

Affirmative
David N Landon

Proposition: The righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer for his justification.

The purpose of this debate is to inquire into the nature of that righteousness by which we are justified. My friend Keith and I are both agreed that there is a righteousness required unto justification and that this righteousness is imputed to the believer. We differ only on the question of *whose* righteousness is thus imputed. It is my position that Christ not only paid the penalty of the law due unto our sins, but also rendered that obedience which it required on our behalf. While our faith is necessary as the instrumental cause of justification (see last debate) it is the righteousness of Christ imputed to the believing sinner that constitutes the *formal cause* of his justification. By way of proof of the above proposition we must inquire first into the meaning of imputation and, secondly, into the requirements of that righteousness by which we are justified.

1. Imputation...Keith and I are agreed that what a man possesses of his own may be imputed unto him. God acknowledges that a man has that which He imputes unto him and deals with him accordingly. In such cases "The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him," Ezek.18:20. In such cases God proceeds according to strict justice, imputing unto men those things, or qualities, that were theirs prior to the imputation. There may, however, also be an imputation unto certain ones of that which was not their own antecedently. Again, all that is required in such cases is that God reckons a man to really have that that is imputed unto him and treat him accordingly. Several examples can be given from the Scriptures. Because of the covenant relationship that all men have with Adam God determined that the guilt of that first sin would be imputed to all Adam's posterity, Romans 5:19a. Christ also, as covenant head of His people, and as a surety for them, had the sins of all the elect imputed unto Him, 2 Corinthians 5:21. This, in part, resulted in the non-imputation of sin to the people of God, Romans 4:8. However, the mere non-imputation of sin to the believer does not give him a title to heaven; there must also be a positive righteousness. The law of God is clear, "Do, and ye shall live." There is therefore, in addition to the nonimputation of sin, a *gracious imputation* of the righteousness of Christ to the believer, Romans 5:19b. There is this blessed exchange, our sins are imputed to Christ and His righteousness is accounted as ours. The apostle Paul gives both sides of this exchange in one verse, "For He hath made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him," 2 Corinthians 5:21. That being "made the righteousness of God" is by the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us follows from the parallel that Paul draws from Christ being made a sinner. Our Lord is not "made sin" in the sense that He actually becomes a sinner. Rather, our sins are imputed to Him. In like manner His righteousness is imputed to us. That Paul had been thinking along the lines of imputation is further evidenced by his use of the same language in verse 19. It is only "*in Him*" that we receive that righteousness that entitles us to life. Union with Christ is the foundation of imputation. Our maker is also our husband (Isaiah 54:5;) all that is ours, including sin, is His, all that is His, including righteousness, is ours.

Double imputation, as taught in 2 Corinthians 5:21, was also taught in type and figure in the Old Testament. In Ezekiel 16 sinners are not commanded to do thus and so if they wish to live, rather the single word "Live," vs.6, is pronounced upon them; it is a justification of the ungodly. Their nakedness is covered, vs.8 (non-imputation of sin) and they are clothed with fine

linen, vs.10 (they are declared righteous).

2. Righteousness... God freely created man as a rational creature capable of rendering such obedience as would issue in rewards or punishments. This being supposed it is evident that such a creature could be governed only by means of a moral law. Several things, concerning this law may be noted, as...

1. This law was given to Adam at his creation, and in him, to all mankind. While in substance the same as the written law, it was in the beginning written on Adam's heart. The apostle Paul speaks of this law in Romans 2:14,15 where he shows that the Gentiles, who do not have access to the written law nevertheless have that same law written on their hearts.

2. This law of God was renewed at Sinai and written on tables of stone in order to demonstrate their abiding validity. In addition to the moral law there were added judicial laws that were to govern the nation of Israel, and ceremonial laws prefiguring the gospel, both of which were to expire after they served their purpose.

3. It is evident from Scripture that the moral law, contained in the ten commandments, was intended by God to continue in force to the end of the world. This law consists of two parts: precepts, requiring sinless, perfect obedience for life, and sanctions, threatening death for transgressions. It is of this moral law that Jesus said 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law...but to confirm [it],' Matthew 5:17.

4. It is therefore not sufficient for our justification that Christ suffered on our behalf, and that the benefits of His death are imputed to us, for it is nowhere written 'Suffer, and you shall live,' but, rather, 'Do, and you shall live.' As Jesus told the rich young ruler, 'If you will enter into life, keep the commandments.' It is therefore required for justification either that we render perfect obedience unto God, or that a surety, appointed on our behalf, renders it in our place.

5. Christ is a surety on the behalf of His people. As a result of the covenant between the Father and the Son, Christ undertook to perform all that was required on the part of the elect. Not only His passive obedience in suffering death on our behalf, but also His active obedience is put to our account. Paul was able to say that because of the imputation of Christ's righteousness that he had the righteousness of God, 2 Cor. 5:21.

Additional Scriptural proofs

1. As I stated at the beginning of this paper there is a righteousness required of us for justification. This righteousness must be either ours or another's. It cannot be our righteousness for that is described in Isaiah 64:6 as "filthy rags." Christ therefore is our righteousness and is, in fact, given that title by the Old Testament prophets. Jeremiah describes Jesus as "the Lord our righteousness," 23:6.

2. Philippians 3:8,9. Paul, in verse 8, considers together all those excellencies, of which he had just taken inventory in verses 4-6, as so much dung compared to that righteousness which comes from God, and is received by faith alone. It is union with Christ (note the phrase in him, vs 8) that entitles us to this blessing.

3. 1 Corinthians 1:30. This verse also speaks of union with Christ. It is because we are in Him that He 'is made unto us.. righteousness.'

4. Ephesians 2:8-10. The works that Paul excludes from having any part in our salvation are not merely the works of the flesh or of the law, but include also the good works of believers. Paul also excludes the good work of faith, vs.8. Salvation is by grace, by a righteousness from

without; we are His workmanship, vs. 10.

Conclusion

Since Keith seems to enjoy Latin phrases from the Reformers I will not disappoint him in this debate. One of the most famous was that the believer in Christ is *simul iustus et peccator* (at the same time righteous and sinful.) This expression was not found in some theological textbook; it was the result of agonizing over the question ‘How can I find a forgiving God.’ The gospel, at first, was not good news to Luther; he was certain that Romans 1:17 spoke either of a righteousness that God possessed, or of one that He required of men. Luther came finally to see that the righteousness revealed in the gospel was one that God **gave** to sinners, when they were sinners, Rom. 4:5. The gospel was indeed good news.

All false religions, and all non-Reformed forms of Christianity, recognize only our own inherent righteousness. To offer this for justification is to offer ‘filthy rags.’ We conclude that we are justified only by the perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone.

Negative Keith Sharp

The great Calvinistic scholar Benjamin B. Warfield asserted, “the three-fold doctrine of imputation - of Adam’s sin to his posterity, of the sins of His people to the redeemer, and of the righteousness of Christ to His people” is “the core of the constitutive doctrines of Christianity” (266). Imputation, defined as transfer, is the mechanism by which Reformed theologians believe the “Five Points of Calvinism” work. This is the doctrine my friend David Landon has taught in his affirmative. By demonstrating his error I will sever the tap root of Calvinism.

Three Fundamental Errors

Three fundamental errors are at the heart of Calvinistic imputation. Dave asserts, “It is therefore not sufficient for our justification that Christ suffered on our behalf...” **Calvinists deny the efficacy of the blood sacrifice of Christ for our justification.** The inspired apostle Paul emphatically disagreed. He declared we are “justified by His blood” (Romans 5:9). The blood of Christ doesn’t just partially justify us; it perfects us forever (Hebrews 10:14). Calvinism denies the central tenet of the gospel, justification by the blood of Christ. It is another gospel (Galatians 1:6-9).

The doctrine of transfer of guilt or righteousness portrays justification as an elaborate scheme of divine pretense. Calvinists contend, “... our sins are imputed to Christ and His righteousness is accounted as ours.” Dave admits, “Our Lord is not ‘made sin’ in the sense that He actually became a sinner.” He then states, “In like manner His righteousness is imputed to us.” The parallel is that we are not really righteous, but God just pretends we are. As eminent Calvinistic theologian Charles Hodge states, “So when righteousness is imputed to the believer, he does not thereby become subjectively righteous” (3:145). It is all a sublime hoax. In stark contrast, biblical justification by the blood of Christ makes the sinner really, completely, righteous (Romans 5:18-19; Ephesians 4:24; 1 John 3:7).

Calvinists assert, “It is therefore required for justification either that we render perfect obedience unto God, or that a surety, appointed on our behalf, renders it in our place.” That is sheer assumption without biblical proof. When we are cleansed by the blood of Christ, we are truly righteous (Romans 3:21-26). Yes, the Master assured the rich young ruler he would live if he kept the Law of Moses under which he lived (Matthew 19:16-17), but it is mere assumption to therefore assert God requires we present to him a sinlessly perfect life to inherit eternal life.

Fundamental Difference

The fundamental difference between the Calvinistic theory of imputation and the Bible doctrine of imputation is that Calvinists assert we are credited with the righteousness of Christ that we might be justified whereas the Scriptures affirm we are justified by the blood of Christ that we might be righteous (Romans 3:20 - 4:25).

What Law?

We are not under the same moral law that Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses were under. Abraham and David were righteous though polygamous (Genesis 16:3-4; 2 Samuel 3:2-5; 5:13-14; Galatians 3:9; Acts 13:22). No one today can so be (Matthew 19:4-6; 1 Corinthians 7:2; Ephesians 5:31). The Law, including the moral precepts, even the Ten Commandments (Romans 7:4-7), passed away when it was fulfilled in Christ (Matthew 5:17; Galatians 3:19-25).

Legs of the Lame Unequal

All three legs of Calvinistic imputation are the myths of human wisdom. It is unjust and false to contend God imputes Adam's sin to all mankind (Ezekiel 18:4,20,25). The Calvinistic covenant between Adam and his posterity, whereby we are charged with his sin, is unknown to Scripture.

Calvinists appeal to 2 Corinthians 5:21 as proof that God actually charged Christ with the sins of the elect. Calvinists admit Christ is not literally "sin." They assert without proof that the figure means our sins were imputed to Jesus. Why not take the figure to mean what we know is true, that Christ was made a sin offering for us? (cf. Isaiah 53:10; Ephesians 5:2) This is "metonymy," in "which one name or noun is used instead of another, to which it stands in a certain relation" (Bullinger. 538). This specific usage is the word "sin" to mean the "sin-offering" (Ibid. 584).

Proof Texts Examined

But does God impute the righteous life of Christ to believers for our justification? Let's examine the proof texts employed.

Romans 5:19. Verse eighteen states, "even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life" (NKJV). The **King James Version** has "righteousness," where the **New King James** has "righteous act." The **American Standard Version**, **New International Version**, **New American Standard Bible**, and **English Standard Version** all translate it "one act of righteousness." The Greek term is "*dikaionoma*" which Thayer defines as "*a righteous act or deed*" (151), Vine as "a righteous act" (2:285), and Arndt and Gingrich as "*righteous deed*" (197).

This perfectly fits the parallelism the apostle Paul here constructs. Through one man's one act of sin condemnation was introduced (verse 18a), and spread to all "because all sinned" (verse 12). Correspondingly, through one man's one righteous act "justification of life" came to all (verse 18b).

The parallel continues in verse 19, the one act of disobedience of Adam contrasted with the one righteous act of obedience of Christ. Jesus Christ was "obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). By this righteous act of obedience His people are justified and become righteous (Romans 3:21-26).

2 Corinthians 5:21. Calvinists just assume and assert that “the righteousness of God” is the righteous life of Christ. But the apostle identifies the righteousness of God as the divine plan of forgiveness through the sacrifice of Christ (Romans 3:21-26).

The phrase “in Him” is not synonymous with being clothed with His righteous life. Rather, it designates through or in relationship to Him (John 15:1-7). The context of 2 Corinthians 5:21 (verses 18-19) indicates that “in Him” denotes, not imputation of the personal righteousness of Christ, but forgiveness of sins through Him.

Isaiah 54:5. God as our Husband is our “Redeemer.”

Ezekiel 16:6,8,10. Yes, God pronounced life upon Israel, but that didn’t mean they didn’t have to do anything to live (Leviticus 18:5; Ezekiel 3:21; 18:9,21; 20:11,13,21; 33:11,15). Certainly they were “declared righteous,” but that proves nothing about imputation of the righteous life of Christ.

Isaiah 64:6. Assuredly none of us so live that we can be righteous before God on the basis of our own meritorious works (Romans 3:20,23), but Isaiah 64:6 doesn’t prove it, nor does it prove we can’t do any works which God will accept (Hebrews 6:10; 1 John 3:7). Isaiah was confessing the sins of Israel, because they needed to be saved (Isaiah 64:5) and none called on the Lord’s name (verse 7). But we are to work righteousness (Acts 10:35), and we are righteous when we do so (1 John 3:7).

Philippians 3:8-9. Once more, Calvinists just assume and assert that “the righteousness of God” is the righteous life of Christ. The “righteousness of God” is the divine plan of forgiveness of sins through the sacrifice of Christ (Romans 3:21-26). By the way, Dave as Luther inserted the word “alone” before faith. It’s not in the text (cf. Revelation 22:18-19).

1 Corinthians 1:30. If the passage teaches us God gives us credit for the personal righteousness of Christ, it teaches He also gives us credit for His personal wisdom, sanctification, and redemption. Christ wasn’t redeemed; He is the Redeemer (Romans 3:24). Does anyone really believe the Father credits us with the personal wisdom and sanctification of Christ? Christ is the source of our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

Ephesians 2:8-10. Paul excludes boastful works (verse 9), and works of obedience to Christ are not boastful works (Luke 17:10). Faith itself is a work we must do (John 6:28-29).

Conclusion

The Scriptures nowhere call righteous people sinners. “He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). The “ungodly and sinners” are not righteous (1 Peter 4:18). Being sinful and righteous at the same time is the Calvinistic fallacy of divine pretense. The “righteousness of God” is the divine plan of justification by grace upon the basis of the blood of Christ by means of obedient faith (Romans 3:21-28). This is not our own inherent

righteousness, rather, it is “the righteousness of God,... through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith” (Romans 3:22-25). The Calvinistic doctrine of imputed righteousness is a myth of human wisdom.

Works Cited

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Response David N. Landon

Keith' s original proposition was that *the obedience of faith of the believer is imputed to him for justification* (repeated seven times in his affirmative). In his negative the entire emphasis is on the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice for justification. This seems to represent a real change (for the better) from something entirely subjective (our own personal faith) to something objective. Consider the following points in response:

1. Calvinists do not "deny the efficacy of the blood sacrifice of Christ." I remind Keith that the Reformed doctrine of the definite atonement teaches that while the sacrifice of Christ is sufficient for all, it is efficacious for the elect. There is, however, no *bare efficacy* of the atonement. The benefits of the blood of Christ must be applied to sinners. In justification this application has a two-fold dimension; negatively in the nonimputation (forgiveness) of sin, and positively in the imputation of righteousness to the believer. Both these benefits are secured to the believer by the atonement.

2. Keith writes that our doctrine of imputation "portrays justification as an elaborate scheme of divine pretense," and that it is "all a sublime hoax." *Legal fiction* was the term used in the 16th century by Roman Catholic theologians to ridicule this doctrine. "The blood of Christ," writes Keith, "makes the sinner really... righteous." As I have stated before, this is sheer Romanism. In the council of Trent we read, "... we are not only reputed, but are truly called, and are just, receiving justice within us," (session 6, ch.7). Keith quotes Charles Hodge to the effect that in imputation we do not become "subjectively righteous." But is it therefore a "sublime hoax?" In the paragraph that Keith quotes from Hodge the very next sentence states, "If the righteousness be adequate, and if the imputation be made on adequate grounds and by competent authority, the person to whom the imputation is made has the right to be treated as righteous" (3:145). The authority is God Himself. The righteousness is the perfect righteousness of Christ, and the ground of the imputation is our union with Christ, - we are "members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones" (Ephesians 5:30). These things being the case, we have a right to be treated by God as righteous. Calvinism, by the way, does not teach *only* imputative righteousness; it also has a place for subjective righteousness. We distinguish, once again, between justification and sanctification. In justification God deals with our bad record; that must be made perfect, and it is so, imputatively. In sanctification God deals with our bad heart; that too He makes subjectively perfect (progressively in this life, completely when we behold Him).

4. I will reserve comment on the continuity of the moral law for our next debate.

3. Space permits comment on only a few of the proof texts used:

Isaiah 64:6. Keith says, "... we are to work righteousness, and we are righteous when we do so." (The Pharisee in Luke 18 could not have said it better.) God says "All our righteousnesses are filthy rags." Who are we to believe?

1 Corinthians 1:30. This text only states that wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption come from Christ. There is nothing in the text, nor in formal logic, that requires that these benefits come to us in the same way.

Ephesians 2:8-10. Works of obedience will not lead to boasting if we are mindful that they are the result of the Spirit's gracious work in us. There will, however, be at least grounds for boasting, if we view them as that by which we make ourselves to differ from other men.

Unfortunately, space does not permit an adequate treatment of the remaining texts, all of which are important, particularly Romans 5:12-19. I recommend Professor John Murray's The Imputation of Adam's Sin for the serious reader.

Conclusion

As this debate concludes the series of doctrines that deal especially with salvation, it might be helpful one final time to contrast the two systems. Ezekiel 16:6-10 is a perfect passage for this purpose. God commands dead sinners to live. "I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, live." (vs 6). It is a justification of the ungodly, Romans 4:5. Keith's take on this text is that God's command to a sinner to live does not mean that we don't have to do anything to live. What is all important, however, is where you place the **Do** in relation to the **Live**. "Live, and do works of obedience" is a gospel of grace. "Do works of obedience, and live" is a false gospel of works. It is important to note that both systems allow for the necessity of good works. Keith misrepresents Calvinism when he implies that it does not make good works necessary for salvation. But a sinner, dead in sins and trespasses, must first receive life from God, before he can offer himself back to God as a living sacrifice. The Reformers placed great emphasis on the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation). Regeneration and union with Christ came first. God then declares us just, on the basis of our union with Christ. This is a one time declaration of God, never to be revoked, nor repeated. Sanctification follows; God making us what He had before declared us to be. Good works are a condition of salvation, not as a cause of salvation, but as the inevitable consequence of true saving faith.

"The Scriptures," Keith writes, "nowhere call righteous people sinners." The apostle Paul was of another mind. He could say that in Christ he was "the righteousness of God" 2 Cor. 5:21. He could also say that Jesus came into the world to save sinners, "of whom I am [present tense] chief." It is only a Calvinist who could speak like this, - we have remaining sin because the Spirit's sanctifying work in us has not been completed; we are at the same time declared perfectly just, being united to Christ by faith.

Affirmative Keith Sharp

Imputed righteousness is central to salvation. This, the eighth discussion between my Presbyterian friend David Landon and me, actually continues the subject of the seventh discussion - justification. I affirm **The obedience of faith of the believer is imputed to the believer for his justification.**

Definitions

“Obedience of faith” (Romans 1:5; 16:26) can indicate either doing as directed because of faith in the heart or doing what the faith, the gospel (Galatians 1:11,23), directs. Which is unimportant, for, in practicality, they are the same. The proposition denotes faith in the believer’s own heart and his own obedience to the faith resulting from believing. To impute is “to reckon, take into account, or, metaphorically, to put down to a person’s account....” (Vine. 2:252) The preposition “for,” as used in my proposition, means “in order to.” “Justification” is the act of being made righteous (Romans 3:21-28; 4:2-3), free from guilt under divine law, thus, acceptable to God.

Exegesis of Romans Four

The term translated “impute” (*“logizomai”*) occurs thirty-nine times in the New Testament, eleven times in Romans chapter four. The specific subject of this chapter is imputed righteousness. Thus, the defense of my proposition will simply be a brief exegesis of Romans chapter four. Please read Romans 3:20 - 4:25 now.

In Romans 3:27-28 the apostle Paul contrasts two laws, two systems of justification, the law of works and the law of faith (Romans 3:27-28). We are justified by the law of faith rather than by the law of works (verse 28). The law by which we cannot be saved, the law of works, is the Mosaic covenant (Romans 2:12-20).

The “works” Paul contrasts with faith in Romans and Galatians are works of the Mosaic covenant, works which would demand sinless obedience, would thereby earn justification, and would thus be grounds for boasting (Romans 4:2,4,6; 9:32; 11:6; Galatians 2:16; 3:2,5,10). “Faith” in Romans, rather than being “faith alone,” is “the obedience of faith” (Romans 1:5; 6:17-18; 10:8-10; 16:26).

Many Jewish disciples flatly rejected Paul’s proposition. They first thought the gospel was for Jews only (Acts 11:19), but the conversion of Cornelius convinced them otherwise (Acts 11:18). However, many still thought it was necessary to keep the law of Moses and to be circumcised (Acts 15:1,5). Had they been correct in binding the law, perfect obedience would have been required; thus salvation would have to be earned, a matter of boasting (Galatians 3:10; Hebrews 10:4). These judaizers laid great stress on their physical relationship to Abraham (Luke 3:8; John 8:33). Paul showed that salvation was by the faith of Christ, the Gospel, rather than the law of Moses or any other law that demands sinless obedience (Romans 3:27-28).

In Romans 4:1-5 the beloved apostle presents the strongest possible case from a Jewish perspective for justification by faith apart from the law. Abraham, the friend of God, the patriarch of the Hebrew people, was justified by faith apart from the law.

‘Flesh’ in verse one includes the Jews’ natural relationship to the fathers, the bodily mark of circumcision, and the law of Moses as a fleshly covenant (cf. Romans 9:8; 2:28-29; Hebrews 9:9-10). Abraham was justified before God with none of these. Abraham was not justified by works, i.e., keeping the law of Moses (verse 2). Rather, ‘For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness’” (verse 3; cf. Genesis 15:6). The pronoun ‘it’ manifestly refers to the clause “Abraham believed God.” Abraham’s act of believing, i.e., his own subjective faith, “was accounted to him.” “Accounted” is from “*logizomai*,” the Greek verb meaning to impute. The preposition “for” is the Greek “*eis*,” which has as its primary meaning “into, in, toward, to” (Arndt & Gingrich. 227). Thus, God set Abraham’s faith down to his account in order that he might be righteous.

God accounted Abraham righteous by faith though Abraham never kept the law of Moses. He was first identified as a saved believer when He left the Ur of the Chaldees (Hebrews 11:8; Genesis 12:1-4). But later, when the Lord promised him his seed would be as the stars of heaven, ‘he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness’” (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3). Many years later, he by faith was willing to offer Isaac (Genesis 22:1-18), and, once again, ‘the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness’” (James 2:23). Rather than being justified once at the beginning of his walk by faith, justification by faith is a summary of Abraham’s life of faith.

Thus, to the one who does not keep the works of the law but believes, his faith is set down to his account in order that he might be righteous (Romans 4:5). This faith is the obedience of faith (Romans 1:5; 6:17-18; 10:8-10; 16:26). Therefore, **The obedience of faith of the believer is imputed to the believer for his justification.**

David, the man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22), is also an example of righteousness apart from works (Romans 4:6-8). Paul quotes David’s thanksgiving to the Lord (Psalm 32:1-2) as proof David was righteous by forgiveness of sins rather than by works (sinless law keeping). But Paul introduces this argument by saying David’s righteousness was ‘just as’ (verse 6) Abraham’s (verse 3) and ours (verse 5). Thus, our righteousness is by forgiveness of our sins.

In verses 9-12 the apostle argues that Abraham was justified before he was circumcised, thus, we are justified without circumcision or keeping the Mosaic covenant, which circumcision demands (Galatians 5:1-4). When God imputed Abraham’s faith to him, in order that he might be righteous (Genesis 15:6), Abraham was uncircumcised (cf. Genesis 17:24). Circumcision was a sign of the righteousness by faith he already possessed (Romans 4:11). Thus Abraham is the father of the faithful, whether they are circumcised or uncircumcised (Romans 4:11-12; Galatians 3:7). The faithful are those “who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised” (Romans 4:12). Thus, **The obedience of faith of the believer is imputed to the believer for his justification.**

In verses 13-22 Paul reasons that Abraham is our example of justification not by keeping the law but by faith. Abraham was ‘heir of the world’ (verse 13) in that all the world is blessed through him (Genesis 12:3; 22:18; cf. Psalm 2:8) and all may become his children by obedience of faith (Galatians 3:6,26-29). The righteousness thus attained is by grace through faith rather than flawless law keeping (Romans 4:14-16). This accords with Abraham’s justification by faith (Romans 4:16-17; Genesis 17). Because Abraham’s faith was strong, his faith ‘was accounted to him for righteousness’ (Romans 4:17-22). But Abraham’s faith was obedient faith. Thus, **The obedience of faith of the believer is imputed to the believer for his justification.**

The apostle concludes that Abraham’s justification by faith was recorded for our benefit (Romans 4:23-25; cf. 15:4). We also are justified by faith rather than works (keeping the law of Moses, sinless law keeping). We also are justified by means of faith, the obedience of faith. Righteousness is imputed to us on the basis of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Therefore, **The obedience of faith of the believer is imputed to the believer for his justification.**

Review

Reread each of the eleven references to imputation in Romans chapter four. God set Abraham’s faith, shown in obedience, down to Abraham’s account, so he would be righteous (verse 3) . To the one who works (keeps the Law of Moses), righteousness is not set down to his account on the basis of grace, but of debt (verse 4). To the one who does not work (keep the Law of Moses), but believes (renders obedience of faith), his faith, shown in obedience, is set down to his account, in order that he might be righteous (verse 5). God imputes righteousness to man without the works of the law (verse 6). The man whom God forgives is blessed since God no longer sets sin down to his account (verse 8). Verse nine repeats the truth of verse three. Abraham’s faith was set down to his account so he could be righteous before he was circumcised (verse 10). God imputes the faith of the uncircumcised to them that he might impute righteousness to them also (verse 11). Again Paul repeats his theme first stated in verse three (verse 22). These principles are recorded for our benefit (verses 23-24). Our faith also, shown by the obedience of faith, is set down to our account in order that we might be righteous (verse 24). Therefore, **The obedience of faith of the believer is imputed to the believer for his justification.**

Conclusion

How can any Bible believer doubt the truth of the proposition? Indeed, **The obedience of faith of the believer is imputed to the believer for his justification.**

Works Cited

Arndt, W.F. and F.W. Gingrich, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament**
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Negative David Landon

Keith' s position that we are justified, or declared righteous, on the basis of the obedience of faith cannot be true; for,-

1. As with all false gospels it blurs the distinction between justification and sanctification. Roman Catholicism, Pelagianism, and Arminianism all share three things in common, -justification is a process, final justification depends upon our obedience, and justification can be lost. While Scripture occasionally uses the terms just or justify after a more common manner, to signify our justification *before men* (Matt.12:37; James 2:24) yet, strictly speaking, justification is a one time act of God declaring a sinner righteous, which act results in peace with God, Romans 5:1,9. ‘Being **now** justified.. .,” vs 9. In justification God declares us righteous, in sanctification He makes us righteous. His declaration is true, for it is based upon Christ’s righteousness imputed to us. His sanctifying grace is effective, causing us daily to die to sin, and to live to righteousness. In Keith’s position there is virtually no distinction between justification and sanctification; faithful works of obedience form the grounds of both.

2. Keith’s position in effect involves God in a lie, by declaring us righteous when, in fact, we are not. Keith admits that because of sin, justification by the law is an impossibility. God now imputes faith, or the obedience of faith, as righteousness. Will God then credit weak faith or imperfect obedience as righteousness? Keith writes ‘Because Abraham' faith was *strong*, his faith was accounted to him for righteousness” (emphasis added). Will weak faith justify, Mark 9:24, John 20:25? The Reformed position honors the law of God; He remains just, while justifying the one who believes in Christ, Romans 3:26. Keith’s position, in effect, has God grading on a curve.

3. Keith’s position is essentially a works gospel. Keith presents a false antithesis when he writes, “The works Paul contrasts with faith... are works of the Mosaic covenant.” Any system that puts God in debt concerning rewards is a works system, Romans 4:4. As 19th century theologian James Thornwell put it, “Any plan of salvation, therefore, which lays down anything to be done by man, no matter what and no matter how, whether with or without the assistance of Divine grace as a condition of the Divine favour, is a legal plan...” Later he writes, “Neither is the principle affected by the thing required to be done; whether it be obedience to the whole moral law, or only sincere obedience, or only faith, repentance and perseverance which are required, something is to be done - a condition is prescribed - and God’s favour ultimately turns upon man’s will” (Thornwell, Works, vol.2). Only the Reformed faith, with its distinction between conditions that are causal and those that are consequent, is able to preserve the gratuitous nature of salvation.

4. Keith' s position that we are justified by the obedience of faith provides *grounds for boasting*. Those who are justified by a legal covenant ‘have something of which to glory” (Romans 4:2) but Keith’s interpretation of Romans 4 is essentially a legal one (see point 3 above) therefore, etc. Keith, throughout this series of debates, has taken the position that only works performed in obedience to the Mosaic covenant give grounds for boasting. This view is not tenable in light both of the parable of the Pharisee and publican, and also of many Pauline texts such as Ephesians 2:8,9; 1 Corinthians 4:7 and Philippians 3:4-9. There are things included in these texts that were not commanded in the law of Moses, and yet give grounds for boasting. According to the above texts a thing gives grounds for boasting if it meets two criteria. First, it is performed in our own strength and, secondly, it becomes that by which we make ourselves to differ from other men. Keith’s

interpretation of what faith is meets both these criteria.

The Reformed position that we are justified by the imputed righteousness of Christ must be true for,...

1. It maintains the Biblical distinction between justification and sanctification. Justification is a once-for-all declaration by God that we are righteous. Sanctification is a process wherein God, by the impartation of His Spirit unto us makes us righteous.

2. It honors the law of God. Jesus kept the law of Moses perfectly. Because we are united to Christ by faith all that is His, including His righteousness, is ours.

3. Salvation remains entirely of grace. God justifies the ungodly. According to Keith's view our own subjective faith is what is imputed unto us for righteousness. But the imputation of what is our own anyway prior to imputation cannot be a gracious transaction. Our definition of faith, and its function in salvation, must be such that salvation remains gracious, "Therefore, it is of faith, that it might be by grace," Romans 4:16.

4. Boasting is excluded. Keith has yet to answer my question in previous debates: why do some believe, and some not? What answer can he possibly return that does not, on his interpretation of Scripture, afford grounds for boasting? The Reformed position is clear; "he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord," 2 Corinthians 10:17.

Keith's Argument From Romans 4

Keith's entire argument is built upon eleven references to imputation in Romans chapter four. Some texts, at least on a *prima facie* level, seem to support his conclusion. Verse three is one such text, - "Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." "The pronoun 'it,' writes Keith, manifestly refers to the clause 'Abraham believed God.'" I note in passing that it is not any more manifest than whether the phrase "and that not of yourselves," in Ephesians 2:8, should refer to the word "faith" (its closest referent in the text) and yet Keith has repeatedly rejected that exegesis.

Paul's word structure in Romans four must be followed closely. As author John Piper points out, Paul puts it both ways: "faith is imputed for righteousness" (4:3,9), and "God imputes righteousness to us [by faith]" (4:6,11). Piper gives the following illustration, - he promises his son that he can go to the game if he cleans his room before school. His son forgets, so John cleans it for him. After school his son sees the clean room, apologizes, and accepts the consequence of no game. John says "I am going to credit the clean room to your account because of your apology." That would correspond to the language in Romans 4:6,11. Or John could say "I credit your apology for a clean room." That is like the language in Romans 4:3,9. In either case it was John who cleaned the room; the son's apology merely connects him with the promise of a game. In like manner Abraham's faith connected him with the promise of imputed righteousness.

Abraham received instruction from Jesus and rejoiced in it (compare John 8:40 with 8:56).

Faith, then, is merely the *instrumental means* of connecting us to the promise of imputed righteousness. The obedience of faith cannot be itself that righteousness; for,

1. That is something that is our own inherently and subjectively prior to imputation, and anything that constitutes our own righteousness is *filthy rags*, Isaiah 64:6. Paul rejects the idea of having anything in himself form his righteousness before God. "That I may be found in Him, not

having mine own righteousness,” Philippians 3:9.

2. That whereby the righteousness of God is to be obtained cannot be that righteousness itself, but such is the function of faith. See Romans 9:30-10:13. Israel had not obtained righteousness for they were seeking it by the law, ignorant of the fact that Christ (*not faith*) is the end of the law for righteousness, 10:4.

3. Paul clearly teaches that we righteous by virtue of another’s righteousness. “...by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous, Romans 5:19.

4. Keith’s position does not come close to doing justice to the language in 2 Corinthians 5:21. In that text Paul is very clearly drawing a parallel between the way in which Christ was constituted a sinner and the way in which we, as Christians, are constituted righteous. Jesus did not become actually and morally a sinner; rather the guilt of our sins were imputed to Him. Charles Hodge explains, “Our sins were the judicial grounds of the sufferings of Christ, so that they were a satisfaction of justice; and his righteousness is the judicial grounds of our acceptance with God, so that our pardon is an act of justice” (quoted in Piper). Keith’s view does not sustain this parallel. He has Christ sinful legally and imputatively while sinners, on the other hand, are righteous really and subjectively.

Conclusion

Keith concludes his affirmative with the question “How can any Bible believer doubt the truth of the proposition [that we are justified by the obedience of faith] ?” I answer that countless thousands of believers have doubted Keith’s proposition; early Church Fathers, martyrs, Reformers, Puritans, and millions in our own age have all given witness to the truth that **“The Lord is our righteousness.”**

Response
Keith Sharp

Thanks, Dave, for a spirited debate free from acrimony.

We are justified, sanctified, and saved when we first become Christians (1 Corinthians 6:11; Titus 3:4-7), there is a process of each in our lives (1 John 1:9; Hebrews 10:14; Philippians 2:12); and final justification, sanctification, and salvation depend upon faithful obedience (Romans 6:16; 2 Timothy 2:19-22; 1 Peter 1:3-5).

The context of Matthew 12:37 doesn't mention justification before men, but is entirely of forgiveness or condemnation before God (verses 31-36).

The 'justification' of James 2:24 is equivalent to salvation (verse 14). What men was Abraham justified before when he offered Isaac? (James 2:20; cf. Genesis 22:5)

If justification and sanctification are separate, one can be an immoral wretch yet justified before God. 'Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous' (1 John 3:7).

Dave charges me with the consequences of his own doctrine. According to Calvinists, we are not actually righteous, but God gives us credit for the righteous life of Christ. Now who involves God in a lie? When God forgives us (Psalm 103:2-3) we are really righteous, for He sends our sins away 'as far as the east is from the west' (Psalm 103:12).

Our faith must be strong enough to lead us to obey God (Hebrews 11:6-8). There is no curve. We must obey all the Lord's commands (Matthew 28:19-20) and seek His forgiveness when we fail to do so (Acts 8:22).

I didn't take 'the position that only works performed in obedience to the Mosaic covenant give grounds for boasting.' I stated, 'Paul showed that salvation was by the faith of Christ, the Gospel, rather than the law of Moses or any other law that demands sinless obedience (Romans 3:27-28)

I totally agree that "Any system that puts God in debt concerning rewards is a works system, Romans 4:4." Calvinists grievously err in contending that meeting conditions earns rewards. Israel had to march around Jericho thirteen times, blow on rams horns, and shout with a great shout (Joshua 6:3-5, but that doesn't mean they earned the city (Joshua 6:2). Naaman had to dip seven times in the Jordan to be cleansed of leprosy (2 Kings 5:1-14), but he didn't put God in debt. According to Calvinism, if Dave gave me a brand new BMW as a gift and just asked me to believe he would give it and be baptized to receive it, I would have earned the car and put him in debt to me. I'll gladly take a BMW on those conditions and won't ungratefully claim Dave owes it to me.

Dave made no arguments on Ephesians 2:8-9 and 1 Corinthians 4:7, and I have repeatedly answered his errors on these passages in past debates. Please read Philippians 3:4-9 and see if you

agree that it supports my proposition.

Justification is indeed by grace, but the Scriptures nowhere affirm it is “entirely of grace.” “You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only” (James 2:24).

How do we honor God’s law by depending on someone else to obey it in our stead and refusing to acknowledge that we ourselves must obey it to be justified? “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

If justification by obedience of faith provides a ground for boasting, what did Paul mean in Galatians 5:6, “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love”?

Indeed, our glory must be in the Lord (2 Corinthians 10: 17). Perhaps Dave can explain how the Lord received the glory for Gideon’s victory over the Midianites (Judges 7:2,7,15), though Gideon and 300 Israelites had to work to achieve victory (Judges 7:19-22).

I have repeatedly answered Dave’s question why some believe and some do not - some have good hearts and some do not (Luke 8:4-15). This doesn’t mean we earn salvation (Luke 17:10), but it does mean God doesn’t arbitrarily elect some individuals and pass over others (cf. Ezekiel chapter 18).

Dave refuses to concede that Ephesians 2:8-9 doesn’t teach faith is a gift from God, though he’s never attempted to answer the argument by Presbyterian Albert Barnes that this is grammatically impossible.

Dave’s room cleaning illustration on Romans four is clever. He just needs a passage that states or implies Christ obeyed the law of God in our stead, and that biblical passage doesn’t exist.

Of course “faith is ...the *instrumental means*... of imputed righteousness.” That’s my position. Whoever contended faith is that righteousness? Righteousness by forgiveness based on the sacrifice of Christ by means of obedient faith is righteousness from God, and it is not our own as to source.

Romans 9:30 - 10: 13 plainly teaches my proposition. Righteousness is “of faith” (Romans 9:30) or “by faith” (verse 32), it is to those who believe (Romans 9:33; 10:4) and requires that we do something to be righteous: hear (Romans 10:13-17), believe (Romans 10:8-10), and confess (Romans 10:8-10).

“By one man’s” one act of “disobedience,” Adam’s sin, sin entered, and “by one Man’s” one act of “obedience,” the death of Christ on the cross (cf. Philippians 2:8), “many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:19; 3:21-26).

Calvinists commit the classic blunder on 2 Corinthians 5 :21 of extending a parallel beyond the biblical application. My explanation 2 Corinthians 5:21 in my negative stands.

Conclusion

Of course **“The Lord is our righteousness.”** Presbyterians erroneously claim that it is by imputation of His personal righteousness; I accept and defend the apostle’s own explanation that it is on the basis of the blood sacrifice of Christ and by means of our obedience of faith (Romans 3:21 - 4:25). **“Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar.” The obedience of faith of the believer is imputed to the believer for his justification.**