant Theology,” in *Forsaking Israel: How it Happened and Why it Matters*, ed. Larry D. Pettigrew (The Woodlands, TX: Kress, 2020), 192. The erroneous presuppositions that undergird Pettigrew’s conclusions lie beyond the scope of this study. However, it should be noted that his position is largely denied from not only a misunderstanding of covenant theology and its conclusions, but also a misunderstanding of dispensationalism and its history. To reject everything that is affirmed by covenant theologians on the grounds that they are covenant theologians is not only poor scholarship, but poor Christian charity.

Pettigrew’s fallback presupposition is to assume that because covenant theologians affirm active obedience, it should be either reexamined or denied by dispensationalists. This position was perpetuated by Andrew V. Snider, “Justification and the Active Obedience of Christ: Toward a Biblical Understanding of Imputed Righteousness,” Th.M. thesis (The Master’s Seminary, 2002), 102.

Furthermore, “The theologians who affirm the vicarious active obedience doctrine are covenant theologians. Those who disagree with or de-emphasize the doctrine tend to be dispensationalist, or at least non-covenantal” (105). Snider cites both Lightner and Chafer for support. Yet in the very section cited Chafer writes, “If the distinction between that which Christ wrought in His life and that which He wrought in His death—and many are apparently not awake to it—is not observed, only confusion of doctrine will result.” Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology: Soteriology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 3:42. It does not appear Chafer is disagreeing with the doctrine of active obedience. Chafer states that failing to distinguish between active and passive obedience will only result in confusion. He then goes on to explain the traditional views of both doctrines and gives no indication of disagreement. Instead, he merely rejects a particular presentation by Jonathan Edwards, of dividing passive obedience into two parts; namely, that all of Christ’s shed blood—even the blood from His circumcision—was vicarious.

Secondly, Snider claims that, “No mention is made of the topic,” in Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999) and Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949). However, this is not the case, and he does not reject active obedience.

believes that the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness needs to be abandoned.⁸ New Perspective advocates likewise deny, redefine, or mystify the imputed righteousness of Christ's earthly merit as the foundation of justification.⁹

It is the duty, then, of evangelical theologians to reaffirm the substance of the righteousness that is imputed to believers in justification. The objective of this article is to demonstrate that the doctrine of imputed righteousness is the imputation of Christ's human righteousness, which was achieved through His obedience to the law. This study will focus on Romans 5:18–19, a text that many English versions have sadly mistranslated. Having demonstrated Paul's explicit teaching on the imputation of Christ's human righteousness to the believer in Romans 5:18–19, this paper will then establish a biblical definition of the doctrine and interact with opposing views.

This study, then, will address the substitutionary nature of Christ's work (His federal headship over the elect), the notion that imputed righteousness is the imputation of Christ's human righteousness, and the fact that Christ's righteousness is biblically defined as His law obedience. The importance of these themes can hardly be overstated. They are, after all, vital to the doctrine of justification—the doctrine which Luther rightly considered “the Chief article of Christian doctrine.”¹⁰ Luther

Ryrie states, “The sufferings of Christ in His death have been labeled His passive obedience in classical Protestant theology. This passive obedience stands in contrast to Christ's active obedience, which refers to the obedience exhibited during His lifetime” (324–25). Thiessen states, “We must distinguish between penal satisfaction and pecuniary satisfaction” (324). Then he goes on to cite Hodge in support of active obedience saying, “By His obedience and sufferings, by His whole righteousness, active and passive He, as our representative and substitute, did and endured all that the law demands” (324–25).

Many of the titular heads of old dispensationalism Ryrie, Chafer, and Thiessen all affirm the active obedience of Christ as a classical protestant doctrine, and so do modern “leaky” dispensationalists such as John MacArthur, *Biblical Doctrine* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 615–18.

⁸ Robert H. Gundry, “Why I Didn't Endorse ‘The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration’ ... Even Though I Wasn't Asked to,” in *Books and Culture* 7, no. 1 (January/February 2001): see especially 6–9. Also see his article, “The Non-Imputation of Christ's Righteousness,” in *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Leicester, England: IVP Academic, 2004), 17–45.

⁹ It is not the intent nor within the extent of this article to deal with the New Perspective on Paul. However, important issues related to it are addressed throughout; for a more thorough dealing with N. T. Wright and his followers see: D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, *Justification and Variegated Nomism. Volume 1: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); Donald A. Hagner, “Paul and Judaism: Testing the New Perspective,” in *Revisiting Paul's Doctrine of Justification: A Challenge to the New Perspective*, ed. Peter Stuhlmacher (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001); Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001); Philip H. Eveson, *The Great Exchange: Justification by Faith Alone in the Light of Recent Thought* (Leominster, UK: One Day Publications, 1996); John W. Robbins, *A Companion to the Current Justification Controversy* (Unicoi, TN: Trinity Foundation, 2003); most importantly see, John Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007).

New Perspective advocates confuse what was achieved in the Reformation by distinguishing between forensic and transitive righteousness. For a detailed examination of the error, see: Guy Prentiss Waters, *Justification and the New Perspectives on Paul: a Review and Response* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004) especially, 185–90. Another helpful analysis on the Union with Christ issue, and the misunderstanding of the New Perspective advocates on the doctrine of imputation, that deals, in great detail, with Albert Schweitzer, Albrecht Ritschl, N. T. Wright, and Rick Lusk see: J. V. Fesko, “Justification and Union with Christ,” in *Justification: Understanding the Classic Reformed Doctrine* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 264–80.

¹⁰ Martin Luther, *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, compiled by Ewald M. Plass (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 2:705.

continued, “If we know this article, we are in the clearest light; if we do not know it, we dwell in the densest darkness. Therefore if you see this article impugned or imperiled, do not hesitate to resist Peter or an angel from heaven; for it cannot be sufficiently extolled.”¹¹ This article intends to follow Luther’s advice: to “resist Peter” and the “angel from heaven” by demonstrating from Scripture that sinners have no hope without the imputed human righteousness of our blessed Lord.

Romans 5:18–19: Analyzed and Defended

In Romans 5:18–19, there are three propositions regarding the doctrine of active obedience. The first is that Christ is a federal head/substitute for His people. Moreover, the passage juxtaposes the imputation of righteousness over and against death. Lastly, active obedience best explains Christ’s righteousness as His human, law-keeping obedience. To test the validity of these statements, the student of Scripture might ask, “What righteousness is imputed to believers?” Romans 5:18–19 answers unambiguously:

So then as through one man’s transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one man’s righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.¹²

Ἄρα οὖν ὡς δι’ ἑνὸς παραπτώματος εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς κατάκριμα, οὕτως καὶ δι’ ἑνὸς δικαιώματος εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς δικαίωσιν ζωῆς· ὡς περ γὰρ διὰ τῆς παρακοῆς τοῦ ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου ἁμαρτωλοὶ κατεστάθησαν οἱ πολλοί, οὕτως καὶ διὰ τῆς ὑπακοῆς τοῦ ἑνὸς δίκαιοι κατασταθήσονται οἱ πολλοί.

This portion of Romans 5 is concerned with displaying (1) Adam and Christ as the representative heads of the human race and (2) the status their actions bring upon those whom they represent. Therefore, a detailed exegetical analysis of this passage must address the three main elements that Paul is addressing with respect to Adam and Christ. The three elements, drawn as a comparison, are: (1) representation, (2) action, and (3) result. Each of these three will be examined as they relate to Christ and Adam. The chart below organizes the theological themes in Romans 5:18–19 and will be used as the outline for the following sections.

¹¹ Luther, *What Luther Says*, 2:705.

¹² The translation of this text is my own. It is not within the scope of this article to discuss particular redemption. However, some might confuse Paul’s discussion here to propose a form of general redemption because of the phrase “all men.” Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 343 makes a great point on this issue: “Paul’s point is not so much that the groups affected by Christ and Adam, respectively, are coextensive, but that Christ affects those who are His just as certainly as Adam does those who are his.” If someone were to presuppose general redemption from this text because of the use of “all men” in 5:18 would have to explain what Paul meant by 5:19 when he switches to “many” and not “all.”

Chart 1.1 Comparison Between the First and Second Adam

Representative	Action	Result/Status
Christ	Obedience	Righteous
Adam	Disobedience	Unrighteous/Sinner

Representatives

First, it must be noted that Paul has isolated Adam and Christ. He chooses these two individuals because they are the only two to hold the respective position of federal head.¹³ While there have been men in biblical history whom God appointed to represent their people, such that their actions had consequences affecting many (e.g., Noah, Moses, David, etc.), none represented their people as Adam and Christ did. The difference lies in that only the actions of these two men have a one-to-one correspondence with an immediate consequence upon those whom they represent. Their federal headship, moreover, extends beyond the temporal and physical realm to the spiritual and eternal. Moreover, Adam and Christ are the only men who have been in a uniquely sinless relationship to God as representative heads.¹⁴

¹³ There is a debate as to how men received the sinful nature of Adam. Some hold to the seminal/natural headship view and others hold to the federal/representative headship view. The seminal headship view holds that the entire human race was seminally and physically in Adam, the first man. As a result God considered all people as participating in the act of sin which Adam committed and therefore received the penalty he received. The view is based on Isaiah 53:10; Romans 4:16; 9:8; Galatians 3:29; and 1 John 3:9. Which show that men can be represented and “present” even while in the loins of someone. Even adherents of the federal headship view admit that Adam is the natural head of the human race physically; the issue is the relationship spiritually. Federal/representative headship understands the relationship by means of representation and imputation. For more on this issue see Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 3:100–6; J. van Genderen and W. H. Velema, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. Gerrit Bilkes and M. van der Maas (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 404–5; Robert Duncan Culver, *Systematic Theology: Biblical and Historical* (2005; repr., Fearn, UK: Mentor, 2008), 280–81; Charles Hodge, *Romans* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993), 137–49, William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (1888; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 2:184–88.

Federal headship is seen in Rom. 5:18–19 rather than seminal headship because seminal headship is not fitting to the comparison Paul is making between the two heads: Adam and Christ. It seems clear that Paul is comparing Adam and Christ, to have seminal headship in Adam and federal headship in Christ would break this comparison. Also, men are not seminally in Christ, therefore it would be wrong to take this text to be referring to seminal headship rather than federal headship. Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 437 explains, “since natural or seminal headship is not and can never be descriptive of Christ’s relationship to men, and since the relationship between Christ and the justified, therefore, must be one of various representations, we must assume that the relationship between Adam and his posterity, on the basis of which his one (first) sin is imputed, is also one of vicarious representation.” Likewise, seminal headship cannot properly explain why only the first sin was passed on to humanity and not each and every sin of Adam’s life.

A second issue which is directly related to this doctrine is a debate as to how sin is transmitted. These are 1) immediate imputation, 2) mediate imputation, 3) the realist view, and 4) the agnostic view. These views are further discussed in Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia, PA: P&R Publishing, 1968), 262–69.

¹⁴ D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 5 Assurance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 178. “God has always dealt with mankind through a head and representative.”

Adam was the first of God’s creatures, created in His image, and thus was in a special relationship with Him. God gave Adam a command attached with a promise of punishment for violation. Adam was told, “Do not do this, or you will die.”

In Romans 4–5, Paul addresses how Adam’s sin was carried over to all mankind. Adam’s representative nature is expressed in terms such as “through” (δι’), “resulted” (εις), and “made” (κατεστάθησαν). Christ’s representative nature is expressed in the same terms: “through” (διὰ), “resulted” (εις), and “made” (κατασταθήσονται). Thomas Schreiner makes the case for the representative positions of Adam and Christ in his comments on this text:

Adam as the head of the human race sinned as our representative, and we were sinners by virtue of being in corporate solidarity with Adam. Many theologians have explained the connection in terms of the imputation of Adam’s sin to his descendants. This explanation accounts for the wording of the text, which repeatedly attributes death and condemnation to Adam’s one sin. It accounts for the analogy between Adam and Christ, for just as Adam functioned as the head of the human race, so too did Christ.¹⁵

Actions

The second element that needs to be examined is the actions of the two individuals. The actions of both men are presented in antithetical terms. Adam’s actions are described as “trespass” (παραπτώματος), and Christ’s are described as “righteous” (δικαιώματος). Adam’s actions are further described as “disobedience” (παρακοῆς), and Christ’s as “obedience” (ὑπακοῆς). Douglas Moo is helpful here:

First, if, as we think likely, ἐνὸς refers to Christ, it is awkward to speak of justification or a sentence of justification as being “of Christ.” Second, more important, the strict parallelism between the first and second clauses suggest that, as παραπτώματος refers to something Adam did, so δικαιώματος will refer to something Christ did.¹⁶

Paul uses numerous words from Romans 5:14–19 to describe Adam’s act: “disobedience” (παρακοή, 5:19), “transgression” (παράπτωμα, 5:15 [2x], 16, 17, 18), “sinners” (ἁμαρτωλός, 5:19), and “sin” (ἁμαρτάνω, 5:14). Semantically, each of these terms demands a legal understanding.¹⁷ John Gill explains sin as follows, “ἁμαρτωλός always signifies persons guilty of a fault.”¹⁸ The notions of fault, guilt, trespass, and transgression necessitate a standard which actions are measured against

¹⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998) 289–90.

¹⁶ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 341.

¹⁷ See: Gerhard Kittel, “παρακοή,” in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 1:223; Wilhelm Michaelis, “παράπτωμα,” in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 6:170–72; Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, “ἁμαρτωλός,” in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 1:317–33. Rengstorff writes, “The substantive means the “sinner” as a man who forfeits a correct relationship to God by his culpable attitude to the Jewish Law” (327), clearly law violation.

¹⁸ Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth*, 291.

and ruled as disobedience or law violation. In this particular case, the law is not merely human law, but God's law.

Particularly relevant to the current study is the legal demand of God upon both federal heads. Christ's actions are described as "righteous" (δικαιώματος, 5:18) and "obedience" (ὕπακοης, 5:19). These two terms have been the subject of much discussion amongst commentators, and most affirm that the righteousness and obedience of Christ are vicarious.

The "one man's righteousness" (δι' ἑνὸς δικαιώματος, 5:18), often referred to in English translations as "one act of righteousness" (NASB, ESV, HCS, NIV, etc.), refers to Christ's obedience to God's legal demands. So what exactly is Paul intending to communicate in this phrase, δι' ἑνὸς δικαιώματος? Is he trying to communicate Christ's entire life of obedience, or just His death? Many English translations translate this as "one act of righteousness" for two reasons: (1) Paul's use of ἑνὸς from the root εἷς, and (2) δικαιώματος is singular. However, these reasons do not grammatically demand the rendering "one act of righteousness."

The following chart helps explain how ἑνὸς is being used by Paul throughout Romans 5.

Chart 1.2 Paul's Use of ἑνὸς

Text	Greek	Translation	NASB	ESV	HCS	NIV
5:12	δι' ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου	Through one man	"through one man"	"through one man"	"through one man"	"through one man"
5:15a	τῷ τοῦ ἑνὸς παραπτώματι	The transgression of the one (man)	"by the transgression of the one"	"through one man's trespass"	"by the one man's trespass"	"by the trespass of the one man"
5:15b	τῇ τοῦ ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου	(the grace) ...of the one man	"of the one Man"	"of that one man"	"of the one man"	"of the one man"
5:16a	δι' ἑνὸς ἀμαρτήσαντος	Through one (man) who sinned	"through the one who sinned"	"result of that one man's sin"	"the one man's sin"	"of one man's sin"
5:16b ¹⁹	ἐξ ἑνὸς εἰς κατάκριμα	From one (sin or man) resulting in condemnation	"from one transgression resulting in condemnation"	"one trespass brought condemnation"	"from one sin came the judgment"	"followed one sin and brought condemnation"

¹⁹ Note: 5:16b should be "one man's" not "one sin," since that is how ἐξ ἑνὸς appears in 9:10, the only other time in which that phrase occurs.

5:17a	τῷ τοῦ ἐνὸς παραπτώματι	By the transgression of the one (man)	“by the transgression of the one”	“because of one man’s trespass”	“by the one man’s trespass”	“by the trespass of the one man”
5:17b	διὰ τοῦ ἐνὸς	Through the one (man)	“through the one”	“through that one man”	“through that one man”	“through that one man”
5:17c	διὰ τοῦ ἐνὸς	Through the one (Jesus Christ)	“through the One, Jesus Christ”	“through the one man Jesus Christ”	“through the one man, Jesus Christ”	“through the one man, Jesus Christ”
5:18a	δι’ ἐνὸς παραπτώματος	Through the transgression of the one (man/Adam)	“through one transgression”	“as one trespass”	“as through one trespass”	“just as one trespass”
5:18b	δι’ ἐνὸς δικαιώματος	Through the righteousness of the one (man/Christ)	“through one act of righteousness”	“one act of righteousness”	“through one righteous act”	“one righteous act”
5:19a	διὰ τῆς παρακοῆς τοῦ ἐνὸς ἀνθρώπου	Through the disobedience of the one man	“through the one man’s disobedience”	“by the one man’s disobedience”	“through the one man’s disobedience”	“through the disobedience of the one man”
5:19b	διὰ τῆς ὑπακοῆς τοῦ ἐνὸς	Through the obedience of the one (man)	“through the obedience of the One”	“by the one man’s obedience”	“through the one man’s obedience”	“through the obedience of the one man”

As can be observed from the chart above, wherever δι’ + ἐνὸς is used in 5:12–19, the object of the preposition is not ἐνὸς. Modern English translations render it as an adjective and not as a noun, though it appears as a noun every other time in 5:12–19. Therefore, the object of the preposition in 5:18 must be either παραπτώματος (transgression) and δικαιώματος (righteousness), not ἐνὸς. Here, ἐνὸς is a subjective

genitive, not the object of δι'. The phrase should therefore be translated "one man's righteousness," not "one act of righteousness."²⁰

Translating this phrase as "one man's righteousness" fits well with how 5:12 is translated. The Greek reads ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον. Is this aorist to be translated as a past (for all sinned) or as a gnomic present (for all sin)? Almost all English translations translate the phrase as "all sinned" (aorist/past) in Adam. In other words, Romans 5:12 is understood to teach that men are held accountable, as if they had performed the very work of Adam—that is, his transgression of the law. To be sure, Paul is not attempting to convey the concept of status change here as in 5:19, which reads ἁμαρτωλοὶ κατεστάθησαν ("the many were made sinners"). In 5:19, κατεστάθησαν is used not just to convey the "status" of sinners, but also their accountability as actual workers of iniquity.²¹ ἐνὸς is being used in a similar fashion as it was in 5:17 to refer to the "one man's" work. Therefore, ἐνὸς should have the same meaning in 5:18, thus referring to "one man's righteousness."

Paul's use of the term δικαίωματος is also necessary to understand why Paul is not referring to "one act of righteousness," but to "one man's righteousness." Because δικαίωματος appears in the singular, many English translations interpret Paul's words as meaning "one act of righteousness." However, this interpretive meaning of the text is not demanded by a singular appearance of δικαίωματος. The term can be used comprehensively, as it is in Romans 8:4: "so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." The term translated "requirement" (NASB) is δικαίωμα. In Romans 8:4, though this term appears in the singular, it clearly refers comprehensively to plural requirements, and does not isolate one requirement above the rest. For example, if Romans 8:4 is referring to the Mosaic Law,²² then one would not assume that the Mosaic Law is made up of one law; it entails hundreds of laws! In 8:4, as in 5:18, the term's appearing in the singular does not necessitate a numerical one, but a comprehensive one. Therefore, to isolate Christ's death from His entire life of righteousness is unnecessary and unwarranted.²³

Because δι' ἐνὸς δικαίωματος is best understood as "one man's righteousness," most commentators have highlighted the comprehensive nature of Christ's righteousness from this text, and ascribed it as vicarious. F. F. Bruce agrees and offers a middle position, "The 'act of righteousness' is the crowning act of Christ's life-long obedience (verse 19), when He yielded up His life."²⁴ However, if Paul intended the death of Christ exclusively, he could have stated this explicitly. Rather, Paul goes on to explain this "righteousness" as "obedience" in Romans 5:19, not "death." Paul

²⁰ The KJV is correct in rendering the phrase, "by the righteousness of one."

²¹ More below on the significance of Paul's change from λογίζομαι to καθίστημι between Romans 4 and 5.

²² There are some who may not think Romans 8:4 is referring to the Mosaic Law, but rather to the transcendent Law (for more details on these classifications see, Peter Sammons, "No Hope Without It! The Doctrine of Active Obedience Defined and Vindicated" (The Master's Seminary, 2013), 80–90. The same principle still applies. The gentiles are not under one solitary law, but hundreds of laws, by the one law giver. Therefore, law can be seen as a picture of the whole including in a comprehensive way its many parts.

²³ For a more detailed look at Romans 5:12–18 see; Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ*, 90–116.

²⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, TNTC (1963; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 133.

did not intend to isolate Christ’s death from the rest of His life, but rather, both His life and death are in view. After all, Christ’s death was the climactic act of obedience in His life. Piper makes the following observation:

Were there not many acts of obedience in Jesus’ final days and hours? Are we to think of the obedience of Gethsemane, or the obedience when the mob took Him away, or when He was interrogated, or the obedience when He was crowned with thorns, or the obedience when He was flogged, or the obedience when He was nailed to the cross, or the obedience when He spoke words of love to His enemies, or His obedience when He offered up His spirit to His Father?²⁵

Admittedly, some theologians have argued that the “one act of obedience” is only a reference to Christ’s death.²⁶ But this act of obedience is both the work on the cross, and His life leading up to the cross. If Christ was not obedient up to the moment He was on the cross—through the mockery, through the many moments of pain, and through his last gasp—then He could not be said to have been obedient at all. Moo adds:

The characterization is, of course, a fair one since Adam and Eve had been explicitly told not to eat the fruit of the tree. In keeping with the careful contrasts that Paul has used throughout the passage, then Christ’s work is characterized as “an act of obedience.” Paul may be thinking of the “active obedience” of Christ, His lifelong commitment to “do His Father’s will” and so fulfill the demands of the law.²⁷

C. E. B. Cranfield similarly stated, “Paul means not just His atoning death but the obedience of His life as a whole, His loving God with all His heart and soul and mind and strength, and His neighbor with complete sincerity, which is the righteous conduct which God’s law requires.”²⁸ Even Schreiner admits, “It is possible that His whole life is in view.”²⁹ Because the evidence heavily weighs against limiting this “obedience” to Christ’s death, then His whole life must be in view. Anthony Hoekema rightly noted, “Since the ‘one act of righteousness’ is contrasted with ‘one trespass,’ the former expression must refer to the law-keeping obedience of Christ.”³⁰

Most commentators understand Christ’s righteousness to be vicarious and to have earned the reward for His perfect life. This view can be seen in the comments

²⁵ Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ*, 112.

²⁶ Johannes Piscator, *A Learned and Profitable Treatise of Mans Justification Two Bookes. Opposed to the Sophismes of Robert Bellarmine, Iesuite. By Iohn Piscator...the Famous Schools of Nassouia Sigena*. (1599; repr., London: EEBO Editions, Oxford University Bodleian Library, 2010).

²⁷ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 344. Moo gives the “active obedience” position as a credible option, which he does not labor to demerit. He however, takes the focus of the “act of obedience” as pointing to Christ’s death, because it is the ultimate act of obedience. While Christ’s death was certainly an act of obedience, it is not necessary to make a strong distinction between His life and death in this verse, for both were out of obedience and substitutionary.

²⁸ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 1:289.

²⁹ Schreiner, *Romans*, 287.

³⁰ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 183.

by Gottfried and Quell: “In Rom 5:18 (δικαιῶσιν) the reference is again to the actualization of the divine sentence of justification by the blessing of believers. The attributive (ζωῆς) is life, that it entails life in the full sense, that life is the eternal result and goal.”³¹ Because “righteousness” is lexically tied to legal recompenses, then Paul must be presenting life as the reward for the merit of Christ’s righteousness.

The actions of the two representatives are made clear by Paul in 5:19. Paul describes Adam’s action by the use of the term “disobedience” (παρακοῆς). The meaning of this term in the NT, “always means ‘bad hearing’ in consequence of unwillingness to hear, and therefore in the guilty sense of disobedience which does not and will not proceed to the action by which hearing becomes genuine hearing.”³² Adam’s disobedience was his flagrant disregard for the warning of God. It took only one sin to plunge humanity into damnation, because Adam’s law violation instantaneously brought the imprisonment of mankind to the penal demands of the law, with no way to pay it.

Paul describes Christ’s actions with the term “obedience” (ὕπακοῆς). This term is always used in respect to religious decisions and is measured by obedience to God.³³ Fulfilling the will/demands of the Father upon humanity was intended to be perpetual. Christ could not have simply obeyed once in order to counteract Adam’s one act of disobedience. It takes one act to break the law, but a lifetime to fulfill it. Therefore, this draws a fitting contrast between Adam’s work and Christ’s work.

Adam’s disobedience is called transgression—that is, a violation of the law of God. The use of this term is consistent with the comparison Paul is making here with regard to the obedience of Christ as obedience to the requirements of the law. Paul’s point is not to draw a one-to-one correlation between the action(s) of one or the other, but to highlight them with two precise words—“obedience” and “disobedience”—in order to draw an adequate contrast between the two representative heads.

Results

The results of the actions of the federal heads are to be understood in reality, and not as “divine fiction.” Those who were in Adam are actually seen as guilty and condemned on Adam’s account. They are “made” (κατεστάθησαν) sinners as a result of his action. The same is true of Christ. Those whom He represents receive a real righteousness. They are “made” righteous (κατασταθήσονται). “In both parts of the verse, then, we are dealing with a real, though ‘forensic,’ situation: people actually become sinners in solidarity with Adam—by God’s decision; people actually become ‘righteous’ in solidarity with Christ—again, by God’s decision.”³⁴ Piper explains the change in status as a result of Christ’s human righteousness:

Therefore, when Paul goes on to say, “so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteousness,” he does not mean only that Christ’s status was imputed to us. Rather, in Christ we are counted as having done all the

³¹ Quell and Schrenk, “δικαιῶσις,” 2:224.

³² Kittel, “παρακοή,” 1:223. Also see, Spicq, “παρακοή,” 2:28–29.

³³ Kittel, “ὕπακοή,” 1:224–25.

³⁴ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 346.

righteousness that God requires. Imputation is not the conferring of a status without a ground of real imputed moral righteousness. It is the counting of an alien, real, moral, perfect righteousness, namely Christ's as ours.³⁵

An examination of καθίστημι helps prove this point. There is a significant change in the metaphor from Romans 4:3 to 5:19 with respect to righteousness. In 4:3, the term for the metaphor is, “counted, reckoned, accredited, or imputed” (ἐλογίσθη from λογίζομαι). Conversely, in 5:19 Paul changes the term for the metaphor to “made” (κατεστάθησαν from καθίστημι). In 4:3, the main subject is Abraham and his actions. In that context, Paul is establishing the instrument of imputed righteousness, namely faith. But in 5:19, there is a change in the actors from Abraham to Christ. In 5:19, the focus is no longer on the instrument of imputed righteousness (faith), but on the material principal of justification—the righteousness of Christ—and the status that that righteousness brings to those whom He represents. Romans 5:19 speaks to the status of those in Christ, not the faith or the instrumental cause, which is the focus in 4:3.

Brian Vickers provides an excellent definition of καθίστημι: “The word καθίστημι occupies two somewhat distinct semantic domains. ... The idea is that something or someone is caused to be in a state or is occupying a status that is somehow different from some previous state or status.”³⁶ This is how καθίστημι appears in James 4:4, “Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (also in 2 Pet 1:18). καθίστημι is different than λογίζομαι, because λογίζομαι refers to the means (“imputation”) and καθίστημι refers to the resulting status (“made”).

In the LXX, καθίστημι is used to translate numerous words.³⁷ However, in its OT context, καθίστημι is never used to translate the Hebrew term for “reckon, impute.” Instead, when the LXX authors translated the Hebrew text to speak of “imputation” or “reckoning” (cf. Rom 4:3), they used λογίζομαι, just as Paul did in the NT. The best example is seen in Isaiah 53:12: הָרַגַּנְנוּ עִיִּי וְנִפְשָׁנוּ תִּתֵּן, which is translated as καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἀνόμοις ἐλογίσθη. Here, the LXX translator communicates the concept of imputation with the word λογίζομαι, not καθίστημι. He could have used καθίστημι, as he did in Isaiah 3:13; 49:8; and 62:6. Yet, καθίστημι did not adequately communicate what λογίζομαι could. Thus, it is apparent that in the LXX these two

³⁵ John Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 171.

³⁶ Brian Vickers, *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Imputation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 116. The second meaning mentioned by Vickers is that of authority. This is the majority of uses. To be put in charge of duties or authority over others (see: Matt 25, 21, 24; Luke 12:14; Titus 1:5).

³⁷ The term καθίστημι is used to translate over twenty different Hebrew words. καθίστημι appears for the following words: קָפַס: Gen 39:4–5; Num 3:10, 32; 31:48; Deut 20:39; Josh 10:18; 1 Sam 29:4; 1 Kings 11:28; 2 Kings 7:7; 22:5, 9; 25:22–23; 1 Chr 26:32; 2 Chr 12:10; 31:13; 34:10; Neh 12:44; Est 2:3; Ps 108 (109):6; Isa 62:6; Jer 1:10; 20:1; 47 (40):5, 7, 11; 48 (41):2, 18. In these appearances the term is translated “appoint.” שׁוּם: Gen 47:5(6); Ex 2:14; 5:14; 18:21; Num 4:19; Deut 1:13; 17:14–15 (וְתָהּ is translated with καθίστημι in Deut 17:15 as well “place over”) Josh 8:2; Judg 11:11; 1 Sam 8:1, 5; 10:19; 2 Sam 15:4; 17:25; 18:1; 2 Kings 10:3; 1 Chr 11:25; 2 Chr 33:14; Est 8:2; Ps 17 (18):43; 104 (105):21. In these appearances it is generally translated “place over.” It is also used of שָׁלַח: Ps 8:6; מָלַךְ: 2 Chr 36:1, 4; קָצַב: Ps 2:6; צוּר: 2 Sam 6:21; and in Aramaic שָׁלַח: Dan 2:48. An entire detailed examination of these words and more can be found in Vickers, *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness*, 118.

terms are not synonymous, because the term καθίστημι is never chosen to translate terms that conveyed the idea of imputation.³⁸

The change in the legal status of individuals, therefore, comes as a result of the real actions of the representative heads. Adam's actual sin results in a direct status for those whom he represents, and Christ's actual human righteousness results in a direct change in status for those who are in Him.³⁹ Paul sees fit to define the righteousness of Christ with the term "obedience." Therefore, it is on the basis of this obedience that Christ is deemed righteous, and by extension all who are in Him. Brian Vickers summarizes the points made concerning Romans 5:19:

The statements in Romans 5:19 refer to statuses. One is either a "sinner" or one is "righteous." It is perhaps the most basic point made in all Scripture, and it is a profound point as well, because each individual person possesses his status because he was "made" a sinner or "made" righteous on the basis of another's action.⁴⁰

Imputed Righteousness Defined

The doctrine of justification lies at the very heart of the Christian faith. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that in justification, righteousness is either infused or imparted to the sinner.⁴¹ Both of these, however, are inadequate ways of understanding how men receive Christ's merit, because both depend on self-effort. In contrast, the Protestant understanding of the righteousness of Christ is that His righteousness is granted to the elect by means of imputation. Imputation is an accounting term, used to ascribe good or evil as accountable to an individual.⁴² Hodge explains:

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

³⁸ This is also true in the apocryphal literature list of such texts: 1 Macc 3:55; 6:14, 17, 55; 7:20; 9:25; 10:20, 22, 32, 37, 69; 11:57, 59; 14:42; 15:9, 38; 16:11; 2 Macc 3:4; 5:22; 12:20; 3 Macc 2:26; 4 Macc 4:16; 5:25; Tob 1:22; Jud 1:3 (5); 5:3; 6:14; Sir 17:17; 33:29; 32:1. Both the semantic ranges are used for καθίστημι in apocryphal literature. For a more detailed discussion on these texts see the notes in: Vickers, *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness*, 120–121.

³⁹ G. K. Beale *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 479 points out that, "Paul sometimes portrays Christ as a last Adam who received the victorious position of glorious and incorruptible kingship, apparently as a result of having accomplished all the requirements of obedience that were expected of the first Adam."

⁴⁰ Vickers, *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness*, 121–22.

⁴¹ For a proper understanding of these differences in understanding the doctrine of justification, and a refutation of the Roman Catholic view see James R. White, *The Roman Catholic Controversy* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1996). For a detailed history of this debate see William David Webster, *Church of Rome at the Bar of History* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1997).

⁴² John Owen defined imputation as "to judge or esteem this or that good or evil to belong unto him, to be his." Owen, "The Doctrine of Justification by Faith," in *Faith and Its Evidences*, The Works of John Owen (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1967), 5:165.

imputation is made had the right to be treated as righteous...and a claim in justice to eternal life.⁴³

In other words, to have righteousness imputed to one's account is to be granted the legal right to eternal life. To misunderstand this point is to misunderstand the core of the Christian faith. Hence, imputed righteousness must be defined carefully. And those who cannot define imputed righteousness functionally deny it.

Orthodox View

It is my contention that imputed righteousness can only be properly defined as the active obedience of Christ. Active obedience should be understood as: *the meritorious righteousness of Christ, which is His obedience to the law, imputed to the elect, as the foundation of their justification before God. This obedience entails His entire life of righteousness from birth through His gruesome death.* Active obedience describes the righteousness which is imputed to believers. It concerns Christ's fulfillment of the commands and demands which the Father places upon humanity (law), at all ages and at all times. These commands and demands were fulfilled vicariously in the life of Christ, in His continual and perfect obedience to the law for the elect, at every age of His life. John Owen defines active obedience as:

The righteousness of Christ (in His obedience and suffering for us) imputed unto believers, as they are united unto Him by His Spirit, is that righteousness whereon they are justified before God, on account whereof their sins are pardoned, and a right is granted them unto the heavenly inheritance.⁴⁴

A common misconception of active obedience is that it separates Christ's obedience from His suffering, ascribing suffering only to His passive obedience, and obedience only to His life. This is a serious charge, which if true, would severely undermine the validity of active obedience. Nothing inherent to this doctrine calls for this division. Indeed, proponents have gone to pain-staking lengths to defend the unity of Christ's work, so that this second element may not be misunderstood as a second work. James Buchanan helps with this misconception:

It is not to be interpreted as if it meant, that His passive obedience consisted in mere suffering, or that His active obedience consisted in mere service; for it implies obedience in both, and excludes suffering from neither: nor is it to be interpreted as if it meant, that the two might be so separated from each other, as to admit of His mere sufferings being imputed to us, without any part of His obedience.⁴⁵

⁴³ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:145.

⁴⁴ John Owen, "The Doctrine of Justification by Faith," 5:208.

⁴⁵ James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification: An Outline of its History in the Church and of its Exposition from Scripture* (1867; repr., London, UK: Billing and Sons, 1961), 321.

In short, Christ actively obeyed in his death and passively suffered in His life. Therefore, the theological constructs of active and passive obedience do not woodenly separate His life from His death; both elements are interconnected. Louis Berkhof affirms the inseparability of Christ's work:

It is customary to distinguish between the active and passive obedience of Christ. But in discriminating between the two, it should be distinctly understood that they cannot be separated. ... It was part of Christ's active obedience that he subjected Himself voluntarily to suffering and death.⁴⁶

Forgiveness and justification are both necessary and achieved by Christ. The two elements of the work of salvation can rightly be understood as unique. Those who believe in active obedience as the grounds for justification likewise affirm penal substitutionary atonement as the grounds for forgiveness. These two elements together describe salvation; one cannot be had without the other.

If Christ lived a perfect life and did not pay the penalty for men, then the merit of Christ's life cannot outweigh the debt of sin that had to be paid. Likewise, if Christ merely pays the penalty for men's sin, but does not provide them righteousness, then at best men are left in the condition of Adam before the fall. Adam's pre-fall condition was guiltless, but not worthy of reward. Therefore, if Christ merely propitiates/pays for the sin for the elect, they are merely returned to the pre-fall, innocent status of Adam. They are left without a position of positive righteousness. Together, the payment for sin and the provision of righteousness form a harmonious whole.

Erroneous Views

The doctrine of justification by faith is the crown jewel of the Christian faith. It is no surprise, then, that attacks against the active obedience of Christ constantly burst forth in history as the Hydra's heads. Two major errors regarding the active obedience of Christ have recently crept into evangelicalism. The first is the notion that the righteousness imputed to believers is an attribute of God, and the second is that Christ's death effectively renders someone righteous without any positive addition. What unites these alternatives (and most others) is their denial of double imputation.

An advocate of this position, Andrew Snider, explains, "These theologians clearly believe—and explicitly state—that Christ's death was not enough to merit eternal life for those who believe, because a 'positive' righteousness must be added."⁴⁷ This "positive" righteousness, which is necessary for humanity and achieved by Christ's law obedience, is the one element often rejected by those who deny double imputation. They often contest:

⁴⁶ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (1938; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 379.

⁴⁷ Andrew V. Snider, "Justification and the Active Obedience of Christ: Toward a Biblical Understanding of Imputed Righteousness," Th.M. thesis (The Master's Seminary, 2002), 81. Similar statements can be found in his ETS presentation, Andrew Snider, "Justification and the Active Obedience of Christ: A Theological Analysis of the Reformed Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness" (paper presented at the Evangelical Theological Society, April 2002), 9.

There is no mention of this negative-positive dichotomy in the text of Scripture. Rather, Christ is simply put forward as the δικαιοσύνη of the believer (1 Cor 1:30). The dualistic imputed righteousness conceived in Reformed theology goes beyond the statements and implications of Scripture.⁴⁸

Because these theologians reject double imputation and active obedience as the substance of Christ’s imputed righteousness, they are forced to recast their own view of what imputed righteousness means.

Righteousness Is an Attribute of God

In their attempts to provide a broader definition of imputed righteousness, those who reject the traditional view often come staggeringly close to the error of Andreas Osiander (1498–1552). A representative of this camp defines imputed righteousness as “the *divine* righteousness, that perfect harmony with God’s character and standard which is the *attribute* of the Godhead, that is imputed to the believer.”⁴⁹ The similarity between Osiander and the new redefinition of imputed righteousness can be observed in Calvin’s summary of Osiander’s view: “Osiander’s opinion is that since Christ is God and man, He is made righteousness for us with respect to His divine nature, not His human nature.”⁵⁰ These modern theologians, along with Osiander, affirm singular imputation—that is, the imputation of sin to Christ. Nevertheless, they reject the imputation of Christ’s human righteousness to believers.⁵¹ This wanders far too close to the deification view of justification. Otherwise known as *theosis*, this view of justification is the blunder of the Eastern Orthodox Church, which teaches that men need and receive a divine attribute.⁵² The difference between Osiander (and the Eastern Orthodox Church) and modern academics is that some academics affirm the forensic nature of justification and insist on the terms “imputed righteousness.” Nonetheless, what they mean is far different from the Protestant understanding of double imputation.

⁴⁸ Snider, *Justification*, 83; Snider, “Justification and the Active Obedience of Christ,” 10; yet again, “Thus, it will be seen that the death of Christ purchases all the benefits of salvation—there is nothing lacking that must be made up by his obedience” (15).

⁴⁹ Snider, *Justification*, 96–97. Emphasis added. Furthermore, he writes, “The righteousness that is imputed is δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ” Snider, “Justification and the Active Obedience of Christ,” 18. Again, “Christ’s divine righteousness is manifested in his active obedience, which facilitates, qualifies, and validates his passive obedience, which in turn makes possible the imputation of his divine righteousness” Snider, *Justification*, 97.

⁵⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, LCC, ed. Ford Lewis Battles, trans. John T. McNeill (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 1:734.

⁵¹ Calvin notes how Osiander affirms penal substitution and the imputation involved in it, but rejects the imputation of Christ’s human righteousness. “Osiander agrees with us, that we are justified in Christ, in so far as He was made an atoning sacrifice for us: something that does not comport with His divine nature”; *ibid.*, 1:736.

⁵² The teaching of the Eastern Orthodox Church and deification is more dramatic than what Snider claims, yet the similarities are too comparable to be ignored. The deification view has been expressed by Veil-Matti Kärkkäinen, “Justification and deification, then, mean the “participation” of the believer in Christ, which, because Christ is God, is also participation in God himself.” “Deification View,” in *Justification: Five Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), 224.

This error runs into a few problems. First, it must be asked whether God expects or requires divine attributes from His creatures. Scripture nowhere speaks in these terms; therefore, the burden of proof to demonstrate that God demands from humanity a divine attribute rather than achieved merit, lies with those who redefine imputed righteousness. In other words, proponents of this view must demonstrate that God expects an inherent divine quality from His creatures, and not communicable attributes. If God does not expect this, however, what would be the purpose of the imputation of divine righteousness?

At this point, one might think that perhaps a communicable attribute is what is imputed to the believer. However, this does not work. By definition, communicable attributes are those which God endowed to His creatures to reflect as image bearers. This being the case, men, despite their fallen nature, already possess, to some degree, the communicable attributes. There is no indication that man has lost any of the communicable attributes in the fall (James 3:9). If man had lost a communicable attribute, then that attribute could no longer be considered communicable. And at that point, their argument would fall into disarray. Thus, the claim that the imputed righteousness of God is a communicable attribute is unable to sufficiently explain imputed righteousness.⁵³

Moreover, it would be unjust for God to demand a divine attribute from a creature. If God had commanded something of Adam which lay outside of his natural ability—such as being inherently holy, self-existent, immutable, or timeless, or any such command⁵⁴—then God would no longer be holy, because He would be demanding something which He made man incapable of in the first place. For God to demand “divine righteousness” from humanity would be similar to demanding a pig to fly, or a fish to walk upright on the earth, and condemning them when they were made deficient in those areas. These would be unrighteous demands, and thus sinful.

It should also be noted that Romans 5:18–19 describes—contrary to the claim of an attribute being imputed to the believer—that the *results* of actions/works are what is imputed to the believer. After all, Adam’s disobedience was not the *attribute* of disobedience, but an actual, worked-out disobedience. It is this action—this violation of the law—that is imputed to all whom Adam represented (otherwise known as imputed guilt). For the parallel in Romans 5:18–19 to be maintained, Christ’s obedience must also be a practical, worked-out obedience.

If God imputes a divine attribute, then in what way and for what purpose was it necessary for Christ to be “made for us righteousness” (1 Cor 1:30) or to be “in the flesh” (John 1:14; 1 Tim 3:16)? They would reply: “to atone for human sin.” Yet they maintain He did not need to live a human life to obtain human righteousness. However, to say that Christ needed to die a human death to atone for human sin, but

⁵³ This is not likely a claim that Snider is willing to make since he does not acknowledge the communicable incommunicable attributes as a proper Scriptural or theological distinction. See: Andrew Snider, “Story and System: Why We Should not Categorize the Attributes of God” (paper presented at the Evangelical Theological Society, Nov 2012).

⁵⁴ The key here is “inherent” as in an attribute. God commands men to be holy as He is holy (Lev 19:2; Deut 18:13; 1 Pet 1:16; and Matt 5:28) but those are not commanding men to obtain an attribute of God, but to obey His law, as image bearers, which is an embodiment of His communicable holiness.

did not need to live a human life to achieve human righteousness, is an arbitrary decision inconsistent with the testimony of Scripture.

This redefinition of imputed righteousness as the imputation of a divine attribute is not mandated by Romans 5:18–19, and it is logically impossible without severely damaging the essence or holiness of God, as well as His requirements upon man. Even Michael Bird, who does not hold to active obedience, quickly rejects the notion of imputing a divine attribute to man with the warning, “Beware the error of Osiander!”⁵⁵

Propitiation Equals Righteousness

Another alternative to the traditional position is to equate propitiation with righteousness. This means that to have one’s sins forgiven is to be constituted as righteous. This position—first and most famously propagated by Johannes Piscator—holds that Christ’s death alone was necessary for justification.⁵⁶ Although Piscator was not the only Reformed scholar to deny the imputation of righteousness as the obedience of Christ, he was certainly the most vocal.⁵⁷ He primarily argued that Jesus only had to undergo the penalty of the law in order to save men.

⁵⁵ Michael Bird, “Progressive Reformed Response,” in *Justification: Five Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), 252.

⁵⁶ While Propitiation has been a staple teaching in the systematic theology of the Protestant reformed faith a few Reformed theologians were the first to question or deny its creditability. For a history of the active obedience of Christ as held by the Westminster Assembly, and the dominant affirmation of it see Alan D. Strange, “The Affirmation of the Imputation of the Active Obedience of Christ at the Westminster Assembly of Divines,” *The Confessional Presbyterian* 4 (2008): 194–209. For another helpful, and detailed historical examination of the active obedience of Christ and the Westminster Assembly see: Jeffrey Jue, “The Active Obedience of Christ and the Theology of the Westminster Standards: A Historical Investigation,” in *Justified in Christ: God’s Plan for Us in Justification*, ed. K. Scott Oliphint (Fearn, UK: Mentor, 2007), 99–130. Another interesting point is that the French Synods affirmed the active obedience of Christ against Johannes Piscator. John Quick, *Synodicon in Gallia Reformata: or, The Acts, Decisions, Decrees, and Canons of those Famous National Councils of the Reformed Churches in France* (London: Parkhurst and J. Robinson, 1692), 401.

⁵⁷ There is a debate as to what other reformed scholars denied active obedience. The debates center primarily on Zacharias Ursinus, along with Crocius, Marinius, Wendelin, Scultetus, Gataker, and Twisse. The thought that Zacharias Ursinus, co-writer of the Heidelberg Catechism, denied active obedience, is alleged by credible sources. However, it is not an explicate argument made by Ursinus, in denial of active obedience, but generally that he didn’t believe it. Theologians from both sides argue whether he adhered to active obedience or not. Neither side has provided definitive evidence. For a more detailed discussion on the history of the unity and disunity of the reformed churches on the active obedience of Christ after the time of Calvin see: Cornelis P. Venema, “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Imputation of Christ’s Righteousness: Another Example of ‘Calvin Against the Calvinists?’” *MAJT* 20 (2009): 15–47. Also see, Wilhelm Münscher and James Murdock, *Elements of Dogmatic History* (1901; repr., Charleston, SC: Nabu Press, 2011), 185.

Twisse is another interesting example, Alexander Ferrier Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly: Its History and Standards* (1883; repr., Charleston, SC: Nabu Press, 2010), 154–60. Twisse was one of the proctors’ who oversaw the Westminster Assembly; some have affirmed that he denied the active obedience of Christ as central to justification. However, the evidence presented by both views is inconclusive. If Twisse rejected active obedience it was not of the same nature as Johannes Piscator or Richard Baxter. Twisse was a committed supralapsarian, some might say he was a hyper-Calvinist, and so his rejection of active obedience would not be on the same grounds as the neo-nomian, semi-Arminian, positions presented by Piscator or Baxter. Alan D. Strange, “The Imputation of the Active

Piscator is thus a fitting representation of those who denied double imputation in the Puritan era.⁵⁸ His argument was straightforward. He stated that forgiveness of sins makes one righteous, and denied the imputation of positive merit, obedience to the law, and positive righteousness. Piscator thus argued that innocence is equal to righteousness: “[God] accepts Christ’s satisfaction for the elect ... imputes the same unto them; and there upon receives them into favor, and adopts them for sons and heirs of eternal life.”⁵⁹ In other words, only Christ’s death (satisfaction) was necessary for our salvation, not his fulfillment of the law. Christ’s death (satisfaction) rendered believers righteous because it took away their sins. A corollary of this view is that men could not be held accountable to both elements of the law (natural and penal).

It is thought that once men came under the penal demands of the law, they were no longer responsible to keep the natural demands of the law. Therefore, Christ’s death pays the penalty for sins of commission, the penal elements of the law, and the sins of omission for not keeping the natural demands of the law.⁶⁰ This assessment is summarized well by Wesley White, “In Piscator’s view, we are not righteous because God sees us as having done all that Christ did. Rather, we are considered righteous because our sins of commission and omission are forgiven on the basis of Christ’s satisfaction.”⁶¹ In summary, mankind’s legal relationship to God is either subject to the penalty for violation or reward for obedience, but not both. This understanding does not believe that men, after Adam, are still held to the natural demands of the law, but only needed to fulfill the penal demands of the law.

Obedience of Christ,” in *Drawn Into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates Within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 39–45. See: Benjamin Brooks, *The Lives of the Puritans* (1813; repr., Pittsburg, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1994), 3:12–17.

What is important to note is that those who denied active obedience rarely denied imputed righteousness of some form and they were therefore tolerated by the majority of the Reformed tradition. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (1938; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 380–81; Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics: Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources*, rev. and ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: Willmer Bros., 1950), 460. And also see: Wesley White, “The Denial of the Imputation of Christ’s Active Obedience: Piscator on Justification,” *Confessional Presbyterian* 3 (2007): 147–54. Shedd believed that John Wesley did not hold to the imputation of Christ’s righteousness in William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (1888; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 2:547. An interesting thing to point out about John Wesley was that he seemed to flip flop on this issue. There are places where he seemed to clearly deny it as Shedd points out; however, there are other places where he clearly affirms it. See: John Wesley, *The Lord Our Righteousness. A Sermon Preached at the Chapel in West-Street, Seven-Dials, On Sunday, Nov. 24, 1765. By John Wesley* (1765; repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: Harper Collins Publishers, 2010). He says, “Whoever believes the doctrine of imputation, understands it chiefly, if not solely, of His human righteousness” (3–4).

⁵⁸ Johannes Piscator, *A Learned and Profitable Treatise of Mans Iustification Two Bookes. Opposed to the Sophismes of Robert Bellarmine, Iesuite. By John Piscator...the Famous Schools of Nassouia Sigena* (1599; repr., London: Oxford University Bodleian Library, 2010). A good overview of Piscator is given by R. Scott Clark, “Do This and Live,” in *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry: Essays by the Faculty of Westminster Seminary California*, ed. R. Scott Clark (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 232.

⁵⁹ Piscator, *A Learned and Profitable Treatise of Mans Iustification*, 5–6.

⁶⁰ “That remission of sins, wherein man’s justification consists is remission of all sins: therefore not only of sins of committing, but also of sins of omitting.” Piscator, 106.

⁶¹ White, “The Denial of the Imputation of Christ’s Active Obedience: Piscator on Justification,” 151.

The first error of this view comes as a refusal to admit that the law can demand both perfect obedience and punishment for sin. It also wrongly assumes that forgiveness of sins equates to righteousness rather than innocence.

The proposition that men are responsible to keep either the penal elements of the law or the natural elements of the law, but not both, is arbitrary.⁶² To affirm one element of the law (penal) and yet to deny the other element (obedience) does not account for why Christ had to live a perfect sinless life “under the law to redeem those under the law” (Gal 4:4–5). While it may appear to deal with the penal demands of the law, it does not make much of God’s natural demands for Adam. God did not create Adam under the penal demands of the law, because Adam, being made sinless, had not transgressed.

The second flaw, that innocence of sin is the same as being righteous, cannot explain why Adam was never glorified. For example, if only sinlessness was necessary for eternal life and no confirmation of righteousness through the natural demands of the law (i.e. obedience), it must be asked why Adam was never glorified before He fell. Adam’s innocence was not enough to earn glorification or he would have been glorified and never been able to fall. He needed to be perpetually obedient to God to be granted this reward. By glorification what is meant is that human state of immutability which was first granted to Christ after His death and resurrection, and is the future hope of each believer in Christ (Rom 8:30). This view does not explain why the natural demands of God upon Adam were removed. Berkhof explains:

This “either ... or” applied to the case of Adam before the fall, but ceased to apply the moment he sinned and thus entered the penal relationship of the law. God continued to demand obedience of man, but in addition to that required of him that he pay the penalty for past transgression. Meeting this double requirement was the only way of life after sin entered the world.⁶³

There is certainly a logical error to affirm that man can be deemed as having kept the law if only the penal elements are kept. For example, let us suppose that there is a law that states, “You shall not rape.” Attached to this legal command is a penal demand that states, “Those who violate this law are subject to twenty-five years in prison.” Then suppose that someone violates this law, goes to prison for twenty-five years, and after the twenty-five years is released. Can such a man be said to be righteous? No, he cannot be said to be righteous, because righteousness demands obedience to the law, not a violation of it. There is a separate stipulation for law breakers (a penal element), which is not due to them naturally unless they violate the law.⁶⁴

⁶² For a great response to this, see: Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1993), 2:140.

⁶³ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 381.

⁶⁴ It may seem that this view does not have a place for dealing with Christ’s relationship to the law; however, it could be responded that Christ’s obedience to the law was necessary to make Christ’s sacrifice worthy to the Father. A similar view of Christ’s law obedience is held by Michael F. Bird, “Progressive Reformed View,” in *Justification Five Views* ed. James K Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy

This view does not properly understand Christ's representative nature. Jesus did not need to affirm His own righteousness, for He was the righteousness of God incarnate. J. Gresham Machen asserted correspondingly, "No obedience was required of Him for Himself, since He was Lord of all."⁶⁵ By that, Machen meant that the Lord of all, the King of creation, who has dominion over the angelic hosts of heaven, who is sovereign over all powers and authority, cannot be demanded anything merely for Himself. In order for anything to be demanded of Christ (penal or natural), it must be demanded of His human nature. Because Jesus Christ possesses two natures, it cannot be said to be a demand upon His divine nature. Therefore it must be demanded of His human nature, and thereby humanity whose place He took. Likewise Wayne Grudem says, "Jesus had no need to live a life of perfect obedience for His own sake—He had shared love and fellowship with the Father from all eternity and was in His own character eternally worthy of the Father's good pleasure and delight."⁶⁶

Scripture does not restrict Christ's suffering to the three hours on the cross (Isa 53:4, 5; 1 Pet 2:21; 3:18; Matt 16:21; Heb 5:7; 10:8, 9). It is one thing to be redeemed from the curse of the law and another to receive a reward as sons for righteousness unto the law (Acts 26:18; Gal 3:13–14; 4:4–5). Pardon from punishment does not mean that men have done everything required of them from the Creator, but only that they have their penalty. Being counted innocent is not the same as being counted righteous.⁶⁷

(Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 145. In anticipating this question, he explains, "Jesus' obedience qualified him to be the sacrifice who could redeem Israel humanity in their alienation from God." Ironically, saying that Christ kept the law so that He could be a worthy sacrifice, or as Piscator explained, Christ's law fulfillment was limited to the penal demands of the law; both of these statements actually validate the active obedience view and do not disqualify it. To assert one element of the law as binding, in this case the penal element, equally asserts the second element of the law as binding. It validates the obedience to the natural law as necessary because it took transgression of the first (natural demand) to bring about the condition of the second (penal demand). The same authority stands behind both elements of the law equally, so you cannot nullify or affirm one without nullifying or affirming the other.

⁶⁵ J. Gresham Machen, "The Active Obedience of Christ," in *God Transcendent* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), 189.

⁶⁶ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 571. Many others have stated the case similarly, e.g. John Owen: "suffering for punishment gives right and title unto nothing, only satisfies for something"; "The Doctrine of Justification by Faith," in *Faith and Its Evidences*, Works of John Owen (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1967), 5:257. Also, "The term satisfaction is often restricted to His suffering and death, as if it had an exclusive reference to the penalty of the Law which had been violated and dishonored by sin. But as it must be held, even when employed with special reference to the death of Christ, to include, not only the pains which He endured, but also the obedience which He rendered, in dying"; James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification: An Outline of its History in the Church and of its Exposition from Scripture* (1867; repr., London, UK: Billing and Sons, 1961), 322.

⁶⁷ This has been similarly affirmed by the Church. Just before the calling of the Westminster Assembly, the Irish Articles of 1615 taught that the righteousness of Christ imputed to believers includes His entire obedience to the law. The article reads, "So that Christ is now the righteousness of all them that truly believe in him. He, for them, paid their ransom by His death. He, for them, fulfilled the law in His life; that now, in Him, and by Him, every true Christian man may be called a fulfiller of the law"; Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom: With A History and Critical Notes* (1887; repr., New York: Harper and Brothers, 1919), 3:532. Likewise, the Synod of Dort affirmed Piscator's view to be faulty on the same grounds. See Nicolaas H. Gootjes, *The Belgic Confession: Its History and Sources* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 151–52.

Conclusion

To conclude, this study has demonstrated that Romans 5:18–19 stands as one of the great torches that illuminate the halls of Protestant soteriology. As Adam’s sin brought condemnation to those in union with him, so did Christ’s law obedience render believers righteous before a holy God. In other words, Christ lived and died as a man, in the place of men. The righteousness that is imputed to believers is none other than His creaturely righteousness, for that is what God requires.

Consequently, to reject the doctrine of this text is to subvert the very holiness of God. It is to suggest that He demands that which is beyond the creature’s natural ability to achieve. Alternatively, to reject active obedience is to tear off the believer’s beautiful garment of salvation in order to clothe himself with the mutable leaves of performance he once wore in Eden. This would amount to a truncated, half gospel.

The true gospel call, however—in the words of Isaac Watts—says:

Come naked, and adorn your souls
In robes prepared by God,
Wrought by the labors of his Son,
And dyed in his own blood.

GOD FREELY JUSTIFIETH...BY IMPUTING CHRIST'S ACTIVE...AND PASSIVE OBEDIENCE

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* * * * *

This article traces seventeenth century debates surrounding the doctrine of justification. The united testimony of Reformed writers, the common consent of the English Puritan confessions, and even the startling testimony of a most important Roman apologist together provide a powerful argument: justification comes solely from the work of Christ the mediator. These debates helped to produce the beautiful words of the Second London Confession: “Christ by his obedience, and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are justified; and did by the sacrifice of himself, in the blood of his cross, undergoing in their stead, the penalty due unto them: make a proper, real and full satisfaction to God’s justice in their behalf: yet inasmuch as he was given by the Father for them, and his Obedience and Satisfaction accepted in their stead, and both freely, not for anything in them; their Justification is only of Free Grace, that both the exact justice and rich Grace of God, might be glorified in the Justification of sinners.”

* * * * *

“That article of our faith which concerns the justification of a sinner in the sight of God, must needs be acknowledged to be of great importance, and we ought to be more careful of nothing, than that our minds be not corrupted from the simplicity of the Gospel, and we moved from our steadfastness thereabout.”¹

With these words Nehemiah Coxe commences his exposition of the doctrine of justification by faith alone in refutation of the heresies and errors of one Thomas Collier. In the face of a difficult theological and pastoral situation potentially affecting many churches, Coxe had been seconded by six London elders to address

¹ Nehemiah Coxe, *Vindiciae Veritatis* (London: Nathaniel Ponder, 1677), 104. Quotations from primary sources maintain archaic orthography.

and repudiate Collier's serious doctrinal defections. In 1645, Thomas Collier had been sent, perhaps from William Kiffen's London Particular Baptist congregation,² as an evangelist and church planter to the West Country³ of England, enjoying measurable success in both conversions and new assemblies. He became the most influential leader of the many congregations in the western counties, eventually chosen to represent the associated western churches.

Vindiciae Veritatis

Early in his ministry, Collier expressed deviant theological positions, but seemed to have repented of these.⁴ By the mid-1670s, he again fell into error, advocating a strange admixture of heterodox, unorthodox, and plainly heretical doctrines. In response, the London elders took several steps, including commissioning Coxe to examine and publish a repudiation of Collier's errors. The result is Coxe's *Vindiciae Veritatis*, a fascinating study contrasting unorthodoxy with truth. Demonstrating deep acumen and theological profundity, Coxe examined Collier's recently published writings and exposed them by the light of carefully articulated Reformed orthodoxy. Through seven chapters, he examines Collier's deviations on classical theism and Christology, election, the extent of the death of Christ and the nature of the atonement, the power of the will in fallen humanity, the perseverance of the saints, justification, and the Judgment Day and eternal damnation. Other matters are also addressed along the way. In each chapter, he interacts at length with Collier's published views, often relying on the best Christian scholarship of the day, citing authorities (often in Latin) both well-known—such as William Ames, Gisbertus Voetius, and John Owen—along with more obscure scholars—such as the Hebraist Johannes Mercer, the orientalist exegete Benedictus Arias Montanus, the Dominican philologist Santes Pagnino, and the French Hebraist François Vatable.⁵ The sixth chapter *Of Justification* is directly relevant to this study.

The Second London Confession

Vindiciae Veritatis is not, however, the only published document seemingly issued in response to Thomas Collier. Samuel Renihan has presented a convincing case showing that the appearance of the *Second London Confession* in 1677⁶ may be

² Richard D. Land, "Doctrinal Controversies of the English Particular Baptists (1644–1691) as illustrated by the Career and Writings of Thomas Collier," D.Phil. Thesis (Oxford University, 1979), 25ff.

³ The West Country extends from Devon and Somerset in the southwest of England to Bristol on the west coast, and inland towards London.

⁴ See James Renihan, "The Strange Case of Thomas Collier," *Journal of the Institute of Reformed Baptist Studies* (2016): 97–122.

⁵ Each of these is cited in Francis Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James Dennison (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1997); see the "Biographical Dictionary," III:681 ff. They are also referenced in John Gill's *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*.

⁶ While popularly known as the *1689 London Baptist Confession*, this is a misnomer, for there is no evidence that an edition of the Confession was published in that year. It has been identified with *1689* since that was the year in which the first national General Assembly of Particular Baptist churches was held in London. At that meeting, the Confession was formally adopted, hence the attribution. See James

a response to Collier's aberrations.⁷ In 1674, he published *The Body of Divinity*⁸ with the subtitle "A Confession of Faith, being the substance of Christianity: Containing the most material things relating to matters both of faith and practice." This "small brief Treatise"⁹ is over 600 pages long, serving as an attempt to provide a system of theology to unite believers. Naming it a "Confession of Faith" provided the appearance of an official document, perhaps intended to reflect the theology of the Particular Baptist churches at large. It was followed in 1676 by *An Additional Word to the Body of Divinity, or Confession of Faith*,¹⁰ a book intended to clarify "some things in my book, titled *The Body of Divinity, or a Confession of Faith*, relative to the Person of the Son of God, with some other things, at which some took offence."¹¹ Rather than helping, the *Additional Word* caused greater concern. Elders from West Country churches, along with some members of his own Southwick congregation expressed great unease and sought assistance from the London pastors. Collier published a narrative of the events¹² describing correspondence, personal meetings, and his objection to the publication of Coxe's *Vindiciae Veritatis*, to which he also replied in 1677 with *A Sober and Moderate Answer to Nehemiah Coxe's Invective*.¹³ Through the process, the London elders were convinced that Collier indeed advocated heresy, and on 2 August 1677, joined with elders from Bristol, by letter formally charged Collier with heresy.¹⁴ "The letter from the London and Bristol elders defined a heretic as one 'that chooseth an Opinion by which some fundamental Article of the Christian Religion is subverted.'"¹⁵ Within a few weeks, the first known literary record of the *Second London Confession* appears in London's Petty France church-minute book, reading, "It was agreed that a Confession of Faith with the appendix thereto having been read & considered by the Brē: should be published."¹⁶ This is the congregation where Nehemiah Coxe was pastor. In the letter "To the

Renihan, *Faith and Life for Baptists: The Documents of the London Particular Baptist General Assemblies, 1689–1694* (Palmdale: RBAP, 2016), 207 ff.

⁷ Samuel Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance: The Federal Theology of the English Particular Baptists (1642–1704)* (Oxford: Centre for Baptist History and Heritage, Regent's Park College, 2018), 174 ff. The following material is a summary of his argument.

⁸ Thomas Collier, *The Body of Divinity, or, A Confession of Faith, Being the Substance of Christianity: Containing the Most Material things relating to matters both of Faith and Practise* (London: Nath. Crouch, 1674).

⁹ Collier, *Body of Divinity*, A6 recto.

¹⁰ Thomas Collier, *An Additional Word to the Body of Divinity, or Confession of Faith; Being the Substance of Christianity* (London: Printed for the Author, 1676).

¹¹ Collier, *Additional Word*, A3 recto.

¹² Thomas Collier, *A Brief and true NARRATIVE of the unrighteous dealings with Thomas Collier, a Member and Minister of the Church usually assembling at Southwick in the County of Wilts.* (n.p., 1677).

¹³ Thomas Collier, *A Sober and Moderate Answer to Nehemiah Coxe's Invective (pretended) Refutation as he saith of the gross Errors and Heresies asserted by Thomas Collier in his Additional Word: Wherein his Refutation is examined, and found too light* (London: Francis Smith, 1677).

¹⁴ Collier, *A Brief and true NARRATIVE*, 16.

¹⁵ Samuel Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance*, 178. Collier transcribed the letter and printed it in his *Brief and True NARRATIVE*, 12–15.

¹⁶ The church minute book is held at the London Metropolitan Archives, LMA CLC/179/MS20228/001B "Memoranda and Minutes of Church Meetings and Membership Lists of the Congregations Successively at Petty France, Westminster; Artillery Lane, Spitalfields; Walbrook; and Turners' Hall, Philpot Lane." It has been transcribed and is printed in Samuel Renihan, *The Petty France Church, (Part 1)* (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2019), 231.

Judicious and Impartial Reader” prefaced to the Confession, it is stated that the publication is intended “to manifest our consent...in all the fundamental articles of the Christian religion,” the Appendix containing the nearly identical phrase “we endeavoured to manifest, that in the fundamental articles of Christianity we mind the same things” as had been confessed in the earlier Westminster Confession of Faith and the Congregational Savoy Declaration of Faith.¹⁷ The use of this phraseology is significant, and may provide a clue to the provenance of the Confession. Joined to this, the notice on the title page that the Confession is issued by congregations in London *and the Country* seems to point to these circumstances as well. Collier’s prominence, and his boldness in publishing a heretical “Confession of Faith,” necessitated the publication of a thoroughly orthodox doctrinal symbol. Perhaps it is no surprise that Collier was not finished with his objections, responding in 1678 with *A Confession of Faith, published on Special Occasion ... Whereunto is annexed, a POSTSCRIPT, with brief Animadversions on some things, contained in a Confession of Faith, lately published in the name of the Elders and Brethren of many Congregations in London and the Countrey [sic]*.¹⁸ The evidence is strong indicating that the Second London Confession emerged from this crisis.

The doctrine of justification by faith alone is among the theological issues flagged by both Coxe and Collier as matters of disagreement, but they were not the first to express significant disparity on the nature of the gospel as defined by the Puritan-era confessions. Richard Baxter proposed similar objections, a story that must be told.

Richard Baxter

In October 1658, a synod of Congregational theologians including Thomas Goodwin and John Owen was held at the Savoy palace in London. At that meeting, the delegates undertook the task of revising the earlier *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647), resulting in the publication of what is known as the *Savoy Declaration*.¹⁹ It closely follows the contents and order of the Presbyterian symbol, in places supplementing or adapting its statements in the light of theological developments manifested in the intervening decade, while also expressing some verities specific to the polity and concerns of the congregational churches. The *Second London Confession* followed nineteen years later, based on both documents but now adapted to a Baptist system of doctrine and practice, intentionally maintaining the form and matter in which there was profound agreement; the family resemblance is evident at a glance. The taxonomy is clear: *Westminster* provided the order and framework; *Savoy* adopted and adapted the same, and the Particular Baptists intentionally followed suit. While they generally accepted the *Savoy*

¹⁷ *A Confession of Faith. Put forth by the Elders and Brethren of many Congregations of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith) in London and the Country* (n.p.: Printed in the Year, 1677), A3 verso and 109.

¹⁸ Thomas Collier, *A Confession of Faith, Published on Special Occasion* (London: Francis Smith, 1678).

¹⁹ *A Declaration of the Faith and Order owned and practiced in the Congregational Churches in England* (London: D. L., 1658); *The Humble Advice of the Assembly of Divines...Concerning a Confession of Faith* (London: Printed for the Company of Stationers, 1647).

amendments and alterations, on at least twelve occasions they restored readings from *Westminster* which had been changed in *Savoy*. For the purposes of this paper, an addition to the first paragraph of chapter 11 *Of Justification* is significant. The following table shows the similarities and supplementation. One should notice that the Baptist document exactly follows *Savoy* in theological expression.

Second London Confession	Savoy Declaration	Westminster Confession
<p>CHAP. XI. Of Justification.</p> <p>1. Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting, and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone, not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their Righteousness; but by imputing Christ's active obedience unto the whole law, and passive obedience in his death, for their whole and sole righteousness, they receiving, and resting on him, and his righteousness, by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.</p>	<p>Chap. XI. Of Justification.</p> <p>Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth; not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing Christ's active obedience unto the whole law, and passive obedience in his death for their whole and sole righteousness, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.</p>	<p>Chap. XI. Of Justification.</p> <p>I. Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth: not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness, by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God.</p>

Approximately two-thirds of the way through the paragraph, the congregational divines added a clarifying clause, not to undermine or disagree with the earlier statement, but simply to sharpen its expression. The three Confessions agree that justification is not the result of infused righteousness, nor “for anything wrought in them” or their own efforts, nor on the basis of the act of faith or believing or any

other gospel-oriented righteousness. *Westminster* then states truly but simply that justification flows from the imputation of Christ's obedience and satisfaction, while *Savoy*, followed by *Second London*, adds that justification is based solely upon the imputation of the work of Christ considered from two perspectives—His life of holy and perfect obedience to the law of God and His sacrificial death. In this way, they articulate the fact that Christ's labors satisfy the double needs of humanity: His death is a propitiation for sin, satisfying divine justice against sin, and His life provides to those who believe the righteousness they lack to be welcomed into the divine presence. This is consonant with what had previously been expressed in the *Savoy Declaration/Second London Confession* chapter eight paragraph four:

This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertake, which that he might discharge he was made under the Law, and did perfectly fulfill it, and underwent the punishment due to us, which we should have borne and suffered, being made Sin and a Curse for us.²⁰

Christ “perfectly fulfilled” the law and suffered in the place of the elect, and this is what is imputed to those who by faith, itself a gift of God, place their trust in Christ. Salvation is thus wholly of grace, dependent upon the work of the Mediator on behalf of his people. This seems like straightforward Christian soteriology. Richard Baxter objected.

During the civil wars between king and Parliament in the 1640s, Baxter encountered preachers whose doctrine troubled him deeply. They proclaimed an antinomian type of faith—in his words these evangelists were “falling in with [John] Saltmarsh, [teaching] that Christ hath repented and believed for us, and that we must no more question our faith and repentance, than Christ.”²¹ Throughout his life, this led him to adopt and promote an unorthodox doctrine of justification.

Writing in that 1675 book, Baxter specifically identified the amendments made to the first paragraph of chapter eleven in their *Declaration* by the Savoy synod as especially problematic. Citing the date, location, and precise words of the *Declaration*, he indicated that some unnamed observers “thought it gave the *Papists* so great a scandal, and advantage to reproach the *Protestants* as denying all inherent righteousness that it was necessary that we should disclaim it.” Baxter “excepted” against two sentences even though in one case “the same words are in the Assemblies Confession, though they might have been better left out.”²² He objected to the statement that faith is not imputed as righteousness, and that Christ's active obedience is imputed “for their sole righteousness.” In both cases, he supports his

²⁰ *A Confession of Faith*, 30–31. The words in bold were added by *Savoy*, retained by *Second London* but are not present in *Westminster* 8.4. The “office” is that of mediator and surety, explicated in the previous paragraph.

²¹ Richard Baxter, *Of the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness to Believers* (London: Nevil Simons, 1675), 22. John Saltmarsh was an enigmatic preacher prominent in the 1640s who seems to have advocated classic antinomian doctrines. See *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. Saltmarsh, John.

²² Baxter, *Of the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness*, 25–26. The “Assemblies Confession” is the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. The same charge is made against *Savoy* and *Westminster* in *Richard Baxter's Catholicke Theology: Plain, Pure, Peaceable for Pacification of Dogmatical Word-Warriors* (London: Robert White, 1675), fifth pagination, 254. He says there “I hope they meant better than they spake.”

objections with a bevy of Scripture texts, all of which he asserts must be taken literally. Regarding the first difficulty he writes:

Our opinion is,

1. That it is better to justifie and expound the Scripture, than flatly to deny it: If Scripture so oft say, that *Faith* is *reckoned* or *Imputed* for *Righteousness*, it becometh not Christians, to say, *It is not*: But to shew in what sence it is, and in what it is not. For if it be so Imputed in *no sence*, the Scripture is made false: If in any sence it should not be universally denied but with distinction.

2. We hold, that in Justification there is considerable, 1. The Purchasing and Meritorious Cause of Justification freely given in the new Covenant. This is only Christ's Sufferings and Righteousness, and so it is Reputed of God, and Imputed to us. 2. The *Order of Donation*, which is, On *Condition* (sic) of *Acceptance*; And so 3. The Condition of our *Title* to the free Gift by this Covenant; And that is, Our Faith, or Acceptance of the Gift according to its nature and use. And thus God Reputeth Faith, and Imputeth it to us, requiring but this *Condition of us* (which also he worketh in us) by the Covenant of Grace; whereas perfect Obedience *was required of us*, by the Law of Innocency. If we err in this explication, it had been better to confute us than deny God's Word.

This literalistic interpretation of Scripture texts contradicted the common and received interpretation of most Protestants. Their understanding of these statements is perhaps best represented by David Dickson, a contemporary Scottish Presbyterian and commentator on the *Westminster Confession*:²³

Doth GOD justify men, by imputing Faith it self, the Act of believing, or any other Evangelical obedience, to them, as their righteousness?

No. *Rom.* 4. 5, 6, 7, 8.2 *Cor:* 5. 19,21. *Rom:* 3. 22,24, 25,27, 28. *Tit:* 3. 5.7. *Eph.* 1. 7. *Jer:* 23. 6.1 *Cor* 1. 30, 31. *Rom:* 5. 17, 18, 19.

Well then, do not the *Arminians* err, who maintain, *that Faith it self, and the Act of Believing, is imputed to us for righteousness?*

Yes.

By what reasons are they confuted?

(1.) Because, Faith is that *by which*, we receive righteousness; *Acts* 26. 18. Therefore if it be that *by which*, we receive righteousness it cannot be righteousness it self: because, *that which is received*, is far different, and another thing from *that, whereby we receive it*. (2.) Because, we are not justified by inherent righteousness, as is proven evidently against the *Papists* in the last

²³ David Dickson, *Truth's Victory over Error* (Edinburgh: John Reed, 1684), 79–80.

foregoing Question, all which reasons do clearly evince, that we are not justified by the imputation of Faith it self, or by the act of believing, as our righteousness.

Dickson recognizes that a demurral such as Baxter's is characteristic of Arminianism! Baxter's second objection also incorporates a litany of Scripture texts, all focused on the righteous acts of believers. He says "many score of texts ... mention a righteousness distinct from that of Christ imputed to us. ... Christ's obedience and suffering is not our *sole righteousness*."²⁴ So far as he was concerned, a proper formulation of justification necessitated some sense in which believers' righteous acts are incorporated into that construction. He would not accept the distinction so well expressed in the three major Puritan-era confessions that "Faith thus receiving and resting on Christ, and his Righteousness, is the alone instrument of Justification: yet it is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving Graces, and is no dead faith, but worketh by love."²⁵ Reformed theology built a wall between justification and sanctification while never denying the place and importance of righteousness in a believer's life.

Baxter's²⁶ critics were direct in their evaluations of his ideas. In a preface to William Eyre's *Vindiciae Justificationis Gratuitae*, John Owen said that there was "too great evidence of very welcome entertainment, and acceptance, given by many to an almost pure *Socinian Justification*, and *Exposition of the Covenant of Grace*."²⁷ J.I. Packer calls this Owen's "persistent insinuation"²⁸ concerning Baxter's position. Perhaps more accessible is the appendix to Owen's 1655 work *Vindiciae Evangelicae* which is a reply to some animadversions offered by Baxter against Owen. In that appendix, Owen says, "He that shall deny the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, and maintain that our performance of new obedience is the matter of our justification before God, according to the tenor of the new covenant, and yet grant the satisfaction of Christ, and assign it a place (some or other) in the business or our justification, his doctrine is but almost Socinian, and yet, in my judgment, is altogether an error."²⁹ Baxter dedicated his first explicitly theological work, *Aphorisms of Justification*,³⁰ to two Westminster divines—Anthony Burgess and Richard Vines. Neither of them was pleased; Burgess wrote privately and then publicly against Baxter in 1654,³¹ and Vines expressed his objections by way of

²⁴ Baxter, *Of the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness*, 30.

²⁵ See *Westminster Confession*, *Savoy Declaration*, and *Second London Confession* 11.2, which employ this identical language.

²⁶ This paragraph is taken from my essay "Reforming the Reformed Pastor: Baptism and Justification as the basis for Richard Baxter's Pastoral Method," in *Reformed Baptist Theological Review* 2, no. 1 (January 2005): 113.

²⁷ William Eyre, *Vindiciae Justificationis Gratuitae* (London: R. I., 1654), unnumbered preface page, emphasis in original.

²⁸ J. I. Packer, *The Redemption and Restoration of Man in the Thought of Richard Baxter* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2003), 398.

²⁹ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen* (repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1966), 12:597. The appendix runs from page 591–616.

³⁰ Richard Baxter, *Aphorisms of Justification, with their Explication annexed* (London: Francis Tyton, 1649).

³¹ Anthony Burgess, *The True Doctrine of Justification Asserted and Vindicated from the Errors of many, and more especially Papists and Socinians* (London: Thomas Underhill, 1654).

letters.³² Hans Boersma asserts that “at least five others” sent private comments on the *Aphorisms*, among them a minister from a neighboring village, John Tombes.³³ When the published responses began to issue from the press, Baxter was engulfed by opposition; not only Owen but Tombes, Thomas Blake, George Kendall, William Eyre, John Crandon, and Thomas Tully³⁴ among others wrote against him during his lifetime. After his death, further treatises came forth against the doctrine sometimes known as “neonomianism” or “Baxterianism” by such men as Robert Traill, Isaac Chauncy, Benjamin Keach, and Thomas Edwards.³⁵ In addition, it is not unusual to find pointed remarks directed against Baxter’s views within other works: one might note Henry D’Anvers’ comments in *A Second Reply in Defense of A Treatise of Baptism*³⁶ or Joseph Caryl’s Preface to Crandon’s *Mr. Baxters Aphorisms Exorized and Authorized* as examples. He lived in a whirlwind of opposition and criticism, but he never backed away from his convictions.

Thomas Collier

Baxter’s concern, centered on the confessional language, is not unlike Collier’s, though Collier was more consistent in his open adoption of Arminian-like principles, and expressed his divergent opinions both before and after the publication of the *Second London Confession*. In his *Additional Word* he wrote:

If any persons dare to maintain, that any are justified before God without faith and holiness; as the terms thereof, though not the deserving cause; I must leave

³² Hans Boersma, *A Hot Pepper Corn: Richard Baxter’s Doctrine of Justification in its Seventeenth Century Context of Controversy* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 1993), 33–36.

³³ Boersma, *Hot Pepper Corn*, 36–37.

³⁴ Thomas Blake, *The Covenant Sealed* (London: Abel Roper, 1655); George Kendall, *Qeokratia Or, A Vindication of the Doctrine Commonly Received in the Reformed Churches Concerning Gods Intentions of Special Grace and Favor to his Elect in the Death of Christ* (London: Thomas Ratcliffe, 1653); *Sancti Sanciti. Or, The Common Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints* (London: Thomas Ratcliffe, 1654); John Crandon, *Mr. Baxters Aphorisms Exorized and Authorized* (London: 1654); Thomas Tully, *Justificatio Paulina sine operibus ex mente ecclesiae anglicanae* (Oxford: Henry Hall, 1674); *A Letter to Mr. Richard Baxter Occasioned by several injurious Reflexions of his upon a treatise entituled Justificatio Paulina* (Oxford: Henry Hall, 1675).

³⁵ Robert Traill, *A Vindication of the Protestant Doctrine concerning Justification, and of its Preachers and Professors, from the unjust charge of Antinomianism in The Works of the Late Reverend Robert Traill, A. M.* (repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1975), 1:252–96; Isaac Chauncy, *Neonomianism Unmasked: or, The Ancient Gospel Pleaded against the other called a New Law or a New Gospel* (London: J. Harris, 1692); *Alexipharmicon: or a Fresh Antidote against Neonomian Bane and Poyson to the Protestant Religion* (London: W. Marshall, 1700); Benjamin Keach, *The Marrow of True Justification, or Justification without Works* (London: D. N. 1692); *A Medium Betwixt Two Extremes* (London: Andrew Bell, 1698); Thomas Edwards, *The Paraselene Dismantled of her Cloud, or, Baxterianism Barefaced* (London: William Marshall, 1699). Edwards is not to be confused with the earlier Presbyterian Thomas Edwards nicknamed *Gangraena* after his famous books of the same title. W. T. Whitley suggests that the latter Edwards was a Baptist. See W. T. Whitley, *A Baptist Bibliography* (repr., New York: Georg Olms, 1984), 216.

³⁶ Henry D’Anvers, *A Second Reply in Defense of A Treatise of Baptism* (London: Francis Smith, 1675), 223. D’Anvers cites a variety of authors, including Tully and Owen, in order to demonstrate the similarity of Baxter’s doctrine of justification with “papist” views.

them to their own understanding without all Scripture grounds; for my own part I fully, on good grounds, believe the contrary.³⁷

Coxe replied stating that these words:

give just occasion to suspect his own understanding to be dark, and his judgment to be unsound. For although true and justifying faith is pregnant with good works, and whosoever is justified is sanctified also; and that faith considered as a grace inherent in us, belongs to our sanctification: Yet doth not the Scripture anywhere allow good works the same influence into our Justification as it doth unto faith; which is a clear evidence that it is not the act of believing, nor any other holy duty for which we are justified: But that in this business, faith is to be considered as relative to Christ, and that it is the object of faith apprehended thereby on the account of which it is said to justify.³⁸

So far as Collier was concerned, “the Protestants to be rid of Popish meritorious works, run themselves too much in principle and practice, beyond almost all works of charity.”³⁹ Coxe’s response is pointed—this is the same tactic used by “Jesuites against the faithful ministers of the gospel.” He asserts that Reformed authors have always emphasized holiness, urging their auditors to press on in sanctification. For Coxe, this charge is not merely unfounded but offensive, and a demonstration of Collier’s ignorance of the true content of their writings. He then provides a lengthy quotation, in Latin and translated into English, from the justly famous *Synopsis purioris Theologiae*, “written by Polyander, Rivet, Walleus and Thysius (no obscure men among Protestants)” so that Collier may have a “taste of what they teach concerning the necessity of good works.” His translation reads

*Good works are necessary on divers [sic] accounts: They are said to be necessary, 1. Because commanded of God. 2. They are necessary as a medium ordered (or in order) to the glory of God, and our own salvation. 3. They are necessary, in that they are the worship and obedience that we are by the law of nature obliged to perform to God. 4. They are necessary for the keeping a good and peaceful conscience, comfortably witnessing to our election of God, and calling unto salvation. 5. They are necessary on the account of that office of love, that we ought to perform unto our neighbor.*⁴⁰

³⁷ Collier, *An Additional Word*, 12.

³⁸ Coxe, *Vindiciae Veritatis*, 105.

³⁹ Collier, *An Additional Word*, 59. The context of this sentence is highly reminiscent of Baxter’s language: his doctrine “informs us, of the great miscarrying of those, who...have faln (sic) into, not only oppositions and contentions, but separations from each other, to the great trouble of the church and scandal of religion...How greatly it concerns all, to take heed, and beware of extreams, in our notions and principles, in the matters of our God and the Gospel.” This is the common refuge of those who deviate from the middle. They complain that the orthodox have excluded them, when in reality the opposite is true.

⁴⁰ Coxe, *Vindiciae Veritatis*, 107–8. Johannes Polyander was a Dutch theologian present at the Synod of Dort, Andre Rivet a Huguenot who fled to the Netherlands (Coxe published a biographical sketch of him), Antonius Walleus was a professor at Leiden and Antonius Thysius was also a delegate at Dort.

Coxe's defense reflects the precise emphases of the Puritan confessions, especially in their accent on the imputation of Christ's active and passive obedience. In constructing a positive doctrine, he defines justification as "the gracious sentence of God by which for Christ's sake apprehended by faith, he looseth the sinner from his obligation to eternal wrath and punishment; and accounts him righteous to the obtaining of Life and Glory."⁴¹ He follows this definition with a summary of Gisbertus Voetius' language in his *Select Disputations*.⁴² "The meritorious cause of our justification is the obedience of Christ both passive and active; and our actual justification is the effect or consequent of the imputation thereof to us." It involves two things: freedom from condemnation "or the remission of sins" purchased by Christ in his atonement, and the gift of life "for the sake of Christ's active obedience imputed to us in like manner."⁴³ This double imputation resolves the two-fold problem faced by sinful humans—a debt to pay and a righteousness to qualify. Christ's life and death provide both. The use of Ames and Voetius, like that of the *Synopsis*, serves a useful though perhaps unspoken point: the doctrine of the Confessions is the received doctrine of the Reformed churches. Collier is thus the odd man out; in fact, Coxe is blunt when he speaks of Collier's "swelling words of vanity and contempt of the understanding of others."⁴⁴ Despite what Collier (and Baxter) might say, the majority understanding is clear.

Both Baxter and Collier objected to the language defining justification in the *Savoy Declaration* and *Second London Confession*. Baxter's objection has been noted; Collier must also be mentioned. He wrote,

A Confession of Faith lately published from *London*, providentially coming to my hands; and contrary to my expectation, finding such things therein, as was and is truly grievous to me, it being inconsistent with the true Faith and Religion of God, I could not in good conscience, both towards God and Man, pass it by, without saying something thereunto.

In which I find, under the name of fundamental Principles of Faith, no less than seven things of special note, contrary thereunto, most of which I have before detected, and them I shall but only name; so that though there are many good Truths scattered therein, yet these contrary, unsound, and unscriptural notions contradict and undo them all

4. Justification by Faith without Works, and not by Faith neither, as the Scripture states it, *viz.* as the conditions and terms of our Justification, in *Pag. 40. Of Justification*, they say, *it is not by imputing Faith it self, the act of Believing, or any other Evangelical obedience, as their Righteousness; Faith is the alone*

⁴¹ Coxe, *Vindiciae Veritatis*, 104. In the original, these words are italicized, which often indicates a quotation from another source. That source is very possibly William Ames' *Medulla S. S. Theologicae* (London: Robertum Allotum, 1630), 138. Coxe's words seem to be a translation of Ames's Latin. Coxe cites the *Medulla* earlier in *Vindiciae Veritatis*.

⁴² Gisberti Voetii, *Selectarum Disputationum Pars Quinta* (Ultrajecti: Antonii Smytegelt, 1669), 281.

⁴³ Coxe, *Vindiciae Veritatis*, 104–5. Thank you to Susan Strickland for assisting me in the translation of Voetius.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

*instrument of Justification, as of receiving Christ: whereas the Scripture saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for Righteousness, Gen. 15. 6. and Rom. 4. 3, 5. His Faith is counted for Righteousness, ver. 23, 24. But they say plainly, No, it is not imputed, but only an Instrument, and what that is I do not know, nor is the Scripture acquainted with such language; but I leave the Reader to believe the Scripture, or them, which he please.*⁴⁵

Although this was written after Coxe's *Vindiciae*, his response is proleptically contained there. He says:

If those that plead most for the interest of good works in our justification would seriously consider what themselves dare abide by before the tremendous tribunal of the great Judge; they must all fly to *Bellarmines tutissimum est*, and put an end to this controversie, by acknowledging that they dare not venture into God's sight, nor pass out of this world to his judgement-seat in their own righteousness.⁴⁶

By these words, Coxe draws a personal and practical note into the debate. He appeals to Collier, and anyone else who might contemplate standing before God on the judgement day expecting to be welcomed into his awful presence on the basis of his or her own works, even if those efforts play a small part in justification, to stop and consider the implications of this notion. As a judicial term, justification calls to mind the great tribunal, reminding the guilty sinner that the demand for righteousness on that day is absolute. Without a perfect cloak of righteousness, the Holy Lord will reject the sinner and condemn that one to an eternity of punishment. Who would want to stand before God in such a way, especially when the perfect remedy has been provided? One hears Nehemiah pleading with Thomas to pause and ponder. Is your righteousness sufficient for that day?

But what is Bellarmine's *tutissimum est*? Bellarmine is the Roman Cardinal Robert Bellarmine, famous for his many writings in opposition to the doctrines of the Reformation. John Owen calls him "one of our greatest and most learned adversaries" in the debate over justification. His *tutissimum est*, a shorthand phrase drawn from a comment he made in his treatise on Justification, is cited regularly by Reformed writers. Owen quotes directly from Bellarmine's Latin original, providing a translation as well:

"Propter incertitudinem propriae justitiae, et periculum inanis gloriae, tutissimum est fiduciam totam in sola misericordia Dei et benignitate reponere,"—"By reason of the uncertainty of our own righteousness, and the danger of vain glory, it is the safest course to repose our whole trust in the mercy and kindness or grace of God alone."⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Collier, *A Confession of Faith, published on Special Occasion*, 42–44.

⁴⁶ Coxe, *Vindiciae Veritatis*, 106.

⁴⁷ John Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith in The Works of John Owen* (repr., Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1981), 5:32. The quotation in context may be found at *Disputationum Roberti Bellarmini...De Controversiis Christianae Fidei Adversus Hujus Temporis Haereticos* (Venetiis: Joannem Malachinum, 1721), 504.

What a remarkable statement! One understands why Protestant writers would employ it so regularly. It was so well known that they could refer to it by the briefest of abbreviations, “*tutissimum est!*” The phrase alone would call to mind an astonishing concession made by one of the greatest Roman champions. Though a staunch defender of the doctrines of the Council of Trent, Bellarmine still suggested that the safer course for believers was to rely on Christ and His merits rather than their own. In Coxe’s polemic against Collier, this was exceedingly useful. Collier was no match for Bellarmine, no theologian of such internationally recognized status. If the renowned Jesuit ultimately fell back on the gospel and urged others to do so, what right did Collier have to think that his (or anyone else’s) righteous works would be sufficient to contribute to the gift of forgiveness and eternal life?

To drive home his point, Coxe wrote:

I might heap up testimonies of this kind; and will at any time, if called to it, evince from the confessions of faith of all the reformed Churches, and from the writings of all the worthy reformers that treat of this subject, as also from theirs who of late have asserted our justification by free grace through the imputation of Christ’s obedience both active and passive to us, without the works of the Law, that they all plead for a necessity of good works on the account, and for the ends, beforementioned. So then their doctrine deserves not this calumny⁴⁸

The united testimony of Reformed writers, the common consent of the English Puritan confessions, and even the startling testimony of a most important Roman apologist together provide a powerful argument. Justification comes solely from the work of Christ the mediator. There is a place for good works in the life of the believer, but not in any way serving as the basis for justification. The doctrine formulated and expressed in the *Second London Confession* is wonderfully true:⁴⁹

CHAP. XI.
Of Justification.

1. Those whom God Effectually calleth, he also freely (*a*) justifieth, not by infusing Righteousness into them, but by (*b*) pardoning their sins, and by accounting, and accepting their Persons as (*c*) Righteous; not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ’s sake alone, not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other (*d*) evangelical obedience to them, as their Righteousness; but by imputing Christ’s active obedience unto the whole Law, and passive obedience in his death, for their whole and sole Righteousness, they (*e*) receiving, and resting on him, and his Righteousness, by Faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of *God*.

a Rom. 3.24. ch. 8.30.

b Rom. 4.5,6,7,8. Eph. 1.7.

⁴⁸ Coxe, *Vindiciae Veritatis*, 108–9.

⁴⁹ Collier, *A Confession of Faith*, 40–43.

c 1 Cor. 1.30,31. Rom. 5.17 18,19.
d Phil. 3.8,9. Eph. 2.8,9,10.
e Joh. 1.12. Rom. 5.17.

2. Faith thus receiving and resting on Christ, and his Righteousness, is the (*f*) alone instrument of Justification: yet it is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving Graces, and is no dead faith, (*g*) but worketh by love.

f Rom. 3.28.
g Gal. 5.6 Jam. 2.17 22.26.

3. Christ by his obedience, and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are justified; and did by the sacrifice of himself, in the blood of his cross, undergoing in their stead, the penalty due unto them: make a proper, real and full satisfaction (*h*) to *Gods* justice in their behalf: yet inasmuch as he was given by the Father for them, and his Obedience and Satisfaction accepted in their stead, and both (*i*) freely, not for anything in them; their Justification is only of Free Grace, that both the exact justice and rich Grace of *God*, might be (*k*) glorified in the Justification of sinners.

h Heb. 10.14. 1 Pet. 1.18,19. Isa. 53.5,6.
i Rom. 8.32. 2 Cor. 5.21.
k Rom. 3.26. Eph. 1 6,7. ch. 2.7.

4. God did from all eternity decree to (*l*) justify [*sic*] all the Elect, and Christ did in the fulness of time die for their sins, and rise (*m*) again for their Justification; Nevertheless they are not justified personally, until the *Holy Spirit*, doth in due time (*n*) actually apply *Christ* unto them.

l Gal. 3.8. 1 Pet. 1.2. 1 Tim. 2.6.
m Rom. 4.25.
n Col. 1.21;22. Tit. 3.4,5,6,7.

5. God doth continue to (*o*) Forgive the sins of those that are justified, and although they can never fall from the state of (*p*) justification; yet they may by their sins fall under *Gods* (*q*) Fatherly displeasure; and in that condition, they have not usually the light of his Countenance restored unto them, until they (*r*) humble themselves, confess their sins, beg pardon, and renew their faith, and repentance.

o Mat. 6.12. 1 John 1.7.9.
p Joh. 10 28.
q Ps. 89.31,32,33.
r Psal. 32:5. & 51. Mat. 26.75.

6. The Justification of Believers under the Old Testament was in all these respects, (s) one and the same with the justification of Believers under the New Testament.

s Gal. 3.9. Rom. 4.22,23,24.

THE SUBSTANCE OF *SOLA FIDE*: JUSTIFICATION DEFENDED FROM SCRIPTURE IN THE WRITINGS OF THE REFORMERS¹

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The doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone (sola fide) stood at the center of theological controversy during the Protestant Reformation. Men such as Luther, Melancthon, Calvin, and Chemnitz were willing to lose their lives over the doctrine of justification, for to misunderstand this doctrine was to misunderstand the very essence of the gospel. The Protestant church appreciates these men and their convictions, but many may wonder what sola fide actually means. This article seeks to express three core components to the doctrine of sola fide: (1) that justification is forensic, not formative; (2) that justification is distinct from sanctification; and (3) that the basis for justification is the imputed righteousness of Christ. These men were convinced that it was upon these articulations that the church stood or fell, and the church today would do well to remember the urgency of this doctrine.

* * * * *

In the summer of 1505, while walking through the German countryside, a young Martin Luther was nearly struck by lightning. He cried out in terror, “Saint Anne, spare me and I will become a monk.” True to his word, he abandoned his pursuit of law and joined the Augustinian monastery in Erfurt.

Compelled by the fear of death to become a monk, he spent the next decade consumed by the fear of divine judgment. He tried fervently to earn God’s favor through good works and acts of penance. But the harder he worked, the more frustrated he became, recognizing he could never be good enough to appease divine

¹ This article is adapted from Nathan Busenitz, *Long Before Luther: Tracing the Heart of the Gospel from Christ to the Reformation* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2017). For a more detailed study of this topic, see Nathan Busenitz, “Does *Sola Fide* Represent a Sixteenth-Century Theological *Novum*?” Examining Alister E. McGrath’s *Iustitia Dei* in Light of More Complete Evidence,” unpublished Ph.D. diss. (Sun Valley, CA: The Master’s Seminary, 2015).

wrath or atone for sin. Out of exasperation, he came to hate the phrase “the righteousness of God” because in it he saw nothing but his own condemnation. Luther understood God’s righteous standard to be perfection (see Matt 5:48). He also recognized he fell woefully short of that mark (see Rom 3:23).

It would be a number of years before God opened Luther’s eyes to the truth of the gospel. Through his study of Psalms, Romans, and Galatians, this fastidious monk came to understand that the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel (see Rom 1:16–17) speaks not only of God’s perfect standard, but also of His righteous provision—in which the righteousness of Christ is reckoned to those who embrace Him in saving faith (see Rom 3:21–4:5). For the first time, Luther realized that forgiveness for sin and a right standing before God depended not on his own self-effort, but solely on the finished work of Christ. In that moment, through the working of the Holy Spirit, he experienced the glorious truth and transforming power of God’s saving grace.

Luther’s testimony illustrates the reality that for him and his fellow Protestants, the Reformation was deeply personal. It was not an esoteric discussion about scattered philosophical musings. Rather, it concerned the means by which sinners can be reconciled to God by grace through faith in Christ. The heart of the gospel was at stake (see Gal 2:5). Having been personally transformed by the truth of God’s saving grace, the Reformers took a bold stand to defend the good news and preach it others.²

Sola Scriptura: The Reformers’ Starting Point

The Reformers insisted their teachings be grounded in the Bible. Their theological conclusions were driven by an unwavering commitment to the authority of Christ and His Word above any other authority. In this regard, the *Geneva Confession* of 1536 is representative: “We affirm that we desire to follow Scripture alone as the rule of faith and religion.”³ Though they appreciated and used the writings of the church fathers, the Reformers viewed the Bible as their final authority. As Luther explained in 1519 to his Catholic opponent Johann Eck, all non-biblical writers must be evaluated “by the authority of the canonical books” of Scripture.⁴

The Reformers’ commitment to the final authority of Scripture compelled them to teach the doctrine of *sola fide*. Convinced it was clearly revealed in Scripture, they boldly proclaimed salvation by grace through faith alone. After providing an extensive survey of biblical passages regarding justification, Martin Chemnitz—known as the second “Martin” of Lutheranism—declared, “The doctrine of justification itself will be plain and clear, if only we are allowed to seek and judge it

² In this article, the study of the Reformers is limited to the leading Reformers in the Lutheran and Reformed branches of the Reformation. Specifically, this study will consider the writings of Martin Luther, Philipp Melancthon, John Calvin, and Martin Chemnitz. Their positions on justification represent the standard Reformation viewpoint for later Lutheran and Reformed churches.

³ “Geneva Confession of 1536,” in *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Arthur C. Cochrane (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 120.

⁴ Martin Luther, *Contra malignum Iohannis Eccii iudicium super aliquot articulis a fratribus quibusdam ei suppositis Martini Lutheri defensio*, in *WA*, 2.626, quoted in and trans. John W. Montgomery, *God’s Inerrant Word* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), 84.

from the divine oracles and not from the philosophical opinions of reason.”⁵ John Calvin similarly addressed the topic by amassing “many clear testimonies of Scripture to confirm” his assertions in his *Institutes*.⁶

Although the Reformers sought secondary affirmation from the writings of the church fathers, it was Scripture that served as the ultimate foundation for their theological claims.⁷ Convinced that the purity of the church was at stake⁸ and that the gospel they preached was overwhelmingly supported by the biblical text, they proclaimed it with bold confidence, regardless of whether it departed from medieval Roman Catholic tradition. Commenting on Galatians 1:6–9, for instance, Luther noted that “everyone must obey, and be subject to” the Scriptures. He stated further, “The pope, Luther, Augustine, [or even] an angel from heaven—these should not be masters, judges or arbiters, but only witnesses, disciples, and confessors of Scripture. Nor should any doctrine be taught or heard in the church except the pure Word of God. Otherwise, let the teachers and the hearers be accursed along with their doctrine.”⁹ The Reformers consistently looked to Scripture to defend their understanding of justification *sola fide*, seeing this doctrine revealed on the pages of God’s Word.

Salvation by Grace through Faith

The teaching that believers are saved by grace through faith apart from works is reiterated in many places throughout the New Testament. Near the beginning of His ministry, Jesus said that whoever would believe in Him would have eternal life (John 3:15; see also 20:31). His parable contrasting a pharisee and a tax collector (in Luke 18:10–14) illustrated that the grace of justification is given not to those who look religious on the outside, but to those who recognize their utter unworthiness and cry out to God for mercy (see also Matt 5:4–6). The truth that salvation is not contingent upon good works is seen vividly at the cross, when Jesus told the thief who believed, “Today you shall be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). The thief on the cross was saved even though he had no opportunity to perform good deeds.

If good works were the basis for justification, the apostle Paul would have had much in which to boast (Phil 3:4–6). Yet, he recognized his self-righteous efforts were worthless; the only righteousness that matters was that which was given to him through faith in Christ. As he explained to the believers in Philippi, “I count all things

⁵ Martin Chemnitz, “Concerning Justification,” 1.3.2, in *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 4 vols., trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1971), 1:477.

⁶ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1559 ed., 3.11.2–3, in John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Library of Christian Classics 20–21, ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 1:726–27. All references to Calvin’s *Institutes* in this article refer to the 1559 edition.

⁷ For example, see Luther, *WA*, 38.206; Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1966), 338.

⁸ Noting the importance of *sola fide*, Luther declared, “If the article of justification be once lost, then is all true doctrine lost.” (Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians*, ed. John Prince Fallows, trans. Erasmus Middleton [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1979], xvi; *WA* 40.47.28). Calvin similarly regarded it as the “main hinge upon which religion turns” (*Institutes* 3.11.1).

⁹ Martin Luther, “Lectures on Galatians, 1535,” in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 26, trans. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 57–58.

to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord ... not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith” (Phil 3:8–10).

In his missionary journeys, Paul boldly preached the good news of divine forgiveness freely extended to sinners by grace through faith in Christ. To an audience at the synagogue in Psidian Antioch, he declared, “Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man [Jesus] is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38–39, NKJV). When false teachers threatened the purity of that gospel message, insisting certain religious works were necessary for salvation (Acts 15:1, 5), Paul refused to give them any credence (Gal 2:5). The issue came to a head at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, where Peter defended Paul by publicly affirming that the hearts of sinners are cleansed “by faith” and that believers are saved solely “through the grace of Jesus Christ” (Acts 15:9–11).

For the rest of Paul’s missionary career, the gospel of grace through faith alone, apart from works, was a repeated theme. The former Pharisee was clear: those seeking to add legalistic works to the gospel were guilty of frustrating grace (Rom 11:6; Gal 2:21) and preaching another gospel (Gal 1:6–9). Conversely, salvation is God’s free gift to those who believe. As Paul explained to the Ephesians, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph 2:8–9). He similarly told the church in Rome, “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. ... To the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness” (Rom 3:28; 4:5). Near the end of his life, Paul reiterated these truths to Titus, noting that God “saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:4–7).

In text after text, the New Testament presents salvation as being given freely to those who embrace the Lord Jesus in saving faith. Their sins are forgiven not on account of their good deeds, but entirely on the basis of Christ’s redemptive work. It was from these texts, and others like them, that the Reformers derived their commitment to preach the good news of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, so that all glory may be given to God alone.

But what, specifically, did the Reformers mean when they spoke of justification through faith alone? The answer requires a deeper look at the three core components of their teaching on this doctrine.¹⁰ These characteristics are: (1) the forensic nature of justification, (2) a distinction between justification and sanctification (or regeneration), and (3) the imputed righteousness of Christ. The remainder of this article will consider the writings of Luther, Melancthon, Calvin, and Chemnitz to

¹⁰ These criteria are identified by Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 3rd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 212–13, as distinguishing the Reformation doctrine of justification *sola fide*.

see how they defined and defended these three aspects of Protestant doctrine. In particular, it will focus on the biblical arguments they used to make the case that sinners are justified by grace through faith alone.

The Forensic Nature of Justification

The Reformers understood justification to be the legal declaration of God in which He, as the supreme Judge, pardons sinners by forgiving their sin and declaring them to be righteous. The assertion that “to be justified” means “to be declared righteous” stood in sharp contrast to the prevailing Roman Catholic teaching of the sixteenth century, which viewed justification as a formative process in which sinners were progressively “made righteous” over their entire lifetimes. In the Roman Catholic view, believers contributed to their justification through acts of penance and good works. The Reformers rejected that notion, arguing instead that justification results in an immediate change in the sinner’s status before God. It is positional, not progressive; forensic, not formative; immediate, not gradual; and entirely the work of God, not something to which the sinner contributes.

The term *forensic* refers to the court of law. God, as Judge, declares sinners to be righteous because Jesus’s righteousness has been credited, or imputed, to their account. Though they deserve condemnation as lawbreakers, God views them as righteous because they are clothed in the perfect righteousness of His Son. They receive this righteousness not because of anything they have done, but because they have been united to Christ through faith in Him.

A forensic understanding of justification is particularly clear in the writings of Philipp Melanchthon and John Calvin. Melanchthon pictured the sinner standing before a divine tribunal: “Certainly no man in God’s court is without sin. ... All men must come before God through the Mediator Jesus Christ, and must first receive forgiveness of sins and acceptance for the sake of the Lord Christ.”¹¹ Although they deserve condemnation for their works, believers are forgiven by the divine Judge and declared to be righteous. This is possible because they are “accounted just by God on account of Christ when [they] believe.”¹²

In his *Institutes*, Calvin also used law court imagery to describe justification. As he explained, “Our discourse is concerned with the justice not of a human court but of a heavenly tribunal, lest we measure by our own small measure the integrity of works needed to satisfy the divine judgment.”¹³ He added that everyone must admit their guilt before “the Heavenly Judge.”¹⁴ Like Melanchthon, Calvin understood that sinners can do nothing to earn God’s favor or appease His wrath. Their righteous standing before the divine Judge is possible only because they are clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ. As Calvin wrote, “Justified by faith is he who, excluded from the righteousness of works, grasps the righteousness of Christ through

¹¹ Melanchthon, *Melanchthon on Christian Doctrine: Loci Communes, 1555*, ed. and trans. Clyde L. Manschreck (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 162.

¹² Melanchthon, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1992), 25. Cf. Melanchthon, *On Christian Doctrine*, 156.

¹³ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.12.1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.12.1.

faith, and clothed in it, appears in God’s sight not as a sinner but as a righteous man.”¹⁵

Melanchthon and Calvin provide two clear examples of a Reformation understanding of the forensic nature of justification.¹⁶ Sinners stand guilty and condemned in the court of heaven. Even their self-righteous works are like filthy rags before a holy God (see Isa 64:6). Yet by grace through faith in Christ, they are pardoned by the heavenly Judge and declared to be righteous. To be justified is to be acquitted of sin and accepted by God. Sinners are treated as if they were righteous, not because of anything they contribute but only because they are clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ.¹⁷

Defending Forensic Justification

As noted above, the Reformers insisted that “to be justified” meant “to be declared righteous” in terms of a person’s status before God. To support their doctrinal position, they put forward a series of biblical arguments. Consider the following five lines of Scriptural evidence.

First, the Reformers looked to the Old Testament, asserting that the New Testament authors based their understanding of justification on what was previously revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures. They noted the forensic nature of the justification language in the Old Testament, where forms of the word *šādaq* (meaning “to be just” or “righteous”), refer to a declaration of righteousness. As Melanchthon explained, “According to the Hebrew usage of the term, *to justify is to pronounce or to consider just.*”¹⁸ Calvin similarly observed that the phrase “to be justified” derives its meaning “from legal usage” in the Old Testament.¹⁹ Chemnitz used the same argument by appealing to the Septuagint, looking specifically at instances where the translators used the Greek word *dikaioō* (“to justify”) to translate *šādaq* in terms of a forensic declaration of righteousness (in passages like Gen 44:16; Deut 25:1; 2 Sam 15:4; 1 Kgs 8:32; Job 13:18; 27:5; 32:2; 40:8; Ps 51:4; Prov 17:15; and Isa 5:23; 43:9, 26).²⁰ Chemnitz noted in the New Testament the “earnest care the apostles bestowed, lest the Hebrew character of the word ‘justify’ which is less well known in other languages, should either disturb or obscure the doctrine.”²¹ He also cited examples from Acts 13:38–39; 15:11; Romans 3:24; 4; 5:10–11, 19; Galatians 2:16; and Ephesians 2:5 to demonstrate that the New Testament writers understood and

¹⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.11.2. See also 3.14.12.

¹⁶ It is acknowledged that not all the Reformers viewed justification in precisely the same way. See McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 234–56, for a discussion about the similarities and differences between Luther and others like Johannes von Staupitz, Andreas Karlstadt, Johann Bugenhagen, Andreas Osiander, Francesco Stancari, Huldrych Zwingli, Johannes Oecolampadius, Heinrich Bullinger, and Martin Bucer. This author is convinced that Luther and Melanchthon were in agreement on their understanding of justification. See, for example, Carl Trueman, “Simul peccator et justus: Martin Luther and Justification,” in *Justification in Perspective*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 91–92. And John Calvin held essentially the same understanding of justification.

¹⁷ See Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.11.2.

¹⁸ Melanchthon, *Commentary on Romans*, 25.

¹⁹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.11.11.

²⁰ Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 1:470–471, 476.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1:474.

intentionally preserved the forensic quality of the Hebrew terms.²² The Reformers were convinced that the apostles' use of the verb "to justify" in the New Testament reflected their understanding of the parallel concept from the Hebrew Old Testament.

Second, the Reformers defended a forensic understanding of justification by noting places in the New Testament where *justification* is directly contrasted with *condemnation*. In Romans 8:33–34, for example, Paul asks rhetorically, "Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns?" Paul's use of the courtroom metaphor here is evident, with an imaginary accuser bringing legal charges against God's elect. Yet the accusations carry no weight because no one can condemn those whom God has justified. The direct contrast between the terms *justifies* and *condemns* indicates that both should be understood as legal declarations.

In his *Institutes*, Calvin used this Pauline antithesis to argue that justification is forensic since the apostle contrasts acquittal with accusation.²³ In his comments on Romans 5:17, Luther wrote, "As the sin of the one [Adam] becomes known through our condemnation without any actual sin of our own, so the grace of the other is made known by this that His [Christ's] righteousness is granted to us without our merit."²⁴ As sinners are condemned (declared guilty) through Adam, believers are justified (declared righteous) through Christ. In this way, justification (acquittal) is accurately defined in light of its opposite (condemnation).

Third, the Reformers supported their understanding that "to justify" means "to declare righteous" and not "to make righteous" by pointing to places in Scripture where God is said to be justified. Clearly, God cannot be "made righteous," since He is already morally perfect. But He can be "declared righteous" by those who recognize and praise Him for His absolute holiness. In 1 Timothy 3:16, Paul applies the language of justification to the Lord Jesus: "By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated [literally, "justified"] in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory." Calvin understood in this text that Jesus was *shown* or *declared* to be righteous, not *made* righteous.²⁵ Luke 7:29 communicates something similar. Luke writes, "And when all the people heard Him, even the tax collectors justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John" (NKJV). As Calvin observed, the tax collectors did not make God righteous, but rather declared His righteousness.²⁶

²² Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 1:475.

²³ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.11.11.

²⁴ Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1954; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1967), 97. Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 1:473, agrees, noting that both in Rom 8:33–34 and "also in Rom. 5 justification and condemnation are repeatedly placed in opposition to each other." Chemnitz also notes Matt. 12:37 as an example of this (*ibid.*, 1:476).

²⁵ John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. T. A. Smail (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 233. Calvin also mentions Matt. 11:19 and Luke 7:35, 39 in this same context.

²⁶ John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke*, 3 vols., ed., David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 2:9–10.

Fourth, the Reformers pointed to 1 Corinthians 4:3–4 for further evidence of the declarative, forensic nature of justification. In that passage, Paul wrote, “But to me it is a very small thing that I may be examined by you, or by any human court; in fact, I do not even examine myself. For I am conscious of nothing against myself, yet I am not by this acquitted [literally, “justified”]; but the one who examines me is the Lord.” Paul can declare himself to be righteous and even seek to be vindicated by a human court, but only the declaration of righteousness from God truly matters. That Paul anticipated being “examined” by the divine Judge and “justified” by Him indicates that he understood justification in forensic terms.²⁷ The apostle did not base his confidence on the opinions of men. He appealed to the only opinion that ultimately matters, God’s verdict.

Fifth, the Reformers believed the whole of Paul’s teaching in Romans necessitates a forensic understanding of justification.²⁸ In that epistle, Paul explained that both Jews and Gentiles stand condemned before the law of God, the standard of which is perfection.²⁹ If sinners are to avoid the punishment they rightly deserve, they must seek His pardon. Such assumes a forensic understanding of justification in which sins are forgiven and the guilty acquitted by the divine Judge. Paul’s argument hinges on the fact that justification is granted by faith apart from works. That reality precludes the possibility that justification is some sort of gradual moral transformation that includes good works.³⁰

Based on these lines of evidence, the Reformers built a biblical case for a forensic understanding of justification, asserting that it must be understood as *declarative* rather than *transformative*.³¹ Their appeal to history was secondary to the arguments they derived from the Word of God. Whether or not their position was in agreement with the church fathers (a point they debated with their Roman Catholic

²⁷ See Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 1:487, 489.

²⁸ Based on his study of Romans, Melancthon, *Commentary on Romans*, 25, concludes, “Thus we know for certain that in these disputations of Paul justification signifies the remission of sins and acceptance to eternal life, as the fourth chapter of Romans testifies in a sufficiently clear manner, where it defines justification as the forgiveness of sins. Therefore when we say we are justified by faith it is the same thing as saying that we are accounted just by God on account of Christ when we believe.” Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, ed., David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. Ross Mackenzie (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959), 5, interpreted Romans through a similar lens, asserting that “the main subject of the whole Epistle...is that we are justified by faith.”

²⁹ Commenting on Romans 2:13, Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, 47, writes, “We do not deny that absolute righteousness is prescribed in the law, but since all men are convicted of offense, we assert the necessity of seeking for another righteousness. Indeed, we can prove from this passage that no one is justified by works. If only those who fulfill the law are justified by the law, it follows that no one is justified, for no one can be found who can boast of having fulfilled the law.” See also Melancthon, *Commentary on Romans*, 142–43.

³⁰ As Melancthon, *Commentary on Romans*, 40, explains, “[T]he Word of God nevertheless testifies that no one satisfies the Law. It accuses men who trust in their own righteousness, and puts forward the Mediator, the Son of God...The voice of the Gospel...commands us to approach God although we are unworthy, but are trusting in the Mediator, the Son of God.”

³¹ Modern commentators agree with the Reformers’ assessment. In the words of Douglas Moo, “It is now generally agreed, then, that *dikaioō* in Paul means not ‘make righteous’ but ‘declare righteous,’ or ‘acquit,’ on the analogy of the verdict pronounced by a judge. To justify signifies, according to forensic usage, to acquit a guilty one and declare him or her righteous” (Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 86). Cf. Everett F. Harrison, “Romans,” 3–171, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 12 vols., ed. Frank E. Gaebelien [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976], 10:42).

opponents), their primary concern was to set their interpretations squarely in line with the teachings of both the Old and New Testaments.

But what about the distinction they made between justification and sanctification, and what about the imputed righteousness of Christ? What passages of Scripture did the Reformers use to define and defend these doctrines?

Justification Distinguished from Sanctification

In keeping with their forensic understanding of justification, the Reformers were careful to distinguish between justification (the external declaration of righteousness in which the believer's standing before God is changed from guilty to righteous) and regeneration or sanctification (the internal work of renewal and cleansing in which the believer's heart is transformed and begins to grow in personal holiness).³² The Reformers taught that justification is accomplished at the moment of salvation, which means the believer is immediately declared righteous and restored to God's favor. Sanctification also begins at the moment of conversion—as a result of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 5:17; Titus 3:5)—but it continues progressively over a believer's entire lifetime through the power of the Holy Spirit. The regenerated heart, having received new life in Christ, is able to respond in obedience to God. Thus, regeneration results in a lifetime of progressive sanctification that flows out of it.³³

While recognizing that all true believers are in the process of being sanctified, the Reformers insisted that sanctification is not the basis of one's justification. Luther emphasized this point in his *Commentary on Galatians*: “Christians are not made righteous in doing righteous things, but being now made righteous by faith in Christ, they do righteous things.”³⁴ The German Reformer identified two distinct kinds of righteousness that result from saving faith in Christ. The first is a positional righteousness which includes the “forgiveness of sins, and imputation of righteousness, because of our faith in Christ.”³⁵ Of this justifying righteousness, Luther stated,

Through faith in Christ, therefore, Christ's righteousness becomes our righteousness and all that he has becomes ours; rather, he himself becomes ours. ... This is an infinite righteousness, and one that swallows up all sin in a moment, for it is impossible that sin should exist in Christ. On the contrary, he

³² These definitions of “justification” and “sanctification” are from McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 213.

³³ Since justification is declarative and immediate, rather than transformative and gradual, it must be differentiated from regeneration and progressive sanctification. Whereas justification consists of divine pardon and a legal declaration of righteousness, sanctification involves the Spirit's continuing work of transforming the regenerated sinner into the image of Christ (2 Cor 3:18). Progressive sanctification begins at the moment of regeneration—which occurs at the same time as justification—when the sinner is born again and his heart is transformed by the Holy Spirit (cf. John 3:3–8; Titus 3:5).

³⁴ Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, 148; *WA* 40.402.24. See also Martin Luther, “Concerning Christian Liberty,” 245–293, in *Luther's Primary Works*, eds. Henry Wace and C. A. Buchheim (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1896), 275–277, 288.

³⁵ Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, 151–52. On Gal. 3:10.

who trusts in Christ exists in Christ; he is one with Christ, having the same righteousness as he.³⁶

Luther referred to this righteousness as an “alien righteousness” because it comes from a source outside of the believer, namely from Christ Himself.³⁷

Luther also recognized a second kind of righteousness, which is the practical righteousness of personal holiness. This righteousness flows from hearts that have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and enables believers to exhibit the fruit of obedience and good works.³⁸ Thus, he explained, “The second kind of righteousness is our proper righteousness, not because we alone work it, but because we work with that first and alien righteousness. This is the manner of life spent profitably in good works. ... This righteousness is the product of the righteousness of the first type, actually its fruit and consequence.”³⁹ In this way, Luther distinguished between justification (the positional righteousness of Christ received by faith in Him) and sanctification (the practical righteousness made possible by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit).

Yet, distinguishing between these two kinds of righteousness does not imply that believers can possess one without the other. The two are inseparably linked. Luther insisted that those covered with Christ’s justifying righteousness will subsequently exhibit personal holiness by living in obedience to His commands. He wrote, “Now, when we are appareled with Christ as with the robe of righteousness and our salvation, then we must put on Christ also by example and imitation.”⁴⁰

Melanchthon similarly distinguished between the righteousness of faith (in justification) and the fruit of good works (in sanctification). Commenting on Romans 3:24, he explained that to be “justified means that we obtain forgiveness of sins, and are received by God into grace.” But he was quick to mention “the renewal that follows, which God effects in us, [which] he calls sanctification, and these two words [*justification* and *sanctification*] are clear and distinct.”⁴¹ In response to his opponents who pointed to passages like 1 Corinthians 13:2 and 1 John 3:14 to assert that justification was partially based on love and obedience, Melanchthon answered, “These and similar passages say that love and a new obedience must be in us; that is true. However, love and new obedience do not merit forgiveness or cause a person to be pleasing to God. A person has forgiveness and is pleasing to God for the sake of the Mediator alone, whom one appropriates only by faith, and Christ gives his Holy Spirit who is the flame of true love and joy in God. This single true answer explains

³⁶ Martin Luther, “Two Kinds of Righteousness,” in *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 156–58. Cited from William Webster, *The Gospel of the Reformation* (Battle Ground, WA: Christian Resources, 1997), 72–73.

³⁷ For a discussion of Luther’s emphasis on an “alien righteousness” (*iustitia aliena*) see Paul ChulHong Kang, *Justification: The Imputation of Christ’s Righteousness from Reformation Theology to the American Great Awakening and the Korean Revivals* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 65.

³⁸ Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, 151–52.

³⁹ Luther, “Two Kinds of Righteousness,” 157–58.

⁴⁰ Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, 222.

⁴¹ Melanchthon, *On Christian Doctrine*, 163. Also see, Melanchthon, *Commentary on Romans*,

many passages.”⁴² In this way, Melancthon was careful to explain that God’s gracious gift of justification, which is received by faith, is founded entirely on the righteousness of Christ, and not the obedience of believers.

Like Luther and Melancthon, Calvin distinguished between justification and sanctification, explaining “that the benefits of Christ—sanctification and righteousness [justification]—are different,”⁴³ that “they are things distinct,”⁴⁴ and that “Scripture, even though it joins them, still lists them separately in order that God’s manifold grace may better appear to us.”⁴⁵ Yet Calvin also emphasized that the two cannot be separated.⁴⁶ In his *Institutes*, after citing 1 Corinthians 1:30—“Christ Jesus ... became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption”—Calvin highlighted both the distinctiveness and inseparability of justification and sanctification. He wrote, “Therefore Christ justifies no one whom he does not at the same time sanctify. ... How true it is that we are justified not without works yet not through works, since in our sharing in Christ, which justifies us, sanctification is just as much included as righteousness.”⁴⁷ In other words, the righteousness of justification is given freely on account of faith in Christ. But those who receive Christ also receive His Holy Spirit, through whom they are regenerated and sanctified.⁴⁸ For Calvin, believers’ union with Christ means they are partakers of His righteousness—both in justification, through the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, and in sanctification, through the impartation of righteousness by the Holy Spirit, who conforms believers to the image of Christ.⁴⁹

The writings of the Reformers demonstrate a clear distinction between the positional righteousness of justification and the personal holiness of sanctification. While their Roman Catholic opponents viewed regeneration and sanctification as part of justification, thereby making good works a contributor to their righteous standing before God, the Reformers insisted that the two must not be conflated or confused.

Defending the Distinction

The Reformers pointed to a number of biblical texts to maintain their distinction between justification and sanctification, such as 1 Corinthians 1:30; 6:11; and

⁴² Melancthon, *On Christian Doctrine*, 171. See also 175–186; Philip Melancthon, “Love and Hope,” in *The Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1969), 19.112.

⁴³ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.11.14.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.11.11.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.11.6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.16.1. Regarding this passage, Alistair E. McGrath, *Studies in Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 395, explains, “In other words, although justification and sanctification may be distinguished, they cannot be separated.”

⁴⁸ See Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.14.9: “Christ lives in us in two ways. The one life consists in governing us by his Spirit, and directing all our actions; the other, in making us partakers of his righteousness; so that, while we can do nothing of ourselves, we are accepted in the sight of God. The first relates to regeneration, the second to justification by free grace.”

⁴⁹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1979), 74.

Revelation 22:11.⁵⁰ For them, a key New Testament passage demonstrating the distinction is Romans 6:15–23. Having established that justification is by grace through faith apart from works in chapters 3–5, Paul transitioned his focus in chapter 6 to discuss the ethical implications of the gospel. Calvin commented on that transition with these words, “Paul maintains here that we cannot receive righteousness in Christ [justification] without at the same time laying hold on sanctification. ... It follows, therefore, that no one can put on the righteousness of Christ without regeneration. Paul uses this as the basis of exhortation to purity and holiness of life.”⁵¹ In focusing on the doctrine of sanctification in Romans 6, Paul insisted that grace does not give believers a license to sin (vv. 1–2). Rather, those who belong to Christ now walk in newness of life (v. 4), being dead to sin (vv. 6, 11) and freed from its bondage (v. 16). Consequently, their lives are marked by fruits of righteousness and obedience to the Lord (vv. 17–18). As Paul declared, “But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome eternal life” (v. 22; see also v. 19).

Melanchthon, Calvin, and Chemnitz affirmed that Paul’s description of sanctification in verses 19 and 22 distinguishes it from the forensic act of justification that he described in the previous chapters of the epistle.⁵² They understood the apostle to be teaching that those who have been justified and are positionally righteous on account of Christ have also been regenerated by the power of the Spirit, which enables them to demonstrate practical righteousness through acts of virtue and obedience. Though justification and sanctification are distinct, they are also inseparable in the lives of the redeemed.

At the same time, because sanctification is a life-long process, believers still struggle in the fight against sin. The Reformers looked to Romans 7 to illustrate that reality in a vivid way. Reflecting on Paul’s teaching in verses 15–23, Melanchthon explained, “The saints always need the forgiveness of sins. Our fulfillment of the law, our love, and our works are not good enough for us to be righteous because of them, that is, accepted [by God]; neither are they worthy of eternal life. But we receive remission of sins by faith because of Christ, the mediator, and life eternal by imputation of righteousness.”⁵³ Paul’s testimony in Romans 7 exemplifies the reality that believers are simultaneously righteous yet still sinners.⁵⁴ That seeming paradox is possible because justification and sanctification represent two distinct realities. Though believers have been justified and forgiven in Christ (see Rom 8:1) so that they are *positionally* righteous before God, in *practice* they still sin because the sanctification process is not complete this side of heaven (see Rom 7:15–23).

⁵⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.11.6. See I. John Hesslink, “Pneumatology,” in *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 307, who writes, “A key verse in this connection [between justification and sanctification] is 1 Corinthians 1:30, a text Calvin returns to again and again.” See also Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. John W. Fraser (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959), 46, where Calvin states that “it would be wrong, to confuse what Paul expressly separates.” See also, Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 1:472.

⁵¹ Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, 7–8.

⁵² See Melanchthon, *Commentary on Romans*, 151; Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, 136; Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 1:472.

⁵³ Melanchthon, *Commentary on Romans*, 160.

⁵⁴ See Luther, “Lectures on Romans,” *WA*, 56.269–273.

The Imputed Righteousness of Christ

If sinners stand guilty and condemned before the law of God, and if their works can make no contribution to their justification, the question naturally arises: How can they be pardoned and declared righteous by the holy Judge of heaven? To state the question another way: if God is perfectly just (and therefore cannot arbitrarily ignore sin), and if sinners fall woefully short of God's perfect standard (which everyone does; Rom 3:23), how then can those who deserve to be punished be acquitted? The Reformers answered this by pointing to the substitutionary atonement and imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. In other words, the sins of believers are imputed (or credited) to Christ, who paid the penalty for them on the cross.⁵⁵ Conversely, the righteousness of Christ is imputed to believers who are reckoned righteous by God on account of Christ. Luther expressed how this marvelous exchange took place: "So making a happy change with us, he took upon Him our sinful person and gave unto us His innocent and victorious person; wherewith we being now clothed, are freed from the curse of the law. ... By faith alone therefore we are made righteousness, for faith lays hold of this innocence and victory of Christ."⁵⁶ Elsewhere, he contrasted the cursed inheritance received from Adam with the gracious gift received through faith in Christ, stating, "As Adam became a cause of death to his descendants, though they did not eat of the forbidden tree, so Christ has become a Dispenser of righteousness to those who are of Him, though they have not earned any righteousness; for through the Cross He has secured righteousness for all men."⁵⁷ Because of Adam's sin, all of Adam's descendants stand condemned before God and are worthy of eternal death (see Rom 5:12–21). But in Christ, believers receive both the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of His righteousness.⁵⁸ Rather than being punished, they are promised the free gift of eternal life.

Melanchthon similarly emphasized both the negative and positive sides of justification; namely, that sins are forgiven and righteousness is imputed. Referring to Romans 5, he wrote, "If we believe on the Son of God, we have forgiveness of sins; and Christ's righteousness is imputed to us, so that we are justified and are pleasing to God for the sake of Christ. ... And we have all this only on account of the Lord Christ, by grace, without merit, through faith alone."⁵⁹ Consequently, the righteousness that covers believers is not their own inherent righteousness. Rather, they are covered by the righteousness of Christ. In Melanchthon's words,

We are clothed with a strange righteousness [namely, a righteousness outside of ourselves]. Although our nature itself is still not uniform with God, nevertheless,

⁵⁵ As Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, 166–67, explained, "And this is a singular consolation for all Christians, so to clothe Christ with our sins, and to wrap Him in my sins, thy sins, and the sins of the whole world, and so to behold Him bearing all our iniquities."

⁵⁶ Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, 172. I have updated the English for clarity.

⁵⁷ Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 96–97.

⁵⁸ See *ibid.*, xix. Commenting on Gal. 3:27, Luther articulates the benefits of being clothed in the imputed righteousness of Christ: "To be appareled with Christ according to the gospel, is not to be appareled with the law, nor with works, but with an incomparable gift; that is to say, with remission of sins, righteousness, peace, consolation, joy of spirit, salvation, life, and Christ Himself" (Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, 222).

⁵⁹ Melanchthon, *On Christian Doctrine*, 156. See also 169.

as the Mediator Christ in his complete obedience is uniform with God and covers our sins with his righteousness, so we are justified, have forgiveness of sins, and are pleasing to God, for Christ's sake, whose righteousness is accepted on our behalf.⁶⁰

Calvin echoed this, declaring that “we are justified before God solely by the intercession of Christ's righteousness. This is equivalent to saying that man is not righteous in himself but because the righteousness of Christ is communicated to him by imputation.”⁶¹ Because Christ's righteousness is the sole basis for justification, believers enjoy the forgiveness of all sins—past, present, and future. Calvin taught that both the initial pardon and ultimate glorification of every believer is guaranteed by the righteousness of Christ. He wrote, “Furnished with this righteousness [of Christ], we obtain continual forgiveness of sins in faith. Covered with this purity, the sordidness and uncleanness of our imperfections are not ascribed to us but are hidden as if buried that they may not come into God's judgment.”⁶² Because believers are covered by the perfect righteousness of Christ, they are spared from God's wrath against sin.

Defending Imputed Righteousness

As with the other aspects of their understanding of justification, the Reformers appealed to Scripture as their primary defense for the doctrine of Christ's imputed righteousness. To anyone who might accuse them of inventing this doctrine, Chemnitz's reply still applies: “We do not ourselves devise this teaching, that Christ the Mediator has fulfilled the law for us by the fullest satisfaction of the punishments and by the most perfect obedience and that this righteousness of the Mediator is imputed to the believers, that by it they may be justified before God to life eternal. But this is the specific and perpetual doctrine of the Gospel.”⁶³ The Reformers used a host of biblical passages to illustrate and defend this doctrinal tenet, including Acts 13:38–39; Romans 3:21–4:25; 5:18–19; 10:4; and 1 Corinthians 1:30.⁶⁴ Two primary texts to which the Reformers appealed were 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Philippians 3:7–9.

⁶⁰ Melancthon, *On Christian Doctrine*, 162. It might be noted that Melancthon linked this righteousness with Christ's active obedience here on earth. See 167–68.

⁶¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.11.23.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 3.14.12. For similar statements from Chemnitz, see *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 1:501.

⁶³ Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 1:502.

⁶⁴ For Acts 13:38–39, see Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.11.3. Regarding Rom. 3:21–4:5, see Melancthon, *On Christian Doctrine: Loci Communes, 1555*, 156; Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.11.4; Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, “Concerning Justification,” 4.17–18. For Rom. 5:18–19, see Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 97; Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.11.23; Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, “Concerning Justification,” 1.7.6. Concerning Rom. 10:4, see Melancthon, *Commentary on Romans*, 195; Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, 221–22. For 1 Cor. 1:30, see Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, 46; Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, “Concerning Justification,” 1.3.15.

2 Corinthians 5:21

If the doctrine of imputation is implicit in other passages, the Reformers found it taught explicitly in 2 Corinthians 5:21, where Paul wrote, “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” The Reformers recognized that Jesus did not actually become a sinner on the cross; yet God punished Him as if He were a sinner so that, in Christ, believers might be treated as if they were righteous. The sins of believers were imputed to Christ at the cross so that, by bearing the punishment for those sins, His righteousness might be imputed to those who believe in Him. Chemnitz summarized that principle by simply asking, “How was Christ made sin? Certainly by imputation. And thus we are made the righteousness of God in Him.”⁶⁵ Calvin articulated that same perspective in his commentary on 2 Corinthians:

How can we become righteous before God? In the same way as Christ became a sinner. For He took, as it were, our person, that He might be the offender in our name and thus might be reckoned a sinner, not because of His own offences but because of those of others, since He Himself was pure and free from every fault and bore the penalty that was our due and not His own. Now in the same way we are righteous in Him, not because we have satisfied God's judgment by our own works, but because we are judged in relation to Christ's righteousness which we have put on by faith, that it may become our own.⁶⁶

The parallel made by Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:21 caused Calvin to regard that verse as the clearest passage on imputation in Scripture. As he stated in his *Institutes*, “The best passage of all on this matter is the one in which he [Paul] teaches that the sum of the gospel embassy is to reconcile us to God, since God is willing to receive us into grace through Christ, not counting our sins against us [2 Cor 5:18–21].”⁶⁷

Philippians 3:7–9

If 2 Corinthians 5:21 was one of the Reformers' favorite texts for defending the doctrine of imputation, Philippians 3:7–9 provided a vivid illustration of that truth in the life of the apostle Paul. Having once been a Pharisee in pursuit of works-righteousness, the apostle declared that as a believer:

I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.

⁶⁵ Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 1:502.

⁶⁶ John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, trans. T. A. Small (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 81–82.

⁶⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.11.4.

Here Paul explained that his righteous standing before God was not based on law-keeping or his own merits, but rather on a righteousness given by God through faith in Christ.⁶⁸ The Reformers were quick to point out the implications of Paul's testimony. Calvin exclaimed that this is "a remarkable passage, if anyone desires to have a good description of the righteousness of faith, and to understand its true nature. ... For whereas the law employs works, faith presents man naked before God, that he may be clothed with the righteousness of Christ."⁶⁹ Calvin continued to explain that justifying righteousness is received solely as a gift of God's grace through faith.

These and other texts⁷⁰ were used to defend the imputed righteousness of Christ as the sole grounds for justification. Armed with a doctrinal conviction drawn from Scripture, the Reformers boldly denounced any teaching that made the believer's justification partly dependent on his or her own good works. To base justification on personal merit, they insisted, would subvert the gospel by succumbing to legalism.

Substantiating *Sola Fide*

The doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone (*sola fide*) stood at the center of theological controversy during the Protestant Reformation. For Luther and his fellow Reformers, it represented the article on which the church stands or falls. To err on this point was to err on the essence of the gospel, which is why the Reformers approached the topic with such thoroughness and zeal.

A survey of the leading Reformers (Luther, Melancthon, Calvin, and Chemnitz) demonstrates that they understood *sola fide* to include three core doctrinal components—namely, (1) that justification is forensic, not formative; (2) that justification is distinct from sanctification; and (3) that the basis for justification is the imputed righteousness of Christ. Significantly, the Reformers looked to the biblical text to defend these doctrinal convictions. In each instance, they appealed to Scripture as the authoritative basis for what they believed. The Reformers' understanding of the gospel was primarily informed by and ultimately established on the teaching of God's Word. Accordingly, they were willing to depart from medieval Roman Catholic tradition, if and when biblical truth compelled them to do so. In that way, the material principle of the Reformation (*sola fide*) flowed naturally from the formal principle (*sola Scriptura*). Because they recognized the final authority of Scripture, they boldly proclaimed the gospel articulated on its pages.

⁶⁸ In addition to pointing to Phil. 3:7–9, Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.11.11, also highlights Rom. 7:24, where Paul states that he did not rely on his own righteousness.

⁶⁹ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries on The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959), 275. See also Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 1:486. Chemnitz continues by quoting Phil 3:9–10.

⁷⁰ To these passages teaching the imputation of Christ's righteousness, Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, 1:502–504, adds Isa. 53:5–6, 11; Jer. 23:6; Matt. 20:28; Rom. 5:9; 8:3–4, 32; Gal. 3:1, 27; 4:4–5; 1 Tim. 2:6.

BENJAMIN KEACH'S DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

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Many Christians would recognize the name of the pastor and author Richard Baxter. Likely fewer would recognize the name of the seventeenth-century Baptist pastor Benjamin Keach. This article follows the thinking and articulation of Keach as he defends the orthodox, Reformed position of the doctrine of justification and imputed righteousness against the errant views of Richard Baxter. This article is a window into the necessity to defend this doctrine that rests at the center of the Christian faith.

* * * * *

Introduction

Benjamin Keach (1640–1704), an early Particular Baptist pastor, set out to disprove Richard Baxter's Neonomian doctrine of justification and to affirm the biblical and orthodox doctrine of justification. Keach never wrote merely to contribute to academic discourse in a way detached from the local church and the advancement of Christ's kingdom. Instead, he always wrote and preached with a pastor's heart, aiming to protect God's people from error and to train them in practical holiness for the glory of God. Keach aimed to refute not only Baxter's false doctrine of justification, but also all aberrant theologies of justification by works. He believed the Protestant doctrine of justification on the ground of Christ's righteousness alone, received by faith alone, is the very heart and marrow of the gospel. He was convinced that this doctrine is the teaching of Scripture, and that it has far-reaching implications for the believer's personal progress in godliness.

Keach's doctrine of justification was a central component of his theological matrix. The covenant of grace, justification, conversion, baptism, and church membership were all interconnected in Keach's theology. Keach never isolated the doctrine of justification from other doctrines of Scripture, but always discussed it within the broader framework of soteriology, ecclesiology, covenant theology, anthropology, Christology, eschatology, and theology proper. The thesis of this

article is that Benjamin Keach affirmed the orthodox Reformed doctrine of justification on the ground of Christ's imputed righteousness received by faith alone, over and against Richard Baxter's doctrine of justification. To demonstrate this thesis, four of Keach's works will be examined, including *The Marrow of True Justification*, *The Everlasting Covenant*, *A Golden Mine Opened*, and *The Display of Glorious Grace*.

The Marrow of True Justification (1692)

Keach's initial response to the Neonomian controversy came in the form of two sermons on Romans 4:5 which he first preached to his congregation at Horsely-down¹ because some "Christian Friends" had asked him to.² Later, he enlarged and published these sermons in the form of a forty-page booklet, which he entitled *The Marrow of True Justification*.

In the Epistle Dedicatory of the booklet, Keach provided his two main reasons for publishing these sermons. First, he aimed to assert and expound the biblical doctrine of justification for the edification of the saints in light of recent errors. This was the most significant objective from Keach's perspective. Second, he intended to demonstrate to Christians in various denominations that Baptists were thoroughly orthodox in their theology. In a reference to the writings of Tobias Crisp, Keach wrote, "As for my part, if Dr. Crisp be not mis-represented by his Opposers, I am not of his Opinion in several respects; but I had rather err on their side, who strive to exalt wholly the Free Grace of God, than on theirs, who seek to darken it and magnify the Power of the Creature."³ Tobias Crisp was reputed to be an Antinomian because he taught that sinners in Christ are truly righteous in their own persons before God. The notion that believers are personally and perfectly righteous before God based on Christ's imputed righteousness led to the belief that God sees no sin in believers at all.⁴ This teaching produced licentious living among some of Crisp's followers, especially in Cromwell's army.⁵ Keach consistently and self-consciously rejected Antinomianism, and he denied that justification by grace alone through faith alone promotes Antinomianism.

¹ The Horsely-down congregation was later pastored by noteworthy figures such as John Gill, John Rippon, and Charles Spurgeon. See Robert W. Oliver, *History of the English Calvinistic Baptists* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2006), 337.

² Benjamin Keach, *The Marrow of True Justification or, Justification without Works. Containing the Substance of Two Sermons lately preached on Rom. 4:5. And by the Importunity of some gracious Christians, now published with some additions* (London: n.p., 1692), 1. Some spelling changes have been made in the quotations from Keach's writings in order to conform to modern English. However, throughout this paper, I have not changed any of the grammar, punctuation, or capitalization conventions of the time.

³ *Ibid.*, A2–A3. Keach wrote, "if Dr. Crisp be not mis-represented." That statement shows that in 1692, Keach probably had not yet read Tobias Crisp's work, though he had read the Neonomian critiques of it. Thus, *The Marrow of True Justification* was a response to Baxterianism, not a defense of Tobias Crisp.

⁴ J. I. Packer, *The Redemption and Restoration of Man in the Thought of Richard Baxter* (Vancouver: Regent College, 2003), 248–49; Peter Golding, *Covenant Theology: The Key of Theology in Reformed Thought and Tradition* (Fearn: Mentor, 2004), 134–35.

⁵ Michael Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (New York: Oxford, 1978; repr., 2002), 293–94 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

Both of Keach's sermons on Romans 4:5 were grounded in the Word of God. At the outset of the sermon, Keach cited his text and exegeted it. Romans 4:5 says, "And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness." Keach derived two doctrinal statements from the passage. The first is "that all Works done by the Creature, are quite excluded in the point of Justification of a Sinner in the sight of God."⁶ The second is "that Justification is wholly of the free Grace of God, through the Imputation of the perfect Righteousness of Jesus Christ by Faith."⁷

After dealing with the text itself, Keach summarized and refuted a number of erroneous interpretations. The Roman Catholic theologian, Robert Bellarmine (1542–1641), argued that men are justified by perfectly keeping the law to merit eternal life, and that men may commit venial sins and yet still perfectly keep the law.⁸ The Socinians denied the divinity of Christ, rejecting both His penal satisfaction and the legal justification of sinners. On the Socinian scheme, God simply forgives sinners according to His mere mercy. But if that is the case, Keach argued, then God is cruel to have sent His beloved Son to suffer and die unnecessarily.⁹ Some Arminians, such as William Allen, taught that justification excludes legal works, but that it includes gospel works—such as faith, love, mercy, and obedience to Christ. Keach insisted that while love and good works are inseparable from faith, only faith justifies.¹⁰ Some of Keach's contemporaries held to the possibility of sinless perfection, claiming that God only justifies those who are truly and in themselves perfectly holy, but Keach argued that perfect holiness is impossible prior to glorification.¹¹ Keach dealt with all of these errors in a short space, and then he turned to address his primary concern, which was Neonomianism and the particular errors of Richard Baxter and Daniel Williams at greater length.

Keach considered Baxter's Neonomianism to be a most insidious perversion of the doctrine of justification. He understood the Neonomians to teach:

That Faith and Obedience are Conditions of the Gospel, or of the Covenant of Grace, as perfect obedience was of the Covenant of Works; and that Christ has purchased by his death, that this new Covenant should be made with us, *viz.* That if we would believe and obey the Gospel, we should be pardoned and saved &c. Therefore that for which we are Justified and saved, is our Faith and Obedience; and so far as I can gather, the Faith they speak of does not respect the taking hold of Christ's Righteousness, &c. but the Belief of the acceptance of our Person's Holiness, and sincere Obedience to the Gospel, through Christ, to our Justification; Christ having taken away, by His Death, the rigor of the law of the First Covenant, which required perfect Righteousness in point of Justification, and has made the terms of our Justification easier, *viz.* instead of perfect

⁶ Keach, *Marrow of True Justification*, 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9–10.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

Obedience, God will now accept of imperfect Obedience, if sincere, and acquit us from Condemnation, and receive us to Eternal Life.¹²

Keach believed that Neonomianism was a direct contradiction to the very heart of the gospel because it taught that men are justified and receive eternal life as a result of their obedience to the easy terms of the gospel: faith and evangelical obedience. While Keach and other orthodox theologians taught that obedience issues from justification, the Neonomians claimed that justification issues from personal obedience. They taught that men were only justified to the degree that they were sanctified and that justification is only complete on judgment day. From Keach's perspective, the Neonomians turned God's method of redemption upside down because they made men's righteousness depend on themselves, rather than upon the perfect righteousness of Christ.

Keach summarized Baxter's own words from his preface to Dr. Tully.¹³ According to Keach, Baxter taught that adults enter into a "baptismal covenant" by faith in the Triune God, and that upon their initial entrance into the covenant, members have a right to all the covenant blessings, including justification. However, subsequent to their entry into the baptismal covenant, members only retain the right to justification and other blessings through their obedience. That obedience includes resisting temptation, overcoming sin, and obeying God's laws.¹⁴ Keach registered strong disagreement with Baxter's understanding of the ground of justification. Baxter taught that a believer is not righteous because he grasps Christ's righteousness by faith alone; rather, the believer's own faithful obedience is his righteousness.¹⁵ Keach also disagreed with Baxter's understanding of the object of saving faith. Baxter insisted that the object of Christian faith is the Triune God, not Christ primarily. While Keach agreed that believers trust each person of the Trinity, he also insisted that Christ is the immediate object of faith because Scripture directs the believer's eyes to Christ for redemption.

Keach then critiqued some of the statements of Daniel Williams in his work, *The Vanity of Childhood and Youth*.¹⁶ Daniel Williams was one of Richard Baxter's disciples, and Keach was convinced that the two were "of the same Faith and Judgment."¹⁷ Williams said that the most "damning sin" and the "heart of all sin" among God's covenant people is the neglect of obedience to the terms of the baptismal covenant.¹⁸ But Keach insisted that when Christians sin, the root sin is a

¹² Keach, *Marrow of True Justification*, 11–12.

¹³ Richard Baxter, *An Answer to Dr. Tullies Angry Letter* (London: n.p., 1675). According to Allison, Baxter's Aphorisms of Justification created a "storm of protest." He wrote, "Among those who objected to the Aphorisms were Anthony Burgess, John Wallis, Christopher Cartwright, George Lawson, John Crandon, John Warner (not the Bishop of Gloucester), Thomas Tully, John Tombes, and William Eyre." C. Fitzimons Allison, *The Rise of Moralism: The Proclamation of the Gospel from Hooker to Baxter* (1966; repr., Vancouver: Regent, 2003), 154.

¹⁴ Keach, *Marrow of True Justification*, 12–13.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁶ Daniel Williams, *The vanity of childhood & youth wherein the depraved nature of young people is represented and means for their reformation proposed* (London: n.p., 1691).

¹⁷ Keach, *Marrow of True Justification*, 14.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

lack of trust in Christ alone for righteousness, not a neglect of covenant stipulations.¹⁹ Keach believed that the most basic sin is a lack of Christ-centered faith, while Williams thought it was a lack of personal obedience.

Keach identified one of the main problems in Neonomianism as relating directly to its paedobaptist concept of a baptismal covenant. The Neonomians misunderstood the meaning of the ordinance of baptism, and therefore they misunderstood the nature of Christian obedience within the covenant. For the Baxterians, baptism is primarily prospective, pointing to future and final obedience to the terms of the covenant of grace, while Keach understood that baptism is primarily “an outward sign of that inward Grace we have (or ought to have when baptized).”²⁰ Thus, for the Neonomians, baptism looks forward to the final covenant blessing of eternal life, while for Keach, baptism primarily looks backwards and signifies the actual possession of eternal life and justification.

Keach recognized a close connection between the Neonomian doctrines of justification by works and their wider paedobaptist ecclesiology. Baxter and Williams both believed that infants should be baptized as members of the covenant of grace. They both also taught that in order for infants to remain in the covenant, infants must grow up to believe and obey the commandments of Christ to the end. But, inevitably, some covenant children will fail to remain faithful to their baptism and will turn away from Christ, thereby committing the most “damning sin.” In contrast to the Neonomian doctrine of the baptismal covenant, Keach believed that only the elect are ever joined to Christ in the covenant of grace and that Christ keeps all of His people to the end. Since believers only are actually joined to Christ in the covenant of grace, only believers should be baptized.²¹

Keach also described how the Neonomians distorted the doctrine of the atonement. They denied that Christ is a surety and substitute, and insisted that He is merely a mediator. They claimed that Jesus did not keep the law for the elect as a substitute, thereby standing in their place and meriting life in their stead; rather, Christ kept the first rigorous law of perfect obedience to purchase from the Lawgiver a new and easier law of grace for all men so that they might obtain life for themselves.²² For the Baxterians, Christ's work is not itself attributed to His people; rather, Christ's work purchases benefits for them. Keach briefly responded to this error by arguing that it undermines the necessity of the incarnation. If Christ is not a substitute, then He does not need to identify with His people by taking on a human nature. If Christ is not a substitute, then all imputation is impossible, since the doctrine of imputation rests on the doctrine of substitution. The Baxterians were consistent in their denial of substitution because they also denied that Christ bore the

¹⁹ Keach did not deny the necessity of the believer's holy obedience to the law of God. Rather, he denied that such holiness contributes anything to the believer's justification before God. He wrote, “Sirs, we deny not but that Obedience and Personal Holiness is [*sic*] necessary to Salvation, or in order to a meetness for an actual Possession of Heaven: But we must exclude all inherent Holiness or Works of Obedience done by us, in point of Justification.” *Ibid.*

²⁰ Keach, *Marrow of True Justification*, 14.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Regarding the Neonomian scheme, Louis Berkhof wrote, “Thus, the covenant of grace was changed into a covenant of works. This is simply Arminianism under a new name.” Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (1937; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1997), 192.

sins of the elect and that He merited life for them. Keach further argued that their denial of substitution makes justification and satisfaction of divine justice impossible because Christ did not actually keep the law in the place of the elect. In Keach's view, unless the original law is kept in its entirety, there can be no justification at all. Keach then articulated the orthodox view, "We affirm that believing Sinners are made Partakers of Christ's Righteousness, and the benefits of it; and that by Faith alone, as that by which we wholly fly to him for Righteousness, and trusting in the promise of Life for his Sake and Merits."²³ He concluded his first sermon by issuing a pastoral warning to his congregation, urging them to be careful about which preachers and theologians they read and hear. He also implored them to hold fast to the true doctrine of justification.²⁴

In the second sermon, Keach showed that Scripture excludes all works from the sinner's justification before God, arguing from Romans 3:27; 4:2, 6; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8–9; Philippians 3:8–9; and Titus 3:5. He anticipated the objection that Scripture does not exclude all works from justification, but that it only excludes perfect law-works from justification but never imperfect gospel-works. His initial response to that objection came from the perspective of historical theology. He argued that the Protestant distinction between law and gospel does not claim that the law requires perfect works for justification, while the gospel requires only imperfect works for justification. Rather, it asserts that while the law requires perfect works for justification, the gospel requires faith and not works for justification.²⁵ Keach then demonstrated that orthodox Protestant theologians drew this doctrine straight from Scripture, which teaches that "the law is not of faith" (Gal 3:12), and "to the one who does not work, but trusts him who justifies the ungodly; his faith is counted as righteousness" (Rom 4:5). Keach wrote, "If therefore we seek Justification by any manner of doing or Works, though upon never so easy and mild a Condition of Obedience, we do thereby bring our selves under the Terms of the Law."²⁶ If a person seeks justification by any works, then he is obligated to keep the whole law (Gal 5:3) because nothing short of perfect obedience can count for justification (Gal 3:10). That is why the sinner needs the perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to him through faith alone.

Keach then connected the Baxterian doctrine of justification by evangelical obedience with the legalistic Judaism of the days of Christ and the apostles. He said, "Brethren, this new Doctrine is but a piece of Old Judaism."²⁷ The Neonomians were not saying anything new about justification, but were simply rehearsing the old, legalistic heresy against which Christ and the apostles fought from the beginning, which is why Keach was so opposed to their views.

While Keach excluded all of the believer's works from justification, he did not exclude them from sanctification or from the gospel in all its latitude. In an outline of the Galatian heresy, Keach wrote, "Nor was the Observation of the Moral Law a damning Sin: No, no, the Gospel obliges to it; but it was their seeking Justification

²³ Keach, *Marrow of True Justification*, 17.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 15–17.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

thereby, and not by Faith only, or in that respect mixing Works with Faith.”²⁸ Keach understood that the gospel proclaims the believer's obligation to keep the moral law, but it does not require law-keeping for justification.

One of Keach's most important arguments against Baxterianism was based on God's character. He wrote, “[God] requires a perfect or sinless righteousness in point of Justification.”²⁹ According to Keach, the law of God is a true reflection of God's own perfectly holy character. The law is perfect and holy because God's character is perfect and holy. God's justice could never be satisfied with an imperfect obedience because God Himself is perfect. Therefore, sinners cannot be justified by an imperfect obedience because that would be unjust. While the Baxterians claimed that God's original law was created by a divine decree, which could justly have been otherwise from the very beginning, and which God changed in light of the fall, Keach insisted that God's original law is immutable, perfect, and holy because God Himself is immutable, perfect, and holy. The Baxterians claimed that God could loosen or relax His law according to His good pleasure, but Keach argued that God can no more change the law than He can change himself. He wrote, “The Law did not only proceed from God, doubtless as an Act of his Sovereign Will and Prerogative, but as an Act proceeding from his infinite Justice and Holiness.”³⁰ According to Keach, the law does not determine what is holy; rather, what is holy determines the law.

Keach further criticized the Baxterian position on the ground that it casts doubt upon the wisdom of God. If Adam sinned against a perfect law, which might have been otherwise, then God appears to have been excessive for establishing that law in the first place. The Baxterians would agree that God foresaw that Adam was going to break the perfect law. But, God still chose to give that law to Adam. Such a choice might appear wise if it brought greater glory to God through the work of Christ, the mediator, who upholds the original law. That is what orthodox Protestantism teaches. But, in the Baxterian model, God seems unwise because He simply discarded the original law and provided an easier one that men can keep by their own good works. Such a scheme diminishes God's glory by destroying the perfect law that reflects His glory, and it exalts the good works of human beings by providing a less-than-perfect law that they can keep to justify themselves. Therefore, Baxterianism calls God's wisdom into question.³¹

Keach also criticized Baxterianism on the ground that it eliminates the mysterious nature of the gospel. He wrote, “If our Justification was by our own Obedience, or by conforming our Lives to the Rules of the Gospel, Justification and Salvation would cease from being any more a mystery.”³² Keach argued that Baxterianism appeals to human reason when it says that men justify themselves by their own works. That appears both logical and just. But, the mystery of the gospel is that God justifies men because of Christ's works alone. That gospel does not appear reasonable to the human mind, but is an offense to it. Baxterianism denies that offense, and therefore undermines the mystery of the gospel.

²⁸ Keach, *Marrow of True Justification*, 23.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

³² *Ibid.*, 26.

Keach further claimed that Baxterianism is a form of heathenism. He argued that in the Baxterian system, when men come under a sense of guilt and condemnation for their sins, their only recourse is to change their lives, start obeying the law, and practice covenant faithfulness in order to obtain eternal life. However, Keach argued that this is nothing other than heathenism.³³ Every religion in the world, except for the gospel faith of Christianity, is a religion of mere ethical reform. All the other religions teach that men must work to obtain the favor of the gods and to escape their wrath. Thus, Baxterianism is no different in its substance from heathenism.

Keach then argued that the very idea of imperfect gospel obedience creates insurmountable practical problems for the believer. On the one hand, the sins of believers cannot be sins against the gospel at all. Keach wrote, "Nor indeed can I see (as a Divine observes) if Sincere Obedience be the condition of Justification and Life, how the Imperfections of the Godly should be any sins against the Gospel. ... For this New Law i.e., the Gospel requires no more than sincere and upright Obedience."³⁴ The gospel only requires imperfect obedience. Practically speaking, this means that as long as a person is faithful, he is sinless on the terms of the gospel and may think of himself as perfect. It also means that there will be confusion about how much or what kind of sin makes a person "insincere" and outside the requirements of the gospel.

On the other hand, the believer has no way of knowing how much positive obedience he needs to inherit eternal life. Keach said that as long as a person believes "that he can be justified by his own Works, or inherent Righteousness, he can never be soundly persuaded that his Righteousness is sufficient for that purpose; but hath just Cause not only to doubt, but also to despair."³⁵ This will create great confusion about how much or what kind of obedience makes a person "sincere." The Baxterian view creates enormous practical problems for the believer because it obscures the true nature of sin, as well as the true nature of righteousness.

Keach also argued that consistent Baxterianism eliminates the possibility of deathbed conversions and the salvation of infants dying in infancy. Since neither infants nor those on their deathbeds can perform a pattern of gospel obedience to obtain justification, then they cannot be saved according to a consistently Neonomian theology. Pointing out the unbiblical nature of these implications, Keach wrote, "*But the Thief on the Cross* was justified without Works of Obedience, and so are all Infants that die in Infancy that are saved."³⁶ Keach argued that the blood and perfect righteousness of Christ are all that are legally necessary to procure justification; therefore, infants who die and adults who convert on their deathbeds can be justified and saved. No amount of gospel-works is needed.

Finally, in the sermon's section on application, Keach responded to the Neonomian objection that the system he was setting forth was Antinomian. First, Keach said that if it is "Antinomian" to insist that justification excludes all works and is by faith alone, then every Christian must be an Antinomian since that is what the Bible teaches. Name calling must not deter fidelity to Scripture. But, second, Keach

³³ Keach, *Marrow of True Justification*, 26.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 32. Italics are in the original.

argued that genuine godliness and obedience to Christ is founded upon and flows from justification by faith alone. He wrote:

*The Faith of the Operation of God will soon purify your Hearts, and cleanse your Lives; this Grace will teach you to deny all Ungodliness and Worldly Lusts, and to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present evil World. We do not tell you, you must be holy, and then believe in Jesus Christ; but that you must believe in him, that you may be holy. You must first have Union with him, before you can bring forth Fruit to God; you must act from Life and not for Life.*³⁷

Keach understood that believers “must act from Life.”³⁸ Good works are not optional for the believer, but neither are they required for justification. Keach rightly emphasized the duty and obligation of believers to do good works. Thus, the dispute between Keach and the Neonomians did not pertain to the necessity of good works, but to their role in salvation. For Keach, good works necessarily flowed from faith, justification, and eternal life. For the Neonomians, faith and good works were both means to attain justification and eternal life.

The Everlasting Covenant (1693)

For Keach, the doctrine of justification was inextricably bound up with the biblical doctrine of the covenants, and especially with the covenant of grace. According to Austin Walker, “The covenant of grace assumed a central place in Keach’s thinking, so much so that it is not possible to appreciate either Keach’s Calvinism or the man himself without a right appreciation of his understanding of it.”³⁹ It is also true that it is impossible to understand Keach’s doctrine of justification without understanding his doctrine of the covenants. *The Everlasting Covenant* is a series of two sermons that were later edited and printed in a forty-four page booklet.

Keach originally preached the first of these sermons to his congregation at Horsley-down at the funeral of a fellow minister of the gospel, Mr. Henry Forty. The sermon passage was 2 Samuel 23:5, “For does not my house stand so with God? For he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure.” The text says that these were “the last words of David” (v. 1). Keach believed that just as the everlasting covenant of grace comforted David and gave him hope on his deathbed, so the covenant of grace is the only hope of any dying sinner. He wrote, “Men may talk of their own Righteousness, and Gospel-Holiness; yet I am persuaded, they will not dare to plead in Point of Justification, on their Death-Beds, nor in the Judgment-Day; No, no ‘tis nothing but Christ ... can give Relief to a wounded, and

³⁷ Keach, *Marrow of True Justification*, 37. Italics are in the original.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Walker, *Benjamin Keach*, 107. See also J. Barry Vaughn, “Benjamin Keach,” in *Baptist Theologians*, ed. Timothy George and David Dockery (Nashville: Broadman, 1990), 58. For more information on covenant theology among Baptists, see Paul Fiddes, “‘Walking Together’: The Place of Covenant Theology in Baptist Life Yesterday and Today,” in *Pilgrim Pathways: Essays in Baptist History in Honour of B. R. White* (Macon: Mercer, 1999), 44–74.

distressed Conscience.”⁴⁰ The main burden of the two sermons is to demonstrate that there is no distinction between the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace. According to Keach, the covenant of grace is the covenant of redemption, and preserving the unity of the two serves to safeguard the doctrine of justification by faith alone on the ground of Christ's righteousness alone.⁴¹

In the first section of the work, Keach explained that he had previously been convinced of a distinction between the covenant of grace and the covenant of redemption, but upon further study, he was persuaded that they are the same covenant.⁴² There is one covenant of grace, with two distinct parts. One part of the covenant of grace is made with Christ the mediator, and the other part is made with all of the elect in Him. Keach believed that to separate these two parts of the covenant of grace into two different covenants tends to separate Christ from the redemption of His people and opens the way for men to rely upon their own holiness for justification. He therefore sought to show that the doctrine of one eternal covenant of grace is biblical, that it stands against all objections, that it is interconnected with the rest of biblical doctrine, and that it brings great comfort to the souls of believers.

Keach argued from Scripture that the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace are the same covenant. According to Keach, the Bible never recognizes three overarching covenants, but only two: the covenant with Adam and the covenant with Christ. Romans 5 contrasts these two covenant heads only (Rom 5:12–21), and just as there is one covenant with Adam and all who are in him, so also is there one covenant with Christ and all who are in Him.⁴³ Keach affirmed that the Bible reveals two administrations of the covenant of works. The first administration appeared in the garden before Adam's fall. That garden covenant promised eternal life to Adam on the condition of his perfect obedience to God's law, and threatened eternal death for sin.⁴⁴ Beyond that first edition of the covenant of works, Keach wrote that “there was another Edition or Administration of it given to Israel, which tho' it was a Covenant of Works, i.e. Do this and live, yet it was not given by the Lord to the same End and Design. ... It was not given to justify them.”⁴⁵ Referencing John Owen's work, Keach argued that the Mosaic covenant given to the Israelite nation serves to reveal God's perfect holiness.⁴⁶ It also serves to prove that sinners, who are without such perfect holiness, can never be justified in God's sight. Therefore, one function

⁴⁰ Benjamin Keach, *The Everlasting Covenant, A Sweet Cordial for a Drooping Soul or, The Excellent Nature of the Covenant of Grace Opened in a Sermon Preached January the 29th at the Funeral of Mr. Henry Forty* (London: n.p., 1693), from the preface.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴³ Though Keach does not make the argument explicitly, consistency would seem to require his opponents to admit that if the covenant with Christ and those in him must be two separate covenants because it is made both with the covenant head and those in the covenant head, then the covenant with Adam and those in him must be two separate covenants as well. The covenant of works would have to be divided into two covenants. But, his opponents evidently did not make that argument.

⁴⁴ For the development of the doctrine of the covenant of works in Reformed theology, see Robert Letham, “The *Foedus Operum*: Some Factors Accounting for its Development,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 4, no. 4 (1983): 457–67. Letham argues that the covenant of works developed on a Ramist methodology in which law was viewed as foundational to and causative of grace. Law undergirds grace on classical federal theology.

⁴⁵ Keach, *The Everlasting Covenant*, 7.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

of the Mosaic covenant is to drive men outside of themselves, away from their own righteousness, and to the alien righteousness of Christ for justification (Rom 3:19–20; Gal 3:21–22).

Then Keach argued that the Old Testament covenants of promise point to Christ as the only basis of justification. Genesis 3:15 reveals the first gospel promise to Adam in the protoevangelium. This promise “primarily runs to Christ, *as the Woman’s seed*, and so to us in him.”⁴⁷ The Abrahamic covenant does the same when God declares to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 and 22:18, “In your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” According to the New Testament, Christ himself is the promised offspring (Gal 3:16), and this promise guarantees blessings for men from every nation who are in Him (Gal 3:28–29). Similarly, Keach argued, the Davidic covenant “runs to Christ, and also in him to us” (Ps 89:20, 28, 29).⁴⁸ The covenant with David and his offspring pointed to Christ and was a type of the covenant with Christ and those in Him. So, all of the Old Testament covenants are promises flowing from a single covenant with Christ and those in Him.⁴⁹ The Old Testament knows nothing of two distinct covenants of redemption and grace. The Bible’s structure is therefore bi-covenantal, not tri-covenantal (1 Cor 15:22).

The sermon then proceeds to answer a number of objections to Keach’s doctrine of one eternal covenant of grace. Keach did not specify the source or sources of the following objections, but they were actual objections leveled by those who opposed Keach’s views. Some objected that because God’s saving design involves distinct parties, there must be two covenants. They argued that Christ’s obligations and promises are different from the obligations and promises God made to the elect; therefore, there are two covenants. Keach responded by asserting that the situation is not so clear cut. God’s covenant with Christ was a covenant that involved the elect because all of His redemptive work was to be on their behalf and to secure their blessings. So, God’s covenant with the elect was a covenant with them in Christ, not apart from Him.⁵⁰

Another opposing argument claimed that since God eternally entered into covenant with Christ before the fall, and since God temporally enters into covenant with the elect after the fall, there must be a separation between the two covenants. Keach responded that the covenant of grace was made with Christ and the elect in Him before the foundation of the world. Even though the elect were not yet created, God still covenanted with Christ and with them in Him for their redemption. Likewise, when God performed that same eternal covenant through the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Christ, He did so with Christ and with the elect in Him. The mediator and the elect are parties of the eternal covenant both eternally and temporally. David’s dying hope in the sermon text (2 Sam 23:5) is the “everlasting” and eternal covenant of grace, not a mere temporal covenant, and Keach points out that the same is true in other passages of Scripture (Ps 89:19, 20, 26, 29).⁵¹ To separate Christ from His people in a temporal covenant of grace and then to

⁴⁷ Keach, *The Everlasting Covenant*, 10. Italics are in the original.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁹ Keach did not refer to the Noahic covenant.

⁵⁰ Keach, *The Everlasting Covenant*, 10–11.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 11–12.

emphasize that temporal covenant with the elect over the eternal covenant with Christ makes covenant theology man-centered rather than Christ-centered, and it opens the way to highlight man's works for justification rather than Christ's work alone.

A further objection insisted that since Christ fulfills one set of conditions and the elect fulfill a different set of conditions, there must be two different covenants. Keach's opponents said the condition of the covenant of works was perfect obedience for justification, but faith alone is the condition of justification in the covenant of grace. Therefore, there must be two different covenants. However, Keach responded by pointing out that the covenant with Christ secures and supplies all the covenant "conditions" for the elect. Christ did not live, die, and rise again merely to sit idle at God's right hand. Instead, Christ continues actively as the mediator of the elect, interceding for them and procuring for them the blessing of faith. Thus, when the objectors insisted that faith must be a condition of the covenant of grace, since "Christ does not believe for us," Keach responded, "Who says he does? But ... has not he obtained Grace for us, to enable us to believe? Is not he the Author and Finisher of our Faith?"⁵² Though Christ does not Himself believe for the elect, Keach argued that He causes the elect to believe by his mediating work in the covenant. Thus, it is wrong to separate the belief of the elect from Christ's giving the elect belief. In the covenant, Christ both procures faith for the elect by His life, death, and resurrection and He applies faith to the elect by His covenantal intercession.

Keach did not speak of faith as a "condition" of the covenant of grace as some did; rather, he preferred to call faith a "blessing," which flowed from the merits of Christ.⁵³ Those who would distort the covenant of grace by tearing it into two covenants laid the foundation of both Neonomianism and Arminianism because on both of those systems, faith is viewed primarily as a responsibility that covenant members must fulfill, rather than a gift purchased and efficaciously applied by the work of Christ (John 6:37; 10:16; Phil 1:6; 2:13). That man-centered emphasis turns the covenant of grace into a covenant of works because it emphasizes the work of men over the work of Christ. Contrary to Neonomianism and Arminianism, King David's hope was that God would act on his behalf, "I cry out to God Most High to God who fulfills his purpose for me" (Ps 57:2).

Keach went on to say that separating the covenant of redemption from the covenant of grace makes Neonomian paedobaptist ecclesiology possible. Neonomians taught that unbelieving children may enter into the covenant of grace through infant baptism. They said that everyone in this covenant should believe and obey for their justification on the last day. Keach wrote:

I fear some Men run astray. For it seems as if some Men would have us believe, that the Covenant of Grace in the latitude of it, is but that merciful conditional Covenant of Faith, and Gospel Holiness, that God is pleased to enter into with us, and we with him, *in our Baptism*, and if we perform that Covenant to the end, we shall be Justified and saved; no, and so far as we do act in sincere Obedience, so far, we are already Justified; and if this be the Notion of these Men and that we must believe, as they do, then say I, we are not under Grace, but under a Law

⁵² Keach, *The Everlasting Covenant*, 16.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 12–14.

that will keep us in Doubts and Bondage as long as we live; and if we have no other Righteousness than this, which is either within us or wrought by us, we shall certainly drop down into Hell when we come to die.⁵⁴

Believers and their children enter into the covenant of grace through baptism and to the degree that they believe, they are already justified. However, full justification, according to Keach's understanding of Neonomianism, is reserved for Judgment Day. Keach believed that the heart of this error is separating the covenant people of God from the righteousness of their covenant head by making a distinction between the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace.⁵⁵

Having answered various objections, Keach then set out to demonstrate the nature of the covenant of grace. First, Keach argued that it is a covenant of works and merit to Christ; to the elect, however, it is a covenant of grace. Second, Keach said that it is an absolute covenant. There are no conditions of entry for the elect. They are joined to Christ eternally and unconditionally in the divine decree, and they are made actual beneficiaries with a real interest in all its blessings and privileges when the Spirit of Christ effectually and unconditionally works faith in them. Third, Keach explained that the eternal covenant of grace is a well-ordered covenant (2 Sam 22:5).⁵⁶

The covenant of grace is "well-ordered" in various ways. It is well-ordered with respect to God's attributes. It puts many of God's attributes on display, including God's sovereignty, making evident that God has the right to choose those upon whom He would bestow His saving benefits. The covenant further displays God's infinite wisdom in designing such a covenant, His love for His people, His justice in upholding His holy law, His power in effectually calling the elect, and His faithfulness in keeping them to the end.⁵⁷

Keach said the covenant is well-ordered in that it magnifies the glory of the whole Trinity. The Father's glory is magnified because He is the efficient cause of redeeming grace. The Father sends the Son, and everything the Son does in the covenant ultimately redounds to the glory of God the Father. The covenant of grace also magnifies the glory of Jesus Christ as the covenant head. Christ is glorified by His loving willingness to suffer and intercede for God's enemies and to be their high priest forever, purchasing and securing justification for the elect. The covenant also magnifies the glory of the Holy Spirit, demonstrating His divinity and distinct personality. He has His own terms to fulfill: convicting of sin, quickening the elect on the basis of Christ's work, robing them in Christ's righteousness by faith alone,

⁵⁴ Keach, *The Everlasting Covenant*, 17–18.

⁵⁵ Many orthodox covenant theologians distinguish between the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace without running to the extremes advocated by the Neonomians. For a Reformed Baptist description of the distinction, see Fred A. Malone, *The Baptism of Disciples Alone*, rev. and exp. (Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2007), 50–52. For a Reformed paedobaptist discussion, see Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (n.p., 1696; repr., Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994), 2:184–86 (page citations are to the reprint edition). For the history of this distinction among orthodox covenant theologians, see John Murray, "Covenant Theology," in *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1982), 4:223–34; and John von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 63–77.

⁵⁶ Keach, *The Everlasting Covenant*, 20–21.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 22–24.

sanctifying them to the uttermost, and preserving them safely unto their glorification. Thus, Keach said that the covenant of grace is well-ordered to glorify the whole Trinity.⁵⁸

Furthermore, the covenant of grace is well-ordered because it honors God's holy and righteous law. For Keach, this is no small matter. The law is part of the very substance of the covenant of grace. While Keach understood the Neonomians to teach that God changed the law of perfect obedience into a flexible gospel-law, which is milder and easier to keep, Keach insisted that Scripture reveals God upholding and honoring the law by means of the covenant of grace. Keach wrote:

God did not Repent, he gave the Law of perfect Obedience; for what could suit better with the Purity of his Holy Nature; nor could any Righteousness, short of a perfect Righteousness, Justify us: He did not therefore Design, by the Mediation and Obedience of Christ, to destroy the Law, or take any Recompense in the room of it, that every way did not Answer the Righteousness it required, and make Satisfaction for the Breach thereof: therefore, by Faith (that is) by having Christ's perfect Righteousness imputed to us, in his [explicit ?] Conformity to the Law, by his active and passive Obedience [would ?] establish the law, and make it honorable. If by any Law, as God is Rector or Governor, Justification, or eternal Life, is to be had, it must be a Law of perfect Obedience, God's Holy and Righteous Nature requiring it; and no Law of imperfect Obedience, tho' never so Sincerely performed, can answer God's justice, nor be agreeable with the Purity of his Nature, infinite Wisdom and Holiness.⁵⁹

This is important because it demonstrates what Keach believed about the relationship between the law of God and his character. Keach insisted, against the Neonomians, that God's law is determined and fixed by God's immutable character. God cannot justly discard his law, nor can He justly accept imperfect obedience as the ground of partial justification, because any justification requires perfect obedience to God's law. Keach said that Christ had to keep the law of the original covenant of works on behalf of the elect as their substitute for them to be justified at all. Because the Neonomians denied this, Keach believed that they dishonored both God's law and God's holiness.⁶⁰ But, the true covenant of grace is well-ordered because it honors and upholds God's law and holiness.

Keach then argued that the covenant of grace is well-ordered for the good of the elect. It is the ground and cause of their reconciliation, quickening, justification, adoption, sanctification, and salvation from hell. It is a dependable covenant, sure and certain in every respect. Christ fulfills all of its terms. The covenant was formed in the eternal and immutable decree of God, and it is therefore sure. It is a sworn oath and promise for the elect. It was confirmed by Christ's blood and executed by the

⁵⁸ Keach, *The Everlasting Covenant*, 24–27.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 28–29. The words “explicit” and “would” are uncertain due to the illegibility of the extant copies of the work.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 29–30.

Holy Spirit. This covenant was witnessed by mighty miracles and attested by the apostles. Therefore, the elect may trust that this is a sure covenant for their good.⁶¹

Finally, Keach turned to apply his two sermons. His application included both “reprehension” and “exhortation.” Keach began by reprovving licentious living. It took the death of Christ to redeem men from their sin, which reveals sin’s seriousness. Far from promoting Antinomianism, the covenant of grace, rightly understood, leads men to understand the great wickedness of sin and causes them to hate it and turn from it. Keach also reprovved those who mixed their own holiness with Christ’s righteousness, since nothing short of Christ’s perfect righteousness can merit any justification for sinful men. He further rebuked the Neonomians and Arminians who speak of the covenant of grace as though it is a covenant of works because that belittles the work of Christ and fails to recognize the full extent of what He accomplished. Keach also admonished everyone who tries to reform his life through moral efforts and legal strivings, since that can never bring salvation. Only those who look to and rest in Christ and His righteousness may have peace with God and properly grounded relief for their troubled consciences.⁶²

Keach then turned to exhortation. He exhorted the ungodly to tremble in light of their sins and the infinite offense they are to God. He told broken sinners to look to Christ for comfort and urged them to embrace God’s free grace in the gospel, and to find consolation in Jesus Christ.⁶³ For Keach, the covenant of grace and justification by that covenant is no lofty or high-minded speculation. It is the very marrow of the gospel with rich and far reaching practical implications for all men everywhere, but especially for those the Father has chosen for salvation.

A Golden Mine Opened (1694)

Keach preached another series of sermons on various issues pertaining mainly to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. Since Keach understood that biblical theology is an inter-connected whole. He believed that justification, like every other doctrine of the Bible, is vitally connected to the doctrine of perseverance. *A Golden Mine Opened* is a collection of thirty-six sermons in a five-hundred page volume that Keach edited and published for public consumption.

Keach held that justification gives men the right and title to eternal life, which can never be lost. He argued that there is a three-fold life among men. First, there is natural life, which all living men have. Second, there is spiritual life, which is the gracious life of the redeemed sinner. Third, there is eternal life, which is “properly the Life of Glory, or the Life of the other World, that Life which the glorified Saints possess above.”⁶⁴ Even though eternal life is “properly” the life of the glorified saint in heaven, Keach also taught that there are two senses in which eternal life is the present possession of every saint. In an objective sense, every justified sinner has the right and title to eternal life. Heaven is presently the objective possession of every

⁶¹ Keach, *The Everlasting Covenant*, 31–34.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 38–41.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 42–43.

⁶⁴ Benjamin Keach, *A Golden Mine Opened or, The Glory of God’s Rich Grace Displayed in the Mediator to Believers. And His Direful Wrath against Impenitent Sinners. Containing the Substance of near Forty Sermons upon Several Subjects* (London: n.p., 1694), 144.

believer in Christ. In a subjective sense, every regenerated sinner has an earnest, or down payment, of the future inheritance by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit provides the believer a true, though partial, experience of the joy of eternal life. Both of these objective and subjective realities are based on the fact that every saint is joined to Jesus Christ who is Himself eternal life. Therefore, whoever has Christ has eternal life, and can never lose Him, even though the full experience and enjoyment of eternal life in Christ is yet future.⁶⁵

Justification and eternal life hinges on a clear doctrine of penal substitution, since God only gives eternal life to those for whom Christ substituted. Keach provided a number of arguments making clear that Christ did not merely die “for our good,” as the Baxterians said, but “in our stead.”⁶⁶ He insisted that in normal speech, when someone is said to “die for” another, the phrase does not merely mean that one person died “for the good” of another, but that one person died “in the place of” another. Scripture uses the phrase in this plain sense. Keach argued that the Greek word *huper*, translated “for,” necessarily communicates the idea of substitution. According to 1 Peter 3:18, “Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous.” That is, Christ the righteous suffered in the place of unrighteous sinners. Scripture teaches that Christ laid down His life for us (1 John 3:16) and died for us while we were yet sinners (Rom 5:7–8). Isaiah says that “he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities,” and “the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa 53:5–6). The New Testament declares that Christ bore the sins of his people (1 Pet 2:24) and that their sins were imputed to Him (2 Cor 5:21). Galatians 4:4–5 says that Christ was born under the law to redeem those who are under the law. Paul’s expression in Galatians 4 indicates that Christ functioned in the “Law-place” of His people.⁶⁷ The book of Leviticus anticipated that Christ would be offered to bear the sins of many (Lev 5:1; 7:8). Therefore, to reject the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement is to reject the teaching of the Bible.

In addition to all of those positive arguments for the doctrine of substitution, Keach added several negative arguments. If the Baxterians were correct that Christ died merely to take away the “*rigid Law of Works*, and to merit a milder Law of Grace,” then several unbiblical absurdities follow.⁶⁸ First, the Neonomian denial of penal substitution implies that God changed His mind about giving a law of perfection to Adam in the first place. If Christ did not have to die to keep the original law, then that law itself must have been a mistake. Perhaps it was unnecessarily harsh. If the original law of perfection was not a mistake, however, and if it cannot merely be discarded, then penal substitutionary atonement is necessary to fulfill it. Second, the Baxterian denial of penal substitution implies that God may allow sin. If Christ did not actually pay the penalty for sinners, then God simply allows the sins of believers to go unpunished. This is inconsistent with God’s righteous character and makes God Himself a transgressor of the law. Third, if God may not allow sin, then the Neonomian denial of penal substitution implies that the law of perfect holiness does not flow from God’s perfect nature. God may define sins out of existence simply

⁶⁵ Keach, *A Golden Mine Opened*, 144.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 237.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 240. Italics are in the original.

by changing the law. That then implies that God might have given Adam the milder law of grace from the very beginning, which leads back to the first absurdity.⁶⁹ Therefore, since the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement is biblical, and since its denial leads to unbiblical absurdities, Keach strongly affirmed it.

Keach argued that Christ's substitutionary work on the cross and resurrection purchased certain irrevocable benefits for all of the elect. According to Keach, Christ's death and resurrection cause the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the elect. The Spirit regenerates the elect and appropriates all of the bounties Christ purchased in the atonement. Two main blessings flow from Christ's work by the Spirit. First, Keach wrote, "Justification is ... another Effect of the Death and Resurrection of Christ."⁷⁰ Keach insisted that Christ's death and resurrection cannot be without the effect of justification. The Bible teaches that Christ "was raised for our justification" (Rom 4:25). Second, Keach wrote, "Sanctification is another effect of the Death of Christ. ... Christ died not only to justify Believers, but to sanctify them also."⁷¹ His death is the cause of sin's mortification in the elect, and His resurrection is the cause of the vivification of godliness in the elect. Keach said that Christ's death is not simply a passive example for believers to follow, but that it powerfully changes believers into Christ's likeness, such that all persevere until they are glorified on the last day.⁷² In Keach's theology, justification and sanctification are inseparably linked because both flow inevitably from Christ's work. Nevertheless, justification and sanctification are always distinguished and never confused.

Keach taught that since Christ's historical work purchases and secures righteousness and justification for the elect, none of those who are justified can lose Christ's righteousness or fall finally away from God's grace. However, some objected that Keach's doctrine of perseverance is unbiblical because Ezekiel 28:24 proves that the righteous can turn from their righteousness and die in their sins: "But when a righteous person turns away from his righteousness ... he shall die." Keach responded to this objection by noting that Scripture speaks of two kinds of righteousness. First, there is "A Moral and Legal Righteousness," and second, there is a "Gospel or Evangelical Righteousness."⁷³ Ezekiel 28:24 refers to a man who sinfully turns away from moral righteousness. But all men turn from moral righteousness and, therefore, all men deserve to die. That is why everyone needs the alien righteousness of Christ to be justified. Keach demonstrated that the prophet Ezekiel teaches two things about "righteousness." First, it says that men who turn from their righteousness will die, but second, it also shows that men who trust in their own righteousness will die. Ezekiel 33:13 says, "Though I say to the righteous ... if he trusts in his righteousness ... he shall die." Both turning from righteousness and relying on one's own righteousness are sins deserving of death. So, the only way of escape from death is for a man to turn away from moral righteousness altogether and trust in the gospel righteousness of Jesus Christ. Gospel righteousness based on

⁶⁹ Keach, *A Golden Mine Opened*, 240–41.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 263.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, 264.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 307.

Christ's righteousness alone is everlasting righteousness, and those who have it will never perish.⁷⁴

The Display of Glorious Grace (1698)

Four years later, Keach made another sermon series available to the public. *The Display of Glorious Grace* is a 304-page collection of fourteen sermons in which Keach expanded upon his doctrine of the covenant of grace. He viewed these sermons as having a direct bearing on the doctrine of justification and as being a critical part of the refutation of Baxterian notions. The last line of Keach's full title explains, "the Errors of the present Day, about *Reconciliation and Justification*, are Detected."⁷⁵ Since Keach summarized his doctrine of the covenant of grace in *The Everlasting Covenant*, it will not be necessary to cover this work in every detail, but an overview of some of the main headings may be useful.⁷⁶

Keach began this sermon series by unfolding eight explanatory propositions. First, he asserted that God eternally foresaw that mankind would sin against the law and deserve condemnation. Second, he said that in light of the fall, God eternally entered into a covenant of grace with Christ to merit justification for the elect. Third, Keach asserted that the separation between God and men is very great. Fourth, the breach arose because Adam and those in him broke the perfect law of creation, or covenant of works, which had promised justification and life to perfect obedience. Fifth, no one in heaven or on earth could repair the breach, except for Christ. Sixth, God dispenses justification and life on the basis of His free and sovereign pleasure. God was not required to enter into the covenant of grace with fallen human beings, and God was not obliged to magnify His mercy in the redemption of sinners. The whole world might have been justly condemned to hell. Furthermore, God did not have to create the world, but He "was at the liberty of his Will whether he would make this World or not."⁷⁷ Seventh, God's saving covenant flows from His grace and not according to human merit or divine obligation. Eighth, and lastly, God's saving covenant also flows from His mercy and desire to comfort those in misery.⁷⁸

Keach also explained the eternal covenant transactions. He argued that God and Christ made a peace treaty for the elect (Ps 89:3), which brought about reconciliation and justification for them. In this eternal covenant, "the Father makes Proposals to the Son, and showed him what he will have him do, if ever our Peace succeed and is made."⁷⁹ The Son would have to satisfy divine justice both by perfectly keeping God's law and by dying to remove its curse to secure justification for the elect. The Son is not only the messenger of this peace treaty, but He is also its mediator. Keach argued that Christ is able to mediate peace between God and the elect because He is both God and man. Since Christ is fully God, His blood and righteousness can merit

⁷⁴ Keach, *A Golden Mine Opened*, 307.

⁷⁵ Benjamin Keach, *The Display of Glorious Grace or, The Covenant of Peace Opened. In Fourteen Sermons Lately Preached, in which the Errors of the present day, about Reconciliation and Justification are Detected* (London: n.p., 1698), A1. Italics are in the original.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, vii.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 9–21.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

justification and eternal life for the elect. Since Christ is fully man, He can sympathize with the elect and be their perfect representative head. Christ's mediation is one of the grounds of penal substitution and justification by free grace.⁸⁰

In the section on Christ's work as a mediator, Keach denounced Richard Baxter, Daniel Williams, and Samuel Clark in the strongest of terms, saying, "And thus is Popery revived among us, and Justification by Works asserted by these Law and Works-mongers, for I cannot call them Gospel-Ministers."⁸¹ He went on to say, "It is a hard case, my Brethren, that these degenerate Presbyterians, or any pretending to be Gospel-Preachers, should deny Christ to be a Common Head and Surety for the Elect."⁸² Keach was infuriated when Samuel Clark argued that men are only justified in this life to the extent that their obedience is perfected.⁸³ According to Keach, Clark's scheme lays a ground for boasting and robs Christ of glory.⁸⁴ Unless Christ both mediates and substitutes for the elect, He cannot receive all the glory for their justification.

Keach said that true gospel ministers preach the nature and terms of the covenant of grace.⁸⁵ Faithful gospel proclamation reveals the infinite love of the Triune God, and proclaims that the elect are peacefully reconciled to God through the blood of Christ. Keach denied that Christ's work on the cross merely made reconciliation possible, which is what the Baxterians taught, and insisted that Christ actually accomplished reconciliation for the elect (Rom 5:9–10; 2 Cor 5:18). Keach made much of this point, arguing that reconciliation is not conditioned upon anything done by the elect, but was fully secured by Christ in history.⁸⁶ There is nothing the elect must do and no condition they must meet in order to be reconciled to God, because Christ did all that was necessary for their reconciliation in the covenant of grace.

True gospel ministers also freely offer forgiveness and peace to everyone without distinction. Reconciliation, peace, and good news are to be universally announced to the entire world. Keach wrote, "Pardon is proclaimed of all kinds of Sins, and free Forgiveness and Peace in Christ, is offered to all manner of sinners, Rebels, and Traitors to God, whoever they are."⁸⁷ Thus, even though Keach held to a limited and effectual atonement, which genuinely reconciled the elect to God, he also held to the universal free offer of reconciliation.

Keach anticipated that some might argue for a universal atonement on the ground of the gospel's universal offer. But, Keach taught that the notion of a universal atonement is biblically absurd, because some people die and go to hell. He said that if Christ made atonement for all, but all are not eventually justified and saved, then Christ's blood failed. Keach further argued that if Christ, the priest, died to atone for all, then He would have also prayed for the redemption of all. But, in His high priestly

⁸⁰ Keach, *Display of Glorious Grace*, 35–74.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 78–79.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 80–81. See Samuel Clark, *Scripture-Justification, According to the Evidence of Scripture-Light: Wherein the Nature of Justification is fully open'd and the Great Point of Justification by Works, both of the Law and Gospel, is clearly Stated* (London: n.p., 1698), 18.

⁸⁴ Keach, *Display of Glorious Grace*, 82–83.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 120–21.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 151–56.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 156–57.

prayer, Christ only prayed for the redemption of the elect, not for the reprobate world (John 17:9).⁸⁸ Therefore, Christ did not make a universal atonement; rather, He atoned only for the elect. Thus, free and universal offers of peace in gospel proclamation are part of the nature of the covenant, but those offers do not necessitate universal atonement because a universal atonement is inconsistent with Scripture and reason.

In continuing to expound upon the nature of the covenant of grace, Keach explained that the nature of the covenant of grace must be understood in contrast to the covenant of works. The covenant of works was made with man without a surety, while the covenant of grace was founded only on the sure work of Jesus Christ. The covenant with Adam was a conditional covenant of perfect obedience for justification, which was repeated to the house of Israel, while the covenant with Christ is an "absolute," or unconditional, covenant to believers, which requires nothing of them to merit their justification.⁸⁹ Keach believed that the Mosaic covenant was a republication of the covenant of works, but he said, "I deny not, but that there was much Grace held forth in it."⁹⁰ The covenant of works gave its members no power to perform what it required. But, in the covenant of peace, "whatsoever God's Law required of us to our Justification in his Sight, Christ *covenanted* and *performed* it for us, and we in him."⁹¹ In the covenant of grace, Christ not only satisfied the law of God for justification, but God grants all of the duties He requires for sanctification, including faith, a new heart, and love. The key to understanding Keach's distinction between the role of good works in the covenant of works and their role in the covenant of grace has to do with the prepositions "for" and "from." Keach wrote, "The *One* [covenant] puts Men upon working, or doing for Life; the *other* puts them upon believing and working from Life."⁹² Keach said that the covenant of works was all command and law for justification, but the covenant of grace is all promise for justification.⁹³

Keach's general application of these sermons consists of Trinitarian exhortations. First, Keach noted that God the Father is the source of the covenant of grace, and therefore He deserves all honor for redemption. Second, Christ is to be identified with the covenant of grace. To be in Christ is to be in the covenant of grace. Keach wrote, "Also be exhorted to prize and highly esteem of the Lord Jesus Christ, from what you have heard concerning the Covenant; because Christ is the Sum of the Covenant. ... Christ is originally and fundamentally the Covenant."⁹⁴ Believers must honor the Father and esteem the Son, but they must also recognize the glory of the Holy Spirit in the covenant of grace. Keach wrote, "The Holy Ghost deserves (my brethren) equal Glory with the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit must plant Grace in our Hearts. ... It is the Spirit that draws us to Christ, that unites our Souls to him, without it the Death of Christ profits no Man."⁹⁵ The doctrine of the covenant of

⁸⁸ Keach, *Display of Glorious Grace*, 158–60.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* Italics are in the original.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 180. Italics are in the original.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 293.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

grace should lead believers to reject the “*New and Cursed Notions*”⁹⁶ of the Neonomians, and lead them to labor after faith in Christ alone. The doctrine of the covenant should cause men to mourn their sin, trust in Christ, love Him, love the people of God whom Christ purchased, esteem the preachers of the covenant of grace, and bring about peace of mind and conscience.

Keach finally cautioned against a potential misunderstanding of his sermons. Even though he asserted that Christ’s work reconciles the elect to God unconditionally and apart from any repentance or faith on their part, God is not “at Peace, Reconciled, and well pleased with the Elect, while they remain in a State of Enmity against him, being vile and notorious Sinners.”⁹⁷ He said there are two kinds of reconciliation (and justification), because it would be absurd to say that the unregenerate elect are both reconciled (and justified) as well as at enmity with God (and condemned) in the same sense, since that would be a contradiction.⁹⁸ Keach wrote, “We should therefore distinguish between a Federal, a Virtual, and a *Representative Union*, and Justification, and an *Actual Union* and *Personal Justification*.”⁹⁹ In other words, the unregenerate elect are federally united to Christ, but not actually united to Christ. They are also federally reconciled and justified, but not actually reconciled and justified. Actual union with Christ brings about actual reconciliation and actual justification after a person is converted. John Girardeau said of this distinction, “It is the only doctrine of justification which harmonizes the Calvinistic system with itself, and saves it from a Baxterian compromise with Arminian views.”¹⁰⁰ In addition, without this distinction, gospel preachers would have no ground on which to claim that all unregenerate men are under divine wrath.¹⁰¹ But, in light of the distinction between federal and actual union with Christ, ministers of the gospel can and should preach that the unconverted are adversaries and enemies of God and must believe to be actually reconciled to Him.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the early Particular Baptist, Benjamin Keach, taught that the doctrine of justification is founded upon Christ’s perfect righteousness, received by faith alone. His doctrine of justification was nested within the larger system of his theology and was particularly connected to his covenant theology. Keach believed that Christ accomplished in the covenant of grace what Adam failed to accomplish in the covenant of works. He taught that at the appointed times, the Spirit unites the elect to Christ in the covenant of grace, where they receive Christ and all the blessings Christ purchased in that covenant, which includes a free and gracious justification.

⁹⁶ Keach, *Display of Glorious Grace*, 293. Italics are in the original.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 300.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 301.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 302. Italics are in the original.

¹⁰⁰ John L. Girardeau, *The Federal Theology: Its Import and its Regulative Influence*, ed. J. Ligon Duncan (1881; repr., Greenville, SC: Reformed Academic Press, 1994), 26.

¹⁰¹ See Michael A. G. Haykin, *Kiffin, Knollys, and Keach: Rediscovering our English Baptist Heritage* (Leeds: Reformation Today Trust, 1996), 90. Haykin confirms that where eternal justification before faith was affirmed, it rendered preaching unnecessary.

PAUL’S USE OF GENESIS 15:6 IN ROMANS 4:3

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This essay examines (1) the relevant uses of Genesis 15:6 and references to Abraham in a large group of ancient Jewish sources; (2) the immediate context of Romans 4:3; (3) the analysis of the Old Testament context of Genesis 15:6; and (4) the way in which Paul interprets and utilizes Genesis 15:6 in Romans 4:3. Paul’s use of the text is a reaffirmation of themes original to Genesis 15:6 in its OT context, and his careful use of the OT contrasts with contemporary Judaic tendencies to read the OT as supporting a soteriology of human achievement or “the works of the law.” This conclusion undermines the central premise of the New Perspective on Paul, while supporting the traditional doctrine of justification, sola fide.

* * * * *

Introduction

Because of the influence of the New Perspective on Paul and other similar movements in recent decades, questions now abound concerning the traditional Protestant understanding of the doctrine of justification. Prominent among these questions are those which involve the Pauline doctrine of justification. The traditional Protestant understanding of Paul has been challenged. In a yet more extreme fashion, the propriety of Paul’s understanding of justification has been challenged. In particular, questions have been raised with regard to whether the Old Testament itself actually supports the Pauline and Protestant understanding of justification. This is an important—even crucial—question. It is the more crucial because, I suspect, that many who believe in the Pauline and Protestant doctrine harbor certain questions about how this doctrine fits with the teaching and the themes of the Old Testament. This article will examine the key passage in which Paul responds to such questions and, in particular, the key Old Testament quotation which he examines in this passage. This article will argue that the Pauline understanding of the Old Testament is unequivocally superior to those understandings associated with the New

Perspective and similar movements which deviate from the traditional, Protestant understanding of justification. It will be demonstrated that it embodies a crucial insight into the teaching and themes of the Old Testament overlooked by many today.¹

The Relevant Uses of Genesis 15:6 in Jewish Sources

A thorough examination of all the relevant data in the ancient Jewish literature is outside the scope of this paper. The influence of E. P. Sanders, James D. G. Dunn, N. T. Wright, and the consequent debate surrounding the New Perspective on Paul requires, however, some reference to more extensive treatments of the data.² Das provides a balanced assessment when he remarks:

Sanders may have gone too far when he denied that there are admonitions throughout this literature to observe perfectly what God enjoins in the law. If it is true that the Jews saw the law as requiring strict, perfect obedience, the key premise in “the new perspective on Paul” would be wrong.³

Das presents evidence that the New Perspective is in need of corrective lenses. The evidence from Jewish literature now to be reviewed with regard to Abraham appears to confirm Das’s general point of view.⁴

4 Ezra 9:7 says of Abraham:

And it shall be that everyone who will be saved and will be able to escape on account of his works, or on account of his faith by which he has believed.

The Apocalypse of Baruch 57:2 says:

And after these things you saw the bright waters; that is the fountain of Abraham and his generation, and the coming of his son, and the son of his son, and of those who are like them. For at that time the unwritten

¹ In my doctoral dissertation I argue that there was a monolithic, Protestant doctrine of justification reflected in the writings of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and the great Protestant creeds. I also argue that there are significant movements departing from this doctrine in Evangelicalism today. My dissertation is now published by Reformed Baptist Academic Press. It is entitled, *Faith, Obedience, and Justification: Current Evangelical Departures from Sola Fide*.

² A number of important studies may be cited that handle the data more comprehensively than this essay is permitted to do. Cf. A. Andrew Das, *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001), 12–69; D. Dixon Sutherland, “Genesis 15:6: A Study in Ancient Jewish and Christian Interpretation” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982), 73–135; Michael Thomas Irvin, “Paul’s Use of the Abraham Image in Romans and Galatians” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1985), 7–45.

³ Das, *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant*, 13.

⁴ Many of these statements were found with the help of Hermann Leberecht Strack, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (München: Beck, 1965), 4:186–201.

law was in force among them, and the works of the commandments were accomplished at that time, and the belief in the coming judgment was brought about, and the hope of the world which will be renewed was built at that time, and the promise of life that will come later was planted. Those are the bright waters which you have seen.

Aboth 5:3 in the Babylonian Talmud reads as follows:

With ten trials was Abraham, our Father proved, and he stood firm in them all; to make known how great was the love of Abraham, our Father (peace be upon him).

Genesis Rabbah, Parashah 44, in its comments on Genesis 15:1 contains this fairly typical view of Abraham:

Another matter: "His way is perfect" (2Sam. 22:31) refers to Abraham, for it is written in his regard, "You found [Abraham's] way faithful before you" (Neh. 9:8). Later in this same Parashah there is this revealing comment: "A. "After these things" (Genesis 15:1): There were some second thoughts. B. Who had second thoughts? Abraham did. He said before the Holy One, blessed be he, "Lord of the ages, you made a covenant with Noah that you would not wipe his children. I went and acquired a treasure of religious deeds and good deeds greater than his, so the covenant made with me has set aside the covenant made with him. Now is it possible that someone else will come along and accumulate religious deeds and good deeds greater than mine and so set aside the covenant that was made with me on account of the covenant to be made with him." Also note: "A. "But he said, 'O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?'" (Gen. 15:8): B. R. Hama bar Haninah said, "It was not as though he were complaining, but he said to him, 'On account of what merit [shall I know it? That is, how have I the honor of being so informed?]" C. "He said to him, 'It is on account of the merit of the sacrifice of atonement that I shall hand over to your descendants."⁵

Jubilees 11:15–17 reads:

And in the seventh year of that week, she bore a son for him, and he called him Abram, after the name of his mother's father because he died before his daughter conceived a son. And the lad began understanding the straying of the land, that everyone went astray after graven images and after pollution. And his father taught him writing. And he was two weeks of years old. And he separated from his father that he might not worship the idols with him. And he began to pray to the Creator of all

⁵ This material is taken from Jacob Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis: A New American Translation* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, n.d.), 125, 128, 129, 134, 135.

so that he might save him from the straying of the sons of men, and so that his portion might not fall into straying after the pollution and scorn.” As the following context makes clear (11:18), Abram is viewed as 14 years old at the time of the above description.

Jubilees 17:17–18 says:

And the Lord knew that Abraham was faithful in all his afflictions, for he had tried him through his country and with famine; and had tried him with the wealth of kings, and had tried him again through his wife, when she was torn (from him), and with circumcision; and had tried through Ishmael and Hagar, his maid-servant, when he sent them away. And in everything wherein He had tried him, he was found faithful, and his soul was not impatient, and he was not slow to act; for he was faithful and a lover of the Lord.” Irvin adds these relevant remarks to the above quotation: “Whatever might be offensive in the Genesis account was altered. No deception about Sarah occurred in Egypt (13:11–15), and when God told Abraham he and Sarah would have a son, Abraham rejoiced (15:17) instead of laughing (Genesis 17:17). At the age of fourteen, Abraham rejected idol worship, rebuked his father for worshipping them, and then boldly burned the idols (Jubilees 12). Abraham also endorsed the Torah’s eternal validity and established cultic rituals. He reestablished the Feast of Weeks which had been discontinued since the time of Noah (6:18–20), he practiced circumcision, an eternal ordinance (15:25, 26), and he began the practice of tithing (13:25). Abraham even celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles exactly as the Torah later required. (16:31)⁶

Jubilees 23:10 also describes Abraham:

For Abraham was perfect in all of his actions with the LORD and was pleasing through righteousness all of the days of his life.

Jubilees 24:11 says of Abraham (cf. 24:10):

And all the nations of the earth will bless themselves by your seed because your father obeyed me and observed my restrictions and my commandments and my laws and the ordinances and my covenant.

Sirach 35:24 reads:

He that believeth in the Lord taketh heed to commandment; and he that trusteth in him shall fare never the worse.

⁶ Irvin, “Abraham Image,” 11.

Sirach 44:19–22 declares:

Abraham was the great father of a multitude of nations, and no one has been found like him in glory; he kept the law of the Most High, and was taken into covenant with him; he established the covenant in his flesh, and when he was tested he was found faithful. Therefore the Lord assured him by an oath that the nations would be blessed through his posterity; that he would multiply him like the dust of the earth, and exalt his posterity like the stars, and cause them to inherit from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. To Isaac also he gave the same assurance for the sake of Abraham his father.

1 Maccabees 2:52 asks:

Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness?

Odes 12:8 affirms:

You, therefore, Lord God of the righteous ones, did not appoint repentance to the righteous ones, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the ones who did not sin, but you appointed repentance to me the sinner.⁷

Much in Jewish literature is indistinguishable from biblical ideas⁸, but in the passages cited above, themes emerge alien to the biblical canon. Abraham's righteousness is exalted in terms that exceed those of the Bible. He is said to be perfect, supposedly passing all ten of the divine tests. Readers are told how great Abraham's love was for God. Even before being called by God, when he was only 14, he recognized the idolatry of his father and sought God to save him from the idolatrous straying of men. Thus, Abraham had no need of repentance like ordinary men. Das adds that Philo said, "Abraham achieved perfect obedience of the law."⁹ It is clear, furthermore, that this perfect obedience was seen as accruing merit to Abraham both for himself and his descendants. Abraham's faith is seen as obedience to God's commandments and as faithfulness in testing. Little mention is made of trust in God's promises. It is not for believing God's promises that Abraham is credited as righteous, but because he was found faithful when tested. The fact that God blesses His people for the sake of Abraham receives, therefore, a strange twist. God loves Abraham and blesses Israel for His sake as a response to the works of Abraham. Paul likely knew that such viewpoints were current in Jewish circles when he cited Genesis 15:6 in Romans 4:3.

⁷ Translation mine.

⁸ Irvin, "Abraham Image," 7–45, provides a much broader treatment of the Jewish sources than is possible here. His treatment and conclusions clearly support the necessarily more narrow treatment provided here and support its conclusions.

⁹ Das, *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant*, 30.

The Immediate Context of Romans 4:3

Romans 1:1–17 forms a comprehensive introduction to the letter to the church in Rome. For the purposes of this article, the most significant aspect of Paul’s introduction in Romans is its repeated emphasis on the gospel. This repetition suggests that the theme of the epistle is the gospel, which has for its power the righteousness of God (Rom 1:16–17). (Note threefold use of the word, gospel, *εὐαγγέλιον* (in 1:1, 9 and 16) and the verb *εὐαγγελίζομαι*—meaning to preach the gospel in 1:15.)

Romans 1:18–3:20 concerns the ruin of man. More specifically, Paul is intent in this section of Romans on establishing the thesis he states in 1:18a, “the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” Paul does this by showing that both men in general (1:18–2:16) and Jews in particular (2:17–3:8) possessed a revelation of God’s law against which they have sinned and in terms of which they are condemned. Paul brings this section of Romans to an emphatic conclusion through a long series of OT quotations intended to demonstrate the depth and universality of human sin. 3:19–20 is the summary conclusion of his argument. In this conclusion, Paul asserts that “by the works of the law no flesh will be justified in his sight.”

Romans 3:21–5:21 has for its theme the righteousness of God as the remedy to the wrath of God. 3:21 begins Paul’s exposition of the righteousness of God which according to 1:17 is the power of the gospel.¹⁰

3:21–26 is Paul’s initial identification of the righteousness of God. From the outset, Paul contrasts this righteousness of God with “the works of the law.” Verse 21 begins with the words, “but now without law.” This righteousness of God is not by means of the law, but rather by means of redemption (v. 24) or propitiation (v. 25) achieved in and by God’s act in Christ Jesus’s bloody (v. 25) death.

This righteousness is, therefore, not something reserved for Jewish law-keepers. Since it is “without law” (3:21) and not “by the works of the law” (3:20), it is “for all those who believe; for there is no distinction” (3:22; cf. 1:16; 10:12). Thus, a polemic against Jewish ethnocentricity emerges in these verses, but one based on the universal inadequacy of the law to save.

Romans 3:27 commences a series of several questions and answers. First, there is the two-part question about boasting in 3:27. There is, second, the two-part question about whether God is the God of the Gentiles in 3:29. Third is the question about the nullification of the law in 3:31. Then fourth is the question about Abraham in 4:1. This series of questions in 3:27–4:1 seems to have for its purpose to draw out the implications of “the righteousness of God” revealed in the gospel as stated in 3:21–26.

Significant questions exist with regard to the internal connections of these questions with one another.¹¹ Though several considerations tie these four questions

¹⁰ Interestingly enough, neither the noun, gospel, nor the verb, evangelize, is used again by Paul until chapter 10 where the verb is used in 10:15 and the noun is used in 10:16.

¹¹ John Murray, *Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 127–29.

together,¹² it seems clear that the final question in 4:1 marks a significant turning point in Paul's argument. 4:1 and following are Paul's summary response to each of the previous questions. Since the issue of boasting brackets this series of questions in 3:27 and 4:2, this suggests that the question of 4:1 is connected to the question of 3:27. Abraham's example is, then, intended to show why justification by works and boasting is excluded. The question of 3:29 also finds its definitive response in the answer to the question and answer found in 4:1–25. It seems clear then that 4:1 and following is the extended response to each of the previous questions in the distinctive series of questions found in 3:27–4:1.¹³ 4:1–25 are the OT confirmation of Paul's doctrine of the righteousness of God just expounded in Romans 3:21–26.

Richard B. Hays has raised the question of how 4:1 should be understood. He deviates from most interpreters in regard to the punctuation and the translation of the text. With regard to punctuation, Hays would make these words into two questions. He would punctuate as follows: Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν, Εὐρηκέναι Ἀβραάμ τὸν προπάτορα ἡμῶν κατὰ σάρκα; *What shall we say therefore? Have we found Abraham to be our forefather according to the flesh?* Hays makes an alluring case for this approach to the text, and in so doing, furthers the agenda of the New Perspective by focusing on the relation of Jews and Gentiles.¹⁴

Hays's proposal confronts, however, serious difficulties, chief of which is that Hays's translation creates confusion with regard to the connection of 4:2 and 4:1. Hays understands the problem and can only focus attention on 4:9–25 and away from 4:2–8. 4:2–8 then becomes a "preliminary step" in Paul's argument, the pivot of which is only reached in 4:9–18.¹⁵ His view, however, simply does not provide a natural connection between 4:1 and 4:2, and assumes a significant difference between the two verses. In contrast, the language reveals a close connection between the two verses both by the repetition of the name, Abraham, and the use of the connective, γὰρ. The customary translation provides for a close and natural connection. "What then shall we say that Abraham our forefather according to the flesh has found?" Found with regard to what? The foregoing discussion supplies the ellipsis. Paul is asking, *What has he found with regard to the matter of the righteousness of God and justification?* Verse 2 follows naturally. He found, and we find with him, that we are justified not by works, but by faith.

Against the tendency of exegesis influenced by the New Perspective on Paul, 4:2–8 stands as abiding testimony to the emphasis and prominence in this context of the contrast between justification by works and justification by faith. Paul is

¹² For instance, these questions are bracketed by the mention of boasting in 3:27 and then 4:2. This appears to indicate that there is some unifying thought that ties the four questions together.

¹³ The οὖν of 4:1 is usually translated inferentially as *then* or *therefore* and suggests the possibility that Paul begins a new section of argument here. H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), 252–58 argue that οὖν may also have an intensive or even adversative force. The οὖν of 4:1 could be translated in one of these ways. The intensive translation would be as follows: "What indeed shall we say that Abraham our forefather according to the flesh has found?" The adversative translation is the most attractive, "What, however, shall we say that Abraham our forefather according to the flesh has found?" This translation is consistent with the idea that here in Paul's argument we come to a new point of departure or section of thought.

¹⁴ Richard B. Hays, "Have We Found Abraham to Be Our Forefather According to the Flesh?" *Novum Testamentum* 27, no. 1 (1985): 89.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 92–93.

interested in the fact that Jews and Gentiles are both justified in the same way, but he is more interested in this contrast between works and faith. It is a continuing feature of his exposition of the righteousness of God revealed in the gospel (3:20, 21, 27–28). This contrast emerges again and explicitly in 4:2–8.

Romans 4:2 clearly emphasizes this contrast. There is some confusion, however, as to the exact force of Paul’s reasoning here. At the root of the confusion is the meaning of the phrase, ἀλλ’ οὐ πρὸς θεόν (*but not toward God*). Superficially read, this phrase appears to claim that if Abraham was justified by works, he would have something to boast about before men, but nothing to boast about before God. But Paul has exclusively in view justification *coram deo*. In 3:27, Paul affirms that boasting is excluded not on general principles, but because of the principle of (justification by) faith. So here it is probable that ἀλλ’ οὐ πρὸς θεόν simply means: *but this is not the case with reference to God*. It is not the case, in other words, that Abraham was justified by works before God and has something to boast about toward God. 4:3 supports by showing that Scripture says that Abraham was justified by faith.

Romans 4:3 is, then, Paul’s pivotal scriptural proof that Abraham was justified by faith, and that his doctrine of justification does not nullify the OT. Paul will cite the example of David in the Psalms in 4:6–8, but he immediately returns to the example of Abraham in 4:9–25 because Abraham is the pivot of Paul’s argument. This is not surprising. Consider the respect the average American has for George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Billy Graham, and the Pope and combine that into one person, and the Jews respected Abraham still more. His example carried immense weight.

Romans 4:4–5 amplifies a crucial assumption of Paul’s interpretation of Genesis 15:6. Paul probably understood that Abraham’s example was often used as an example of justification by works in Jewish thought. Paul, therefore, explains why he sees faith as opposed to the works of the law in 4:4–5.

Romans 4:4 likely echoes the LXX of Genesis 15:1 where God promises that the reward (ὁ μισθός) of Abraham will be very great. It is natural to ask how Abraham will come to possess this reward. Paul reasons that if a reward is given in response to works, it is given as the payment of a debt and not as a gift. Paul thinks this would give man a ground to boast. Thus, it is untenable both in terms of the relationship with God that it postulates, and the gracious character of justification already affirmed in 3:21–26.

Romans 4:5 then places Genesis 15:6 in contrast to the way of working for reward explained in 4:4. Working is, however, contrasted not simply with the absence of work, but with believing in the promises made to the unworthy and ungodly. (The preposition translated “in” by the NASB is ἐπι, which means literally “upon” and, in combination with the verb for “believe,” conveys the idea of resting on the promises of God.) The word “ungodly” implies that Abraham himself was not justified because he was the paradigm of obedience. Instead, he was the ungodly person justified by faith. In the quotation found in Romans 4:7–8, the crediting of righteousness is said three times to consist in the forgiveness of sin. This implies that not only David, but Abraham as well committed sins and lawless deeds, and that his righteousness consisted in part of his sins being covered by grace.

By citing the example of David in Romans 4:6–8, Paul further clarifies that righteousness is credited apart from works. Righteousness is not a matter of being

rewarded for faithful obedience, but of having one's lawless deeds freely forgiven and not having one's sin taken into account.

Romans 4:9–12 contains one of the most brilliant of Paul's exegetical insights. Emphasizing what a plain reading of Genesis makes clear, he asserts that Abraham's faith was credited as righteousness while he was still uncircumcised. In Genesis 15 Abraham is already justified, but circumcision was not required until Genesis 17. It must be remembered that being uncircumcised and being a Gentile were equivalent.¹⁶ And even more, being a Gentile and being ungodly (ἄσεβῆ —4:5) were also equivalent for Jews (Gal 2:15). Since Abraham was an ungodly Gentile when he was justified, he certainly was not (Paul argues) justified by the works of the law.

Romans 4:13–22 enlarges on the fact that the promise of God to Abraham was not made in connection with the law, but in connection with the promises of God. Consequently, the fulfillment of the promise was not dependent on the weakness of the flesh, but on the power of the God who keeps His promises even if it means raising the dead or calling into existence that which did not previously exist (4:17, 21).

Romans 4:23–25 brings Paul's short sermon on Abraham in Romans 4 to its closing application. God's promise to Abraham is finally fulfilled by the delivering up of Jesus to death because of our transgressions and then His resurrection from the dead (4:24–25). It is by believing the same promise that Abraham believed, only now in a fuller state of realization, that our faith—like his—will be credited as righteousness.

It is a significant mistake for Hays, who follows Sanders and others, to bring the concept of the merits of the patriarchs to the discussion of Abraham in Romans 4. He says, "Abraham's faithfulness was reckoned by God to the benefit not only of Israel (as in the rabbinic exegetical tradition) but also of the Gentiles."¹⁷ To speak of "the vicarious effects of Abraham's faithfulness"¹⁸ is to obscure or miss the whole point. Abraham is the ungodly man—not the faithful man—in Romans 4. He is not a Christ-figure with a treasury of merit, but a sinner with no merit in need of justification. His faith is not admirable faithfulness, but empty-handed reliance on the promise of God.

The Analysis of the Context of Genesis 15:6

Reflections on Abraham in Scripture after the Conclusion of His Lifetime

Abraham is, as noted already, a prominent figure in both the Old and New Testament. Thus, the reflections on Abraham in the Old and New Testaments must be examined in order to place Genesis 15:6 in its scriptural context.

The Reflection on Abraham in the Old Testament after His Lifetime

There are 216 references to Abram and Abraham in the Old Testament—43 of which are outside of Genesis. Most references are relatively insignificant for the

¹⁶ See for example, Eph. 2:11.

¹⁷ Hays, "Have We Found Abraham," 96.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

purposes of this article, but a number are relevant. God's undying love and friendship for Abraham are emphasized (2 Chron 20:7; Isa 41:8; Mic 7:20). There is mention of the fact that Abraham kept God's covenant and commands and that, therefore, Isaac will be blessed (Gen 26:3). The biblical emphasis on God's grace to Abraham, however, places this in a completely different theological context than it has in the Jewish literature cited. Mentions of Abraham's origin as an idolatrous Gentile emphasize God's power and grace in separating him from his evil background (Neh 9:7; Josh 24:2). As an encouragement to the faithful remnant, there is reference to the fact that though Abraham was only one, the power and grace of God multiplied him into a great nation (Isa 51:2). We also learn that the wicked grounded a false hope in this same fact (Ezek 33:24).

The Reflection on Abraham in the New Testament

There are 67 references to Abraham in the NT. Many are found in formulas mentioning God's covenant with Abraham or the God of Abraham. Some stress Abraham's obedience (Heb 11:8, 17; James 2:21, 23), others that Abraham was justified by faith and not by works (Rom 4; Gal 3).¹⁹ The Gospels emphasize the false confidence that the Jews placed in Abraham as their physical forefather (Matt 3:9; 8:11; Luke 13:28; 16:23–31; John 8:39–58). One verse emphasizes that God appeared to Abraham in Mesopotamia before he lived in Haran (Acts 7:2). It likely teaches that God graciously appeared to him even while he was still living in idolatry (Josh 24:2; Neh 9:7). Paul emphasizes in Romans 4:9ff. that Abraham was uncircumcised when he received God's promises and that this makes him the father of both Jews and Gentiles who believe in Christ.

Genesis 15 as the Immediate Old Testament Context of Genesis 15:6

Genesis 15:1–6

Ὁ μισθός in the LXX of Gen. 15:1 is used of wages in the other 15 uses in the LXX of the Pentateuch. Nevertheless, we must not think that the term, reward, necessarily connotes something that is earned or strictly deserved. Genesis 15:1 indicates that God Himself is the reward of Abraham. Does Abraham deserve to have God Himself as his reward? Of course not! Paul also resists the equation of "reward" and "merit." In Romans 4:4, Paul clearly assumes that a "wage" or "reward" may be credited either as a "favor" or "grace."²⁰

The emphasis on divine promise is prominent in Genesis 15:1–6. The (apparently unsolicited) promises of verse 1 open the passage. The complaint of Abraham in verses 2 and 3 refers to the previous promise of a seed in Genesis 13:14–18 and Genesis 12:1–3 (which promises were also unsolicited). The promise of a seed

¹⁹ Hebrews 6:13 approaches this same emphasis.

²⁰ As will be noted below, the language of crediting used in Genesis 15:6 in other passages has the effect of reversing an idea—crediting something to be something that it is not. Perhaps, then, we are to think that God is credited as Abraham's reward (wages), when, in fact, He and all His gifts to Abraham are a matter of grace.

is renewed in verses 4 and 5. The greatness of the seed promised (it is to be as the stars of the sky) serves to emphasize the glory of God's promise and the magnitude of His grace to Abraham. All of this orients Abraham's faith in verse 6 not to God's commandments, but Jehovah's promise. This orientation of Abraham's faith is in striking contrast to the orientation assumed in the Jewish literature cited above, but in striking conformity to the orientation of Abraham's faith in Paul (Rom 4; Gal 3; Heb 6:13–20; 11:8–12).

Genesis 15:7–21

The immediately succeeding context of Genesis 15:6 continues the striking emphasis of the chapter on the amazing promises of God to Abraham. In verse 7 Jehovah raises the issue of the land promise (Gen 12:1) and connects it with his bringing of Abram out of Ur of the Chaldees. In response in verse 8, Abraham asks for a confirmation of this promise of God. Without rebuking Abram, Jehovah orchestrates the strange ritual recorded in verses 9–21. Though debated by OT interpreters, the issue most important for this essay is clear. The oven of smoke and torch of fire that passes through the split sacrifices is clearly a symbol of Jehovah Himself. They seem to anticipate the appearance of Jehovah as a burning bush and as a pillar of fire and cloud. This identification is confirmed by the connection of verses 17 and 18 (cf. Jer 34:18–19). Passing through divided sacrifices symbolizes the forging of a covenant with someone. The oven of smoke and torch of fire passing through the split sacrifices indicate that “on that day the Lord made a covenant” (Gen 15:18).²¹ Jehovah passed through the divided sacrifices, but Abram did not. Jehovah pledges Himself in covenant to Abraham and takes the burden of the fulfillment of His promises wholly upon Himself. Leupold remarks:

The covenants God makes with men are not mutual agreements as between man and man. They are rather agreements emanating from God. For in the nature of the case here are not two parties who stand on an equal footing. In fact, in the instance under consideration God binds Himself to the fulfillment of certain obligations; Abram is bound to no obligations whatsoever. God's priority is a prominent feature of the covenants of this type.²²

This much seems clear. God is pleased in the most graphic way to confirm the promise to Abraham by making a covenant with him. The grace of this confirmation must not be overlooked. God's promises should never be doubted, but in condescension to Abraham's weakness and a kind assurance of his faith, God

²¹ G. J. Wenham, “The Symbolism of the Animal Rite in Genesis 15: A Response to G. F. Hasel, *JSOT* 19 (1981): 61–78,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 22 (Fall, 1981): 135. Wenham here states, “It is surely agreed that the smoking fire pot and flaming torch symbolise the presence of God, as they do elsewhere in the Pentateuch.” My own brief survey confirms that the generality of interpreters think that the oven of smoke and torch of fire symbolise Jehovah. Only John Calvin, *Commentaries on The First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, 420, of those I checked seems to differ.

²² H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 489.

confirms His promise with a covenant. Hebrews 6:13–18 points to another of God’s dealings with Abraham, but its words apply:

For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, saying, “I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU.” And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. For men swear by one greater *than themselves*, and with them an oath *given* as confirmation is an end of every dispute. In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.

Two related emphases in Genesis 15 are, then, highly significant for the meaning of Genesis 15:6: (1) the magnificence of the promises of God, and (2) God’s desire to confirm these promises to Abraham. Both emphases are intended to strengthen Abraham’s faith. They serve to orient the faith of Abraham to the promises of God. Abraham’s faith, then, must be defined in terms of reliance on God’s magnificent and gracious promises. Paul exemplifies this orientation, but the Jewish literature does not.

The Larger Context of Genesis 15 (Gen 11:23–25:11)

As one considers the life of Abraham recorded in Genesis, a number of features or emphases become clear.

First, the story of Abraham is the story of divine promise, grace, and initiative. Readers find nothing (contrary to the Jewish literature) that commended Abram to God’s choice and call. Instead, God makes glorious (and apparently unsolicited) promises to Abram (Gen 12:1–3; 13:14–18; 15:1–21; 17:1–22). Likely in an attempt to liberate Abram from idolatry, God commands him to leave his native country and relatives. And then almost immediately, readers are told of Sarai’s barrenness. This emphasizes that a covenant seed depends wholly on God’s promise and power.

Second, the story of Abraham is also the story of Abraham’s believing response to God’s promissory and covenantal approaches. He believes even when great promises are made to him (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3). The hiphil of יָאֵם (translated *believed*) in Genesis 15:6 according to Keil and Delitzsch expresses “that state of mind which is sure of its object, and relies firmly upon it.” As “a firm, inward, personal, self-surrendering reliance upon a personal being” (212) Abraham’s faith then is here presented as trustful reliance upon the promise of God.

Third, Abraham is sometimes presented as an obedient man. Abraham obeys when called to leave his native country. He builds an altar to worship the God who has made such promises to him, allows Lot to leave peacefully to take the better land, and delivers Lot at great personal risk from those who had captured him. He is portrayed as a man of hospitality, as a man of prayer who intercedes for Sodom for the sake of Lot, and as a careful father who does not allow his son to take a wife from the increasingly wicked people of the land. He observes the sign of the covenant God

makes with him. He even offers up Isaac when God requires this strange and difficult act of obedience.

Fourth, the story of Abraham's life is also checkered. It is the story of the forgiveness of an ungodly and sinful man (Josh 24:2; Rom 4:5). In contrast to the glorification of Abraham as practically or completely sinless in the Jewish literature, the sins of Abraham are clearly recorded on the pages of Genesis. Throughout his life, he is guilty of the questionable stratagem of deceiving others regarding the identity of his wife (Gen 13; 20). Though Sarah was his half-sister, the disaster that he almost brought upon those he deceived and the way in which Isaac repeated (without his excuse!) this same stratagem (Gen 26) seems clearly to indicate its sinfulness. He is complicit in the unbelieving device of his wife, when he takes Hagar as a concubine. The grace of God is peculiarly evident in this event. God keeps His promise of a seed in spite of Abraham's weakness in taking Hagar.²³

The tension between Abraham the obedient (James 2:21–23) and Abraham the ungodly (Rom 4:3–5) must be considered. One strain of Judaism felt no tension in the character of Abraham. They believed that Abraham was an obedient man and was justified accordingly. Yet the biblical picture of Abraham seems to tell a different story.

But questions remain. Does not Paul in Romans 4:5 refer to Abraham as ungodly in Genesis 15:6? Does he not say that he was justified in Genesis 15:6?

The second of these questions will be considered first. The peculiar form of the Hebrew verb describing Abraham's faith (אָמַן) is relevant to it. Leupold asserts:

The form is unusual, perfect with *waw*, not as one would expect, imperfect with *waw conversive*. Apparently by this device the author would indicate that the permanence of this attitude would be stressed: not only: Abram believed just this once, but: Abram proved constant in his faith.²⁴

²³ Robert R. Gonzales, *Where Sin Abounds: The Spread of Sin in Genesis with Special Focus on the Patriarchal Narratives* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009), 108–39. Gonzales through a careful exegesis of the key narratives of Genesis shows that even in the narrative of Abraham the author is emphasizing the spread of sin. His exegesis makes clear that we are not to attempt to exculpate Abraham from the sins he committed even after his being called by God or cover up the dark places in his checkered life recorded in Genesis 12 and following. As Gonzales remarks on pages 138–39, “Despite the fact that Abraham had aligned himself with Yahweh and committed himself to a life of faith, he was at times ensnared by remaining sin (Heb. 12:1). Indeed, his failure illustrates the lamentable truth that certain sins do not easily go away, and the true believer may “once more strike his foot against the same stone.” Sin has not only spread to *all mankind*, but it has become so deeply entrenched that even the righteous cannot easily escape its grip.”

²⁴ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1942), 1:477; Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 1–15* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 324. My friend and Ph.D. in Old Testament, Bob (Robert) Gonzales, in private correspondence agrees with Leupold that the form of the verb used here is unusual. While the very scarcity of its occurrence makes him hesitant to be dogmatic, and while he notes examples of the use of this from which may not support Leupold's interpretation of it, he notes a number that do support him. He concludes: “Consequently, usage allows for Leupold's suggestion that Moses switches from the *waw*-imperfect consecutive, which normally functions as a preterite (i.e., discrete actions or events), to the plain *waw*-perfect in order to denote the durative or constative idea, i.e., ‘Abram proved constant in his faith.’ That is, Leupold's view is linguistically and

Genesis 15:6 consequently is not a comment only or specifically on Abraham's faith in Genesis 15, but on his faith throughout his life. The writer rather says: *So we see here another illustration of that ongoing faith of Abraham by which he was credited as righteous.* Ungodly Abraham had been justified by this ongoing kind of faith years before as Hebrews 11:8 confirms. Before Genesis 15:6, there are clear evidences of faith. So the answer to the second question posed above—*Does he not say that he was justified in Genesis 15:6?*—is no.

But what of the assertion that Paul in Romans 4:5 refers to Abraham as ungodly in Genesis 15:6? The plain record of Abraham's grievous failures after his calling are relevant to the question at hand. These grievous manifestations of remaining sin are a reminder of what Abraham had been, what he was by nature, and that his standing before God was not grounded on the very imperfect obedience which grew out of his faith in God's promises. Thus, for the purposes of being justified by God, Abraham was (from the standpoint of the stringent requirements of God's law) ungodly not only before his call, but afterwards. This, however, is not contrary to saying that (from the standpoint of the gospel) he was justified and possessed the real, but imperfect, manifestations of evangelical obedience in his life.

The Way in Which Paul Interprets and Utilizes Genesis 15:6 in Romans 4:3

In Romans 4:3, Genesis 15:6 is adduced as part of Paul's polemic against being "justified by works" and boasting before God. Verses 4 and 5 elaborate the contrast involved in this polemic. This means that both Abraham's believing in God and his faith being credited for righteousness are seen as contrasting with the view against which Paul polemicizes. It is clear with regard to both parts of the quotation that Paul is correct. As has been seen, Abraham's believing in God in Genesis 15:6 is exclusively oriented toward God's gracious and free promises in its OT context.

But is Paul correct when he regards faith being reckoned as righteousness as not grounded on Abraham's own obedience? Yes, the context of Romans 4:3 shows that this means that *in some way* Abram's faith was a substitute or replacement for the righteousness before God which he did not possess. Psalm 32:1–2 is cited in Romans 4:6–8. This citation shows that reckoning as righteous even in the Old Testament consisted (partly) in the free and unearned forgiveness of sin. Is this, however, a possible meaning of the language of Genesis 15:6?

The answer is an unequivocal yes. In each of the other three uses of the verb translated, reckon or credit (חשב) in Genesis, the idea of "something being regarded as something it is not" is present. In other words, the word is used to refer to a kind of reversal of the normal state of affairs. The word for reckon is in bold and italicized in the English translations given below.

syntactically plausible. Not surprisingly, Leupold is not the only commentator to suggest a constative or durative understanding of Abraham's faith in Genesis 15:6...Kenneth Mathews has noted the anomalous construction and averred, "The verbal construction "believed" (v. 6) and reference to a past event at Ur (v. 7) substantiate that Abram had already exhibited faith. The syntax of the verb [*wehe'emin*] diverts from the typical pattern found in past tense narrative. The force of the construction conveys an ongoing faith repeated from the past' Genesis 11:27–50:26 in vol. 1b of *The New American Commentary*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: B&H Publishers, 2005), 166]" email message to author, May 2, 2004.

Gen 31:15: “Are we not *reckoned* by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and has also entirely consumed our purchase price.”

Gen 38:15: “When Judah saw her, he *thought* she *was* a harlot, for she had covered her face.”

Gen 50:20: “As for you, you *meant* evil against me, *but* God *meant* it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.”

With this evidence before him, O. P. Robertson remarks:

Other Scriptures in the Pentateuch employ the term *השב* to indicate that a person may be “reckoned” or “regarded” as something that he himself is not. Leah and Rachel affirm that their father “reckons” or “regards” them as *strangers*, although they are his own daughters (Gen. 31:15). The tithe of the Levite is “reckoned” or “regarded” as the corn of the threshing-floor and as the fullness of the winepress, although it obviously is not these things (Numb. 18:27, 30). Their tithe-offering functions in a substitutionary capacity.

Even closer to the “reckoning for righteousness” described in Genesis 15:6 is the declaration concerning certain sacrifices as described in Leviticus 7:18. If a particular sacrifice is not eaten by the third day, its value shall be lost, and it shall not be “reckoned” to the benefit of the sinner. The verse envisions a situation in which righteousness could be “reckoned” to a person, even though the individual concerned admittedly is a sinner.

In this setting it is quite appropriate to understand Genesis 15:6 in terms of God’s accounting as righteous the person of the patriarch although he himself is unrighteous.²⁵

But how can faith be a “substitute” for righteousness before God? Romans itself makes clear that that Abraham’s faith considered in and of itself is not an adequate substitute for righteousness. Many things conspire to make this clear. Two of the most important are as follows. First, to make Abraham’s faith in itself righteousness would in Romans mean that it is *the righteousness of God* (Rom 1:16–17). It would be strange, indeed, if Paul were to give Abram’s or our weak faith the mighty name of *the righteousness of God*. Second, to identify faith in itself as the righteousness of God would be to make superfluous the obvious attention that Paul seeks to draw throughout this entire context to the death and resurrection of Christ (3:21–26; 4:24–25).

We must, rather, remember that faith is oriented toward and, we may even say, shaped by the promise of God. Faith is what it is because of the promise of God. Its content is the content of the promise of God. Since Paul in Romans 4:23–25 finds the

²⁵ O. P. Robertson, “New Covenant Expositions of an Old Covenant Text,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 42, no. 2 (1980): 265–66.

ultimate fulfillment of the promise of God to Abraham in the death and resurrection of Christ, it is not difficult to see that the content of faith for which it is credited as righteousness to Abraham and the believer consists in the death and resurrection of Christ. This, and not Abraham's faith in and of itself, is the righteousness of God. To use Luther's illustration, "The believing heart holds fast to Christ just as the setting of a ring grips the jewel: we have Christ in faith."²⁶ Christ is the value and righteousness of faith.

Conclusion

Romans 4:1–25 provides the OT corroboration for the doctrine of the righteousness of God Paul enunciates in Romans 3:21–31. Paul had likely heard many times that what he was teaching simply was not in accord with the teaching of the OT. In Romans 4, Paul responds with a masterful and compelling three point defense of justification, *sola fide*. In Romans 4:3–9, he demonstrates that the OT teaches that Abraham was justified by faith not works; in 4:10–12 that Abraham was justified while still an uncircumcised (and, thus, ungodly) Gentile; and in 4:13–22 that Abraham was justified long before the giving of the law by simple belief in the promise of God. In the context of this argument, Genesis 15:6 provides a crucial and compelling testimony against Jewish legalism and the New Perspective, and for a Pauline and Protestant understanding of the righteousness of God.

²⁶ Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 231.

**CONTENDING FOR DOCTRINAL LANGUAGE
IN MISSIONS:
WHY IMPUTATION AND *SOLA FIDE* ARE GOOD NEWS
FOR KARMA-BACKGROUND CHRISTIANS¹**

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The frontlines of missions are where theological error has a tendency to fester. New missional movements draw distinctions between the helpfulness of the Bible and theology, affirming the former and disregarding the latter. The mission field has become a place of embarrassment regarding many of the doctrines that the church fathers lived and died over. Specifically, the doctrine of imputation has been practically neglected amongst many of the frontline missional efforts. And the consequences are and will continue to be devastating. This article is a call for missionaries to reach the unreached with the beautiful and historic doctrines of the Christian faith.

* * * * *

“We don’t want to impose our white Western cultural interpretations upon their theology.” These are sentiments I hear frequently from missionaries who have undergone years of derisive ‘white-shaming’ for the eighteenth–to–twentieth centuries’ excesses of colonialization and Western theological imperialism. A consequent mixture of doctrinal confusion, embarrassment, and hesitancy plague many missionaries from traditionally missionary-sending Euro-American countries. So, to prevent future failure and humiliation, some popularly overemphasized, hyper-contextualization practices encourage theological or doctrinal deconstruction. They encourage local Christians in a target culture to liberate themselves from imperialistic Western theology and thus to interpret Scripture according to what they value in their

¹ This essay is an abbreviated synthesis of chapters 4-5 in the forthcoming book: E. D. Burns, *Ancient Gospel, Brave New World: Jesus Still Saves Sinners in Cultures of Shame, Fear, Bondage, and Weakness* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2021).

own cultural orientation. This is a tendency in the movement towards contextual theology, ahistorical indigenous theology, and standpoint self-theologizing.² So, they ask the Christians of the target culture, “How do *you* understand this biblical passage?” And when the indigenous Christians, being respectful of their teachers, turn the open-ended question back to the missionaries, if the missionaries are ungrounded in doctrine and historical theology, they will often employ a method devoid of doctrine (because in their mind, Bible = good; doctrine = bad).

So, what is one essential doctrine that missionaries tend to sideline more than others? That Jesus died for the forgiveness of sins? That God is Creator? That there is a heaven and a hell? Those are still, nevertheless, central themes that many missionaries treasure. Yet, one key doctrine that most overlook, and some even outright reject, is the glorious truth of justification, specifically imputation. If missionaries do, however, claim to uphold the doctrine of justification, the way they might describe it is as though it were synonymous with pardon and forgiveness—not a small oversight. The implications of neglecting the doctrine of Christ’s imputed righteousness through faith alone have eternal consequences, and for those in merit-based, karmic cultures, this doctrine is eminently relevant.

One common example on the mission field of this anti-doctrinal approach is putting a Bible into the hands of new believers and asking them how they interpret it and plan to apply it. Errors abound, then, especially in terms of confusing achieved personal righteousness with received alien righteousness. This is especially true for those people who view reality through a meritorious system that they believe secures favor with spirits, gods, ancestors, Allah, etc. If the missionary doesn’t contend for the centrality of justification through faith alone, errors of works-righteousness will inevitably creep in unnoticed. Consequently, the local Christians’ hermeneutical grid, worship, discipleship, and assurance suffer.

Bible-Only Language Versus Doctrinal Assertions

These kinds of fallacies abound in missions networks where the needs of the unreached are staggering, progress has been slow and discouraging, theological precision and exactitude are disparaged, and listening for the Holy Spirit’s secret, extrabiblical words is regularly practiced. And the Bible becomes a mystical book, quoted out of historical and doctrinal context, but quoted nonetheless as the basis for their ministry practices and conclusions. If there is any pushback, anti-doctrinal missionaries might claim, “I’m just doing what the Bible says”; “The Bible is my creed”; “I’m just listening to the Spirit”; or “I’m just following the way of Jesus.”

This distinction between using Bible-only language as definitive versus employing doctrinal formulations might seem hair-splitting and pedantic. That’s an understandable assessment. Nevertheless, this issue is worthy of our attention as missionaries. It has eternal ramifications.

² This is not to say that *seeking to apply* Scripture to a local, indigenous context is unwarranted. Indeed, we should duly encourage it. For instance, teaching a theology of vocation and work has many different applications: where one people group might corporately struggle with sloth and idleness, another people group might corporately err on the side of being worried busybodies and vainly self-sufficient. Both need a theology of vocation and work under God’s natural and providential decrees, but such theology will be uniquely applicable and meaningful depending upon the context.

The history of false teaching and heresy records the practice of using the Bible's language to affirm imprecise doctrine or to suggest patently false doctrines. Saying, "I'm a Jesus-follower" and refusing to clarify what one believes to be true about Christ's identity and Christ's work is a pious distraction clouded by sentimental, hazy, and "authentic" language. The follow-up question, then, is, "Who is Jesus and what did He do?" Well, which Jesus? Muslims have a Jesus. Mormons have a Jesus. Secular elites have a Jesus. The Word of Faith movement and the New Apostolic Reformation have a Jesus. In claiming that doctrine is divisive and that "the world will know we are Christians by our love," propositional truth becomes not only extraneous but sometimes even a perceived threat to true spirituality. All that matters, then, is a "pure and simple devotion to Jesus," not proactively teaching truth claims of the history and doctrine of Christ. In other words, some big-hearted, undiscerning missionaries improperly use the Bible's own language in a way that sounds sincere and pure-hearted, but in the end, such *solo scriptura* (not *sola scriptura*) obfuscates well-crafted creeds and doctrines that discriminate between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. To put it bluntly, each person's eternity is on the line in knowing, assenting, and trusting propositional truths that rightly cut between truth and falsehood. Heaven and hell hang in the balance. And one *iota* can tip the scale one way or the other.

This is why missionaries and translators, of all people, need to handle language with painstaking attentiveness. Irreversible syncretism can sneak in through a negligence of theological and transcendent categories, embracing the target culture's value systems, adopting their standpoints, and not redefining common-sounding categories with biblical truths. As dogmatic theologian, Gilles Emery, describes Thomas Aquinas's (1225–1274) tenacity for exacting theological language, missionaries and translators should take note: "St. Thomas is constantly working at the purification of our language, in order to make it appropriate for a correct understanding of the faith."³ Words have meaning, and theological ideas have generational and eternal consequences.

No concealed missiological conspiracy likely exists to "dumb down" theological tradition and doctrinal standards. Yet, as in psychological warfare where radical ideologues employ disinformation campaigns, so demonic powers and the spirit of the age all practice biblical disinformation tactics to blur, deviate, and pollute doctrinal truth. Believers are engaged in a truth war, and maybe no other arena suffers more blitzkrieg than the frontlines among the least-reached language groups. Ever since biblical times and especially throughout church history, the doctrines of demons have threatened to infiltrate the ranks of God's elect. Commonly the enemy has done this through undiscerning, and occasionally even devious, leaders in the church who promote biblical-sounding terminology with doctrineless or twisted doctrinal definitions.

³ Gilles Emery, "Central Aristotelian Themes in Aquinas's Trinitarian Theology," in *Aristotle in Aquinas's Theology*, ed. Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering (Oxford University Press, 2015), 21.

Athanasius, Doctrinal Language, and Righteousness in Christ

One classic example of anti-doctrinal *solo scriptura* was the controversy over the nature of Christ between Athanasius (300–373) and Arius (250–336) in the fourth century. Arius and his followers’ denial of the divinity and eternity of Christ was the locus of the controversy, but because they were using biblical verses and language to prooftext their arguments, this issue was unusually complex to unravel. Historian, Mark Noll, helpfully explains how complicated this was:

Arius enhanced his argument by quoting from the Bible in a way that revealed deep study of Scripture, but also that caused great uneasiness among his opponents. For example, he apparently referred often to the monologue by Wisdom in Proverbs, chapter 8. With many others in the early church Arius understood Wisdom as a personification of Christ, but against the main current of orthodoxy he maintained that the statement in verse 22, about Wisdom being created at the beginning of God’s work, indicated that Jesus did not share the Father’s divine essence. Similarly, Arius fastened on passages in the Gospels where Jesus spoke of the Father as “greater than I” (John 14:28) or where Jesus was said to grow (Luke 2:52) or to suffer human privations. ... In studying the Bible, Arius maximized whatever he could find that suggested differences between the Father and the Son. ... Arius’ use of the Bible seemed selective or sophistic. He was accused of reading meanings into innocent passages that distorted the rightful sense of the text.⁴

Piously claiming the high ground of “just saying what the Bible says,” the Arians uploaded their own defective definitions into their Bible-only affirmations. They were truth terrorists, smuggling in deadly toxins through biblical language and pious-sounding terminology. As Noll describes, “Athanasius ... did not consider Arius’s arguments as philosophical curiosities. Rather, he viewed them as daggers at the very heart of the Christian message.”⁵ Interestingly, the way Arius crept in unnoticed was through his personality and popularity. Most of the bishops in the empire held to Arius’s view, and Arius was a respected leader with a charming persona. In his preface to *De Incarnatione*, C.S. Lewis (1898–1963) described the popular perception among “all the civilised world” that Arius’s theological sentiments were merely “one of those ‘sensible’ synthetic religions ... [that] included among their devotees many highly cultivated clergymen.”⁶ Most of the notably experienced and cultured bishops recognized Arius’s views as merely a matter of astute nuance, fresh perspective, and difference of emphasis. However, Athanasius, Arius’s junior by fifty years, appeared to be a brash theological nit-pick with insensitive tone—a juvenile Pharisee, as it were. Athanasius (followed by the Alexandrians) was picking a fight with a distinguished bishop over the ostensible pettiness of a single *iota: homoousios*

⁴ Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 53–54.

⁵ Noll, *Turning Points*, 55.

⁶ C. S. Lewis, “Preface,” in Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, Popular Patristics Series, ed. John Behr (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), 44b:14.

(same being), not *homoiousios* (similar being). Jesus is not created because He is not merely similar to the Father; rather, Jesus is equal to the Father in His divine being and therefore not made. The odds were against Athanasius.

When Athanasius and the Alexandrians confronted the Arians with biblical passages that argued for the eternal deity of Christ, they were shocked that the Arians seemed to agree. As the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* records,

To their [that is, the Alexandrians] surprise they were met with perfect acquiescence. Only as each test was propounded, it was observed that the suspected party [that is, the Arians] whispered and gesticulated to one another, evidently hinting that each could be safely accepted, since it admitted of evasion. If their assent was asked to the formula “like to the Father in all things,” it was given with the reservation that man as such is the “image and glory of God.” The “power of God” elicited the whispered explanation that the host of Israel ... and that even the locust and caterpillar are called the “power of God.” The “eternity” of the Son was countered by the text, “We that live are always” (2 Corinthians 4:11)! The fathers were baffled ... by the evasions of the Arians.⁷

Noll demonstrates why Athanasius saw this underhanded use of biblical language as a threat. In diminishing Christ’s eternality and divinity, the doctrine of righteousness in Christ was at stake! The “great exchange” was on the line. The hope of righteousness through faith in Christ’s cross and resurrection drove Athanasius to contend for Christological doctrine:

His memorable treatise *De Incarnatione* (Of the incarnation) was written early in the dispute with Arius. It summarized as follows the case he would continue to make for the rest of his life: If Christ were not truly God, then he could not bestow life upon the repentant and free them from sin and death. Yet this work of salvation is at the heart of the biblical picture of Christ, and it has anchored the church’s life since the beginning. What Athanasius saw clearly was that, unless Christ was truly God, humanity would lose the hope that Paul expressed in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “that in [Christ] we might become the righteousness of God.”⁸

⁷ Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 4:xvix. For this quotation and a popular discussion of this event and the implications of the Arians’ use of biblical language, see John Piper, *Contending for Our All: Defending Truth and Treasuring Christ in the Lives of Athanasius, John Owen, and J. Gresham Machen* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 63–66. See also Bryan M. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers: An Evangelical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 149–58; Michael A. G. Haykin, *Rediscovering the Church Fathers: Who They Were and How They Shaped the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 117–19; Justin S. Holcomb, *Know the Heretics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 87–98; Peter J. Leithart, *Athanasius* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 318–81.

⁸ Noll, *Turning Points*, 55 [sic]. Athanasius argued, “He became what we are so that He might make us what He is.” In Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 54.

This new life in Christ, Athanasius insisted, is for those who have “put on the faith of the cross” (*Inc.* 28). As theologian, John Behr, says in the introduction to *De Incarnatione*, Athanasius’s purpose in fighting for theological precision was “in reality nothing other than presenting an apology for the cross.”⁹

The Alexandrians soon learned that quoting biblical language *only* (i.e., citing verses to proof-text ideas) was insufficient and allowed for error through using the Bible’s language to import aberrant meaning. Since the error surrounded the *meaning* of biblical terms and ideas, in order to safeguard the apostolic doctrine, then codifying propositional truth in a creed and a confession was essential. Athanasius held that the Bible indeed interprets itself, but the explanation of its meaning required extrabiblical creeds that both upheld affirmations of truth and equally maintained denials of error. Conceding to a truth statement by secretly holding to a different definition of terms was a cunning move by the Arians. However, once the bishops forced agreement of denials and anathemas of false statements, the Arians stood exposed for their duplicity.

Athanasius, *contra mundum*,¹⁰ drew the line in the sand of the doctrine of Christ: Jesus is eternally begotten, not made, true God and true Man, yet not two, but one Christ. One side is truth, the other false; one side is orthodox, the other heterodox; one side leads to heaven, the other to hell. Nice, distinguished, veteran “Christian” leaders who misuse the Bible’s language to selectively affirm what is merely “nuanced language” (code for “falsehood and error”) about Christ and the gospel and who dilute or deny propositional truths of the historic doctrines of the universal church are in danger of eternal damnation. This is a grave matter that demands sentinel-minded vigilance, surgeon-focused precision, and father-devoted care.

Central Doctrinal Language: Guilt and Substitution

The self-evidencing biblical witness and apostolic interpretation is that at the heart of the good news of Jesus Christ is substitution—penal substitutionary atonement, to be precise. All other gospel motifs revolve around the center of penal substitution. Equally, all other cultural value systems, such as shame/honor, fear/peace, bondage/freedom, and weakness/strength emerge out of the objective guilt of trespassing God’s law, whether it be a Gentile’s internal moral law or a Jew’s written law.

God effects the benefits that Christ earned for his people, which believers experience specifically because of the gospel’s substitutionary framework. Consider a few of the marvelous substitutionary benefits of Christ’s work on behalf of his people:

- He has *borne our griefs and carried our sorrows*. (Isa 53:4)
- He was *pierced for our transgressions*; He was *crushed for our iniquities*; upon him was the *chastisement that brought us peace*, and *with His wounds we are healed*. (Isa 53:5)

⁹ John Behr, “Introduction,” in Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 36.

¹⁰ *Contra mundum* is Latin for “against the world,” a title for which Athanasius was famously known.

- The LORD has laid on Him *the iniquity of us all*. (Isa 53:6)
- As for His generation, who considered that He was *cut off* out of the land of the living, stricken *for the transgression* of my people? (Isa 53:8)
- Yet it was the will of the LORD to *crush* Him; He has put Him to *grief*; when His soul *makes an offering for guilt*, He shall see His offspring. (Isa 53:10)
- By His knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, *make many to be accounted righteous*, and He shall *bear their iniquities*. (Isa 53:11)
- He poured out His *soul to death* and was numbered *with the transgressors*; yet He *bore the sin of many*, and makes *intercession for the transgressors*'. (Isa 53:12)¹¹

Let us preach the good news of substitution to ourselves, and with the Psalmist, say: “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits, who *forgives* all your iniquity, who *heals* all your diseases, who *redeems* your life from the pit, who *crowns* you with steadfast love and mercy, who *satisfies* you with good” (Ps 103:2–5).¹²

Where the biblical gospel penetrates any cultural value system, at the center of the good news is substitution. For example, in a cultural value system of shame/honor, Jesus substitutes human shame for His honor. This substitutionary system similarly functions at the center of every other value system that reflects biblical categories. But, what makes Christ able to substitute His earned benefits for sinners' earned debt? Penal substitutionary atonement. Since humans' fundamental problem is that they are objectively guilty in Adam as their federal head, their penalty demands full satisfaction. Nevertheless, people in some cultural value systems might recognize their humanity is broken because of experiences of horizontal shame among their community or demonic fear in their religious rituals. But more significant and central to the brokenness of the horizontal human dilemma is the vertical objective guilt that demands satisfaction.

Enter the heart of the gospel: after living a perfect life in obedience to God's law, Christ satisfied the law's penalty for law-breakers on the cross, atoning for their sin, propitiating God's wrath, expiating their guilt, crediting His righteousness, reconciling them to God, and rising from the dead to secure eternal life for those for whom He died. Having resurrected and ascended as Lord to the right hand of the Father, Jesus fulfills the redeemed with a chief enjoyment of *Himself* as their true reward, graciously bestowing all His blessings upon those who trust alone in Him alone to the glory of God alone. Christ Himself is the *telos* of the gospel.¹³

¹¹ All italics mine.

¹² Emphases added.

¹³ For some theologically rich and evangelically warm-hearted resources on penal substitutionary atonement, see *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Theological & Practical Perspectives*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004); Steve Jeffrey, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007); John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 20th Anniversary Edition (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006); J. I. Packer and Mark Dever, *In My Place Condemned He Stood: Celebrating the Glory of the Atonement* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007); R. C. Sproul, *Saved from What?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002); John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 2015 ed. (Grand

Central Doctrinal Language: Guilt and the Imputation of Righteousness

How are the benefits of Christ's substitutionary work made possible for His people? Through the act of imputation. Some will object that imputation is a Greco-Roman legal construct and medieval category forced upon the text, which the Protestant Reformers blindly overapplied and, in the opinion of some, misapplied. They will also argue that it is not a word mentioned in the Bible. Such claims are deeply flawed, revealing a revisionist reading of church history and a myopic understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures, emerging more from trendy new perspectives on Paul than from church history or the Old and New Testaments.

Remember who the northern Europeans were before the gospel transformed their lives and communities. History records them as savage barbarians who sacked the "eternal city" of Rome. Some argue that out of the rubble of Rome's humiliated eminence, Greco-Roman legal language of imputation and justification captivated and civilized the alleged "savages" of northern Europe who worshiped trees and tormented the imaginations of their neighboring regions. Some insist that medieval clergy adopted such legal language because it effectively transformed tribalistic Europe into a law-based civilization. Granted, this sounds like hyperbole, but these are some of the bizarre sentiments I have heard from practitioners who insist on rescuing the Bible from western legal terminology with a renaissance of Ancient Near East (ANE) shame/honor and fear/power cultural values. The truth is that the ideas of imputation and justification are rooted in the Jewish traditions and Hebrew Scriptures.

Justification and Jewish Doctrine

Evidence exists that justification was a treasured doctrine, even in pre-Christian Judaism. Consider the echoes of substitution and justification in the writings of the early Jewish Qumran community:

If I stumble, God's loving-kindness forever shall save me. If through sin of the flesh I fall, my justification will be by the righteousness of God which endures for all time...Through His love He has brought me near, by His loving-kindness shall He provide my justification...and through His exceeding goodness shall He atone for all my sins. By His righteousness shall He cleanse me of human defilement.¹⁴

Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015); *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013).

¹⁴ From 1QS 11:9–15; *A New Translation of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, trans. Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, Jr., and Edward Cook (New York: HarperOne, 2005), 143. Quoted in Michael Horton, *Justification*, New Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2018), 1:44.

Ancient Judaism held to a doctrine called 'the merit of the fathers,'¹⁵ which taught that one's own merits and the merits of others, like Abraham, could be imputed (or credited) to individuals or the nation in the name of covenant solidarity. In his magisterial study on justification, theologian Michael Horton explains:¹⁶

This doctrine of the merit of the fathers, which is found in many places in the Mishna (oral Torah) was fully elaborated in recent times by Solomon Schechter (1909) and Arthur Marmorstein (1920).¹⁷ According to Marmorstein, "These sages taught, with few exceptions, that one is able to acquire merits before God." ... Such merits, the rabbis believe, "benefit not merely themselves, but also their posterity, their fellow-creatures, their ancestry, their whole generation, not merely during their life, but even after their departure from the land of the living. Even in the hereafter their merits protect and heal others. Judaism further teaches, as a supplement to the doctrine of *imputed merits*, the law of *imputed sin*. ... This is nothing else but *the law of the solidarity of mankind*, of the brotherhood of all peoples and nations."¹⁸ ... Notice Marmorstein calls this the "law of solidarity of *mankind*," not just of Israel. ... With the 'law of imputed sin' we have original sin, and with 'the doctrine of imputed merits' we find the category for justification ... in the ancient Jewish texts."¹⁹

Horton establishes from pseudepigraphal and other ancient Jewish sources hundreds of years before Christ that the forensic, marketplace, and banking analogies for justification were commonplace in Jewish tradition. These three types of analogies for the doctrine of justification are not foreign Greco-Roman notions. Horton says, "It is clear from the Mishnah that one stands at the last day on his or her own. ... The courtroom, scales, and bookkeeping dominate descriptions of final justification in ancient Judaism; they are not simply metaphors drawn from Roman jurisprudence and medieval penance projected back onto Judaism." Horton proceeds to demonstrate that among these Jewish sources, "there is a consensus affirming the imputation of both sin and merits from one person to another. For Paul, the believer's righteousness is 'alien,' that is, 'not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith' (Phil 3:9)."²⁰

¹⁵ See Hermann Lichtenberger, "The Understanding of the Torah in the Judaism of Paul's Day," in *Paul and the Mosaic Law: The Third Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium on Earliest Christianity and Judaism*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 16; cited in Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 636.

¹⁶ Horton, *Justification*, 2:322.

¹⁷ Solomon Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, digital ed. (repr., Berkeley: University of California Libraries, 1909); Arthur Marmorstein, *The Doctrine of Merits in the Old Rabbinical Literature*, Jewish College Publication 7 (London: Jews' College, 1920).

¹⁸ Marmorstein, *The Doctrine of Merits*, 4. Emphasis added.

¹⁹ Horton, *Justification*, 2:322.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 2:324.

Justification and the Ancient Church

Moreover, in light of the revisionist assertion that justification doctrine is either a unique phenomenon of the European Reformation, or that it is an overemphasized byproduct of western legal constructs, believers must honestly consider the pervasive influence of justification doctrine in the ancient and medieval church. Below is a small sampling²¹ of ancient church and pre-Reformation sources and church leaders who hailed this doctrine of justification and the great exchange as central to the gospel system:

- Why was our father Abraham blessed? Was it not because he attained righteousness and truth through faith? Isaac with confidence, knowing the future, was willingly led to sacrifice. Jacob with humility departed from his land ... and the twelve tribes of Israel were given to him. ... All therefore were glorified and magnified, not through themselves or their own works or the righteous actions which they did, but through his [God's] will. And so we, having been called through his will in Christ Jesus, are not justified through ourselves or through our own wisdom or understanding or piety or works which we have done in holiness of heart, but through faith, by which the Almighty God has justified all who have existed from the beginning, to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.²² [Clement of Rome, *1 Clement* 32:4. From c. AD 100]
- He Himself gave up His own Son as a ransom for us, the holy one for the lawless, the guiltless for the guilty, the just for the unjust, the incorruptible for the corruptible, the immortal for the mortal. For what else but His righteousness could have covered our sins? In whom was it possible for us, the lawless and ungodly, to be justified, except in the Son of God alone? O sweet exchange, O the incomprehensible work of God, O the unexpected blessings, that the sinfulness of many should be hidden in one righteous person, while the righteousness of one should justify many sinners!²³ [*Epistle to Diognetus*. From c. AD 150]
- But because all had come under sin, doubtless they were likewise estranged from the glory of God because they were able neither to receive it in any respect whatsoever nor to merit it. ... Therefore the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ reaches to all who believe, whether they are

²¹ For definitive sources on the priority of justification doctrine in the ancient and pre-Reformation church, see Nick Needham, "Justification in the Early Church Fathers," in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 25–54; Gerald Bray, "Reformation Invention or Historic Orthodoxy?," *The Doctrine on Which the Church Stands or Falls: Justification in Biblical, Theological, Historical, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 563–86; Horton, *Justification*, 1: 39–130. For a well-researched and accessible source, see Nathan Busenitz, *Long Before Luther: Tracing the Heart of the Gospel from Christ to the Reformation* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2017).

²² Clement, *1 Clement* 31–32, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2nd ed., ed. and rev. Michael W. Holmes, trans. J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 45–46. Quoted in Bray, "Reformation Invention or Historic Orthodoxy?," 565.

²³ *The Epistle to Diognetus*, 9:1–6, in *The Apostolic Fathers in English*, ed. and trans. Michael W. Holmes (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 298.

Jews or Greeks. It justifies those who have been cleansed from their past crimes and makes them capable of receiving the glory of God; and it supplies this glory not for the sake of their merits nor for the sake of their works, but freely to those who believe. ... He gave himself as a redemption price.²⁴ [Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. From c. AD 246]

- If Abraham believed in God and it was imputed to him for righteousness, then each one, who believes in God and lives by faith, is found to be a righteous person.²⁵ [Cyprian. From AD third century]
- This is the true and perfect glorying in God, when a man is not lifted up on account of his own righteousness, but has known himself to be wanting in true righteousness and to be justified by faith alone in Christ.²⁶ [Basil. From AD fourth century]
- Without the works of the law, to an ungodly man, that is to say, a Gentile, believing in Christ, his 'faith is imputed for righteousness' as also it was to Abraham.²⁷ [Ambrose. From AD fourth century]
- For this is the righteousness of God, when we are justified not by works, in which case it would be necessary that not even a spot should be found, but by grace, in which case all sin is done away. And this, at the time that it does not allow us to be lifted up (for it is entirely the free gift of God), teaches us also the greatness of what is given. For what came before was a righteousness of the law and of works, but His is the righteousness of God.²⁸ [John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Corinthians*. From c. AD fourth century]
- When an ungodly man is converted, God justifies him through faith alone, not on account of good works which he possessed not.²⁹ [Jerome. From AD fifth century]
- Shall not all our righteousness turn out to be mere unrighteousness and deficiency? What, then, shall it be concerning our sins, when not even our righteousness can answer for itself? Wherefore ... let us flee, with all humility to Mercy which alone can save our souls ... whosoever hungers and thirsts after righteousness, let him believe in thee, who 'justifies the ungodly'; and thus, being justified by faith alone, he shall have peace with God.³⁰ [Bernard of Clairvaux. From AD twelfth century]

²⁴ Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 1–5*, trans. Thomas P. Scheek (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 215. Quoted in Horton, *Justification*, 1:56.

²⁵ Cyprian (c. 200–258) was a bishop in North Africa. Quoted in James Buchanan, *Not Guilty* (London: Grace Publications Trust, 2005), 39

²⁶ Basil (330–379) was bishop of Cappadocia. Quoted in Buchanan, *Not Guilty*, 39.

²⁷ Ambrose (340–397) was bishop of Milan. Quoted in Buchanan, *Not Guilty*, 40.

²⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 2 Corinthians 11:5*, cited in Needham, "Justification in the Early Church Fathers," 35. See also, John Chrysostom, "Homily 11 on 2 Corinthians [2 Cor. 5:21]," *New Advent*, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/220211.htm>, accessed 24 July 2020.

²⁹ Jerome (347–420) was famous for translating the Bible into Latin. Quoted in Buchanan, *Not Guilty*, 40.

³⁰ Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) was a French abbot who was famous for his monastic revitalizations and writings on the love of God. Quoted in Buchanan, *Not Guilty*, 41–42.

The Justification Debate

Over the years, I have observed the sweeping popularity of ideas from the New Perspective on Paul (hereafter NPP) throughout the international missions community. Many are not even aware of the origin of their NPP-influenced notions, nor are they aware of how quickly ideas spread and evolve past their original intent. Usually ideas spread and morph through conversations and conferences rather than through studying the sources. Understanding the original sources and ideas helps to discern their applied implications in contemporary missions.

According to the NPP, being justified means to be declared a covenant member of God's family apart from keeping the works of the law, such as receiving circumcision and maintaining dietary laws.³¹ So, here, justification is ultimately a matter of ecclesiology, not soteriology. And then, faith—or faithfulness—proves who is in the covenant community, not the *means* through which God declares the unrighteous to be righteous. N.T. Wright, famous proponent of the NPP, does not explicitly deny that Christ took believers' sins or that they eventually receive righteousness. But he does not believe that that is what Paul meant by "justification." Wright believes that "if you start with the popular view of justification, you may actually lose sight of the heart of the Pauline gospel."³² His criticism of artificial "once-saved-always-saved" evangelicalism might have legitimacy, but his new perspective is no more convincing. Moreover, his argument is not merely a matter of reemphasizing a feature of the gospel (e.g., union or reconciliation) to correct an imbalance and present the full-orbed gospel package; rather, he seeks to improve the understanding of "justification" and "faith" so much so that they are redefined altogether. He claims not to deny initial justification through faith, but proceeds to teach final justification through faithfulness. And the bigger issue at hand is that the NPP's ideas have taken on a life of their own through social media, mission conferences, and popular evangelical jargon. And by the time they reach the mission field, the NPP's proposals from years ago are currently applied in ways that counterfeit the gospel of grace altogether.

In Galatians, according to the NPP, part of the different gospel that was being proposed was that Gentile believers needed to undergo circumcision and remain kosher to be justified, which according to the NPP means being included as a member of the covenant family. The false gospel, then, issues from racism, classism, and ethnocentrism—the Jews imposing ceremonial boundary markers that originally excluded the Gentile believers. These are supposedly what the "works of the law" mean. Alternatively, "justifying faith" means Spirit-wrought covenant obedience—

³¹ N. T. Wright notes that the NPP debate has developed over time to where the differences are more in terms of emphasis rather than antithesis. This is especially true among various adherents and proponents of Wright's works; see N. T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 36. See also James D. G. Dunn, "The New Perspective: Whence, What, and Whither?," in *The New Perspective on Paul: Collected Essays* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 1–88. For a helpful and accessible treatment of the errors of the New Perspective on Paul, see Stephen Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered: Rethinking a Pauline Theme* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013). See especially, Horton, *Justification*, 2:97–148.

³² N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 113.

faithfulness, allegiance, devotion. So, the confusion was over who could eat with the Jews at the table. But the question arises then, what Gentile would want to endure persecution, willingly submit to dietary restrictions, and become circumcised in order to join a small Jewish Christian Church?³³ Why not just plant a Gentile church, like the rest of church history? Or was the issue more eternally consequential than mere community belonging?

When the Holy Spirit through Paul uses justification and salvation language in Paul's other letters to Thessalonica (cf. 1 Thess 1:6–10; 2:4, 13, 16; 5:9; 2 Thess 1:8; 2:12; 3:2) and Corinth (1 Cor 1:18–25, 21; 4:4; 6:9–11; 9:20–23; 10:33; 11:32; 15:1–2; 2 Cor 2:15–16; 3:7–9; 4:3; 6:1–2), the letters never address the false teaching that Gentiles needed to undergo circumcision and to observe Jewish laws to be part of the church community. The letters use such language only in terms of all people (Gentiles and Jews alike) finding grace before God's righteous standards. Justification language is always in terms of salvation before God and corresponds directly to condemnation language. Justification necessarily corresponds to and solves the plight of condemnation just as sanctification is the solution to corruption.

The NPP proponents—who seek to rescue readers from the modern Western enculturated trappings of a Greco-Roman, medieval, Lutheran guilt-orientation—seem to reflect contemporary cultural values of multi-culturalism, egalitarianism, tolerance, and the celebration of unity in diversity, ironically committing the exact enculturation fallacy they claim to circumvent. In other words, possibly the charm of the NPP is that it resonates with our classless, brotherhood-of-man-moment in the global village.³⁴ Ostensibly seeking to deter cultural Christians from a *faux* “easy believism,” the NPP and other well-meaning likeminded theologians—who are rightly concerned with superficial, lukewarm Christianity that treats Christ like “fire insurance”—emphasize faithfulness, loyalty, and allegiance as the *meaning* of faith. They nobly emphasize discipleship and devotion and inadvertently conflate the instrumental cause of justification (faith) with the necessary evidence of sanctification (faithfulness).

For instance, Wright rephrases Romans 1:17 as, “The gospel, [Paul] says, reveals or unveils God's own righteousness, his covenant faithfulness, which operates through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for the benefit of all those who in turn are faithful.”³⁵ Wright redefines faith as faithfulness, which becomes the basis for believers' final justification, and in his system, righteousness is not transferred to the believer. He does allow that believers “are declared, in the present, to be what they will be seen to be in the future, namely the true people of God. Present justification declares, on the basis of faith, what future justification will affirm publicly (according

³³ Theologian, Stephen Westerholm, makes a similar observation: “How, we may well wonder, was a demand for circumcision made convincing to Galatian believers in Christ? In itself, circumcision can hardly have seemed a desirable operation to undergo; it can only have been urged upon the Galatians as part of a bigger picture.” Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 12.

³⁴ For an incisive discussion of how the NPP reflects our 21st-century inclusivist priorities, see Michael J. Kruger, “Is the ‘New Perspective on Paul’ a Product of Our Current Cultural Moment?,” *Canon Fodder*, 20 May 2019, <https://www.michaeljkruger.com/is-the-new-perspective-on-paul-a-product-of-our-current-cultural-moment/> (accessed 19 February 2020); Barton Swain, “A New Take on the Apostle Paul,” *Wall Street Journal*, 16 May 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-new-take-on-the-apostle-paul-11558048430> (accessed 19 February 2020).

³⁵ Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 109. Cited also in Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 633.

to 2:14–16 and 8:9–11) *on the basis of the entire life.*³⁶ Believers' covenantal faithfulness becomes the basis for their final justification, which apparently becomes the object of their faith. So, to unpack the progression, faith is not instrumental to believers' salvation, but rather, the sign that they are part of the covenantal family. And their entrance and membership in the covenantal family is grounded in their allegiance, loyalty, and faithfulness to the covenant. And this allegiance to Christ and loyalty to the covenant is a lifetime community effort.

Occasionally I hear missionaries blend the abovementioned notion with what New Testament scholar, John Barclay, observes about the ancient practice of gift giving.³⁷ (Christians must be careful of using the ANE culture to unlock hidden meanings in biblical texts that diverge from the inspired composite whole). Apparently, ancient gifts were not wages; they were indeed gifts. But the giver gave them to *worthy* recipients. Consequently, some rabbinic leaders insisted on Israel's worthiness for God's election of them, so Israel's allegiance and desire to obey God, imperfect as they were, qualified them as worthy recipients of God's divine gift.³⁸ So the grace gift was contingent upon a degree of loyalty, worthiness, and devotion to God. Perfection was not expected, but effort was. And there was an emphasis upon corporate solidarity, being faithful to God's covenant together as a community.

But diverging from the ancient Jewish cultural notions of grace and gifts, the Holy Spirit through Paul uses this rabbinic terminology but confronts and redefines the grace gift as *free, unmerited*, and bestowed upon entirely *unworthy* rebels who are never faithful and sincere enough. New Testament scholar, Will Timmins, commenting on Abraham's faith, helpfully explains the "polemical edge" of Romans 4 issued against Second Temple Judaism's notion of Abraham's worthiness:

Both the phrase, "hope against hope," and the depiction of Abraham's full conviction concerning God's ability, implicitly reference the *incapacity* and the *inability* of Abraham as one whose body is dead (vv. 18–19), and, therefore, as one who contributes the grand total of nothing to God's promised salvation...The believing Abraham brings *nothing* to God; he receives everything...This suggests that Paul's depiction of Abraham's faith in Romans 4 carries with it a polemical edge, being contrasted with the view that was common in Second Temple

³⁶ Wright, 129. Emphasis added. See also Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 634.

³⁷ See John M. G. Barclay, "Grace Within and Beyond Reason: Philo and Paul in Dialogue," in *Paul, Grace, and Freedom: Essays in Honour of John K. Riches*, ed. Paul Middleton, Angus Paddison, and Karen Wenell (London: T. & T. Clark, 2009), 1–21; John M. G. Barclay, "Paul, the Gift, and the Battle over Gentile Circumcision: Revisiting the Logic of Galatians," *Australian Biblical Review* 58 (2010): 36–56; John M. G. Barclay, "Believers and the 'Last Judgment' in Paul: Rethinking Grace and Recompense," in *Eschatologie—Eschatology: The Sixth Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium: Eschatology in Old Testament, Ancient Judaism, and Early Christianity* (Tübingen, September 2009), ed. Hans-Joachim Eckstein, Christof Landmesser, and Hermann Lichtenberger, with Jens Adam and Martin Bauspiess (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 195–208, cited in Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 31–32.

³⁸ See Barclay, "Paul, the Gift, and the Battle," 49; cited also in Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 32.

Judaism, which is that Abraham was exemplary for his faithfulness and obedience to God in the midst of trial.³⁹

The problem was that Jews and Gentiles alike could never desire or remain faithful to God enough, neither qualitatively nor quantitatively. The question is: When is enough, enough? Does God have a sliding scale where He capriciously justifies some at the final judgment based upon whether they “did their best”—89% sincerity and 64% faithfulness for some, and 73% sincerity and 51% faithfulness for others? I do my best, and God does the rest. What god does that? That’s Allah, not Adonai. That is not an immutable God. Stephen Westerholm explains:

For Paul, God’s gift of salvation *necessarily* excludes any part to be played by God-pleasing “works” since human beings are incapable of doing them. Human beings are all sinners, the “weak,” the “ungodly,” God’s “enemies.” They are slaves of sin. In their flesh lives no good thing. Their mind-set is one of hostility toward God; they cannot please God.⁴⁰

The Holy Spirit through Paul teaches: “Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness” (Rom 4:4–5). The verb “works” is contrasted with the verb “believes,” and “wages” are due the one who “works”; whereas “a gift” corresponds to the one who has “faith,” not “faithfulness” or “worthiness.” Notice, moreover, that the Holy Spirit emphasizes the individual dimension here. Believers are *individually* justified and *individually* responsible. This does not emphasize the collective in justification. It does not say, “To *those* who work, *their* wages ... *their* due. To *those* who believe, *their* faith” Salvation is neither a community effort nor a collective enterprise. The Holy Spirit through Paul is not differentiating between keeping the signs of Judaism (circumcision, etc.) and Spirit-empowered covenantal loyalty, as some suggest. Yet, the NPP is essentially arguing that believers, as a collective, are declared righteous based upon their covenant faithfulness, not their Jewish kosher-keeping.⁴¹

This kind of reasoning is not good news for anyone, but especially for those whose tender consciences seek escape from works-based religions. A Reformation occurred for this very reason. This kind of emphasis on covenant faithfulness indeed “contextualizes” for many cultures around the world, and the gospel, for karmic cultures, in such “loyalty” terms is not necessarily foreign, moronic, or offensive. If the imputation of Christ’s righteousness through faith alone no longer holds center in the gospel system, then Christ Himself has been lost. True, God has predestined the saints to be united to Christ from before the Creation, but that vital union is only

³⁹ Will N. Timmins, “A Faith Unlike Abraham’s: Matthew Bates on Salvation by Allegiance Alone,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 61, no. 3 (2018): 613–14. Emphases in original. See also Will N. Timmins, *Romans 7 and Christian Identity: A Study of the “I” in Its Literary Context*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, 170 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 182–85.

⁴⁰ Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 32. Emphasis in original.

⁴¹ For a practical and accessible evaluation of the issues at hand in the NPP, for which I am indebted, see Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 630–41.

legally possible because of justification through faith alone. If there were no exchange of believers' sin and Christ's righteousness on the cross, there would be no legal union to Christ and all His benefits. Imputation through faith alone is not a legal fiction—no imputation, no salvation.

Some missionaries promote the gospel of allegiance for obvious reasons: impenetrable people groups, like Buddhists and Muslims, latch onto this idea quite easily. The target group might not initially agree with it, but it conceptually makes sense based upon the expectations for doing right in their value systems. Whether intended or not, the gospel of covenant faithfulness and allegiance to Christ the King sounds like a lateral move from one karmic, merits-based religion to another—from karma to karmic Christianity. And given enough exposure to the benefits of Christianity, people from karma-based systems might find Christianity appealing because historically it has underscored transcendental virtues of love, mercy, kindness, human equality, sacrifice, and eternal rest, more so than the hopelessness of reincarnation or the anxiety of Allah's variability.

Instead of innovating and seeking to repackage the gospel in more transferable ways for a target culture, claiming to be building gospel bridges according to their cultural value systems, believers should consider, rather, how the Holy Spirit has illuminated the gospel throughout the ages, as confirmed by the confessing universal church. Here is an excerpt, decisively silencing the new "upgrades" on the gospel, from the confessional statement on justification in *The Second London Baptist Confession*:

Those whom God effectually calls, He also freely justifies, not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; *not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone; not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness;* but by imputing Christ's active obedience unto the whole law, and passive obedience in His death for their whole and sole righteousness by faith, which faith they have not of themselves; it is the gift of God. Faith thus *receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness*, is the alone instrument of justification; yet is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but works by love. (LBC, XI.1–2)⁴²

Guilt/Righteousness Paradigm

The scriptural doctrines of substitution and imputation function as the linchpin for the "great exchange"—Christ's benefits for our debt, Christ's righteousness for our guilt, Christ's honor for our shame, Christ's peace for our fear, Christ's freedom for our bondage, Christ's strength for our weakness, and every other benefit that He credits to us in exchange for our earned and deserved penalty.⁴³ This great exchange

⁴² Italics mine.

⁴³ For academic and pastoral resources on justification and imputation, see Jerry Bridges and Bob Bevington, *The Great Exchange: My Sin for His Righteousness* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007); John Owen,

is critical for understanding how believers in Christ through faith receive the benefits of cultural value systems (eg., honor, peace, freedom, and strength), as they correspond to the gospel benefits found in Christ alone.

Missiologists and missionaries have commonly viewed innocence as the antithesis of guilt-oriented cultural value systems, just as shame is the antithesis of an honor-oriented value system. So, as the reasoning goes, sinners are guilty, and through forgiveness of sins, they are innocent, or not guilty. But this model is fundamentally incomplete. Guilt and innocence are only corollaries in a modern nation state that mandates not breaking the law (negatively), but does not require its perfect positive alternative. The state mandates no murder, but it does not mandate loving your neighbor as yourself. The state mandates no desecration of national monuments, but it does not mandate loving and esteeming such objects above everything else. The state mandates no rape, but it does not require directing sexual desires only toward one's spouse. But God does. More than innocence, God requires righteousness. And above state surveillance, God knows every thought and intent of the heart.

**Guilt/Righteousness
Value System Terms**

Right. Wrong. Good. Bad. Wicked. Evil. Correct. True. False. Genuine. Hypocritical. Honest. Deceitful. Faithful. Unfaithful. Trustworthy. Deceptive. Law-Abiding. Duplicitous. Perfect. Upright. Blameless. Condemnation. Damnation. Sin. Innocent. Guiltless. Righteous. Iniquity. Credit. Impute. Reckon. Transgression. Trespass. Obedience. Disobedience. Lawful. Lawless. Forensic. Justice. Judicial. Just. Unjust. Judgment. Vindication. Justification. Acquittal. Rebellion. Virtuous. Depraved. Moral. Immoral. Ethical. Unethical. Court. Legal. Trial. Testimony. Charge. Fault. Accuse. Defense. Crime. Bondage. Prison. Rules. Code. Precept. Standard. Throne. Criminal. Boundary. Treaty. Ratify. Covenant. Punishment. Penalty. Debt. Atonement. Wrath. Pleasing. Displeasing. Due. Payment. Commendation. Recompense. Exact. Wrest. Acceptable. Approval. Remedy. Amend. Order. Test. Instruction. Commandment. Demand. Edict. Verdict. Decree. Grant. Measurement. Error. Blameworthy. Mediator. Intercessor. Merit. Offense. Fault. Forgiveness. Contrition. Breach. Fair. Violation. Requirement. Tenet. Regulation. Canon. Impartial. Unbiased. Equitable. Dereliction. Reprobate.

The Doctrine of Justification by Faith, through the Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ Explained, Confirmed, and Vindicated (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006); R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017); Thomas Schreiner, *Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification*, The Five Solas Series, ed. Matthew Barrett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015); R. C. Sproul, *Getting the Gospel Right: The Tie that Binds Evangelicals Together* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017); J. V. Fesko, *Justification: Understanding the Classic Reformed Doctrine* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008); Barrett, *The Doctrine on Which the Church Stands or Falls*; Horton, *Justification*, 2 vols.

This guilt/innocence paradigm might work in contemporary law courts, but biblically and theologically, the antithesis of guilt is not merely innocence. This is only half true. The simplistic evangelical axiom that defines justification as “just as if I’d never sinned” is unexpectedly inaccurate; rather, more precisely, in equally simple terms, justification is “just as if I were always righteous.” The former highlights only what we did not do (never sin), while the latter highlights only what we did do (always obey). Forgiveness indeed relates to the expiation of our guilt, leaving us (amazingly) innocent, which is no small gift. Yet if ended there, then it must be concluded that in another cultural value system, like shame/honor for example, the equivalent would be to have shame removed, leaving them (amazingly) shameless. Again, no small gift. But for a shame/honor value system, similarly, that is only half the good news.

The point is this. Just as in a biblically defined shame/honor system, where the full good news is that previously shameful people are now imputed with honor and thus treated as truly honorable, so in the guilt/righteousness value system, previously guilty people are now imputed with righteousness and thus treated as truly righteous. Forgiveness brings sinners to a neutral: innocent standing before God; whereas justification and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness brings sinners to a righteous standing before God. God is against us no longer (being innocent), and moreover, He is truly, infinitely, immutably, for us (being righteous). In a shame/honor system as understood biblically, God not only says to His child, “You are no longer shameful to Me,” but He additionally says, “You are truly honorable to Me.” Likewise, in a guilt/righteousness system, God not only says to His child, “You are no longer guilty before Me,” but He says, “You are truly pleasing to Me.” That is gloriously good news. This is why believers must go beyond the guilt/innocence value system and contend for a guilt/righteousness system.

Scripture repeatedly describes Yahweh as righteous or the “Righteous One”—the first time being Pharaoh’s concession after the plague of hail in Egypt: “Then Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron, and said to them, ‘I have sinned this time; the LORD is the righteous one, and I and my people are the wicked ones’” (Exod 9:27 NASB). The Messiah is called the “Righteous One” (cf. Isa 24:16; 53:11 NASB). And in three different monologues by Peter, Stephen, and Paul in the book of Acts, Jesus is called the “Righteous One” (Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14 NASB).

When evaluating the data of Scripture’s vocabulary, categories, and proportionality of emphasis, consider the overwhelming volume of synonymous varieties and related ideas to the guilt/righteousness value system, not to mention the unmistakable frequency of such thematic varieties of this paradigm. This motif dominates Scripture.

Consider the account of God’s first and most explicit Self-revelation in the Old Testament. After the Hebrews fell into worshipping a golden calf, crediting it for delivering them out of Egypt (Exod 32:1–6), God was ready to obliterate those stiff-necked rebels. Yet, knowing that atonement was necessary (32:30–34), Moses interceded, God relented, and Moses found grace in God’s sight (33:12–17). Consequently, trembling beneath Yahweh’s otherworldly lovingkindness, Moses pleaded to see His glory (33:18). Scripture says, “The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands,

forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty” (34:6–7). These verses comprise the most beloved and quoted verses in the Old Testament; essentially, they are the “John 3:16 of the Hebrew Scriptures.”

The highwater mark of God’s Self-revelation in the Old Testament reveals His graciousness, indomitable faithfulness, and covenant-keeping love for those who commit iniquity and transgress His law, whom He nevertheless has forgiven. And Yahweh’s covenant-keeping love for His people starkly contrasts with His promise that He will by no means let the guilty go unpunished. Notice, the greatest self-revelation of Yahweh is love for the guilty-yet-forgiven transgressors. This is the pre-Messiah gospel. There is no mention here of honor for the shameful based upon a shameful person’s loyal faithfulness to God, and no insinuation of any other good, true, and beautiful value system. To be sure, this does not invalidate other cultural values, but, rather, the emphasis of God’s covenant-keeping love for guilty transgressors simply *prioritizes* the motifs of guilt/righteousness, atonement, substitution, and trust in Him alone.

This is Yahweh’s answer to Moses’s plea to see His glory (i.e., His honor). God’s honor chiefly depends upon showing grace to the guilty and keeping covenantal faithfulness to those unfaithful transgressors whom He forgives. Moses wanted to see God’s honor, and God didn’t say, “If you’re loyal to Me and honor Me, I’ll take away your shame and honor you.” God, rather, proclaims His faithful love for guilty people, showing Moses that he will understand God’s glory and honor inasmuch as he understands that each person’s problem is original guilt and that God will rescue shameful, fearful, enslaved, and weak transgressors from their guilt. And there will come a day when all the earth will honor and glorify the name of the Righteous One: “They cry out from the west concerning the majesty of the LORD. Therefore glorify the LORD in the east, the name of the LORD, the God of Israel, in the coastlands of the sea. From the ends of the earth we hear songs, ‘Glory to the Righteous One’” (Isa 24:14–16). Unmistakably, this motif holds sway at the heart of God’s glory.

Trust Alone

“You just need to believe!” “You just need to have faith!” These are the common mantras of popular spirituality. Triviality and transience mark modern spirituality, constantly aping the latest fads that promise to finally enlighten human hearts and make them whole—Celtic spirituality, yogic spirituality, iconographic spirituality, creative spirituality, monastic spirituality, etc. Phrases like “faith encounter” and “spiritual journey” are often used in the church. The problem with using biblical words like “faith” is that if believers do not carefully define terms theologically and according to historic doctrines, others might employ the same terminology but with different definitions. Faith in the twenty-first century, if defined by its common usage, essentially means a positive ethereal sentiment or an optimistic psychological persuasion that fate will somehow turn adversity into wholesomeness. It will be so if people simply “lean in” and believe and try hard enough. If people could only work up enough positive feelings and psychological confidence anticipating brighter days, then the proverbial scales of favor will be tipped. Few are probably self-aware enough to describe “faith” in such terms, but this perspective is ubiquitous today. It is merely post-truth and post-proposition superstition. Because of how the term “faith” is so

commonly used (e.g., the “Islamic faith,” “faith journey,” “interfaith dialogue,” “my faith got me through,” etc.), missiologists and theologians must define terms and deny assumptions. Using the word “trust,” generally, instead of “faith” seems preferable because trust gets at the heart of faith’s theological import.

So, what should Christians mean by “faith”? Faith requires knowledge (*notitia*) of the truth and assent (*assensus*) to its veracity, yet even the demons know and acknowledge the truth (cf. James 2:19). Faith is not less, but more. It is resting, leaning, trusting (*fiducia*) in the truth. I must know gospel truth, agree that it is true, and trust that it is true for *me*. Faith is the instrument, not the ground, of justification. God justifies by grace, through faith, because of Christ. Of true faith, the *Heidelberg Catechism* and its baptistic edition, *An Orthodox Catechism*, both explain:

It is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word; but also a hearty trust, which the Holy Ghost works in me by the Gospel, that not only to others, but to me also, forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness and salvation, are freely given by God, merely of grace, for the sake of Christ’s merits.⁴⁴

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Question 86), and the *Baptist Catechism* (Question 91) both succinctly state, “Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation, as He is offered to us in the gospel.”⁴⁵ This does not suggest to know “exhaustively,” but to know assuredly. This also does not mean a Christian never has doubts (cf. James 1:6), but faith requires a degree of certainty in truth over and against wishful thinking or superstition. For instance, that Jesus died is history, which I must first understand; that Jesus died for sinners is doctrine, to which I must assent; and that Jesus died for me is gospel, in which I personally trust.

Assurance and Trust Alone

Depending on a Christian’s maturity, his or her faith may weaken and strengthen at different times. This neither invalidates the genuineness of one’s faith nor the trustworthiness of Christ. True, trusting faith and temporal unregenerate belief are two different *kinds* of faith, not two different degrees of faith. *The Second London Baptist Confession* helpfully explains:

⁴⁴ Cf. John 17:3, 17; Acts 16:14; Rom. 1:16–17; 3:20–26; 4:18–21; 5:1; 10:10, 17; 1 Cor. 1:21; Gal. 2:16, 20; Eph. 2:8–10; Heb. 4:16; 10:10; 11:1–3; James 2:19. Particular Baptist minister, Hercules Collins (1646/7–1702) published the baptistic version of *An Orthodox Catechism* (1680). Another version of the Heidelberg Catechism, Question 21, says, “True faith is a sure knowledge whereby I accept as true all that God has revealed to us in his Word. At the same time it is a firm confidence that not only to others, but also to me, God has granted forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness, and salvation, out of mere grace, only for the sake of Christ’s merits. This faith the Holy Spirit works in my heart by the gospel.” In his book, *Christ the Lord*, Michael Horton helpfully lists out ten scrutinizing and perceptive propositions about the nature and identity of faith alone; see Michael Horton, *Christ the Lord: The Reformation and Lordship Salvation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1992), 209–10.

⁴⁵ Cf. Isa 26:3–4; John 1:12; 6:40; Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:9; Heb. 10:39.

This Faith although it be different in degrees, and may be weak, or strong; yet it is in the least degree of it, different in the kind, or nature of it (as is all other saving Grace) from the Faith, and common grace of temporary believers; and therefore though it may be many times assailed, and weakened; yet it gets the victory; growing up in many, to the attainment of a full assurance through Christ, who is both the Author and finisher of our Faith. (LBC, XIV.3)⁴⁶

Moreover, true faith must have an *object*. Faith does not save; the object of faith—Christ—saves. As the *Belgic Confession*, on “The Righteousness of Faith,” states,

We do not mean, properly speaking, that it is faith itself that justifies us—for faith is only the instrument by which we embrace Christ, our righteousness. But Jesus Christ is our righteousness in making available to us all His merits and all the holy works He has done for us and in our place. And faith is the instrument that keeps us in communion with Him and with all His benefits. When those benefits are made ours they are more than enough to absolve us of our sins. (Article 22)

True faith looks away from itself to Christ and abides in restful union in Him. Our assurance, solace, and hope of salvation rests in the Person and work of Christ, in whom is the ground of our justification. Jesus is the sufficient object of our assurance, and faith alone is its sufficient instrument. Sects like the Word of Faith Movement teach “faith in faith,” but the Bible commends faith in Christ. The question, then, is not, “*Did* you trust in Christ as your Lord and Savior?” which implies trusting in a point-in-time event or experience (i.e., your prayer to receive Christ). It is better to ask, “*Do* you trust in Christ as your Lord and Savior?” which implies *trusting* in Christ. But even still, that “yes-no” question suggests trusting in one’s trust in Christ—finding assurance in the sense that one is *really* trusting in Him enough. Yet, to get to the heart of faith, we should ask an open-ended question: “Who is Christ and what has He done for you?” The answer to that question will reveal the object of our knowledge, assent, and hearty trust. Biblical faith is trust alone in *Christ*, not itself, not a feeling, not a memory, not right behavior, not a prayer, not a sacrament, not an experience.

Too easily, Christians (and Karmic background Christians particularly) confuse the consequential new affections of regeneration (love, holy desires, warm-hearted faithfulness, etc.) with saving faith. What is more, too often the notion of “holy affections” gets confused with physical feelings and emotions, which are not the same. So, many Christians probe their souls for assurance based upon their feelings: “Am I *sincerely* loving Christ today? Am I making *every* effort to increase in holiness? Am I *fully* walking in victory? Am I *really* happy in Jesus? Have I surrendered *all* to Christ’s lordship in my life? Am I *honestly* repentant this time? Is my obedience *genuinely* joyful?” And their emotional assurance rises and falls based upon their perceived degree of imitation and fealty to Christ. Sadly, many Christians grow dispirited from fickle assurance based upon waning obedience, less-than happy

⁴⁶ Matt. 6:20; Rom. 4:19–20; Eph. 6:16; Col. 2:2; Heb. 5:13–14; 6:11–12; 12:2; 2 Pet. 1:1; 1 John 5:4–5.

dispositions, and irregular repentance. Feeling worn down from unending introspection and self-analysis, Christians often give up or give in, because after all, “What’s the use of trying to find assurance? I’ll never be good enough.”

New Covenant desires and holy living are not the same thing as faith alone; they are the outgrowth of new birth and union to Christ. Instead of looking to our holy affections and actions for assurance, we should be “fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith” (Heb 12:2 NASB). From start to finish, beginning to end, Jesus has authored our faith in Him, and He will bring it to perfection. From initial justification to final glorification, Jesus is the Source and the Champion of our faith. He will finish what He has started. Though the Bible indeed commands us to examine ourselves (cf. 2 Cor 13:5), the dominant gaze of our souls should be to Christ, to Whom we are irrevocably united, counted as righteous, welcomed as sons, all through faith alone. To be sure, the Christian life necessarily evidences Spirit-wrought love, loyalty, obedience, and faithfulness, but such signs of life are neither instrumental nor the basis for our justification, from the first day to that final Day. Otherwise, the Scriptures would not promise, “those whom He predestined ... He also glorified” (Rom 8:30). Moreover, the Holy Spirit through Paul promises, “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it” (1 Thess 5:23–24).

Trust *alone* silences all self-assured boasting, because it is devoid of all effort. Trust alone is not synonymous for trustworthiness, just as faith alone is not equal to faithfulness. No one trusts in their ability to lay on a hospital bed as a skilled surgeon removes a brain tumor. The trustworthiness of the surgeon to successfully operate is the object of the patient’s trust. A parallel analogy more common to our daily experience is that of resting in a chair. No one trusts in their ability to hold themselves up as they relax in a chair. The sufficiency of the chair and its strength to hold the person’s weight is the trustworthy feature. The person simply transfers their total weight to the chair, trusting alone in the chair’s reliability and stability. Either a person is fully sitting in a chair, resting in its strength, or awkwardly balancing, trying to squat and not fall. True, resting trust is trust alone in the object of trust. The human experience understands this intuitively. No one lays awake at night convincing themselves that they are trusting enough in their mattress to keep them off the floor. They just rest in the mattress. Onboard a commercial jet, when children ask their parents how they know the plane won’t crash, the parent does not say, ‘Because I just believe.’ No. The parent assures, ‘Because this is a trustworthy aircraft with a trustworthy pilot,’ which communicates knowledge, assent, and a hearty trust. Furthermore, the parent might indeed take comfort in their previous experiences: “I’ve endured bad turbulence before, and each time the pilot has landed the plane successfully. The crew has assured me that we are safe as long we stay buckled up and don’t open the emergency door.” Their devotion to stay seated and not open the door is merely indicative of their hearty trust and illustrative of their desire to honor the authority of the pilot, crew, and aircraft rules. Who would risk taking their family into the sky on an uncertified, unreliable, derelict aircraft with an incompetent pilot? Moreover, no one assures themselves that their devotion to the pilot or the airline company will guarantee their arrival at their destination.

All of Christ through Trust Alone

Faith never performs; it rests. Faith never seeks to earn anything; faith, rather, takes refuge in Christ and receives everything. To trust is to rest; and equally, to rest is to trust. Anything else requires work. For a similar reason, in the Psalms, trust in God is often analogous with taking refuge. Taking refuge in a fortress or in a stronghold guaranteed salvation, not because of any benefit the refuge-seeker brought along. To take refuge in a fortress was to rest and trust in it entirely. Whether the refuge-seeker was a young orphan, an old sage, or one of David's mighty men, hiding and taking refuge in a stronghold had nothing to do with the person's age, nationality, strength, or wisdom. Inside the fortress, the child, the old man, and the warrior claim nothing in and of themselves in which to boast. They only rejoice and rest in the trustworthiness of their fortress. And the fortress is obviously an extension of its Savior-King. Their admission into and permission to abide in the fortress are indicative of the King's benevolent will to save and guard them. And what do they do while at rest in the fortress? They are free to gratefully worship the King, with no conditions or contracts that they must fulfil. Here, then, is the logical question: "Is the King's fortress mighty to save?" If it is indeed trustworthy, it requires only trust to enter and remain in it. Rest. Refuge. Covering. Sanctuary. Grace. Assurance. Gratitude.

Our grasp of "faith" is essential for understanding how we access the benefits secured for us by Christ. It is critical for helping Christians coming out of works-oriented, karmic, reciprocity-based religions to rest in Christ's work and promises for them. Instead of focusing on how strong our trust is (however we might subjectively measure it according to our feeling in the moment), we should rather look to Christ and the objective truth of the grace of God in uniting us to Him freely, fully, and forever. And trust *alone*, not in addition, receives Christ and His righteousness by grace alone, which is the ground for receiving all of Christ's benefits.

We are positionally, progressively, and finally saved *by* God's grace alone *through* faith alone *in* Christ alone *for* the glory of God alone. It's all from grace, and it's all for Christ. Our gaze of faith is all *about* Him, *from* Him, *to* Him, and *for* Him. We are *His*. Nothing and no one can revoke that. Isn't that astonishingly reassuring? That's why it is called "good news." And to speak of gazing upon the Person of Christ does not invalidate knowing and trusting in the doctrines of Christ. For, the revelation of the second Person of the Trinity is glorious because of what He did, does, and will do on our behalf. Therefore, knowing and resting in Christ *demand*s knowing and resting in propositional truths about Christ. Otherwise, schmaltzy sentimentality about knowing Christ devoid of defined doctrines of Christ creates false assurance, gnostic imaginations, and counterfeit gospels.

Trust alone takes refuge in Christ Himself and His vicarious obedience and atonement, receiving Him and His benefits because He is benevolent and trustworthy, which God has vindicated through the resurrection. Trust alone is at the center of the guilt/righteousness value system, and it receives Christ's imputed righteousness and pardon from guilt. Emerging out of that center come the other biblical value systems and the free benefits of Christ's vicarious obedience—honor, peace, freedom, and strength.

Trust alone is a feeble hand, which Christ's strong arm of justifying, sanctifying salvation firmly grabs. Being pulled into the life raft, no drowning victim says to the rescuer, "This is my strongest arm. I can pull myself in." No. They say, "I'm saved! Look at my rescuer!" And riding in the boat all the way to safety, the saved one rests gratefully and admiringly in the rescuer's trustworthiness. Trust is the instrument with which we are united to Christ, imputed with His righteousness, and thus legally adopted into His family. Furthermore, it is the instrument through which His life-giving Spirit empowers us to grow in Christ-likeness and to know Him more. Michael Horton well says:

Adam's federal headship imputes guilt and condemnation as well as imparting inherent corruption, while Christ's federal headship imputes righteousness and imparts his inherent new life. The forensic language of the courtroom and the organic language of head and body, tree and fruit, vine and branches converge without being confused. In Christ we have both justification and new life, an alien righteousness imputed and Christ's own resurrection life imparted.⁴⁷

Author, Jerry Bridges (1929–2016), explained beautifully,

Our legal union with Christ entitles us to all that Christ did for us as He acted in our place, as our substitute. Our vital union with Christ is the means by which He works in us by His Holy Spirit. The legal union refers to His objective work outside of us that is credited to us through faith. The vital union refers to His subjective work in us, which is also realized through faith as we rely on His Spirit to work in and through us. Though our union with Christ has two aspects, it is one union.⁴⁸

Justification is central to the gospel message because the glory of God's grace in Christ is the center of the gospel message. And since the good news is not only that Jesus rescues us from hell but that He rescues us for Himself, then justification is central to that message because all the pleasures and benefits of knowing Christ turn on the doctrine of justification. If we get justification wrong, then we get the glory of Christ wrong. As the French Reformer John Calvin (1509–1564) argued, "Wherever the knowledge of it [that is, justification through faith] is taken away, the glory of Christ is extinguished."⁴⁹ Justification is central because the glory of God in Christ is on the line. The English Puritan John Owen (1616–1683) masterfully explained the connection between justification and our enjoyment of the glory of the extravagant grace of God in Christ:

To the glory of the Father, we are accepted with him, justified, freed from guilt, pardoned, and have "peace with God," Rom. v. 1. Thus, "through Christ we have

⁴⁷ Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 632–33.

⁴⁸ Jerry Bridges, *The Gospel for Real Life: Turn to the Liberating Power of the Cross...Every Day* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 40.

⁴⁹ John Calvin and John Dillenberger, *John Calvin: Selections from His Writings*, American Academy of Religion Aids for the Study of Religion, no. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 95.⁵⁰ John Owen, *Communion with God* (Bexar County, TX: Bibliotech Press, 2020), 253–54.

access by one Spirit unto the Father," Eph. ii. 17. And thus are both Father and Son and the Holy Spirit glorified in our justification and acceptance with God; the Father in his free love, the Son in his full purchase, and the holy Spirit in his effectual working. All this, in all the parts of it, is no less fully procured for us, nor less freely bestowed on us, for Christ's sake, on his account, as part of his purchase and merits, than if all of us immediately upon his death, had been translated into heaven; only this way of our deliverance and freedom is fixed on, that the whole Trinity may be glorified thereby. ... Though our reconciliation with God be fully and completely procured by the death of Christ, and all the ways and means whereby it is accomplished; yet we are brought unto an actual enjoyment thereof, by the way and in the order mentioned, for the praise of the glorious grace of God.⁵⁰

Bringing It to Center

Since all people know they are guilty of breaking the moral law, and since people with their imperfect shared values comprise cultures and cultural orientations, the challenge of presenting the gospel is not mainly to lead the conversation and present it in a way that primarily corresponds to a person's cultural value, though that might be necessary during the first few discussions. But the presentation of the gospel needs to ultimately elaborate mankind's deeper Adamic guilt problem, whose only hope is the Last Adam's righteousness solution. Interestingly, this notion of federal headship is not a difficult concept for historically patriarchal communities whose family benefits are imputed to them through bearing the name of the patriarch.

The great exchange of our Adamic guilt for Christ's righteousness, turning on the hinge of Christ's penal substitutionary atonement, enables Christ to be the benefactor and us to be the beneficiaries of the good, true, and beautiful aspects of God's image in those cultural values that, though touched by the curse, echo Scriptural values. At the heart of the global moral-law problem is objective guilt in Adam, imputed to his biological progeny, with all its shameful, fearful, spiritually enslaving, and spiritually impoverishing consequences. However, Christ's active obedience to the law of God earned our righteousness where Adam transgressed, and His passive obedience on the cross propitiated God's wrath that Adam's progeny deserved, effectively bestowing the blessings of the law while absorbing on the cross the curse of the law for those who trust in Him alone. Because Christ has atoned for our guilt and because in Him God put His name on us and declares us righteous with a righteousness outside ourselves, God benevolently blesses us with honor, peace, strength, and freedom, and every other spiritual blessing that is Christ's, that can only be received by grace alone through trust alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone.⁵¹

⁵⁰ John Owen, *Communion with God* (Bexar County, TX: Bibliotech Press, 2020), 253–54.

⁵¹ See the appendix for "The Transcultural Gospel Model," which illustrates the relationship of guilt/righteousness, atonement, and trust alone as the center of every other cultural value.

Hymn for Reflection: “Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness”⁵²

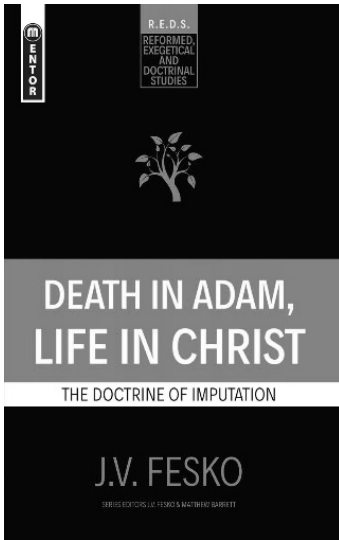
Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
‘Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy I lift up my head.

Bold shall I stand in that great day,
For who aught to my charge shall lay?
Fully absolved through these I am,
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.

Lord, I believe Thy precious blood,
Which at the mercy seat of God
Forever doth for sinners plead,
For me, e’en for my soul, washed.

Lord, I believe were sinners more
Than sands upon the ocean shore,
Thou hast for all a ransom paid,
For all a full atonement made.

⁵² Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700–1760) was the founder of the Moravian movement, which was the genesis of the modern missionary movement. See “Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness,” in *Hymns of Grace* (Los Angeles: The Master’s Seminary Press, 2015), no. 188.



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by: J. V. Fesko

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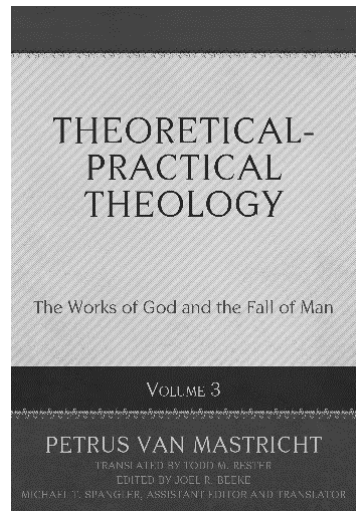
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REVIEWS

Benjamin J. Noonan. *Advances in the Study of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic: New Insights for Reading the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020. 336 pp., \$8.28 Paperback.

Reviewed by Paul Twiss, Instructor of Bible Exposition, The Master's Seminary.

Benjamin Noonan is associate professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Columbia International University. With a Ph.D. from Hebrew Union College, and as the author of *Non-Semitic Loanwords from the Hebrew Bible*, he appears aptly suited to write this latest volume from Zondervan Academic. The book comes as the counterpart to its New Testament equivalent, *Advances in the Study of Greek*, released in 2015. Noonan's stated goal is to "introduce anyone who engages with the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Bible—students, pastors, professors, and scholars—to current issues of interest on these languages" (25). This in turn draws on the assertion that meaningful exegesis depends on engagement with current issues pertinent to Hebrew and Aramaic. Thus, at 336 pages including bibliography and indexes, the book comprises 10 chapters that survey the most recent topics of interest in the academic study of Old Testament languages. These include: linguistic theories (31–50); lexicography (66–87); verbal stems (88–117); tense, aspect, and mood (118–144); discourse analysis (145–180); word order (181–200); register and dialect (201–222); dating of texts (223–260); and teaching the languages (261–278).

Noonan's approach is consistent throughout: for each topic he attempts to summarize the salient issues within scholarship, provide an overview of the predominant views (citing key contributions along the way), offer something of an evaluation, with a few proposals for the way ahead. Each chapter concludes with a helpful bibliography of sources relevant to the topics discussed. Of the 4 categories of reader listed above, Noonan's writing style suggests he prioritizes the first 2: the student and the pastor. He approaches every topic with an assumed working knowledge of Hebrew and Aramaic, while making particular effort to explain the basics of the issue at hand. His didactic bent is clear, as he often employs illustrations and everyday examples to introduce otherwise abstract concepts. Noonan's discussion of the way forward in each chapter is relatively brief, often merely acknowledging that there is more work to be done. As such, his goal is not to give a declarative response to the problems discussed. Rather, it is to raise a student's awareness of the current issues in Hebrew and Aramaic scholarship, opening a

window for further study. With these things noted, it is necessary to highlight a handful of strengths and weaknesses to the book, beginning with the former.

First, and perhaps most plainly, Noonan's volume makes clear the complexity of Old Testament language study and the necessity for further research. As he introduces the student/pastor to the types of issues that are not typically covered in a basic Hebrew exegesis class, the impression created is that there are still many areas of relative uncertainty. Rather than serving to disconcert, Noonan rightly demonstrates that the study of these languages is a dynamic and exciting field of research. Hopefully, the downstream effect is twofold: (1) the student/pastor is exercised towards advanced study, probing further certain issues of interest, and (2) he approaches his routine exegetical efforts with more rigor, understanding better something of the complexity of the issues involved.

Second, and somewhat related, Noonan's survey of significant contributions in each chapter provides an appropriate entry point by which further research can be pursued. Though they are undoubtedly concise—highlighting oftentimes only one claim in each work—the value of these summaries should not be underestimated. For the diligent reader, each chapter offers an accessible orientation to a new field of study, with a sketch of the current landscape. The student/pastor is familiarized with the nature of the issue, the primary contributors, and their views. He is thus well-positioned to begin pursuing further study and engage with what could otherwise be an abstract conversation. By way of example, few seminary classes can venture to explore the field of discourse analysis due to the time constraints of a standard semester, and the requirement to cover more rudimentary matters. As such, the average student graduates unacquainted with this burgeoning field of study. Noonan's three-part discussion is a sympathetic response to the problem. After delineating the modern linguistic framework (146–148), he briefly explains the various approaches to discourse analysis (151–169), and concludes by referring the reader to a handful of pertinent grammars and commentaries (169–178). With this succinct discussion, the student/pastor is equipped with a working definition of linguistics and a handful of applications. Moreover, as he engages with subsequent resources, he is aware of the methodological differences between them, and the corresponding strengths and/or weaknesses. In this respect, *Advances in the Study of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic* fulfills its aim: it introduces the reader to the current issues of interest in these languages. Notwithstanding this commendation, three points of critique should be noted.

First, Noonan's discussion is noticeably theoretical throughout. He engages with every issue at a conceptual level, failing to demonstrate the implications for exegesis and exposition. If his primary readership is students and pastors, the book would have been greatly helped with consistent examples: demonstrating how the issue at hand affects the interpretation of a particular text. His treatment of verbal stems is a case in point. In basic Hebrew grammar, students will have undoubtedly learnt a rudimentary definition for the *niphal*, *piel*, *hiphil*, etc. Noonan's discussion of the various departures away from these traditional categories is excellent. However, there is a risk that the reader fails to heed the significance of the debate, since no worked examples are given. In each case, the discussion could be augmented with a well-chosen interpretive issue, wherein the function of a verbal stem sits at the center of the problem. Indeed, if Noonan had carried through such an example to consider the

implications for preaching and teaching, the reader would surely perceive the significance of the respective debate with greater clarity.

Second, as Noonan restricts himself to the consideration of language related issues, he neglects to note how these impinge on other disciplines. Without suggesting a change in the focus of the book, the discussion would have been strengthened throughout by drawing attention to the implications of particular conclusions for other branches of Old Testament studies. One example of such an opportunity pertains to Noonan's discussion of register, dialect, style-shifting, and code-switching (201–222). To be sure, his evaluation of this exciting sphere of study is helpful: concisely summarizing various consensuses established thus far, and possible future developments. However, Noonan fails to make plain how further advances in our understanding of register, dialect, etc. could impinge upon other disciplines. Specifically, a better understanding of these issues could affect long-held methodological assumptions regarding the composition and development of certain texts. As our grasp of ANE sociolinguistics improves and new vistas of understanding emerge, previously established conclusions will need to be reexamined. Noonan would do well to highlight such relationships, not least to impress upon his reader the significance of such language studies.

Finally, the concluding chapter of the book—on teaching and learning Hebrew and Aramaic—is disappointingly brief. Surely, the discussion will serve as a particular point of interest for most (if not all) who endeavor to read the book: with a survey of the salient issues complete, the question remains as to how to effectively instruct. How should the student think through his first foray into the realm of teaching? How should the pastor leverage his understanding for the benefit of those in his congregation? And how might the faculty member further improve his tried and tested syllabus? These questions and more naturally come to mind at the end of the book. (Indeed, Noonan's accessible presentation of various issues invariably whets the appetite towards the task of teaching.) However, his concluding chapter stops short of such a discussion. Rather, he merely acknowledges the growing trend away from the Grammar-Translation Method, towards Communicative Language Teaching, and provides a series of corresponding resources. Without detracting from the various strengths of the book, Noonan's chapter on teaching Old Testament languages warrants a much fuller discussion.

In sum, *Advances in the Study of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic* is a helpful introduction to the various issues currently attending the discipline. For those who have a foundation in Old Testament languages, the surveys given provide a window into the discussion, and facilitate a path for further study. Not without its weaknesses, the book will be most useful for the advanced seminary student or pastor who desires a greater level of academic rigor in his exegesis. Perhaps it will prove to be most useful when read with others, alongside additional resources. This would allow for the exegetical, expositional, and theological implications of each chapter to be traced out most readily, thereby demonstrating the significance of each issue for an Old Testament teaching ministry.

Curt Daniel. *The History and Theology of Calvinism*. Welwyn Garden City, UK: Evangelical Press, 2020. 912 pp., \$16.00 Hardcover.

Reviewed by Peter Sammons, Director of Academic Publications and Faculty Associate in Systematic Theology, The Master's Seminary.

Curt Daniel is a graduate of Fuller Theological Seminary (M.Div.) and The University of Edinburgh (Ph.D.). His current areas of research interest are the atonement, Jonathan Edwards, apologetics, Reformed theology, and the deity of Christ, among others.

Though Daniel's *The History and Theology of Calvinism* was published this year (Evangelical Press, 2020), this is by no means a new work. I have been gleaming from the unpublished version of this resource long before its release.

This volume is divided into two major sections. The first section explores the history of Calvinism, in which Daniel examines the theologians and preachers who helped to shape Reformed theology. In the second section, Daniel focuses on the theology of Calvinism. He spends time on the five points of Calvinism, the sovereignty of God, and the thought and contributions of Calvin at large.

Daniel's most helpful contribution in this work is his critique of Hyper Calvinism. This section alone is worth the price of the book. In this section, he carefully assesses the main tenets of Hyper Calvinism and demonstrates biblically where such thinkers have wandered from biblical fidelity. Daniel does in this section what few have yet to do: he shepherds believers who are enticed by Calvinism and guides them from the temptations of this extreme.

However, readers must be mindful of certain aspects of this work. In many ways, what Daniel presents in this work is not traditional Calvinism. Instead, this work presents more of the sensibilities of modern evangelical moderate Calvinism. This can be seen in three main areas: (1) classical theism; (2) limited atonement; and (3) predestination. I will address these three.

Classical Theism

At the time Daniel wrote this work, the recent spark in interest in classical theism had yet to ignite. Thus, readers should not hold Daniel to a standard that had yet to receive the level of attention it now has. To his credit, Daniel employs many classic theist definitions in reference to the attributes. Yet he is enticed by the question of a "central attribute," and without hesitation says, "Any idea of God that does not immediately entail Him as Lord is an idol."¹ The notion of a central attribute is a

¹ "Theologians debate whether one attribute of God is superior to the others, or if one is a central quality of God. R. C. Sproul suggested holiness, as many others do. Many Arminians and most liberals say love. John Frame the Calvinist nominates lordship and sovereignty. The LXX usually renders the Hebrew proper name Yahweh with the Greek word Kurios, or Lord. The New Testament uses this word more than any other to describe God. Both testaments call him "Lord of Lords" (Deut 10:17; Rev 17:14; 19:16). Linguistically at least, Frame may be right. God is described as Lord thousands of times more than as holiness, love, or anything else. It is worth pondering. Any idea of God that does not immediately entail Him as Lord is an idol" (185).

more recent debate, one which wasn't the concern of Calvin nor of most of Calvinists after him. It should be noted that Calvin and the enormous majority of Calvinists after him were *defacto* classical theists. This should, thus, be the standard position when tracing the history and theology of Calvinism.

Limited Atonement

Readers also need to be mindful of Daniel's section on the nature and extent of the atonement. Daniel holds that there are general aspects of the atonement, hence, a universal atonement. Daniel writes, "[As to] whether Calvin taught limited atonement ... my own view is that there are some good points made on both sides, but in general there was basic continuity rather than discontinuity. I tend to agree that Calvin taught universal atonement (or at least an atonement with more universal aspects than strict limitarians such as John Owen)."² The position that Daniel articulates is decidedly not the traditional Calvinist position on the atonement.

In his work *Calvin and the Calvinists*, Paul Helm answered the question of Calvin's position on the atonement, along with many others in the Reformed community. And the history that followed in the wake of Calvin was unanimously clear on the Calvinist position on the atonement. The evidence is so strong for Calvin's definite view of the atonement that it is surprising that Daniel attempts to present a multiple intentions view of the atonement as if it were Calvin's.

The multiple intentions position so permeates Daniel's position that it manifests itself repeatedly in the details of the intention and extent of the atonement in both his exegesis and theological conclusions. For example, Daniel writes when exegeting a passage, "Paul willed as God willed. He desired their [all men's] salvation because God desired their salvation. Some take all to mean all types rather than all individuals, but this is not how Paul uses the word in the Pastoral Epistles. First Timothy 4:10 differentiates 'all men' from believers, viz., 'the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.' This concerns the revealed will, not the secret will."³

Sadly, Daniel's position on universal atonement leads him to misunderstand the Reformed position on the will of God and to take the revealed will (God's prescribed will) as if it were assuming a universal intention in the atonement. In the section "Further Proofs of a Universal Saving Desire," he writes, "Surely all these verses (Luke 19:41–42; Rom 10:21; Isa 65:2; Prov 1:24), prove that God has a will of desire for all men's salvation. It will not do to say that Christ was only doing this in His humanity, not His deity. His sinless perfect humanity revealed the Father to men. To argue otherwise is to promote a distorted view of Christ's hypostatic union."⁴

The Reformers were ever careful not to give even the impression that God possessed two wills. They unanimously affirmed His singular will. In Daniel's helpful critique of Hyper Calvinism, however, he gives the impression that God has two wills. He writes,

² Curt Daniel, *The History and Theology of Calvinism* (Welwyn Garden City, UK: Evangelical Press, 2020), 74–75.

³ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 233.

Hyper Calvinists use various arguments. One is that there can be no contradiction between the two wills of God. Since God does not predestine all men to be saved, they reason, it follows that God does not desire all men to be saved...The revealed will can be and usually is broken by sinful men—such as in sinning against the law. But we all know that the secret will cannot be broken. They thus confuse the two wills. To say, ‘there is never any contradiction between the two wills,’ invites the question: Does God will that men sin? In the secret will, yes, God has foreordained that men sin. But in the revealed will God emphatically forbids sin. That is an apparent (and only an apparent) contradiction, for it is the paradox and mystery we have already discussed.⁵

It is possible that Daniel does not believe that God has two wills, but several times he slips with his language in a way that presents two wills in God. At best, this is confusing for the reader.

Having created a bifurcated view of God’s will, Daniel now imports this into his presentation of the intent of the atonement. He incorrectly claims that if readers disagree with his position on the dual will of God regarding the atonement, then they are likely in a vein of Hyper Calvinism. He writes, “A minority of Calvinists reject this line of reasoning. A small number inconsistently deny that God desires all men to be saved, yet they still believe in the free offer of the gospel. Others deny both. This is the essence of Hyper Calvinism.”⁶ The majority of Calvinists from the time of Calvin to present would disagree with Daniel’s assertion here. It is no secret that men like Bunyan, Knox, and many, many others affirmed double predestination and limited atonement, yet both of those men (and many others) stand as some of the greatest evangelists the church has ever been gifted.

Daniel writes statements like, “Christ did not die equally for all men.”⁷ The implication seems to be that Christ *did* in fact die for all men, just not with equal effect. In the section “The Mainstream Position,” Daniel writes, “There have been a large number of leading Calvinists who hold what I consider to be the true biblical position. This may be called moderate limited atonement as opposed to the strictly limited view on the one hand or the strictly universal view on the other.”⁸ Sadly, Daniel confuses the moderate position as if it were the historic position, which is simply untrue and unhelpful.

His multiple intentions view also misunderstands the love of God. Daniel, along with many before him, distorts the love of God and then uses this distorted view to redefine the nature and extent of the atonement. Daniel writes,

Reformed theology teaches that Scripture presents a twofold love of God. He has a general love for all men as His creatures. It would not be inconsistent, then, for there to be a general aspect of the atonement for all men. But God also has a special love for the elect only, and this is shown in the limited side of the

⁵ Daniel, *The History and Theology of Calvinism*, 234.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 233–34.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 488.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 493.

atonement. It is sometimes said that out of these two loves, the death of Christ provides salvation for all but guarantees it for the elect alone.⁹

Readers are likely left wondering after such a presentation: What exactly is the atonement? Does it actually pay for sins? Does it actually save men? Or does it merely make men savable? Is it an accomplished work, or merely a provision? Does the atonement do things other than atone?

Daniel wants to affirm that the atonement is an accomplished act. He writes, “The main purpose of the atonement was to accomplish that atonement—and He most certainly did accomplish it.”¹⁰ But careful readers will be left wondering at Daniel’s presentation: Did it? Or was Jesus’s death of a different intent and quality for the elect as compared to the reprobate? If the atonement paid for the sin of the entire world, then Christ must be disappointed to know that there are people in hell whose sins He paid for with His blood. Owen and historic Calvinism would make the same contentions with Daniel’s presentation of the atonement.

Daniel makes further sweeping assertions regarding the universal “aspects” of the atonement throughout his work. For example, “Christ purchased the whole world with the main intent of attaining the elect and their salvation.”¹¹ And elsewhere, “There are various universal benefits beyond the guaranteed salvation of the elect. One is common grace.”¹² Is this true? Does an omnibenevolent God need to kill someone to pour forth common grace? I, and historic Calvinism along with me, think not.

Next, Daniel misappropriates the traditional Calvinist argument presented by Owen concerning the harmonious work of the Trinity in redemption (otherwise known as inseparable operations and discernable appropriations). He writes,

What God does, He always does as a Trinity. The Father effectually elected a definite and limited number of sinners, not all. The Holy Spirit effectually draws this same limited number to Christ. It follows that the second person of the blessed Trinity effectually redeemed those same elect and them alone. The Father has a general love for all and a special electing love only for the elect. The Spirit gives a general call to all and a special call only to the elect. Christ died in a general way for all men but in a special way for the elect alone.¹³

Again, readers can taste the flavors of Daniel’s universal atonement seeping through in each of his assertions. Because he sees multiple intentions in Jesus’s atoning work, he then is forced to tie that to multiple intentions in the Spirit’s and the Father’s work in the economy of redemption. While this may be Daniel’s personal conviction, it is foreign to historic Calvinism.

⁹ Daniel, *The History and Theology of Calvinism*, 501.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 515.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 502.

¹² *Ibid.*, 505.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 514.

Predestination

The final area of concern with Daniel's work is his presentation of predestination. Daniel would have benefited from relying upon a more standard double-predestination view as presented in R. C. Sproul's *Chosen by God*. Nevertheless, Daniel presents reprobation as a merely passive decision. He does this in two ways: (1) with respect to the will of God, and (2) with respect to the use of permissive language. Once again, manifesting the fruit of his two-will dichotomy, he contrasts between the two wills by saying, "One is decree; the other is desire ... the first permits the existence of sin; the second prohibits the commission of sin. In the first, God wills only some to be saved by election, but in the second God desires all men to be saved by evangelism."¹⁴

Interestingly, Daniel admits that Calvin did not approve of the use of permissive language. He writes, "Calvin was uncomfortable with saying that God merely 'permits' the existence of sin. Others, especially those of a supralapsarian persuasion, speak too boldly regarding God's active foreordination of sin."¹⁵ What Daniel is attempting to do is amiable; he is trying to guard against a purely symmetrical view of double predestination that is reminiscent of Hyper Calvinism. But in his attempt to guard against error, he blunders and makes reprobation nothing more than bare permission.

The most glaring mistake Daniel makes is he confuses decree and execution. He takes the execution of the decree (where permissive language is acceptable) and conflates it back onto the definition of reprobation. He writes, "If God now permits sin without approving of it, then He also eternally foreordained to allow it to exist without approving of it."¹⁶ Again, "He passively foreordains sin by permission but with moral disapproval, reflecting His wrath."¹⁷ He continues, "God does no evil when He sovereignly permits others to do it."¹⁸ Because of this mistaken and inadequate presentation of the decree of reprobation (preterition and predamnation) along with a distinct presentation of the execution of the decree (causality and condemnation), he binds himself into affirming reprobation as essentially non-election.¹⁹

In sum, Daniel's work is helpful in its organization and presentation of Hyper Calvinism. As it is for many of us, our strengths can also cripple us. Because of Daniel's awareness and concern regarding the pitfalls of Hyper Calvinism, he has pushed away some of the richest truths of Calvinism and left himself with an anemic Calvinism. This book is many things, but I regret to say that it is not historic Calvinism. For those who purchase this book in hopes of gleaning from the history and theology of Calvinism, this book presents a dead end.

¹⁴ Daniel, *The History and Theology of Calvinism*, 235.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 263.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 261.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 262.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 269.

¹⁹ He says it in multiple ways, but essentially the lackluster definition of reprobation is that "reprobation is non-election." *Ibid.*, 397.

Sammons, Peter. *Reprobation: From Augustine to the Synod of Dort: The Historical Development of the Reformed Doctrine of Reprobation*. Edited by Herman J. Selderhuis. Vol. 63 of *Reformed Historical Theology*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020. 154 pp., \$125.00 Hardcover.

Reviewed by Jerod A. Gilcher, Ph.D. Candidate, Gateway Seminary.

It has been said that to forget history is to be doomed to repeat it. This adage may also apply to theology, and in this case, specifically historical theology. Should we fail to acknowledge the historical development of a particular doctrine, we leave ourselves vulnerable to the heresies of history. This is what drives Dr. Peter Sammons in his book *Reprobation: From Augustine to the Synod of Dort: The Historical Development of the Reformed Doctrine of Reprobation*.

While recognizing the “perceived distastefulness” of the doctrine of reprobation (15), Sammons explains that this “distaste” stems from a “failure to distinguish between primary and secondary causality,” which results in a view of God that makes Him out to be the “capricious author of sin.” Thus, Sammons explains and traces the development of this controversial and critical doctrine. As Sammons notes in his preface, few object to the gracious providence of God working all things for good to those who love Him (Rom 8:28), but disagreement erupts when the Bible alludes “to the divine ordination of men unto damnation.” So Sammons seeks to explain the long history and critical significance of this oft-misunderstood doctrine.

Beginning with the early church in the first century, and then tracing the development all the way to the Synod of Dort (AD 1618–1619), Sammons seeks to “define, clarify, and explain a reformed view of reprobation against misunderstandings of it by retrieving a proper definition from history by means of tracing the development of reprobation and related doctrines through history” (19). The conclusion of such a journey is, in the author’s words, “the positive affirmation of reprobation by every generation from Augustine to the Synod of Dort” (15). This journey reveals that this doctrine has been “neither novel nor marginal,” but rather a “chief point of conviction throughout church history” (15).

In his preface, Sammons reminds readers that a historical survey is not a reinterpretation, but a *retrieval* of the past. It is this retrieval that offers clarity and precision to the present church. Sammons’ makes clear the purpose of this work: “First, it seeks to gather key thoughts from prominent theologians through each century that influenced the articulation of the reformed doctrine of reprobation,” and second, “to properly define the doctrine of reprobation” (19).

After the preface and preliminary comments regarding methodology, Sammons starts the historical treatment in chapter 1 with the early church and the post-Nicene Fathers (AD 362–475). Immediately, Sammons introduces readers to the works and thoughts of men like Augustine and Lucidus, while guiding readers in how to understand and engage with these early churchmen.

Chapter 2 then takes readers to the Middle Ages (467–1543). Despite the misgivings or perceived “darkness” of the Middle Ages, Sammons reveals that these years were theologically formative, with the likes of Gottschalk (803–869), Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), and Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). It is during the

Middle Ages that the foundation was being laid for ideas such as compatibilism, efficient causality, meritorious causality, affirmative reprobation, and initial decree—which all became essential concepts to a proper articulation of reprobation.

In chapter 3, Sammons surveys the Reformation (1521–1610), which “set notable trajectories for the discussion on the issue of predestination and reprobation” (59). The survey of Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Beza, Knox, and others reveals significant development with regard to the centrality of God’s will in the discussion of reprobation. Summarizing the thought of Luther in particular, Sammons captures what became the heart of reformed thought with regard to the issue of reprobation: “The will of God is the driving factor in eternal matters. It is by God’s will alone that everything happens, and because of that, everything happens by necessity” (61). This includes sin, evil, and sinners who need a Savior.

Chapter 4 then chronicles the English Reformation (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). Sammons reveals the theological fine-tuning of the Reformation tradition that occurred during this era, specifically on the matters of causality and compatibility. The pastors and scholars of this age offer nuanced formulations of reprobation that sought to uphold the absolute will and decree of God on the one hand, while affirming the full accountability of human beings on the other.

In chapter 5, Sammons surveys not only the Synod of Dort (1618–1619), but also the significant movements and players in the Synod, including Jacob Arminius (1559–1609), the Remonstrance (1610), and the Hague Conference (1611). Sammons pulls back the curtain of Dort and reveals the tension and dialogue, as well as the seeds that would take root and grow into the Westminster Standards and Puritan movement.

In sum, Sammons’ *Reprobation* is a foundational resource, not only for the study of the doctrine of reprobation, but for a glimpse into the development of reformed theology as a whole. The reasons for this are many. First of all, *Reprobation* is a prime example of exemplary scholarship. This work exemplifies the precision of the academy as well as the weight of articulating the majesty of God in one work. Protestants scholars would do well to read and learn from this standard of scholarship.

Second, *Reprobation* reveals a masterful balance between breadth and depth of research. Sammons covers 1,600 years of church history (breadth) with clarity, precision, and insight (depth). While the book is concise (just over 150 pages), Sammons says much with an economy of words as he guides readers in their understanding of the progression and nuances of the doctrine of reprobation. Sammons has also provided English translations of works that previously had only been available in Latin, thus granting readers access into historic and foundational resources.

Finally, I found that Sammons’ work was itself a compelling force to continue to push the conversation forward in the discussion of reprobation. With over 1,600 years of historical conversation, this work proves that the issue of reprobation is profoundly relevant to life, scholarship, and ministry. If we care about the issues of sin, evil, salvation, missions, eternity, and God’s sovereign will, then we cannot (and must not) allow the doctrine of reprobation to collect dust in the attic of antiquity. In the end, *Reprobation* is well worth our time, money, study, and contemplation, and will prove itself a helpful resource in any arena, be it seminary or the local church.

Linguistics and New Testament Greek: Key Issues in the Current Debate. Edited by David Alan Black and Benjamin L. Merkle. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020. 276 pp., \$27.46.

Reviewed by William Varner, Professor of Biblical Studies and Greek, The Master's University.

I eagerly anticipated the release of this volume because I attended the conference where most of these chapters were delivered as lectures. The conference was held at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, April 26–27, 2019. The conference was an attempt to bring New Testament studies up to speed with how linguistics can inform both our understanding of New Testament Greek and how it can also be taught more effectively utilizing linguistic insights.

The chapters are written by the conference speakers, with opening and closing chapters written by the editors of the volume. David Black first attempts to lay out the field and exhort the readers not to ignore linguistics because of its great value. “It is obvious that students of NT Greek can and should have a working knowledge of linguistics” (10). He is aware that there yet remains a few professors who feel threatened by this approach (5, fn 9), but students and professors should get on board because linguistics is alive and well and here to stay.

The first presenter at the conference, Stanley Porter, leads off with a chapter on the various “linguistic schools” and how they impact the language (11–36). Constantine Campbell effectively surveys the relationship of aspect and time in the language (37–54). Michael Aubrey explores the usage and meaning of the perfect tense in light of linguistic theory (55–81). Although he sought to simplify his data-driven lecture, my guess is that readers will find his chapter as heavy as I found his lecture! Jonathan Pennington calls us to rethink the concept of deponency in the middle voice and effectively lays to rest (hopefully) the use of that term (83–102). In other words, middle voice verbs are true middles! Applied linguist Stephen Levinsohn and disciple Steven Runge apply an eclectic model of linguistics to a discourse analysis of Galatians (103–124) and to interpreting constituent order in Koine Greek clauses (125–146). Greek pedagogy is served by Michael Halcomb’s survey of living language approaches (147–168) and Randall Buth’s description of the importance of Greek pronunciation (169–194). The formal chapters conclude with practical information about electronic tools, presented by Thomas Hudgins (195–212) and Rob Plummer’s description of the “ideal” beginning Greek grammar (213–226). Nicholas Ellis then provides an informed overview of how all the above relates to biblical exegesis (227–246).

In the concluding chapter, Ben Merkle organizes the contents of the volume into three main subject areas: (1) Linguistic Schools; (2) Verbal Aspect; and (3) Pedagogy and the Living Language Approach. In the first two areas, the shadow of Stan Porter looms large. The two main “schools” are the Systemic-Functional approach propounded by Porter, and the Cognitive-Functional and more eclectic approach represented by Levinsohn and Runge. In truth, most professors are rather eclectic in how they apply theory to practice, especially in the burgeoning discipline of discourse analysis. The debate here was not so much on the merits of each “school,”

but rather on the wisdom of eclecticism. In my opinion, Merkle sides with the eclectics, favorably citing Runge that we must be open to “incorporating new insights from other approaches” (250). He suggests that such an eclectic approach has widespread practice within the broader linguistic field, while Porter argues that eclecticism is often a cover for an inconsistent utilization of linguistics! I have often observed that discourse analysts are better at actually doing it than defining it. My biggest criticism of the conference and the book is its scarce attention to showing the student and the reader how to apply linguistics to the discourse analysis of whole NT books. In this regard, do not miss the new volume, *Discourse Analysis of the New Testament Writings*, published by Fontes Press and edited by Todd Scacewater. (This reviewer contributed the chapter on James which also was a luncheon talk I delivered to students during the conference).

The second major subject that Merkle mentions is that of “Verbal Aspect” and its relationship to tense forms and the conveyance of time by the Greek verb. He synthesizes well the ideas of presenters Porter, Campbell, and Aubrey as well as other scholars like McKay and Fanning who have written on the subject. He mentions three areas of agreement among scholars. Those areas are (1) its definition: the subjective viewpoint by which the author communicate the action of the verb; (2) that aspect has prominence over tense; and (3) the meaning of the perfective and imperfective aspects, namely viewing the action as a whole or as in process. Some would add that perfective aspect views the action from a distance (externally?) while imperfective aspect views the action closer up (internally?). Merkle points out that this is not some new idea dreamed up by professors immersed in linguistic theory, but can be found in an earlier form in that grammarian of grammarians from a century ago, A. T. Robertson (252). There is disagreement on aspect, namely the specific nature of the aspect conveyed by the perfect tense form. Is it also “imperfective” (Campbell) or is it “stative” (McKay and Porter, 253)? The influence of Stanley Porter in so many areas can be seen again. Like him or hate him (I like him on the stative), he cannot be ignored.

Another major area of the verb and verbal aspect debate relates to whether the indicative conveys time. Here again Porter has argued that it does not, but the presentation appears to be that he is almost standing alone in the field in this regard. Porter would remind us, however, that such scholars as McKay and Decker also held to this view (as well as others). On the other hand, Merkle avers that the majority of grammarians are not willing to surrender the conviction that the augment in the indicative verb conveys past time.

The third general subject in the chapters that Merkle summarizes is how linguistic awareness impacts the way professors communicate the Greek language to their language learners in the classroom. Here the contributions of such pedagogues as Halcomb (living language) and Buth (living language/pronunciation) are acknowledged. All of us who teach are aware of these methods and, like Merkle, many tend to shy away from them. Merkle does not criticize their new methodology, but is troubled by the insistence that these methods are the best way to teach. It is sometimes forgotten that we are not teaching students to speak these languages, but to read them. And since we do not have any native Koine speakers alive today, how do we really know for sure how the details of these languages were actually pronounced? Modern Greek speakers would be as perplexed at hearing

“Reconstructed Koine” as in hearing my Erasmusian pronunciation! The giants of Greek scholarship over the last few hundred years have done fairly well without these modern pedagogical aids. Many of us are not convinced that this “living language” emphasis is due to great linguistic insights, and may be a result of fads rather than of pedagogical insights. That may sound a bit harsh on these two scholars, but it was also implied by Merkle and finds resonance with many Greek professors today, whatever their ages!

In conclusion, my main substantive criticisms of this book are not in what the chapters say, but in what is omitted. I would like to have seen in the conference and in the book a greater emphasis on discourse analysis and how it actually can be applied to whole texts. In my opinion, that is the greatest benefit that linguistics can provide to students and teachers of the Greek New Testament. I also think that a chapter on semantics would also have been helpful—something along the lines of D. A. Carson’s “exegetical fallacies.” Linguistics has some important things to tell us about rhetorical features and tropes in the original language of the NT. Although he probably did not want to mention it, Black’s own *Linguistics for Students of NT Greek* contains these important matters that may have been overlooked in the conference and in this otherwise excellent volume.

Carmen Joy Imes. *Bearing God’s Name: Why Sinai Still Matters*. Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 2019. 240 pp., \$18.00 Paperback.

Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Distinguished Research Professor of Old Testament, The Master’s Seminary.

Carmen Imes is associate professor of Old Testament at Prairie College in Alberta, Canada. After completing her M.A. in Biblical Studies at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, she completed her Ph.D. in Biblical Theology (Old Testament) at Wheaton College. She wrote her doctoral dissertation on the third commandment. She published her work under this title through Eisenbrauns: *Bearing YHWH’s Name at Sinai: A Re-Examination of the Name Command of the Decalogue*. She is a very productive writer, generating various resources in the area of Old Testament, focusing on the book of Exodus.

In this volume she has interests beyond her dissertation. She seeks to tack the metanarrative of the Bible, giving careful attention to “bearing God’s name” as it relates to the relevance of the Sinai covenant and the message of the entire Bible. She begins where the book of Exodus begins, with the Hebrews languishing as slaves in Egypt.

Along with a helpful introduction and conclusion, Imes divides this volume into two main sections: (1) Becoming the People Who Bear God’s Name (11–93), and (2) Living as the People Who Bear God’s Name (101–184). The first part focuses on the OT, from Exodus through Numbers, ending with Israel on the last part of their journey to the Promised Land. The second part is more thematic, walking more quickly through highpoints from Deuteronomy through Kings, some of the prophets, and then migrates to the NT with a focus on Jesus.

She includes numerous “sidebars” and “cutouts” to deal with topics that need attention but would distract from her larger, synthetic concerns. The “cutouts” include key quotes from the text that are especially impactful or memorable. For example, in her introduction, Imes gives a brief explanation of the name Yahweh (6). One of her cutouts presents this insightful statement: “Trust is not automatic, and God does not expect it to be. He patiently works on Israel’s behalf until they can see that he is worthy of their confidence” (22). Every chapter ends with a “Digging Deeper” resource box. In addition to other related written resources, she points to one or more videos from the Bible Project. After the conclusion (and acknowledgements), Imes provides a few appendices: (1) the titles and QR codes for all the Bible Project videos cited at the end of each chapter, (2) discussion questions and recommended Bible reading for each chapter, (3) end notes for the chapters and sidebars, (4) a bibliography, and (5) a Scripture index.

Imes writes with clarity and warmth. She avoids highly technical language and brings the reader into her argument from Scripture with her ability to provide vivid explanation. She uses intertextual connections, Ancient Near Eastern background, and personal experiences to clarify or strength a point she seeks to make.

Even though this volume gives attention to the big picture message of the OT, her conclusions about the meaning and significance of the third (or second?) commandment is at the core of the book. Unlike what is commonly taught based on this commandment, the big idea is not how we speak God’s name, but how well we bear God’s name before others—i.e., how we represent God’s surpassing God’s character to those around us, both near and far (48–52).

I want to strongly affirm that this volume contains rich treasures for any reader. Imes has “hit the nail” on the head so many times, especially regarding how to correctly understand the OT law in the OT and NT. She addresses numerous poor understandings of the OT in general or the OT law in particular. Space does not allow me to detail these many benefits.

Regardless of my thorough enjoyment of this volume, I do have some “quibbles” or interpretive concerns. These do not set aside the value of the book. First, following the lead of other OT scholars, Imes present OT laws as demonstrations of wisdom rather than binding laws (37–38). Later (45), she prefers to call the Ten Commandments the Ten Words since she does not regard them as commands. They represent an invitation to a life worth living. The Ten Commandments and the 613 case laws all present what could be called “covenant requirements” to which God demanded heartfelt obedience. Second, she numbers the Ten Commandments as the Lutherans and Catholics do (as opposed to the more customary way Reformed scholars pursue) (45–53). Imes regards Exodus 20:2–6 as the first command and 20:7 as the second command. She includes the preamble of the Ten Commandments as well as the second command (according to my understanding) all as part of the first command. To still have ten commands, she splits the “don’t covet” command into two commands (where “covet” occurs in two clauses). Other faithful scholars have argued that 20:3–6 involves one command as well (e.g., Dan Block, Jason DeRouchie). My main concern is that this approach misses a key part of God’s expectation that no one should form or worship any image of Him. He alone can define His image. Finally (because of space constraints), Imes presents the Ten Commandments as a kind of “bill of rights”—that is, the rights of one’s neighbor

(53). She writes that “the job of every Israelite is to protect other people’s freedoms,” and that keeping the Ten Words does just that (53).

Besides these and a few other unmentioned quibbles, the bulk of Ime’s volume provides a vivid and helpful picture of the purpose for which God gave His law to His chosen people. It was never a means of salvation, but a set of concrete expectations that gave guidance as to how His followers could pursue lives that exalted His surpassing character. This volume deserves a place on the reading list of anyone who desires to understand the OT law better.

William Varner. *Passionate about the Passion Week: A Fresh Look at Jesus’ Last Days*. Dallas: Fontes Press, 2020. 132 pp., \$19.95 Paperback.

Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Distinguished Research Professor of Old Testament, The Master’s Seminary.

William Varner is professor of Biblical Studies and Greek at The Master’s University (TMU) in Santa Clarita, CA, where he has taught almost three decades. His varied degrees and ministry experience have given him a thorough knowledge of OT, NT, and Judaica. He is well acquainted with biblical and geographic details of one of the biblical lands—Israel—having led over fifty trips there. Also, he has taught the Life of the Messiah (Christ) for over thirty years.

Through this modest volume, Varner does not present a thorough exposition of the entire “Passion Week” (from Triumphal Entry to Resurrection). He seeks to explain key aspects of “the Passion Week,” offering better ways to understand certain elements of that important week that ended Christ’s life on earth.

After a brief introduction, Varner provides twelve chapters and concludes the book with an epilogue focusing on Isaiah 53. One of Varner’s colleagues at TMU provided the excellent photos throughout the volume. A few relevant maps and reconstructions also occur to help the reader see the geographical or historical significance of Varner’s point. Each chapter ends with two to three suggested resources that relate to that chapter’s content as well as a meaningful prayer that draws on an aspect of Christ’s ministry just covered.

Varner’s chapter titles are lively, piquing the reader’s interest: Ch. 1: “The Beginning of the Via Dolorosa”; Ch. 2: “Palm Monday?”; Ch. 3: “How Did He Get Away with It?”; Ch. 4: “A Pharisee is Not Sad-You-See”; Ch. 5: “Trouble in the Temple”; Ch. 6: “Singing for your Supper”; Ch. 7: “No ‘Garden of Gethsemane!’ Is Nothing Sacred?”; Ch. 8: “Jesus Barabbas or Jesus Messiah? Those Fickle Jews”; Ch. 9: “There Was No ‘Mount Calvary’! Who was Forsaken and What Was Finished”; Ch. 10: “What Day Is It?”; Ch. 11: “Different *Viewpoints* of the Resurrection”; Ch. 12: “He’s Gone! There He Is!”

Time and space prevent me from highlighting all of Varner’s insights (motivation to buy this helpful volume), so I will just summarize several of them. I will refer to the chapter number before summarizing an insight (see above). Let’s begin. In chapter one, Varner points out that the Via Dolorosa (“the way of suffering”) does not begin at the same place proposed by most tour guides, but about 150 miles north of Jerusalem at Caesarea Philippi. It was in the region of this city

that Jesus began to explicitly tell His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer, be killed, and raised on the third day (Matt 16:21).

In chapter two, Varner proposes that the Triumphal Entry occurred on Monday rather than the conventional view, Sunday (hence, “Palm Monday”). He suggests this for at least two reasons. First, if you piece together the events of the passion week, with Palm Sunday setting the events in motion, there are no events detailed for Tuesday evening (after the Olivet Discourse) through Thursday afternoon (the Passover and Lord’s Supper takes place that evening). Second, in the Jewish celebration of the Passover, Monday (Nisan 10) would be the day when the lamb was selected for the coming Passover on Nisan 14. With “Palm Monday,” “the Triumphal Entry was the day that the Messiah presented himself as Israel’s Paschal Lamb” (17).

Varner provides a brief overview of the key distinct groups in Israel during Jesus’s life and ministry: Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees. Varner’s key point is that the Sadducees took the lead in the quest to put Jesus to death. In the middle of the Passion Week, the Pharisees drop into the background and do not participate in the actual condemnation and crucifixion of Jesus.

In chapter eight, Varner correctly dismisses the commonly preached idea that the Jews were totally fickle—welcoming Jesus as their promised deliverer on “Monday” and yet calling for his crucifixion on Thursday. Varner begins his explanation by pointing to numerous ways the Jewish religious leaders (led by the high priest) violated Jewish laws which were meant to govern the way trials were conducted and the appropriate way and timing for delivering a verdict. In general, this was a hurried affair to reach a verdict before people would wake up and be aware of their treacherous conduct. The Jews who gathered to call for Jesus’s crucifixion were a totally different crowd from those who welcomed Jesus in the Triumphal Entry just several days earlier. Varner also points to the clear statement of Matthew 27:20, “The chief priests and the elders, however, persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to execute Jesus.”

One of Varner’s most significant insights comes in chapter nine and deals with two of Christ’s sayings on the cross. First, he contends that God the Father did not “forsake” the Messiah when Jesus said, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken (or abandoned) me” (Mark 15:34). He supports his view by considering the context of Psalm 22 (see vv. 21–24), where that statement also occurs (Ps. 22:1). Varner regards Jesus’s statement as a victory cry rather than a reference to divine abandonment. Second, when Jesus cries out, “It is finished,” Jesus does not declare that the provision of redemption has been completed, but that the prophecies of his suffering have been fulfilled (82–83). In the next chapter, Varner explains when Jesus finished His provision of redemption for humanity.

One of the issues Varner addresses in chapter twelve focuses on when/where He finished providing redemption. After the pattern of the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:15–16) and considering Hebrews 9:11–12 and 9:24, 26, he states that “atonement was begun on the cross and finished in heaven” (107–180).

Throughout this volume, Varner writes with clarity and warmth. He causes his readers along the way to smile at some of his asides. Besides focusing on the events of the Passion week, Varner consistently highlights various examples of clear intertextuality between the Passion Week narratives and various OT passages, enriching our understanding of that important week.

Varner has accomplished one of his desires in writing this book. He has passed on his passion for the Passion week to his readers, including this reader.

J. Daniel Hays. *A Christian's Guide to Evidence for the Bible: 101 Proofs from History and Archaeology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2020. 320 pp., \$21.99 Paperback.

Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Distinguished Research Professor of Old Testament, The Master's Seminary.

J. Daniel Hays (“Danny”) is the dean of the School of Christian Studies and professor of Biblical Studies at Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, Arkansas. He has authored, co-authored, or co-edited over a dozen book including *Grasping God's Word* and *God's Relational Presence*.

Hays's stated goal for the volume is “to bring together pictures and descriptions of Bible-related artifacts from museums across the world, as well as the latest in archaeological discoveries, and to present everything in a compact format so that more people can know about this” (16). The volume provides 101 examples of historical and archaeological verification for the Bible that they contain (from several biblical lands). Besides dividing his examples between OT and NT, he further subdivides those examples into historical people in the OT (#1–30), historical events in the OT (#31–41), historical places in the OT (#42–51), historical people in the NT (#52–75), historical events and group in the NT (#76–84), and historical places in the NT (#85–101). These examples should force critics to admit that the Bible contains an overwhelming number of people, events, and places that can be verified historically and archaeologically. Broadly speaking, these six categories of evidence also fall into general categories: ancient literary material (e.g., Mesha Stele pointing to Mesha, a Moabite king, 58–60) and archaeological material (e.g., Lachish relief, commissioned by the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, 93–97).

Each chapter or “evidence” (between 2–4 pages total) has seven descriptive sections: title of the evidence, Scripture reference, biblical context, historical and archaeological evidence, conclusion (or significance), academic sources for further information, and Wikipedia articles. Out of several benefits that deserve mention, here are two. First, these examples have a powerful apologetic function, adding credibility to numerous biblical facts, events, and people. Second, it makes these evidences accessible to scholars and lay people, whether for class preparation, Bible study preparation, or personal Bible study. This marvelous volume could be significantly improved by having more photographs of the artifacts in addition to including a desperately needed subject and Scripture index. Also, I am not excited about having “proofs” in the title, since archaeology cannot “prove” the Bible to be true. Regardless, this volume offers great potential benefit to students of Scripture.

Titus Kennedy. *Unearthing the Bible: 101 Archaeological Discoveries that Bring the Bible to Life*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2020. 256 pp., \$22.99 Paperback.

Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Distinguished Research Professor of Old Testament, The Master's Seminary.

Dr. Titus Kennedy combines a lifetime love of archaeology with consistent involvement in various archaeology digs, serving as an adjunct professor at several university/seminary settings, as well as writing several journal articles. Kennedy has two goals for this volume: “to provide a resource with quality photographs and information about archaeological artifacts that illuminate the story and context of the Bible for a more thorough and accurate understanding of the Scriptures, and to demonstrate how artifacts also confirm the historical reliability of passages in the Bible” (10). Kennedy writes that he chose these specific examples “as an assortment of the most important and interesting artifacts that not only contextualized various time periods of biblical history, but also demonstrated that archaeological remains are connected to and provide historical support for the books of the Bible” (239).

The 101 discoveries summarized in this volume are arranged in eight chapters and are organized chronologically by historical periods and books of the Bible: stories of creation, flood, Babel, and the patriarchs (Genesis and Job) (#1–15), the Israelites in Egypt, Exodus, and the Wilderness (Exodus–Deuteronomy) (#16–24), Conquest, settlement, and the Judges (Joshua–Ruth) (#25–32), the United Monarchy of Saul, David, and Solomon (Samuel–Kings) (#33–41), shattered kingdoms (Kings–Chronicles) (#42–60), empires of Babylon and Persia (Jeremiah–Malachi) (#61–74), Jesus and His world (Matthew–John) (#75–85), and the first Christians and the early church (Acts–Revelation) (#86–101). Besides these eight chapters, the volume includes a brief introduction and conclusion, a list of key terms with brief definitions, a chart of archaeological periods (with dates), a timeline of biblical and ANE events and people from 3298 B.C. (end of the flood)–95 A.D. (John writes Revelation on the island of Patmos), two maps (of the OT and NT world), and a Scripture index.

Each of the eight chapters begin with a one-page summary of the period the chapter covers. Every discovery has two pages of explanation that begin with a colored box with the following features: date, location of discovery, period, keywords, and relevant Bible passages. The treatment ends with a short and relevant biblical passage. Each discovery includes a hi-res photo, taken by the author.

As an OT professor, I am happy to have over two-thirds of the discoveries be relevant to the OT world. After all, 39 OT books represents about sixty percent of the Bible! Regardless, NT or Bible Exposition professors might have desired more discoveries relevant to the NT world. Though Kennedy’s explanations of each discovery are short (about 1.5 pages of text), he provides a helpful summary of the artifact’s key significance.

I am quite happy that Kennedy provided the end-matter, including a Scripture index. Kennedy has a high view of Scripture and holds to an early date of the Exodus. He has some unique dating decisions (Abraham arriving in Canaan ca. 200 years or so later than Thiele’s chronology, Joseph serving under a Hyksos administration, etc.), but has provided a helpful resource. Although I commend Kennedy for the work

that goes into going to the various museums to take high-resolution photos, the lighting for several images takes away from its quality and clarity. This volume by Kennedy will provide encouragement and help to students of God's Word. If I could only purchase one volume (this volume or the one by Hays's reviewed in this same issue of *TMSJ*), I would likely purchase Hays's volume. Yet the two volumes, though in many ways similar, each have distinct features and their own value.

Michael S. Heiser. *Demons: What the Bible Really Says about the Powers of Darkness*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020. 320 pp., \$16.46 Paperback.

Reviewed by James R. Mook, Professor of Theology and Director of Ph.D. Studies, The Master's Seminary.

Are common beliefs among Christians about demons correct? Are they truly derived only from proper exegesis of the Bible? Or have they been shaped by tradition that started with new interpretations and concepts in intertestamental Judaism and developed by the NT authors and later church theologians? These are questions that Michael Heiser claims to authoritatively answer in *Demons: What the Bible Really Says about the Powers of Darkness* (Lexham Press, 2020).

Michael Heiser is an experienced educator and prolific author. He was educated at Bob Jones University (B.A.), the University of Pennsylvania (M.A. in Ancient History, 1992), and the University of Wisconsin-Madison (M.A. and Ph.D. in the Hebrew Bible and Semitic Studies, 1998, 2004). He has taught at the college and university level since 1992. Heiser's books focus on the spiritual realm—focusing in particular on angels and demons—including *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (2015); *Supernatural: What the Bible Teaches about the Unseen World and Why It Matters* (2015); *Reversing Hermon: Enoch, the Watchers, and the Forgotten Mission of Jesus Christ* (2017); *Angels: What the Bible Really Says About God's Heavenly Host* (2018); and *A Companion to the Book of Enoch: A Reader's Commentary, Vol. 1: The Book of the Watchers (1 Enoch 1–36)* (2020). Heiser's work on hermeneutics is *The Bible Unfiltered: Approaching Scripture on Its Own Terms* (2017). Heiser is the current Executive Director of the School of Ministry at Celebration Church in Jacksonville, FL and has served as a distance professor for Liberty University and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (Kansas City, MO). He has also served as an Academic Editor for Logos Bible Software (2008–2013) and has been active in writing academic essays and popular articles and blogs.

At the outset of his *Demons*, Michael Heiser alerts that what he writes “will not conform” to what most readers are “already thinking,” as he promises to provide content that they have “never heard in church or perhaps in a seminary class.” Heiser asserts that he will set the matter straight by “close study of the original Hebrew and Greek texts,” thus opposing what is “filtered through and guided by church tradition” and “English translations” (xv–xvi). For initial shock value, he asserts that demons in the OT are not the same as those in the Gospels; the “Satan” of Job 1–2 is not the devil of the NT; and that there is no biblical evidence for the “oft-repeated belief”

that Satan led one-third of the angels in rebellion against God before the creation of man (xvi).

To accomplish his purported corrective of traditional Christian demonology, Heiser (xvii–xviii) begins by maintaining that the LXX conflated many terms for “supernatural powers” rebelling against God. He claims that this confused vocabulary was greatly influenced by “new terms” from intertestamental Second Temple Hebrew and Aramaic Jewish writers. Then Heiser outlines three “divine rebellions” (“not just one”) in the OT—the first two framing “ancient beliefs” about Satan, depravity, and the demons. The third rebellion is put forth as the source of the “princes” of Daniel 10 and the Pauline “principalities and powers”—rebels that are distinct from each other and from those of the previous two rebellions. Third, Heiser posits how NT writers “processed” OT material through the prism of the LXX and originated the concept that the Messiah would be identified by His casting out demons and the concept (by Paul) of the resurrection of Christ as delegitimizing the authority of the principalities and powers. Heiser concludes by clearing up “points of confusion in modern Christian demonology.”

There are aspects of this book to affirm. Heiser is correct that exegesis of the original text of Scripture in its original contexts must stand over and correct tradition when the two are in conflict. Exegetical priority should lead to intense study of the Bible in its original languages and openness to accept improved definitions of biblical terms and concepts when proper hermeneutical principles indicate such a direction. In this respect, Heiser’s analysis of OT Hebrew terms for evil spirit beings (chapter 1) are worth consideration. Also, certain conclusions of Heiser’s are well-taken because Scripture supports them: angels and rebel spirit beings are not offered redemption (242); Satan and the evil spirits would not have known the details of the plan of salvation, which had to be revealed by God to His people (246–248); hideous imagery of Satan (horns and tail) was absorbed from pagan images of their false gods (248–249); Cain was not spawned by Satan (250–253); Christians cannot be demon-possessed (253–256); Christian spiritual warfare does not involve “power encounters” in confronting Satan and demons, but rather consists of holy living and proclaiming the gospel (256–262).

However, there are significant problems in Heiser’s major theses and other concepts, which proper hermeneutics and exegesis contradict. This critique will address three major problems, the first one based on the other two. (Others could be noted, such as Heiser’s amillennialism, implicitly eliminating Israel’s future in its land, his frequent references to his other writings as evidentiary, and his seeming assumption that there was only one LXX.)

Finding Three Rebellions in Genesis. A major thesis in this book, and all of Heiser’s books for that matter, is that there was not a single rebellion of Satan and the demons prior to the creation of man, but rather three rebellions of “divine beings” (spirit beings) in history. The first rebellion (chs. 3 and 4) was by “the serpent” in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3 and did not occur before the events recorded there. Heiser contends that the OT does not identify the serpent as “Satan,” nor is there any specifically named spirit rebel named “Satan” in the OT, even in Job 1 and 2 and Zechariah 3 (because there is a definite article before *Satan* in Hebrew, and Hebrew “does not tolerate the definite article to precede a proper personal name” (76)). According to Heiser, Eden on earth was the earthly temporal representation of the

heavenly temple of God in heaven. In the heavenly temple, God met with the spirit beings in the “divine council,” the “heavenly host,” God’s “administrative bureaucracy,” of which the serpent was one. Heiser sees Isaiah 14:12–15 and Ezekiel 28:1–19 as concerning this first rebellion in Eden. As a result, the serpent was ever after “an adversarial figure” in biblical history (although not named “Satan” in the OT), and he was cast out of the “divine council” to the “earth” (which in Hebrew is a term for “the realm of the dead” (81). He did not, however, cause one-third of the angels to rebel and be cast out with him. Heiser believes that the reference to the “third of the stars of heaven” cast to the earth in Revelation 12:4–5 references Satanic and demonic opposition to the Messiah at His first advent (243–245), effected by demons already in Satan’s service.

The second rebellion in Heiser’s thesis (chs. 5 and 6) is the rebellion of the “sons of God” (or the “sons of the gods”) in Genesis 6:1–4. Appealing to 1 Enoch 1–36, the “Book of the Watchers” (Second Temple literature) as a clarifying source, and the Mesopotamian story of the *apkallu* as the proposed polemical focus, Heiser posits that Genesis 6:1–4 concerns “the Watchers”—spirit beings who intermarried with human women and corrupted men with knowledge of heavenly secrets. According to 1 Enoch (9:1–11; 10:1–3), God responded by destroying the earth with the flood and consigning the “Watchers” to the abyss. According to 1 Enoch 15, the spirits of the mixed nature of the Nephilim (“Giants”), the offspring of the Watchers, become the demons (136–144).

The third rebellion (chs. 7 and 8) occurred in Genesis 11:1–9 at the Tower of Babel. Because man rebelled, he divided the nations among the *elohim*—the spirit beings in existence—except that Israel was claimed by God as His inheritance. Heiser bases his view of what happened at Babel on the LXX and DSS reading of Deuteronomy 32:8 (“according to the number of the sons of God” (LXX) rather than “according to the number of sons of Israel” (MT)); 4:19–20; and Psalm 82, which Heiser interprets as God addressing “the divine council; in the midst of the gods” rather than human judges or other powerful ones. So, God has Israel as His inheritance, but the other nations have other gods,” lesser *elohim* as “princes” over them. However, when this division of the nations among the “sons of God” was made at Babel, these spirit beings were not “fallen,” but were members of the “divine council.” However, these *elohim* rebelled by having their nations worship them (150–154). Heiser extends this concept to argue that these are the “princes” over the nations in a “cosmic geography” in which each nation outside Israel worships and is “under dominion of hostile gods,” as seen by the “princes” of Daniel 10:13, 20 (155–58).

Compromising Canon Structure. The three rebellions in Heiser’s thesis are the result of a second problem in his book. As has already been noted, to him Second Temple literature, especially 1 Enoch and the LXX, served as hermeneutical means for interpreting the OT by the writers of the NT. He prefers LXX readings over the MT, and seems especially focused on 1 Enoch as evidence that the NT authors had their concept of OT demonology shaped by the LXX and Second Temple literature. This view is contradicted by (1) the lack of explicit dependence by the apostles on the LXX and the intertestamental books; (2) the specific assertions in intertestamental writings that there were no more prophets after Malachi and so what was written after did not have the same authority (e.g., 1 Macc 4:46; 9:23–27; 14:41); and (3) the apostles’ concept that the canon was confined to the prophets and the apostles (cf. 2

Pet 3:2; Rom 1:2; Heb 1:1–2; 2:3; Luke 11:49) and the ancient church’s refusal to accept as canon any book not written by a prophet or an apostle. For the latter point, see the writings of Michael J. Kruger and his evidence in the NT and in the church fathers of an intentional “Bi-Covenantal Canon” (e.g., *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Crossway, 2012)).

Disrupting Progressive Revelation. With the breaking of the inspired canon structure through the addition of intertestamental literature and preference for LXX readings comes a disruption and cessation of biblical progressive revelation. This progress involved the Holy Spirit using the thorough knowledge that each writer had of every previously written Bible book along with understanding of the themes being developed in the progress of revelation. This progress was affected by the Holy Spirit in each OT writer, then in Jesus Christ, and, finally, in the apostles and writers closely associated with the apostles. The progress of revelation did not come through the intertestamental writings or the LXX, but rather only from the Hebrew OT interpreted only through Jesus Christ (see Luke 24:25–27, 44–45; also, Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scripture from the Prophets and Apostles* (Kregel Academic, 2018)).

Pastors and academics committed to the doctrines of the inspiration of the Scriptures should read Heiser’s books, since he is a popular teacher concerning the spirit realm and is trained as a scholar. Servants of Christ must know what Heiser is teaching by faithfully interacting with his writings, but should be discerning concerning his bibliological principles and methods.