

What is the Righteousness of God?

A BIBLICAL STUDY OF IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS

BILL PARKER

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DEDICATION

On behalf of his mother and myself, I want to dedicate this book to our son, Aaron, who is also our brother in Christ. The Lord took Aaron from this world and into the glory of His presence on December 20, 2018. His mother and I consider him a wonderful gift from God to us, and we were blessed to have had him and his fellowship on this earth for 38 years. As much as we grieve our loss, we have the comfort and peace of knowing that it is truly Aaron's gain. This book is about Aaron's (as well as every true believer's) hope and assurance of God's grace in the Lord Jesus Christ.

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I want to thank the following people who encouraged and helped me to put these pages together for God's glory and the good of His people. First, I want to thank my dear wife, Debbie, who is also my sister in Christ, for her patience, care, and encouragement for me while I worked on this writing. I also want to thank the members of the congregation that I pastor at Eager Avenue Grace Church in Albany, GA, for allowing me the time and the opportunity to write Gospel books and pamphlets as the Lord leads me. Specifically, I want to thank the following brothers and sister in Christ:

-- Randy Wages, Jim Casey, Mark Pannell, and Robert Margeson for their much needed help in editing and proofreading this book;

-- Kristen Fuller for putting it all together in a format for final printing.

None of my writings would have been possible without the prayers, encouragement, and help of all these mentioned above. I thank God for all of them as they have been used of God to promote His glory in spreading the Gospel message of His grace in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Pastor Bill Parker
January 8, 2019

FOREWORD

In the past few years I have written three books aimed at communicating and proclaiming Gospel truth as it is revealed in the Bible which I believe to be God's verbally-inspired, inerrant Word of truth and life. There is no book to be compared with the Bible, and everyone should read and study it while prayerfully asking God to make them ***"wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus"*** (2 Timothy 3:15). The Bible is the only true authority for authenticating and confirming truth used by God the Holy Spirit to bring sinners to salvation and guide them in a life of faith. In my writings I have stated often that no book written by human beings (not even those written by true believers) can or should ever be elevated to a position above (or equal to) the perfect revelation of God's Word recorded in the Bible. However, the Bible itself tells us that God uses weak human beings as instruments to deliver His truth to His people (***Romans 10:13-17; 1 Corinthians 1:17-24; 2 Corinthians 2:14-17; 4:6-7***). It pleases the Lord to do this, and whenever a sinner is brought to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the power is never to be attributed to the preacher or the writer, but only to the glory, power, and grace of God in Christ.

My goal in writing these books is not to draw attention to or promote myself and certainly not to replace or rival the Book of books. Some would accuse me of this, but I know that God alone is the true Judge of my heart and motives (***Hebrews 4:12-13***), and I am content to leave this matter with Him. I honestly believe the Lord has laid this task upon my heart, and I have two goals in mind:

(1) First, it is my goal that these books be used to glorify God and exalt Christ in true EVANGELISM to reach lost people with the simple and basic truths of the Gospel of God's free and sovereign grace in the salvation of sinners by Jesus Christ our Lord. These books are intended to be tools to guide seekers who desire to find truth in God's Word, the Bible. Whatever is written in these books is to be judged and believed only as supported by and

founded upon God's inspired and inerrant Word of truth as revealed in the Bible.

(2) Secondly, it is my desire to glorify God, exalt Christ, and to be used of God as an instrument to promote the EDIFICATION of true believers, building them up in the faith of God's elect, encouraging them in the assurances of God's grace in Christ, and inspiring them in the obedience of faith for the glory of God. I consider these books to be the same as Gospel sermons intended to point believers to Christ and His Word for all grace and truth in salvation.

To accomplish these goals, I have sought to engage people who profess to be Christians in the Godly exercise of Biblical SELF-EXAMINATION as commanded in the Holy Scriptures –

2 Corinthians 13 – (5) Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?

We live in a day when so many people who claim to be Christians are sadly ignorant of the teachings and doctrine of Christ as revealed in the Bible. Also, there is so much error, confusion, and division amongst professing Christians over what the Bible does and does not teach. These books are intended to aid one in a serious, sincere, and prayerful study of the Bible in this exercise of self-examination. This has been so impressed upon my heart and mind by the Lord that I have identified these books together as my SELF-EXAMINATION SERIES. The first three books in this series are –

RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD

Rules for Interpreting the Bible

WHAT IS SALVATION?

A Biblical Study of God's Greatest Gift

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

A Biblical Study of the One True Faith

This book is the fourth in the SELF-EXAMINATION SERIES and entitled –

WHAT IS THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD?

A Biblical Study of the Imputed Righteousness of Christ

I realize that many who read these pages may have never heard the term “imputed righteousness.” Many may be confused as to what it really means and involves. Others may have rejected it based on misunderstandings and misinterpretations of this doctrine. But I assure you that, according to the Bible, it is impossible to overstate the importance of the truth and reality of the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ in the salvation of sinners. It is the heart of the Gospel message in presenting both the glorious Person and finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The truth contained in this term is necessary for a right understanding of the cross-work of the Lord Jesus Christ as He is the one and only Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of God’s chosen people.

If we understand the revelation of God’s Word of salvation, we will find that the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ is both the GROUND of a sinner’s salvation and justification before God and the SOURCE and POWER of all spiritual, eternal life and blessings. Some say that the Gospel is simply the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but the historical facts of His death, burial, and resurrection mean nothing apart from an understanding of who Christ is, what He accomplished, why He did it, and where He is now. All these things are made clear if we know the meaning of ***“the righteousness of God”*** revealed in the Gospel. This is Christ’s righteousness imputed and received by God-given faith.

This truth, which finds its foundation and ultimate fulfillment in the Person and redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ, is used by the Holy Spirit to bring God’s people to faith in Christ and repentance of dead works. It shows how salvation (along with all blessings of salvation) was conditioned

on the Lord Jesus Christ and how He alone fulfilled these conditions by finishing His great work of redeeming His people on the cross. It is opposed to all false gospels which teach salvation conditioned on sinful men. This great and glorious Gospel truth is also used by the Holy Spirit to establish a believer's heart with grace and motivate him as a true child of God in the obedience of grace, love, and gratitude. It exposes the evil of man's natural and sinful motives of legal fear of punishment and mercenary promises of earned reward(s).

It is no wonder that this great Gospel truth is one of the most misunderstood, denied, neglected, and hated doctrines of the Bible. It gives all glory to God in Christ and leaves us with no room to glory in ourselves, our decisions, or our works. It is my desire and prayer that God will use this book, as well as the other books, to bring lost sinners to know and believe His Word of salvation by His grace in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

ALL SCRIPTURE QUOTATIONS ARE TAKEN FROM
THE AUTHORIZED KING JAMES VERSION

ALL OF THE BOOKS IN THE SELF-EXAMINATION SERIES
ARE AVAILABLE FREE OF CHARGE AT WWW.ROFGRACE.COM

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INTRODUCTION

The Heart of the Gospel

Most people do not realize that when it comes to understanding the Bible, the grace of God in salvation, and the Gospel message in its simplest form, it is all about Christ – His glorious Person and His finished work to redeem His people from sin and death. Being all about Christ means that it is all about righteousness. A right understanding of who Jesus Christ is and what He accomplished in His death on Calvary for His people involves a right understanding of righteousness as revealed in the Bible. One cannot truly understand or preach Christ without understanding and preaching righteousness. And one cannot truly understand or preach righteousness without understanding and preaching Christ. Christ is identified in the Old Testament as ***“THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jeremiah 23:6; 33:16)***. The Apostle Paul was inspired by God the Holy Spirit to define the Gospel of Christ as the revelation of ***“THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD” (Romans 1:16-17)***. This book is a detailed study of this term as it appears in its many forms throughout the Bible. It is intended for the serious Bible student who has a desire to study and show him or herself ***“approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15)***.

Weighed in the Balance

There is a very significant historical account recorded in ***Daniel 5*** of a Babylonian king named Belshazzar. Belshazzar threw a party for a thousand of his nobles. During this party he commanded his servants to bring the golden and silver vessels that his father, Nebuchadnezzar, had taken from Solomon’s temple when he conquered and destroyed Jerusalem. Belshazzar and all who attended his party, without any regard for the true and living God, drank wine out of those vessels which God had sanctioned only to be used in temple worship and service to Him. Belshazzar used these holy

vessels for profane and idolatrous purposes, praising ***“the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone”*** (*Daniel 5:4*). As they enjoyed themselves in their party, the fingers of a man’s hand appeared and wrote words upon the wall that the king did not understand. It frightened him so much that his legs went limp and his knees literally knocked together (*Daniel 5:6*).

King Belshazzar then called for his astrologers, wise men, and fortune-tellers. He offered them much wealth, position, and power if they could interpret the writing on the wall. None of them could read the writing or tell the king what it meant. The queen informed the king of another man in the kingdom of whom she had heard had the ability to understand such mysteries and to interpret dreams. This man was God’s true prophet, Daniel, who had before interpreted dreams for Belshazzar’s father. Belshazzar called in Daniel and offered him gifts and rewards to interpret the writing on the wall. Daniel told the king to keep all the gifts and rewards, but that he would willingly read and interpret the writing on the wall for him. This is what happened –

Daniel 5 – (25) And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. (26) This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. (27) TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. (28) PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians. (29) Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. (30) In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. (31) And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old.

The words on which we need to focus our attention are these – ***“THOU ART WEIGHED IN THE BALANCES, AND ART FOUND WANTING.”*** God had taken an account of King Belshazzar, weighed him in the scales of justice, and found the king to be lacking in righteousness. Now it is very easy for us to see a sinful, idolatrous, and profane man like Belshazzar to be found

“wanting” (lacking in the righteousness required to balance the scales of God’s justice). But would you be surprised or upset to know that if God were to weigh any of us by the scales of His justice based on our works, we also would all be **“found wanting”**? It is because we are all sinners who fall **“short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23)**. When God’s Word tells us, **“For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not” (Ecclesiastes 7:20)**, and **“As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10)**, do we imagine that such verses apply only to openly immoral persons like King Belshazzar? The main point of this book is to show that this is the case for all of us as we are fallen in Adam and born spiritually dead in trespasses and sin. We are all sinners.

The Gospel Reveals Christ as the Righteousness of God

I want to show from the Bible that our only hope of having the scales of God’s justice tipped in our favor so that we are saved from our sins can be found only in the glorious Gospel (good news) of **“THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD.”** It is very significant that the Apostle Paul was inspired by God the Holy Spirit to identify and distinguish this great and glorious Gospel message as the power of God unto salvation because it is the revelation of this truth of **“THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD” –**

Romans 1 – (16) For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. (17) FOR THEREIN IS THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD REVEALED FROM FAITH TO FAITH: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

The true Gospel is given and revealed by God to His people whereby God the Holy Spirit brings them to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and true repentance of dead works. False gospels will lead sinners to counterfeit “christs,” false hopes, empty refuges, and leave them void of true righteousness. How, then, can we be sure that we know and believe the TRUE Gospel? The above verse tells us that if we really know the TRUE Gospel message, we know something of the truth of what Paul was inspired to call

“the righteousness of God.” My purpose in this book is to show from the Bible what these words mean and how important they are for a right understanding of the Gospel of God’s free and sovereign grace through the Lord Jesus Christ. As we unpack this phrase, we will find some of the most basic truths that set true Christianity apart from all other religions and prove it to be the one and only way of salvation for sinners.

Behind this phrase are the Gospel doctrine of Christ and the doctrine of grace. The ***“righteousness of God”*** is a term that presupposes and includes the truth of God’s nature and glory as the one true and living God Who is holy, sovereign, just, gracious, loving, and merciful. It also presupposes and includes the truth about our own natural sinfulness and total depravity to show that we have no righteousness of our own and cannot create one by our best efforts to obey the law of God. It presupposes and includes the truths concerning the glorious Person of Christ who is ***“Emmanuel – God with us” (Matthew 1:23)***, and the power and success of His redemptive work on the cross when (as the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His people) He died, was buried, and arose again. It presupposes and includes the work of Christ by the Holy Spirit in the new birth where He irresistibly gives spiritual life to spiritually dead sinners and brings them to faith in Christ, repentance of dead works, and perseverance in the faith of God’s elect.

My purpose is to prove from Holy Scripture that this ***“righteousness of God”*** is the merit (value, worth, quality, excellency) of Christ’s obedience unto death for His people which God has imputed to them. As stated in the sub-title of this book, it is **THE IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST**. If you have never read or heard of this term, it is helpful to begin with some basic definitions, keeping in mind that we must define these words within the context of Holy Scripture. Many people are either ignorant of or confused about this phrase, and yet it describes the heart and essence of the true Christian Gospel as it is set forth in God’s Word in the glorious Person and redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you claim to be a Christian but are ignorant of or confused about this truth, then please consider the following verses written by the Apostle Paul as he was inspired by God the Holy Spirit to reveal the state of the unbelieving Jews –

Romans 10 – (1) Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. (2) For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. (3) For they BEING IGNORANT OF GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS, and going about to establish their own righteousness, HAVE NOT SUBMITTED THEMSELVES UNTO THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD. (4) FOR CHRIST IS THE END OF THE LAW FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS TO EVERY ONE THAT BELIEVETH.

Paul believed these religious Jews, who claimed to be saved, were still lost in their sins as evidenced by their ignorance of God’s righteousness and the fact that they were not submitted to ***“the righteousness of God.”*** Their unbelief was evidenced by the fact that they were ***“going about to establish their own righteousness”*** before God rather than being submitted to God’s righteousness. It is clear that God the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to remind the Roman Christians that the ***“Gospel of Christ”*** is the revelation of the ***“righteousness of God”*** to all who truly have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation with all its blessings and benefits. And yet, as stated, how many people who claim to believe the Gospel today are either ignorant of or confused about this vital truth of the ***“righteousness of God”***? What does it really mean, and how can it be good news (Gospel) to sinners like us who deserve nothing but God’s eternal wrath? This term is found in this form in the Authorized King James Version (AKJV) eight times including the two that were cited earlier, ***Romans 1:17*** and ***Romans 10:3***. The other verses are –

Romans 3 – (5) But if our unrighteousness commend THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man)

Romans 3 – (21) But now THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

Romans 3 – (22) Even THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

2 Corinthians 5 – (21) For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD in Him.

James 1 – (20) For the wrath of man worketh not THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD.

2 Peter 1 – (1) Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD and our Saviour Jesus Christ:

Although the exact term ***“the righteousness of God”*** is found only eight times in the AKJV, the Gospel truth of righteousness and the righteousness of God are found throughout the Bible from ***Genesis*** to ***Revelation***. It is not an exaggeration to say that in this truth we find the very heart of the Gospel message of God’s grace in the salvation of sinners by the Lord Jesus Christ. When the Apostle Paul wrote, ***“That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 5:21)***, he had this glorious Gospel truth in mind – ***“the righteousness of God”*** as stated in ***Romans 1:17***. How can we know that the Apostle Paul had this in mind? The context in which it appears in the ***Epistle to the Romans*** proves this and shows us exactly what he meant. It is the ***“righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith.”***

1 The Biblical Truths of Righteousness, Sin, and Imputation

To gain a full understanding of *“the righteousness of God”* as revealed in the Gospel, we must find the Biblical meaning of certain words related to this truth. These words are RIGHTEOUSNESS, SIN, and IMPUTE. The need to understand RIGHTEOUSNESS is obvious. It is the RIGHTEOUSNESS of God. We also need to understand what the Bible means by the word “SIN” because sin is the opposite of righteousness, and it is the problem from which we need to be saved. God’s people are SINNERS saved by grace through Christ Who is the very *“righteousness of God.”* We need to understand the word IMPUTE because, as revealed in the Gospel message, this is God’s way of applying sin to Christ and righteousness to His people for their justification.

Part 1 – Understanding Righteousness

The words *right*, *righteous*, and *righteousness* are found throughout the Bible and mean basically the same thing. They are also often translated as *just*, *justice*, and *justification*. For example, in the Old Testament the word *righteous* is the Hebrew word transliterated as *tsaddiyq* and pronounced “tsad·dēk”. In the AKJV it is translated as *“righteous”* 162 times and as *“just”* 42 times. There are other forms of the word found many times. In the New Testament it is the Greek word δίκαιος (transliterated as *dikaios*, and

pronounced “dē¹-kī-os”). In the AKJV it is translated as “**righteous**” 41 times and as “**just**” 33 times. There are also other forms of the word found many times in the New Testament. The point is this – the term “**righteousness of God**” could be rightly translated as the *JUSTICE of God*. This brings to the forefront how the truth of God’s JUSTICE cannot be separated from the Gospel message and the truth of salvation. In the Bible salvation has to do with a sinner being JUSTIFIED BEFORE GOD on a JUST ground. JUSTIFICATION IS THE LEGAL REALM OF SALVATION. It is not the only realm of salvation, but it provides the ground upon which God saves His people by His grace through the merits of the obedience unto death of the Lord Jesus Christ, His righteousness imputed.¹ What does it mean for a sinner to be JUSTIFIED BEFORE GOD? Consider the following –

“JUSTIFIED” and “JUSTIFICATION”

Romans 5 – (9) Much more then, being now JUSTIFIED by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

Romans 4 – (25) Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our JUSTIFICATION.”

These terms refer to the act of God declaring His people to be free from guilt, accepted with Him, and to be righteous in His sight –

Romans 8 – (33) Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? IT IS GOD THAT JUSTIFIETH.

Both are legal (forensic) terms often used within the context of a courtroom setting. One who has been accused of a crime is JUSTIFIED when a judge declares them to be “not guilty” and to be “righteous” based on a just

¹ See What is Salvation? A Biblical Study of God’s Greatest Gift, by Bill Parker

(or righteous) ground. And the only just ground upon which God justifies sinners is the death of Christ (i.e. His righteousness imputed) –

Romans 8 – (34) Who is he that condemneth? IT IS CHRIST THAT DIED, YEA RATHER, THAT IS RISEN AGAIN, Who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

Justification before God then includes both the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of righteousness. The justification of sinners before God is a singular act. It is not a process (or progressive work) in time. Once God declares a sinner to be not guilty, forgiven, and to be righteous IN HIS SIGHT, that sinner is truly, completely, finally, and eternally justified. This justification before God can never be changed by any improvement or depreciation. It is true that the ground of this justification must be produced and completed in the process of time. This is what Christ accomplished by redeeming His people from their sins in His obedience unto death as their Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer – ***“But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Galatians 4:4-5).*** What God had determined and declared to be true before the foundation of the world had to have its fulfillment in time for His glory and the good of His people.

It is also true that the fruit of this justification must be produced and completed in the process of time – ***“And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:6).*** This is what Christ accomplishes by the new birth when He sends the Holy Spirit to give those for whom He died spiritual life in regeneration and conversion to faith in Christ, bringing them to be justified, not before God, but in their consciences as sprinkled by the blood of Christ. They are –

1 Peter 1 – (2) Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.

Their hearts have been “*sprinkled from an evil* [legally guilty and defiled] *conscience*” (**Hebrews 10:22**). This sprinkling takes place when God the Holy Spirit brings them to faith in Christ as their Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer and brings them to repentance of dead works. It is also true that all whom God has justified in His court of justice will be (without fail) declared to be so before the whole universe at the Final Judgment. But the Bible is clear that those who are vindicated publicly at Final Judgment are those who have already been justified in God’s court and brought to faith in Christ.

As I have stated earlier, in the Bible righteousness is the MERIT of Christ’s finished work to redeem His people, therefore, we need to keep in mind what the word MERIT means. MERIT is the worth, value, and earning power of a thing or a work. For example, we understand how different jobs require different levels of knowledge, skill, and time. Therefore, some jobs merit (earn, deserve) more money as payment than others. The merit of the job is determined by the difficulty, quality, and result of the work. What is the merit of Christ’s work for His people on the cross? IT IS RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT SECURES THE COMPLETE AND ETERNAL SALVATION OF ALL FOR WHOM HE DID THIS WORK. So, the righteousness of God is the merit of Christ’s finished work on the cross as the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His people.

When we understand what it means to be justified before God, this is where we find the essence of Biblical righteousness. Consider how that many people tend to think of righteousness only as a moral quality of character expressing itself in godly human behavior. But, technically speaking, righteousness is not a moral quality of character. RIGHTEOUSNESS IS GOD’S PERFECT LEGAL STANDARD BY WHICH ALL MORALITY AND GOODNESS IS TO BE MEASURED. To show this distinction consider the definition that one preacher gave in a message entitled, “The Doing of Righteousness.” In this message he stated that “righteousness is sinlessness,” and went on to say, “That’s the best definition I can give of righteousness.” Now I would certainly agree that one who is truly sinless should and would be counted righteous in God’s sight. But if we are sinners saved by God’s grace in Christ, we are truly counted righteous in God’s sight even though we are not sinless in ourselves.

How are we counted righteous by God? We are counted righteous LEGALLY based on Christ's righteousness imputed to us. How are we still sinners in ourselves? We are sinners within ourselves because of the remaining presence, influence, and contamination of the sins of our flesh. As believers, the only sinlessness we can claim is what we find in Christ and based on the legal imputation of our sins to Him and His righteousness to us.

All false religions and false gospels teach and inspire people to seek to attain righteousness by their works and/or find it within themselves by God working righteousness within them in some way, to some degree, at some stage. But the Bible tells us plainly that ***"by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin"*** (Romans 3:20). The Apostle Paul wrote that even though he was ***"dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord"*** (Romans 6:11), he was still ***"carnal, sold under sin"*** (Romans 7:14). His being dead to sin described his legal standing before God in Christ based on Christ's righteousness imputed. His being carnal and sold under sin described His present state as a sinner within himself. So, Paul was righteous before God legally in Christ, but he was still not sinless within himself. His sins could not be charged to him to condemn him because he was justified before God by the blood of Christ –

Romans 8 – (33) Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. (34) Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

Even at his best, sinful man simply cannot measure up to God's perfect standard of righteousness. According to God's standard, anything less than perfect righteousness is sin. The Lord spoke of the Pharisees who went above and beyond the call of duty in trying to work out righteousness by their efforts to keep the law. He told the people who admired and followed them –

Matthew 5 – (20) For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Many people surmise that the Lord was speaking of the Pharisees as being insincere and hypocritical. As far as being insincere, we can surmise that, like many in religion today, some of the Pharisees were also insincere. But the context would not support this as Christ had just finished stating that He Himself had come to fulfill the law's righteousness (***Matthew 5:17-19***), and He followed this with a statement of the law's demand for perfect righteousness which no sinful human being can attain (***Matthew 5:21-48***). Also, where in the Bible does it state that our sincerity in trying to obey God can make us righteous or equal the righteousness of the law? It does not! In fact, the Apostle Paul spoke of the sincerity and zeal of many of his fellow Israelites as being far from the righteousness of the law that can only be found in and by Christ (***Romans 10:1-4***).

It is true that the Bible speaks of those who ***"DOETH righteousness"*** (***1 John 2:29; 3:7***), and we will deal with these verses later in Chapter Five. But righteousness in the Bible is not human morality, sincerity, or any act of man on earth in an unregenerate or regenerate state. Righteousness in the Bible is not even what God enables His people to do. **RIGHTEOUSNESS IS WHAT CHRIST BY HIMSELF ACCOMPLISHED IN HIS OBEDIENCE UNTO DEATH FOR HIS PEOPLE.** God's standard of righteousness as revealed in the Bible can be defined as **PERFECT CONFORMITY TO GOD'S LAW AND PERFECT SATISFACTION TO GOD'S JUSTICE.** It is revealed in, and measured by, this standard as displayed in the obedience unto death of the Lord Jesus Christ –

Acts 17 – (31) Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness BY THAT MAN WHOM HE HATH ORDAINED; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that HE HATH RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD.

It is clear then that whatever measure of morality we attempt or achieve, we cannot Biblically call it righteousness unless it equals the perfection of Christ Himself. The Bible teaches that even the best and most sincere works of fallen sinners cannot attain righteousness for them. And even the best attempts at obedience of true believers do not measure up to righteousness. They can only be accepted by God as they are presented to Him through the blood (the righteousness) of the Lord Jesus Christ –

Hebrews 4 – (14) Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. (15) For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. (16) Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 10 – (19) Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, (20) By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; (21) And having an high priest over the house of God; (22) Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

1 John 1 – (6) If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: (7) But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.

This is why we need the righteousness OF GOD to be justified and saved from all sin and unrighteousness. The righteousness of man cannot accomplish this because sinful men have no righteousness and cannot achieve righteousness by their works to be justified before God –

Romans 3 – (10) As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: (11) There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.

Romans 3 – (19) Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. (20) Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD CAN ONLY BE FOUND IN THE PERFECT WORK OF OBEDIENCE UNTO DEATH OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. It is the merit of HIS work on the cross. It is not something that God works within us. It is something that God works out through His Son for us. This is the declaration and revelation of the righteousness of God in the Gospel –

Romans 1 – (1) Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God, (2) (Which He had promised afore by His prophets in the Holy Scriptures,) (3) Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; (4) And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:

The righteousness we need is identified as the righteousness OF GOD because:

- (1) God alone has purposed and ordained it;
- (2) God sent His Son (who is Himself God) into the world to work it out by His obedience unto death as the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His people, and
- (3) God (the righteous Judge and Savior) has imputed it to all for whom Christ stood as Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer.

THIS RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IS THE ONLY GROUND OF A SINNER'S JUSTIFICATION BEFORE GOD AND THE ONLY SOURCE OF SPIRITUAL AND ETERNAL LIFE FOR SINNERS SAVED BY GRACE. In the Bible this righteousness of God (which is satisfaction to God's justice) is described as a "**PROPITIATION**," which means a turning away of God's wrath based on His justice satisfied –

Romans 3 – (24) Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: (25) Whom God hath set forth to be a PROPITIATION through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; (26) To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

1 John 2 – (1) My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: (2) And He is the PROPITIATION for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

In **1 John 2:1-2**, the context shows that the phrase "**the whole world**" refers to God's chosen people for whom Christ died and arose, and for whom He appears before God as the propitiation for His people who live throughout the world, both Jew and Gentile. This is evidenced by their faith in Christ and their repentance from dead works and idolatry, both which are gifts from God and the fruit of Christ's righteousness imputed to them. It does not include every person without exception. If propitiation had been made for all without exception, then all without exception would be saved and brought to faith in Christ. The Apostle John was making the point that is found in **Romans 1:16**, that the Gospel is the "**power of God unto salvation, to EVERY ONE THAT BELIEVETH**," whoever and wherever they are in the world.

1 John 4 – (10) Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the PROPITIATION for our sins.

Propitiation involves a sin-bearing sacrifice which makes complete satisfaction to God's justice on behalf of others. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Surety, Substitute, and sin-bearing sacrifice who accomplished redemption for His people (God's elect). This is the establishment in time of **"the righteousness of God."** In this way all who have been brought by God to have faith in Christ see that it is God's unconditional love for His elect that sent forth His Son to satisfy the justice of God for them. They see that Christ as their Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer took their sins upon Himself and went under the wrath of God in their place to redeem them by satisfying the justice of God with His own blood. Christ worked out a perfect righteousness by which God could be just and still justify sinners –

Isaiah 45 – (20) Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, ye that are escaped of the nations: they have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god that cannot save. (21) Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the LORD? and there is no God else beside Me; A JUST GOD AND A SAVIOUR; there is none beside Me. (22) Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.

God must be just when He justifies the ungodly, and the only ground upon which He can accomplish this is the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His people.

Part 2 – Understanding Sin

The reason we need the righteousness of God for salvation is because we must be saved from sin. This is why Christ came into the world – ***"thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).*** We need to understand that the reason we need salvation is because SIN DEMANDS AND DESERVES ETERNAL DAMNATION AND DEATH – ***"the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23a).*** **GOD CONDEMNS ALL**

SINNERS TO WHOM HE IMPUTES SIN. Christ had to come and establish righteousness for His people to save them from sin. **RIGHTEOUSNESS DEMANDS AND DESERVES ETERNAL LIFE AND GLORY – “*but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*” (Romans 6:23b).** So, to understand the reality and truth of righteousness, we must also understand the reality and truth of SIN as revealed in God’s Word. Also, an understanding of both is necessary when we consider, for example, verses such as **2 Corinthians 5:21 – “For He hath made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”** HOW was Christ made sin, and HOW were His people made righteous? This question is answered throughout this book, but I will deal with it in detail in Chapter Eight.

As stated before, righteousness is perfect satisfaction to God’s law and justice that can only be found in the glorious Person and finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His people. **ANYTHING LESS THAN THE PERFECT RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD FOUND ONLY IN CHRIST IS SINFUL IN THE SIGHT OF GOD.** Consider how that there are many words in the New Testament used to describe the reality and true nature of sin. But all of these must be defined in light of the righteousness of God revealed in the Gospel of God’s grace in Christ Jesus.

HAMARTIA is the most common Greek word for sin in the New Testament. It is pronounced “hä-mär-tē-ä”. It appears in the AKJV in many forms and is translated as **sin, sinful, and offense**. It literally means “to miss the mark, to fall short.” For example, one verse often quoted is – **“For all have SINNED, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).** The **“glory of God”** is found in Christ crucified and risen from the dead. The mark of which we all fall short is our failure to meet up to God’s standard of righteousness as seen in the glorious Person and finished work of redemption by the Lord Jesus Christ. I heard a preacher argue that this is “a very weak definition of sin because it does not tell the whole story.” Granted, it does not tell the **WHOLE** story of the problem and nature of sin, but no one word could tell the whole story. This is **NOT** a weak definition. It shows us that

when it comes to justification before God and a right relationship with God, anything less than the perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ is sin in the eyes of God. Righteousness, therefore, is hitting the mark, meeting up to the standard, as seen in the glorious Person and finished work of Christ.

PARABASIS is another common Greek word for sin in the New Testament. It is pronounced “pă-ră'-bă-sēs”. In the AKJV this word is translated as “transgression” and “breaking” as in “breaking the law” of God – ***“Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through BREAKING THE LAW dishonourest thou God?” (Romans 2:23)***. This word describes one who has stepped across the line between right and wrong drawn by God. It means to overstep, neglect, violate, and transgress the boundaries that God has set. Sin is rebellion against God by stepping over the line and entering forbidden territory. This is the forbidden territory of sinful thoughts, attitudes, words, and actions. Righteousness, therefore, would be staying within the boundaries that God has set for us.

ANOMIA is another Greek word in the New Testament describing sin and is pronounced “ă-no-mē'-ă”. It is translated in the AKJV as “iniquity,” “unrighteousness,” and “transgression of the law.” The idea here is inequity, meaning that whatever is sinful is so because it does not equal (or balance with) the righteousness of the law. For example, Christ told the false professors in ***Matthew 7:23 – “And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work INIQUITY.”*** There was nothing inherently sinful in the things these false professors claimed – ***“Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? and in Thy name have cast out devils? and in Thy name done many wonderful works?” (Matthew 7:22)***. But none of these things balanced with the scales of God’s justice and measured up to the righteousness God requires. Therefore, it was all iniquity. When any work is presented as the ground of a sinner’s salvation and justification before God, it will be judged as iniquity unless it measures up to the righteousness that Christ worked out for His

people on the cross – the imputed righteousness of Christ. This is why the Apostle Paul expressed his desire as follows –

Philippians 3 – (8) Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, (9) And be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

Righteousness, therefore, is that which balances the scales of God's justice and measures up to the standard of righteousness found only in the Person and finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Anything less is iniquity.

PARAPTŌMA is a common Greek word for sin found in the New Testament and is pronounced "pă-ră'p-tō-mă". It is translated as "trespasses," "offences," "sin," "fall," and "fault." It means "to slip, stumble, tumble, fall, or fall away" and describes one who is lacking the self-control and balance it takes to stand up straight. It describes one who is swept away by impulse or passion so as to be out of control. It is a good word to describe the natural, fallen, sinful man who can do nothing but sin because he is spiritually dead in trespasses and sins – ***"And you hath He quickened, who were dead in TRESPASSES and sins" (Ephesians 2:1)***. It also shows how that without Christ (washed in His blood and clothed in His righteousness) none of us will be able to stand at the Final Judgment. Righteousness, therefore, is being able to stand before God as accepted in Christ. This aspect of sin can be described in the following Old Testament psalm –

Psalms 1 – (5) Therefore the ungodly SHALL NOT STAND IN THE JUDGMENT, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. (6) For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.

OPHEILĒMA is another Greek word in the New Testament that helps us understand the reality of sin. It is pronounced “o-fā'-lā-mā”. It is translated in the AKJV as “debt” – **“And forgive us our DEBTS, as we forgive our DEBTORS” (Matthew 6:12)**. Our fall in Adam and every sin we have ever committed have brought us in debt to God. We have defrauded God of what He is due which is perfect obedience to His law. And where God’s law is broken, He requires perfect payment to His justice. We often hear how criminals must “pay their debt to society.” All of us by nature are criminals according to God’s law, and our crimes have incurred a debt that we cannot pay. The Gospel wherein the righteousness of God is revealed shows how Christ took that debt for His people and paid it in full – **“Wherefore in all things it BEHOVED [opheilō] Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2:17)**. Righteousness, therefore, is the perfect payment of this debt.

All these words serve us well in understanding the nature and reality of sin in light of the righteousness of God’s law. It is in this light of the nature of both righteousness and sin that we can see the importance of the glorious truth of imputation and how God justifies the ungodly by imputing the sins of His people to Christ and by imputing the righteousness of Christ to them. The sin-debt of His people imputed to Christ insured His guilt under the law and obligated Him to suffer, bleed, and die in their place. Christ’s righteousness imputed to all His people insures their complete salvation, including spiritual life given in the new birth by the Holy Spirit to bring them to faith in Christ and repentance of sin. This cannot be over-emphasized for an understanding of the ground of a sinner’s justification before God.

Part 3 – Understanding Imputation

King 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” (Psalm 32:1-2)**. By inspiration

of God the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul quoted this psalm of David and added words to show what David had in mind – ***“Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin” (Romans 4:6-8).*** The word ***“imputeth”*** used by David is the Hebrew word ***CHASHAB***, pronounced *“khä-shav”*. The Greek word used by the Apostle Paul is ***LOGIZOMAI***, pronounced *“lo-gē’-zo-mī”*. The word ***“imputeth”*** is found in both Old and New Testaments in other forms, but it basically carries the same meaning – *“to account (or count), charge, reckon, credit, consider, think.”*

It is used as a business (mercantile) term when it refers to the accounting, crediting, or charging of a debt owed or a payment made. Some people try to degrade the importance and value of imputed righteousness by calling it a “mere mercantile righteousness.” But King David rejoiced in the fact that God did not charge him with the debt of his sins and charged the righteousness of Christ to his account. It is also used as a legal term when, for example, in a court of law a person is charged with a crime and is declared either guilty or not guilty. The truth of justification in the Bible has to do with both the imputation of the sins of God’s elect to Christ and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to God’s elect. It is upon the ground of the merits of Christ’s obedience unto death that God declares His people to be not guilty, forgives them of their sins, and declares them to be righteous in His sight. By the same token, it was upon the ground of the debt of all of the sins of all God’s chosen people imputed to Christ that, as their Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer, He was declared guilty and cursed under the law of God. Based on their sins imputed to Him, He JUSTLY took their punishment under the wrath of God and paid their debt to God’s justice in full. This secured the eternal salvation of all for whom Christ died –

Romans 8 – (33) Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. (34) Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that

died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

Whenever I try to explain the truth and reality of imputation to people, I often use the following two illustrations. The first one is straight from the Bible and the next one is from a possible experience in human life:

ILLUSTRATION #1 – PHILEMON 17-19

God the Holy Spirit by the Apostle Paul gave us a beautiful illustration of this great truth in the **Book of Philemon**. The runaway servant, Onesimus, had stolen from his master, Philemon, and fled to Rome. It was here by the providence of God that Onesimus met the Apostle Paul and heard the Gospel of God's grace in the Lord Jesus Christ. Onesimus was brought by God to believe in Christ. Paul then wrote this letter to Philemon, a brother in Christ, and interceded for Onesimus who also had become a brother in Christ –

Philemon (17) If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. (18) If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, PUT THAT ON MINE ACCOUNT; (19) I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I WILL REPAY IT: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.

This is what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for His people. In essence, He said unto the Father, "If they have wronged you or owe you anything, PUT THAT ON MY ACCOUNT. I WILL REPAY IT." And it was just and right for God to do this for the salvation of His people. This is the miracle of God's grace and mercy in the substitutionary work of the Lord Jesus Christ. There was no injustice and no pretense in this transaction. The Lord Jesus Christ suffered, bled, and died for all the sins of all His people imputed to Him. What He went through in His suffering and death is a mystery of wonder for all of us. He

suffered in His very soul and died a real death in place of His people. This was all based on the guilt of all the sins of His people imputed to Him.

The Biblical doctrine of imputation also teaches that not only were the sins of God's chosen people imputed to Christ, but also His righteousness was imputed to them. This legal exchange is the sole basis and ground of reconciliation between God and His people. It is the sole basis and ground of our whole salvation with all its blessings and benefits. When we speak of the blood of Christ for our redemption and which cleanses us from all our sins, this is what His blood means. Christ's righteousness imputed is the only ground upon which sinners are to approach God, be reconciled to God, and find salvation.

ILLUSTRATION #2 – DEBT PAID AND MONEY IN THE BANK

Imagine you decide to start a business and you borrow one million dollars from a bank for the start-up. One million dollars is charged to your account. It is *imputed* to you on the bank's account books. For some reason you then make bad decisions, squander all the money, and find yourself totally unable to pay back the debt. You are so broke that you cannot pay even one penny of that debt. Realizing your financial problem, you decide to go to the banker and beg for mercy. But even if he wanted to show mercy, the banker could not do so because the law states that THE DEBT MUST BE PAID IN FULL. The banker is legally bound to retrieve the money with interest. You are in legal bondage to that bank for that debt. Not only are you bound legally, but you are also bound in your own conscience with the burden of that debt. Two things are needed to set you free:

(1) The debt must be paid in full to liberate you from all legal obligation binding you to the bank, and

(2) Someone who has the authority to do so must inform and convince you that the debt is paid in full to liberate you in your own conscience.

The banker says to you, “Let’s sit down here, open the account book, and look at your account.” He opens the account book and finds your name. He then says something incredible. He says, “Wait a minute. There is NOTHING charged to your account. Somebody else has PAID YOUR DEBT IN FULL!” Could you imagine the sense of relief that would come over you in hearing this from a banker who has the authority to tell you this joyful news? As you get up to leave his office, the bank officer says, “Hold on. There is more. The same person who paid your debt for you has also given you an additional one million dollars to put to your account. You have a million dollars, sir, charged (imputed) to your account.” Could you imagine then how you would rejoice over hearing this news from this banker? Wouldn’t you say that the first thing you would want to know is WHO paid your debt and gave you a million dollars? Wouldn’t you want to find this person and thank him? Wouldn’t you love him and be willing to serve him for the rest of your life? You know you would.

This is exactly what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for all people whom His Father gave to Him before the foundation of the world. By His obedience unto death for them, He has secured their complete salvation, including their justification before God, their redemption from sin, their spiritual life in the new birth, and their preservation unto eternal life and glory.

The Bible reveals salvation by God’s grace in light of representation by Adam in our fall into sin and death, and representation of God’s elect by Christ unto righteousness and life –

1 Corinthians 15 – (21) For since by man [Adam] came death, by Man [Christ, the Godman] came also the resurrection of the dead. (22) For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

Consider these three great truths of representation:

I. By Adam’s one act of disobedience, the whole human race fell into sin and death. This is expressed in a verse already cited above – ***“Wherefore,***

as by one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Romans 5:12). “All have sinned” is literally ***“ALL SINNED.”*** The first man, Adam, was appointed by God to be the representative of the whole human family, so much so that when Adam fell, all of us fell in him. The whole human race was ruined by Adam’s fall. The reality of our fall in Adam is proven by the effects of it – ***“death by sin, and so death passed upon all men.”*** The fact that in our natural birth we are all born spiritually dead in trespasses and sin, along with the fact that we are all sinners and subject to physical death, is proof of our fall in Adam. As the result of our fall in Adam, we are all by nature spiritually dead, and we all deserve and have earned condemnation and death –

Romans 5 – (18a) Therefore as by the offence of one [Adam] judgment came upon all men to condemnation; ...

Romans 5 – (19a) For as by one man’s [Adam] disobedience many were made [constituted and brought into the state of being] sinners, ...

This is the state of all people by nature as fallen in Adam. Death and condemnation are what all of us deserve because of Adam’s sin which brought alienation from God and death – ***“The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23a)***. This shows us four truths about all of us as fallen in Adam –

(1) If God were to give any of us what we have earned or what we deserve, it would be eternal death and damnation.

(2) None of us can be saved, made righteous, or pardoned based on our works.

(3) We have neither the natural knowledge and understanding of, nor any inherent desire for, the things of the Spirit that glorify God in salvation by His grace through Christ.

(4) If salvation comes to any of us, it is totally a free gift of God’s grace through the righteousness of another, the Lord Jesus Christ – ***“but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23b)***.

II. The sins of God's elect were imputed to Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ has always been the Representative of God's elect as determined by God in the everlasting covenant of grace made before the world began. So, just as Adam represented the whole human race in his fall, the Lord Jesus Christ represented the whole election of grace (God's chosen people) in His obedience unto death. This is redemption by His blood. Think of it this way – The condemnation of Adam comes upon all men as represented by Adam, even upon the elect of God themselves **AS TO WHAT THEY DESERVE AND HAVE EARNED**, but it is not executed upon them, because their sins (original sin and their own sins) had been already imputed to Christ Who was made their Surety before the world began. God had already purposed and decreed to execute His wrath upon Christ for His chosen people. Having been chosen by God before the foundation of the world, they are delivered from His wrath by His grace through the death of Christ as their Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. So, although they were *“made sinners”* in and by Adam, the demerit of their sins had already been imputed to Christ –

Isaiah 53 – (6) All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and THE LORD HATH LAID ON HIM THE INIQUITY OF US ALL.

Isaiah 53 – (12) Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong; because He hath poured out His soul unto death: and HE WAS NUMBERED WITH THE TRANSGRESSORS; and HE BARE THE SIN OF MANY, and made intercession for the transgressors.

2 Corinthians 5 – (21a) For HE HATH MADE HIM TO BE SIN FOR US, Who knew no sin;

Hebrews 9 – (28) So Christ was once offered TO BEAR THE SINS OF MANY; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

1 Peter 2 – (24) Who His own self BARE OUR SINS IN HIS OWN BODY ON THE TREE, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by Whose stripes ye were healed.

In the everlasting covenant of grace, the Lord Jesus Christ agreed to be their Representative and Surety. He agreed to come to earth and, as God in human flesh without sin, to pay the redemption price with His own blood. Their sins were imputed to Him, and because of His love for His Father and for His people, He willingly took upon Himself the whole responsibility to pay their sin-debt and work out righteousness so that God could be just and still justify them. The elect were (and are) always IN CHRIST to Whom all their sins were imputed as He stood Surety for them. But when God's chosen people fell in Adam, as one writer stated it, they did not fall out of Christ. Again, Christ has always stood Surety for God's elect, and their sins (including their fall in Adam) were imputed to Him in the everlasting covenant of grace.

Some will argue, "If this is true of all of God's elect from the beginning, then why did Christ have to come and die for them, or why do they need to be saved?" We must realize that even though Christ has always been Surety for God's covenant people, they still suffer the effects of Adam's fall as they all fell in Adam and all are born spiritually dead in trespasses and sins. By nature (as they are naturally born) there is no difference between God's chosen people and those who die and perish in their sins. By nature we all deserve God's just wrath and condemnation. So, if it were not for Christ's death as our Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer, we would not only be **"BY NATURE the children of wrath, even as others;"** we would also be **"vessels of wrath fitted to destruction" (Romans 9:22)**. Christ stood for the elect as Surety before the world began because they would fall in Adam and need His righteousness, the righteousness of God. So, we need to emphasize that even though all of God's chosen people were (and are) **"vessels of mercy which HE had before prepared unto glory" (Romans 9:23)**, and even though they were (and are) **"accepted in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:6)**, (all based on Christ's righteousness imputed to them), they were still **"BY NATURE the**

children of wrath, even as others” (Ephesians 2:3). But the free gift of righteousness has been imputed to all whom God gave to Christ, all for whom He stood Surety, and for all for whom He died to redeem from their sins and for their justification. They shall all have eternal life –

Romans 5 – (17) For if by one man’s offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)

III. The righteousness of Christ has been imputed to all the elect. The Bible clearly states that Divine righteousness (the righteousness of God worked out by and found only in the Lord Jesus Christ) is freely and fully provided for His people and given to them by God through a sovereign act of imputation – God accounting them as righteous in Christ –

Isaiah 45 – (21) Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the LORD? and there is no God else beside Me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside Me. (22) Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. (23) I have sworn by Myself, the word is gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. (24) Surely, shall one say, IN THE LORD HAVE I RIGHTEOUSNESS AND STRENGTH: even to Him shall men come; and all that are incensed against Him shall be ashamed. (25) IN THE LORD SHALL ALL THE SEED OF ISRAEL BE JUSTIFIED, AND SHALL GLORY.

Isaiah 53 – (10) Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief: when Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. (11) He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied: BY HIS KNOWLEDGE SHALL MY RIGHTEOUS SERVANT JUSTIFY MANY; for He shall bear their iniquities. (12) Therefore will I divide Him a portion with

the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong; because He hath poured out His soul unto death: and He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors

Isaiah 61 – (10) I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, HE HATH COVERED ME WITH THE ROBE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.

Romans 4 – (6) Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, UNTO WHOM GOD IMPUTETH RIGHTEOUSNESS WITHOUT WORKS, (7) Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. (8) Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. (9) Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. (10) How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. (11) And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; THAT RIGHTEOUSNESS MIGHT BE IMPUTED UNTO THEM ALSO:

2 Corinthians 5 – (21b) ... that we might be made THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN HIM.

Philippians 3 – (8) Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for Whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, (9) And be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

This truth is embedded in the very name of God. In prophesying of the Messiah to come, the prophet Jeremiah said –

Jeremiah 23 – (5) Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. (6) In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is His name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

And in speaking of the true church of the living God in union with Christ as His bride, Jeremiah said –

Jeremiah 33 – (15) In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. (16) In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

So, when we speak of the ***“righteousness of God”*** revealed in the Gospel, we are speaking of the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ IMPUTED to His people. It is not our righteousness by nature or by our works, and it is not righteousness worked in (or imparted to) us by God. It is completely outside of us, or “alien” to us as some of the old writers described it. It is totally the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. IT IS TRULY OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS BUT ONLY BY THE IMPUTATION OF IT TO OUR PERSONS BY GOD WHO JUSTIFIES THE UNGODLY. It is a work which Christ accomplished by Himself for His people –

Hebrews 1 – (1) God, Who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, (2) Hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, Whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by Whom also He made the worlds; (3) Who being the brightness of His glory,

and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had BY HIMSELF purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

Hebrews 10 – (14) For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

The same holds true for the sins of God's people that were given to Christ by a Divine act of imputation. Just as Christ's righteousness is truly ours, not by nature, not by our works, and not by any work of God within us, our sins were truly His, not by nature, not by works, and not by any work of God within Him. As His righteousness is ours by a Divine act of imputation, our sins are His by a Divine act of imputation. This is how the psalmist David could rightly say concerning the reward of God's grace, ***"The LORD rewarded me according to MY RIGHTEOUSNESS; according to the cleanness of my hands hath He recompensed me" (Psalm 18:20).*** This could be said of Christ Himself as David's Surety when applied prophetically and typically. But the only way it could apply to David personally (or any true child of God) is as he stood in Christ, washed in His blood and clothed in His righteousness. Remember, this is the same man who wrote, ***"If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Psalm 130:3),*** and, ***"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" (Psalm 32:1-2).***

To conclude this chapter, consider the reasons why that in the Gospel revelation, this is called ***"the righteousness of God"*** –

(1) It is the *"righteousness of God"* to distinguish it from any supposed or pretended righteousness of man.

(2) It is the *"righteousness of God"* because it was purposed, planned, and provided by God Himself without the aid of man and worked out by the Lord Jesus Christ Who is both God AND man in one glorious Person.

(3) It is the “*righteousness of God*” because it HIS justice satisfied by the obedience unto death of the Lord Jesus Christ to enable God to be both a just God and a Savior.

(4) It is the “*righteousness of God*” because it is the entire merit (value, worth, quality, excellence, and power) of the obedience unto death of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His people, all whom the Father gave to Him before the foundation of the world.

(5) It is the “*righteousness of God*” because it is the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ which God has freely imputed (charged, accounted, credited) to all His people for their justification (forgiving them and declaring them not guilty, forgiven, and righteous) before Him.

(6) It is the “*righteousness of God*” because it is the only source and power of spiritual life given by God the Holy Spirit in the new birth and the righteousness to which God’s people submit as their only ground of salvation when they are brought by the Holy Spirit in the new birth to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and repentance of dead works and idolatry.

2 Imputed Righteousness and the Justice of God

Part 1 – God Justifies the Ungodly

“The righteousness of God” revealed in the Gospel for the salvation of sinners fully embraces and comprehends the strict and inflexible justice of God. It reveals the only way that God can save sinners and be just in doing so. Consider how the Lord God identifies and distinguishes Himself in His Word as revealed in such Scriptures as ***Isaiah 45:21*** and ***Romans 4:5*** –

Isaiah 45 – (21) Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the LORD? and there is no God else beside Me; A JUST GOD AND A SAVIOUR; there is none beside Me. (22) Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.

Romans 4 – (4) Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. (5) But to him that worketh not, but believeth on HIM THAT JUSTIFIETH THE UNGODLY, his faith is counted for righteousness.

These two phrases, ***“a just God and a Savior”*** and ***“Him that justifieth the ungodly,”*** are a summary of God’s highest glory, because they reveal how every attribute of God’s essential nature is engaged to save sinners by His grace in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit to describe this fulness of God’s glory in the following verses –

2 Corinthians 4 – (6) For God, Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give THE LIGHT OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE FACE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Colossians 2 – (9) FOR IN HIM DWELLETH ALL THE FULNESS OF THE GODHEAD BODILY. (10) And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power:

GOD’S GLORY INVOLVES GOD MAKING HIMSELF KNOWN AS THE ONE TRUE AND LIVING GOD. The psalmist wrote that ***“the LORD is known by the judgment which He executeth ...” (Psalm 9:16).***² God’s glory begins with His justice (His holiness and righteousness). We must understand that in the Biblical revelation of God, He is a just God. He can never pervert justice or act unjustly. This certainly holds true in God’s judgment of the wicked. When God determined to destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham stated an unalterable fact in the form of the question, ***“Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Genesis 18:25).*** The answer was (and is) quite clear – God, the Judge of all the earth, will always do right (act in justice). Consider the following words of Holy Scripture –

Deuteronomy 32 – (3) Because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. (4) He is the Rock, His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He.

² The rest of this verse states ***“the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands,”*** so it is speaking specifically of God’s just judgment against the wicked, but the truth of this pertains to all of God’s judgments and works.

Job 34 – (12) Surely, God will not act wickedly, And the Almighty will not pervert justice.

Psalm 9 – (7) But the LORD shall endure for ever: He hath prepared His throne for judgment. (8) And He shall judge the world in righteousness, He shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness.

Psalm 11 – (7) For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; His countenance doth behold the upright.

Consider this in light of what the Bible reveals about all of us as fallen and sinful people who have earned and deserve nothing but God's wrath. It is frightening to know that ***"our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29)***, meaning God's wrath justly consumes the wicked. **God justly condemns sinners to whom sin is imputed.** But the Bible states that God also saves sinners. In fact, the Bible's main message of salvation by God's grace can be stated as follows – **IT IS THE GLORY OF GOD TO SAVE AND JUSTIFY SINNERS!** So, the question is, "HOW can God be just and still save sinners?", or – **HOW CAN GOD BE BOTH A JUST GOD AND A SAVIOR?**

How can God be just and punish sinners as they deserve but still show love, mercy, and grace in saving sinners? How can God be both a righteous (just) Judge and a gracious, loving Father to sinners? Is this possible? This is a major problem that no man can solve. Only God can answer this question and solve this problem. **AND IT IS HIS GLORY TO DO SO.** Let us consider some of the issues involved in this great cosmic mystery.

FIRST, whether God condemns sinners or saves sinners, ***"we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth" (Romans 2:2)***. God cannot and will not pervert His justice. He cannot lie or pretend in matters of condemnation or justification. Because He IS God, and because He is just, He must act in all His ways in accordance with strict justice. To do otherwise would be the equivalent of denying Himself and ceasing to be God. If God condemns the wicked (and He does), He must honor and magnify His justice.

If God justifies the ungodly (and He does), He must still honor and magnify His justice. Again, it is His glory to do so.

SECONDLY, God must act in justice towards all people, because to do otherwise would be to deny Himself. If God were to act unjustly with anyone, He would as well cease to be God. God must also show mercy because it is His nature to do so. The Bible tells us that God IS (in His very nature) merciful, and that God delights to show mercy (**Micah 7:18**). It tells us that His mercy in the salvation of His chosen people by Christ endures forever and ever (**Psalms 118**). But as God MUST act in justice in His dealings with ALL people, He is not required to act in mercy towards ALL people. If God sovereignly chose to show mercy to one sinner ("**Jacob have I loved**") but not to another sinner ("**Esau have I hated**") (**Romans 9:13**), He can do this without denying Himself. This is because mercy is a free undeserved gift given by God to the people of His sovereign choice. God can glorify Himself by showing mercy to a multitude of sinners and by withholding His mercy from others. In fact, God Himself states clearly that it is His glory to show mercy to some and not to others –

Romans 9:15 – For He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion (quoted from **Exodus 33:19**).

Romans 9 – (18) Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth. (19) Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted His will? (20) Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast Thou made me thus? (21) Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? (22) What if God, willing to shew His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: (23) And that He might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory.

However, we must understand that if God sovereignly chooses to show mercy to any sinner, He must do so in accordance with His strict law and justice. Neither Jacob nor Esau deserved God's mercy, for by its very nature mercy cannot be deserved or earned. Both Jacob and Esau deserved and earned God's just wrath because both were sinners. God sovereignly chose to give Esau what he deserved and earned, but God sovereignly chose to show mercy to Jacob. In withholding His mercy from Esau, God was just to do so. In bestowing His mercy upon Jacob, God was just to do so. So, God MUST show mercy to some because it is His nature to do so, but He is not obligated to show mercy to all without exception. However, if God sovereignly chooses to be merciful to any sinner, He then obligates Himself to save that sinner in a just way, for He is also faithful and just in keeping all of His promises –

Lamentations 3 – (22) It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. (23) They are new every morning: GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS.

1 John 1 – (9) If we confess our sins, HE IS FAITHFUL AND JUST to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Again, the main point with which we are concerned here is that in being faithful to show mercy to His chosen people, God must still act in strict compliance with His holiness and justice, for He cannot deny Himself. Consider how the Lord revealed Himself to Moses –

Exodus 34 – (5) And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. (6) And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, MERCIFUL AND GRACIOUS, longsuffering, and ABUNDANT IN GOODNESS AND TRUTH, (7) KEEPING MERCY FOR THOUSANDS, FORGIVING INIQUITY AND TRANSGRESSION AND SIN, AND THAT WILL BY NO MEANS CLEAR THE

GUILTY; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.

When it involves the salvation of sinners, these words may seem contradictory to us, but they are not contradictory at all. On the one hand, the Lord is ***"merciful and gracious"*** towards His people who are sinners, for sinners are the only ones who need God's mercy and grace. But on the other hand, the Lord is ***"abundant in goodness AND truth."*** Simply letting us off the hook, so to speak, and saving us without justice would be contrary both to goodness and to truth. On the one hand, the Lord is ***"keeping mercy for thousands,"*** but on the other hand, He ***"will by no means clear the guilty."*** This tells us that God must find a way that He can save sinners by justly clearing them of guilt. Again, it is His glory to do so. The psalmist stated this same truth –

Psalm 85 – (9) Surely His salvation is nigh them that fear Him; that glory may dwell in our land. (10) MERCY AND TRUTH ARE MET TOGETHER; RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PEACE HAVE KISSED EACH OTHER. (11) Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven.

THIRDLY, the eternal problem of how God can be both a just God and still save sinners comes from two undeniable realities: (1) WHO GOD IS in His righteous and holy nature, and (2) WHO WE ARE as fallen in Adam and born spiritually dead in trespasses and sins. We are sinners who have earned and deserve nothing but condemnation and death. This is our unrighteousness (unjustness) and ungodliness. God is righteous (just), and we are not righteous (not just). We are sinners who have no righteousness of our own. We are sinners who cannot work out or create righteousness. Our best and most sincere efforts to obey and serve God will not make us righteous. Our natural depravity is exposed in its lowest depths by our ignorance and hatred of being made righteous GOD'S WAY exclusively by His power and grace through the imputed righteousness of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ –

John 3 – (19) And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. (20) For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

1 Corinthians 1 – (18) For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

The “**deeds**” described in **John 3:19-20** are sinful man’s attempts to make himself righteous by his works. The Gospel of Christ crucified, which reveals “**the righteousness of God**” in and by Christ, exposes such deeds to be evil. Sinful man insists on righteousness his own way, and this is a way that leaves him room to boast either in his deeds or in his decision. This is the way of failure and death. By nature (before being given spiritual life, knowledge, and faith), we want a righteousness that involves something we do or something we choose so that we can claim a part either in attaining or maintaining our salvation. But we must realize that anything in which we presume to have a part as contributing to the ground of our justification and making a difference between being saved and being lost falls way short of the righteousness God requires. This is stated in the following verses, and keep in mind that these words describe all of us by nature as sinful and totally depraved (even the most sincere and religious) people –

Romans 3 – (10) As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: (11) There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. (12) They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. (13) Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: (14) Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: (15) Their feet are swift to shed blood: (16) Destruction and misery are in their ways: (17) And the way of peace have they not known: (18) There is no fear of God before their eyes. (19) Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that

every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. (20) Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

These verses show us that IN OURSELVES BY NATURE, (1) we have no righteousness, (2) we cannot do enough to work righteousness, and (3) we desire no righteousness God's way. Even in our natural fallen and unregenerate state we have some desire for righteousness due to our natural consciences. The Apostle Paul made this point by showing how the Gentiles who did not have the Law of Moses still had laws by which they governed themselves and their societies –

Romans 2 – (14) For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: (15) Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;)

The problem we have when it comes to attaining righteousness before God is that our natural consciences are also fallen and defiled by sin. The result of this is that our standard of righteousness falls way short of what God requires. As shown in Chapter 1, if you want to know the high standard of righteousness required by God for our justification, we must look to Christ in His obedience unto death –

Acts 17 – (31) Because He [God] hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead.

“That man” whom God ***“ordained”*** (appointed) is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. So, this leads us to three conclusions:

(1) Fallen, sinful man cannot measure up to the righteousness God requires, and any righteousness man thinks he has falls way short of the perfection that can only be found in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His people.

(2) Any righteousness the natural man thinks he has is nothing more than sinful self-righteousness that denies the glory of God revealed in justification based solely on Christ's righteousness imputed. Such natural thinking, therefore, denies Christ and His work of redemption for His people.

(3) Any righteousness the natural man thinks he has attained gives him room to boast in something other than Christ and His righteousness and shows that he considers Christ's death to be worthless –

Galatians 2 – (21) I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

Paul wrote, ***“God forbid that I should glory [boast], save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world” (Galatians 6:14).*** Consider what the psalmist wrote concerning God in relationship to sinners –

Psalm 5 – (4) For Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with Thee. (5) The foolish shall not stand in Thy sight: Thou hatest all workers of iniquity. (6) Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the LORD will abhor the bloody and deceitful man.

It is unpopular to preach the hatred of God, but God's hatred is not like the sinful hatred that we naturally hold within our sinful hearts. Our hatred is sinful because it comes from our self-righteousness and self-love. But God's hatred is His just wrath against ***“all workers of iniquity.”*** It is God's righteous indignation towards all to whom iniquity is imputed (charged). So, we see that when it comes to God's justice, God does not love everyone

without exception as some people claim. But are we not all ***“workers of iniquity,”*** sinners who fall short of righteousness and do not measure up to perfect righteousness? We are all ***“workers of iniquity”*** within ourselves. We have all earned and deserve the ***“wages of sin”*** which is eternal death. The question we must then ask is – **How can God JUSTLY love and save sinners like us?** God must conceive of a way that sinners like us can stand before Him in His court of justice and NOT be judged as ***“workers of iniquity.”*** The iniquity must be removed from us and not be charged to us. And this must be accomplished in a just way. Again, it is God’s glory to do so.

FOURTHLY, in this matter of how God can be both a just God AND a Savior, consider again that God requires perfect righteousness. This fact leaves us in need of righteousness that we cannot produce. Some would say that it is unfair or unjust for God to require something of us that we cannot achieve or attain. Consider what the Bible tells us. By inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Moses (the lawgiver) asked and answered a question for the Hebrew children before they entered the Promised Land –

Deuteronomy 10 – (12) And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul,

Have you ever considered the question, “What does God require of me to be saved and live in His glory forever and ever?” What Moses described to the Hebrews was the strict and perfect requirement of God’s law. If we read the historical record of the nation Israel under the Old Covenant Law (from ***Exodus*** to ***Malachi***), we find that they always fell short of God’s standard in the Law. They were a sinful and rebellious people who failed to keep the Law. Now before we become proud and puffed up about ourselves, we need to realize that the nation Israel under the Law was just a reflection of the sinfulness and depravity of all mankind fallen in Adam into sin and death. We would have fared no better than Israel under the conditional

requirements of the Old Covenant law. Again, consider, ***“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, FOR THAT ALL HAVE SINNED” (Romans 5:12).***

GOD IS NOT UNFAIR OR UNREASONABLE

Many people conclude that if this is the case (and it is) then God is unfair or unreasonable to require such a high standard of righteousness from sinful people. But God is neither unfair nor unreasonable. The fact is that God can require no less than perfect righteousness because He is by His very nature righteous within Himself. This is why there are some who claim that the phrase ***“the righteousness of God”*** in ***Romans 1:17*** refers only to God’s attribute of righteousness – His perfection within Himself. This is not so. If it were only God’s attribute of righteousness, it would not be good news for us as sinners, because it would only condemn us. But the Gospel way of salvation is freely and fully provided by God for the salvation of His people, and it is in line with His righteous nature.

Consider, for example, the following question – If God knew the Israelites could not keep the Law perfectly, why did He place that nation in such an impossible position? Was He being cruel? Was He simply toying with them and gaining some kind of sick pleasure from their failures? NO! The main reason the Old Covenant Law was given to Israel was to show them the inflexible justice of God, the perfect standard of His righteousness, and the impossibility of sinners being able to meet that requirement and measure up to God’s standard by their works. The Law was given to show them their need of salvation by God’s grace based on the righteousness of the promised Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ –

Romans 5 – (20) Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: (21) That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Galatians 3 – (18) For if the inheritance [salvation] be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise [of Christ]. (19) Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the SEED [Christ] should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.

Galatians 3 – (24) Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

So, while the ***“righteousness of God”*** revealed in the Gospel is not simply a revelation of God’s righteous nature or His justness, it is certainly based on and includes the glorious truth and revelation that God is righteous (just) in all His ways. The reason we as sinners need ***“the righteousness of God”*** as revealed in the Gospel for salvation is because God is perfectly righteous and cannot be anything less. One cannot preach and believe the Gospel of God apart from recognizing this fact. When it comes to the salvation of sinners, God cannot act against Himself (His very nature as God). To require less than perfect righteousness would be the equivalent of ceasing to be God, and that cannot be.

DOESN'T GOD REQUIRE FAITH AND/OR REPENTANCE?

When it comes to the question of what God requires for sinners to be saved, most professing Christians would answer simply by saying, “faith,” or “believing.” Some would add “repentance” and/or “perseverance.” It is true that God requires faith in Christ, repentance of dead works, and perseverance in the faith from His people. But the Bible shows us that all these spiritual qualities are blessings and gifts of God’s grace in Christ and the fruits of His righteousness imputed to His people. They are not conditions sinners must meet in order to attain and maintain salvation. And in themselves, they do not equal perfect righteousness. I will deal with this in more detail in a later chapter, but bear in mind for now that – **THE CONDITION FOR ATTAINING AND MAINTAINING SALVATION IS RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

Is God then unfair or unjust to require such a high goal from sinners who are totally unable to accomplish this? The answer is a resounding, “NO.” It is not unfair or unjust because due to the nature of God Himself, He can require nothing less than perfect righteousness. Also, it is not unfair or unjust because God has fully and freely (graciously) provided the very righteousness He requires for salvation, justification, eternal life, and acceptance with Him in the glorious Person and finished work of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ – ***“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Romans 10:4).***

Sinners are commanded by God to believe in and embrace Christ for all righteousness and repent of trying to work out one of their own. God’s way of righteousness is the way of His grace and mercy in Christ. It is the way of the cross of Christ Who died for sinners who have no righteousness of their own. Christ told self-righteous religionists, ***“They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance: (Matthew 9:12-13).*** It is plainly stated in God’s Word that GOD JUSTIFIES THE UNGODLY and GOD IMPUTES RIGHTEOUSNESS TO HIS ELECT WITHOUT THEIR WORKS ***(Romans 4:5-6).***

This is why I emphasize that the main issue of God’s revelation of righteousness is this great mystery of mysteries and what I have called the question of all questions. It poses a real problem that sinful man is not equipped to answer. All the philosophies, religions, and schemes of man fail to address and answer this dilemma as defined in the following –

(1) GOD IS RIGHTEOUS AND REQUIRES PERFECT RIGHTEOUSNESS.

(2) MAN IS UNRIGHTEOUS IN HIMSELF AND UNABLE TO PRODUCE RIGHTEOUSNESS.

(3) HOW CAN SINFUL MEN BE MADE RIGHTEOUS IN GOD’S SIGHT? and,

(4) HOW CAN GOD MAKE SINFUL MEN RIGHTEOUS AND STILL BE JUST TO DO SO?

This is the main issue of the Gospel and salvation itself. We need to understand that whenever we say that God saves and forgives sinners, that God accepts and receives sinful men, and that ***“God justifieth the ungodly” (Romans 4:5)***, this major problem is the issue that must be settled. It is a real problem in consideration of the truth of God’s righteousness and holiness. God is a righteous Judge who MUST punish all sinners –

Isaiah 13 – (11) And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.

Ezekiel 18 – (4) Behold, all souls are Mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is Mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.

Romans 2 – (11) For there is no respect of persons with God. (12) For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; (13) For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

Romans 6 – (23) For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Many will rely solely upon the phrase in ***Romans 6:23, “but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord,”*** and this is fine as long as we understand the Gospel truth revealed here. To understand the Gospel truth, we must also deal with the issue of ***“the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23a)***. This speaks of what we as sinners have earned and deserve from God. It shows us that salvation (with all its blessings and benefits) can never be a matter of what we earn or deserve. We are sinners. And though

there may be many differences between us in our various characters, conduct, and situations, all of us (even the best of us) still ***“fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23)***. God, Who is holy and just, cannot save or justify any of us based on our works. Consider again –

Romans 3 – (19) Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. (20) Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

When the Bible tells us that ***“the gift of God IS eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord,”*** what does this mean? What did Jesus Christ do to obtain this gift of eternal life for His people? Consider again what it means to be JUSTIFIED BEFORE GOD. To be JUSTIFIED BEFORE GOD means –

(1) To be forgiven of all sins, pardoned of all iniquity, pure and clean in God’s sight, and not charged (held accountable) for sins. It means to be NOT GUILTY before God.

(2) To be made right with God, to be truly righteous in God’s sight, to have a right standing with God in His court of justice. It means to be declared truly and really RIGHTEOUS before God.

So, again, as the question was posed at the beginning – ***“How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?” (Job 25:4)***. How can sinful people (who have earned and deserve nothing from God but eternal death and damnation) be JUSTIFIED? How can such people be cleansed of all their sins? **HOW CAN GOD BE JUST AND STILL JUSTIFY SINNERS?**

First, this problem cannot be solved or answered on the basis of man's works. No religion or philosophy invented or conceived by man has ever come close to answering this problem. Remember what Job said –

Job 9 – (2) I know it is so of a truth: but how should man be just with God? (3) If he will contend with Him, he cannot answer Him one of a thousand.

If sinful man would “**contend**” with God (i.e. plead his case before God), God can bring a “**thousand**” charges against man, and man cannot “**answer**” one charge. The psalmist stated it –

Psalm 130 – (3) If Thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?

To “**mark**” is to note (take notice of) in the sense of keeping a record. It means to impute sin to our account. If the Lord should keep a record of our sins, who among us would stand in the day of Judgment? But in asking this question, we also have to consider another question – How can God NOT keep a record (i.e. not hold our sins against us, or not impute them to us) and still be just in not doing this? Remember, He is a righteous Judge who cannot and will not pervert justice in any case. This brings us to the question – **Upon what basis or ground does God pardon the sins of His elect and declare them righteous in His sight?** It must be a JUST (RIGHTEOUS) ground.

The answer is found in the revelation of the Gospel which is “**the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith**” (**Romans 1:17**). And, as I am showing in this book, this is the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ imputed to His people. It is the righteousness which they receive as they believe in Him by God-given faith. This is the Gospel of God's free and sovereign grace based upon “**the righteousness of God,**” which is the entire merit of the obedience unto death of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His people. It is upon this ground alone that God justifies the ungodly. We must

have this matter clear in our minds and applied to our hearts by God the Holy Spirit.

Part 2 – Objection!

Just as in a court of law whenever a JUST ground is presented upon which the accused is proven to be not guilty, the prosecuting attorney (the accuser) may raise an objection. Many object to the truth of God imputing righteousness to sinners, i.e. justifying the ungodly by the imputation of Christ's righteousness to them, by appealing to the following verse of Scripture –

Proverbs 17 – (15) He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD.

They claim that if God were to justify the wicked, as in the case of justifying the ungodly (His chosen people), or condemn the just, as in the case of condemning Christ for the sins of His chosen people, God would be an abomination (a disgrace, an obscenity, an atrocity) to Himself. They claim this would make God unjust. They rationalize that God must first make Christ to be sin in some way other than by imputation before He can justly impute sin to Christ and condemn Him for sin. How God makes Christ to be sin is something they cannot answer. Some claim that God made Christ to be sin by some mysterious transference of sin which they cannot explain. One proponent of this kind of unscriptural rationale attempts to support his view by concocting his own personal definition of the word ***“made”*** found in **2 Corinthians 5:21**. He states that in the phrase, ***“For He hath made Him to be sin”*** (or literally ***“made Him sin”***), the word ***“made”*** means “mysteriously, wondrously made, made in a profoundly mysterious way that is beyond explanation.” This is NOT a Biblical or proper definition of the word ***“made”*** in the context of **2 Corinthians 5:21**, and I will show this in a study of this verse in Chapter Eight of this book. The death of Christ on the cross was most certainly profound, and there is much about this great transaction that is

mysterious and beyond explanation. But Christ was ***“made sin,”*** not by any transference of sin into His Person. He was ***“made sin”*** by the imputation of the sins of God’s people to Him. He ***“offered Himself WITHOUT SPOT to God”*** for the sins of His people (***Hebrews 9:14***).

By the same token, they rationalize that God must make sinners to be righteous in some other way than by imputation before He can justly impute righteousness to them. Many of them claim that God first must make sinners righteous by some mysterious impartation of righteousness (such as by the new birth) and then impute righteousness to them. This is the heretical notion of the justification of sinners based on an infused or imparted righteousness. It also clearly indicates that they may have some notion of sin infused or imparted to Christ, even though they will not go so far as to admit this. Some of them have stated that “however we are made the righteousness of God in Him, He was made sin in the exact same way.” An example of this kind of unscriptural rationalizing is displayed in the following article written by a pastor who denies that Christ was made sin by imputation alone –

A JUST JUDGE JUSTLY IMPUTES

According to Holy God in his word (not the definitions and traditions of men) a just judge is one who imputes (charges, reckons) righteousness where righteousness is and imputes sin where sin is. (De 25:1; 27:25; Ex 23:6-7; Is 5:23). The judge who does otherwise, according to this book, is an abomination to God, to be cursed and abhorred by the people. (Pr 17:5; 24:23-26) If this book is our only rule of faith then that forces us to conclude that the Judge of the whole earth who sent Christ for the very purpose of declaring His righteousness, did not make Christ sin by imputation, for that would be unjustly charging sin where sin was not, which God forbids in His own word. But the just Judge justly imputed sin to Christ because He first made Christ sin who knew no sin. (2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 2:24; Gal 3:13)

Likewise the just Judge does not make the believer righteous by imputation, for that too would be unjustly imputing righteousness where

righteousness is not, which God forbids in his own word. But the just Judge imputes righteousness to the believer through faith, when in spirit the believer has been made righteous by God's workmanship, WHEN HE IS BORN AGAIN conformed to the image of Christ that created him. (2 Cor 5:21; Ro 5:19; Eph 2:10; Col 3:10) "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he." (Deut 32:4)

The heresy in the above article is born of two problems: (1) An ignorance of (or confusion about) the Biblical truth of imputation, and (2) Man's natural desire for experience-based salvation which states that "something is not right or real until we experience it within ourselves." How do we answer such heresy?

FIRST, we must realize that the truth as stated in **Proverbs 17:15** presents a real problem that men cannot solve. It is the glory and wisdom of God alone as revealed in the Gospel of His grace in Christ Jesus as the very "**righteousness of God**" that answers the problem. **Proverbs 17:15** is very true. When men in human courts justify the wicked and condemn the just, it is an abomination to the Lord. Why? IT IS BECAUSE MEN CANNOT DO THIS ON A JUST GROUND. With men this is a perversion of justice. But as I have stated throughout this book – IT IS THE GLORY OF GOD TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT MEN CANNOT ACCOMPLISH. God's glory in this matter is revealed in the Gospel of His grace to justify His people through the Lord Jesus Christ and based upon the redemption of His people accomplished by Him. Herein we may extol the wisdom and mercy of God "**that justifieth the ungodly**" and does so ON A JUST GROUND. When man justifies the ungodly, it IS an abomination. But when God justifies the ungodly, there is no perversion of His justice. He is both JUST and JUSTIFIER, because it is based on the meritorious, justice-satisfying sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Consider, for example, what Dr. John Gill wrote in his commentary on **Proverbs 17:15** –

“From this passage we learn, that the word "justify" is used in a forensic sense, for pronouncing persons just in a court of judicature; and in which sense it is used in the article of a sinner's justification before God: by which act, though it is an ungodly person that is justified, yet it is through the perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to him, and is quite agreeable to law and the justice of God; and not at all inconsistent with this passage, which represents the justification of a wicked man as an abomination: it is so where there is no righteousness, but not where there is (righteousness).”³

SECONDLY, we must realize that the objection raised is the product of sinful human reasoning and not Biblical revelation. The man who wrote the above article is reasoning “from the ground up,” i.e. based on a sinful, limited, earthly point of view. God requires His people to reason “from heaven downward,” i.e. based on what God reveals to us from heaven. This is stated in verses such as ***Isaiah 1:18 – “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”*** How can this be? How can we who are so sinful be “*as white as snow*” and “*as wool*”? God reveals the answer in the glorious Person and finished work of Christ on the cross. But the “*preaching of the cross*” is “*foolishness*” to all who are perishing. It is “*the power of God*” only to all who are being saved (***1 Corinthians 1:18***). To those who believe God's Word, it is “*Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God*” (***1 Corinthians 1:24***). The way of salvation has never entered the minds of men, and it sounds foolish (even unjust) to the natural man –

1 Corinthians 1 – (27) But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the

³ John Gill's Commentary, Proverbs 17:15

world to confound the things which are mighty; (28) And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: (29) That no flesh should glory in his presence. (30) But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: (31) That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

1 Corinthians 2 – (1) And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. (2) For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. (3) And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. (4) And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: (5) That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. (6) Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: (7) But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: (8) Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (9) But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. (10) But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. (11) For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. (12) Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. (13) Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. (14) But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

(15) But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. (16) For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ.

THIRDLY, with regards to the above quoted objection that misapplies ***Proverbs 17:15***, we should recognize that the Gospel reveals that it is Christ's work alone that makes all for whom He died and arose again righteous before God and not the work of the Holy Spirit within us – ***"For by one offering HE hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified"*** (***Hebrews 10:14***). The work of righteousness is a work accomplished totally outside of us and without our knowledge and experience of it. Just as God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (obviously before we knew anything about our election and before we experienced any of the blessings and benefits of election unto salvation), Christ was made our Surety in the everlasting covenant of grace. This insures that all for whom Christ died will without fail experience all of its blessings and benefits.

This is one of the main points that makes true Christianity so unique and different from all religions of man. It is not experience-based religion that teaches salvation is real only when we experience it (know and feel it) within ourselves. True Christianity (and the Christian Gospel) shows that our justification before God is totally a work of Christ for us. And even though it guarantees a gracious, sovereign, and powerful work within us by the Holy Spirit, its reality is found in the Lord Jesus Christ crucified, risen from the dead, and seated at the right hand of the Father ever living to make intercession for us. Think about this – When you stand before God at Judgment, do you desire that God would judge you based on what you believe He has enabled you to do, or would you rather that God would judge you IN CHRIST and BASED ON HIS PERFECT RIGHTEOUSNESS IMPUTED TO YOU? Consider the Pharisee's and the publican's hope of righteousness –

Luke 18 – (9) And He [Christ] spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: (10) Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other

a publican. (11) The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. (12) I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. 13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful [propitious] to me a sinner. (14) I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

Notice how the Pharisee began his prayer – ***“God, I thank thee.”*** His hope of righteousness was what he believed God had enabled him to do by way of obedience. Notice the publican’s hope of righteousness – ***“God be merciful to me a sinner.”*** As shown, the phrase ***“be merciful”*** means that he was appealing to his need of a *propitiation*, a *mercy-seat*, which describes the work of Christ on the cross to establish righteousness for His people and which God imputes to all His people. Paul wrote that his desire was to ***“be found IN HIM, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Philippians 3:9).*** The work of the Holy Spirit within us is necessary in our salvation, but not to make us righteous before God. Christ’s work alone for us makes us righteous before God. But the work of the Holy Spirit within us is necessary because it is the fruit of the righteousness of Christ imputed to us by which God justifies all of His people. It is clear that God’s way is a miracle of His free and sovereign wisdom, power, and grace in Christ Jesus as the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His chosen people. For this great transaction to take place successfully, three things were required:

(1) A substitute appointed by God.

(2) This substitute must be willing to do what is necessary to accomplish the work required.

(3) This substitute must be able to do what is necessary to accomplish the work required.

The only one who fits all three of these requirements is the Son of God incarnate, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Before the world began and in the everlasting covenant of grace, God the Father appointed His Son to be the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His chosen people. God the Son willingly agreed to become and to do all that was required to insure their complete salvation. As God in human flesh without sin, He was (and is) able to accomplish all that was required to obtain the salvation of His people. God the Father imputed (charged, accounted, reckoned) all the sins of His chosen people to the Lord Jesus Christ as their Surety. The Lord Jesus Christ willingly became responsible for all the sins of all whom the Father had given to Him in the covenant of grace. The sin-debt (the guilt of sin) was placed to the account of Jesus Christ so that when He was judged guilty and cursed by the Judge of all, and when He suffered unto death under the penalty of the law, God the Father was just and righteous in punishing His Son for the sins of His people. He who was (and is) innocent, pure, and sinless in Himself was justly declared guilty and cursed by the Father, all based on the sins of His people imputed to Him.

In the exact same way, God the Father imputed the righteousness of Christ to His chosen people. The merit of His obedience unto death was placed to their account. In time Christ sends forth the Holy Spirit to give them spiritual life in the new birth. He brings them to believe in Christ and submit to Christ as the Lord their Righteousness. And even though they have Christ's righteousness imputed to them for their eternal and complete standing before God, and even though they have the Holy Spirit within them and have been given spiritual life (a new heart), they are still sinners within themselves and declare that their only righteousness before God is the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, their Surety, Substitute, Redeemer, and Intercessor.

3 The Reality of Imputed Sin and Imputed Righteousness

I have already shown in Chapter One how the justification of sinners by the grace of God based on Christ's righteousness imputed is strictly a legal (forensic) matter. Justification before God is not something that takes place within sinners by the work of the Holy Spirit in their regeneration and conversion. It is not our personal experience in the new birth where we are given new life (a new spirit), a new heart, a new mind, and new knowledge, motives, and goals. However, if a person has been legally justified before God based on Christ's righteousness imputed to him, this insures and always results in the fruit of the new birth which is sanctification by the Holy Spirit in the calling of the Gospel. As I have stated, Christ's righteousness imputed to us legally is the GROUND of salvation, and Christ's work within us by the Holy Spirit is the FRUIT of salvation. If we are to think Biblically, we must recognize and maintain the distinction between our LEGAL justification before God and our SPIRITUAL sanctification by the Holy Spirit. However, there are some who call themselves "Christian" who confuse these two glorious works of God in the salvation of His people through Christ. Because of this confusion, many of them also either deny or confuse the reality of the legal imputation of sin to Christ and the legal imputation of Christ's righteousness to His people.

A very common objection from Roman Catholics (as well as some non-Catholics) against the doctrine of imputation is that this would mean “God declares someone to be innocent who is not, in fact, really innocent.” They argue that this is “legal nonsense” or “a legal fiction.” They believe that God would never declare a person to be righteous who has not already been made righteous in some way other than by imputation. And, as shown in the last chapter, some even go so far as to say that God would be unjust to impute righteousness where He has not already made a person righteous by some prior act. So, the idea of Christ’s righteousness reckoned to a sinner who has not already been made so is nonsense to them. They claim that this would be equivalent to God declaring something to be true which is actually false and God declaring something to be just which is actually unjust. They believe that God first makes a sinner righteous by the infusion or impartation of a “righteous nature” given to that sinner in the new birth, whereupon God then imputes righteousness to that sinner.

The Bible states otherwise. The Bible teaches that because Christ’s righteousness has been imputed to a sinner, God the Holy Spirit gives spiritual life to that one who was by nature spiritually dead. As sinners saved by grace, we are not declared righteous by God based on a work done WITHIN us. WE ARE DECLARED RIGHTEOUS BY GOD BASED ON THE MERIT OF A WORK DONE FOR US AND CREDITED TO OUR ACCOUNT – THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST. And all who are credited with Christ’s righteousness will most certainly be sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Christ’s righteousness imputed is a real and just act of God declaring His people to be forgiven, not guilty, and righteous in His sight. The new birth does not make this legal transaction a reality, but it does prove the reality of this legal transaction because righteousness demands life

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Romans 5 – (21) That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 8 – (10) And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life BECAUSE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

If we understand imputed sin and imputed righteousness according to the Bible, we will see that they are in no way unreal, false, or any kind of “legal fiction.” Imputed sin and imputed righteousness are realities in which God sovereignly acts, views, and judges the whole human race. All human beings stand before God either as having sin imputed to them in Adam or having righteousness imputed to them in Christ. All who have sin imputed to them are truly and really condemned by the judgment of God and in His sight. All who have righteousness imputed to them are truly and really justified by the judgment of God and in His sight. Anyone who imagines that God’s judgment and God’s view of these matters is unreal, fake, or some kind of “legal fiction” does not know the true and living God. The reality of these matters is determined by God’s declaration and view of them, not ours. We see the reality of God’s declaration and view of these matters when God either brings us to be born again by the Holy Spirit or leaves us alone to perish in our sins. The fact is this – All who have Christ’s righteousness imputed to them are brought by God the Holy Spirit to faith in Christ, repentance of dead works, and are preserved unto glory by God’s grace. All who live and die having sin imputed to them spend their lives in ignorance and unbelief of the truth of God’s grace in Christ and perish in their sins –

John 3 – (18) He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

John 3 – (36) He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

The legal reality of God’s judgment in either case is not settled by our experience in which we come to know the truth of these matters. They are settled by God’s judgments and God’s view of truth and reality as HE has determined it. We come to know God’s judgments and how He views these matters when He is pleased to reveal His Word of truth to us in Christ. We

also know that whatever God declares to be so IN HIS SIGHT is reality whether we see it or not. Consider the following statement made by a contemporary preacher in a message where he was trying to define what he viewed as “REAL justification.” He said, “Most people view justification like this – God declares you righteous when you are really not righteous.” This statement reveals a serious misunderstanding of the Biblical truths of justification and imputation.

God NEVER declares any one righteous who is not REALLY righteous. WHEN GOD JUSTIFIES HIS PEOPLE (i.e. DECLARES THEM RIGHTEOUS IN HIS SIGHT), THEY ARE REALLY RIGHTEOUS BASED UPON GOD’S DECLARATION OF THIS FACT. It is no fake or pretended righteousness. God never declares or views anyone except as they truly are. As stated, God sees and declares reality even when we fail to see it. For example, the Pharisees APPEARED righteous unto men, but they were not righteous in God’s sight (**Matthew 23:28**). True Christians may not appear righteous to the world, but they are all righteous in God’s sight. Imputed righteousness is not the appearance of being righteous. It is the legal declaration of God Who sees and declares things, not as they appear to be, but as they truly are. What God sees as reality is truth; what we may or may not see can be a lie.

We have seen the great and glorious Gospel truth of how the salvation of sinners involves God justifying the ungodly. This means that God legally declares His people (sinners saved by grace in Christ) not only to be forgiven of their sins and not guilty but also to be righteous in His sight. In the last chapter we saw HOW God could justify sinners and still preserve the glory and honor of His justice. The Bible tells us in the Gospel revelation that the way God in His infinite wisdom and power accomplished this miracle of grace was by a legal exchange as expressed in verses such as **2 Corinthians 5:21** – **“For He [God the Father] hath made Him [Christ, God the Son incarnate] to be sin for us, [Christ] Who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”**⁴ This verse reveals how the sins of God’s elect were imputed to Christ and how His righteousness was imputed to them. But

⁴ See Chapter 8

there are many who do not interpret this verse as teaching imputed sin and imputed righteousness. And, as stated before, much of this comes from a general misunderstanding of the Biblical doctrine of imputation.

Also, many who deny that **2 Corinthians 5:21** teaches imputed sin and imputed righteousness do so because they have fallen prey to the age-old heresy of sinful people insisting on finding and claiming righteousness within themselves in some way. To seek and to find righteousness in any other way but in Christ crucified and risen from the dead as our Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer is nothing more than self-righteousness. There are those who claim that when they are born again by the Spirit that God imparts the righteousness of Christ so as to give them a “new, divine, righteous nature that cannot sin and cannot be contaminated.” This is heresy, because it denies what the Bible teaches us in passages such as **Romans 7:14-25** and **Galatians 5:16-18** about ourselves even as sinners saved by grace – that sin still contaminates everything we think, say, and do. I will deal with this issue more in Chapter Nine.

In reality, the view of any “perfect righteousness within ourselves,” as stated above, is no different than the unbiblical view of the Roman Catholic Church concerning how sinners are justified before God. They claim that God justifies sinners by Christ’s righteousness “infused” or “imparted” rather than by Christ’s righteousness imputed. They also claim that God would be unjust to impute righteousness where He has not already made that person righteous by an infusion or impartation of Christ’s righteousness to him. They attack justification solely by the imputed righteousness of Christ calling it a “legal fiction” and not a reality. But, as stated, their view is heresy that denies the Gospel revelation of the true “**righteousness of God**” found only in Christ and the merit of His obedience unto death as the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His people. Consider the same heresy as stated in the following article that promotes the same error as Roman Catholicism –

“When God imputes righteousness to us, it is not to treat us as if we are righteous when we really are not. According to God’s definition of

imputation in scripture, God imputes sin or righteousness to a person only if that is what they are by a prior act. It is not imputation that makes us so. IT IS THE PRIOR ACT. Therefore, God imputes righteousness to us because it is what we are by the acts of Christ. God imputes righteousness to us because we were made righteous by the obedience of Christ Jesus the Lord. 'For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.' (Rom 5: 19)."

The man who wrote this uses reasoning which is totally unbiblical and false. FIRST, there is no argument that "when God imputes righteousness to us, it is not to treat us as if we are righteous when we really are not." As I have stated, when God imputes righteousness to His people, they really are righteous in His sight. Anyone who thinks imputed sin and/or imputed righteousness are not real does not understand the Biblical truth of imputation.

SECONDLY, consider how that to support his heresy, he had to redefine the word "imputation." He wrote, "According to God's definition of imputation in scripture, God imputes sin or righteousness to a person only if that is what they are by a prior act. It is not imputation that makes us so. IT IS THE PRIOR ACT." I am amazed at the arrogance of this man to call his own definition "God's definition." If this were God's definition, it would be found in the Bible clearly. He quoted **Romans 5:19**, but this verse does not support his definition. In fact, it disproves his view.

Romans 5 – (19) For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.

Adam's sin was imputed to his posterity before they actually became sinners in themselves – ***"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5:12).*** So, the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity was

not based on a prior act within them as sinners. In fact, the Bible tells us that those who live and die in Adam without Christ were from the beginning ***“the vessels of wrath fitted [prepared for] to destruction” (Romans 9:22)***. Those whom God chose in His sovereign electing grace were chosen in Christ and were from the beginning ***“the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory” (Romans 9:23)***. These ***“vessels of mercy”*** are also described as those whom God had chosen ***“before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us ACCEPTED IN THE BELOVED” (Ephesians 1:4-6)***. Upon what just ground did God accept His people? It was the righteousness of Christ, ***“the Beloved,”*** imputed to them. It was a righteousness that Christ would come in the future and accomplish on earth for His people by His death on the cross.

THIRDLY, it is clear that the “prior act” to which the writer refers is the work of the Holy Spirit within God’s people in the new birth. The same writer wrote in another article the following –

“Likewise the just Judge does not make the believer righteous by imputation, for that too would be unjustly imputing righteousness where righteousness is not, which God forbids in His own word (referring to ***Proverbs 17:15***)⁵. But the just Judge imputes righteousness to the believer THROUGH FAITH, WHEN IN SPIRIT THE BELIEVER HAS BEEN MADE RIGHTEOUS BY GOD’S WORKMANSHIP, WHEN HE IS BORN AGAIN CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF CHRIST THAT CREATED HIM.”

⁵ See Chapter Two, pp. 49-56

So, this man claims that sinners are made righteous not by the cross-work of Christ alone FOR His people but by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit IN His people. Just like those who accuse God of being unjust to impute righteousness unless He makes us righteous within ourselves, they call the imputation of righteousness without a prior act (righteousness imparted by the Holy Spirit) a “fake” or “pretend” or “unjust” righteousness. Those who call it a “legal fiction” claim that justification has to be “more than a legal matter.” Consider the following statement written by another contemporary preacher –

“Justification, as it is revealed in Holy Scripture, is much more than a mere forensic (legal) standing. It is a state of being (Rom. 5:1-11). It is more than a judicial declaration. Justification is the real emancipation of our souls in Christ. To be justified before God is to be free of guilt in your conscience by the sprinkling of Christ’s blood, that is by the Spirit’s application of Christ’s atonement (Heb.9:14).”

The Bible is clear that our justification before God is totally and exclusively a LEGAL (forensic) matter of our standing before God. It is totally and exclusively a judicial declaration. Justification before God is NOT “the real emancipation of our souls in Christ,” and it is NOT “to be free of guilt in [our] conscience by the sprinkling Christ’s blood” as applied by the Holy Spirit. What we need to understand is this – Justification before God guarantees and leads to “the real emancipation of our souls in Christ,” and it guarantees and leads to freedom from “guilt in [our] conscience by the sprinkling Christ’s blood.” But, again, these blessings of God’s grace are the fruit and effect of having already been justified before God based on Christ’s righteousness imputed to us. Consider –

(1) In the Bible there is a difference between a sinner being justified before God in His court of justice and being justified in the court of that

sinner's conscience. The Bible reveals that God has already been reconciled to His chosen people in Christ ***"not imputing their trespasses unto them"* (2 Corinthians 5:19)**. This non-imputation of sins includes the imputation of righteousness to them. It is the work of Christ alone, outside of us, as He stood as our Surety and Substitute to redeem us from our sins. But the Bible also reveals that it is the work of Christ through the Holy Spirit to bring all to whom God has been reconciled in and by Christ to be reconciled unto Him in and by Christ –

2 Corinthians 5 – (20) Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, BE YE RECONCILED TO GOD.

By nature, we are all born spiritually ***"dead in trespasses and sins"* (Ephesians 2:1)**, and our natural spiritual deadness is evidenced by the fact that before the new birth we are ***"alienated and enemies in [our] mind by wicked works"* (Colossians 1:21)**. This alienation from (and enmity against) God is evidenced by our ignorance of and rebellion against God's way of salvation by His grace through Christ. Salvation by God's grace is based on Christ's righteousness imputed and received by God-given faith. But when Christ sends the Holy Spirit to give us spiritual life, He brings us to submit to God's way of salvation and justification in and by Christ. We are then reconciled to Him – ***"yet now hath He reconciled"* (Colossians 1:21)**. This is when we are justified, NOT before God, but in our own consciences. And the ground of this reconciliation is what God has already accomplished in the glorious Person and finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed by God's Word in passages such as ***2 Corinthians 5:21***.

(2) The fact that justification before God is totally and exclusively a legal (forensic) declaration of God (not the emancipation of our souls in Christ and freedom from guilt in our consciences by the sprinkling of Christ's blood as applied by the Spirit) does not deny or diminish the necessity and value of the

work of the Holy Spirit. His work in us is the fruit and result of our having been justified legally before God based on Christ's righteousness imputed.

The men who wrote the articles above confuse the work of Christ FOR His people with the work of Christ IN His people. Our justification before God based on Christ's righteousness imputed is not the same as our sanctification by God the Holy Spirit in giving us spiritual life in the new birth. Remember, in our justification, we are declared by God (in the court of His justice) to be forgiven, not guilty, and righteous in His sight. In our sanctification by the Holy Spirit, we are given spiritual life and knowledge by which we are convinced to believe and rest in Christ and what He has already accomplished for us. Again, it can be said that in sanctification by the Holy Spirit we are justified in the court of our consciences, but not in the court of God's justice. God has already been reconciled to His people long before they are reconciled to Him. Our justification (legally, forensically) before God insures and demands that we be set free in our spirits and consciences by the Holy Spirit sprinkling the blood of Jesus Christ. Consider the following verses of Scripture –

Romans 6 – (3) Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? (4) Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (5) For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection: (6) Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. (7) For he that is dead is freed [justified] from sin. (8) NOW IF WE BE DEAD WITH CHRIST, WE BELIEVE THAT WE SHALL ALSO LIVE WITH HIM:

In these verses God the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to describe the believer's oneness with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Christ lived, died, and was raised from the dead as the Representative, Surety,

Substitute, and Redeemer of God's elect. All who believe in Him can truly say, "When Christ died, we died; when Christ was buried, we were buried; when Christ was raised from the dead, we were raised from the dead." What Christ finished on the cross for us was (and is) real. And what Christ accomplished for us insures that we will experience the resurrection life of Christ within and come to know who He is and what He has accomplished for us in our redemption. Our experience and knowledge of Christ, and our faith in Him, did not make what He accomplished for us real. It was already real, and this is proven by our experience, knowledge of, and faith in Him.

Romans 6 – (7) For he that is dead is freed from sin.

Romans 6 – (17) But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. (18) Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.

In **Romans 6:7** the word "**freed**" is the Greek word *dikaioō* which means "justified" or "declared righteous." In **Romans 6:18** the word "**made free**" is the Greek word *eleuthero* which means "liberated" or "set at liberty." It is like a person having his debt fully paid and then later finding out that the debt was fully paid. The debt being paid was a real legal transaction, and it is not made any more real when the person finds out about the payment. It is like a prisoner held on death row who has been legally and justly pardoned by the judge, and later is let out of jail to enjoy his freedom. He was already legally and justly pardoned, and this was a reality even before he heard about it and was set free to enjoy it. The point of all this is to show that the legal justification of God's elect in His court of justice based on Christ's righteousness imputed is the GROUND upon which God declares His people to be "not guilty" and "righteous" in His sight. And that legal justification before God always issues forth in the spiritual liberation of His people in the new birth and being brought by God to faith in Christ and true repentance. Christ's righteousness imputed is the GROUND of salvation and the SOURCE

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of spiritual life and liberty. Christ's life imparted is the FRUIT of His righteousness which God has imputed to His people –

Romans 8 – (10) And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

Consider again how the Lord Jesus Christ was made Surety for His people before the world began. He was made the Surety of the everlasting covenant of grace. The salvation of His people was always based upon what He accomplished in His death on the cross as their Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. All the Old Testament saints were justified in God's court based on the merits of Christ obedience unto death which was to them a FUTURE act, not a prior act. Also, as I have stated, it is not the work of the Holy Spirit in our new birth that justifies us and makes us righteous in God's sight. It is totally and exclusively the work of Christ on the cross. It is the work of the Holy Spirit within us to bring us to see Christ and His finished work on the cross as our only righteousness before God. No wonder the psalmist David wrote –

Psalm 32 – (1) Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. (2) Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.

David did not view the non-imputation of sin to be a “legal fiction.” He viewed it as a blessing of God's grace in Christ. And we know from Scriptural testimony that the non-imputation of sin to God's people involves three realities of God's grace in the salvation of His people:

(1) The imputation of the debt of those sins to Christ. If God did not charge His people with their sins, He had to charge them to someone (a Surety) who was willing and able to pay the debt. This one was (and is) the Lord Jesus Christ –

Hebrews 7 – (25) Wherefore HE IS ABLE also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.

(2) The imputation of Christ's righteousness to God's elect. This is how God the Holy Spirit inspired the apostle to state David's meaning when he wrote ***Psalm 32:1-2*** –

Romans 4 – (6) Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, (7) Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. (8) Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

(3) As the result and fruit of their sins imputed to Christ, His obedience unto death to redeem them from their sins, and His righteousness imputed to them, the Holy Spirit imparts spiritual life in the new birth and brings them to faith in Christ, repentance of dead works, and the obedience of grace and faith –

Romans 7 – (4) Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him Who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. (5) For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. (6) But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.

“The righteousness of God” is a Divine revelation from God to His people. God reveals to us a reality that none of us by nature see and know. It is a reality that can only be seen and known by God-given knowledge and conviction that brings us to faith in Christ. But it is also a reality that the natural man views as a contradiction. The natural (unregenerate) person simply cannot conceive of how a just God can declare a sinner to be righteous

when that sinner is not already righteous within himself. So, in unbelief and self-righteousness, he concludes that sinners must be made righteous either by their deeds of law or by some miracle of God's work within the sinner to make him righteous before God can justly impute righteousness to him. In other words, he concludes that God cannot justify an ungodly person until He first makes that person godly. But the revelation of ***"the righteousness of God"*** shows us two things:

(1) Since man CANNOT be made righteous by his deeds of law, he can only be made so by the deeds of another person. This person must be one who is appointed by God to be the surety, substitute, and redeemer of sinners, one who is able to make reconciliation for his people, and one who is willing to do so. The only one who fits these qualifications and who can fulfill these conditions is the Lord Jesus Christ.

(2) ***"The righteousness of God"*** was established in the mind and purpose of God before the world began –

Ephesians 1 – (3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: (4) According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: (5) Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, (6) To the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.

2 Timothy 1 – (8) Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the Gospel according to the power of God; (9) Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.

All of this took place in the eternal mind and purpose of God before He created this world and before Adam fell and brought the whole human race into sin and death. Christ was made the Surety of His people in the everlasting covenant of grace. This was all according to HIS ability and HIS willingness to come in time and work out righteousness for His people. Before the foundation of the world, before righteousness was established in time on earth, God chose His people IN CHRIST, purposed to save and justify them IN CHRIST, and accepted them IN CHRIST, ***“the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:6)***. All that God purposed and promised before the foundation of the world had to be purposed and promised on a JUST ground. That just ground was (and is) the righteousness of Christ imputed to His people as established in the eternal mind and purpose of God. Having the debt of all the sins of all His people imputed to Him according to the terms of the everlasting covenant of grace, ***“it behoved Him [Christ] to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2:17)***.

All of this purpose and plan of God’s grace was eternally and truly fulfilled in the mind and purpose of God before the foundation of the world. And it was sure and certain to be fulfilled in time because just as God called Abraham a father before Abraham physically became a father, God ***“calleth those things which be not as though they were” (Romans 4:17)***. What God purposed and promised His people in Christ before time demanded and insured the accomplishment of all those things in time.

Another reason that this was all sure and certain to be accomplished in time is because all of it was conditioned on Christ in Whom ***“all the promises of God IN HIM are yea, and IN HIM Amen, unto the glory of God by us” (2 Corinthians 1:20)***. The substitutionary death of Christ in time was necessary to redeem us from our sins. The righteousness that God imputed to us had to be established in time, but it was always real in the mind and purpose of God. There was never any pretense or legal fiction in this matter. For example, both Abraham and David were justified before God based on Christ’s righteousness imputed to them before Christ actually came into the world to redeem them and work out righteousness for them in time –

Romans 4 – (6) Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, (7) Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. (8) Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. (9) Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. (10) How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. (11) And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:

The righteousness by which God justified Abraham and David was the perfect righteousness that the Lord Jesus Christ accomplished in time on the cross. It was imputed to Abraham and David by promise. The promise was real, and the certainty of its fulfillment was real.

THE BELIEVER'S STANDING BEFORE GOD AND STATE IN THIS WORLD

One of the things that seems to confuse some people, and which seems to be a contradiction, comes from a misunderstanding of the reality of a believer's STANDING BEFORE GOD and his STATE IN THIS WORLD. But the Bible is clear on this issue. Consider –

(1) The true believer's standing before God refers to his LEGAL (forensic) standing IN CHRIST. In Christ the believer is perfectly righteous in God's sight. As the righteous Judge of all, God has declared him to be legally righteous in every sense of the word as he stands in Christ his Representative, Surety, Substitute, Redeemer, and Mediator. His standing before God is all based on Christ's righteousness imputed to him. God cannot and will not impute sin to any believer's account because God-given faith is evidence that

his sin-debt has been imputed to Christ Who by Himself has purged his sins and worked righteousness which God has imputed to him –

Romans 8 – (33) Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. (34) Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

In Christ, based on Christ’s righteousness imputed, a sinner saved by grace is as righteous as he will ever be. He is truly righteous before God, and this can never change. His standing before God cannot be improved or diminished in any degree because it is based on the perfect righteousness of Christ. His right standing before God can never be lost, no matter what he goes through in this life, because Christ (the Lord his righteousness) ever lives to intercede on his behalf. Again, this proves that justification before God is strictly and exclusively a legal (forensic) matter. Justification before God is not a matter of our personal experience or knowledge, but it insures that all whom God has legally justified will be brought personally to experience and know what God has done for them by His grace in Christ. They will personally experience (in the new birth) a powerful change within whereby the Holy Spirit brings them to faith in Christ, repentance of dead works, and the obedience of grace.

(2) The true believer’s state in this world refers to his SPIRITUAL condition as one who, having been justified before God, has been born again by the Holy Spirit and given a new heart, a new spirit, new knowledge, along with new motives, goals, and desires. But the born-again person is still plagued with the remaining presence, corruption, and contamination of the flesh. Based on Christ’s righteousness imputed to him, the believer is legally justified and perfectly righteous before God. He cannot be charged with and condemned for sin. But while on this earth and in himself, the believer is still a sinner who falls short of perfect righteousness in everything he thinks, says, and does. He has a God-given desire to be perfectly conformed to Christ

within himself, but until he leaves this world and goes to be with Christ, it is an unfulfilled desire of which he is always keenly aware. Even though a true believer is constantly aware of his own sinfulness and shortcomings, he can have the assurance of salvation and final glory because he is not looking to or within himself for salvation, peace, and/or comfort. He is looking to the Lord Jesus Christ as ***“the Author and Finisher of [his] faith” (Hebrews 12:2)***. And by the grace of God in the power of the Holy Spirit, He is resting in Christ’s righteousness and ability to save him to the uttermost –

Romans 7 – (24) O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? (25) I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

Philippians 3 – (12) Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. (13) Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, (14) I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

2 Timothy 1 – (8) Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the Gospel according to the power of God; (9) Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, (10) But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, Who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel: (11) Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. (12) For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: FOR I KNOW WHOM I HAVE BELIEVED, AND AM PERSUADED THAT HE IS ABLE TO KEEP THAT WHICH I HAVE COMMITTED UNTO HIM AGAINST THAT DAY.

Hebrews 7 – (25) Wherefore HE IS ABLE also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.

DECLARING WAR AGAINST A METAPHOR

Some of the detractors of imputed sin to Christ and imputed righteousness to His people argue that if it were only by imputation, then it would be a mere “pasting on of sin to Christ” or “pasting on of righteousness to His people.” They reason that if it were only by imputation, then it is not real but simply an external and superficial matter that has no effect or power in the reality of what it means when the Bible says Christ was truly ***“MADE sin,”*** and God’s people are truly ***“MADE the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)***

Whether they know it or not, those who object to the Biblical doctrine of imputed sin and imputed righteousness by calling it “pasted on sin” or “pasted on righteousness,” are really declaring war against a wonderful Biblical metaphor that was never intended by God to be taken literally. A metaphor involves using symbolic language (such as types and pictures) to reveal and illustrate truth. One of the most common metaphors (types) found in God’s Word to reveal and illustrate imputation is the wearing of a coat (cloak or garment). For example, when Adam fell, both he and Eve sought to hide their nakedness by sewing fig-leaf aprons to cover themselves and their shame –

Genesis 3 – (7) And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

In the Bible nakedness is a metaphor symbolizing a lack of righteousness which brings shame when exposed by God. It is being exposed to God’s just wrath against our sin and having no cloak to cover us and no shield from the wrath of God. The ***“fig leaves”*** sewn by Adam and Eve symbolize man’s futile

attempts to cover his nakedness and shame with his own efforts. It is a symbol for man seeking to make himself righteous by his works. As we are taught in **Genesis 3**, God exposed Adam's and Eve's shame in spite of their self-made coverings –

Genesis 3 – (9) And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? (10) And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. (11) And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? (12) And the man said, The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. (13) And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.

God then began to pronounce the curses upon Satan, Adam, and Eve. In pronouncing the curse upon Satan, God revealed the way of salvation through the woman's seed who is none other than the promised Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ –

Genesis 3 – (15) And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel.

After pronouncing the curses upon Satan, Adam, and Eve, God then did something amazing. He showed how this promised Messiah (the seed of woman, God in sinless human flesh) would accomplish His work of conquering Satan, sin, and death and working righteousness for His people to enable God to be just to justify them, forgive their sins, and give them life based upon a just ground. Notice first that God through Adam gave Eve her name –

Genesis 3 – (20) And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.

Up until this time her name was simply “woman,” but God gave her the name **“Eve”** which means **“the mother of all living.”** Had it not been for God’s purpose and promise to save His people from sin through the woman’s seed, she would not have been the **“mother of all living,”** but rather the mother of all dead. This was because the first Adam brought sin and death to all of his posterity – **“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Romans 5:12).** The woman’s seed (Christ) is the **“last Adam”** (man) who is a **“quickening [life-giving] Spirit” (1 Corinthians 15:45),** and this life is the fruit of His righteousness established by Him alone on the cross and imputed to all whom the Father had given Him –

1 Corinthians 15 – (21) For since by man came death, by Man came also the resurrection of the dead. (22) For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

The way that God would accomplish salvation for His people was by the death of a substitute who would stand in their place and satisfy His justice for them; for **“without shedding of blood is no remission” (Hebrews 9:22).** God revealed this amazing truth through a metaphor (a type) –

Genesis 3 – (21) Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.

Hereby God revealed, by this type, how Christ is the Lamb of God who would give Himself for the sins of His people and establish righteousness for them. This is His righteousness imputed to them as symbolized in the **“coats of skins”** with which God **“clothed them.”** The fig-leaf aprons (symbols of man’s works-righteousness) had to be removed, and the animal skins (symbols of the merits of Christ’s work by His death) had to be placed on them. These types reveal the forgiveness of sins by the blood of Christ, along with the non-imputation of sins and the imputation of righteousness accomplished by the blood of Christ. From this point on in the Bible, the

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righteousness of God (Christ's righteousness imputed) was symbolized and typified with the wearing of a coat, a robe, or a piece of armor –

Job 29 – (14) I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment was as a robe and a diadem.

Isaiah 11 – (5) And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.

Isaiah 59 – (17) For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke.

Isaiah 61 – (10) I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.

Psalms 132 – (9) Let thy priests be clothed with righteousness; and let thy saints shout for joy.

Ephesians 6 – (14) Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

Revelation 3 – (4) Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. (5) He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before His angels.

Revelation 19 – (8) And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

All of these verses are God's way of revealing the glorious truth of the **"righteousness of God"** (the imputed righteousness of Christ) to His people through the use of types and metaphors. Another illustration of this great truth is found in the following passage –

Zechariah 3 – (1) And He shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. (2) And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? (3) NOW JOSHUA WAS CLOTHED WITH FILTHY GARMENTS, and stood before the angel. (4) And He answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, TAKE AWAY THE FILTHY GARMENTS FROM HIM. And unto him He said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I WILL CLOTHE THEE WITH CHANGE OF RAIMENT. (5) And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and CLOTHED HIM WITH GARMENTS. And the angel of the LORD stood by.

Joshua's **"filthy garments"** typify man's works in which he claims to be righteous. The **"change of raiment"** and the new **"garments"** with which he was **"clothed"** typify the righteousness of Christ imputed to him. The point is this – None of these metaphors or types were intended by God to be taken literally as if righteousness was an article of clothing only to be placed on the outside of a person or "pasted on" outwardly. They were never intended to make a sinner "look like he is righteous when he is really not righteous." As we have already seen, righteousness and sin are not material substances that can be taken from one person or place and placed upon (or outside of) another person or place. Righteousness is the merit (value, quality, excellence) of a work and cannot be literally "pasted on" or put upon us as an article of clothing. Sin is the demerit (shortcoming, imperfection, failing) of a work and cannot be literally "pasted on" or put on us as a coat. To use such misrepresentations to deny or diminish the truths of sin imputed to Christ and righteousness imputed to His people is false and irresponsible.

Those who do this are erroneously and foolishly declaring war on the metaphors and types that God in His wisdom has chosen to reveal the reality of imputation to His people.

As believers we can truly say that Christ is the Lord our Righteousness, and we have no righteousness but Him – His righteousness imputed to us. And because of His righteousness imputed to us, we can say with confidence, ***“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:1).*** All of this is REAL in God’s judgment of us as we stand in the Lord Jesus Christ. And even as born-again by the Holy Spirit and brought to faith in Christ, within our own persons we are still sinners and can do nothing to measure up to the righteousness of the law. In Christ we are righteous; in ourselves we are still sinners who fall short in everything we think, say, and do. Our best prayers, our most sincere attempts to believe and obey God, are still contaminated with the sins of the flesh and must be presented to God as washed clean and accepted by God through the blood of Christ. Again –

Romans 7 – (24) O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? (25) I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

We need to emphasize that the reality of the remaining presence, contamination, and corruption of the flesh within believers does not diminish or deny the reality of our being truly righteous before God in Christ. The reality of the work of the Holy Spirit within us is that it is the fruit of Christ’s righteousness imputed to us. It is the earnest of our inheritance as we look to and plead the merits of Christ’s righteousness. It is the guarantee that when we leave the body of this death, we will be perfectly conformed to Christ within ourselves and totally free from the remaining presence and power of the flesh. Consider the following truths showing the true reality of salvation as believers stand in Christ, washed in His blood and clothed in His righteousness imputed –

(1) The reality of salvation is found in Christ as our REPRESENTATIVE and SURETY (ONE standing for the many) having the sins of God's elect imputed to Him, standing alone before God FOR His people given to Him by the Father before the foundation of the world. As cited above, Paul wrote of God ***"Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel" (2 Timothy 1:9-10).*** Consider how the names of God's chosen people ***"from the foundation of the world,"*** were written in the Lamb's book of life and Christ is identified as ***"the Lamb slain"*** for them (***Revelation 13:8***). The word ***"slain"*** describes an action which is viewed as having been completed in the past, once and for all, not needing to be repeated. Having to come and die for His people in time is not repeating this action. It is fulfilling ONCE in time what is never to be repeated. The point is this – the imputation of the sins of God's elect to Christ before the foundation of the world was so real that God viewed it in light of eternity and wrote their names in the Lamb's book of life on the just ground of Christ's one sacrifice for their sins – ***"For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14).*** This does not deny the necessity of the cross in time. It demands the necessity of the cross in time –

Mark 8 – (31) And He began to teach them, that the Son of man MUST suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

(2) The reality of salvation is found in Christ as our SUBSTITUTE and REDEEMER. Based on the sins of God's elect imputed to Him, Christ had to become incarnate and live a perfect life under the law. He had to suffer unto death under the penalty of the law. This alone shows us how real the imputation of sins was to Him as it was the ground of His own guilt under the law and condemnation under the wrath of God for His people. This was so

real that in His lowest moment on the cross, being alienated from His Father, He cried out in agony –

Matthew 27 – (46) And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?

He did not cry out in ignorance as if asking for information. He cried out in agony expressing His suffering for the sins of His people. But as God in sinless human flesh (the glorious ***“Emmanuel”***) He took the place of His sheep, obeyed unto death, even the death of the cross, ***“the Just for the unjust” (1 Peter 3:18)***. He redeemed His people from their sins by His precious blood which resulted in the very ***“righteousness of God”*** by which God justified all His people. Jesus Christ the righteous is the propitiation (satisfaction) for our sins – ***“Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Romans 3:24-26)***.

(3) The reality of salvation is found in our REGENERATION and CONVERSION. All to whom God has imputed Christ’s righteousness shall be born again by the Holy Spirit because Christ’s righteousness imputed demands that they have life from above. Christ sends the Holy Spirit to give us spiritual life and bring us to see, believe, and REST IN HIM AS THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS – ***“And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness” (Romans 8:10)***. In giving us spiritual life in the new birth, the Holy Spirit does not make us righteous within ourselves, but He brings us to faith in Christ where we willingly submit to HIM for all righteousness – ***“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Romans 10:4)***. Born-again persons have been given spiritual life, a new heart and a new spirit, new

knowledge and desires. But even as born-again persons, we are still plagued with the remaining presence and contaminations of the flesh so that nothing we do, even as inspired by the Spirit, can equal perfect righteousness. Even our best and most sincere efforts to worship, serve, and obey God must be cleansed by the blood of our Savior – ***“Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, ACCEPTABLE TO GOD BY JESUS CHRIST” (1 Peter 2:5).*** Even our prayers can be acceptable to God only because we have ***“a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God” (Hebrews 4:14).***

These great and glorious works of God’s grace show the reality of sins imputed to Christ and His righteousness imputed to His people. All of this is the fruit of what Christ accomplished on the cross by Himself –

Hebrews 10 – (14) For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

4 Imputed Righteousness, the New Birth, Faith, and Obedience

Since the fall of man and the first revelation of the Gospel of God's free and sovereign grace in the salvation of sinners based solely upon the merits of Christ's righteousness imputed, unbelievers have sought to deny and disprove this glorious truth by seeking to establish their own righteousness before God. Unregenerate persons have used a number of unfounded accusations ignorantly seeking to deny the glory of Christ and exalt themselves above the station of sinners saved purely by grace. The following statement made by a false preacher (who claims to be a Christian) is an example of such attempts to disprove the truth of Christ's righteousness imputed to His people. It states a very common misunderstanding of sin and righteousness –

“Those who believe in imputed righteousness are those who say that we can't stop sinning, but Christ's blood covers us, therefore when God looks on us, he cannot see our sin. All he sees is Jesus. I call it the 'Jesus-suit' doctrine. It's an incredibly illogical doctrine, and it turns the grace of God into a license to sin. You know, we put on this 'Jesus suit.' We can be sinning away underneath the suit, but God can't see it. It's hidden from God. All he sees is his son. It makes God an idiot, and it makes him a liar because it says he's

calling something righteous that isn't. And God's plan is more thorough than that. It's more thorough than just hiding our sins. Christ died to free us from the bondage of sin so that we could be made a new creation. It says Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness. But Abraham also obeyed God. God said, 'He obeyed my voice. He kept my commandments, my statutes, my laws.' So imputed righteousness is imparted righteousness."

As stated, this is an example of one of the most common objections raised against the Biblical truth that God justifies the ungodly based on Christ's righteousness imputed alone without the works or wills of men. Notice how the preacher above denies imputed righteousness claiming that it gives people an excuse or license to "go on sinning" in their lives. But the truth is that if we understand what God's Word reveals concerning the Gospel truth of Christ's righteousness imputed, it is easy to see that the above objection falls flat and has no basis in Biblical truth. God's Word shows us clearly that where God has imputed Christ's righteousness to a person (i.e. justified that person), there will be three things that follow as the fruit and evidence of this state of justification before God:

(1) God the Holy Spirit in time will bring that person under the preaching of the Gospel and impart spiritual life in the new birth giving that person new spiritual life, a new heart and knowledge, with new godly motives, desires, and goals. The Holy Spirit permanently resides within that person, and implants the Word of God indelibly upon his heart –

Ezekiel 36 – (26) A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. (27) And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them.

Romans 8 – (9) But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.

1 John 2 – (27) But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him.

(2) In this new birth, God the Holy Spirit imparts God-given knowledge and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ which brings the justified and born-again person also to repentance of sin and dead works. The Bible is clear that all whom God has justified ***“shall LIVE BY FAITH” (Romans 1:17)***. This is living spiritually by God’s grace and power, persevering in the faith as we continually look to, rest in, and follow Christ as the Author and the Finisher of our faith (***Hebrews 12:2***). Where God has imputed Christ’s righteousness to a sinner, God gives that sinner faith to believe in Christ and brings him to repent of his dead works and idolatry. Christ’s righteousness is not only the ground of a sinner’s justification; it is also the source and power of spiritual life within a sinner –

Romans 6 – (11) Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. (12) Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.

Romans 6 – (17) But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. (18) Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.

(3) Where Christ’s righteousness is imputed to a sinner and spiritual life is imparted bringing him to faith in Christ and repentance of dead works,

there will be the fruit of godliness because of God's preserving grace which causes believers to persevere in faith and obedience. This does not mean that believers will not "go on sinning" in the sense of always falling short of the perfection of righteousness found only in Christ. This does not mean that believers will never fall into open sin and even sinful habits. This also does not mean that salvation can be judged by so-called "good works" or, as some contend, that such "good works" are the proper ground of godly assurance. But it does mean that the Holy Spirit will always be the Spirit of conviction motivating believers to a life of continual repentance, warring against the sins of the flesh, and striving to obey God as motivated by grace, love, and gratitude.

This also does not mean a sinless life or any notion of a total eradication of the presence, influence, and corruptions of the flesh within us. Believers are still sinners saved by grace. We are free from sin legally, but we are not free from sin experientially. Our victory over the presence, influence, and corruption of sin within is assured because of Christ's righteousness and power to preserve us unto glory and make us perfectly like Him. But we will not experience complete victory over the remaining sins of the flesh until we are delivered from this physical and sinful existence and brought into the presence of the Lord. Until then, we are guided, motivated, and energized by the grace of God in the power of the Holy Spirit to rest in, follow, and serve Christ –

Romans 7 – (24) O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? (25) I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

Romans 8 – (1) There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

John 15 – (1) I am the true vine, and My Father is the husbandman. (2) Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

Romans 6 – (22) But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

Romans 7 – (4) Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.

Ephesians 2 – (10) For we are HIS workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

We need to understand that just because godly living and good works do not justify us before God, this does not mean they are not necessary and that there is no place for them in the Christian life. They ARE necessary, but not as the grounds upon which God justifies us, accepts us, or gives us assurance. Godly living and good works are necessary as the fruit and result of God's grace in our justification based on the righteousness of Christ imputed.

We also need to understand that the objection stated above comes from the natural, unbelieving person's obsession with salvation conditioned in some way, to some degree, and at some stage upon his own works, decisions, and/or cooperation. It is motivated by natural self-righteousness and pride which motivates his efforts to make himself righteous in God's sight rather than submit to God's way of righteousness in Christ. In our natural fallen state, we are all so consumed with a legal and mercenary spirit that we cannot imagine or accept any reality of salvation totally based on the righteousness of another, the Lord Jesus Christ, without any contribution from us. We naturally insist on having something (or doing something), either

by the way of working for or cooperating with God, to earn our way out of condemnation and into the eternal blessedness of salvation. The Bible teaches that sinful man's works CANNOT earn for him a release from sin and death – ***“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20).***

The Bible also teaches that, if left to his own choice, sinful man will not accept Christ or cooperate with God (believe in and serve Him) by submitting to God's way of salvation by grace in Christ – ***“There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Romans 3:11-12).*** The Bible teaches that by nature we are all too ignorant, proud, and self-righteous to accept the true reality of sin and salvation (with all of its blessings) TOTALLY (100%) by God's free and sovereign grace based on the righteousness of Christ imputed. When the truth of the imputed righteousness of Christ is preached as the Bible reveals it (that salvation is NOT earned, gained, or appropriated by man's works or man's will), unregenerate man naturally reasons as follows – “Then I can sin as much as I want,” or “Then I don't have to do anything at all in the way of believing, repenting, or obeying the Lord.” This kind of reasoning reveals the sinfulness of the natural man's self-righteous motivations for obedience. He sees no reason to obey God unless he can by his obedience earn something from God. Such sinful reasoning shows that the Holy Spirit has not implanted the godly motives of grace, love, and gratitude within his heart. So, in preaching the Gospel of God's free and sovereign grace in Christ to sinners, we must emphasize the following two truths –

(1) CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS IMPUTED IS THE ONLY GROUND UPON WHICH GOD JUSTIFIES HIS PEOPLE (THE UNGODLY).

(2) CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS IMPUTED IS ALSO THE ONLY SOURCE OF SPIRITUAL LIFE IMPARTED WITHIN GOD'S PEOPLE BY THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE NEW BIRTH WHICH BRINGS THEM TO FAITH IN CHRIST AND THE OBEDIENCE OF GRACE.

These truths are taught throughout the Bible. They are summarized in verses such as **Romans 5:21** – ***“That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”*** The righteousness through which God’s grace rules in the lives of His people is the imputed righteousness of Christ which He alone accomplished by His obedience unto death as the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His people. As Christ is the ***“righteousness of God”*** for His people, He is also the life-giving Spirit – ***“the last Adam [Christ] was made a quickening [life-giving] Spirit” (1 Corinthians 15:45b)***. Just as sin demands death, righteousness demands life. This life that comes to God’s people by the Lord Jesus Christ includes the work of the Holy Spirit in the new birth to impart spiritual life, knowledge, faith, repentance, and a God-given desire to follow Christ and engage in the warfare of the Spirit against the flesh as we are motivated by grace, love, and gratitude.

CAN WE “STOP SINNING?”

The preacher who raised the objection above said, “Those who believe in imputed righteousness are those who say that we can’t stop sinning.” Is this true? Can we who are saved by God’s grace “stop sinning”? To understand this matter Biblically, we need to be clear on what we mean by “sinning.” This preacher probably had in mind that a TRUE believer cannot continue in a life of total disobedience, open immorality, and/or insincerity, etc., without some measure of godly sorrow over sin that leads to repentance, and this is true. Also, we know that TRUE believers can and do experience changes in sinful habits and behaviors. For example, believers can and do, to a certain degree, stop cheating, lying to, and stealing from other people. They can and do, to a certain degree, become honest in their dealings with people and charitable rather than dishonest and greedy towards others. Consider the case of the greedy and dishonest publican Zacchaeus who ***“said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold” (Luke 19:8)***. Zacchaeus was not saved, or made righteous before

God, because of his reformation of character and conduct. His reformation was the fruit of God's grace freely given to him through Christ. There is no argument that God commands His people to fight and seek to mortify (put to death) all sinful actions and thoughts. By the grace of God in Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God, believers are to declare war against the flesh and seek not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. However, this DOES NOT mean that we can "stop sinning" altogether.

Consider again how the Bible defines sin.⁶ Sin is transgression of the law. Sin is anything that falls short of the perfect righteousness of the law found only in Christ. When God the Holy Spirit imparts spiritual life to us, we do love Christ and His people, but can we honestly say that we love Christ and His people PERFECTLY, without any contamination of remaining sin that still plagues us in this life? NO! Our love for Christ and His people still falls short of the perfection of righteousness required by God's law. And in this sense, we CANNOT "stop sinning." This is what the Apostle Paul described in the following passage –

Romans 7 – (14) For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. (15) For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. (16) If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. (17) Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. (18) For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. (19) For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. (20) Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. (21) I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. (22) For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: (23) But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. (24) O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? (25) I thank

⁶ Chapter 1, pp. 16-20

God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

This is the case of a sinner truly saved by God's grace and justified in God's sight based on Christ's righteousness imputed. By God's grace truly justified sinners can and do live by faith in true repentance, obedience, and perseverance in the faith. But they cannot "stop sinning" in the sense of achieving perfect righteousness. In this life our obedience, even as justified and sanctified people, will never measure up to the perfect righteousness found only in Christ. This is the perfection that God requires for a sinner to be justified. There are only two types of people on this earth – sinners still lost in their sins and sinners saved by God's grace.

To one degree or another, truly justified sinners bear the fruit of God's grace and power in their lives. They bring ***"forth fruit unto God" (Romans 7:4)*** and the ***"fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22)***. Christ is ***"the true Vine"*** and His people are ***"the branches"*** who abide in Him and ***"bringeth forth much fruit" (John 15:5)***. But even in bearing the fruit of God's grace, which lies in faith in Christ and repentance of dead works, their best efforts to obey God do not equal the perfect standard of righteousness or make them righteous before God. The perfection of righteousness that they have is Christ's righteousness imputed to them by God's grace. The imputation of Christ's righteousness to them is evidenced when they are brought by God to receive Christ and believe in Him as the ***"the LORD [their] righteousness" (Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:15-16)***.

Also, as true believers we know that even our best works are still contaminated with the corruption of the remaining flesh so that none of our works can save us, make us righteous, or earn God's favor and blessings for us. This is what the Apostle Paul described in ***Romans 7:14-25*** as cited above. Consider how the same person who boldly claimed to be ***"dead indeed unto sin" (Romans 6:11)*** and ***"free from sin" (Romans 6:18)*** also stated that he is ***"carnal, sold under sin" (Romans 7:14)***? This may seem like a contradiction to us, but the answer is that Paul is treating of three distinct areas of life as a sinner saved by grace. ***"Dead indeed unto sin" in Romans 6:11*** describes a

believer's LEGAL STANDING before God in Christ and based on Christ's righteousness imputed to him. As stated in Chapter One, ***"free from sin"*** in ***Romans 6:18*** describes a believer's SPIRITUAL STATE as a believer who has been liberated from the bondage of darkness and unbelief. ***"Carnal, sold under sin"*** describes a believer's PRESENT STATE on earth as a justified sinner who desires to be perfectly conformed to Christ in his character and conduct, but who cannot attain this goal because of the remaining presence, influence, and corruption of sin in his life.

Paul was confident that he could not be condemned for his sin because of his standing before God in Christ – ***"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Romans 8:1)***. He also admitted that he failed to attain righteousness in his best efforts to serve and obey God because the sins of the flesh still contaminated his best efforts and works. He knew his only hope was (and is) the grace of God that ***"reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 5:21)***. But he was also adamant that this knowledge given by revelation of God in the Gospel gave him no cause or motivation to live a life of sinful abandonment and selfishness –

Romans 6 – (1) What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? (2) God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

The Bible teaches us that salvation by God's grace based on Christ's righteousness imputed gives us the greatest, most noble, and godly motivation to obey God and fight our sinful fleshly thoughts, appetites, and actions. These are the motives of grace, love, and gratitude that characterize, not a forced, legal slavish motivation, but the incentive given to a willing and loving bondservant of Christ. Salvation gained and maintained by a sinner's efforts reveals a very low (even sinful) motivation for obedience. It is the motive of legal fear of loss of rewards and mercenary promise of earned rewards. This is what it means to be a servant of sin, which applies not only

to an unbeliever who is openly immoral in the eyes of men, but also unbelievers who are highly religious and moral in the eyes of men –

Luke 16 – (15) And He [Christ] said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.

Given that what the Apostle Paul describes in **Romans 6** and **7** is the state of all believers while in this present life on earth, we need to ask the following question – If the best works of justified sinners are still contaminated by the flesh (and they are), and God is holy and cannot accept or look upon sin (and He is), how then can God be pleased with and accept our prayers, worship, and obedience? God DOES accept the prayers, worship, and obedience of His children, not because of any merit in these sacrifices of praise, but as they are presented through our Mediator and Advocate, the Lord Jesus Christ, based upon HIS merits – His blood and His righteousness imputed –

2 Peter 2 – (1) Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and all hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, (2) As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: (3) If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. (4) To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, (5) Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, ACCEPTABLE TO GOD BY JESUS CHRIST.

Consider, for example, how the prayers of God's people are received and accepted by God –

Hebrews 4 – (14) SEEING THEN THAT WE HAVE A GREAT HIGH PRIEST, THAT IS PASSED INTO THE HEAVENS, JESUS THE SON OF GOD, let us hold fast our profession. (15) For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like

as we are, yet without sin. (16) Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Another point is that the blood of Christ (His righteousness imputed) does not cover us so that when God looks on us He cannot see our sins. God sees all things as they are –

Hebrews 4 – (12) For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (13) Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do.

The blood of Christ is not a covering to hide our sins from God. The covering for sin in the Bible is a reference to the mercy-seat in the tabernacle over which the high priest of Israel sprinkled the blood of atonement. This was a picture of the blood of Christ satisfying the justice of God as the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His people so that their sins, having been imputed to Christ, were not imputed to them by God. God sees our sins, but He cannot and will not impute (charge) them against us –

Romans 8 – (33) Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. (34) Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

When the Bible states the following truth concerning God's people – ***"And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Hebrews 10:17)***, it means that God does not keep a record so as to hold our sins against us (the non-imputation of sins) and condemn us based on those sins. But God does see our sins. He sometimes chastens His children for their sins, but this is

never punishment in the way of payment to His law and justice. Chastisement is punishment for correction. It comes from a loving Father to His children –

Hebrews 12 – (6) For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. (7) If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?

As far as calling the God Who justifies the ungodly based on Christ's righteousness imputed "an idiot" and "a liar," charging that "he's calling something righteous that isn't," this false preacher's arrogance and rebellion rises to the very height of blasphemy. God never calls something or someone righteous that is not truly righteous. But, as described before, there is a clear Biblical distinction between the saved sinner's standing before God in Christ and that same person's state in this world.⁷ And as far as God's plan being "more thorough than that," one cannot get any more thorough than righteousness established by Christ (God the Son incarnate) by which His people are justified and from which they are born again and brought to final glory. It is true that "Christ died to free us from the bondage of sin so that we could be made a new creation." As we have already shown, the merits of Christ's obedience unto death (which is His righteousness imputed) frees us from the legal sentence of condemnation and results in spiritual freedom and life in our new birth –

Romans 6 – (6) Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. (7) For he that is dead is freed [justified] from sin.

Romans 6 – (17) But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was

⁷ See Chapter 3, pp. 72-75

delivered you. (18) Being then made free [liberated] from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.

Let us again emphasize that the Bible teaches not only that Christ's righteousness imputed is the GROUND of a saved sinner's salvation and justification before God, but also that Christ (as the LORD our righteousness) is also the SOURCE and POWER of the Christian life of faith, repentance, obedience, and perseverance. Remember –

Romans 1 – (16) For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. (17) For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.

This verse tells us plainly that all who have been justified before God based on Christ's righteousness imputed will, as the result, be brought to **"LIVE BY FAITH."** Living by faith means that, having been born again from above by the Holy Spirit, they live spiritually. They believe and rest in Christ for all righteousness. They cling to and follow Christ as His disciples seeking to follow Him in His Word. Our justification speaks of Christ's work FOR us as our Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer by which we are legally and truly (not fictionally) declared righteous in God's sight. Our regeneration speaks of Christ's work IN us by the Holy Spirit as the life-giving Spirit Who gives us new hearts, new spirits, new minds, and brings us to faith in Christ, repentance of dead works, and the obedience of faith and love. He establishes within our regenerate hearts the motives of grace, love, and gratitude.

It might be helpful here to deal again with the issue of motives for obedience. If a person seeks salvation and blessings from God based on his works of obedience, his motives are legal and mercenary. A legalist is motivated by legal fear of punishment and loss of reward. A mercenary is motivated by a promise of earned rewards. The Gospel wherein the righteousness of God is revealed exposes such motives to be evil because they fail to glorify the God of all grace, and they fail to exalt Christ in the glory

of His Person and finished work. They are the product of unbelief, and ***“without faith it is impossible to please”*** God (**Hebrews 11:6**). As we have seen, when the Gospel is preached, we often hear the objection – ***“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?”*** (**Romans 6:1**). Those who raise this objection reveal that their only motives for obedience are legal and mercenary which the Gospel exposes as that which results in ***“fruit unto death”*** –

Romans 7 – (5) For when we were in the flesh [unregenerate, in unbelief], the motions [passions] of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.

No matter how they appear outwardly to men, all unbelievers bring forth ***“fruit unto death.”*** They may be openly immoral and perverted or openly religious and sincere. Either way, without faith in Christ both are living after the flesh and in a state of spiritual death evidenced by their unbelief. The criminal or openly immoral person does not even appear righteous to most people, but the self-righteous religionist does appear righteous to most people. It takes the light of the Gospel to expose the religious unbeliever who appears moral and righteous to people. The Gospel light exposes both them and their evil deeds –

John 3 – (19) And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. (20) For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

Until God the Holy Spirit in the new birth brings us to believe the Gospel, our motives are always evil in the sight of God. But when He brings us to faith in Christ and repentance of dead works, when He brings us to submit to Christ as our only righteousness before God, He establishes within our hearts the godly motives of grace, love, and gratitude, whereby God works in us to bring forth ***“fruit unto God”*** –

Romans 7 – (4) Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.

Remember, Christ's death for the sins of His people, and His righteousness (the merits of His obedience unto death) imputed to His people, insure that they will be born again by the Holy Spirit and brought by faith to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for all salvation –

John 6 – (37) All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out. (38) For I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me. (39) And this is the Father's will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.

John 12 – (32) And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me. (33) This He said, signifying what death He should die.

Christ's righteousness imputed in our justification also insures His ever-abiding presence within our hearts by the continual indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the permanent implanting of His Word –

Romans 8 – (9) But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His. (10) And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. (11) But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you.

1 John 3 – (9) Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin [does not forsake Christ and apostatize from the faith]; for His seed [Christ's offspring; God's true children] remaineth in Him [stay with Christ]: and he cannot sin

[his true child cannot leave Him], ***because he is born of God*** [not because of his own power but because he has been born again by the Spirit Who indwells him permanently].

2 John (2) – For the truth’s sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever.

The grace of God which reigns ***“through righteousness”*** most certainly does bring His people ***“UNTO eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 5:21)***. God justifying His elect based on Christ’s righteousness imputed not only provides for their legal state of justification. It also provides spiritual life for them. It is ***“justification of life” (Romans 5:18)***, meaning that it always leads to spiritual and eternal life for all whom God has justified. Sin demands death; righteousness demands life. Their new birth (spiritual life within) is evidenced by their God-given faith in Christ, repentance of sin, and the obedience of faith and love. This spiritual life within proves that they had already been justified before God based on Christ’s righteousness imputed and chosen God’s sovereign grace before the foundation of the world.

All of this great work of redemption (and the results of it in the complete salvation of all of God’s elect in Christ Jesus) is included in a proper understanding of THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD REVEALED IN THE GOSPEL. RIGHTEOUSNESS includes all that Christ accomplished to pay for the sins of His people. By this payment in His obedience unto death, He has established RIGHTEOUSNESS by which God is just to justify the ungodly. And this is the RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN CHRIST FREELY IMPUTED TO ALL HIS PEOPLE. The fruit of this great work is their new birth as the Holy Spirit imparts spiritual life to them from Christ and brings them to Him by faith. To be ignorant of this righteousness as it is in Christ Jesus is to be lost in our sins, because this would mean ignorance of the Gospel wherein Christ and His righteousness are revealed by the Holy Spirit –

Romans 10 – (1) Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. (2) For I bear them record that they have

a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. (3) For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. (4) FOR CHRIST IS THE END OF THE LAW FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS TO EVERY ONE THAT BELIEVETH.

When Christ sends the Holy Spirit in sovereign power to impart His resurrection life to us in our new birth, He gives us spiritual eyes to see realities that we had never seen before. He causes us to see the reality of who God is in His holiness and justice as well as His mercy and grace. He shows us the reality of who we are by convincing us of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He shows us the reality of who the Lord Jesus Christ is and what it took for Him to redeem us from our sins and work out perfect righteousness by His obedience unto death as our Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. Consider what the Lord told His disciples in teaching them of the work of the Holy Spirit –

John 16 – (7) Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you. (8) And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: (9) Of sin, because they believe not on Me; (10) Of righteousness, because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more; (11) Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

So, Christ's righteousness imputed in our justification also insures the establishment of spiritual life within us. This is the whole point of Paul's argument in **Romans 6**. Paul anticipated the same objection to salvation totally by God's grace through the righteousness of Christ imputed that the false preacher quoted above raises –

Romans 6 – (1) What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? (2) God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

Again, remember that ***“dead to sin”*** does not mean that believers are dead to the remaining influences, corruptions, and contaminations of sin within them. The corruption of sin is what the Bible sometimes means by the word ***“flesh”*** (ex. ***Romans 8:12-13***). ***“Dead to sin”*** means dead to sin’s power to condemn us. How did we become ***“dead to sin”***?

Romans 6 – (3) Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? (4) Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (5) For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection: (6) Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

All for whom Christ died on the cross ***“were baptized into Jesus Christ”*** and ***“baptized into His death.”*** ***“Baptized”*** here does not refer to the ordinance of believer’s baptism. In water baptism we confess our union with and faith in Christ by immersion in water which pictures our death, burial, and resurrection with Christ. The word ***“baptized”*** literally means ***“placed into,”*** and it describes the union of Christ with all whom the Father gave to Him before the foundation of the world, all who were justified in Him based on His righteousness imputed, all for whom He died, was buried, and arose again. They are all one with Christ. Christ is their Representative, Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. When Christ obeyed the law unto death, it can be said that they too obeyed the law unto death, not personally in themselves, but IN CHRIST, their Representative and Surety. When He died, they too died. When He was buried, they too were buried. When He arose from the dead, they too arose from the dead. Again, this was not their personal acts or

experience. It was all Christ's work FOR them as their Representative, Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer.

The **"old man"** that **"is crucified with"** Christ (**Romans 6:6**) is dead. This is our former identification with and connection to Adam in the fall whereby we were brought into our natural state of sin and death evidenced by ignorance, unbelief, and even rebellion against the truth. Were it not for God choosing us IN CHRIST before the foundation of the world; were it not for God justifying us IN CHRIST based on His righteousness imputed; and were it not for redeeming us IN CHRIST by His death on the cross, we would be condemned to eternal death. But Christ destroyed the whole **"body of sin"** when He removed its **"sting"** (its power to condemn sinners) (**1 Corinthians 15:55-57**). The **"body of sin"** refers to the whole scope and dominion of sin that would condemn us apart from Christ crucified. What we have earned and deserved because of our fall in Adam and because of our own personal sins (past, present, and future) has been **"destroyed"** by Christ, our Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. It is clear from the following verse that Paul is describing a believer's legal death to sin because of the work of Christ –

Romans 6 – (7) For he that is dead is freed [justified] from sin.

Christ accomplished this in His death based on the sins of God's elect imputed to Him. If we are truly one of God's elect, we have been justified based on His righteousness imputed to us. Christ accomplished all of this, NOT to leave us in the darkness and deception of sin as spiritually dead people, and NOT that we should remain as slaves to sin. He did all of this so ***that henceforth we should not serve sin*** –

Romans 6 – (8) Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him: (9) Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him. (10) For in that He died, He died unto sin once: but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God. (11) Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. (12) Let not sin therefore reign in your

mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. (13) Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

Consider HOW Christ died unto sin. He did not die unto sin's influence, corruption, or contamination within Himself. Within Himself He remained perfectly holy and righteous without any corruption or contamination of sin. Christ is the Lamb ***"without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19)***, as He ***"Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:22)***. Christ ***"knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21)***. While He walked on earth as God in sinless human flesh, and while He suffered, bled, and died, He was never made to be (nor did He ever become) a sinner in Himself. Sin was never imparted or infused into Him. He was guilty and justly condemned by God based on the sins of His people imputed to Him, but He remained sinlessly perfect in all His thoughts, motives, and actions. His suffering unto death on the cross is described as follows – ***"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, THE JUST FOR THE UNJUST, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" (1 Peter 3:18)***. The only way He died unto sin was unto sin's power to condemn. ***"He died unto sin ONCE,"*** and this was enough to satisfy God's justice fully for His people –

Hebrews 1 – (1) God, Who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, (2) Hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by Whom also He made the worlds; (3) Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, WHEN HE HAD BY HIMSELF PURGED OUR SINS, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;

Hebrews 10 – (14) For by ONE OFFERING He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

“Sanctified” describes how God’s people are “SET APART” by God for His glory in Christ. They were set apart by God the Father in sovereign, unconditional electing grace and justifying grace before the foundation of the world – ***“Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called” (Jude 1)***. They were set apart in God the Son incarnate (the Lord Jesus Christ) in redeeming grace when Christ took their place and died for their sins on the cross – Paul wrote ***“Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours” (1 Corinthians 1:2)***. They are set apart by God the Holy Spirit when He brings them under the Gospel truth, gives them spiritual life in the new birth, and calls them out of darkness into the light of salvation – ***“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied” (1 Peter 1:2)***. God-given faith in the Lord Jesus Christ sets them apart from the world and evidences their justification before God based on the imputed righteousness of Christ.

LIVING BY FAITH

Another Biblical truth that proves the fallacy of any objection that imputed righteousness leads to a life of sin and disobedience is a point that has been emphasized much in this book – ***“THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.”*** Living by faith describes a sinner who has been resurrected unto spiritual life in the new birth and who lives life by looking to, resting in, and following the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not believing in Christ only to live life unto and for ourselves. It is living unto God by the power of His grace in Christ Jesus and for His glory –

Galatians 2 – (19) For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. (20) I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live

by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me, and gave Himself for me. (21) I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

Living by faith means living in the light of and guided by God's Word –

2 Timothy 3 – (16) All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: (17) That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

The faith that God gives His people is not an empty or dormant profession of religion. It is a dynamic fruit and power of the Holy Spirit which works by love and proved genuine, rather than hypocritical, with the obedience of true faith, motivated by grace, love, and gratitude –

Galatians 5 – (1) Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. (2) Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. (3) For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. (4) Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. (5) For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. (6) For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but FAITH WHICH WORKETH BY LOVE.

James 2 – (17) Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. (18) Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

The ancient believers ***“obtained a good report”*** because of their testimony in word and their walk –

Hebrews 11 – (1) Now faith is the substance [confidence] of things hoped for, the evidence [conviction] of things not seen. (2) For by it the elders obtained a good report.

Their testimony was not salvation by their works, their character, or their conduct. Their testimony of faith was the sure promise of God in justifying them based on the righteousness of the promised Messiah (the Lord Jesus Christ) imputed to them and Who would come in time and establish righteousness by redeeming them from their sins by His blood. It is obvious that they were not perfect people in themselves. Like all of God's children on this earth, they were sinful and weak human beings, but sinners saved and preserved by God's grace. While on this earth, they never attained the perfection of righteousness within themselves, but by God's grace, they lived and walked by faith. In much of their lives and at many times in their lives as recorded in the Bible, if one were to judge them by their works, they would be judged as "unchristian." God does not hold back in recording both the strength of their faith (as given to them by God) and their many sins and weaknesses. The record of their sins and weaknesses is not to show us how much we can get away with and still be "Christians" or to excuse such behavior. They are recorded to show us that even in the best of God's people, salvation is totally by God's grace based on a righteousness that no sinful human being can produce. They are also recorded as examples to be avoided showing forth that even though God's true children cannot be charged by God and condemned for their sins, there are still sometimes dire consequences of sinful behavior in this life. Consider what the Lord said to King David through the prophet Nathan concerning David's sin –

2 Samuel 12 – (9) Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. (10) NOW THEREFORE THE SWORD SHALL NEVER DEPART FROM THINE HOUSE; BECAUSE THOU HAST DESPISED ME, AND HAST TAKEN THE WIFE OF URIAH THE HITTITE TO BE THY WIFE. (11)

Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. (12) For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun. (13) AND DAVID SAID UNTO NATHAN, I HAVE SINNED AGAINST THE LORD. And Nathan said unto David, THE LORD ALSO HATH PUT AWAY THY SIN; THOU SHALT NOT DIE. (14) Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.

The Lord brought King David to repentance and reassured him through the prophet that his sins had been forgiven by the blood of Christ, the promised Messiah. How do we know that this was the basis upon which God forgave David? Consider some of the language in David's penitent prayer recorded in the following **Psalm 51** –

Psalm 51 – (7) Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. (8) Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice. (9) Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. (10) Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

“Purge me with hyssop” is a direct reference to the sprinkling of the blood of Passover (**Exodus 12:22**) which was a picture of salvation and cleansing from sin by the blood of Christ, the promised Messiah. It was upon this basis that God forgave David and brought David to repentance.

Always remember that God the Holy Spirit continually convicts God's people of their sin and continually inspires and motivates them in the obedience of faith based on His grace to forgive and cleanse them of all sin by the blood of Christ. God's Word states that within true believers, just as the flesh inspires sinful desires against the Spirit, the Spirit inspires godly desires against the flesh – ***“For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that***

ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Galatians 5:17). This keeps us from attaining sinless perfection, but it also keeps us from totally giving in to the flesh. This keeps us looking to Christ for all forgiveness and righteousness, and it keeps us fighting the warfare of the flesh and the Spirit –

Galatians 5 – (13) For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

The difference between true faith in Christ and the kind of obedience that the false preacher quoted at the beginning of this chapter would inspire is that true faith in Christ motivates by the liberty of God’s grace and love. Although probably ignorant of this fact, the kind of obedience the false preacher would inspire is motivated by bondage and law. The imputed righteousness of Christ guarantees the new birth of all whom God has justified, brings them to faith in Christ and repentance of dead works and all sin, and gives them the strongest motivation for obedience and service to Christ and His people.

5 Justified by Faith, Works, and Doing Righteousness

As I have shown that God justifies His people based solely upon Christ's righteousness imputed, how does this truth fit with the language of the Bible when we read in certain verses that sinners are "***justified by faith,***" "***justified by works,***" and that saved sinners "***doeth righteousness.***"

Part 1 - How are Sinners "Justified by Faith"?

The term "***justified by faith***" is found three times in the Authorized King James Version of the New Testament –

Romans 3 – (28) Therefore we conclude that a man is JUSTIFIED BY FAITH without the deeds of the law.

Romans 5 – (1) Therefore being JUSTIFIED BY FAITH, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

Galatians 3 – (24) Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be JUSTIFIED BY FAITH.

It is common for those who claim to be “Reformed” (meaning an agreement with the doctrinal tenets of the Protestant Reformation that began in the early fifteenth century) to distinguish themselves, especially from Roman Catholicism, by saying, “Sinners are justified by faith and not by works.” They speak of what is commonly called “The Five Solas,” a term used to designate five great foundational rallying cries of the Protestant Reformation. “Sola” is a Latin word meaning “only” or “alone.” The Five Solas are:

Sola Scriptura, which means the Scriptures alone are our foundation and rule of faith;

Sola Gratia, which means salvation is by grace alone and not by human effort or merit in any way;

Sola Fide, which means salvation is received by faith alone and not by works in any way;

Sola Christus, which means salvation is accomplished by Christ alone;

Sola Deo Gloria, which means that God alone is to be glorified and no glory goes to man.

These are good tenets to embrace, but when we deal with “Sola Fide” (faith alone), we must be careful to understand what faith is according to Scriptural testimony within the various contexts in which the word “faith” appears. For example, we must be careful to make certain that we do not make “faith” (in the sense of God-given faith by which we believe and embrace Christ) to be the ground or cause of our justification before God (as well as our whole salvation) rather than Christ’s blood and righteousness imputed alone. This would be “Sola Gratia” and “Sola Christus,” salvation by God’s grace alone based on the merits of Christ alone without any contribution from us.

Many people who call themselves “Christians” are ignorant of the reality of true Biblical faith. For example, many today view faith as an act that comes from a person’s “free will” by their decision to “accept Christ as their personal savior,” “believe on Jesus,” and/or to “make him their Lord and Savior.” This

is what is commonly known as “personal faith” or “saving faith” which they believe appropriates the salvation which, as they claim, God has provided for everyone without exception. This makes their “personal faith” the reason, cause, or condition that they must meet to attain salvation and justification before God. This is false doctrine as it portrays Christ as a messiah who died for all people without exception, even for those who perish, but saves only those who meet the condition of faith. In their view, Christ’s death alone did not secure the salvation of any sinner, but only made salvation possible for every sinner who would believe. This is not a Biblical view of salvation. First, it denies the justice of God by claiming that God sends to eternal death sinners for whom Christ died and for whom He made a propitiation. It says that God imputed sin to Christ, but He also imputes sin to those for whom Christ stood as Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. This denies the justice of God as it says that God sends sinners to eternal damnation and death for whom Christ died and satisfied justice in their place. The Bible says that all for whom Christ died as Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer shall be saved. His blood and righteousness demand their salvation –

John 10 – (11) I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth His life for the sheep.

John 10 – (27) My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: (28) And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.

Romans 8 – (33) Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. (34) Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

Secondly, it denies what the Bible reveals about all people without exception who fell in Adam, that we are by nature totally depraved and by

nature unwilling to receive Christ until God the Holy Spirit gives us life in the new birth –

John 1 – (11) He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. (12) But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: (13) Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

1 Corinthians 2 – (14) But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

Thirdly, it denies that spiritual life and faith are gifts of God that come through Christ, based on His righteousness imputed alone –

Romans 8 – (10) And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

2 Peter 1 – (1) Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ:

Fourthly, it makes their faith to be their savior and not Christ. If you claim to be a Christian, I urge you to consider this matter in light of the Scriptural Gospel revelation. If we are to have a Biblical understanding of faith, we must be careful not to make “faith” (in the sense of God-given faith by which we believe and embrace Christ) to be the ground, cause, or condition of our salvation (including our justification) rather than Christ’s righteousness imputed alone. We must ask ourselves, “Do we have faith in Christ and Him alone, or do we have faith in our faith?” The Bible presents faith in two ways depending upon the context:

(1) **OBJECTIVE FAITH** in which faith is used as a synonym for the body of Biblical doctrine, the truth of the Gospel itself. It is the teachings of the Gospel revelation of God in Christ. For example, the Christian faith is the doctrine of Christ and salvation for sinners by God's grace in Him. The Jewish and Muslim faiths are different, but they both teach some form of the doctrine of salvation by works. In this use of the word "faith," one might ask, "WHAT do you believe?"

(2) **SUBJECTIVE FAITH** which is the God-given gift that brings a person to believe in, trust, and embrace the Lord Jesus Christ for all salvation. This is the fruit, evidence, and effect of the work of Christ for His people in justifying them and giving them spiritual life in regeneration and conversion (the new birth) by the Holy Spirit. In this use of the word "faith," one might ask, "DO you believe?"

In the Bible, subjective faith is not natural to fallen, spiritually dead sinners. It is not the result of man's so-called "free will" or some imaginary "spark of goodness." It is the gift of God by His Spirit in the new birth. Consider again –

John 1 – (11) He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. (12) But as many as received Him, to them gave He power [the right, privilege] to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: (13) Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Also, in the Bible, subjective faith is always based on objective faith –

Romans 10 – (13) For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. (14) How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? (15) And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of

them that preach the Gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! (16) But they have not all obeyed the Gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? (17) SO THEN FAITH COMETH BY HEARING, AND HEARING BY THE WORD OF GOD.

Many people are confused about what “justification by faith” really means, and there are some vast doctrinal differences amongst those who claim to believe this. There are those who fall into the popular heresy of “justification BASED ON (or because of) our believing.” They believe that God justifies His people (imputes Christ’s righteousness to them) on the ground (or because) of their believing the Gospel. This makes our believing to be the GROUND of justification rather than the FRUIT of God’s grace in justifying His people based on Christ’s righteousness imputed. This is opposed to the true Gospel message because it makes salvation conditioned on man rather than on Christ alone.

Some believe that the righteousness of Christ imputed is applied by means of their believing, meaning that they do not have righteousness imputed to them until God gives them faith to believe in Christ. They will make statements such as, “God imputes righteousness to us upon our believing in Him.” They still claim that imputed righteousness is the ground of justification, but that God waits to impute it to us until the time that He brings us to believe in Christ. This is really confusing because it says that God gives spiritual life and faith before He imputes righteousness from which all spiritual life and faith come. It is, therefore, heresy.

Others believe “justified by faith” means that God justifies His people at the time of their being brought by God to believe the Gospel, but they are clear that their believing is NOT the ground upon which God justifies them. They know that their believing is no part of the righteousness by which God justifies them. They claim that God first imputes Christ’s righteousness to the person as the ground of justification and then the Holy Spirit immediately gives faith to that person by which he comes to believe in Christ. This may sound a little confusing, but it is not anti-Gospel. It states clearly that God’s grace through the righteousness of Christ imputed is the ONLY ground of a

sinner's justification before God. And all true believers agree with this fundamental tenet of true Christianity.

To understand the term ***"justified by faith"*** we must first understand what the Bible means by the word ***"faith."*** The Greek word for ***"faith"*** in this and the other verses cited above is ***"pistis,"*** and pronounced ***"pē'-stēs"***. In the Bible this God-given faith encompasses not only the act of a person exercising faith in believing, but also the doctrine that is believed as it pertains to the Gospel and the whole Word of God revealed in the Bible. Right knowledge revealed by God is necessary for us to believe, and this is how God brings us to trust Christ as He is identified and distinguished in the Gospel revelation. Before we can believe what is right and true, there must be right and true knowledge as revealed and taught to us by God –

Matthew 11 – (27) All things are delivered unto Me of My Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him.

John 6 – (44) No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. (45) It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto Me.

God-given faith always has as its object the Lord Jesus Christ in the glory of His Person and the power of His finished work of redemption by which He established the righteousness of God which is imputed to His people. The Bible states that all who believe in Christ for salvation ***"believeth unto righteousness" (Romans 10:10).*** Notice, it is not "believeth in the place of righteousness." It is ***"believeth UNTO righteousness"*** because we believe in Christ Who is the Lord our righteousness.

Some object to this by accusing us of teaching what they call "saved by knowledge" and not by Christ. This is a "straw man" used to cover their own claim of salvation when they were ignorant of these Gospel truths. We are not "saved by knowledge." We are saved by the Lord Jesus Christ. But in

saving us, God gives us spiritual knowledge by which He brings us to receive the true Christ and not be deceived by counterfeits. God-given faith is NOT “blind faith” or a “blind leap in the dark.” God-given faith is not believing that which is illogical and contrary to God’s logic as revealed in His Word and His ways. Man’s natural logic is foolishness, but God’s logic is HIS wisdom revealed in His way of salvation by grace through Christ and His righteousness. God-given faith believes God’s Word. Often in Scripture we see the term **“THE faith”** in reference to the teachings of Christ. This is “the Christian faith” –

Acts 6 – (7) And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to THE FAITH.

Acts 14 – (21) And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, (22) Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in THE FAITH, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

Acts 16 – (5) And so were the churches established in THE FAITH, and increased in number daily.

Romans 1 – (5) By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to THE FAITH among all nations, for His name:

As stated above, there are all kinds of different faiths in the world. There is the Christian faith, the Muslim faith, the Hindu faith, the Jewish faith, etc. But there is only ONE FAITH for true Christians –

Ephesians 4 – (4) There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; (5) One Lord, ONE FAITH, one baptism,

(6) One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Any claim of faith which is not founded upon right doctrine as revealed in God's Word is a false faith. It is believing a lie. God-given faith cannot be separated from the truth as God reveals it in Christ by the Holy Spirit –

Romans 6 – (17) But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart THAT FORM OF DOCTRINE WHICH WAS DELIVERED YOU. (18) Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.

“That form of doctrine” is the Gospel of Christ wherein the **“righteousness of God”** is revealed to God's people. Anyone who claims to be a true Christian believer apart from this doctrine is lying to himself and to others –

2 John – (9) Whosoever transgresseth, and ABIDETH NOT IN THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.

Romans 1 – (16) For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. (17) For therein is the righteousness of God revealed FROM FAITH TO FAITH: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

“From faith to faith” – Some claim this means from one degree of faith to a greater degree of faith. And although it is true that saving faith and knowledge grows as we grow in grace and knowledge of Christ, the sense here is in line with the revelation of God's promise and God's way of saving and justifying His people when they are all brought by the Holy Spirit to believe. I believe **“from faith”** refers to the Gospel doctrine (as in THE faith) revealed to the elect of God by which God brings them **“to faith”** whereby

they believe and embrace the Lord Jesus Christ for all salvation. ***“From faith to faith”*** is the God-given knowledge by which God brings His elect to believe and trust wholly in Christ and plead His righteousness as their only ground of reconciliation unto Him. It is God’s people believing what He reveals to them in the Gospel –

Romans 10 – (4) For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. (5) For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them. (6) But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) (7) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) (8) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; (9) That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. (10) For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

If we understand the term “justified by faith” as it appears in the Bible, we understand that it is the same as being justified by God’s grace based on the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ imputed to us. It is not our act of believing that justifies us. It is Christ’s righteousness by which we are justified before God. As stated earlier, sinners are justified before God (in His court of justice) before they are brought to believe in Christ. We can say that when sinners are brought to believe in Christ, they are justified in the court of their own conscience. When the Holy Spirit imparts spiritual life and knowledge in the new birth, their hearts are purged of the guilt and condemnation of sin. This is metaphorically described in the Bible as the sprinkling of blood upon their hearts and their consciences –

Hebrews 10 – (19) Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, (20) By a new and living way, which He

hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; (21) And having an high priest over the house of God; (22) Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Consider this phrase as it appears in ***Romans 5 – (1) Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: (2) By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.***

Notice how ***“peace with God”*** comes not upon the ground of our believing in Christ but ***“through our Lord Jesus Christ,”*** i.e. upon the ground of His work alone as promised by God from the beginning. This is the content of the faith that God gives His people whereupon they believe in Christ and submit to Him as their only righteousness before God. When God the Holy Spirit brings us to believe in Christ and embrace Him as our righteousness before God, this is when we have peace with God within our consciences. This is not simply splitting hairs. It establishes in the minds and hearts of God’s people the preeminence of Christ and His work on the cross for His people. It shows us that Christ makes the difference in our salvation and not we ourselves by believing. It shows that Christ’s righteousness imputed is the only ground of our justification and peace with God, and our believing is the fruit and result of His work for us. The point is this – Our believing does not establish peace with God. Christ established peace between God and sinners by the blood of His cross –

Colossians 1 – (19) For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell; (20) And, HAVING MADE PEACE THROUGH THE BLOOD OF HIS CROSS, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.

As a result of this peace with God established by **“the blood of His cross,”** God the Holy Spirit brings us to be reconciled unto God by faith in Christ –

Colossians 1 – (21) And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled (22) In the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in His sight: (23) If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister;

The **“if”** in ***Colossians 1:23*** is not a condition we must fulfill out of our own power and will to be saved, justified, and have peace with God. It is an EVIDENCE of the fact that Christ has already established peace with God for us by His death on the cross as our Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. It is an evidence that God has already imputed Christ’s righteousness to us. And from Christ (Who is our life) comes spiritual life, faith, repentance, and perseverance as the fruit of His righteousness imputed to us. But does not James, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, state **“that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only”** (***James 2:24***)? Did James not (as written in ***James 2:21***) and in contradiction to Paul, use Abraham as an example of how a man is justified by his works? The answer is **“NO.”** Consider –

Part 2 – How are Sinners “Justified by Works”?

If we are justified by Christ’s righteousness imputed exclusively without our works, then do we as believers have no works at all, or are we not to encourage works of obedience to God? Why does James write that Abraham was **“justified by works”**?

James 2 – (21) Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? (22) Seest thou how faith

wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? (23) And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. (24) Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

The Apostle Paul wrote the following –

Romans 4 – (1) What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? (2) For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. (3) For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. (4) Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. (5) But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

Were James and Paul of two different denominations of Christianity? Did they differ as to how God justifies sinners? NO! James and Paul were writing of two different matters. Paul's subject was HOW A SINNER IS JUSTIFIED BEFORE GOD. James's subject was HOW A BELIEVER'S CLAIM AND TESTIMONY OF FAITH IN CHRIST WAS JUSTIFIED (vindicated, proved genuine) BEFORE MEN. The context of each passage proves this, and there is no contradiction between these two men. Consider the following comparison and contrast:

PAUL SPEAKS OF THE JUSTIFICATION OF SINNERS BEFORE GOD – **“For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; BUT NOT BEFORE GOD” (Romans 4:2).**

JAMES SPEAKS OF THE JUSTIFICATION OF OUR FAITH BEFORE MEN – **“Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: SHEW ME THY FAITH without thy works, and I will SHEW THEE MY FAITH by my works” (James 2:18).**

PAUL DENIED OUR WORKS AS A CAUSE OR GROUND OF JUSTIFICATION BEFORE GOD – ***“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith WITHOUT THE DEEDS OF THE LAW” (Romans 3:28).***

JAMES AFFIRMS GOOD WORKS AS THE FRUIT OF GOD’S POWER AND GRACE AND THE EVIDENCE THAT A PERSON’S CLAIM OF FAITH IS GENUINE AND SINCERE RATHER THAN A DEAD, EMPTY CLAIM – ***“But wilt thou know, O vain man, that FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD?” (James 2:20).***

PAUL WARNED THOSE WHO SOUGHT RIGHTEOUSNESS AND ACCEPTANCE WITH GOD BY THEIR WORKS THAT THEY COULD NOT ACHIEVE THEIR GOAL – ***“Therefore BY THE DEEDS OF THE LAW THERE SHALL NO FLESH BE JUSTIFIED IN HIS SIGHT: for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20).***

JAMES WARNED THOSE WHO CLAIMED TO HAVE FAITH BUT WHO HAD NO REGARD FOR GOOD WORKS AND OBEDIENCE TO CHRIST – ***“Even so FAITH, IF IT HATH NOT WORKS, is dead, being alone” (James 2:17).***

The proof of this is found in the following statement – ***“Was not Abraham our father justified by works, WHEN HE HAD OFFERED ISAAC HIS SON UPON THE ALTAR? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?” (James 2:21-22).*** ***“By works was faith made perfect”*** does not mean that when we add works to our faith that this brings such a moral quality to our faith that we can then say it is ***“perfect”*** in the way of righteousness or moral perfection. It means that faith reaches its appointed goal in a life of obedience that glorifies God and honors the Lord Jesus Christ in the power of His grace and righteousness imputed to us. The Bible is clear that when Abraham offered Isaac, he had long before been justified before God based on Christ’s righteousness imputed to him –

Romans 4 – (9) Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned

to Abraham for righteousness. (10) How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. (11) And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:

Two things are made clear by these verses: (1) Abraham was justified before God before he was circumcised, and (2) Abraham was justified before God, not by his works, but by the merits of the work of Christ – His righteousness imputed. James states that Abraham’s claim of faith in Christ was proven (vindicated) to be genuine by the fact that he obeyed God’s commandment to sacrifice Isaac. The issue with James was not how Abraham was justified before God. The issue with James was this – Did Abraham really and truly believe God as he claimed? So, the context proves that sinners are not justified before God by their believing plus their works. They are justified before God based solely upon the imputed righteousness of Christ. This justification before God is evidenced by God-given faith in Christ. This God-given faith is proven to be genuine by the evidence of their works as motivated by grace, love, and gratitude. If this is so, then what did the psalmist and the Apostle John mean when, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they wrote that those who are born of God ***“doeth righteousness” (Psalm 106:3; 1 John 2:29; 3:7)?***

Part 3 – How Can It Be Said That Sinners “Doeth Righteousness”?

Psalm 106 – (3) Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that DOETH RIGHTEOUSNESS at all times.

1 John 2 – (29) If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one that DOETH RIGHTEOUSNESS is born of Him.

1 John 3 – (7) Little children, let no man deceive you: he that DOETH RIGHTEOUSNESS is righteous, even as He is righteous.

One evidence of being born again by the Holy Spirit is the DOING OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. Many believe this refers to a believer's efforts to obey God, fight sin, and strive to be conformed to Christ in character and conduct. The problem with this is that if we stay with the Biblical view of true righteousness, we have to conclude that none of a believer's efforts to obey God, fight sin, and strive to be conformed to Christ measure up to the perfect righteousness of the law. This can only be fulfilled by and found in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord our Righteousness. Others claim that this is the "actions of a new righteous nature." I will deal with this false claim more in Chapter Nine. But, for now, suffice it to say, that even the best efforts of true believers to do acts or works of righteousness still fall short of the perfection of righteousness required by God's law and found only in Christ, the Lord our Righteousness.

What then did the psalmist and the apostle mean by DOING righteousness? The context of these passages gives us the true meaning. The psalmist was clearly speaking of a sinful person who saw his need of God's mercy and of God's power to work judgment –

Psalm 106 – (1) Praise ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever. (2) Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD? who can shew forth all His praise? (3) Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that DOETH RIGHTEOUSNESS at all times.

To "***keep judgment***" can sometimes refer to just and honest judges who try to do right when they administer civil justice. But here it is speaking of a sinner seeking mercy and judgment from God. This can only come to sinners by God's grace through the Lord Jesus Christ. To "***keep judgment***" is to believe the Gospel wherein God is revealed as both a just God and a Savior. "***Doeth righteousness at all times***" is to embrace and cling to Christ

continually as the Lord our Righteousness. It is to seek and find the salvation that honors God's mercy and justice at all times in Christ –

Psalm 106 – (4) Remember me, O LORD, with the favour that Thou bearest unto Thy people: O visit me with Thy salvation;

In **1 John** the Apostle John speaks of those who claimed to be Christians but who had apostatized (fallen away completely) from the faith –

1 John 2 – (18) Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. (19) They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

John states that those who had apostatized from the faith had never truly been born again by the Spirit and never truly believed in Christ unto righteousness and salvation. By their falling away, they merely revealed what they had always been – false professors of truth. John states that if they had truly been saved (born again by the Spirit) they would never have completely forsaken Christ, left the Gospel, and separated from God's people. John then identifies true believers –

1 John 2 – (20) But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. (21) I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. (22) Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. (23) Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also. (24) Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father. (25) And this is the promise

that He hath promised us, even eternal life. (26) These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. (27) But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him. (28) And now, little children, abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. (29) If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one that DOETH RIGHTEOUSNESS is born of Him.

John clearly applies the term ***“antichrist”*** to those who had apostatized. They had denied that Jesus is the Christ, and they did not abide in Christ or the doctrine of Christ. True believers are those who have an ***“unction”*** (anointing) from Christ by the Holy Spirit whereby He has implanted the Word of truth (the Gospel) within their hearts so that they cannot (and will not) totally forsake and deny Christ. By the grace and power of God, they will persevere in the faith – ***“abide in Him.”*** They are those ***“who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:5).*** They are the true sheep of whom Christ (the Shepherd) said, ***“And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father’s hand” (John 10:28-29).***

They have been truly born of God, and the main evidence of their new birth is that they ***“doeth righteousness.”*** The doing of righteousness here does not describe their works and efforts to be conformed to Christ in their character and conduct. It describes their continual abiding (perseverance) in Christ Who is their righteousness. Doing righteousness then is walking by faith in (and clinging to) Christ for all righteousness. It is admitting that we have no righteousness except Christ’s righteousness imputed and that in Him we will not be ashamed at His coming. This is further proven by the statement the Holy Spirit inspired John to write in ***1 John 3 –***

1 John 3 – (3) And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as HE is pure.

“This hope” is the certain expectation of salvation (with all blessings and benefits, including justification before God), conditioned on and fulfilled by Christ as the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His people. **“This hope”** is permanently implanted within the hearts of God’s people by the Holy Spirit, and it purifies the sinner saved by grace, NOT by making him righteous (sinlessly perfect) within himself, and NOT by enabling him to work righteousness by his efforts or by some activity of a so-called “new sinless nature.” It purifies the sinner saved by grace by causing him to see all purity, all holiness, all righteousness in Christ as the Lord our Righteousness. This is the same as the heart purified by faith (**Acts 15:9**) and the **“washing of water by the Word” (Ephesians 5:26)**. It is the same as having our hearts **“sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water” (Hebrews 10:22)**, which is the blood of Christ (His righteousness imputed), cleansing us from all sin and justifying us before God.

John wrote, **“And ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins; and IN HIM IS NO SIN” (1 John 3:5)**. Christ took away the sins of His people by dying for them upon the cross. He paid their sin-debt in full and established righteousness for them. The result is this – As we stand IN CHRIST, even as sinners saved by grace, there is no sin charged (imputed) to us. God has justified us, and we cannot be condemned for sin. God holds no record of our sins against us in His court of justice.

Therefore, **“WHOSOEVER ABIDETH IN HIM SINNETH NOT: whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither known Him” (1 John 3:6)**. In what sense can believers claim that we do not sin? It is not in the sense of our works and efforts to obey God. We will see more of this when we study the Apostle Paul’s testimony in **Romans 7:14-25**. I will deal with this passage more in Chapter Nine. The Apostle John has also made this clear –

1 John 1 – (7) But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth

us from all sin. (8) If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (9) If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (10) If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

1 John 2 – (1) My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: (2) And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

Even after our new birth in Christ by the Holy Spirit, while living in the world, we still have the remaining presence, influence, contaminations, and corruptions of sin within us (the flesh). We still fall short of righteousness in ourselves, and we need the continual intercession of Christ pleading the merits of His righteousness for His people (God's elect) all over this world. The only sinless perfection that a true believer can claim is that which he has IN CHRIST, based on Christ's righteousness imputed. As long as we stand IN CHRIST, we are counted righteous before God, and no sin is charged to us. All who have been born again by the Holy Spirit will stand IN CHRIST forever. They will not leave Him. They are the ones who ***"doeth righteousness."*** Those who expose themselves as false professors by leaving and forsaking Christ and the Gospel are those who ***"committeth sin"*** –

1 John 3 – (7) Little children, let no man deceive you: he that DOETH RIGHTEOUSNESS is righteous, even as He is righteous.

How can anyone rightfully claim that he is righteous as Christ is righteous? The only way that we, sinners saved by grace, can say this based on Scriptural testimony is as we stand in Christ, having His righteousness imputed to us. Doing righteousness, then, is clinging to Christ as our one and only righteousness before God.

1 John 3 – (8) He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was

manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. (9) Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; FOR HIS SEED REMAINETH IN HIM: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

“Committeth sin” describes one who has forsaken Christ and is totally without a righteousness that answers the demands of God’s law and justice. We know this because this is connected with the work of the devil ***“from the beginning”*** when he, through Eve, enticed Adam to sin and bring the whole human race into sin and death. Sin is the ground of condemnation for those to whom sin is imputed. This state of condemnation is evidenced by a continual rejection of Christ and the Gospel of God’s grace in Him. Christ ***“destroyed the works of the devil”*** for His people when He died on the cross. Hereby He removed the ground of condemnation from them and established righteousness for them. Christ’s righteousness is the ground of their justification and the source and power of their new birth and new life. All who are ***“born of God”*** do not ***“commit sin”*** only in the sense that they do not reject and forsake Christ Who is their only salvation from sin and their only righteousness before God. ***“For HIS seed”*** – These are the children (the offspring) of God in Christ – ***“remaineth in Him”*** – They stay with Christ, cling to Him, and cannot leave Him. Why? It is because they are born of God.

I am aware that the language of these passages of Scripture are difficult, but it takes the Spirit of God to reveal their true meaning to us. And when the Holy Spirit reveals the truth to us, He shows us that we must view such passages in the light of the reality of our sinfulness (even as born-again people), and the glory of God in Christ Who is our only righteousness before God. God the Holy Spirit will never give us reason to look within ourselves and boast of righteousness within, not even what God gives us in the new birth and what He enables us to do. He will always bring us to look unto Christ as the Author and Finisher of our faith – the Lord our Righteousness. We glory in Him and His finished work to put away our sins and make us righteous before God.

6 Justified Freely by God's Grace

An Exposition of *Romans 3:21-31*

As I have emphasized from the beginning, this book is intended to be a BIBLICAL study of ***“the righteousness of God”*** as revealed in the Gospel which is described in *Romans 1:16* as ***“the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.”*** This chapter, and the next two chapters, are expositional studies of three passages of Scripture that show some of the most precise Biblical language that defines this Gospel truth. These passages are just a few of the many that support the theme of this book in defining ***“the righteousness of God”*** as the imputed righteousness of Christ. As time and space will not allow for a complete exposition of all the passages we could study, I tried to choose a few of the most precise and clear verses of God's Word. We will begin with what the Apostle Paul wrote by inspiration of the Holy Spirit in *Romans 3:21-26*.

Romans 3 – (21) But now THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; (22) Even THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: (23) For all have

sinned, and come short of the glory of God; (24) Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: (25) Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; (26) To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

As the Holy Spirit defines the righteousness of God for us in the verses above, consider the context and Paul's line of reasoning up to this point. Keep in mind that Paul's reasoning here is by Divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit as ***"all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:15)***, and it is in line with God's command for sinners to ***"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18)***. At the beginning of the *Epistle to the Romans*, Paul began his presentation of the Gospel message –

Romans 1 – (1) Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God, (2) (Which He had promised afore by His prophets in the Holy Scriptures,) (3) Concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; (4) And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead:

The first thing we find in our search for Gospel truth is that the TRUE Gospel is ***"THE GOSPEL OF GOD."*** It is not the religion or philosophy of man. The Bible tells us that God is HOLY. This means God is unique and separate from all others. There is no one or nothing which compares with God. He alone is the sovereign Creator and Governor of this world. This being the case, it stands to reason that HIS Gospel must be unique and different from everything that man has ever imagined or invented as far as religion is

concerned. The Gospel of God is unique, separate, and distinct from all religions of man.

The next great truth that we learn is this – **The true Gospel concerns the glorious Person and finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ Who is God's Son.** The Gospel is “good news” founded upon and established by this glorious, unique Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is God the eternal Son, the second Person of the Holy Trinity. As God the Father is unique and separate from all others, God the Son is also unique and separate from all others. Who is Jesus Christ? He is **“GOD WITH US” (Matthew 1:23)**, the Son of God incarnate, i.e. the eternal Word of God **“made flesh”** to dwell among us (**John 1:14**). The **“righteousness”** we need for salvation is the righteousness **“of God”** because it was accomplished by the death of Christ Who is Himself **“God with us,”** and **“God manifest in the flesh.”** This is what Paul meant by the fact that Jesus Christ **“was made of the seed of David according to the flesh.”** The **“seed”** (offspring) **of David** reveals the fact that the holy humanity of Christ was conceived and born in the lineage of King David and the Jewish tribe of Judah. So, the Lord Jesus Christ is both God and man without sin, and the Scriptures identify and distinguish Him as such –

Isaiah 7 – (14) Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. (cf. Matthew 1:21,23)

Isaiah 9 – (6) For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

John 1 – (14) And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

1 Timothy 3 – (16) And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

The Gospel also concerns the finished, accomplished, and successful work of Christ (redemption by His blood – His death) for sinners. It took one who is both God and man to fulfill all that God required for the salvation of His elect. To pay the sin-debt for His people, and to establish righteousness by which God could justify them, the Lord Jesus Christ had to die for their sins because death is the wages of sin. God cannot die, but this glorious Person Who is God did die under the wrath of God for the sins of His people. This death can only be attributed to His human nature (body), but it was an act of His entire Person as God in human flesh. Man (not even a perfect man) can create and give life to other men, but this glorious Person Who is fully man without sin did create and does give life to others. This creation and giving of life can only be attributed to His deity, but it was (and is) an act of His entire person as God in human flesh.

These are all amazing truths that we cannot fully comprehend and certainly cannot explain, but they are true. Together, in the Person of Christ, they make the fulfillment of the ***“righteousness of God”*** an accomplished fact that secures and demands the salvation of all sinners for whom Christ lived, died, and arose from the dead. This is stated in ***Romans 1:4 – “And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”*** This reveals how that the resurrection of Christ is the visible declaration and proof of the righteousness of God established through His obedience unto death – justice satisfied for God’s people.

To believe in the resurrection of Christ is much more than simply believing in life from the dead. His resurrection is an historical fact. But what is more important for us as sinners who need salvation by grace according to God’s justice, His resurrection was (and is) proof that in His obedience unto death, Christ established the only righteousness by which God is just to justify and save His people. Not only does God justify His people based on Christ’s

righteousness imputed, He also sanctifies them by the Holy Spirit in the new birth because Christ's righteousness imputed to them demands that spiritual and eternal life be given to them. The resurrection life of Christ (spiritual life) that He gives to His people in the new birth is based on the righteousness He established for His people by His death on the cross –

Romans 5 – (21) That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 8 – (10) And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

Romans 10 – (9) That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. (10) For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

So, as the ***“righteousness of God,”*** which is Christ's righteousness imputed to His people, is the GROUND of justification for the people of God, it is also the SOURCE and POWER of spiritual life and faith given to God's people –

Romans 1 – (5) By Whom [Christ] we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for His name: (6) Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ:

It is in this context that the Apostle Paul wrote –

Romans 1 – (16) For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. (17) For therein IS THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

From **Romans 1:18** to **Romans 3:20** Paul proves why we as sinners need the **“righteousness of God”** to be saved and justified before God. Paul takes the role of a skilled prosecutor presenting evidence against all mankind as sinners who fell in Adam into sin and death and who deserve nothing but God’s just wrath and condemnation for our sins. But Paul is not doing this self-righteously. He is not simply pointing his finger at everyone else. He includes himself as being a sinner worthy in himself of God’s judgment and wrath. He makes a very profound statement in **Romans 1:18** that sets the tone for this indictment and puts the issue of sin in its proper light –

Romans 1 – (18) For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, WHO HOLD THE TRUTH IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS;

First, what exactly is the **“wrath of God”**? The **“wrath of God”** is His just punishment of all sinners to whom sin is imputed. This is why it is such a magnificent blessing of God’s grace to be one to whom God does not impute sin – **“Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile” (Psalm 32:2)**. The true nature and full degree of God’s wrath against sin where it is imputed can only be seen in the suffering unto death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross for the sins of His people imputed to Him. Based on their sins imputed to Him, God’s justice demanded His death. By His death on the cross as Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His people, Christ satisfied God’s justice and turned back God’s wrath from them. He is the **“propitiation”** for His people (**Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10**). Without Christ’s blood to cleanse us from sin and without His righteousness imputed to justify us before God, there is nothing for us but God’s wrath.

To **“hold the truth in unrighteousness”** is the essence of unbelief. By nature, fallen and sinful man will reject and pervert God’s truth and hold it to be unjust, unfair, and unrighteous. The truth all men by nature reject is the truth about God in His holiness and justice, the truth about our own sinfulness and depravity, and the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ and how

God saves sinners by His grace based on the righteousness of Christ imputed. By nature man will take what he naturally knows of God from creation and his own conscience and twist it into a lie, even idolatry (**Romans 1:19-23**). Paul includes the gross immorality of those who appear unrighteous to men (**Romans 1:24-32**), but he then brings the same indictment against the religious Jews and all who appear to be righteous in the eyes of men (**Romans 2:1-16**). Paul shows here that the religious Jews who condemned the Gentiles were just as lost and no closer to righteousness before God than the lost Gentiles (**Romans 2:17—3:8**). Then Paul reaches the grand conclusion concerning fallen sinful mankind, both Jew and Gentile –

Romans 3 – (9) What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that THEY ARE ALL UNDER SIN; (10) As it is written, THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NO, NOT ONE: (11) There is NONE THAT UNDERSTANDETH, there is NONE THAT SEEKETH AFTER GOD. (12) They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; THERE IS NONE THAT DOETH GOOD, NO, NOT ONE.

Keep in mind that all righteousness and goodness is to be measured, not by man's sinful, self-righteous, and low standard, but by God's perfect standard of righteousness found only in the Lord Jesus Christ. There are basically three things we learn about sinful depraved mankind here leading up to the definition of the righteousness of God found in **Romans 3:21-26**.

(1) "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NO, NOT ONE" (ROMANS 3:10) – BY NATURE, AS FALLEN IN ADAM AND BORN SPIRITUALLY DEAD, MAN HAS NO RIGHTEOUSNESS BY WHICH TO BE JUSTIFIED BEFORE GOD.

This includes the most immoral of men and the most religious, sincere, and dedicated of men. It includes both Jew and Gentile – ***"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5:12).*** We all fell

into sin and death through Adam's transgression. As a result of our fall in Adam, we are born SPIRITUALLY dead in trespasses and sins. This spiritual death is the absence of spiritual life as will be shown in Point 3.

(2) “THEREFORE BY THE DEEDS OF THE LAW THERE SHALL NO FLESH BE JUSTIFIED IN HIS SIGHT: FOR BY THE LAW IS THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN” (ROMANS 3:20) – SINFUL MAN CANNOT MAKE HIMSELF RIGHTEOUS BEFORE GOD THROUGH HIS BEST EFFORTS IN RELIGION OR MORALITY.

There is no argument that we should all try diligently and zealously to be the best people we can be in all areas of obedience, kindness, charity, and responsibility. But we need to realize that none of our efforts to be “good” and righteous will make us so or justify us in God's sight –

Titus 3 – (4) But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, (5) NOT BY WORKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH WE HAVE DONE, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; (6) Which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; (7) That being JUSTIFIED BY HIS GRACE, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Sinful, fallen man can attain great heights of religion and morality as men see and judge these things, but he cannot attain righteousness or morality by his works and efforts to obey God as God sees and judges these matters –

Romans 9 – (31) But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. (32) Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone;

(3) “THERE IS NONE THAT UNDERSTANDETH, THERE IS NONE THAT SEEKETH AFTER GOD. THEY ARE ALL GONE OUT OF THE WAY, THEY ARE

TOGETHER BECOME UNPROFITABLE; THERE IS NONE THAT DOETH GOOD, NO, NOT ONE" (ROMANS 3:11-12) – FALLEN, SINFUL MAN NEITHER KNOWS NOR DESIRES GOD'S WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS BY GRACE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.

The true way of salvation by God's grace through the righteousness of another (the Lord Jesus Christ) imputed is something that is totally foreign to the mind of natural man –

1 Corinthians 2 – (9) But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. (10) But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. (11) For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.

When the light of this Gospel truth concerning the glorious Person and finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ shines on the natural man, if left to himself, he will not believe and receive it. It goes against our natural pride and self-righteous view of ourselves –

1 Corinthians 2 – (14) But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

The Gospel truth of salvation totally by God's grace is offensive to the natural man because it leaves him no room to glory (boast) in himself, and it exposes what he naturally judges as righteous deeds to be evil. It also exposes all false refuges of religion and reveals that there is no other way except Christ crucified and risen from the dead –

John 3 – (19) And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. (20) For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

This is where we see the real problem we have as sinners. It is that God is holy and righteous, and we are not holy and righteous at all. We are sinful and depraved. So, how can a sinful, depraved, and ungodly person (such as we all are by nature) be saved by God Who is holy and righteous? How can such sinful people have a right relationship with such a holy and righteous God and expect anything from Him other than judgment, wrath, and eternal damnation? The sad thing is that most religious people (including most who call themselves “Christians”) have never confronted these questions and do not really concern themselves with them. They go through life (even in religion) simply assuming that God is some sort of heavenly grandfather who loves everybody (even though the Bible says otherwise) and who exists for their convenience. They believe God has such infinite love and mercy that He can simply and unilaterally forgive everybody of their sins, and He does not need anything like justice to save and justify sinful people. They reason that he is God, and he can do anything he wants to do. So he can just wave his hands and say, “You are all redeemed, forgiven, and saved, if you will just accept what I have provided for you.” I actually heard a man who claims to be a Gospel preacher say in a message, “God did not have to send Christ to die on the cross. If He had wanted to do so, He could have just spoken a word and said, ‘You are all redeemed, forgiven, and saved.’ But God chose to do it this way – by sending His Son to die.” We need to see that this notion as described above and as stated by this man is heresy.

First of all, the reason God CANNOT simply “wave His hand and say, ‘You are all saved and forgiven,’” is because He is a JUST God Who must punish sin. It is true that God is ***“merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.”*** But it is also true that God ***“will by no means clear the guilty” (Exodus 34:6-7).*** God must be just when He justifies

sinners. This is where the need for the ***“righteousness of God”*** revealed in the Gospel is found. As we come to the text, we see that God the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to define it without confusion as righteousness accomplished by God without our works of law –

ROMANS 3 – (21) BUT NOW THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD WITHOUT THE LAW IS MANIFESTED, BEING WITNESSED BY THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS;

“But NOW” refers to the actual obedience unto death of the Lord Jesus Christ in time to do His work as Surety and Substitute of His people by redeeming them from their sins. This is the great work of the Messiah to establish the ***“righteousness of God”*** by which God justifies the ungodly and of which ***“the law and the prophets”*** bore witness. What God had purposed before the creation of the world, and what God had promised throughout the Old Testament (by the law and the prophets) was fulfilled in time by the Lord Jesus Christ. The ground upon which God justified His elect in the Old Testament was established in time by Christ their Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. God justified them by His righteousness and gave them life even before Christ actually came and established righteousness in time. How could God do this? He did it by promise based upon the certain assurance that Christ WOULD COME and fulfill in time all righteousness for His people – ***“For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God by us” (2 Corinthians 1:20)***. This promise of grace was revealed to all of God’s people in the Old Testament, and it was made known publicly in time when Christ accomplished what Daniel prophesied about five hundred years before –

Daniel 9 – (24) Seventy weeks are determined upon Thy people and upon Thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.

“The righteousness of God without the law” – Some believe this means that the righteousness of God has nothing to do with the law of God. This is not true. Christ Himself stated that He had come into the world to fulfill the law (***Matthew 5:17-19***). Later in ***Romans 10:4***, it is written that ***“Christ is the end [finishing, perfection, completion] of the law to every one that believeth.”*** The phrase ***“without the law”*** follows the revelation that sinful man cannot be justified by his own deeds under the law (***Romans 3:19-20***). This is truly the righteousness of God without any consideration of or contribution from the works of the law by sinful people. If we are true believers, we know that our works are totally excluded from the righteousness which justifies us before God. Paul shows that this righteousness of God is totally and exclusively the work of Christ under the law and on the cross when He paid the sin-debt of His people and satisfied God’s justice as their Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. In accomplishing this work as God in sinless human flesh and through His death, Christ established righteousness for His people and insured their salvation along with all the blessings of God’s grace –

ROMANS 3 – (22) EVEN THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD WHICH IS BY FAITH OF JESUS CHRIST UNTO ALL AND UPON ALL THEM THAT BELIEVE: FOR THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE: (23) FOR ALL HAVE SINNED, AND COME SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD; (24) BEING JUSTIFIED FREELY BY HIS GRACE THROUGH THE REDEMPTION THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS:

As stated before, in creating this righteousness through the Lord Jesus Christ, God did not ignore or break the law – ***“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Romans 10:4; cf. Matthew 5:17-20)***. The word ***“end”*** here describes the completion and perfection of Christ’s work as Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His people by satisfying God’s justice for them in His obedience unto death. It is the FINISHED and PERFECT work of Christ as the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of God’s chosen people (***John 19:30; Hebrews 10:14***).

“Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ” – Some argue that this should be translated as “faith IN Jesus Christ” rather than ***“faith OF Jesus Christ.”*** But I believe the King James translators understood rightly that the emphasis here in defining the righteousness of God is not on our faith IN Christ but HIS faithfulness to do everything necessary to fulfill all righteousness for the salvation of His people. This does not deny, ignore, or even diminish the necessity of God’s elect having faith IN Jesus Christ and believing in Him. There is no salvation apart from the new birth which includes faith IN Christ. There is no salvation apart from believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. But the new birth and our faith IN Christ is not the righteousness of God by which sinners are justified. The subject here is how Christ was manifested in time to fulfill the righteousness of God for His people exclusively by HIS work for them as their Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. The righteousness of God by which sinners are justified is exclusively the merit of Christ’s work on the cross for their redemption. The righteousness of God is not anything done by men or anything the Spirit does in men in their new birth. Christ’s work FOR His people is the righteousness of God and the ground of their salvation. Christ’s work IN His people by the Holy Spirit in the new birth is the fruit of His righteous work on the cross.

“Unto all and upon all them that believe” – Because of the use of the word ***“all,”*** many use this phrase to support the heretical doctrine of “universal redemption,” but that is NOT what this teaches. Some use it to promote other heresies, such as those who claim that it is our believing that makes us righteous because God is so loving and gracious that He will accept something less than perfect righteousness for our salvation. This too is false. The fact that God sent His only-begotten Son to die on the cross for His elect proves that He will accept nothing less than perfect righteousness to save and to justify His people. Even the faith that God gives to His people, by which they believe in and receive Christ, is not equal to perfect righteousness. Faith believes in and receives Christ as our only righteousness before God.

Some may argue that this righteousness becomes ours by faith – the gift of God which brings His people to believe in and receive the Lord Jesus Christ.

I have dealt with the issue of the righteousness of God and the role of faith in the previous chapter where I showed how that Christ's righteousness is not imputed to sinners BECAUSE OF (or as the result of) their believing in Him. Also, faith is no part of the righteousness of God by which sinners are justified in His sight. To say otherwise is to make faith a work, and this cannot be. Where God in sovereign grace has imputed the righteousness of Christ to a sinner, He will also give that sinner faith to believe in and receive Christ.

The fact is that the phrase ***"unto all and upon all them that believe"*** would be better translated simply ***"unto all that believe."*** The words ***"upon all"*** as found in the AKJV are not in any of the original manuscripts. The King James translators added these words. But in any event, these words have to be interpreted within the context. This shows that if the righteousness of God has been imputed to a person, this is evidenced by their believing in Christ. Their believing in Christ is the fruit of the righteousness that He alone worked out and which God has imputed to them. One may ask, "Do I have Christ's righteousness imputed to me?" The only way I can have assurance of this is if I have been born again by the Holy Spirit and brought to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ – ***"And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness" (Romans 8:10)***. Again, the Gospel is ***"the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Romans 1:16)***. Again, ***"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Romans 10:4)***. A person who lives and dies in unbelief has never been justified before God. He has never had Christ's righteousness imputed to him and was never redeemed by the blood of Christ. He also has never been born again by the Holy Spirit – ***"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36)***.

Christ's death on the cross for His people, whom the Father chose and gave to Him before the foundation of the world (***John 6:37-40; 17:1-4; 2 Timothy 1:8-10***), guarantees and secures their complete salvation, including their new birth and their faith in Christ. His death satisfied God's justice for them, and they cannot be charged with or condemned for their sin(s) (***Romans 8:1,31-39***). Many people quote ***John 3:16*** as an argument against

this – ***“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*** But this verse teaches neither the universal love of God to all without exception (***cf. Psalm 5:5; Romans 9:13***) nor that Christ died for all without exception thus making their salvation conditioned upon their believing. ***John 3:16*** simply teaches that God loved those who are brought by His power and grace to be believers in Christ, and they shall not perish. So, this righteousness comes from God, and it is for believers only, not for all without exception.

“For there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” – All of us without exception fell in Adam and were born spiritually dead. We are sinners who come short of the righteousness God requires (***Romans 3:9-12***). We all have sinned, and all of us by nature deserve and have earned condemnation and death. This includes God’s elect of whom the Bible states ***“were by nature the children of wrath, even as others” (Ephesian 2:3)***. We need to understand that the only way God’s elect have ever been under God’s wrath is as they stood LEGALLY in Christ, their Surety and Substitute, when He went under the punishment of God’s wrath for them. This means that God’s elect have never PERSONALLY been under God’s wrath, but only in Christ, their Representative. They have never PERSONALLY suffered the wrath of God, but they have suffered God’s wrath in and by Christ, their Substitute and Redeemer (***Romans 6:3-7***). This is the judgment of which God the Holy Spirit convicts them by showing them that they were all judged for their sins in Christ Who died to pay for their sins (***John 16:11***) God’s elect have always been God’s chosen ***“vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory” (Romans 9:23)*** in Christ. However, as far as their natural state in this world as fallen and spiritually dead sinners, they are by nature no different than the ***“children of wrath.”*** When it comes to salvation and a right relationship with God, there is no difference among sinful people. But, as we will see in the next phrase, ***“all”*** here is speaking specifically of God’s elect – ALL whom God chose, gave to Christ, and whom He ***“justified freely by His grace.”***

Sin is defined here as coming ***“short of the glory of God.”*** This means to miss the mark, and the mark is the righteousness of God revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ. This mark is perfect satisfaction to God’s law and justice. So if one is a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, he still has nothing of which to boast in himself. He cannot boast in his works before or after conversion because in himself he still falls short of the mark of perfection. He must say with the apostle – ***“But God forbid that I should glory [boast, have confidence], save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ [the righteousness of God], by Whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 6:14).*** He cannot even boast in his faith (believing) as if it came from a spark of goodness within himself or an act of his own will – ***“For by grace are ye saved through faith; AND THAT NOT OF YOURSELVES: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8-10).***

“Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” – ***“Being justified”*** connects with the ***“all”*** who ***“have sinned,”*** showing that this is describing SINNERS SAVED BY THE GRACE OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS. To be saved is to be ***“justified”*** before God (***cf. Romans 8:28-30***). To be ***“justified”*** before God means to be forgiven of all sins, declared by God Himself to be not guilty (not charged with the debt of sin), AND declared to be righteous in God’s sight. To be ***“justified FREELY”*** means to be justified ***“without a cause,”*** i.e. for no reason or cause within us. However, there was (and is) a just ground and cause for God to justify His people, and this is found only in the ***“redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”*** As I have shown before, this enables God to be both a just God and a Savior. This also connects the purpose, decree, and promise of God in justifying His elect, both in the Old and the New Testament, with the death of Jesus Christ. No sinner is justified merely by God decreeing it so. God’s decree always had in focus the death of Christ (His righteousness imputed) as the ground of justification in His sight. It was decreed by God that the justification of His elect would be

“by His grace THROUGH THE REDEMPTION THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS.” This is the main truth in the Gospel wherein the righteousness of God is revealed.

We need to understand the distinction between JUSTIFICATION and REDEMPTION. As stated many times in this book, justification is God’s legal declaration that His people are not guilty but righteous in His sight based on a just ground. Redemption is the actual satisfaction of the justice of the law by Christ paying the debt of our sins. This is the just ground upon which God justifies His people. As the God-appointed Surety, Christ was made accountable for the sin-debt of His people, and they were counted righteous in Him based upon the redemption price being paid in time by His obedience unto death.

ROMANS 3 – (25) WHOM GOD HATH SET FORTH TO BE A PROPITIATION THROUGH FAITH IN HIS BLOOD, TO DECLARE HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS THAT ARE PAST, THROUGH THE FORBEARANCE OF GOD; (26) TO DECLARE, I SAY, AT THIS TIME HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS: THAT HE MIGHT BE JUST, AND THE JUSTIFIER OF HIM WHICH BELIEVETH IN JESUS.

“Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation” – As we have seen before, when we consider the truth revealed in ***Proverbs 17:15*** – ***“He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD,”*** we need to ask when men do this, WHY is this an ***“abomination to the LORD”***? It is because when men in a court of law justify the wicked and condemn the just, it is a perversion of justice that dishonors God and His law. So then, we must ask again, how can God justify sinners (the ungodly) and not be an abomination to Himself? The answer is found in the Gospel of God wherein the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed as the very righteousness of God. In and by the Lord Jesus Christ, God can justify sinners in a way that honors His justice and glorifies Himself. This is a revelation of God’s glory that is totally foreign and a mystery to the natural man (***1 Corinthians 2:6-8***). It is a message of amazing grace that God alone could accomplish for His people and reveal by His grace (***1 Corinthians 2:9-13***).

We are told in the Bible that before the world was created, the Lord Jesus Christ was already appointed by the Father to be Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of God's chosen people. A surety is one who takes legal responsibility for the debts of another. A substitute is one who stands in the place of another and takes his punishment. A redeemer is one who actually pays the debt of another. In other words, the surety satisfies the debt. As Christ was appointed to be the Surety of His people, He had to come in time, take their place to pay their sin-debt by satisfying God's justice, and redeem them from their sins. This is all the work of God, for ***"it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief: when Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin" (Isaiah 53:10)***. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was by the foreordination and purpose of God (***Acts 2:23; 4:28***). It was no accident or back-up plan. Christ was set forth by God in a very public way so that He actually died, was buried, and arose again the third day, all because He brought in the righteousness of God by which God's people are justified.

The word ***"PROPITIATION"*** means justice satisfied. It shows us how we are to understand the substitutionary death of Christ for His people. Those who claim that God would be unjust to impute righteousness to His people before He actually made them righteous miss this vital Gospel truth. ***"Propitiation"*** shows us that because of the sins of God's elect imputed to Him, Christ died under the wrath of God in such a way as to glorify and magnify the infinite worth of the glory of God. It shows how the substitutionary death of Christ guarantees not only that all for whom He died shall be saved, but also that God would be glorified in this great transaction and not be an abomination to Himself. God justifies the ungodly upon the ground of justice satisfied by Christ. For this reason God is not an abomination to Himself. He is just when He justifies sinners based on the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ imputed to them. As a just judge and because of Christ's death on the cross as Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His people, God is able to do what no human can do – glorify and honor both His justice and His mercy in justifying the ungodly.

The death of Christ was (and is) most certainly a grand display of the unconditional love, grace, and mercy of God towards sinners. But it was (and

is) even more so a grand display of God's justice and truth. God DOES love His people unconditionally as His love is expressed towards them. They are sinners and deserve nothing but God's just wrath against their sins. But there are conditions that must be met in order for God to act towards them in love, grace, and mercy to save them. ALL THE CONDITIONS WERE PLACED UPON CHRIST AS THEIR SURETY, SUBSTITUTE, AND REDEEMER, AND CHRIST FULFILLED ALL CONDITIONS FOR THEM TO INSURE THEIR COMPLETE SALVATION! This is the heart of the Gospel message wherein the righteousness of God is revealed. When preachers present a "gospel" that places the conditions of salvation upon sinners, they are preaching a false gospel that fails to glorify God and exalt Christ. It exalts and elevates the sinner rather than Christ. No sinner could ever meet any condition for salvation that would equal the perfection of righteousness found only in Christ. But Christ was so perfect in Himself, and His mind and motives were so completely consumed with the glory of His Father, that He suffered the full penalty of all the sins of His people imputed to Him. He could not have been made to be a sinner or contaminated with our sins, else this goal could not have been achieved. His death for His people certainly displayed His pure and powerful love for them – ***"having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end*** [finishing the work He was given to do]" (***John 13:1***), but it was more a pure and powerful display of God's glory –

John 17 – (1) These words spake Jesus, and lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee: (2) As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him. (3) And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent. (4) I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do. (5) And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.

Consider the following illustration which may aid in an understanding of this great and glorious truth –

Imagine that a young man commits a capital crime (such as murder). He is later apprehended by the police, arrested, formally charged, and taken to be tried in a court of law. All the evidence is clearly against him, so he is found to be guilty by a jury of his peers. The judge then sentences the young man to die by lethal injection. Now, imagine that when the judge declares this sentence, the young man's father steps forward and begs the judge, "Please, please, let me take my son's place and die for him." We know that if the judge would allow this, justice would not be served. The state and the law would not be magnified or honored. We may admire the father's willingness to die for his son, and this certainly does display the father's great love for his son. But we must realize that the father is not doing this to magnify the worth of the state or the honor of God's law. He is doing this to magnify the worth of his son and how much he loves his son. If the judge were to allow this, the state and the law would be dishonored, and the criminal would go free without justice being served. One may argue, "But if the father were allowed to give his life for the son, this may affect the son so much that he would turn his life around and become a model citizen instead of a criminal." It may or may not change the son. It would not be out of the question for the son to go free and continue in his life of crime. In that case, the father's act of love for his son did no more than release more crime into society. Either way, if the judge were to allow the father to die for the son, justice would not be served. The law would not be honored.

What is shown in the above illustration concerning the father's love for his son is NOT what was going on at the cross when Christ died for His people. Christ did not die on the cross to magnify how much a sinner is worth. He died on the cross to magnify how much God's glory is worth. God's glory is maintained, honored, and manifested in His grace to justify sinners based on

the merits of Christ's obedience unto death, His righteousness imputed. God does all of this through Christ and is NOT an abomination to Himself. His glory and honor are preserved, and His justice is satisfied. And not only this, the justification of sinners by God through Christ ALWAYS leads to the fruit of a changed life in the new birth. This is a spiritual life of faith in Christ, repentance of dead works, and the obedience of grace, gratitude, and love.

How can we who are sinners know that we have been justified by God's grace through the righteousness of God in Christ imputed to us? Just as God **"set forth"** His Son in a very public way to die on the cross for the sins of His elect, God also sets forth Christ in a very public way through the preaching of the Gospel wherein the righteousness of God is revealed **"FROM faith to faith" (Romans 1:17)**. Remember, **"from faith"** refers to the doctrine of Christ in the revelation of God's promise in the Gospel message. **"TO faith"** is the gift of knowledge given to God's people by the Holy Spirit whereby they receive and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is expressed here in the phrase, **"through faith in His blood" (Romans 3:25)**. It means that those who have righteousness imputed to them in justification give evidence of this fact by hearing and believing Christ in the Gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit (*cf. Romans 6:17-18; 10:4-17; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17*).

"Through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness" – As stated, the death of Christ as Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of God's elect is the declaration of God's justice in saving them from their sins. This proves that it is not a believer's faith but the blood of Christ that justifies him. The blood declares **"HIS righteousness,"** which is Christ's work as the propitiation for the sins of His people. God-given faith causes the believer to look outside of himself and lay hold of Christ as the Lord his Righteousness. God-given faith causes him to plead Christ's blood as his only righteousness by which God saves, justifies, and accepts him.

"For the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God" – This refers to the Old Testament saints. Since the Lord Jesus Christ had not yet come to earth, lived, died, and arose from the dead, how could

God NOT justly pour His wrath down upon His people prior to Christ dying for their sins? The answer is God's "**forbearance**" (patient endurance; to suffer or bear with) based upon the promise of future redemption to be accomplished by Christ. It was always God's purpose and plan to save His people by His grace through Christ according to His glory. It was always sure and certain to be accomplished in time because God is faithful to all His promises, and all His promises IN CHRIST are sure and certain (**2 Corinthians 1:20**). The forbearance of God is seen in that even before Christ came in time to accomplish redemption for His people, God had this in view and dealt in forbearance with the Old Testament saints. His righteousness in forbearing with and forgiving them was now clearly manifested in the death of Christ. But even God's forbearance had to be shown upon a just ground. So, the death of Christ in time revealed the righteous ground of God's forbearance with the Old Testament saints. It was in view of the propitiation to be accomplished by Christ. This was the ground upon which He dealt with His people in that day. God viewed this great work of Christ as an already accomplished fact for His people. It was not unjust or unrighteous for God to justify (impute righteousness to) Abraham before Abraham was circumcised, because even in Abraham's day God had in view the redemptive work of Christ for His people. The blood of animal sacrifices could never have accomplished this, but they pictured and pointed to the future blood-shedding of Christ in His obedience unto death. Job expressed this concerning his own salvation by God's grace –

Job 19 – (25) For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: (26) And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: (27) Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.

The promise of God to send Christ into the world was the ground of the assurance that Abraham had of his own justification before God. It was the

promise of Christ coming in the future to establish righteousness by which God justified Abraham –

Genesis 15 – (6) And he [Abraham] believed in the LORD; and He [the LORD] counted it to him for righteousness.

John 8 – (56) Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day: and he saw it, and was glad.

David rejoiced in the certainty of his own salvation by the same Gospel promise –

Psalms 32 – (1) Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. (2) Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. (cf. Romans 4:6-8)

2 Samuel 23 – (5) Although my house be not so with God; yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although He make it not to grow.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel, all prophesied of this Gospel righteousness in Christ as the hope of Israel –

Isaiah 45 – (21) Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the LORD? and there is no God else beside Me; A JUST GOD AND A SAVIOUR; there is none beside Me. (22) Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. (23) I have sworn by Myself, the word is gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. (24) Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: even to Him shall men come; and all that are incensed against Him

shall be ashamed. (25) IN THE LORD SHALL ALL THE SEED OF ISRAEL BE JUSTIFIED, AND SHALL GLORY.

Jeremiah 23 – (5) Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. (6) In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is His name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Daniel 9 – (24) Seventy weeks are determined upon Thy people and upon Thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in EVERLASTING RIGHTEOUSNESS, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.

“To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” – All of this in the redemption of God’s people by the Lord Jesus Christ was a declaration of God’s ***“righteousness”*** (His justice) to justify (forgive, declare not guilty and righteous) His people (sinners saved by grace) while maintaining His justice on the basis of the merits of Christ’s obedience unto death. In this way God is both ***“just, and the Justifier”*** of His people who are identified as those who ***“believeth in Jesus.”*** As stated in ***Romans 10:4, “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth.”*** This is the righteousness of God revealed in the Gospel for the salvation of sinners. This is how God has always identified Himself throughout the Bible, Old and New Testaments.

Recall the words of the prophet Isaiah – ***“In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory” (Isaiah 45:25).*** The ***“seed of Israel”*** to whom Isaiah was referring is God’s elect, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, redeemed by His blood, and born again by the Spirit. They are identified by the faith God gives them to believe and rest in Christ for all righteousness –

Galatians 3 – (26) For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. (27) For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (28) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. (29) And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Consider again what God the Holy Spirit inspired the prophet Jeremiah to write concerning this matter –

Jeremiah 23 – (5) Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. (6) In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is His name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

As Jeremiah identified Christ as ***“THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS,”*** he identified the people of God (the true church, the bride of Christ) by that same name –

Jeremiah 33 – (15) In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. (16) In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith SHE shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

This is a declaration from God that the true church is the bride of Christ, and Christ took upon Himself the full responsibility of her eternal well-being and welfare. He did this by executing justice and righteousness for her as her Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. He did this for the glory of His Father and the love He has for His bride – ***“having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end” (John 13:1),*** i.e. the finishing of the work

of her redemption. Because of His love for her and his work to redeem her, God gives her HIS name because she is righteous IN HIM and BY HIM.

Consider the words of the psalmist in **Psalm 22** which is commonly called the “Psalm of the Cross” because it is a clear prophecy of Christ dying in the place of His people for their sins imputed to Him and His working out righteousness which God has imputed to them –

Psalm 22 – (30) A seed shall serve Him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation. (31) They shall come, and SHALL DECLARE HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS unto a people that shall be born, that He hath done this.

This “seed” describes the true children of God in Christ who testify of “His righteousness” for their whole salvation and their right standing before God. It all reaches back to the original seed of woman who would die for the sins of His people, destroy the work of Satan, and be raised from the dead because of the justification of His people (**Genesis 3:15,21**). He is none other than Jesus Christ the Lord our Righteousness. When God the Holy Spirit reveals Christ to His people in the revelation of the righteousness of God in the Gospel, this leaves them no room for boasting in themselves. They can only boast of Christ crucified and risen from the dead. This is boasting in His righteousness imputed for their whole justification.

“Of him which believeth in Jesus” – I asked before – How can we know whether or not we have been justified by God’s grace based upon Christ’s righteousness imputed to us? In the Bible, questions like this cover a lot of ground pertaining to salvation. For example, we are told in the Bible that God chose His people in Christ for salvation before the foundation of the world. We are told that God justified them by His grace based upon the righteousness that Christ would come in time and establish for them by His obedience unto death on the cross. Christ redeemed them by His blood. How can any of us know that God chose us particularly, that He has justified us (imputed Christ’s righteousness to us), and that Christ redeemed us (died for us) on the cross? The answer is this – All whom God chose before the world

began, all whom He has justified by His grace in Christ, all whom Christ redeemed on Calvary, will be born again by the Holy Spirit (regenerated and converted, given a new heart, a new spirit). And the evidence of all these blessings for any sinner saved by God's grace is that they are brought by God to believe in Jesus for their whole salvation. The Holy Spirit imparts spiritual life from Christ and brings them to faith in Christ and repentance of their sins and dead works. The Apostle Paul gives us a clear description of this glorious and powerful change –

Philippians 3 – (7) But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. (8) Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for Whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, (9) And be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: (10) That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; (11) If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

ROMANS 3 – (27) WHERE IS BOASTING THEN? IT IS EXCLUDED. BY WHAT LAW? OF WORKS? NAY: BUT BY THE LAW OF FAITH. (28) THEREFORE WE CONCLUDE THAT A MAN IS JUSTIFIED BY FAITH WITHOUT THE DEEDS OF THE LAW.

When God the Holy Spirit brings us to faith in Christ and repentance of our sins and dead works, just as the apostle described of himself in ***Philippians 3:7-9***, our ***“boasting”*** (our glorying, our confidence) in ourselves and of our own works ***“is excluded”*** (cast out). A sinner truly saved by God's grace boast in Christ alone –

Galatians 6 – (14) But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

Now, boasting in ourselves is excluded ***“by what law”*** (precept or principle commanded by God)? Is our boasting excluded by any precept or command of God that places salvation (or any part of it) on our works or our cooperation with God? Is it excluded if salvation is conditioned on our works or our decisions? NO! Boasting in ourselves can only be excluded by ***“the law of faith.”*** ***“The law of faith”*** is the Gospel of God’s free and sovereign grace in and by the Lord Jesus Christ. If sinners could attain justification before God by their works, they would have reason to boast in themselves. This would also cancel the need for the righteousness of God. But sinners are ***“justified by faith WITHOUT the deeds of the law,”*** meaning justified by Christ according to God’s promise to send Him to fulfill the law by His obedience unto death without their works under the law. Again, we see that it is by Christ’s righteousness imputed to His people that they are justified before God. We see here also that the Gospel has the force of a law, a commandment from God – ***“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31).*** All who hear the Gospel are commanded by God to believe in Christ and that He alone fulfilled all conditions by His obedience unto death as our Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. It is then that we are brought by God-given faith to stop trying to establish our own righteousness before God and submit to Christ as our only righteousness before God – ***“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Romans 10:4).*** The conclusion to which God the Holy Spirit brings all true believers is –

ROMANS 3 – (28) THEREFORE WE CONCLUDE THAT A MAN IS JUSTIFIED BY FAITH WITHOUT THE DEEDS OF THE LAW.

I have already shown what the term ***“justified by faith”*** means. To be ***“justified by faith”*** is not justified before God based on our believing. It is

equivalent to being justified by God's grace based on the righteousness of Christ imputed, the only ground upon which God forgives and justifies sinners. God's people will be brought in time to receive Christ and His righteousness by God-given faith, but faith's object is always the glorious Person and finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our faith is in Christ, not in our believing. Paul, then, states emphatically that this is the one and only way God justifies all His people, both Jew and Gentile –

ROMANS 3 – (29) IS HE THE GOD OF THE JEWS ONLY? IS HE NOT ALSO OF THE GENTILES? YES, OF THE GENTILES ALSO: (30) SEEING IT IS ONE GOD, WHICH SHALL JUSTIFY THE CIRCUMCISION BY FAITH, AND UNCIRCUMCISION THROUGH FAITH.

Both Jews and Gentiles are accountable to God. There is ***“one God,”*** and He is the one true God of all people. As the law of God condemns both Jews and Gentiles based on their works, the only way that either Jews or Gentiles can be justified before God is by God's grace through the Lord Jesus Christ and based on His righteousness imputed and freely received by God-given faith. This is the only way that any sinner (Jew or Gentile) can stand justified before the law of God and still glorify God and honor the law –

ROMANS 3 – (31) DO WE THEN MAKE VOID THE LAW THROUGH FAITH? GOD FORBID: YEA, WE ESTABLISH THE LAW.

Pleading Christ as our only righteousness before God does not cancel or deny the law of God. It is the only way the law is established and honored in the justification of sinners. As quoted often in this book, ***“Christ is the end*** [finishing, completion, fulfillment, perfection] ***of the law to every one that believeth” (Romans 10:4).*** When sinners seek righteousness by their works of the law, they actually break and dishonor the law because none of their works measure up to the law's requirement of righteousness. Only Christ measured up to perfect righteousness for His people, and He is the

foundation, object, and heart of God-given faith by which sinners honor and establish the law.

These verses clearly set forth Christ in the glory of His Person and in the power of His finished work of redemption. He is the very righteousness of God which is freely imputed to God's people and by Whom they all are given spiritual life and brought to faith in Him. This passage is one of the clearest statements of these glorious doctrines of Christ, but it is only one of many passages that reveal the truth of how God is just to justify the ungodly by His grace through the Lord Jesus Christ and based on His righteousness imputed alone.

7 God Imputes Righteousness to the Ungodly

An Exposition of Romans 4

As I have stated so often in this book, the great question of all questions concerning salvation is this – How can God justly declare a sinner to be righteous and still be true to His holy character and not deny Himself? The whole point of this book has been to show that the answer is the righteousness of God revealed in the Gospel, and this is the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ which God, by His grace, has provided for His people in the glorious Person and finished work of Christ. It is the righteousness that God has freely imputed to His people, even in their ungodly state. To support and emphasize this point, the Apostle Paul was inspired to write in **Romans 4** how the patriarch Abraham was justified before God. This was (and is) especially important considering the state and the thoughts of the unbelieving Jews. The unbelieving Jews basically had three grounds upon which they claimed to be justified before God: (1) their physical circumcision, (2) their claim of keeping the law of Moses, and (3) their physical connection with Abraham. The Gospel light exposes these three claims as nothing more than self-righteousness and the sinful imaginations of fallen people. In reality, they amounted to a denial of the living and true God Who justifies sinners by His grace through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul had written that their physical circumcision was useless for justification before God unless they kept the law perfectly – ***“For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision” (Romans 2:25).*** As we saw in the last chapter, Paul went on to show how that no one (neither Jew nor Gentile) can keep the law perfectly –

Romans 3 – (9) What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; (10) As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:

The Lord Himself told the unbelieving Jews who boasted that they kept the law of Moses that the same law in which they trusted for righteousness would be their judge to condemn them. The reason was that they all fell short of perfect righteousness that can only be found in Christ of Whom Moses in the law prophesied –

John 5 – (45) Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. (46) For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me: for he wrote of Me. (47) But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe My words?

It was also apparent then that their physical connection with Abraham could not support their claim of righteousness in God’s sight. This is why when John the Baptist called upon them to repent, he told them not to claim salvation based upon the fact that they were physically descended from Abraham – ***“And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham” (Matthew 3:9).*** Being a natural Jew himself, John knew that they boasted in their physical connection with Abraham as one of their claims of being right with God. The Lord Himself told them that their physical connection with Abraham would not help them in their efforts to be justified before God by their works. He told them that their only hope of

salvation was to believe in Him as the Messiah for all salvation and righteousness as did Abraham –

John 8 – (37) I know that ye are Abraham’s seed; but ye seek to kill Me, because My word hath no place in you. (38) I speak that which I have seen with My Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father. (39) They answered and said unto Him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham. (40) But now ye seek to kill Me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. (41) Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to Him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. (42) Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love Me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but He sent Me. (43) Why do ye not understand My speech? even because ye cannot hear My word. (44) Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. (45) And because I tell you the truth, ye believe Me not.

It may sound astonishing to many people, but the Lord here exposed their spiritual connection with ***“the devil”*** because of their claim of being right with God based on their physical connection with Abraham. They were proud of their physical heritage, and this kept them in unbelief in opposition to what Abraham knew and believed. So, in ***Romans 4*** Paul begins with the following question –

ROMANS 4 – (1) WHAT SHALL WE SAY THEN THAT ABRAHAM OUR FATHER, AS PERTAINING TO THE FLESH, HATH FOUND?

If anyone claims righteousness because of being a descendant of Abraham in the flesh, then consider what Abraham himself ***“found”*** in the matter of salvation and righteousness before God ***“as pertaining to the***

flesh.” The **“flesh”** here describes what Abraham was as a fallen, sinful human being – who he was and what he could accomplish by his works.

ROMANS 4 – (2) FOR IF ABRAHAM WERE JUSTIFIED BY WORKS, HE HATH WHEREOF TO GLORY; BUT NOT BEFORE GOD.

If Abraham was forgiven of his sins, and if he was declared not guilty and righteous before God by his works, he would have had room **“to glory.”** The word **“glory”** means to boast with confidence in the assurance of being saved and right with God. But if we know the living and true God as He reveals Himself to His people in His Word, we know that we can have no true confidence **“before God”** based on our deeds of law. If Abraham’s confidence was in his own works, he could have boasted before men, but God knows the truth about all men, even Abraham. God knows that we are all sinners who have no righteousness in ourselves and can attain no righteousness by our works. God requires perfect righteousness which no man (not even Abraham) can achieve by his works.

ROMANS 4 – (3) FOR WHAT SAITH THE SCRIPTURE? ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS COUNTED UNTO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

“What saith the Scripture” is speaking of God’s holy, inerrant, inspired Word. It is the same as asking, “What does God say about this matter?” It does not matter what men say if they do not speak the Word of God. Preachers today only tell the truth in matters of salvation when they support their words with the written Word of God, the Bible. Some say that we cannot be certain of this because people interpret the Bible differently. But always remember that God must reveal His Word to us, or we will never know the true meaning and be brought to faith in Christ. Also realize that there are rules of interpretation that must be followed to know what the Bible teaches⁸ – **“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not**

⁸ Rightly Dividing the Word: Rules For Interpreting the Bible, Bill Parker.

to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). So, Paul supports the truth here by referring to God's Word recorded in ***Genesis 15:6*** – ***"And he [Abraham] believed in the LORD; and He [God] counted [imputed, reckoned] it to him [Abraham] for righteousness."***

Notice that Paul writes, ***"Abraham believed God, and IT was counted unto him for righteousness."*** The word ***"counted"*** is the same Greek word that is often translated ***"imputed."*** So, there is no doubt that what Paul has in mind here is the merit of a work that was imputed to Abraham ***"for righteousness."*** What was that work? We will read later in ***verse 5*** that it was Abraham's ***"faith"*** that is ***"counted [imputed] for righteousness."*** The difficulty of understanding this is mainly due to a misunderstanding of the word ***"faith."*** I refer you back to Chapter Five for a study on the word ***"faith"*** and what it means to be ***"justified by faith."*** Many professing Christians think of faith as an exercise of their own ***"free-will"*** when they decide to believe in and trust the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. If this were the case, then Paul would be saying much the same as many of the unbelieving rabbinic Jews, one of whom wrote, "So you will find that our father Abraham became the heir of this and of the coming world simply by the merit of the faith with which he believed in the Lord, as it is written, he believed in the Lord and he counted it to him for righteousness."

Notice the expression, ***"by the merit of faith."*** In their view, Abraham was justified because of the quality, excellence, and value of his act of believing. If this were true (and it is not), then Abraham's believing would have to be the moral equivalent of righteousness that gained him merit before God and enabled him to be justified before God. In other passages in Rabbinic Judaism referring to the same passage in ***Genesis 15:6***, ***"And he believed in the LORD; and he counted [imputed, reckoned] it to him for righteousness,"*** the rabbinic literature sometimes translates the text in this way – ***"And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for merit."*** So, in their view, Abraham is conceived to be an individual who was justified by the merit of his believing in the Lord. They, therefore, erroneously regard Abraham's faith to have been a work by which Abraham earned salvation.

This should not shock most professing Christians today, because the most popular view amongst professing Christians is, in essence, the same. Whenever Christ's redeeming work is presented as a universal redemption in which He died for the sins of all people without exception (even those who perish eternally), and that none are saved until they add their faith to Christ's work, then it is pointless to claim salvation based SOLELY on the merit of Christ's work alone. According to this false doctrine, it is not Christ's work alone on the cross that saves sinners, because it asserts that most for whom He died perish anyway. Under this misconception, sinners perish because they do not rise above the majority and choose by the goodness of their own free will to believe in Christ and seal the deal. In this false paradigm, it is not Christ's work alone that saves His people, because, according to this error, Christ's "did all He could, but to no avail unless sinners do their part in believing." It also elevates sinful man above that which the Word of God reveals of him as a spiritually dead sinner who will not believe unless God does a sovereign work in the new birth (*ex., John 1:11-13*). In this false doctrinal system, faith becomes a work, something that merits salvation for a sinner, and faith is the savior, not Christ.

Some defend this position by claiming that faith IS a work, but not a meritorious work. We must understand, however, that this is no more than sinful human rationalization. Whatever makes the difference between being saved and being lost is most certainly meritorious for salvation. The whole Bible reveals that the work of Christ in His obedience unto death is the only thing that makes the difference between being saved and being lost. The Gospel reveals that the work of Christ insures the salvation of all for whom He died and insures the gift of faith by which they believe in Christ – ***"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me" (John 12:32).*** Therefore, faith as exercised in a sinner's belief in Christ is not the cause or ground of being saved. It is the fruit of the merit of Christ's work, His righteousness imputed to His people. Consider the following concerning Abraham's faith –

FIRST, Abraham's believing (his personal faith) was a gift of God's grace which reigns through the righteousness of Christ – ***"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8)***. Any sinner who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ has been given spiritual life from Christ by the Holy Spirit in the new birth. Faith that truly believes God for salvation is not the product or result of man's "free-will" decision and/or cooperation.

SECONDLY, consider exactly what Abraham believed. He believed God's promise of salvation by grace through the blood and righteousness of the promised Messiah. As quoted earlier, Christ Himself said, ***"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day: and he saw it, and was glad" (John 8:56)***.

Abraham's believing was not substituted for (or equivalent to) righteousness. Abraham's believing was not his righteousness before God, but it was the evidence that God had imputed the righteousness of Christ to him. If we consider the most common terms in the New Testament that connect righteousness with faith, we see in their particular contexts that this is the case. For example –

(1) ***"The righteousness of THE faith which he [Abraham] had" (Romans 4:11)*** – ***"Faith"*** here is clearly that which God promised Abraham, the Gospel message of the promised Messiah, which God gave to Abraham. It was God's promise to send the Messiah into the world to satisfy God's justice for His people, redeem them, and establish righteousness which God has imputed to them. This is ***"THE faith which"*** Abraham had because God gave him that faith by revelation in the Gospel.

(2) ***"The righteousness OF faith" (Romans 4:13)*** – This is the righteousness that God imputed to Abraham and promised that it would be brought in and established by Christ for Abraham. Again, faith believes God's Word, and God's Word was the promise of righteousness established by and found in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

(3) ***“The righteousness WHICH IS OF faith (Romans 9:30; 10:6) –*** This refers both to the gift of righteousness promised by God in and by the Lord Jesus Christ and the fact that it must be received by God-given faith. What does one who has true faith believe? He believes in the Lord Jesus Christ and the work Christ accomplished in our behalf. As stated in ***Romans 3:25***, it is ***“faith in His blood,”*** not faith in our faith.

(4) ***“Righteousness BY faith” (Galatians 5:5; cf. Philippians 3:9; Hebrews 11:7) –*** This could more properly describe a righteousness that is received by God-given faith whereby sinners believe and receive Christ for all righteousness. But this in no way makes believing equal to (or a substitute for) the perfection of righteousness that can only be found in Christ’s work as our Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer.

“Faith,” then, refers mainly to the word of God’s promise to Abraham which is the promise of Christ and His righteousness to be accomplished through His obedience unto death as the believer’s Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. God’s people are made by God willing to receive and believe in Christ for righteousness by God-given faith –

Romans 10 – (4) For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

Romans 10 – (10) For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

So, the act of faith in our believing is not our righteousness before God, but it is the evidence that we have been made righteous in God’s sight based on Christ’s righteousness imputed.

ROMANS 4 – (4) NOW TO HIM THAT WORKETH IS THE REWARD NOT RECKONED OF GRACE, BUT OF DEBT.

The **“reward”** is salvation with all its blessings and benefits, including a sinner’s justification before God. It is the **“reward”** of being forgiven of all our sins and being declared not guilty and righteous in God’s sight. If this **“reward”** is **“reckoned”** (imputed, accounted) because of a person’s works, then it is **“NOT reckoned”** because of God’s free and sovereign grace in Christ and based on His righteousness imputed. If it is of works, then it is a matter of **“debt”** (that which a person has earned and deserves). So, if one believes that salvation (or any part of salvation) is a matter of works done by the sinner or conditions met by the sinner, then he does not believe salvation by God’s grace. Paul writes later in **Romans** that grace and works cannot mix when it comes to the ground of salvation and justification before God. One cancels the other –

Romans 11 – (6) And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.

ROMANS 4 – (5) BUT TO HIM THAT WORKETH NOT, BUT BELIEVETH ON HIM THAT JUSTIFIETH THE UNGODLY, HIS FAITH IS COUNTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

This verse shows us three very important Gospel truths:

(1) How God justifies His people (**“counted”**) – It is by a sovereign act of imputation wherein God declared Abraham to be righteous in HIS sight.

(2) What kind of people they are by nature (**“the ungodly”**) – Christ Jesus came into the world to save SINNERS, not the righteous.

(3) What exactly God imputes to them for their justification (**“for righteousness”**) – This is the very righteousness of God found in the merits of Christ’s obedience unto death.

Those who truly believe in Christ for salvation and justification believe on God Who justifies ***“the ungodly.”*** The ***“ungodly”*** refers to those who have no righteousness of their own and who cannot make themselves righteous by their works. Their justification is totally a matter of God’s free sovereign grace and mercy in the Lord Jesus Christ. When God the Holy Spirit brings them to see the holiness and justice of God, to see their own sinfulness and depravity, and to see the salvation that God has freely and fully provided for His people based on the glorious Person and righteousness of Christ, they believe on God Who justifies the ungodly. They believe on God Who is both a just God and a Savior. This is how the Lord God identifies, distinguishes, and reveals Himself to His people in the Gospel of His grace through Jesus Christ our Lord. And this promise is given only ***“to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly.”*** Justification before God is NOT by a sinner’s works. It is by the work of Christ imputed to His people.

“His faith is counted (imputed) for righteousness” – Consider again the term, ***“his faith.”*** What was Abraham’s faith? ***“His faith”*** was the Gospel of God’s grace through Christ as promised by God. ***“His faith”*** refers to the substance of what God promised to do for him in and by the Lord Jesus Christ. The next verses prove that ***“IT”*** in ***verse 3***, and ***“his faith”*** in this verse refers, not to his act of believing, but to the content of what he believed – the promise of God to send Christ to fulfill all righteousness as his Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer.

ROMANS 4 – (6) EVEN AS DAVID ALSO DESCRIBETH THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE MAN, UNTO WHOM GOD IMPUTETH RIGHTEOUSNESS WITHOUT WORKS, (7) SAYING, BLESSED ARE THEY WHOSE INIQUITIES ARE FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS ARE COVERED. (8) BLESSED IS THE MAN TO WHOM THE LORD WILL NOT IMPUTE SIN.

As noted in a previous chapter, this is quoted by Paul from ***Psalms 32:1-2***. Here Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit to explain further what the psalmist, David, had in mind when, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he wrote, ***“Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.”*** This leaves no

doubt as to what Paul had in mind when he wrote that ***“IT”*** was imputed to Abraham for righteousness, and that Abraham’s ***“faith”*** was counted for righteousness. It was specifically what God had promised in light of the non-imputation of sin to his person. Remember how that when God does not impute sin to our persons, this means that He has already imputed them to Christ. And having imputed the sins of His people to Christ, this means that God has imputed Christ’s righteousness to them.

Sins imputed to Christ is described in the Old Testament in passages like the one in Isaiah’s prophecy – ***“the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6)***. The whole debt of the iniquity of His people was made to meet upon Him. This is why He suffered unto death when the wrath of God justly fell upon Him. To whom has the righteousness of Christ been imputed? It has been imputed to all who ***“believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly.”*** This means to believe the Gospel wherein the righteousness of God is ***“revealed from faith to faith” (Romans 1:16-17)***.

ROMANS 4 – (9) COMETH THIS BLESSEDNESS THEN UPON THE CIRCUMCISION ONLY, OR UPON THE UNCIRCUMCISION ALSO? FOR WE SAY THAT FAITH WAS RECKONED TO ABRAHAM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Is the blessing of salvation and the justification of God’s people by His grace through the Lord Jesus Christ for the Jews only, or is it for Gentiles also? By using the example of Abraham to whom God ***“reckoned”*** (imputed, accounted) ***“faith”*** (the merits of Christ’s righteousness imputed and received by God-given faith), Paul proves that this ***“blessedness”*** is for any and every sinner who comes to God by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. No sinner who comes to God through the Lord Jesus Christ, truly and sincerely pleading Christ’s righteousness for all of salvation, is turned away by God. They have the same God-given faith that Abraham had, and that ***“faith”*** is ***“reckoned”*** to them as it was to Abraham. Remember that ***“faith”*** is the substance of the promise of God of righteousness imputed to them because of what Christ accomplished as their Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer.

ROMANS 4 – (10) HOW WAS IT THEN RECKONED? WHEN HE WAS IN CIRCUMCISION, OR IN UNCIRCUMCISION? NOT IN CIRCUMCISION, BUT IN UNCIRCUMCISION.

How was righteousness imputed to Abraham? Was it on the basis of his circumcision, or was he justified before God when he was uncircumcised? It is obvious that Abraham was justified before God before he was circumcised. Therefore, Abraham's circumcision had absolutely nothing to do with his being justified before God.

ROMANS 4 – (11) AND HE RECEIVED THE SIGN OF CIRCUMCISION, A SEAL OF THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE FAITH WHICH HE HAD YET BEING UNCIRCUMCISED: THAT HE MIGHT BE THE FATHER OF ALL THEM THAT BELIEVE, THOUGH THEY BE NOT CIRCUMCISED; THAT RIGHTEOUSNESS MIGHT BE IMPUTED UNTO THEM ALSO: (12) AND THE FATHER OF CIRCUMCISION TO THEM WHO ARE NOT OF THE CIRCUMCISION ONLY, BUT WHO ALSO WALK IN THE STEPS OF THAT FAITH OF OUR FATHER ABRAHAM, WHICH HE HAD BEING YET UNCIRCUMCISED.

Why did God command Abraham to be circumcised? Circumcision was to be an outward physical **“sign”** (a mark, token) and a **“seal”** (a stamp, signet, label) to show that Abraham had already been justified by God's grace through the Lord Jesus Christ even before he was circumcised. In this way God commanded physical circumcision to be a type of the **“sign”** and **“seal”** by which all whom He has justified give evidence of the grace of God in imputing Christ's righteousness to them. The real and actual **“sign”** and **“seal”** of a sinner being justified before God based on Christ's righteousness imputed to him is spiritual circumcision of the heart. This is the new birth wherein God the Holy Spirit brings God's people to faith in Christ and repentance of sin and dead works –

Romans 2 – (28) For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: (29) But he is a Jew, which

is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Philippians 3 – (3) For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

Physical circumcision was only a type of spiritual circumcision, therefore, physical circumcision had absolutely nothing to do with a person's actual justification before God. This also proved that Abraham is ***"the father of all them that believe,"*** both Jew and Gentile. Abraham was not the physical father of uncircumcised Gentiles, as he was of circumcised Jews, but he was the spiritual father of all who believe the Gospel and rest in Christ for all righteousness. Abraham is a father to all who believe, not in the same way that God alone is our heavenly Father, the Author and Finisher of our salvation. Abraham was a sinner saved by grace. But Abraham is the spiritual father of all who believe in the sense that God has declared him to be the prime example (archetype) of all true children of God. They are spiritually connected to Abraham because they were (and are) saved in the same way (by God's grace based on Christ's righteousness imputed), and they believe the same Gospel as Abraham –

Galatians 3 – (26) For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. (27) For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (28) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. (29) And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

ROMANS 4 – (13) FOR THE PROMISE, THAT HE SHOULD BE THE HEIR OF THE WORLD, WAS NOT TO ABRAHAM, OR TO HIS SEED, THROUGH THE LAW, BUT THROUGH THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH.

The ***“promise”*** is the Gospel ***“promise”*** of salvation (with all blessings and benefits) by God’s grace which would belong to ***“Abraham”*** and ***“his seed”*** (all who are justified before God and who believe in Christ). This ***“promise”*** is by inheritance given to them based on the merits of Christ’s obedience unto death as their Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. This inheritance includes ***“the world,”*** which is the eternal perfection and glory of the new heavens and the new earth –

2 Peter 3 – (13) Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

This ***“promise”*** was not made by God to His people ***“through the law,”*** i.e. their obedience to the law, or their works. It was made by God to his people ***“through the righteousness of faith,”*** i.e. the righteousness of Christ imputed and received by God-given faith.

ROMANS 4 – (14) FOR IF THEY WHICH ARE OF THE LAW BE HEIRS, FAITH IS MADE VOID, AND THE PROMISE MADE OF NONE EFFECT:

If sinners could inherit, attain, and/or maintain salvation, the forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and all other blessings by their law-keeping, then ***“faith”*** is canceled (useless). This would mean that God’s ***“promise”*** of salvation by His grace in and through the Lord Jesus Christ is not needed to save anyone. The grace of God would be frustrated. Paul wrote the same to the Galatians. He wrote that in preaching the true Gospel wherein the righteousness of God is revealed –

Galatians 2 – (21) I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

This shows us that to seek salvation by our works, to seek righteousness before God by our works, is virtually to declare that Christ’s death was for nothing. This is the unbelief of self-righteousness which says that all that

Christ suffered to establish righteousness for His people was literally ***“in vain.”*** This is why salvation conditioned on sinners dishonors the God of all grace and denies the Lord Jesus Christ and His righteousness.

ROMANS 4 – (15) BECAUSE THE LAW WORKETH WRATH: FOR WHERE NO LAW IS, THERE IS NO TRANSGRESSION. (16) THEREFORE IT IS OF FAITH, THAT IT MIGHT BE BY GRACE; TO THE END THE PROMISE MIGHT BE SURE TO ALL THE SEED; NOT TO THAT ONLY WHICH IS OF THE LAW, BUT TO THAT ALSO WHICH IS OF THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM; WHO IS THE FATHER OF US ALL,

The only thing the law of God can do for a sinner based on that sinner’s works is condemn him to eternal death. There was sin in the world before the law of God was given to the Israelites. That sin was (and is) ***“transgression”*** against God and justly deserved God’s wrath. But Paul’s point here is that those who are seeking to be justified by deeds of the law are really transgressing the law, for ***“whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4)***. Even though they may be doing their best to keep the law, they justly deserve God’s wrath. ***“Therefore”*** (for this reason) salvation is ***“of faith,”*** i.e. God’s promise to save His people in Christ, ***“that it might be by grace,”*** conditioned on the merit (the righteousness) of the Lord Jesus Christ –

Romans 5 – (21) That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

In this way, the promise of salvation is ***“sure to all the seed,”*** not only believing Jews, but also believing Gentiles who have the same God-given faith that Abraham had. The only way salvation can be sure to all whom God promised to save is if that salvation is NOT conditioned on them as sinners but on Christ the Surety of His people – ***“For all the promises of God IN HIM are yea, and IN HIM Amen, unto the glory of God by us” (2 Corinthians 1:20)***. If God’s promise of salvation were conditioned on sinners, the only certainty

would be the certainty of failure. So, this proves that Abraham is the father of all who believe in God Who justifies the ungodly based on the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. All who truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, righteousness, the forgiveness of sins, and for eternal life can have the assurance of salvation because of several reasons:

(1) GOD WILL NOT IMPUTE SIN TO THEIR ACCOUNT –

Psalm 32 – (1) Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. (2) Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.

Hebrews 10 – (16) This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; (17) And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

(2) CHRIST, THE LORD THEIR RIGHTEOUSNESS, INTERCEDES ON THEIR BEHALF –

Romans 8 – (33) Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. (34) Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, Who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

1 John 2 – (1) My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: (2) And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

(3) GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL NEVER LEAVE THEM OR LET THEM FORSAKE CHRIST –

1 John 2 – (27) But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him.

1 John 3 – (9) Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His seed remaineth in Him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

ROMANS 4 – (17) (AS IT IS WRITTEN, I HAVE MADE THEE A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS,) BEFORE HIM WHOM HE BELIEVED, EVEN GOD, WHO QUICKENETH THE DEAD, AND CALLETH THOSE THINGS WHICH BE NOT AS THOUGH THEY WERE.

This statement is from **Genesis 17:4-5** where God promised to make Abraham **“a father of many nations.”** Physically Abraham became the father of both the Arab and the Jewish nations. But the point Paul makes here is that Abraham is the SPIRITUAL father of all who believe the Gospel – God’s elect all over the world, both Jews and Gentiles. **“Before HIM Whom he [Abraham] believed”** – This describes how God saw and revealed the promises to Abraham who believed God because he knew God was able to bring life from the dead. Abraham and Sarah were childless until they were very old and past the age of conceiving and bearing children. But it was already accomplished in the mind and purpose of God Who speaks of things that have not been accomplished in time as though they have already been accomplished. It was always sure that Abraham and Sarah would have a son, Isaac, the child of promise. The reason it was so sure is that the fulfillment of the promises God made to Abraham were NOT conditioned on Abraham or Sarah. They were all conditioned upon God alone! It is the same with the salvation of all of God’s chosen people, His children, the seed of Abraham. Our salvation is sure because it is all conditioned upon Christ by the grace of God. The conditions of our salvation can be summarized by the phrase **“the righteousness of God,”** because this truth speaks of Christ in the glory of His Person and the power of His finished work to fulfill all conditions of our

salvation and insure all the blessings and application of salvation to our persons in time. This is the ground of our whole salvation and the source and power of our spiritual life.

ROMANS 4 – (18) WHO AGAINST HOPE BELIEVED IN HOPE, THAT HE MIGHT BECOME THE FATHER OF MANY NATIONS, ACCORDING TO THAT WHICH WAS SPOKEN, SO SHALL THY SEED BE. (19) AND BEING NOT WEAK IN FAITH, HE CONSIDERED NOT HIS OWN BODY NOW DEAD, WHEN HE WAS ABOUT AN HUNDRED YEARS OLD, NEITHER YET THE DEADNESS OF SARA’S WOMB:

By God’s grace, Abraham *“believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations”* when natural reasoning told him not to believe. But it was all according to God’s spoken Word. It was all based on God’s immutable promise and supported by God’s immutable oath, which is His glory in fulfilling all that He had promised –

Hebrews 6 – (13) For when God made promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no greater, He sware by Himself, (14) Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. (15) And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. (16) For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. (17) Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath: (18) That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: (19) Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; (20) Whither the Forerunner is for us entered, EVEN JESUS, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

To believe this promise Abraham had to look away from himself and his wife. He had to put the deadness of his own body and his wife’s womb

out of his mind and depend totally upon the grace, power, and faithfulness of God to provide what God had promise. This is the case of salvation. Those who are truly saved must, by God-given faith, look away from themselves and depend totally upon God's promise to provide everything we need for salvation in and by the Lord Jesus Christ – ***“Looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith; Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).***

ROMANS 4 – (20) HE STAGGERED NOT AT THE PROMISE OF GOD THROUGH UNBELIEF; BUT WAS STRONG IN FAITH, GIVING GLORY TO GOD; (21) AND BEING FULLY PERSUADED THAT, WHAT HE HAD PROMISED, HE WAS ABLE ALSO TO PERFORM.

Here is the substance of true God-given faith. It gives all glory to God and no glory to us. It is the full persuasion that what God has promised, God Himself is able to accomplish. In salvation, God brings His people to bow to His will and His way. But the cause, ground, and assurance of our salvation is not established by any cooperative effort between God and ourselves. It is totally conditioned on the Lord Jesus Christ and what He alone has accomplished as our Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer by His obedience unto death – ***“for I know Whom I have believed, and am persuaded that HE IS ABLE to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day” (2 Timothy 1:12).***

When Paul writes that Abraham ***“staggered not at the promise of God,”*** his purpose is not to boast in any perfection in Abraham himself or his faith in God. Abraham was a sinner saved by grace. As it is recorded in ***Genesis***, Abraham had his problems with inward struggles against sinful doubts and unbelief as do all true believers. For example, it is recorded in ***Genesis*** that even though God promised Abraham and Sarah that He would provide them a son, Abraham argued that Eliezer was his only heir (***Genesis 15:1-6***). Abraham lied to both Pharaoh (***Genesis 12:14-20***) and to Abimelech (***Genesis 20***) concerning Sarah because he feared for his life. In ***Genesis 16*** Abraham

gave in to his wife's doubts and conceived a child with the handmaid Hagar. In **Genesis 17** Abraham argued for Ishmael to be the rightful heir instead of the unborn Isaac. When God reminded him of the promise that he and Sarah would have a son, ***"Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?" (Genesis 17:17).***

Paul describes Abraham here as to the tenor of his life as a believer. Abraham was a man of faith. And even though there were episodes of struggle in his life, as is the case with all believers, struggle is not exclusive of faith. Again, Abraham was a sinner saved by grace. He was not a perfect man who had perfect faith within himself. As is Paul's teaching here, the only perfection Abraham had was the only perfection any child of God has – the perfection of Christ's righteousness imputed to us by God's grace. From this legal perfection comes the gift of faith that marks us as children of God. But as God-given faith marks us as to the tenor of our lives, the flesh still plagues us with sinful doubts. Our hope is that God will preserve us as He did Abraham. So, Abraham ***"WAS STRONG IN FAITH, giving glory to God."*** The greatest insult a sinner can level against God is not to believe His promise. Unbelief denies and dishonors every attribute of God's glory. Unbelief is the mother of all sin. The greatest glory a sinner can give unto God is to believe Him as He reveals Himself in the promise of eternal salvation and final glory in and by the Lord Jesus Christ.

ROMANS 4 – (22) AND THEREFORE IT WAS IMPUTED TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

"IT" here that was imputed to Abraham for righteousness is the same as ***"IT"*** as in **verse 3**, the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. By God's grace Abraham believed that God would give him and Sarah a son (Isaac), and that from that son the Messiah would come – ***"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day: and he saw it, and was glad" (John 8:56).*** Abraham's faith in God to save him by His grace gave evidence that God had already justified him by imputing Christ's righteousness to him.

ROMANS 4 – (23) NOW IT WAS NOT WRITTEN FOR HIS SAKE ALONE, THAT IT WAS IMPUTED TO HIM; (24) BUT FOR US ALSO, TO WHOM IT SHALL BE IMPUTED, IF WE BELIEVE ON HIM THAT RAISED UP JESUS OUR LORD FROM THE DEAD; (25) WHO WAS DELIVERED FOR OUR OFFENCES, AND WAS RAISED AGAIN FOR OUR JUSTIFICATION.

Again, the apostle emphasizes that the promise of justification and eternal salvation based on Christ's righteousness imputed is a promise that God has made only to those who believe the Gospel (**Romans 1:16-17; Acts 2:37-39; Galatians 3:26-29**). No one else can rightfully claim to be saved, to be chosen of God, or to be justified and having Christ's righteousness imputed to them. **"IF we believe on Him"** does not support the false gospels that claim salvation is conditioned on a sinner's believing. The Gospel states clearly that ALL of salvation has been conditioned on Christ, and Christ fulfilled all conditions to secure the complete salvation of all whom the Father had given Him, including their new birth and faith to believe in Him (**John 1:12-13; 3:3-7; 6:37-45**). Some translators render this phrase, "SINCE we believe." We know that man by nature will not believe, but all whom God chose, all for whom Christ died, and all whom the Holy Spirit gives life WILL believe. **"IF we believe on Him"** is EVIDENCE that we have been justified before God the same as Abraham. Christ's righteousness imputed is not only the ground of our justification. It is also the guarantee, source, and power of our regeneration (**Romans 8:10**).

The phrase **"to whom it shall be imputed"** does not mean that God imputes Christ's righteousness upon (or as a result of) our believing. Again, if we truly believe on Christ for salvation, this is evidence that God has already imputed His righteousness to us. **"Shall be imputed"** as translated in the AKJV is not in the future tense in the original Greek. It is in the present tense and is simply a statement of a present fact and reality. It states that all who, like Abraham, believe on God Who **"raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead"** can now rightfully claim to have been justified before God just as Abraham was justified before God. If we truly believe on Christ (or since we believe on Christ), what has been said of Abraham as being justified before God can also

be said of us – We are sinners saved by grace and justified before God based on the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. But we cannot rightfully claim to have been justified before God, to have righteousness imputed to us, UNTIL we are brought by God to believe on Christ as the Lord our righteousness.

The emphatic proof, then, of a sinner's justification before God based on Christ's righteousness imputed is the fact that Christ ***"was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification."*** The ground of justification before God, and that which is imputed to God's people, is the merit of Christ's obedience unto death as the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His people. So, those who truly believe God (as Abraham did) demonstrate that they have the same righteousness imputed to them (the righteousness of Christ) as did Abraham. Those whom God has justified, evidenced by their faith in Christ, believe ***"that Christ died for our sins ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day ACCORDING TO THE SCRIPTURES" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)***. God the Father ***"raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead."*** This means the sins of God's people imputed to Christ were taken away (purged, the sin-debt paid), and there is forgiveness for them based on a just ground. This means God's justice was satisfied and righteousness, which God has imputed to His people, was established for them by Christ on the cross. It was ***"for our offences"*** charged to Him that He died on the cross under the wrath of God. It was ***"for (or "because of") our justification"*** that He was raised from the dead ***(John 16:8-11)***. His resurrection was because of this righteousness. As sin imputed under the law demands death, righteousness imputed under the law demands life. And ***"Christ is the end of the law for righteousness TO EVERY ONE THAT BELIEVETH" (Romans 10:4)***, even ***"for us also."***

8 Christ Made Sin; His People Made the Righteousness of God in Him

A Study of 2 Corinthians 5:21

In this chapter we will deal with two major Gospel issues revealed in the following verse of Scripture –

2 CORINTHIANS 5 – (21) FOR HE HATH MADE HIM TO BE SIN FOR US, WHO KNEW NO SIN; THAT WE MIGHT BE MADE THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN HIM.

I have already quoted and referenced this verse many times in this book, but this chapter is a detailed study of this particular verse within its context. There are several reasons I chose to devote one whole chapter to a study of this verse. First, it is a precise and concise statement of the theme of this book which is the heart of the Gospel and the ground of justification. Secondly, it has been the subject of much controversy (past and recent) concerning the doctrines of justification, imputation, sin, and righteousness. This is a study of Biblical truth and not a quick read. I will take some time in the chapter to show the context of this verse within Paul's second epistle to the church at Corinth. This is necessary for us to understand this verse within

its Biblical context. So I urge you to stay with it and test these words by the written Word of God.

There are two major Gospel issues raised within **2 Corinthians 5:21** that can be stated in two questions:

(1) HOW WAS JESUS CHRIST MADE TO BE SIN FOR HIS PEOPLE?

(2) HOW ARE HIS PEOPLE MADE THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN HIM?

As I have stated, it is my purpose in this book to prove from the Bible that Jesus Christ was made to be sin by a legal act of imputation wherein God the Father imputed all the sins of His elect to Christ. My purpose is also to prove that His elect are made the righteousness of God in Him by a legal act of imputation wherein God the Father imputed the righteousness of Christ to His elect. Some people deny that this verse teaches the imputation of sin and righteousness at all. A few of them try to support their denial by raising their own personal interpretation of one word in this verse – the word ***“made.”*** They make much of the fact that the AKJV translators added the words ***“to be”*** to the original text. They claim that rather than reading it as ***“for He hath made Him TO BE sin,”*** it should read, ***“for He hath made Him sin.”*** Based on this, they will make statements such as, “Christ was not made TO BE sin; He was made sin itself,” or “He was made a mass of sin.” But, as I have already shown in Chapter One, if we study the words (and related words) for “sin” in the Bible, we find that sin is not an entity or substance into which one can be made. Sin is not a mass of anything. Others have taken this even further by claiming that Christ was actually “made to be a sinner.” This is utter heresy. If Christ was made to be a sinner on the cross, He would have been disqualified from being the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His people.

There are some who will not go so far as to say that Christ was “made a sinner,” but they try to obscure such heretical ideas by ambiguous language such as, “Christ had to be made everything that we are, so that we could be made everything that He is.” This too is utter heresy. We are sinners, and

Christ was never made to be a sinner. Christ is both God and man, and we will never be made to be both. I will show that whether or not you read the text as ***“made TO BE sin,”*** or simply as ***“made sin,”*** it makes no difference because the context determines the meaning of the word.

Most interpreters agree that the structure of the text shows that in whatever way Christ was made to be sin for His people, His people were made to be the righteousness of God in Him in the exact same way. As is always the case in Biblical interpretation, especially as it pertains to one verse, there are several spheres of context that we must consider. We must consider the larger context of the whole Bible. Whatever **2 Corinthians 5:21** means, its true meaning will not contradict the teachings found in God’s Holy Word from **Genesis** to **Revelation**. We must also consider the context of the whole epistle of **2 Corinthians** and the immediate context of **Chapter 5**. We need not say very much at this point about the context of the whole Bible as this has been the subject of all the previous chapters proving how God has always saved (and justified) sinners by His grace through the Lord Jesus Christ and based on His blood and righteousness imputed alone. We have shown that the phrase, ***“the righteousness of God”*** in the Gospel means the imputed righteousness of Christ. Does it mean the same as it appears in this verse? This is what we will see as we study this verse within its context. Consider the context of this verse within the whole epistle of **2 Corinthians**.

One of the major themes of Paul’s second epistle to the church at Corinth is the greater glory of the true Gospel ministry in the New Testament over and above the Old Covenant Law. In chapter three Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit to show this by contrasting the Gospel of God’s grace with the Law of Moses. He states that true New Testament Gospel ministers are not ministers of the Law because God has made them ***“able ministers of the New Testament”*** –

2 Corinthians 3 – (6) Who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament; not of the letter, but of the Spirit: for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.

The New Testament is the same as the New Covenant. And the New Covenant is the accomplishment and establishment in time by the Lord Jesus Christ of the Everlasting Covenant of Grace made before time. The Gospel message is the preaching of the terms and conditions of the Everlasting Covenant of Grace as these terms and conditions are completely fulfilled in and by the Lord Jesus Christ as the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His people. So, the Everlasting Covenant of Grace and the New Covenant are essentially the same. The only difference is that one (the New Covenant) is the fulfillment of the other (the Everlasting Covenant of Grace) in time. The Gospel has always been the same, but God gave Israel the Old Covenant Law to show them their sinfulness and their need of salvation by His grace in Christ as promised from the beginning. The Law had no ability to give spiritual life within spiritually dead sinners because there was no righteousness established by sinners under the Law. But the New Covenant is a ministry of spiritual life given to spiritually dead sinners because Christ has established righteousness for them as their Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer.

The Gospel ministry does not consist in a system of written rules and regulations imposed upon rebels so as to condemn them to death. It is a ministry ***“of the Spirit”*** Who gives spiritual life from Christ to God’s people. Being a ministry of the Spirit Who gives life from Christ, this involves Him giving God’s people new hearts. Jeremiah prophesied of this in a prophecy of the New Covenant –

Jeremiah 31 – (31) Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: (32) Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which My covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: (33) But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be My people. (34) And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know

Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Paul called the Law covenant a ministry of condemnation. He called the Gospel covenant a ministry of the Spirit and of righteousness. The Gospel ministry exceeds the Law in glory because the Law could never justify a sinner or give him life from the dead. But the Gospel reveals Christ as the righteousness of God for the justification of God's people and the source of spiritual life for them –

2 Corinthians 3 – (7) But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: (8) How shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious? (9) For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.

Paul went on to show how the unbelieving Israelites under the Law were blinded by the vail of their own self-righteousness and unbelief. This vail could only be removed by looking to Christ and His glory for salvation and righteousness –

2 Corinthians 3 – (12) Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: (13) And not as Moses, which put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: (14) But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; WHICH VAIL IS DONE AWAY IN CHRIST. (15) But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. (16) Nevertheless WHEN IT SHALL TURN TO THE LORD, the vail shall be taken away. (17) Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. (18) But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Paul states that the greater glory of this ministry of the Spirit is the glory that can only be found in the exceeding glory of the Person and finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ –

2 Corinthians 4 – (5) For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. (6) For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Paul sought to comfort believers in Corinth by assuring them that, even though we are weak and sinful people, Christ is our assurance and hope. The Gospel ministry is strong and effective to the salvation of all whom God has determined to save and bring to glory. He assures them that, even though our earthly bodies are decaying and dying, we who trust Christ for salvation and righteousness are certain to be glorified and to live forever in His grace. In this matter we ***“walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7)***. Paul was then inspired by the Holy Spirit to reaffirm the heart of the Gospel in light of Final Judgment and to show that the issues at Final Judgment are:

(1) DO WE HAVE A RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT ANSWERS THE DEMANDS OF GOD’S LAW AND JUSTICE?

(2) DO WE STAND BEFORE GOD ON OUR OWN, PLEADING OUR WORKS AND DECISIONS, OR DO WE STAND BEFORE GOD IN CHRIST, WASHED IN HIS BLOOD AND CLOTHED IN HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS?

Paul begins in **verse 10** by showing that true believers can have real godly assurance even at Final Judgment because they stand in Christ (washed in His blood, clothed in His righteousness) and not in themselves –

2 Corinthians 5 – (10) For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. (11) Knowing therefore

the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.

If we keep with the context of the Bible, we understand that those whom God will judge to be ***“good”*** are those who stand before Him by His grace IN CHRIST, again, washed in His blood and clothed in His righteousness imputed. They are not people who are counted ***“good”*** based on their works or human morality. They are counted ***“good”*** based on the righteousness of Christ imputed to them. Those whom God will judge to be ***“bad”*** are those who stand before Him WITHOUT CHRIST, having no righteousness before God and having their sins imputed to them. ***“The terror of the Lord”*** is the reverence and respect believers have for the glory of God in salvation by His grace through the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that there is no other way for sinners to escape the wrath of God than Christ crucified and risen from the dead! This is why we preach and witness the Gospel of Christ to men, pleading with them to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for all salvation and righteousness and repent of their own dead works and their sins. This is how true preachers of the Gospel are to be judged by other believers – ***“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9)***. In the next two verses Paul defends himself against the accusations of false preachers who had accused him of promoting himself at the expense of the church –

2 Corinthians 5 – (12) For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart. (13) For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause.

Paul states that his testimony is the glory, power, and grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ and not in himself. This is the glory of every true believer – ***“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus***

Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 6:14). When the Corinthian believers gloried (boasted) in Paul’s behalf, they were not boasting in Paul himself but in Christ Whom Paul preached. Paul told them that this is how they should answer false preachers who boasted ***“in appearance”*** (an outward show of religious profession and morality) ***“and not in heart”*** (the testimony of the new heart of Christ and His glory as revealed in the Gospel). To glory ***“in heart”*** is not to boast in emotions and feelings. It is to boast in Christ and His righteousness for our right standing with God – ***“For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10:10).*** This is the new heart of faith in Christ (***Hebrews 10:22***). This is a ***“broken and contrite heart” (Psalm 51:17; cf. Psalm 34:18; Luke 18:13),*** which brings repentance of dead works, idolatry, and sorrow over sin in light of Christ’s righteousness (***Philippians 3:3,7-9***).

False preachers had accused Paul of being foolish (beside himself, out of his mind). Paul states that in preaching Christ and His righteousness for all salvation and justification before God, whether or not his actions were perceived by others to be foolish or serious, it was for the brethren. It was to promote their salvation and assurance according to the glory of God. Paul then goes on to state his motive in preaching the Gospel of reconciliation by God’s grace through Christ –

2 Corinthians 5 – (14a) For the love of Christ constraineth us; ...

The main force that drove Paul in the ministry of the Gospel was ***“the love of Christ.”*** It is true that when the Holy Spirit gives us spiritual life and faith in Christ, we can truly say we love Christ, and this God-given love for Him (though not yet perfect) is the powerful motivation for us to obey God and fight sin. But the following words here show us that the love which Paul has in mind here is God’s love for His elect in Christ which was revealed when God sent Christ to redeem His people from their sins –

2 Corinthians 5 – (14b-15) – ... because we thus judge, that if One died for all, then were all dead: (15) And that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again.

The **“ONE”** who died is the Lord Jesus Christ. He died as the Surety and Substitute of sinners to redeem them from their sins and establish righteousness whereby God is just to justify them. This is the ultimate expression of God’s free and unconditional love to His people –

Romans 5 – (8) But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

1 John 4 – (10) Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Notice the judgment given here – ***“that if One died for all, then were all dead.”*** The literal translation of this clause is – ***“If One died for all, then all died.”*** The force of the text shows that CHRIST DIED FOR THOSE WHO DIED WHEN HE DIED AS EVIDENCED BY THEIR BEING BROUGHT BY GOD TO LIVE BY FAITH IN HIM AND FOR HIS GLORY. So, this describes legal union of Christ with God’s chosen people (the elect). In His death, Christ acted FOR them as their Representative, Surety, and Substitute to redeem them from their sins. Do not ignore what Paul goes on to write, i.e. ***“all who died when Christ died”*** are ***“they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again.”*** In other words, all who died with Christ when He died are those who bear the evidence of spiritual life. They have this spiritual life by virtue of Christ’s death for them. So, the ones for whom Christ died are the ones who obtain spiritual life by the grace and power of God in the new birth. We can ask ourselves, “How do we know if we are included in the ***“all”*** who died when Christ died?” The answer is that we are ones for whom Christ died (who died when He died) if we are living by faith in Christ for the glory of God and NOT for ourselves and for our own

glory. Our living for His glory is not the cause of our spiritual life, but it is the EVIDENCE of our legal death, burial, and resurrection with Christ, and of our new birth in and by Him.

Whenever we find the words **“all,” “every,”** and **“every one,”** as well as the word **“world,”** in the Bible as describing those for whom Christ died and rose again, we have to consider the context to discover exactly who is included in this number. For example, when the word **“world”** is used to describe those for whom Christ died and for whom He makes intercession, it is not speaking of every person who has ever lived or died. It is describing God’s elect (Jew and Gentile) given to Christ before the foundation of the world and who have lived all over the world. In our text, this is stated in the phrase, **“then were all dead.”** Because Christ died as their Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer, they all died with Him. Because Christ arose from the dead as their Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer (which means righteousness established by His death and imputed to them), they all will live spiritually and eternally. This means they all will be born again and brought to faith in Christ and true godly repentance –

John 6 – (37) All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out. (38) For I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me. (39) And this is the Father’s will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. (40) And this is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.

Romans 6 – (3) Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? (4) Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (5) For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection: (6) Knowing this, that our

old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

“Baptized” in ***Romans 6:1*** does not refer to the Christian ordinance of water baptism which is an outward confession of faith in Christ. It refers to a believer’s union with Christ Who represented and substituted Himself for all of God’s people in His death, burial, and resurrection. In the new birth, God the Holy Spirit powerfully and invincibly brings God’s people whom Christ redeemed to see, know, and embrace the love of God to them in Christ. By the Gospel heard and believed, they understand that this love of God to them is free and unconditional towards them. They also see that the love of God to them had to be established upon a just ground – the merits of the blood and righteousness of Christ. The Holy Spirit pours out this love within their hearts (mind, affections, and wills) and establishes within them the motives of grace, love, and gratitude by which He motivates and inspires them to the obedience of grace and faith and the warfare of the Spirit against the flesh.

As stated in ***2 Corinthians 5:15***, the reason Christ died and arose from the dead for His people was to redeem them from their sins by His blood. It was to fully satisfy the justice of God for them, to establish righteousness whereby God is reconciled to them, and to give them spiritual life in which they are reconciled to God by faith in Christ to the praise of the glory of God’s grace. And from the time of their new birth forward (***“henceforth”***), they would not ***“live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and arose again.”*** Those to whom God is reconciled and who are reconciled to God live not for their own glory and self-fulfillment, but for the glory of God in Christ –

Galatians 6 – (14) But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

Philippians 3 – (3) For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

It has been said that **2 Corinthians 5:14-21** is about reconciliation and not regeneration. This is true. This whole passage of Scripture is mainly concerning the nature and message of the ministry and word of reconciliation. It is not mainly about regeneration and conversion (new birth). However, we must not fail to recognize that in treating of the nature and message of reconciliation, Paul was led of the Spirit to include the reality of regeneration and conversion as the fruit and evidence of a sinner being reconciled to God. This is obvious in that he showed how that all for whom Christ died and arose again died with Him and shall **“LIVE”** for His glory. Paul now shows that **“henceforth”** (from the time that God brings His people to be reconciled to Him by faith in Christ), their judgment and discernment of things concerning salvation and a right relationship between God and sinners do change. Their whole view of God, of themselves, of Christ and salvation, and their whole view of the world changes –

2 Corinthians 5 – (16) Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more.

Because our whole salvation is all of God’s grace based on the obedience unto death of the Lord Jesus Christ; because our justification before God is totally based on Christ’s righteousness imputed and not based on our works; and because our being reconciled to God is totally the work of Christ by the Holy Spirit in giving us spiritual life and faith to believe, we now no longer **“know”** (evaluate or perceive) any person’s salvation and relationship with God according to **“the flesh”** (outward appearance and works of morality and/or sincerity). I know there are people who say that we have no right to judge who is saved and who is lost. And it is true that even as true believers we cannot peer into the hidden regions of a person’s heart. Only God is omniscient and knows the true state of the hearts of all His people. But God’s Word also commands us to have fellowship with His people and not to have fellowship with unbelievers. How can we make right judgments in this area? We can only judge by their confession of faith in Christ according to the

doctrine of Christ as revealed in the Bible. This kind of judgment is stated in many, many verses such as the following –

Romans 16 – (17) Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. (18) For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

Galatians 1 – (9) As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

2 John (9) Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. (10) If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: (11) For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

Can we be fooled by false professors of the truth? Yes, but that is not our fault. False professors will have to answer to God for their hypocrisy. The fact still remains that when God the Holy Spirit brings us to be reconciled to God by His grace based on the righteousness of Christ, from that time forward ***“know we no man after the flesh.”*** Our judgment of saved and lost has been changed by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. The Apostle Paul illustrates this by the way his own judgment had changed concerning Jesus of Nazareth – ***“yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more.”*** When Paul was an unbeliever, due to his ignorance, unbelief, and self-righteousness, he judged Jesus of Nazareth to be an imposter, a blasphemer, a criminal. But from the point of his being given life from Christ, being taught of God, and being brought to see the glory of Christ in His glorious Person and the power of His finished work, Paul no longer perceived and evaluated Christ this way. He then saw the truth that

Jesus was (and is) truly the Son of God, the promised Messiah. He saw the glory of God in Christ and the only way of salvation through Him and based on His righteousness alone. Paul describes this in the following verses –

Philippians 3 – (7) But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. (8) Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for Whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, (9) And be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: (10) That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death;

Herein we see the essence and nature of the great change that God works in His people when He brings them to be reconciled to Him by faith in Christ. It is a change from unbelief to faith in Christ. It is a change of mind and heart in repentance of dead works and former idolatry. It is a change in understanding of what constitutes a person as being regenerate or unregenerate. In these ways, believers can truly state the following verse –

2 Corinthians 5 – (17) Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

The key to this is to know from God's Word whether or not we are truly ***"IN CHRIST."*** To be ***"in Christ"*** is both legal and spiritual. Legally, it means that Christ is our Representative Who stands and speaks for us, our Surety Who is responsible and accountable for us, and our Substitute Who took our place and died for us. Spiritually, it means Christ is our life as He gives us life and brings us to Himself by the Spirit through God-given faith whereupon we are reconciled to God on the ground of His righteousness imputed. Reconciliation has to do with God having been reconciled to us based on the righteousness of Christ and our being reconciled to God on that same ground.

We are reconciled to God in our minds and hearts when God the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, righteousness, and judgment, all viewed in light of the glorious Person and finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is then that our whole world changes, literally, and is turned upside down.

Consider how unbelievers judge themselves and others to be “saved” or “lost,” regenerate or unregenerate. Regeneration and conversion constitute the new birth. The new birth is evidenced by faith in Christ and repentance of dead works and idolatry. This is when God brings a sinner whom He has chosen and redeemed by the blood of Christ, and whom He has justified based on the righteousness of Christ, to be reconciled unto Him. He brings that sinner from thinking that salvation was (and is) conditioned on himself to believing all of salvation freely given to him as conditioned on Christ. There are some who claim that a born-again person is to be judged on the basis of faith plus their good works, but that is against the Gospel wherein Christ’s righteousness is revealed. It is only by the true Gospel that works of obedience are revealed to be “good” in God’s sight, not because of any merit in the sinner or his works, but as they are covered by and presented to God through the blood of Christ.

Therefore, as new creatures (new creations) in Christ, what we before judged to be “good” in matters of salvation and a right relationship with God, we now judge to be “evil.” What we before judged to be “evil,” we now judge to be “good.” Before faith in Christ we highly esteemed man’s efforts to make himself righteous before God, but now we side with God and judge such efforts to be an ***“abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15)***. Now we judge all things in salvation in the light of Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead, which is His righteousness imputed.

This sheds some light upon what Paul means by ***“old things”*** that are ***“passed away,”*** and ***“all things”*** that ***“are become new.”*** A sinner saved by God’s grace is united to Christ and is a ***“new creature”*** (or ***“new creation”***). This new creation is evidenced by the fact that ***“old things are passed away; behold all things are become new.”*** There is so much error and confusion concerning what is truly ***“old”*** and ***“passed away”*** and what has actually ***“become new.”*** First, we must understand that what Paul is describing here

is a statement of a present reality, not a process or future accomplishment. The tense of these verb phrases do not suggest that ***“old things”*** are in the process of passing away, and that ***“all things”*** are in the process of becoming new. This is not a process that takes place progressively over a period of time. And it is not something we achieve by our efforts to obey God and to fight sin. It is a work of sovereign grace that God has done and completed, and which has continuing effects and influence within the one whom God has made a ***“new creature.”***

Many view the ***“new creature”*** in whom ***“old things are passed away”*** and ***“all things are become new”*** as describing old sinful habits that have ***“passed away”*** and new holy habits that have replaced the sinful ones. These new habits would include things that fall under the umbrella of morality, sincerity, charity, and devotion. For example, a person becomes saved and quits smoking and drinking. He starts going to church, giving his tithe, and becomes actively engaged in other religious activities. There are some who take this so far as to claim they are no longer sinners. The problem with this view is that it is simply not true. Many people make religious professions and go through outward reformations of character and conduct without being truly saved and being made new creatures in Christ. Also, those who have truly been made new creatures still struggle with old sinful habits and sometimes give in to the desires of the flesh. Those who have been made new creatures in Christ by the grace of God are still sinful people – sinners saved by grace. They still live their lives struggling daily with sinful desires and habits. And even when they imagine they have victory over any sinful habits, it is only by the grace and power of God, and they still cannot claim to be righteous within themselves. They are still totally dependent upon God’s preserving grace. They are still totally justified based on Christ righteousness imputed. They still fall short in everything they think, say, and do, but they are blessed in that God will not impute sin to them. The point is that we cannot say that the remaining presence, influence, and contamination of the flesh, which keeps us from attaining perfect righteousness in our character and conduct, has completely ***“passed away.”***

What the Apostle Paul is describing in the ***“new creature”*** is a whole new way of life, a new way of understanding, that comes from God’s revelation of how sinners are reconciled unto Him by His grace through the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the true believer’s new perception, evaluation, and judgment of himself and the world in light of the Gospel of reconciliation by God’s grace in Christ. The ***“new creature”*** views God in a whole new way. Consider the following BEFORE and AFTER list:

BEFORE, he worshipped and served a god of his own imagination, an idol, who was like himself. NOW, he has turned from his idol to worship the true and living God, a just God and a Savior through Jesus Christ the Lord.

BEFORE, he was ignorant of the depth of his own sinfulness and of God’s righteousness in Christ. He thought he could establish a righteousness of his own by his works and/or decisions. NOW, he sees that he has no righteousness and can work no righteousness. He sees that he is a totally depraved sinner and that if God were ever to give him what he has earned or deserved, it would be eternal death and damnation.

BEFORE, he thought salvation (or some part of it) was conditioned on his works or his faith. He looked for and found righteousness within himself. NOW, he sees that all of salvation was (and is) conditioned on Christ and that Christ (as his Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer) has fulfilled all conditions to secure and guarantee his salvation. He sees now that forgiveness, righteousness, and eternal life can only be found in the glorious Person and finished work of Christ.

BEFORE, he highly esteemed the works and the wills of sinful people in making the difference between salvation and condemnation. NOW, that which he once highly esteemed, he now sees as an abomination to God and dead works in light of the righteousness of God in Christ. He now trusts Christ for all righteousness and repents of his dead works.

BEFORE, his efforts to obey and serve the Lord were motivated by legal threats of punishment and mercenary promises of earned rewards. NOW, his efforts to obey and serve the Lord are motivated by God's grace and love, and his gratitude to God for the freeness and fullness of salvation in Christ.

BEFORE, his judgment of salvation and standard of fellowship was based on religious experience, outward appearance, and the works and will of the flesh. NOW, his judgment of salvation is based on whether or not a sinner is reconciled unto God by God's grace through Christ and based on His righteousness imputed alone.

A *"new creature"* is one whom God has brought to a great and miraculous change by a new birth. In the new birth, God the Holy Spirit does not simply bring an immoral person to become a moral person. False religion can do this. This is not to say that all truly born-again persons should not be moral. As true children of God, we should strive for morality in character and in conduct. But many, many who have experienced a reformation of character and conduct have never been born again by the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit works His sovereign and invincible power in the new birth, when He imparts the life of Christ to a spiritually dead sinner, He brings that person to see and confess his utter sinfulness and depravity. He convinces that sinner that he has no hope of salvation, forgiveness, righteousness, life, and glory in himself, not even in his best. He shows that sinner that it is only by God's sovereign grace through the Lord Jesus Christ (God in sinless human flesh) and by the merits of His shed blood and righteousness imputed that salvation can be obtained. God the Holy Spirit brings that person, not simply from immorality to morality, but to faith in Christ and repentance of dead works (even the sinfulness of self-righteousness in thinking that his morality could contribute to attaining and/or maintaining salvation). This is the great change that takes place when God saves a sinner.

The Gospel of reconciliation wherein the righteousness of God is revealed has changed his whole view of God, of himself, of Christ and salvation, and of the world. Again, as Paul wrote –

Galatians 6 – (14) But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. (15) For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. (16) And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

“All things are become new” in that ***“all things”*** are now perceived, evaluated, and judged as they relate to the glory of God in the glorious Person and finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. This does not mean that a true believer will not still struggle with sins, doubts, misgivings, and fail to achieve righteousness in himself. It means that because the light of God’s righteousness and grace revealed to him, all things pertaining to salvation and a right relationship with God ***“are become new.”*** He knows that God has been reconciled to him, and that now he has been reconciled to God upon the one ground of Christ’s righteousness imputed to him. He knows there is no other way of salvation from sin and death, of justification before God, and reconciliation with God, but Jesus Christ crucified and risen from the dead. And all who believe this Gospel are his brethren in Christ. All who are either ignorant of, or not submitted to the righteousness of God revealed in this Gospel are lost (***Romans 10:1-4***).

2 Corinthians 5 – (18) And all things are of God, Who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;

The ***“all things”*** that are become new ***“are of God,”*** i.e. by God’s grace, power, and work in Christ. And ***“all things”*** that are become new have to do with our being ***“reconciled”*** to God ***“by Jesus Christ.”*** This gives God’s people

a whole new ministry, ***“the ministry of reconciliation,”*** which is the Gospel ministry wherein the righteousness of God is revealed. Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit to define this ministry clearly and precisely so that believers would not be confused and know that it is from God in Christ. It is distinctively separate from the message of false religion. The true ministry of reconciliation is –

2 Corinthians 5 – (19) To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

“To wit,” i.e. *“that is”* – ***“that God was IN CHRIST”*** – God put His own honor and reputation, His glory, in the Person and work of His beloved Son –

Colossians 1 – (19) For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell;

Colossians 2 – (9) For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

“Reconciling the world unto Himself” – Does this mean that God has reconciled everyone without exception unto Himself? If that is what it means, then everyone without exception will be saved. We know that the Bible does not teach this. Consider –

(1) IF A SINNER IS RECONCILED UNTO GOD, IT IS BECAUSE GOD HAS ALREADY BEEN RECONCILED TO HIM.

(2) GOD CANNOT JUSTLY CONDEMN ANY SINNER WHOM HE HAS RECONCILED UNTO HIMSELF.

(3) IF A SINNER IS RECONCILED UNTO GOD, IT IS THROUGH BELIEVING IN CHRIST, AND THAT MEANS SALVATION.

The **“world”** here must be defined within its context, and the context shows that God has reconciled the world of His elect, Jew and Gentile, unto Himself by Jesus Christ. This means peace between God and sinners. I heard a preacher who hated the doctrine of election dealing with **John 3:16** state his objection to this matter as follows – “For God so love THE ELECT? Is that what this verse says? No! It says, ‘For God so love THE WORLD that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’” The fact is that if we understood that all Scripture must be interpreted within its context, **John 3:16** says exactly that God so loved His elect people. How can we say this? It is because God’s redeeming love is only for His elect in Christ, and those whom He loves (His elect) are identified because He brings them to believe in Christ and have everlasting life –

1 Thessalonians 1 – (4) Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. (5) For our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

Furthermore, consider the question – HOW DID GOD ACCOMPLISH THIS WONDERFUL AND AMAZING WORK OF RECONCILIATION? It was by **“not imputing their trespasses unto them,”** i.e. not charging, accounting, reckoning their sins to their account. The way of reconciliation is the way of the non-imputation of sins. The whole context of this passage shows that God is reconciled to His people and His people are reconciled to Him based on the fact that He does not impute their sins to them. This proves that the **“world”** here is not all without exception. It is God’s elect to whom He does not impute sin. We have already shown how that in the Bible, according to **Psalms 32:1-2** as expounded upon in **Romans 4:6-8**, the non-imputation of sins to God’s people means that their sins were imputed to Christ, and His righteousness was imputed to them⁹ –

⁹ Chapter 3, pp. 68-69

Romans 4 – (6) Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, (7) Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. (8) Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

When God's preachers and God's people preach and witness the Gospel of His grace in Christ to a lost world, the message is clear and precise –

2 Corinthians 5 – (20) Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

As ***“ambassadors for Christ,”*** we have His authority through His Word of reconciliation, the Gospel wherein the righteousness of God is revealed. And as ambassadors for Christ and speaking for Him (as we preach His Word), we implore sinners to be ***“reconciled to God”*** by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. Why is it necessary for sinners to believe in Christ in order to be reconciled to God? It is because Christ is ***“the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by [Him] Me” (John 14:6).*** How and why is Christ the only way to God? This brings us to the verse originally in question which describes the one and only ground of reconciliation with God through the Lord Jesus Christ –

2 CORINTHIANS 5 – (21) FOR HE HATH MADE HIM TO BE SIN FOR US, WHO KNEW NO SIN; THAT WE MIGHT BE MADE THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN HIM.

Granted that it has taken us awhile to arrive at this verse, but to find its true meaning, it was necessary to know the context in which it appears. This is the verse about which so many are confused, some even to the point of plunging headlong into heresy. As stated before, the point of confusion and heresy involves the following two issues – How Christ was made to be sin, and how His people were made the righteousness of God in Him. As I have

stated continually in this book, I believe this verse teaches us clearly that Christ was made sin by a legal act of imputation where God imputed all the debt of all the sins of His people to the account of the Lord Jesus Christ as their Surety. In the same way, God has made His people the righteousness of God in Christ by a legal act of imputation where He imputed the entire merit of Christ's obedience unto death to all for whom Christ stood as Surety. So, this verse teaches sin imputed to Christ and righteousness imputed to His people. Consider this verse in its details –

“HE (God the Father and Judge of all) ***hath made HIM*** (God the Son incarnate, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of God's elect) ***to be sin for us*** (the imputation of the sin-debt to Christ for His people), ***Who knew no sin*** (referring back to Christ who had no corruption or contamination of sin within Himself); ***that we*** (God's elect, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world) ***might be made the righteousness of God in Him*** (Christ's righteousness imputed to His people so that they stand before God righteous ***“IN HIM”*** in God's sight as judged IN CHRIST, the Lord their Righteousness).

This verse describes the legal (forensic) relationship that Christ has with all of God's chosen people. As their Surety and Substitute, Christ died for them and redeemed them from their sins. All that took place on Calvary was just and righteous in God's sight because of their sins imputed to Christ and His righteousness imputed to them. There are many who disagree that this verse is teaching a legal (forensic) exchange of imputed sin to Christ and imputed righteousness to His people. I want to show how their arguments are the product of sinful and flawed reasoning. For example, one argument raised against the forensic view is as follows – “What Christ experienced on the cross was much, much more than imputation.” An example of this kind of flawed logic is in the following statement taken from a message where the preacher was attempting to explain **2 Corinthians 5:21** –

"Now the theologians use the word 'imputation.' There was imputed to Christ all of our guilt. But I wonder, and you think just a moment about this, I wonder if the word 'imputation' is sufficient to describe what happened at Calvary. Is it sufficient? Does it really cover the subject? Imputation. It seems to me to be more than that. I don't know how to explain it, but I believe the Bible teaches that Christ was more than just a representative, that Christ took our sins in a deeper, more personal, more literal way than just by imputation. It says in *2 Corinthians 5:21*, listen to it, 'For He hath made Him to be sin,' He 'who knew no sin,' God made Him actually, literally, 'to be sin for us.'"

First, to understand the flawed reasoning used in this statement, we must see that the doctrines of imputed sin to Christ and imputed righteousness to His people are so fundamental and vital to the Gospel message that we must not deny, confuse, or twist them. We must not make them less than what they truly are – the reality of the literal LEGAL transfer of the debt of our sins to Christ, and the literal LEGAL transfer of the merit of His righteousness to us. But *2 Corinthians 5:21* is not describing all that Christ experienced "at Calvary." It is describing the GROUND upon which all that He experienced at Calvary was necessary. Why did Christ have to suffer, bleed, and die on Calvary? It was because He was made sin for His people so that they are made the righteousness of God in Him. What Christ suffered on Calvary was because of sin imputed to Him. What God's people experience in salvation and eternal life is because of the righteousness of God imputed to them. This verse is revealing the GROUND upon which God is reconciled to sinners and sinners are reconciled to God. What it took to establish the righteousness of God was that Christ had to be made sin, and then He had to suffer unto death to pay for those sins. What He experienced on Calvary is clearly and often described in other verses of Scripture.

Secondly, the death of Christ on the cross WAS more than imputation. Imputation is not sufficient by itself to describe all of what Christ experienced

at Calvary, and Christ was (and is) more than our Representative. He is also our Surety, our Substitute, and our Sacrifice – the Lamb of God. CHRIST IS OUR REDEEMER. Because the debt of our sins was imputed to Him, He had to pay that debt for us. Based on our sins imputed to Him, He had to suffer, bleed, die, and be alienated from His Father to pay our sin-debt. He had to go under the curse of the law and satisfy justice in His own body on the tree. BUT THIS ASTONISHING WORK IN WHICH HE SUFFERED UNTO DEATH FOR HIS PEOPLE WAS BASED TOTALLY ON THE GROUND OF SIN IMPUTED TO HIM. This does not deny or diminish the reality of imputation nor the reality of His suffering unto death. Imputation is not merely a figurative or symbolic act. It is a real transaction, and this is proven by the fact that Christ ***"once suffered for sin the Just for the unjust" (1 Peter 3:18).***

So, when the preacher above stated the following – “What Christ went through was more than imputation,” and, “Our salvation is more than imputation,” he was correct. What Christ experienced in His incarnation, obedience unto death, His resurrection, and His ascension into glory was most certainly more than sin imputed to Him. But this does not deny that He was ***“made sin”*** only by imputation. In fact, it supports this very truth. How? Everything that Christ actually experienced in all His work to redeem us from our sins was because of sin imputed to Him.

Again, **2 Corinthians 5:21** is not describing in detail the whole of what Christ experienced as our Substitute to redeem us. It is describing the ground upon which God is reconciled to sinners and sinners are reconciled to God. It is showing the heart of the Gospel in the GROUND upon which Christ obeyed, suffered, and died to redeem us from our sins. Why did Christ become incarnate, obey the law perfectly, and die on the cross? Why did God the Father justly bring condemnation and wrath down upon His Son (Who is holy, harmless, and perfect in Himself)? Why did God the Father forsake His Son when Christ cried out, ***“My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46)***? It was because Christ stood as Surety and Substitute for His people and had the debt of all their sins imputed to Him. Christ suffered ***“the Just for the unjust”*** based on sins imputed to Him (**1 Peter 3:18**).

As Surety for His people, all their iniquities were laid upon Him, and as Substitute of His people, He bore their griefs and carried their sorrows in His obedience unto death to redeem them from their sins –

Isaiah 53 – (4) Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. (5) But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. (6) All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

In **2 Corinthians 5:21** the context also shows that all of His people were ***“made the righteousness of God in Him.”*** This means His righteousness (the merit of His obedience unto death) was imputed to them.

Isaiah 45 – (24) Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: even to Him shall men come; and all that are incensed against Him shall be ashamed. (25) In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.

In the same way that the redemptive work of Christ based on sins imputed to Him was more than imputation, the complete salvation of all His people is more than the imputation of righteousness to them. Our justification before God based on Christ’s righteousness imputed leads to our being born again by the Holy Spirit, brought to faith in Christ and repentance of our sins, and being preserved unto final glory. Christ’s righteousness imputed for our justification (which is what **2 Corinthians 5:21** reveals) is the GROUND of our whole salvation. The new birth is the FRUIT of Christ’s righteousness imputed to us. As I have shown in an earlier chapter, many confuse the GROUND of justification with the FRUIT of justification. This means they confuse the work of Christ FOR His people as their Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer with the work of the Holy Spirit IN His people as the life-giving Spirit. They claim that our justification before God is not

exclusively what God does for us in Christ, but what God does in us in the new birth. This is where the heretical notion of “imparted righteousness” has taken hold of so many people.

This is the age-old problem that has plagued sinful, unregenerate man since our fall in Adam – man’s self-righteous desire to find and claim righteousness within himself rather than in Christ alone. This is the problem with those who were mentioned in a previous chapter who claim that “God cannot justly impute righteousness to us until He first makes us righteous by a prior act.” They say the same about Christ “made sin.” They say that “God could not justly impute sin to Christ unless He first made Christ sin by a prior act.” As stated, the prior act they claim by which God makes His people righteous is the work of the Holy Spirit in the new birth whereby He imparts a new righteous nature first and then imputes righteousness. When it comes to the prior act of God making Christ sin, they are less certain about this and usually portray it as something mysterious that cannot be explained. They do not dare say that God imparted or infused a sinful nature into Christ before He imputed sin to Him, but this is the implication of their view. They will not state it as such, because they know this would be blasphemy.

As stated, those who promote this heresy of “imputation based on a prior act” rely heavily on their own personal interpretations of the word **“made”** in **2 Corinthians 5:21**. It is common for those who descend into heresy to concoct their own personal interpretations of passages in the Bible and support their supposed “new light” by changing the meanings of words and terms to fit their personal views. An example of this is found in those who try to prove that Christ **“made to be sin”** is not teaching that God imputed sin to Christ.

One such preacher defines the word **“made”** as – “God made Christ, not ‘to be sin,’ but sin itself in some mysterious way that cannot be defined.” As I have already stated, the reason he insists on removing the words “to be” as in the AKJV is because the phrase **“to be”** was not in the original Greek manuscripts but added by the translators. In the original it reads, **“For He made Him sin ...”**. Those who deny that this means sin imputed to Christ

often argue this way – “The text does not say that God made Christ ‘to be’ sin by a legal act of imputation, but that God made Him sin itself.”

First, the text DOES say that God ***“made Him sin”*** by a legal act of imputation. Where does it say this? It states it clearly within the context – ***“To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, NOT IMPUTING THEIR TRESPASSES UNTO THEM; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19).*** As stated, this whole passage has to do with reconciliation with God based on His people being ***“made the righteousness of God IN HIM,”*** which is the imputed righteousness of Christ. It speaks of the non-imputation of sins to God’s elect. Remember, the non-imputation of sin to God’s elect, as shown in God’s Word, involved the debt of those sins imputed to Christ and His righteousness imputed to them. So, the whole text speaks of imputation.

Secondly, as stated above, some opponents of this view will argue that “The text does not say that God imputed sin to Christ, but that God made Him sin itself.” This is a self-serving argument. Neither sin nor righteousness are entities into which a person can be literally made. The word ***“sin”*** here is the most common word in the New Testament for sin, and it literally means “to miss the mark, to fall short.” It is not a substance or material that someone can become. This verse is saying that God the Father made Christ to fall short, to miss the mark. How? He did this by imputing the debt of all the sins of God’s elect to Christ. He did not impart or infuse sin within Christ or in His nature, but He did make Christ (Who willingly agreed to be their Surety) to be legally accountable for the debt of the sins of His people.

The same holds true for the word ***“righteousness.”*** ***“Righteousness”*** is not a substance or material. It is perfect satisfaction to God’s justice. It is not a moral quality of character that can be imparted or infused. It is the standard by which all moral qualities of character are measured. It is the merit of a work, and this is the work of Christ Himself for His people as their Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. ***“Righteousness”*** can only be imputed.

CHRIST **"MADE"** SIN FOR HIS PEOPLE

Consider the two words translated **"made"** in **2 Corinthians 5:21**. Christ was **"MADE"** sin, and His people were **"MADE"** righteous in Him. In the original Greek, these are two different Greek words. The first word translated as Christ **"MADE"** sin is the Greek word *"poieō"* (pronounced, "poi-e'-ō"). Here, it describes a creative work of God in making His Son to be sin in the place of His chosen people. It is a word that has various meanings and applications in the New Testament depending on its context. The most common translation of this word in English versions is simply the word **"do"** (357 times in the KJV New Testament). It states that someone has done, made, accomplished something, or has performed a task. The word itself tells us nothing about who made whatever was made and how it was made. The context tells us the meaning, and the context here in **2 Corinthians 5** is clearly the non-imputation of sins to God's people because their sins were imputed to Christ.

The reason many people deny this is because it leaves them no room on the other side of the equation (God's people being **"made the righteousness of God in Him"**) to boast of righteousness worked out by or created within themselves. But it is amazing to see how some opponents of this teaching as found in **2 Corinthians 5:21** go about twisting the Scriptures to try to support their view. Consider the following article where a man seeks to compare and interpret the matter of Christ being **"made sin"** with other miraculous acts of God. The man begins by referring to **Exodus 4:1-9** where the Lord turned Moses's rod into a serpent and then turned it back into a rod. Then the Lord made Moses's hand to be leprous, then turned it back into healthy flesh. The man's reasoning is that because we can conclude that Moses's rod was REALLY made to be a serpent, and Moses's hand was REALLY made to be leprous, we can also conclude that Christ was REALLY made sin.

Was Christ Really Made Sin?

“When Moses cast the rod that was in his hand on the ground, did it become a real serpent, or did it just look like one? When his hand was turned to leprosy, was it real leprosy, or did it just look like leprosy? When Moses poured water on the ground and it turned into blood, did it look like blood, or was it real blood? When Christ was made sin, was he really made sin, or was it just charged to him?

Christ was really made sin just as sure as the rod became a serpent and Moses’s hand became leprosy and the water turned to blood.

We will never see sin until we are able to see Christ being made sin (Read Mark 14:32-36). When I see that his greatest agony was being made what I am, then I will see something of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. In other words, being made me (sin) was his greatest agony, what does that say about me?

Describing sin with many adjectives like evil, wicked, etc. really has no effect on us; however, seeing Christ being made sin has a profound effect on those whom he saves. Seeing him sweating great drops of blood because of being made sin is heart breaking to say the least. Yes, Christ was made sin. O the mystery of the gospel.”

There is much in the article that is true and sounds fine, but the author reveals that he neither understands nor appreciates the reality and blessedness of the Biblical truth of imputation. He degrades it by asking, “was he really made sin, or was it JUST CHARGED to him?” It is most certainly true that Christ was “really made sin.” The Lord Jesus Christ “was really made sin just as sure as the rod became a serpent and Moses’s hand became leprosy and the water turned to blood.” But this certainly does not mean that Christ was made sin in the same way that the rod became a serpent or that Moses’s hand became leprous. Reasoning like this is a very irresponsible way to interpret Scripture. We do compare Scripture with Scripture in order to find

its meaning, but we cannot set the rule of comparison against the rule of context and simple logic.

According to this kind of interpretation, one would have to say that Christ being made sin actually changed His very nature and character as was the case with the rod turned into a serpent, Moses's hand turned leprous, and the water turned into blood. The author even goes so far as to say that in being made sin Christ's "greatest agony was being made what I am." When Christ was made sin, He was NOT made a sinner himself. We must ask ourselves, "What am I by nature?" I am a sinner. Christ was not made a sinner. By nature, I am an idolater. Christ was not made an idolater. By nature, I am a God-hater. Christ was not made a God-hater.

When Christ was made sin, He remained perfectly holy and righteous in Himself. He was not changed into me or something called sin, but He was truly and really made sin. How? All the sins that condemned me were laid to His charge. He was made sin by the imputation of the sins of God's chosen people to His account. If one does not think this is real, then consider how Christ had to suffer and die because of this. This DOES have a profound effect upon His people when the Holy Spirit shows us this great truth and what our Lord had to suffer in His agony and death because of sin imputed to Him. But this does not turn the spotless Lamb of God into a sinner or even sin itself.

I mentioned before another man who denies that **2 Corinthians 5:21** teaches sin imputed to Christ and who tries to make a case that Christ was made sin in some other way. As stated, he attempts to make his case by redefining the word "**made**." He states that the first word translated "**made**" in **2 Corinthians 5:21** means "mysteriously, wondrously made, made in a profoundly mysterious way that is beyond explanation." This is NOT the definition of "**made**" in **2 Corinthians 5:21**. This same man further states that made "is not a legal (forensic) word. Our Lord was wondrously, mysteriously, profoundly caused to be sin for us, that we might be made, in the experience of grace, the righteousness of God in Him." His point is that if "**made**" is not a legal term then this verse cannot be teaching that Christ was made sin by a legal act of imputation. But his reasoning is faulty and self-serving. It is an empty argument.

It is true that the word **“made”** is not in itself a legal term, but that does not mean it cannot be used to describe a legal transaction. Consider our simple English word **“made”** as we use it today. We may say, for example, **“Mary MADE a cake.”** We may also say, **“Congress MADE a law.”** We certainly would not conclude that Mary’s cake and Congress’s law were MADE in the same way. The context shows us how each was made. One of the ways this opponent of legal imputation tries to support his heresy is by comparing the second word translated **“made”** in **2 Corinthians 5:21** with the same Greek word found in **John 2:9** where the Lord performed His first miracle of turning water into wine –

John 2 – (9) When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was MADE wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom,

Consider how the following article erroneously compares Christ being **“made sin”** and God’s people being **“made the righteousness of God in Him”** to the miracle of water **“made wine”** by Christ at the wedding feast in Cana as recorded in **John 2:9** –

“When the water was made wine at the marriage feast, the water was not made to look like wine, the water was not made to taste like wine, the water was not treated as though it were wine, and they didn’t put post-it notes on the water pots saying “Wine.” The water was made wine! And when the Son of God was made sin for us, He was not made to look like sin, treated as though He were sin, or merely have sin pasted on Him, He was, “Made to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.”

What the writer of this article says about the water that Christ changed into wine is true. Christ actually made real water into real wine. Also, it is

true that Christ was actually and really ***“MADE to be sin for us.”*** But Christ was not made to be sin for us in the same way that the water was made to be wine. When Christ made the water to be wine, there was an actual change in the nature and substance of the water into the nature and substance of wine. But when Christ was made to be sin, there was no actual change of nature or substance within Him. His divine nature could not be changed into something else and certainly could not become contaminated. His human nature had to remain sinless in order for Him to be the spotless Lamb and a proper sacrifice for the sins of His people. But Christ was actually and really made sin. How? It was by the imputation of the sins of His people to His account legally. And because of the imputation of our sin-debt to Christ, He had to become incarnate, obey the law perfectly, and die on the cross to pay the actual redemption price of our sins –

Hebrews 2 – (14) Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; (15) And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (16) For verily He took not on him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham. (17) Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. (18) For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted.

Consider that the word ***“behoved”*** in ***Hebrews 2:17*** is the Greek word for ***“debt”*** – ***“opheilēma,”*** pronounced ***“o-fā'-lā-mă”***. This shows that what the Lord Jesus Christ went through in His incarnation and suffering unto death was because of the obligation of a debt that He owed as the Surety of His people. This was the sin-debt imputed to His account, where our debt actually became HIS debt. This is how the sins of His people could actually be called HIS sins. For example, in Messianic and prophetic psalms that apply to

Christ in His death to pay our sin-debt, we see language such as is found in **Psalm 40** and **Psalm 69** –

Psalm 40 – (12) For innumerable evils have compassed Me about: MINE INIQUITIES have taken hold upon Me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of Mine head: therefore My heart faileth Me.

Psalm 69 – (5) O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and MY SINS ARE NOT HID FROM THEE.

As one commentator wrote in interpreting **Psalm 69:5**, “David might truly say this but not our Lord, unless He refers to our sins imputed and laid to His charge. He was **“made to be sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21)**.¹⁰ The same applies to the inspired words of **Psalm 40:12**. Everything that the Lord Jesus Christ experienced as the Surety and Substitute of His people, from His incarnation to the cross of Calvary, was because of sin imputed to Him. When He agreed to be our Surety, He obligated Himself to take our place and die for our sins. But make no mistake about this – Christ was actually made guilty, not for sins within Himself, but for sins imputed to Him. The sins of God’s elect (Christ’s sheep) were actually made to be HIS by a sovereign, legal act of imputation wherein God the Father made His Son (Who knew no sin) to be sin for His people.

CHRIST’S PEOPLE “MADE” THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN HIM

The text also states, **“that we might be MADE the righteousness of God in Him.”** As stated, this is a different Greek word – *“ginomai,”* pronounced “gē’-no-mī”. It means *“to be, to come to pass or come into existence, to become.”* The word itself here in **2 Corinthians 5:21** indicates a work of creation or a generation of people (**“we”**) that have come into existence

¹⁰ With New Testament Eyes, Vol. 2, Henry T. Mahan, p. 43

totally by a work of God the Father through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Some translations state it as follows – *“that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”* This would line up with the whole of Scripture in describing the work of God the Father through Christ to create for Himself a new people, a new family, a new kingdom, a new creation, a new generation as separate and distinct from the generation of the wicked which were created in the fall of Adam. Those whom God had chosen for salvation before the foundation of the world fell in Adam and were by nature part of a wicked generation. But God had already determined that out of the death of Christ, there would come a new generation, a righteous generation, made righteous ***“IN HIM”*** –

Psalm 22 – (30) A seed shall serve Him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation. (31) They shall come, and shall declare His righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that He hath done this.

Psalm 24 – (3) Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in His holy place? (4) He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. (5) He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. (6) This is the generation of them that seek Him, that seek thy face, O Jacob. Selah.

Psalm 102 – (15) So the heathen shall fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth Thy glory. (16) When the LORD shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His glory. (17) He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer. (18) This shall be written for the generation to come: and the people which shall be created shall praise the LORD.

Ephesians 2 – (10) For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

1 Peter 2 – (9) But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light:

All of this tells us that what Paul was stating in **2 Corinthians 5:21** is that the ground of reconciliation between God and His people is their sins imputed to Christ and Christ's righteousness imputed to them. The Gospel call is for sinners to be reconciled unto God upon this ground alone. It took the incarnation, obedience, and suffering unto death of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Surety and Substitute of God's elect to redeem them from their sins imputed to Him and to create them in righteousness which has been imputed to them. All whom God the Holy Spirit gives spiritual life and brings to faith in Christ and repentance of dead works are part of this righteous generation – ***“made the righteousness of God IN HIM.”*** They are still sinners within themselves. The remaining influence, corruption, and contamination of the flesh still resides within them. But the Lord gives them a new heart, a new spirit, and the Holy Spirit Himself indwelling them. They have been made new creatures in Christ as evidenced by their faith in Him as their only righteousness before God. They know well that they are not righteous within themselves, but they are fully and really righteous in Christ based on His righteousness imputed to them.

Christ's righteousness imputed to them is not a fake righteousness. It is not that they are made to look righteous, or have righteousness “pasted on” them but are really not righteous. In fact, if we judge by God's standard revealed in Christ, they do not even “look righteous” outwardly. They are not treated by God as though they were righteous but really are not. God treats them as they really are – righteous in His Son. They are not labelled by God to be righteous but really are not. God sees things as they are. We are the ones who do not see the reality of righteousness until we see our sins in light of Christ. Christ was really and truly made sin, and His people were really and truly made the righteousness of God in Him. Christ was not made to “look like sin,” nor was He treated as though He were sin, or merely have sin “pasted on Him.” He was made sin by a legal act of imputation. And if we

understand the Biblical truth of imputation, then we know the reality of this great legal transaction upon which in Christ our sins are purged away, and for which God will not impute sin to us because He has already imputed our sins to Christ –

Romans 8 – (33) Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. (34) Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, Who is even at the right hand of God, Who also maketh intercession for us.

This is the message and ministry of reconciliation whereby God in power makes the Gospel of reconciliation by the blood and righteousness of Christ to be ***“the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Romans 1:16)***. This is the righteousness of God in Christ which God has freely imputed to His people and from which God gives them spiritual life to know Him Whom to know is life eternal. It is in Christ Who is the Lord our Righteousness that we who believe can find the peace and assurance of eternal life and certain expectation of final glory.

9 Do Believers Have Righteousness Within Themselves?

Several years ago, after having pastored a church for a few years, one of the long-standing elders of the church came to my office stating he had a problem with my preaching. It was a doctrinal difference that he claimed, in his own words, was “as important to [him] as Christ and Him crucified.” Recall that the Apostle Paul wrote, ***“For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2).*** This shows us that nothing is as important as the doctrine of Christ’s Person and finished work on the cross. So obviously, this was a very serious matter to this man and had to be resolved. Believing the man to be a believer and a brother in Christ, I asked him to explain the issue so that we could settle the matter and continue in fellowship as brothers in Christ. He said that it was over the doctrine of the “two natures” in a believer. He stated that he knew that I did not believe the “two natures” doctrine. I explained to him that it was true that I do not prefer the term “two natures” because I believe it to be confusing and a very slippery slope. I told him that it sometimes leads many to unbiblical conclusions concerning the work of the Holy Spirit in the new birth and the nature of the change that God brings about in the new birth. I also told the man that I would not separate with brethren over the use or non-use of this term as long as we stay together on Biblical and Gospel truth.

To me, the differences that believers hold on this issue is largely a matter of semantics (how one defines particular words and phrases). Because of this I prefer to stay with strict Biblical language when it comes to the nature of the operation of the Holy Spirit in the new birth as found in passages such as

—

Ezekiel 36 – (26) A NEW HEART also will I give you, and a NEW SPIRIT will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. (27) And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them.

There are other passages that describe what God the Holy Spirit does within God's elect in the new birth, and I will refer to them later in this chapter, but this is just one example. In the new birth God the Holy Spirit creates within God's people a new heart and new spiritual life. If one chooses to call this a "new nature," I have no problem with this as long as he stays within the boundaries of Scriptural truth and does not deny (or even confuse) the Gospel message of Christ and His righteousness imputed as the only ground of salvation.

After explaining this to the elder, I told him that it was not a Gospel issue and that we should not divide over this. We both believed that the new birth involved the work of the Holy Spirit imparting new spiritual life. It was then that he explained to me, not only what truly was a major doctrinal difference between us, but also one of the most bizarre definitions of the "new nature" I have ever heard. Here is how he defined his doctrine of the "new nature." He said, "I believe that when we are born again, the Holy Spirit creates within us a new divine and righteous nature that cannot sin and cannot be contaminated."

I had heard this from another pastor who had already separated from me over this matter, and I knew this elder was a close friend of this pastor. I knew then what was happening. This particular elder was looking for a

reason to leave our local church fellowship and believed he had found a serious doctrinal difference upon which he could claim biblically and honorably to separate from brethren with whom he had been in fellowship for over thirty years. I first attempted to resolve the issue between us by appealing to the Scriptures. I asked him, “What Scriptures do you use to support your new-found definition of the ‘new nature’?” He referred to the following two verses of Scripture –

2 Peter 1 – (4) Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

1 John 3 – (9) Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His seed remaineth in Him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

I explained to him that neither one of these verses support such a convoluted definition of the “new nature.” One would have to take these verses out of their context and stretch them to the maximum length of human rationalization to extract such a bizarre and complicated doctrine. I will deal with both verses within their respective contexts later in this chapter, but I explained this to the dissenting elder with no success of convincing him otherwise. Reminding him that the Scriptural evidence of having been given a “new heart” and a “new spirit” is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and repentance of sin and dead works, I asked the man what evidence could he find within himself of a “righteous nature that cannot sin and cannot be contaminated”? His reply was, “love.”

I told him that I agreed that the Holy Spirit gives us a “new heart” and a “new spirit” whereby we can honestly say we love Christ and love His people, but we cannot say that we love Christ and His people perfectly and without any contamination of sin. I asked him if he loved me with a sinless and uncontaminated love. Refusing to answer, he simply dismissed the question by saying, “You can argue better than I can.” That was the end of our conversation, and the elder, along with several people who respected and

admired him, separated from our church and started another assembly in another place. This is the tragic story of much of what is going on today in the visible church here on earth. Much of it has to do, not with Gospel issues, but with having respect of men rather than respecting God and His Word. But what I believe started out as nothing more than respect of men with this elder turned into a serious denial of Gospel truth. His view of the “two natures” in a believer was founded upon what some consider to be the doctrine of “imparted righteousness.”

One of the most prevalent and continuing debates amongst professing Christians is stated in the following question – Does God justify sinners based on an IMPUTED righteousness, or does God justify sinners based on an IMPARTED or an INFUSED righteousness? Another facet of this debate can be stated as follows – Does God justify sinners based on a combination of IMPUTED righteousness and IMPARTED (INFUSED) righteousness, and, if so, which is the ground, and which is the fruit? Now, many of the arguments that have been raised in this dispute (and many of the unfounded accusations levelled against one side or the other) have come as a result of nothing more than semantics. But over the years much of the debate has been (and is) a vital issue that determines whether one knows, believes, and preaches the TRUE Gospel or a FALSE gospel. Many have started out with nothing more than differences over semantics, but some have gone too far and have descended into abject heresy – a denial of the true Gospel which is the power of God unto salvation and the revelation of the righteousness of God. To show this, let us begin with something that is obvious – Imputed righteousness IS a Biblical term (***Romans 4:6-8,11,22-24***); imparted righteousness IS NOT a Biblical term.

This is not to say that in expressing Biblical truth that we can never use non-Biblical terms. For example, we believe in the Biblical truth of the Holy Trinity (one God in three Persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). This is Gospel truth and is found in the Bible, but the actual term “Trinity” is not found in the Bible at all. We believe the Biblical truth of God’s absolute sovereignty (that God is in complete control and rules over all things, working all things after the counsel of His own will). This too is a Gospel truth found

in the Bible, but the actual word “sovereignty” is not found in the Bible at all. So, the fact that the term “imparted righteousness” is not a Biblical term does not prove its inaccuracy. But this does show us that whenever we use non-Biblical terms, we must be certain of three things:

(1) That the term does not deny, challenge, or confuse the simple and basic Gospel message of salvation by God’s grace through the Lord Jesus Christ and based on His righteousness alone.

(2) That the term does not deny or confuse the GROUND upon which God saves and justifies sinners with the FRUIT by which God brings His people into the experience of salvation.

(3) That the term accurately expresses clear Biblical truth without confusing and/or dividing true believers or placing a stumbling-block in their way to hinder them in their growth in grace and in knowledge of Christ.

Any right understanding of Biblical truth can only be proven as it lines up with and builds upon the clear and basic Gospel message of Christ crucified and risen from the dead, and as it edifies and unifies the brethren. Consider the words “impute” and “impart” –

IMPUTE AND IMPART

I have already shown from the Scripture that the righteousness by which sinners are justified is the IMPUTED righteousness of Christ. But what about the truth of IMPARTATION? Is the righteousness of God imparted to His people? Is there anything at all imparted to God’s people in salvation, and what exactly is imparted? The words *“impart”* and *“imparted”* are found in three verses in the New Testament. *“Impart”* means *“to give, share, communicate, make known.”* –

Luke 3 – (11) He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him IMPART [give, share with] to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.

Romans 1 – (11) For I long to see you, that I may IMPART [share] unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established;

1 Thessalonians 2 – (8) So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have IMPARTED [shared] unto you, not the Gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.

Spiritual life, knowledge, and gifts are imparted by the Holy Spirit to God's people. For example, we can think of it as a teaching term. A teacher's goal is to *impart* knowledge to his students. He wants the knowledge to go from his mind into theirs and bring about a change within them, making them more informed. He wants them to learn this knowledge and for it to become part of them. Many professing Christians who believe in what they call an "imparted righteousness" mean the impartation or infusion of godly qualities of character which bring about a spiritual change within. They call this "righteousness." As I have already shown, the problem with this is that if we understand the Biblical terms "*righteousness*" and "*impute*," we know that righteousness itself is not a moral quality of character (such as faith, repentance, love, humility, gratitude, and all the fruit of the Holy Spirit). Righteousness is the merit (value, quality) of a finished work that perfectly conforms to God's law and perfectly satisfies God's justice. It is the standard by which all moral qualities of character are measured. The merit of a work cannot be imparted but only imputed. Moral qualities of character cannot be imputed but only imparted. Righteousness, therefore, can only be imputed (legally accounted) and not imparted. The following illustration may help us in understanding this point –

If a human being (even though sinful) were to give his life to save the life of another sinful human being, we would certainly consider this a very high moral quality of character in the person who sacrificed himself for another. The question is – Did that person's moral act of self-sacrifice equal the righteousness of the law of God, or did it make him righteous before God? If we believe the Bible, we would have to say, "NO." Even though the act of self-sacrifice was moral and noble, God says that no work of sinful people can make them righteous in His sight!

On the other hand, when the Lord Jesus Christ (God in sinless human flesh) gave His life for God's elect (sinful human beings), it was certainly a high moral act, but it was more than this. His death did equal the righteousness of God's law for His people. As He was measured by the standard of God's law, His obedience unto death satisfied fully the justice of God's law and brought in everlasting righteousness for His people.

The truth is that even as believers our moral acts do not measure up to the perfect righteousness of the law required by God for our justification in His sight. The moral act of Christ in His obedience unto death, however, most certainly DID measure up to the perfect righteousness of the law required by God for our justification in His sight. As we have shown, the Bible teaches us that ***"by the deeds of law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight" (Romans 3:20)***. This means that no sinner can be declared righteous by any action that men judge to be moral acts of love and obedience. Why? It is because no action of sinful men can equal the righteousness of God. Righteousness can only be found in and by the Lord Jesus Christ in His obedience unto death. We can conclude, therefore, that the righteousness of Christ (being the merit of a work done and finished) may be imputed for the justification of God's people but cannot be possibly imparted or infused.

What, then, is imparted in the salvation of God's people? God the Holy Spirit does impart spiritual life, knowledge, faith, repentance, love, and all the fruit of the Spirit within God's people in their new birth (regeneration and

conversion). This is the powerful and miraculous work of Christ within His people by the power of the Holy Spirit when He brings them to faith in Christ and repentance of dead works. BUT THIS WORK WITHIN US IS NOT OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS BEFORE GOD, AND IT IS NOT OUR JUSTIFICATION BEFORE GOD. It is the FRUIT and RESULT of the merit of Christ's finished work of righteousness imputed to us, and of our already having been justified before God based on Christ's righteousness imputed. This is sanctification (being set apart) by the Holy Spirit when He brings us from death to life, from darkness to light, from unbelief to faith, from bringing forth fruit unto death to bringing forth fruit unto God. This work of God the Holy Spirit in our salvation does not make us righteous before God, but in this work, He convicts us of sin and drives us to Christ and His finished work as our only righteousness before God

John 16 – (7) Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter [Holy Spirit] will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you. (8) And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: (9) Of sin, because they believe not on Me; (10) Of righteousness, because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more; (11) Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

Some of the old Gospel writers referred to this work within God's people as the Holy Spirit imparting "the resurrection life of Christ" to and in them. This work brings about a miraculous, powerful, and spiritual change within God's people. It is described in many ways in the Bible. The following verses are just a few of many, many examples of the nature of the work of the Holy Spirit in imparting spiritual life in the new birth –

Deuteronomy 30 – (6) And the LORD thy God will CIRCUMCISE THINE HEART, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.

Jeremiah 31- (33) But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will PUT MY LAW IN THEIR INWARD PARTS, AND WRITE IT IN THEIR HEARTS; and will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Ezekiel 36 – (26) A NEW HEART ALSO WILL I GIVE YOU, AND A NEW SPIRIT WILL I PUT WITHIN YOU: AND I WILL TAKE AWAY THE STONY HEART OUT OF YOUR FLESH, AND I WILL GIVE YOU AN HEART OF FLESH. (27) And I will PUT MY SPIRIT WITHIN YOU, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them.

John 3 – (3) Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, EXCEPT A MAN BE BORN AGAIN, he cannot see the kingdom of God. (4) Nicodemus saith unto Him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? (5) Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, EXCEPT A MAN BE BORN OF WATER AND OF THE SPIRIT, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

Romans 2 – (28) For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: (29) But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and CIRCUMCISION IS THAT OF THE HEART, IN THE SPIRIT, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

2 Corinthians 4 – (6) For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath SHINED IN OUR HEARTS, TO GIVE THE LIGHT OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE GLORY OF GOD IN THE FACE OF JESUS CHRIST.

Galatians 1 – (15) But when it pleased God, Who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, (16) TO REVEAL HIS SON IN ME, that I might preach Him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:

We cannot overemphasize the fact that this great and powerful work of impartation is necessary in the salvation of sinners. It is a work of God's power and grace in and by the Lord Jesus Christ and based upon His righteousness imputed to God's people. No one will be saved without being born again by the Holy Spirit and believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. Where Christ's righteousness has been imputed, spiritual life from Christ will be imparted. But we must never confuse these two sovereign and powerful works of God's grace. Christ's righteousness imputed is the only ground of our justification before God and our only righteousness before God. As stated throughout this book, this great truth is stated in many, many Scriptures to give Christ the preeminence in our salvation. Spiritual life imparted by the Holy Spirit is the fruit and result of His righteousness imputed to us and reveals that we have already been justified before God. It is not the other way around. It is Christ's work for us on the cross that makes us righteous (justified) in God's sight. It is Christ's work in us by the Spirit (sanctified) that reveals that we have been made righteous by His work for us on the cross.

There are some who confuse these two works by insisting on some form of "imparted righteousness," claiming that sinners are justified (made righteous) first by the work of the Holy Spirit in them in the new birth. As stated in an earlier chapter, they redefine imputation as "God imputing righteousness where righteousness already exists," or "God imputing righteousness based upon the prior act making them righteous within in the new birth." Now, it is obvious that God does not impute righteousness where it does not exist. But it is also true that righteousness has always existed IN THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. This was true as applied to the Old Testament believers even before Christ came in time to establish righteousness on the cross by redeeming His people from their sins. It existed in the mind and purpose of God Who ***"calleth those things which be not as though they were"*** (Romans 4:17).

Some argue that righteousness did not exist until Christ actually came in time and worked it out on the cross. But it DID exist in the mind of God Who sees things, not as limited to time, but as they exist in eternity. God justified

the Old Testament saints based on Christ's righteousness imputed to them because it was always sure and certain that Christ would come in time and work it out in His death on the cross as their Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. So, righteousness DID exist in the Person and work of Christ as the Representative, Surety, Substitute, Redeemer, and Mediator of God's elect. Those who insists on the heresy of "imparted (infused) righteousness" claim that "God only imputes righteousness where righteousness exists WITHIN US by a prior act" which, they claim, is the new birth. As I have already exposed this heresy in two articles written by the same author and cited in Chapter Three. They bear repeating here –

"When God imputes righteousness to us, it is not to treat us as if we are righteous when we really are not. According to God's definition of imputation in scripture, God imputes sin or righteousness to a person only if that is what they are by a prior act. It is not imputation that makes us so. IT IS THE PRIOR ACT. Therefore, God imputes righteousness to us because it is what we are by the acts of Christ. God imputes righteousness to us because we were made righteous by the obedience of Christ Jesus the Lord. 'For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.' (*Rom 5: 19*)."

"Likewise the just Judge does not make the believer righteous by imputation, for that too would be unjustly imputing righteousness where righteousness is not, which God forbids in His own word (referring to **Proverbs 17:15**). But the just Judge imputes righteousness to the believer THROUGH FAITH, WHEN IN SPIRIT THE BELIEVER HAS BEEN MADE RIGHTEOUS BY GOD'S WORKMANSHIP, WHEN HE IS BORN AGAIN CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF CHRIST THAT CREATED HIM."

We can see from this that when men desire to find and claim righteousness within themselves rather than in Christ alone, they always seek to cover themselves by claiming it is all of grace. They claim the righteousness they have within themselves is not their own but Christ's righteousness in them. But, as we have shown above, righteousness is not a moral quality of character that can be imparted or infused. It is the merit of a finished work accomplished by Christ on the cross as the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His people. It is not an operation of the Spirit within God's people. It is the work of God the Son incarnate for His people. Just as all the demerit of all the sins of God's elect was imputed, not imparted, to Christ by which He became legally guilty and cursed in order to die for them, His righteousness has been imputed, not imparted, to them by which they become legally justified and eventually blessed to be born again by the Holy Spirit.

DO BELIEVERS HAVE TWO NATURES, ONE SINFUL AND ONE RIGHTEOUS?

As I have stated, this has been a long-debated subject involving even true believers in seeking to understand the reality and nature of the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation. Let me emphasize that there is no argument amongst true believers that the inward work of the Holy Spirit is necessary for the salvation of God's elect. This is the irresistible and invincible grace of God in bringing all whom He chose before the foundation of the world, and all for whom Christ died and arose again, to faith in Christ and repentance of sin and dead works. I also want to emphasize that this work is the necessary fruit of God's grace in the redemption of His people by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Again, Christ's work FOR His people is the GROUND of justification, and Christ's work IN His people by the Holy Spirit in the new birth is the FRUIT of justification. The disagreements on this matter concern the nature of the Holy Spirit's work within a person and how we are to view this great work and describe it in doctrinal terms. The Bible gives us some specific terms to describe the new birth. For example, in speaking of this to Nicodemus, the Lord Himself stated it this way –

John 3 – (5) Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. (6) That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. (7) Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. (8) The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

The Lord teaches us here that the new birth comes when a person is ***“born of water and of the Spirit.”*** We know exactly what He meant by being ***“born of the Spirit,”*** because salvation involves the Holy Spirit giving (imparting) new spiritual life to a spiritually dead sinner. Paul wrote that ***“the Spirit giveth life” (2 Corinthians 3:6).*** The new birth, then, is a literal resurrection from the dead wherein God the Holy Spirit imparts the resurrection life of Christ to a spiritually dead sinner.

As I have pointed out above, this work is described in the Bible in many ways, but there have been different schools of thought on what the Lord meant by the phrase ***“born of water.”*** Some believe that ***“born of water”*** refers to physical birth. Before babies are born, they live in a sack of amniotic fluid for nine months. When they are born, this sack of water bursts, and the baby is born in a flow of water. This could make sense in light of Nicodemus’s misunderstanding of the new birth confusing it with physical birth. If this was the case, the Lord could have been telling Nicodemus that unless we are born physically (but spiritually dead in trespasses and sins) AND born spiritually (made new creatures in Christ), we cannot see or enter the kingdom of God.

This would also support the great truth that salvation (including the new birth) is ALL OF THE LORD and not conditioned on man. A baby is NOT born physically by any power or decision of its own. It is all the work of God through the father and the mother. A sinner is born again spiritually NOT by any power or decision of his own. It is all the work of God the Father through the Son and the Spirit. Those who fall into the error of thinking that the new birth is the result of a sinner’s believing are sadly deceived and lost. Faith is

the result of the new birth which is the result of God's power and grace in and by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Another view of **"born of water"** is that it refers to spiritual cleansing. This view states that **"born of water and of the Spirit"** are different ways of expressing the same truth – one metaphorically and the other literally. In the Old Testament water is used as a symbol of spiritual cleansing –

Ezekiel 36 – (25) Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.

Psalm 51 – (2) Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

Psalm 51 – (7) Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

The symbol of physical water is used to represent spiritual purification. The New Testament also uses water as a symbol of the new birth –

Titus 3 – (4) But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, (5) Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, BY THE WASHING OF REGENERATION, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; (6) Which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;

Ephesians 5 – (25) Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; (26) That He might sanctify and cleanse it with THE WASHING OF WATER BY THE WORD,

This has also given support to those who believe that **"born of water"** means spiritually born by the Word of God (the Gospel) as empowered by the Holy Spirit –

1 Peter 1 – (22) Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: (23) Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

James 1 – (18) Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.

All of this proves that the sovereign agent in the new birth is God the Holy Spirit sent forth from the Father and the Son with the means of the Word of God (the Gospel) whereby He imparts spiritual life, knowledge, faith, and all the fruit of the Spirit to God's people. This is a spiritual cleansing that brings all of God's people to see the reality of their own sin and depravity, the glory of Christ and His righteousness worked out for them through His blood, and how God is just to justify them based on the merits of Christ's righteousness imputed to them freely by His grace.

This spiritual life is the fruit of what Christ's accomplished by His death as the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of His people. As has been stated often in this book, as sin demanded their death, Christ's righteousness imputed to them demands their spiritual life, or what is also called a "quickenings" –

Ephesians 2 – (1) And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.

It is also described in Scripture as sanctification (setting apart) by the Holy Spirit and a calling of the Spirit through the Gospel –

2 Thessalonians 2 – (13) But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through SANCTIFICATION OF THE SPIRIT and belief

of the truth: (14) Whereunto He CALLED you by our Gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the effectual and invincible calling of the Holy Spirit wherein He imparts spiritual life and knowledge to CONVICT (convince) God's people of the truth concerning matters of sin and salvation by God's grace in Christ. Consider again –

John 16 – (8) And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: (9) Of sin, because they believe not on Me; (10) Of righteousness, because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more; (11) Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged.

The question then is this – Does all of this amount to a righteous nature within believers? When we are born again by the Holy Spirit, does He create within us a new righteous nature that exists alongside of the old sinful nature? As I have stated, the arguments in this issue have been largely a matter of semantics as people on one side define terms to support their view and people on the other side define the terms differently to support their view. But it is important that we realize that not all disagreements on this matter are semantical. As with the elder cited at the beginning of this chapter, some who insist on what they call the “two-natures” theory fall into serious heresy and deny the truth of Scripture. Others are so convinced that their view is the truth that they go so far as to separate from anyone who would disagree with them in their own personal definition of the “two natures.”

Let me emphasize again that I personally do not like the term “two natures” in a believer because I believe it is a “slippery slope” that leads many people into a misunderstanding of Biblical truth and can lead to heresy. Many who prefer this term to describe the Holy Spirit's work within a believer simply mean that in the new birth, the Holy Spirit gives us new life, a new heart, a new spirit, a new mind, and makes us new creatures in Christ. I have no problem, and would not separate, with anyone who simply insists on

calling this work a “new nature” and claim that believers are persons who have “two natures,” a sin nature and a godly nature. But I always caution those who view it this way to be careful that they do not go beyond the Scriptural revelation of this matter.

Some portray the “two natures” almost as if it were two different persons inside of a born-again person and as if each nature acts independently of that person. They describe the inner workings of the “two natures” as one fighting to dominate the other. I have heard some describe it as follows – “The sinful nature can do nothing but sin, and the holy nature can do nothing but righteousness.” The problem with this kind of view is that the Bible does not describe anything like a “sinful nature” or a “righteous nature” doing or not doing anything of themselves. The Bible does describe believers who do (or do not do) things, sometimes acting according to the flesh and sometimes acting according to the Spirit.

There is a warfare waging inside of every true believer. But a believer is not two different people inside of himself. He is ONE person who has within himself both sinful and godly desires. If one wants to call this, “one person with two natures,” this is fine as long as he stays within the context of Biblical truth. A believer is not two different people (Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde) inside of himself, one who is sinful and evil, the other who is holy and pure. He is a sinner saved by the grace of God and accepted with God in the Beloved, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some who hold to the “two-natures” theory are convinced that when the new birth occurs that the Holy Spirit creates in that person a “new man” to exist alongside of (but in opposition to) the “old man.” These two men, as it were, occupy the same person as incompatible roommates. In their view, the “old man” (old sinful nature) continues on in sin as he always has, but now he is at war with the “new man” (new sinless, righteous nature) who does nothing but righteousness. Some believe in the struggle for supremacy the “old man” is victorious one day and the “new man” is victorious another day. It all depends on which nature a born-again person feeds. But they believe that by the grace of God, the “new man” will ultimately win the war. This may sound fine to us, but we need to realize that it is totally unscriptural.

It is not the reality of our experience as true Christians in the spiritual warfare in which we are engaged.

When a sinner is born again by the Holy Spirit, there most certainly IS a struggle within himself – a warfare of the flesh (sinful human nature) against the Holy Spirit Who resides within him. The Holy Spirit gives him spiritual life, and by God’s power and grace, he has been made a SPIRITUAL person. But he still retains sinful human nature with all of its sinful thoughts, desires, motives, and goals. By the power of the Holy Spirit Who has given him spiritual life and knowledge through the Word of God, he is engaged in a warfare against himself and all the corruptions of sin within himself –

Galatians 5 – (13) For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. (14) For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. (15) But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. (16) This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. (17) FOR THE FLESH LUSTETH AGAINST THE SPIRIT, AND THE SPIRIT AGAINST THE FLESH: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

Now, if one insists on labelling the flesh as the “old nature” and labelling spiritual life within as the “new nature,” this is fine as long as he does not take it too far and go beyond the Scriptures so as to try to prove that he has some kind of perfect righteousness within himself. For example, recall how the elder I quoted above who left the church I was pastoring over this issue defined the “new nature” by claiming that when we are born again by the Holy Spirit, “He creates within us a new divine nature that cannot sin and cannot be contaminated.” This is the equivalent of claiming a righteousness within himself, one that is imparted or infused. This takes the “two-natures” theory too far. It states that a born-again person has one nature that does nothing but sin and another nature that does nothing but good. The good nature cannot improve the evil nature, and the evil nature cannot

contaminate the good nature. This gives credence to the heresy that there is part of us that can do nothing but sin and part of us that can do nothing but good. The questions that must be raised are –

(1) Where is such a view of the new birth found and explained in the Bible? It is NOT found in God's Word. As I stated earlier, those who hold this view appeal mainly to two passages of Scripture, and they do so by taking both out of their context –

2 Peter 1 – (1) Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: (2) Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, (3) According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue: (4) Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

First of all, whenever we see the word ***“nature”*** in the Bible, it is speaking either of the physical world and natural order of the universe, fallen human nature, angelic nature, or the nature of God (the Divine nature). The ***“Divine nature”*** here is the nature (character and glory) of God Himself (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). It is not spiritual life created within those who are born of the Spirit. It is true that spiritual life that is imparted to those who are born again is FROM the Divine, i.e. from God. It is the resurrection life of Christ that comes to God's people because of His righteousness by which He Himself was raised from the dead. It is the very image of God that we lost in Adam. Christ is the Creator of our spiritual life! But that spiritual life is not in its very nature divine. First of all, anything that is by nature divine cannot be created. Divinity has no beginning and no end. So, to say that we who are born again by the Spirit have a “Divine nature created within us” is a perversion of truth and even blasphemy. When we are born again, we are

not created and/or changed into something that is divine by nature. Our salvation and spiritual life are all FROM the Divine One in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, but this does not make us to be “little gods.” Even as born-again persons, we are still no more than human beings by nature, even though we are made spiritual human beings with a spiritual nature. In the new birth we are changed from ungodly to godly, but we are not divine in our very nature. God is the Creator of all life, including spiritual life, but there is no creation of anything that is by nature divine.

Next, many times we think of the word “partake” as describing the consumption of food as when we “partake of a meal.” If this were the case in **2 Peter 1:4**, it certainly would indicate some kind of impartation or infusion of the **“Divine nature.”** But this is not what the original Greek word **“partakers”** means. The Greek word is *“koinōnos,”* and pronounced *“koi-nō-no’s.”* In the AKJV it is translated as **“partakers,” “partner,” “fellowship,”** and **“companion.”** It is a word of FELLOWSHIP which means “to share” or “to become partners with.” The same word in another form is translated as **“fellowship”** in **1 John 1:3** –

1 John 1 – (3) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

What Peter was inspired to write in **2 Peter 1:4** is the same truth John was inspired to write in **1 John 1:3**. It means that when God’s people are given spiritual life from God in Christ by the Holy Spirit, they are brought into fellowship (partnership) with the **“Divine nature,”** which is God Himself (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Neither John nor Peter spoke of any notion of a new nature within a born-again person which is divine. Again, that is blasphemy. Only God is divine by nature. We who are born-again from above share to a degree in some of the communicable attributes of God (faithfulness, love, knowledge, etc.), but we can never claim divinity for ourselves. The other verse of Scripture that some who hold to the “two-natures” theory use to try to support their view is found **1 John** –

1 John 3 – (9) Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His seed remaineth in Him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

They claim by this verse that the “seed” here is a “new sinless nature” which is “**born of God**” and cannot “**commit sin.**” Therefore, they claim a “righteous nature that cannot sin and cannot be contaminated.” The problem with using this verse to try to prove such a belief is that it is a serious misunderstanding of the context of **1 John 3:9** and a terrible misuse of the Scriptures. The context shows that John’s subject has to do with those who claim to be saved by grace, to be born again by the Holy Spirit, as evidenced by their perseverance in clinging to Christ, remaining in Him as their only ground and hope of salvation. There were many who claimed to be saved and to be born again by the Spirit but who proved to be false professors because they left the Gospel and forsook Christ. They apostatized from (fell away from and turned against) the faith of the Gospel proving that they had never been born again at all –

1 John 2 – (19) They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

John then shows the contrast between such false professors and the true children of God –

1 John 2 – (20) But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. (21) I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. (22) Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. (23) Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also. (24) LET THAT THEREFORE ABIDE IN YOU, WHICH YE HAVE HEARD FROM THE BEGINNING. IF THAT WHICH YE HAVE HEARD FROM THE BEGINNING SHALL

REMAIN IN YOU, YE ALSO SHALL CONTINUE IN THE SON, AND IN THE FATHER.

The ***“unction from the Holy One”*** is the anointing of the Holy Spirit sent from Christ to give spiritual life in the new birth to all whom Christ has redeemed. They will ***“continue in the Son, and in the Father”*** as opposed to those who forsook the Son and the Father. When John speaks of ***“sin”*** here, he is speaking of the sin of apostasy which leaves a sinner lacking in righteousness which can only be found in Christ. So, whosoever is truly born of God does not commit the sin of forsaking Christ, and because he is in Christ, he cannot fall short of the righteousness God requires. He is righteous in Christ, based on Christ’s righteousness imputed to him. ***“HIS seed remaineth in HIM”*** – The ***“seed”*** here is the offspring (children, generation) that Christ has brought forth by His death and whom He owns as His children and brethren. By God’s grace and by God-given faith, they all will most certainly continue in Him (persevere in the faith). They cannot leave Christ because He will not let them go, and because they have been ***“born of God.”*** The Holy Spirit indwells them and has given them life from God so that they cannot leave Christ and forsake Him.

(2) What does the Bible say about the warfare between the flesh and the Spirit? What does it say about our struggle within?

In Chapter Five I mentioned a man who in preaching on **1 John 2:29** a message entitled “The Doing of Righteousness,” stated that, “Doing righteousness is the action of the new righteous nature.” As I have stated before, the Bible never speaks of a sinful nature or a righteous nature doing or not doing anything. It speaks of a believer doing sinful things and doing godly things. We know that when a believer does sinful things, these are the fruit of sinful human nature. We also know that when a believer performs godly actions, these are motivated and energized by the Holy Spirit working upon the believer’s spirit (i.e. spiritual life or nature, if that is what one prefers to call it). But even in acting in godliness, the believer’s works are still

contaminated by the remaining corruption of sinful flesh. Either way, it is not a sinful nature or a righteous nature doing or not doing anything. It is the person who has been born again by the Holy Spirit. Some who espouse the “two-natures” view as stated in the quotation above try to use Paul’s language in **Romans 7** to support their view –

Romans 7 – (16) If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. (17) Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

Paul was not “passing the buck” here and shifting blame from himself as a person to a sin nature within him. He was speaking figuratively here to show that when he sins, this does not identify the reality of who he really was – a sinner SAVED BY GRACE and RIGHTEOUS IN CHRIST. He was expressing how he had a God-given desire to do good but could not achieve this because he was still plagued with the remaining presence, influence, and contamination of his sinful flesh –

Romans 7 – (18) For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. (19) For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. (20) Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

Paul’s conclusion was that he could not do the good that he wanted to do. If in the new birth we are given, as some claim, a “righteous nature that cannot sin and cannot be contaminated,” would it not stand to reason that there would be some evidence of sinless perfection emanating from us? If this were the case, then Paul’s desire to do good would have to come from the “new nature” because the “old nature” certainly would not desire to do good. And if it were the “new nature’s” desire to do good, what could hinder this goal if this “new nature” could not sin or be contaminated? I hope we can see how confusing and complicated this kind of thinking can be.

To understand the reality of all this, we need to consider what the Word of God says about a believer's struggle in the warfare of the flesh and the Spirit. Consider again –

Galatians 5 – (16) This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. (17) For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: SO THAT YE CANNOT DO THE THINGS THAT YE WOULD.

It is obvious here, and in other passages of Scripture, that a born-again person is one who has opposing desires within himself. He has sinful and selfish motives, desires, and goals, which are natural to him and the product of ***“the flesh”*** which cannot be improved. Someone accused me of believing that the new birth is nothing more than an improvement of the flesh. This is not true. The flesh in this context is sin – sinful motives, desires, and goals. Nothing can improve the flesh. Sin will always be sin and nothing more. But by the grace of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, a born-again person has been given holy and godly motives, desires, and goals, which are not natural to him but given to him by Christ through the Holy Spirit in the new birth. I use the terms “holy” and “godly” here, NOT to mean “sinless perfection,” but separateness. These Spirit-given desires (even though not yet perfect) separate a child of God from the rest of fallen and unregenerate humanity. He has been delivered ***“from the power of darkness”*** and ***“translated into the kingdom of His [God’s] dear Son” (Colossians 1:13)***. His fellowship is no longer with the world but with God in Christ.

The born-again person is engaged in a daily warfare within himself. If one chooses to call this a battle between “two natures,” this is fine, but consider that this is a warfare within himself, not between two different persons within himself. ***“The flesh”*** here is not another person inside of a believer. It is the old sinful thoughts, motives, desires, and goals that have always been with him from birth. We fell in Adam into sin and death, and we were all born spiritually dead in trespasses and sins.

The **“Spirit”** here is another Person that indwells us because He is God the Holy Spirit Who is by nature divine. But He is not us, and we are not Him. He indwells us, but He is separate from us. However, He works within us to give us spiritual life within and to impart spiritual knowledge and faith, along with new thoughts, motives, desires, and goals through the Word of God. So, He **“bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Romans 8:16)**. Our **“spirit”** is spiritual life given to us in the new birth. Again, it is new life, a new heart with new motives, desires, and goals that glorify God in Christ. This new spirit is never described in the Bible as another person inside of us acting on its own. And even though we may speak metaphorically in this way, we should never use such notions as literal truth to the point of making them foundations of faith and fellowship.

But there is something very significant here that proves that whatever you call it, or whatever it actually is, the “new nature” is not a sinlessly perfect nature, or a righteousness within, “that cannot sin and cannot be contaminated.” The reality is as Paul wrote – **“THAT YE CANNOT DO THE THINGS THAT YE WOULD.”** It is often said that this means, on the one hand, **“the flesh”** (the principle and power of sin that remains within us) will not allow us to attain the full measure of goodness and righteousness that we desire as the Holy Spirit has given us a new spirit with new desires. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit (who keeps us in God’s grace, keeps us clinging to Christ, and inspires us to holiness and godliness by the Word of God) will not allow us to descend into the full measure of sin and depravity due to the remaining corruption and contamination of **“the flesh.”** It is God’s will that while we are on this earth, we continue in the power of the Spirit to desire and strive for perfect righteousness while, at the same time, we are hindered from reaching this goal because of the remaining corruption and contamination of **“the flesh.”** Why would God will this for His people? He wills it so because this causes us to look to and cling more and more to Christ for all righteousness. It causes us to realize even more how much we are totally dependent upon His sovereign grace, love, mercy, and faithfulness –

Psalm 130 – (3) If Thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? (4) But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared.

Lamentation 3 – (22) It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. (23) They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness. (24) The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him.

Malachi 3 – (6) For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

Romans 7 – (24) O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? (25) I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

2 Corinthians 12 – (9) And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

This gives Christ all the glory in our salvation and in our preservation – ***“Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 10:25).*** God has determined to show forth the glorious fact that our whole salvation is to the praise of the glory of His grace and nothing of or in ourselves. This makes Christ and His blood even more precious to His people.

But notice again what the apostle wrote – ***“SO THAT YE CANNOT DO THE THINGS THAT YE WOULD.”*** If in the new birth we are given a perfectly righteous and sinless nature “that cannot sin and cannot be contaminated,” then why would Paul say we ***“CANNOT DO THE THINGS”*** that those who claim a righteousness within say the “new nature” does? See how confusing this

is? See how this exalts the sinner and diminishes the glory of God in Christ? As a born-again person, if there is a nature in me that “cannot sin and cannot be contaminated” by the flesh, then why can it not attain the goal of sinless perfection and righteousness as I desire?

The fact is this – Even as born-again persons, while on this earth, the flesh still corrupts and contaminates all that we think, say, and do.¹¹ Even the fruit that the Holy Spirit creates within us is not perfected within us yet. It is not that the Holy Spirit creates within us something sinful, flawed, or even imperfect. What the Holy Spirit works within us is perfect as it comes from God Who is never the Author or Creator of sin. THE PROBLEM IS WITH US. When the fruit of the Spirit is expressed through us, it becomes contaminated by the corruption of the flesh. Who among us would say that when the Holy Spirit imparts this fruit within us that we express this fruit perfectly and righteously without any corruption and contamination of sin from the flesh? I hope none of us would be so foolish and self-righteous as to make such a claim.

For example, Godly love is part of the fruit of the Spirit. Can we honestly claim that our love for God, for our brethren, and for our neighbor is a perfectly sinless love? Do we imagine that our love equals the perfection of righteousness found only in Christ? Can we say honestly that we love as Christ loves? We should strive to love as HE loves, but in this life have we attained that goal? NO! Could we say this about any of the fruit of the Spirit – ***“love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Galatians 5:22-23)***? Would not these gifts of God’s grace be expressed through the “new nature” and not the “old nature” as some believe? And, according to their view, if expressed through the “new nature,” as they claim, how can they be anything but perfect, sinless, and uncontaminated? Such a view is found neither in God’s Word nor in our experience as believers.

Consider the matter of God-given faith. I have already shown in Chapters Five and Six, that the God-given grace of faith, which is part of the

¹¹ See “Can We ‘Stop Sinning’?”, p. 90

fruit of the Holy Spirit, cannot be imputed but only imparted. But God-given faith within us is not equivalent to the perfection of righteousness that God imputes to His people for their justification. Our faith is yet imperfect –

Matthew 8 – (26) And He saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.

Matthew 17 – (20) And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

Mark 9 – (24) And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.

Luke 17 – (5) And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.

Faith grows and increases by the power of God through His Word, but righteousness does not grow and increase. Someone is either righteous or he is not. There are no degrees of righteousness. One degree less than righteousness is unrighteousness. Our faith is yet imperfect, but the righteousness by which we stand justified before God is perfect. Again, it is true that God cannot create anything imperfect or sinful. What God the Holy Spirit imparts to God's people is not sinful or imperfect in itself. But, as stated before, the problem is with us and the remaining presence, influence, and contamination of the flesh. This is what Paul was inspired to describe in the following verses –

Romans 7 – (14) For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.

Notice how the same person who before stated that he was ***“dead to sin” (Romans 6:2, cf. 6:11)***, now states that he is ***“carnal”*** (fleshly) and ***“sold under sin”*** (in slavery to sin). How can the same man say both? He is speaking of two different matters. In ***Romans 6:2,11*** Paul is speaking of His legal standing in the Lord Jesus Christ, having Christ’s righteousness imputed to him. His meaning is that because Christ had the demerit of Paul’s sins imputed to Him, and because He died to satisfy God’s justice for Paul, then sin could not be charged to or condemn Paul. He stands before God in Christ. He is justified, and there is no condemnation for him in Christ. Therefore, he is legally ***“dead to sin.”*** But in ***Romans 7:14*** Paul is speaking of his present state as a born-again person in this present world. Legally he is ***“dead”*** and ***“freed from sin” (Romans 6:7)***, but in this present world, he is morally a slave to sin. He is not sinlessly perfect or righteous within himself. God does not charge him with sin because of Christ’s righteousness imputed to him, but he is still a sinner and cannot yet attain the sinless perfection and righteousness he desires –

Romans 7 – (15) For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. (16) If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.

Paul states in these verses that he does not approve of his own sin and sinfulness. He desires to be free of the presence, influence, and contamination of sin in his flesh. He agrees with the law of God ***“that it is good,”*** even when it exposes his sinfulness. This is the language of repentance. Paul knew that if God were to impute sin to him, he would not stand. Paul knew that his only hope of salvation was (and is) the blood of Jesus Christ.

Romans 7 – (17) Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. (18) For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which

is good I find not. (19) For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.

Again, we must realize that Paul is not, as some suppose, “passing the buck” here and blaming his sinfulness on some being or nature within himself and other than himself. He is simply stating that the source of his sinfulness is his **“flesh”** (fallen sinful human nature) which is opposed to his God-given spiritual will and desire to be perfectly conformed to Christ. Notice he states, **“but how to perform that which is good I find not.”** Paul states that he does not even know HOW to achieve perfect goodness and righteousness. He states that he has the desire to do good but not the ability to do good in the way of sinless perfection. Does this sound like a person who has a “new nature that cannot sin and cannot be contaminated”? He goes on to describe the struggle within himself and states –

Romans 7 – (20) Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. (21) I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.

Once again, Paul is not claiming that he himself is not responsible for his sins. He is simply using language to show that it is his genuine and sincere desire to be perfectly righteous in all that he does. But there remains a powerful principle (**“a law”**) that when he determined in himself to do good, this powerful principle of evil is continually present to keep him from doing what he desired to do. Also, when Paul writes, **“it is no more I that do it,”** he is stating that his inability to do what he desires (to be perfectly righteous in himself) does not define who he really is – the real Paul. The real **“I”** (Paul) is defined by his faith in Christ and by his being submitted to the righteousness of God in Christ.

Romans 7 – (22) For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: (23) But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my

mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

Paul's ***"delight in the law of God"*** was certainly not in himself or based on his own goodness or any uncontaminated sinless nature in himself. His delight in the law was ***"after the inward man."*** The ***"inward man"*** here is not another person inside of Paul acting independently of Paul. It was the inward spiritual life of Paul, ***"the hidden man of the heart" (1 Peter 3:4)***, which is the new heart. It was, if you will, the real Paul, or the reality of who Paul really was (and is) – a sinner saved by grace looking to and depending upon the Lord Jesus Christ for all salvation.

The only way any born-again sinner can delight in the law of God is by looking to Christ Who is ***"the end of the law for righteousness, to every one that believeth" (Romans 10:4)***. It was because of what Paul had been made inwardly by the power of the Holy Spirit that he believed and rested in Christ for all salvation and all righteousness. So, Paul is admitting that he is still a sinner, but the sin he hates and fights does not define the real Paul. It is the ***"inward man"*** that defines the real Paul who believes in Christ and follows Him and who will be revealed in the last day when he is glorified together with all believers as in Christ.

Romans 7 – (24) O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? (25) I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

Here again we see God's wise purpose in leaving us in this life as justified and born-again sinners warring against the flesh. It is to keep us clinging to Christ for all salvation. It is to keep us giving Him all the glory and taking none for ourselves. It is to keep us giving thanks to Him for all the blessings and benefits of salvation by His grace based on the righteousness of Christ imputed to us. It is to keep us humble knowing that if God were to impute sin to any of us, we would be damned forever. It is to keep us in the

assurance, not that we find in ourselves based on some kind of righteousness within, but the assurance of His grace found only in the righteousness of God, Christ's righteousness imputed. It is to keep us as witnesses of His grace and glory in the salvation of sinners through the Lord Jesus Christ. It is to stir up within us more love to Christ and to His people.

Paul states that ***“with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.”*** How did Paul, or how do any of us, truly ***“serve the law of God”***? God's children who have been born-again by the Spirit ***“serve the law of God”*** with their minds (their hearts) by continually ***“looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2)***. We follow Him in His Word knowing that He is our only righteousness before God and that we are safe and secure in Him –

Colossians 3 – (1) If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. (2) Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. (3) For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. (4) When Christ, Who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.

Again, we must understand that this is the way God has ordained it to be concerning our state as believers here on this earth. It is for HIS glory and our good. It is a continual reminder for us that God justifies the ungodly, and that our only hope of salvation and righteousness is God's grace in Christ! So, whether or not you prefer to say that a believer has “two natures” or “two laws” or “two principles” warring within himself, be sure that you do not fall into the heresy of claiming a perfect righteousness within yourself. God the Holy Spirit will always bring sinners by the new birth to see that their only righteousness before God is Christ's righteousness imputed to them. And in realizing this more and more, we grow in grace and in knowledge of Christ. Christ becomes more and more precious to us. In this we are given the assurance that one day, by God's grace in Christ, we will be totally free from the presence, influence, and contamination of sin, and we will be totally righteous within ourselves. We will be perfectly conformed to the image of

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our Savior and Lord. This is the day that we leave the body of this death and go to be with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

I have tried to be very careful and very thorough in this book to prove from the Bible that the ***“THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD,”*** as found in Scriptures such as ***Romans 1:17*** and ***2 Corinthians 5:21***, is the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ by which God justifies His people. I have shown that the justification of God’s people is strictly a LEGAL matter that took place in God’s court of justice, again, based upon the reality of God declaring His people to be righteous in and by the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who deny that justification is strictly a legal matter do not understand Biblical justification. However, I have also shown that the justification of sinners in God’s court of justice, based on Christ’s righteousness imputed, demands the redemptive work of Christ on the cross to redeem His people from their sins, and always leads to their conversion to faith in Christ by means of the new birth.

I truly believe that if one sees the reality of these matters as declared in the truth of ***“the righteousness of God,”*** it will open a veritable treasure chest of Biblical truth and bring a believer to the assurance and confidence of God-given faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It will also cause one to focus his attention on ***“Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2)*** and not on ourselves to find this assurance, peace, and motivation to godliness. If we truly believe that our whole salvation is conditioned on Christ and that He fulfilled all conditions to secure our salvation by His righteousness imputed, then we have been ***“made the righteousness of God IN HIM” (2 Corinthians 5:21)***, and we cannot be condemned to eternal death. Our life is secure by God’s grace in Christ, and we have every reason to trust and follow Him.