

JUSTIFICATION REDISCOVERED



1. Importance

The importance of studying this particular doctrine within the Christian Faith becomes immediately apparent when one considers it from an historical and theological perspective:

1.1. Historical

The Protestant Reformation of the 16th Century was fueled and found common disagreement with the Roman Catholic Church over this very doctrine.

As such, this doctrine continues to be a key point of division between Roman Catholicism and Protestant Christianity in current times as testified to in the controversy surrounding the ecumenical movement, *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*. All attempts of creating any widely accepted form of co-belligerence through the efforts of this group have ultimately failed due to the disagreement surrounding the doctrine of Justification.

Significant debate and division over this doctrine has also existed within Protestant Christianity in the last 40 years. This is especially due to the teachings of those now loosely classified under the title or theological persuasion known as *The New Perspective on Paul*. During this time, there have been no less than 25 books published on the doctrine of Justification (the vast majority within the past 15 years) additionally emphasizing its continuing relevance and importance to the Christian world today.¹

1.2. Theological

Most (if not all) who have studied the book of Galatians would conclude that Paul's main theological focus in the letter is the doctrine of Justification (2:16, 21, 3:6, 8, 11, 21, 5:4).

Paul's stern warning to those preaching a false gospel therefore centers on this issue (cf. 1:8-9). Which means that not only is the doctrine of Justification a main focus of the book, but of the gospel as well. Our understanding of it will determine whether or not we have the gospel which saves or condemns.

In this respect, Martin Luther's words regarding this doctrine become specifically apropos:

[Justification] is chief article of the whole Christian doctrine... the "*articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*" (article of the standing and falling of the church)... if this article stands, the Church stands; if it falls, the Church falls.

¹ If one includes the books devoted to the subject of NPP in the last several years, the number of books related to the subject of Justification is easily doubled. And if one counts web publications, the total number moves well beyond one hundred indicating that the doctrine of Justification and its tangential components are still considered a relevant and important topic of discussion. In my opinion, this also indicates that it is not as settled an issue as most would like to think. Consider by way of contrasting comparison: very little is written today on the Deity or Humanity of Christ—nor is there the kind of heated debate we find surrounding this doctrine.

2. Difficulty

The difficulty of studying this particular doctrine though not immediately apparent nonetheless becomes clear the further a person progresses through the biblical, historical and contemporary literature related to the subject. The following are typical and indicative:

2.1. Supposed contradictions in the biblical prescription.

Consider: (Gal 5:6 w/ 1Co 7:19; Luk 1:4, Phi 3:6, Act 23:1, 24:16, 1Co 4:4, 2Co 1:12 w/ Rom 3:9-12, 7:18, 1Ti 1:15; Rom 3:28 w/ Jam 2:21; Rom 10:4 w/ Rom 8:4, 13:8-10; Act 15:5, 10-11, Gal 2:21 w/ Act 21:20-26).

2.2. Lack of historical consensus in relation to soteriological meaning, permanency and frequency.

As was previously mentioned, the Protestant Reformation is a good example of this. Is the sinner declared righteous or made righteous? Is justification infused over time or imputed all at once? Can a person lose it or is it eternally secure?

Questions such as these meant that there existed a wide range of conviction as to the meaning, permanency and frequency of justification as it related to a person's salvation. And such diversity existed not only between Protestants and Catholics of the 16th Century, but throughout church history—including even among the Protestant Reformers. This lack of historical consensus is portrayed in Alan J. Spence's book, *Justification: A Guide for the Perplexed* where he writes...

“Augustine did not distinguish the justification of the sinner from the transformation that is an essential feature of the life of the one who is justified. Martin Luther held that other than the putting aside of our sins there is in justification a positive transference to the believer of the righteousness of Christ. It was Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin who were most clear that justification was simply divine pardon.” (p.152)

Peter Lillback echoes the lack of consensus that existed during the Reformation when he writes...

*“Luther was convinced that the Swiss were teaching the same as the pope concerning justification.”*²

Such lack of consensus, diversity and tension continues to the same degree in the teachings and writings of those who followed these men—including those of our present day.³

2.3. Heavy emphasis on church history while neglecting biblical history.

When it comes to understanding the doctrine of Justification, it only makes sense that the four hundred years before the time of Jesus is more critical than the four hundred years before our time (i.e. the Protestant Reformation) since this is the religious soil of the New Testament teachers and their responses. However, the bulk of research being done today, at least at the popular levels of

² Peter Lillback, *The Binding of God*, p.113. Luther of course was wrong in his assessment of the Swiss Reformers and their understanding of justification. They were not the same as the pope. They were however not teaching what Luther taught; further emphasizing the lack of consensus and tension that has existed in relation to this subject.

³ I am aware of at least 6 in existence today which I have given the very general designations: Lutheran, Reformed, Wesleyan-Arminian, New Perspective, Roman-Orthodox and Covenantal. It is not my intention to unpack each of these in any detail as the scope of this study does not allow for it. My purpose is instead to emphasize the challenge one faces when trying to understand the doctrine of Justification. Much like the doctrine of Eschatology, it hosts a multitude of differing views and systems of thought in relation to its tenets and biblical interpretation. As was mentioned, this diversity has created as much tension today as it did in former times. Similar to what happened during the Reformation between the Germans and the Swiss—the theological landscape is now filled with plenty of vitriol and “heresy hunting.” In my opinion, it is not without warrant.

consumption, seems to disagree. The focus tends to be on understanding and embracing the Protestant Reformers' view on Justification with very little more than a nod to the historical context of the New Testament.⁴

Such a heavy emphasis on church history (most specifically the Protestant Reformation) while neglecting the historical background of the New Testament itself has not only created yet another hurdle in the study of this important doctrine, but in my opinion has also resulted in the following two consequences:

2.3.1. Large numbers of severely immature people with huge man-crushes no different than those encountered by Paul in Corinth (1Co 3:1-4).

This I believe is confirmed by the following observations:

2.3.1.1. The “rock-star” status given to popular preachers, Bible teachers and Christian authors. Heavily quoted and hardly ever questioned, these people have essentially become the “standard of truth” within Christianity. So much so, that for a person not to align themselves with them—or use them as a source of support---immediately makes them (and their doctrinal position) suspect.

2.3.1.2. The rapid increase in the number of theological/Bible conferences and attendance per year. Since 2001, the numbers in both respects have more than doubled. There is now some form of conference somewhere in the U.S., with thousands in attendance, almost every month.⁵ Though one may perceive this as an increase in biblical interest, my own experience has created the opposite conclusions. The “ecstatic frenzy” tends not to be for the Bible or Theology—but for being in the presence of those teaching it.⁶

⁴ This is the period of time is commonly known today as Second Temple Judaism: the Jewish practices and beliefs that existed between the reconstruction of the Temple by Zerubbabel (516 B.C.) and its destruction by the Romans (70 A.D.). What the Jews believed and practiced during this time is clearly what Jesus, Paul and the other New Testament teachers are responding to in discussions on justification or any other subject for that matter. Which means that if we are to correctly understand this doctrine, this the pre-requisite and not Roman Catholicism—which in the opinion of at least some—is the context Luther read into all of the biblical discussions/teaching on this issue. Unfortunately, similar forms of eisegesis are still happening today. This will be further unpacked in the section titled “History.” For now, in the words of EP Sanders, “We (continue today) to have a retrojection of the Protestant-Catholic debate into ancient history, with Judaism taking the role of Catholicism and Christianity the role of Lutheranism.”

⁵ Jan=Code Orange Revival, Aggressive Sanctification-CA; Feb=Wheaton Theology-IL; Mar=Shepherd’s-CA; Apr= TG4-KY; May= Refueled, Gospel Coalition-IL; Jun=Resolved, Ligonier: West Coast-CA; Sept=Truth Matters-CA; Oct=Resurgence-WA; Nov=Desiring God-MN. Each of these conferences consistently register over a thousand in attendance, and regularly sell out. Additionally, many who attend have or will attend other conferences in the same year with at least some of the same speakers—a clear sign of their demand and that a new subculture within Christianity has emerged: the Christian conference groupie. Though Jesus and even Paul attracted large crowds who followed them, it is hard to imagine they would have allowed for what we see today. Hence why Paul writes what he does in 1Co 3:1-4.

⁶ As an example of this, The Shepherd’s Conference, hosted by Grace community Church and John MacArthur does not allow people into the sanctuary until moments before the actual services. This is due to their awareness of people’s propensity to “camp out” in those pews closest to the front. This however, has the effect of creating mass hysteria once the doors are opened--people running to the front (even fighting) for the choice seats. I should know, I was once one of them! It is worth noting also, that it is not uncommon for individuals to shout accolades at their favorite speakers. For instance, last year at the Truth Matters conference, a man shouted out, “John I love you.” Autographs also are a big part of these events and receiving free books, written by the conference speakers—some specifically for the conference itself. The only thing missing are t-shirts with the faces of these evangelical rock-

2.3.2. Large quantities of biblically ignorant individuals whose established position on this doctrine is determined by sloppy systematics, cherry-picked spoof-texts and a barrage of quotations from un-inspired men.

All one has to do to realize this, is consider how little of the printed/electronic page is given today to working through large portions of the biblical text—especially those germane to the doctrine in question; or consider where debate over a particular doctrine seems to garner the greatest support. The majority of what “flies” today as substantial doesn’t even attempt to reconcile its conclusions with the Analogy of Faith—or the overall context where biblical support is extradited, instead the process is one of citing huge portions of their favorite historical or contemporary teacher’s writings/words—those most supportive of their position. This they do along with a daisy chain of verses in complete isolation from their original context as though they were the *sine qua non* of the biblical author’s point or theology. And this because any such responsible treatment of the biblical text is impossible—since to do so—requires a sufficient familiarity with it.⁷

2.4. Strong biases which severely hinder objective analysis and conclusions in relation to the biblical text.

Exactly where and what those biases are will be demonstrated through the discussions and material forthcoming. For now one example will make the point:

Between 2001-2004 two books, sequestering the expertise, research and opinions of over a dozen evangelical scholars on the subject of Justification were produced: *Justification and Variegated Nomism, Volume 1* and *Justification and Variegated Nomism Volume 2*. Per the title, the specific focus of these rather large volumes (each 500 pages or more) was the assessment of the soteriological framework which was labeled by E.P. Sanders in the 1970’s as “covenantal nomism” and its validity to understanding Paul’s teaching on justification. Volume 1 was especially dedicated to determining whether or not this particular framework (or one of its varieties) is what we find in the extant Jewish writings of Second Temple Judaism. Over twenty different pieces of Jewish literature from this time were examined. And the overwhelming conclusion of the authors in this first volume was that some form of covenantal nomism was indeed what each of these sources implied or explicitly presented as the soteriological framework for God’s redemptive work among people. D.A. Carson, one of the volume’s editors, does a final summary and conclusion of the preceding research and makes this abundantly clear on multiple accounts:

“...the penitential prayers, Faulk finds, often deploy language and motifs that nicely reflect the pattern of covenantal nomism described by Sanders. (p.506)

stars on the front or posters in the bedroom. Teeny boppers move over, Christian man-crush mania is here with no end in sight.

⁷ This is reflected even in books considered to be scholarly in nature. As a fitting example, John Piper’s *The Future Of Justification*, draws substantial conclusions about the doctrine of Justification from the books of Romans and Galatians yet makes no attempt at exegesis or explanation as it relates to the larger context of Paul’s teaching in those books or its consistency with the rest of Scripture. And though I am not in agreement with N.T Wright’s overall conclusions on the subject (Piper’s primary opponent in his book), at least Wright’s analysis of the doctrine attempts to exegete and explain the whole of those books he takes his position from—endeavoring also to show the consistency of his position with the rest of Scripture (see Tom Wright, *Justification*). Piper also makes an appeal to the 16th century as the place to look when understanding the New Testament and its terms versus the first century where they originated (p.36). This is disturbing, yet makes several of the points already mentioned. It seems that for many, church history, proper doctrine or biblical understanding didn’t exist before the Reformation.

There is nothing of classic 'merit theology' in these Psalms, and in many respects Sanders' covenantal nomism would doubtless be a congenial category to the psalmists. (p. 507)

...by and large the pattern exhibited in 1Esdras is in line with Tanakh and with Sanders' covenantal nomism...Once again, the emphases are at least in line with covenantal nomism. (p.509-10)

Jubilees greatly emphasizes God's elective grace in choosing the nation, and equally emphasizes Israel's responsibility to keep the commandments. So far then, the pattern of covenantal nomism is explicit in this book. (p.510)

One can scarcely fail to note the frequency with which several scholars in these pages comment that their corpora largely fit the category of covenantal nomism..." (p.547)

However, the thrust of both volumes is away from any form of covenantal nomism since embracing such a framework is a sure "death-knell" to their theology or understanding of Justification (possibly even to their reputations as Bible scholars!).⁸

2.5. Appropriation or hijacking of biblical/theological terms.

A good example of this is the term "double imputation." It traditionally has referred only to the imputation of our sin to Christ and His righteousness to us. It now also refers to the imputation of both His active and passive obedience.

(http://www.monergism.com/directory/link_category/Justification/Active/Passive-Obedience-of-Christ/).

Another example is the actual phrase, "the righteousness of Christ." Multiple meanings now exist oftentimes making it tricky to determine what a particular author is arguing against or for.

⁸ In light of this, consider Kent Yinger's analysis: "Since 1977 general agreement has been reached on the following points: covenantal nomism is a fair description of Jewish soteriology of the period... Thus students will be hard pressed to find more recent scholars seeking to return to pre-Sanders view (caricature?) of legalistic Judaism." (Yinger, *The New Perspective on Paul*, p.12, 42).

3. Thesis

To emancipate the doctrine of Justification from its popular evangelical understanding by:

3.1. Demonstrating the unbiblical origins of the popular evangelical understanding and its insufficient ability to deal with the entire biblical corpus.

3.2. Rediscovering its biblical definition, history, application and realities.

Hence, this course of study though presented synthetically as one, is actually two parts in nature: one part didactic, one part polemic.

4. Affirmations

As a catalyst for expediting the material in this current course and as a hermeneutical and theological control to future discussions and criticisms, the following is to be assumed as affirmed biblical truth.

4.1. The Bible is the absolute and final authority which Christians must submit their minds as well as their lives to in all things, including all theology. Therefore any tradition, historical figure, theologian, theology, doctrine, statement, thought, idea, assumption, etc., must be supported and can be questioned by the Bible and its teaching. In other words, the Bible knows no “sacred cows” beyond itself (2Co 10:5).

4.2. Only the Bible is inspired, not men or history (2Ti 3:16).

4.3. The Bible’s teaching, especially on issues directly related to salvation is completely perspicuous and therefore knowable, though it will require a range of understanding which encompasses more than just the doctrine of Soteriology, or other disciplines within Systematic Theology, but also Biblical Theology (2Pe 3:16).

4.4. The Bible is completely inerrant and consistent in its teaching revealing but one plan of salvation. Though there are levels of discontinuity between the two major covenants, God’s redemptive dealings with man over time is characterized by great continuity (1Co 10:11).

4.5. All theological error is heresy and wickedness and therefore ultimately leads to the destruction of the Gospel (2Ti 2:19).

4.6. The basis of Justification is the finished all sufficient death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 4:25).

4.7. Justification is a gift given granted only by the grace of God to those exercising faith in Jesus Christ alone. It is therefore not something that can be earned or merited through a person’s efforts, actions or works in any form religious or otherwise (Rom 3:28).

4.8. Faith precedes Justification as its condition and the pre-requisite to eternal Salvation (Eph 2:1-10).

4.9. Salvation is never merit/works-based, though faith is never alone (Jam 2:14-26).

4.10. God has ordained those who will be eternally saved, and therefore it cannot be lost (Eph 1:1-11).

5. Definition

One of the biggest myths within Evangelical Christianity today, is the belief that Protestants have always agreed on the definition of Justification.

This is not the case now,⁹ and it was also not true for the Protestant Reformers.

“I cannot regard Zwingli or any of his teachings as Christian at all. He neither holds nor teaches any part of the Christian faith rightly, and is seven times more dangerous than when he was a papist.” –Martin Luther

This included even Zwingli’s teaching (or definition) on Justification.¹⁰

That being said, it would nonetheless be untrue and completely inaccurate to think that such diversity means that one definition has not risen to a level of popularity within Protestant Christianity far above all others.

5.1. The Evangelical-Reformed Definition of Justification¹¹

For heuristic and comparative reasons this definition will be broken into the following categories: forensic only, permanent and faith only.¹²

5.1.1. Forensic Only

In contrast to Augustine and the Roman Catholic Church’s view that justification actually makes its recipients righteous in moral character before God¹³, the German Reformers came to completely opposite convictions. For them Justification was:

A forensic or judicial act *only*¹⁴ whereby God as Judge was declaring those guilty of breaking the Law to be righteous—not in the sense that they were morally upright or pure—but only that the

⁹ See Justification: Five Views, Beilby, James K. and Paul Rhodes Eddy editors. The authors in this book would all save one consider themselves to be Protestant yet embracing different views on the meaning of Justification.

¹⁰ Consider again Peter Lillback’s statement, “Luther was convinced the Swiss were teaching the same as the pope concerning justification.”

¹¹ By using the term “Evangelical-Reformed” I am referring to all of those within Protestant Christianity whose definition of Justification is an amalgamation of German and Swiss Reformed teaching since it was Luther who first coined the term “Evangelical” and it was the Swiss who took to themselves and their churches the title “Reformed.” The components of this definition will be very similar to Michael Horton’s in Justification: Five Views, which he calls the “Traditional Reformed View.” The problem I have with that definition however is the fact that it gives the allusion that the division and diversity which clearly existed among the Reformers over this doctrine was inconsequential or insignificant. This as already demonstrated was hardly the case.

¹² The imputation of Christ’s righteousness is a key part of this definition and therefore would in most cases create a fourth category. It has however been omitted from the discussion at this point since I will give the entire section titled “Application” to this issue.

¹³ None seem to contest this as the Roman Catholic Church’s view of Justification. Where however, there may be questions is as it relates to Augustine since it is well known that Luther as well as the other Reformers identified him as their closest historical connection for their theological views. For this reason I submit the analysis of Alan J. Spence for consideration, “(According to Augustine) justification forms in us a created rather than imputed righteousness...Justification is for him not only an act of pardon but the creation of a new way of living. This formation of righteousness in a person is always viewed by Augustine as an ongoing process rather than an instantaneous completed act...We see then that Augustine interprets ‘to justify’ as meaning ‘to make righteous in behavior’.”; Justification: A Guide For The Perplexed, p. 34-35

righteous demands of the Law had been satisfied on their behalf through the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.¹⁵ As a result of this kind of righteous standing or state before God, the guilty sinner was both forgiven and worthy to receive eternal life.

This particular aspect of Justification was adopted by the Swiss Reformers as well and therefore was not an area of contention among them, but rather a rallying point against the Roman Catholics' view of Subjective Justification (i.e. God actually makes the sinner morally righteous in Justification).¹⁶

The basis for holding to this "strictly forensic" view of Justification was due in large part to German Reformer, Philip Melanchthon's philological and exegetical study of the verbal form of this term in the Hebrew Scriptures. He became convinced that Paul's usage of various terms to communicate justification in the New Testament was based upon this and its seemingly exclusive forensic nature.¹⁷ It was actually Melanchthon's influence in this area more than Luther's which solidified it as the official Lutheran definition as well as its entrance into the historic Augsburg Confession.¹⁸ For this reason, Melanchthon is often considered the true "father" of the Lutheran definition of Justification and its popularity within Protestant Evangelical Christianity.¹⁹

5.1.2. Permanent

The Evangelical-Reformed definition of Justification teaches that once a person is justified by expressing faith, their new righteous standing and forensic declaration before God is permanent and therefore can never be forfeited or lost. As such Justification becomes synonymous with Salvation since once a person has been justified there is no possibility of forfeiture or lost therefore securing that person's eternal future.²⁰

¹⁴ The Council of Trent declared this to be "legal fiction" since there was no moral aspect to this form of justification.

¹⁵ "simul justus et peccator" (at the same time both just and yet sinner) was Luther's way of explaining this.

¹⁶ Early Princeton theologian Charles Hodge in discussing the issue of Justification as a forensic act, confirms that, "by this the Reformers intended, in the first place, to deny the Romish doctrine of subjective justification." Hodge also confirms my definition here as that of the Reformers when he states that for them, "justification (was) judicial or forensic, i.e., an act of God as Judge proceeding according to Law, declaring the sinner is just, i.e., that the Law no longer condemns him, but acquits him to be entitled to eternal life." Again, nothing more than a declaration of righteousness is conferred, it is truly forensic only.

¹⁷ In his *Loci Communes*, Melanchthon writes, "...for the Hebrews 'to justify' is a forensic verb (only)...Paul therefore understood the word for 'justifying' from the usage of the Hebrew word."; For further discussion consider Mark Seifrid's *Paul's usage of Righteousness Language Against Its Hellenistic Background* p. 67-74 in *Justification and Variegated Nomism Volume 2*, D.A. Carson ed.

¹⁸ See justification of the Ungodly by Henri Blocher, p. 491 in *Justification and Variegated Nomism Volume 2*, D.A. Carson ed.

¹⁹ "The father of the 'Protestant' emphasis was Melanchthon.", Henri Blocher, *ibid*, p.491; Mark Seifrid concurs by stating that Melanchthon's definition of Justification, especially its strictly forensic nature has become "determinative for most of Protestant Theology." *Ibid*, p. 67.

²⁰ Ironically this aspect of Justification has been influenced more by the Swiss Reformers than the Germans who seemed to believe it could be lost. Article 12 of the Augsburg Confession states, "[Our churches] condemn the Anabaptists, who deny that those once justified can lose the Holy Ghost", which at the very least seems to communicate the loss of Justification—if not also Salvation. Consider also <http://beggarsallreformation.blogspot.com/2009/10/did-luther-believe-salvation-can-be.html>. In support of

5.1.3. Faith only

What is to be understood by this designation is not the same as “faith alone.” Protestants throughout history have all agreed with Martin Luther that Justification is gained only by faith alone. Where there has however been disagreement, is over whether or not faith (i.e. trust in Christ) is all that is ever a part of Justification. It is here that this designation applies. The Evangelical-Reformed definition sees faith (i.e. trust in Christ) as the only thing ever associated with Justification. In other words, faithfulness, obedience to God or good works are never a factor in one’s Justification. This too is consistent with the views of Martin Luther.²¹

This once more is how the vast majority of Protestant Christians would define Justification. This definition however, falls woefully short in all three categories when placed under the close scrutiny of the biblical text and the theological questions it raises in regard to this subject.

5.2. Biblical Definition Of Justification

As with the prior definition, this definition will also be broken into three categories for heuristic and comparative reasons. Those categories are: forensic and moral, conditional and faith and faithfulness.

5.2.1. Forensic and Moral

Though there is no doubt that the verbal forms of justification in its various forms can refer to something that is strictly forensic in nature (Exo 23:7; Isa 5:23; Pro 17:15; Luk 16:15; Mat 11:19; Job 32:2; Psa 51:4; Rom 3:4; Luk 7:29; Act 19:40), when speaking from a soteriological perspective however, there is also a moral element. With that in mind consider:

5.2.1.1. There are times in Scripture when the Greek term (δικαιωω) translated “righteous” or “just” is clearly used to refer to a person who is morally righteous or just before God.²²

Daniel 6:23

καὶ σέσωκέ με ὁ θεὸς ἀπὸ τῶν λεόντων καθότι δικαιοσύνη ἐν ἐμοὶ εὗρέθη --lit. “and my God saved me out of the lion’s mouth because of the righteousness in me He found.”

(Also consider: Luke 1:6; Psalms 18:20, 24)

5.2.1.2. Scripture uses terms which seem to communicate that in the act of Justification God also “makes (morally) righteous.”

permanency as the position of the Evangelical community, consider the words of John Ankerberg: “...a man’s justification depend(s) solely on Christ’s meritorious life and atoning death—and not upon anything which a man can do—(therefore) a person could never lose his justification before God. Since Christ had already lived a perfect life and died to pay for all of man’s sins, nothing will ever change what Christ did—this is the very basis of a man’s justification. Therefore, once a person believes in Christ, he or she is entirely and eternally secure.”

²¹ One of Luther’s biggest contentions with not only the Swiss Reformers—but also Melancthon—was their acceptance of what came to be known as the “third use of the law”—the belief that obedience to God’s laws are necessary to salvation and something the believer must pursue as pleasing to God. Luther saw this as a threat to his view of Justification and therefore rejected it—since to believe it necessary to salvation seemed to call into question the sufficiency of Christ’s work in Justification—and was therefore in his mind dangerously close to the position held by the Roman Catholics. For further consideration of this subject see Book of Concord, XVII, 183.

²² “As a state of affairs in the world, ‘righteousness’ cannot be accomplished or even rightly conceived apart from its enactment by God”, Mark Seifrid, *ibid*, p.45. I am in full agreement with this statement as I believe also that the Scripture communicates nothing less. Which means this is the underlying and ultimate reason for all of those who are identified as morally righteous within its pages.

1 Corinthians 6:11

Καὶ ταῦτά τινες ἦτε· ἀλλὰ ἀπελούσαθε (**2pap**) = wash away, to cleanse or make clean in relation to sin (Job 9:30; Act 22:16); ἀλλὰ ἡγιασθητε (**2pap**) = to sanctify or purify by washing (Heb 9:13) ἀλλ' ἐδικαιώθητε (**2pap**) = to MAKE RIGHTEOUS—this has to be the meaning given the preceding words which qualify it.

Titus 3:5-7

Clearly “the washing of regeneration” here refers to Justification since that is the conclusion he draws in verse 7. In addition, “so that being justified by His grace” parallels verse 5 “saved...according to His mercy”—which means that Paul is now revealing the instrument which actually did the washing in the regenerative process.²³

Romans 6:1-11

These verses are the continuation of Paul’s teaching on Justification in Christ by faith which he began in 3:21. Being “set free from sin” is not a forensic reality but a moral one.²⁴

5.2.2. Conditional

The Scriptures know nothing of a Justification which cannot be forfeited or lost. Though what Christ did through His death affords to individuals entrance into a completely righteous, redeemed, reconciled and renewed standing/state with God²⁵ which is impervious to outside forces or future condemnation (Rom 8:31-39), such a standing/state is conditioned upon our actions after we enter in. Hence, Justification can be lost both temporally and permanently.

The following support should make this abundantly convincing and clear:²⁶

²³ Since the idea of washing in each of these contexts is in reference to sin, forgiveness as a forensic act must be seen as preceding this moral act. In other words, we are declared “forgiven” and therefore also “righteous” because our sin has been “washed away.” Hence the biblical view unlike the Roman Catholic, or Reformed View sees the moral aspect of Justification preceding the forensic. Which is why, what the Bible teaches is neither legalistic nor a legal fiction. This is also an important distinction which finds parallel in the OT Priesthood: Consecration through cleansing before declaration to office (i.e. installment or ability to minister before God). The same pattern therefore is carried over into the NT where we serve as priests before God (1Pe 2; Rev 1).

²⁴ In relation to this moral aspect of justification and its use in Romans 6 and Titus 3, Norm Shepherd writes, “In Romans 6:7, (justification) is used where theologically we would expect the vocabulary of sanctification. Paul says that the sinner who has been crucified with Christ has died to sin and is no longer a slave to sin. He ‘has been freed from sin.’ Literally Paul writes that he has been ‘justified from sin.’ We may well have a similar use of ‘justify’ in Titus 3:5-7: ‘He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit...so that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.’ ‘Here Paul may be using ‘justify’ in the sense of forgiveness; but the language also suggests that ‘justification’ is simply another way of referring to the renewal by the Holy Spirit. This shows the close connection between justification and sanctification in the Scripture.” (A Faith That Is Never Alone, p.274).

²⁵ This is my summary definition of Justification as it relates to our standing/state before God based on Paul’s explanation in Rom 6-8. “Renewed” refers to the transformative state of purity and power we now exist in as a result of dying and being raised to life with Jesus Christ—a life free from sin’s dominion and for obedience to God. It is important to mention also that my use of the term “entrance” when speaking of initial faith is also deliberate. This is the idea communicated by Paul in when speaking of initial faith unto Justification (Rom 5:2). This is also something we will discuss more extensively under the section titled, “History.”

²⁶ What also becomes abundantly convincing and clear (as one considers these) is that Justification and Salvation cannot therefore be synonymous. Whereas Salvation is permanent, being conditioned upon the decrees and election

5.2.2.1. Scriptural references which cannot be teaching or talking about anything other than a loss of Justification.

2 Corinthians 5:9-20

According to Paul elsewhere, being “reconciled to God” is a concept associated exclusively with Justification (consider Rom 5:1-10). Though the Corinthians had received this standing with God initially by faith in Christ (which is why Paul planted a church among them, 1Co 3:10), they had through their unrepentant disobedience and embracing of false antinomian beliefs and teachers (vv 11-15) forfeited/lost this standing. This then is the reason for Paul’s continued admonishment in chapter 6 (see especially vv1-2 and 14-18).²⁷

(Also consider: Mat 18:21-35; 2Jo 1:8; 2Pe 2:20-22, 3:16-17; Heb 6:1-8)

5.2.2.2. The fact that Scripture speaks of both initial Justification and something yet future based on what we do in between.²⁸

Galatians 5:1-5

In 3:1-14 Paul makes it clear that those he is writing to are those who have initially received Justification in Christ by faith. Yet they are to v5, “eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness (justification—same word as v4)—understanding that their actions in between could forfeit its realization.

(Also consider: Heb 6:9-12; Phi 3:8-16; Rom 2:13)

5.2.3. Faith and Faithfulness

In correlation to the previous point, faithfulness becomes the necessary helpmate to initial faith in Christ-- not as that which gains Justification but maintains it unto Salvation²⁹. In other words, though Justification cannot be possessed by our obedience or good works, it nonetheless is

of God, Justification is not, being conditioned upon the actions of man after initial faith and entrance into this state; In relation those holding to Evangelical-Reformed definition and therefore seeing Justification and Salvation as synonymous, Mark Seifrid’s words are telling, “for the Septuagintal translators at least, ‘salvation’ did not serve as a translation equivalent for ‘righteousness’. In other words, they understood that the meaning of ‘righteousness’ could not be reduced to the idea of ‘salvation’. Current scholarship (however) has tended to a reduction that is absent in the Septuagint.” Ibid, p.52.

²⁷ I am abundantly aware of how this affects Ordo Salutis: If justification can be lost, then what about the indwelling Spirit or adoption which follows it? I do however believe that further examination of these subjects reveal the possibility of loss as well. In these cases, it is more the soteriological paradigm which is driving their permanency than the testimony of Scripture. In this light consider: Eph 4:30; Psa 51:11; Heb 12:16-17.

²⁸ Several scholars as of recent have recognized this “now-not yet” aspect of Justification. In this regard Douglas Moo states, “A future element in justification does not fit entirely comfortably within my own Reformed tradition. It is messy. But it appears to be biblical”, see <http://www.totascriptura.com/2011/09/09/doug-moo-quotes-on-justification-from-understanding-the-times/>. In Future Justification: Some Theological and Exegetical Proposals (Faith Is Never Alone, P. Andrew Sandlin, ed.), Richard Lusk classifies the distinctions as “Initial” and “Final” Justification.

²⁹ The idea that faithfulness is necessary to salvation, is something clearly taught in the Westminster Standards, “Holy obedience is not only evidence of salvation, but the way of salvation.” (WLC 32). By the way, to argue that this is referring only to Salvation and not Justification reveals not only a faulty understanding of both since one is the function of the other (Justification of Salvation).

preserved by such actions.³⁰ Since however this aspect of Justification is so vital to the upcoming section's material, biblical support will instead be discussed there.

6. HISTORY

One of the key factors in understanding the Bible's teaching on Justification is history or historical context. In other words, words have meaning which are directly tied to and determined by the historical context in which they are communicated. This means, if we are going to understand what any of the given biblical authors are attempting to communicate through their writings, then we must also know the history behind it³¹. This includes religious history. And though this is a common perspective among those studying the doctrine of Justification, it is in this very area where many of the errors regarding this doctrine are made. Since that is the case, it will be helpful to consider them before establishing what is correct. There are two which are most prevalent today:

6.1. The 16th century Protestant Reformation.

As an increasing number of scholars are pointing out, the Reformers—most specifically Martin Luther--was guilty of reading his theological battle with the Roman Catholic Church back into the pages of the New Testament.³² And he did this more than anything else with the doctrine of Justification. Luther essentially saw the Jews as the early progenitors of the Roman Catholic Church. Her popes and priests were the Jewish priests and Pharisees; her view of salvation no different than the system of indulgences and merit he had experienced while in the Catholic Church and in service as one of her monks. These people and this kind of religious system, then was what Jesus and the Apostles stood against—in the same way Luther was now protesting the teaching and theology of Rome. As such, this became the religious backdrop for his historical understanding of the Bible and its doctrine of Justification. Unfortunately, similar eisegesis still exists today. Quoting once more the words of E.P. Sanders, “We (continue today) to have a retrojection of the Protestant-Catholic debate into ancient history, with Judaism taking the role of Catholicism and Christianity the role of Lutheranism.”³³ As a result, there are many who think that what Jesus and the New Testament writers are fighting against is a works-based system of salvation³⁴. Luther or the other Reformers however, are not completely at fault for such thinking. This soteriological viewpoint also finds support in some of those who claimed to have studied the appropriate historical context: Second Temple Judaism.

³⁰ In this way, I believe the mantra of the Reformers is best captured, “We are justified by faith alone, but faith is never alone.”

³¹ This hermeneutic truth makes up a part of what is commonly known as the “grammatical-historical” approach to Scripture.

³² Quoting portions of the Preface in Terrance Donaldson's book, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping The Apostle's Convictional World*, should suffice here, “Older approaches, especially those stemming from the Reformation, have been increasingly perceived as inadequate, their frameworks of interpretation having to be forced upon central elements of Paul's life and thought with greater and greater difficulty. At the same time the recognition that Paul's questions were not the same as those of the Reformers has produced new approaches... (In) reply, ‘how are we to understand Paul's Gentile mission, now that we know how Luther Paul misunderstood Paul?...Lenses polished on the grinding wheel of the Reformation do not provide us with a clear picture of Paul.’”

³³ E.P. Sanders, *Paul And Palestinian Judaism*, p.57

³⁴ At the close of the 16th Century this developed into a formal teaching known as the “covenant of works.”

6.2. Second Temple Judaism as a Works-based Soteriology.

As previously discussed, the most important historical and religious context for understanding the doctrine of Justification is not the four hundred years of time which has defined our historical and religious context as Christians today, but the four hundred years which defined the writings of the New Testament—a period of time known as Second Temple Judaism.³⁵ Which means this is the proper historical and religious context for any consideration of Jesus or Paul on this particular doctrine since this is the soil in which their teachings/writings on Justification are planted. Unfortunately however, identifying the right historical and religious context is only half the battle! In the late nineteenth century, Christian authorship began giving further assistance to Luther's anachronistic eisegesis of the Scriptures by proposing that what the Jews believed and taught during this time (most especially the Pharisees) was the epitome of a work-based salvation—including a system of merits (i.e. good works) which cancels out (i.e. forgives) demerits (i.e. sin) and a repository of the saints!³⁶ And though this view of Second Temple Judaism received both scathing criticism and sound rejection from those who were experts in this field of study—including Jewish scholars, this perception has continued to persevere as the popular and accepted view within Christianity—that the soteriology of the Jewish leaders and Pharisees of the New Testament was completely works-based³⁷. As expected, this has also been adopted by many Christians as it pertains to whole of Judaism. In other words, that what the Old Testament teaches, is also a work-based soteriology. As such, this understanding, places Jesus and Paul and the other New Testament writers and teachers in complete antithesis to not only the Jewish teachers of their day—but also those under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament; whereas Judaism

³⁵ Second Temple Judaism: the Jewish practices and beliefs that existed between the reconstruction of the Temple by Zerubbabel (516 B.C.) and its destruction by the Romans (70 A.D.).

³⁶ This way of thinking is so associated with the Pharisees that a derivative of their name (Pharisaism) has become the stigmatized short-hand when speaking about works-based religion. This is somewhat ironic in light of what is revealed about the Pharisees in Luke 5:21.

³⁷ In support of what has just been said, consider the following quotes: Samuel Sandmel (Jewish scholar of the NT), *The First Christian Century*, p.66 “It can be set down as something destined to endure eternally that the usual Christian commentators will disparage Judaism and its supposed legalism...with those Christian who persist in deluding themselves about Jewish legalism, no academic communication is possible. The issue is not to bring these interpreters to love Judaism, but only to bring them to a responsible, elementary comprehension of it.” E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, p.32, 38, 45, 47 “In 1921, in an article which should be required reading for any Christian scholar who writes about Judaism, George Foot Moore [a leading Jewish scholar of that time] commented on the fundamental change which had taken place in the nineteenth century in works by Christian authors about Judaism. Through the eighteenth century Christian literature had primarily tried to show agreement of Jewish views with Christian theology...With F. Weber, however, everything changed. For him, Judaism was the antithesis of Christianity. Judaism was a legalistic religion in which God was remote and inaccessible. Christianity is based on faith rather than works and believes in an accessible God...By the end of the nineteenth century, Weber's soteriology was widely considered to be an accurate presentation...Weber's view continued despite the objections of experts in Rabbinics...by scholars more knowledgeable and more perceptive. The view that Moore opposed and Sandmel decries is very solidly entrenched in New Testament scholarship, appearing in the basic reference works and being held by many of the most influential scholars of the present and immediately preceding generations. Weber's general view of Judaism lives on in New Testament scholarship, unhindered by the fact that it has been denounced by such knowledgeable scholars as Moore...and despite the fact that many of its proponents, despite Moore's scathing criticism on this point, still cannot or do not look up the passages which they cite in support of their view and read them in context.”

was works-based, Christianity is not, whereas Judaism was about earning one's salvation, Christianity is about faith in another who has earned it on our behalf.³⁸

The following quotations from noted theologians make this particular error abundantly clear:

"The contrast between Paul and Judaism consists not merely in his assertion of the present reality of righteousness, but also in a much more decisive thesis—the one which concerns the condition to which God's acquitting decision is tied. The Jew takes it for granted that this condition is keeping the Law, the accomplishing of 'works' prescribed by the Law. In direct contrast [emphasis mine] to this view Paul's thesis runs—'by, or from, faith.'"-- Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament I*, p. 273

"God gave Israel Torah so that they would have the opportunity to earn merit and reward. Individuals have the capability of choosing the good, and the entire system of 'Pharisaic soteriology' stands or falls with man's capability to fulfill the law. Every fulfillment of a commandment earns for the Israelite merit, while every transgression earns a debt or guilt. God keeps a record of both merits and demerits. When a man's merits are more numerous (than his demerits) he is considered righteous, but when transgressions outnumber merits he is considered wicked. If the two are balanced, he is an intermediate. The balance of his account may alter at any moment. At the end, his final destiny is decided on the basis of the account. A man's effort, then, is to see that his fulfillments outweigh (outnumber) his transgressions. There are two ways of doing this. One is by the positive activity of piling up fulfillments, supplemented by 'good works'. Further he can draw on the merits of the fathers to supplement the number of his merits. In the second place, one can reduce the number of transgressions by acts of atonement, each of which cancels sin and consequently some of the debts or guilts. The old Jewish religion is thus a religion of the most complete self-redemption; it has no room for a redeemer-savior who dies for the sins of the world."— Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch IV*, p.3-13

Pharisaism is the final result of that conception of religion which makes religion consist in conformity to the Law, and promises God's grace only to the doers of the Law. It was the scrupulous adherence to legalistic traditions that created the Pharisaic ethos. —Bruce Metzger, *The New Testament*, p.41

"During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries NT scholars had come to rely upon a portrayal of Second Temple Judaism that could be found in nearly all of the standard reference tools of the day. This portrayal runs as follows. Jews in the first century were enmeshed in legalism, whereas Paul believed salvation came by grace through faith. This keeping of the Law was a hard burden from which Jews longed to be released."—Kent L. Yinger, *The New Perspective on Paul: An Introduction*, p.5-7

As such, one is hard-pressed to find Churches or source material which offers an alternative view/interpretation as it relates to this critically important period of religious history. This however, does not mean that they do not exist! What it does mean, is that we must be willing to consider a "full-scale abandonment" of this misconception—since the sound and biblical view on this issue is far more than a mere tweaking of details—it is instead a complete paradigm shift.

6.3. Second Temple Judaism as a Covenant-based Soteriology.

What all scholars in the field of Rabbinical/Jewish studies now agree on, is that Judaism has never been work-based in its soteriology or a religion which includes the earning of one's salvation through a system

³⁸ To say that this means these individuals therefore believe that God has had at least two plans of salvation through time may be a bit of unfair. Though on the surface it seems like this is true, theologians such as R.C. Sproul have confirmed just the opposite. According to him, a work-based salvation is what is taught in the New Testament as much as in the Old. The only difference is, Christ has effectively "worked" and earned that salvation for us—hence my phrase, "another has earned it on our behalf"; see *Getting The Gospel Right*, p.160.

of merits and de-merits³⁹. And this is true primarily because of E.P. Sanders's writings/lectures on Second Temple Judaism. Sanders became the voice of reason, respect and refutation when assessing the teaching and beliefs of the Jews during this time—especially as it related to viewing its soteriology as work-based or as completely antithetical to the salvation proposed by the New Testament teachers and writers. His research both from ancient extant Jewish sources as well as the Scriptures led him to the conclusion that Judaism was (instead) a religion of grace and faith in much the same way as Christianity. It was also (like Christianity) covenant-based and containing laws which were to be seen as the mandatory and prescribed practice of all those expressing faith in God Who by His grace had brought them into covenant relationship with Himself. These laws however possessed no merit—nor could one “earn” their salvation through them. Rather the law (including laws related to atonement and forgiveness of sins) was simply the means to maintaining the saving relationship with God which had been gained by the Jew through faith and God's gracious election of them as His people and act of making covenant with them. The covenant therefore was the sign that such a relationship existed; faith and law (or faithfulness to the law) simply its entrance and parameters (respectively). This way of thinking he called “covenantal nomism.” In his own words,

“Covenantal nomism is the view that one's place in God's plan [of salvation] is established on the basis of the covenant and that the covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedience to its commandments, while providing means of atonement for transgressions.”⁴⁰

“Obedience determines one's position in the covenant, but it does not earn God's grace as such.”⁴¹

“The pattern or structure of covenantal nomism is this: (1) God has chosen Israel and (2) given the law. The law implies both (3) God's promise to maintain the election (i.e. its inheritance) and (4) the requirement to obey. (5) God rewards obedience and punishes transgression. (6) The law provides for means of atonement, and atonement results in (7) maintenance or re-establishment of the covenantal relationship. (8) All those who are maintained in the covenant by obedience, atonement and God's mercy (grace) belong to the group which will be saved. An important interpretation of the first and last points is that election and ultimately salvation are considered to be by God's mercy (grace) rather than human achievement.”⁴²

Since Sanders initial formulation, particular aspects of covenantal nomism have undergone both criticism and modification. In its general form however, this covenant-based paradigm continues to demonstrate itself not only as the soteriological structure of the Second Temple Judaism but also what we find in the Old Testament Scriptures as well as the New. In other words, the New Covenant also follows this covenant-based paradigm in its soteriological structure. Which means three things: (1) This is not only the historical and religious context of the New Testament, but also the theological context of the entire Bible (both Old and New). (2) God has always had only one basic plan of salvation.⁴³ (3) Justification must be understood in relation to this covenant-based paradigm.

³⁹ Kent L. Yinger, *The New Perspective on Paul: An Introduction*, p.12, ‘Scholars continue to debate some of the details, but since 1977 general agreement has been reached on the following points: (1) first-century Judaism was not the legalistic religion of past caricatures. (2) covenantal nomism is a fair description of Jewish soteriology of the period.’

⁴⁰ E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, p.75

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.420

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.422

⁴³ This includes those before Sinai and the Old Covenant. Adam, Noah and Abraham all had covenants with God which functioned according to this same paradigm.

In light of that, the following represents what I believe to be the...

6.4. Covenant-based soteriology of the Bible (both Old and New Testaments) in its more detailed form:

6.4.1. God will not have a friendly/saving relationship with anyone who is not willing to make covenant with Him. (Hos 6:4-7; Gen 6:12-18, 17:4, 19-21; Exo 2:24, 24:8, 34:27-28; Mat 26:28 w/ Joh 13:1-8; Isa 42:6, 49:8)

6.4.2. Since the Fall, God requires blood and a mediator. (Exo 24:1-8, Mat 26:28; Heb 9:18-26, 10:29; Gal 3:15-22; Rom 8:34; Heb 7:22-25, 8:13, 9:15, 10:14, 18, 12:24; 1T 2:5)

6.4.3. Since the Fall, God's offer to make covenant is completely gracious. (Joh 1:16-17; Gen 15:1-9; Isa 63:7-14; Exo 33:12-23, 34:1, 10, 27; Jer 31:2; Psa 86:6; Act 15:11; 1Co 1:4; Rom 3:24, 4:16; Eph 2:8; Heb 4:16)

6.4.4. Entrance into the covenant is by faith through atonement unto justification.

6.4.4.1. Faith before Christ was in what God had said through Moses and His prophetic spokesmen.

6.4.4.2. Faith after Christ is in what God has said through Christ and His apostolic spokesmen. (Deu 18:18-19; Mal 4:4; Joh 1:17; Luk 16:29-31, 24:27; Joh 1:45, 5:46, Act 28:23; Heb 1:1-2, 2:2-4, 2Pe 3:2; Joh 12:44)

6.4.4.3. Atonement before Christ involved animal sacrifices and the observance of various clean laws.

6.4.4.4. Atonement after Christ involves being made clean only through the sacrifice of Christ. (Lev 1-23; Eze 44:23; Luk 2:22, 5:11-14; Mar 7:19 w/Act 10:15 w/ Rom 14:20; Joh 13:10, 15:3; Heb 9:9-10-14, 19-10:22; Eze 36:25)⁴⁴

6.4.4.5. Justification before Christ meant "pass-over only" in relation to sin.

6.4.4.6. Justification after Christ means "true payment" for sin. (Rom 3:25-26; Heb 9:22 w/10:1-4, 11-14, 18; Rom 3:10)

6.4.5. Maintenance of one's place in the covenant is:

6.4.5.1. Carried out through faithfulness and full compliance with the laws of the covenant—including the laws of atonement (i.e. clean laws). (Gen 2:16-17, 17:1-2; Exo 24:7-8; Deu 7:11-12, 12:32, 28:1-2, 9; Mat 25:21; 1Jo 3:7-10; 1Jo 1:9; Joh 13:10; Mat 5:48; Luk 13:22-30, 14:33, 16:16-17)

6.4.5.2. Possible for everyone in the New Covenant because of the power of our Justification and the indwelling Holy Spirit. (Rom 3:11-18, 7:18 w/8:1-4, 6:1-14)

6.4.5.3. Known by:

6.4.5.3.1. Audible confirmation (ex. Gen 15:18, 17:1-4)

6.4.5.3.2. Covenant community and their confirmation (ex. Act 2:41; Mat 18:17)

⁴⁴ The Bible seems to imply two versus three categories in relation to the OT law and its commands: Ceremonial/Clean laws and Moral/Character laws. Hence, this means the distinctions are more Bi-partite than Tri-partite as is assumed within many Reformed branches of the church today.

6.4.5.3.3. Signs (ex. Gen 17:14; Mar 16:16)

6.4.5.4. Necessary in order to:

6.4.5.4.1. Prevent the loss of Justification. (Mat 18:21-35; 2Co 5:20, 6:1; 2Jo 1:8; 2Pe 2:20-22; Heb 6:1-8)

6.4.5.4.2. Perceive Assurance. (1Ti 3:13; 2Pe 1:5-11)

6.4.5.4.3. Possess Temporal Blessings and Eternal Salvation. (Deu 7:11-13, 28:9-13, 29:9-20; Mat 18:17-20; Heb 10:25 w/36; 2Ti 4:7 w/ Psa 132:12—also consider --Deu 29:9; Gen 18:19; Exo 19:5 w/20:6; Lev 18:4-5; Psa 25:10)

6.4.5.5. The difference between being a “doer of the law” and “under the law.” (Rom 2:12-13)

6.4.5.6. Forfeited through unrepentant sin and apostasy from the covenant community. (Deu 29:9-20; Mat 18:17-20; Heb 10:24-29)

6.4.6. Marriage is the analogous model and motivation. (Gen 2:23-24; Jer 2:2, 32, 3:1, 20; Hos 2; Eze 16:1-32; Rev 19:7, 21:2, 9)

7. APPLICATION

In Protestant Christianity, the application of Justification to the life of the believer has primarily, if not predominately, been discussed under the doctrine of Imputation.⁴⁵ However, due to the rampant error bound up in the Evangelical-Reformed⁴⁶ community’s definition of Justification, as well as her serious misunderstanding of Second Temple Judaism and the religious context of this word and its usage in the Biblical text, this particular doctrine has suffered its own error and misunderstanding. And as we shall see, the consequences do not end there. The very message and meaning of the Gospel has also been threatened. Which means that embracing a sound, biblical view of Imputation is just as important as it is for Justification since one affects the other—and both ultimately affect the Gospel.

The typical approach to study in this series has been to examine the heretical view most prominent today before revealing and establishing what is sound and biblical. This will be the course pursued in the current study with one exception: critique of the heresy will not be embedded in its discussion—nor the contrasting biblical view--- as it has in previous studies. Because of the popularity and consequences associated with this view, such critical analysis will be given its own designated section and focus immediately following its explanation and history. In similar format, the sound-biblical view of Justification will also attempt to give specific focus and designation. In this case, however two sections will accompany the explanation and history: biblical and theological support and supposed objections.

⁴⁵ The word “impute” simply means to “apply”, hence my reasoning for stating that the doctrine of imputation is where Protestants discuss and study the application of Justification to the life of the believer.

⁴⁶ As mentioned before, when using this term I am referring to all those Christians or Churches which would consider themselves to be in general agreement with the Protestant Reformation’s soteriology—especially those from her German (i.e. “Evangelical”) and Swiss i.e. “Reformed”) branches—hence, the designation “Evangelical-Reformed.” For those less aware, my identity of the term “evangelical” with the German Reformers stems from the fact that the term itself was coined by Martin Luther—the father of the German Reformation! My reason for focusing on this particular group within Christianity is because it is closest to my own.

7.1. The Heretical View Of Imputation: Passive Plus Active Obedience

7.1.1. Explanation

It is believed by those embracing this view that what is necessary for a person putting faith in Christ to be justified before God is not only the application of Christ's suffering, death and resurrection but also His perfect law-keeping life before suffering and death. In other words, justification requires the imputing of both Christ's passive obedience as well as His active obedience to the believer. Passive Obedience (PO) therefore refers to the obedience Christ rendered in going to the cross and shedding His blood for sin as our atoning sacrifice, whereas Active Obedience (AO) refers to the obedience Christ rendered to the Father while on earth as a sinless Man, doing exactly everything according to His will and precepts provided under the Old Covenant. It refers also to Christ's "merited state" of righteousness—something believed to be as much separate as it is superior to the idea of just being sinless. According to Wayne Grudem, an avid supporter of this view, being simply sinless only affords to a person, "the position of Adam and Eve before they had done anything good or bad and before they had passed a time of probation successfully⁴⁷. (However) to be established in righteousness...(we like Adam and Eve have) to obey God perfectly over a period of time." According to Grudem, the same was true for Christ—and necessary in light of Adam and our own failure in this area: "For this reason Christ had to live a life of perfect obedience to God in order to *earn* righteousness for us. He had to obey the law for His whole life on our behalf so that the positive *merits* of His perfect obedience would be counted for us."⁴⁸ In summation then, this view teaches:

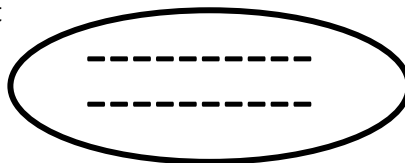
7.1.1.1. Our justification/righteous standing before God requires more than simply the imputation/application of Christ's atoning death and resurrection (i.e. His PO).

7.1.1.2. Our justification/righteous standing before God requires also the imputation/application of what Christ has merited/earned through His perfect life of law-keeping and obedience to God before His death (i.e. His AO).

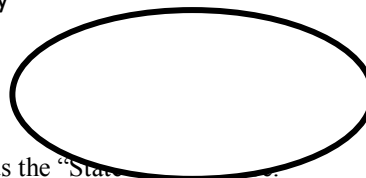
As a means to further clarification consider the following diagram:⁴⁹

PO+AO DIAGRAM

State of Sin: Man w/o Christ



State of Innocence: Man w/ Christ's PO only

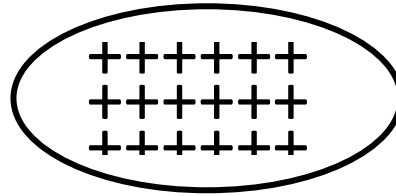


⁴⁷. Most proponents of PO+AO imputation refer to this as the "State of Innocence".

⁴⁸ Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, p.570-571. Emphasis placed on words in italics are mine.

⁴⁹ The idea for this diagram actually came from the one used by Grudem to explain his "Passive Plus Active Obedience" view. See again: Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, p.570-571

State of Righteousness: Man w/ Christ's AO



This once more is the view most prominent today—especially within Evangelical-Reformed circles.⁵⁰ And that because of what was adopted as doctrinal truth shortly after the German and Swiss Reformations.

7.1.2. History

The “Passive Plus Active” view of imputation is actually the necessary result of two more extensive doctrines which became popular toward the end of the 16th Century.⁵¹ Those doctrines were: The Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Redemption.⁵² And though they may seem unfamiliar, most Christians are aware of them based on what they teach. It is essentially the words of Wayne Grudem quoted earlier! His words and therefore belief in the “Passive Plus Active Obedience” heresy finds its basis in these equally heretical doctrines of the Covenant of Works and Redemption which teach:

In the beginning, God made a covenant (the “Covenant of Works”) with Adam whom He appointed as humanity’s representative (i.e. Federal Head). This Covenant promised all of humanity eternal life if Adam perfectly obeyed God’s commands. Adam however, failed to merit such life due to his fall into sin and as such humanity was plunged into its bondage and God’s condemnation. In His mercy and according to His eternal plan, God made a similar covenant (the

⁵⁰ For instance, this is the view/position of the : Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Presbyterian Church of America, Southern Baptist Convention, Association of Reformed Baptist Churches in America, Fellowship of Independent, Reformed Evangelicals---denominations/affiliations whose combined membership represents well over half of all Protestant Christian fellowships in America especially when one considers that this is the personal view of high profile Evangelicals such as : John MacArthur, John Piper, D.A. Carson, Mark Driscoll, Scotty Ward Smith, R Scott Clark, Michael Horton, Kevin DeYoung, Tullian Tchividjian, RC Sproul, Burk Parsons, Phil Johnson, AL Mohler.

⁵¹ “The doctrine of the imputation of active obedience [PO+AO] developed in conjunction with the development of the covenant of works doctrine toward the latter part of the sixteenth century... There was no doctrine of the imputation of active obedience in the early Reformation.” Norm Shepherd, *A Faith That Is Never Alone*, p.268-269; “The main impetus behind the doctrine of the imputation of Christ’s active obedience [PO+AO] is the meritorious covenant of works, which is itself a highly dubious theological construction.” Rich Lusk, *A Faith That Is Never Alone*, p.132, fn 30

⁵²These two covenants are considered “theological covenants” versus “biblical covenants” meaning that they are not seen as explicitly taught in the Scriptures, but rather are the “necessary constructs” for understanding God’s overall plan of redemption and dealings with men. All those holding to Covenant Theology (or Covenantalism) would embrace these two covenants as true since they are part of that biblical-theological system. It is however embraced by those not holding to Covenantalism as well. Wayne Grudem is a good example. At the time, Grudem wrote his systematic theology, he would have categorized himself as leaning more in the direction of Dispensational in his biblical theology.

“Covenant of Redemption”) with His Son who, in becoming our new Federal Head successfully merited eternal life for us through His life of perfect obedience⁵³.

As stated above, the heresy of “Passive Plus Active Obedience” is the direct result of these two “pre-cursor” doctrines (or covenants). Something which can easily be surmised when one considers the fact that:

7.1.2.1. Both assume some form of “merit” (or works) as necessary to attain to eternal life (or salvation).

7.1.2.2. Both assume that a person being without sin is not enough.

7.1.2.3. Christ’s work is seen as vicariously earning through His obedience what Adam failed to earn.⁵⁴

In addition to this, it seems clear that the “Passive Plus Active Obedience” heresy also finds strength and support in the popular view of Second Temple Judaism discussed in the previous study (See VI. History), since this too teaches a merit-based or works-based system of salvation as the soteriology of the Bible.⁵⁵

In light then of the charge that the “Passive Plus Active Obedience” view of Imputation is heresy, the remaining point in this section should provide ample reason to eschew this doctrinal view.

7.1.3. Critical Analysis

There are multiple reasons one should consider this view of Imputation as heretical and dangerous. Consider:

7.1.3.1. It is absent from the teaching of the NT.

There is no verse or set of verses in the NT which teach or support the imputation of both Christ’s passive *and* active obedience.

This is supported by several well known theologians of today—including those who would hold to the “Passive Plus Active Obedience” view! For instance:

D.A. Carson acknowledges that the doctrine of the imputation of Christ’s active obedience is never mentioned or explicitly taught in the NT Scriptures.⁵⁶

⁵³ This represents my combined paraphrase and summary statement of these two doctrines as they found within the teachings of Covenant Theology. Any reputable source espousing this system would once again formally identify these theological covenants and (I am confident) affirm my explanation as correctly representing their teaching on both.

⁵⁴ “The theological argument is that the disobedience of the first man ‘creates an expectation concerning remedial obedience’ to be performed by the final Adam.” Norm Shepherd, *A Faith That Is Never Alone*, p.264

⁵⁵ Even if one rejects my previous conclusions on Second Temple Judaism, one should be able to see that both this view of Imputation and these theological covenants are confirming that very thing for those embracing them: that the Bible teaches a work-based salvation. If not, repeating the words of renowned covenant theologian RC Sproul may help, “Man’s relationship to God in creation was based on works...Ultimately the only way one can be justified is by works.” RC Sproul, *Getting The Gospel Right*, p.160

⁵⁶ Though Carson admits this, he continues to argue ferociously for it. One wonders the motivation. See Carson’s article, “The Vindication of Imputation: On fields of Discourse and Semantic Fields.”

The same can be said of Bird, Packer and Seifrid as demonstrated by the following quotes:

“There is no text in the NT which categorically states that Christ’s righteousness is imputed to believers.” –Michael Bird

“The imputation of Christ’s righteousness is not found in Paul’s writings.” –JI Packer

“It is worth noting that Paul never speaks of Christ’s righteousness as imputed to believers, as became standard in Protestantism.” – Mark Seifrid⁵⁷

Some have attempted to cite Romans 5:18-19 as support. The problem is, those verses speak to a singular act (“one act trespass...one act of righteousness”). Hardly then could it be Christ’s entire life of obedience to God’s laws which is in focus!⁵⁸ Instead it is His passive obedience—His obedience in going to the cross for our sins (Phi 2:8).⁵⁹ As stated earlier, this position is ultimately not the result of biblical study but the acceptance of two equally unbiblical theological covenants.

Another text often cited as support is Matthew 3:15 where Jesus in His baptism by John claims that He is doing it to “fulfill all righteousness.” According to Phil Johnson, this verse is but one example of Christ obeying the Law on our behalf in order to earn our righteousness.⁶⁰ The problem is, John’s baptism was not part of the OT Law! Not only that, but Jesus’ point in doing it was no different than what took place in the OT when those guilty of sin would place their hands upon the sacrificial animal. It was for the purpose of transferring their sins to the lamb. In other words, it was a sign that this creature was now being identified as the one bearing their sin—that it had been imputed to him. In similar fashion, Jesus, by going into the same water as the people, took upon Himself what they were leaving there—their *sin*. In that one act, He both began His public ministry and proclaimed it—that He was the One Isaiah 53:10 spoke of that God would be “well-pleased”⁶¹ to crush by placing the iniquity of his people upon Him; that He was God’s true sacrificial *lamb* for sin. In this way (then) He accomplished (in that moment) the first piece necessary to “fulfill all righteousness” --identifying with those He would make righteous through atonement. If that seems far-fetched as an explanation, consider the information provided in Matthew’s account as well as that of John’s gospel: In verse 6, of Matthew 3, we are told that as the people went into the water they were “confessing their *sins*.” And in response to Jesus’ entry into the same waters we hear, “This is My Son in whom I am *well pleased*” (v17) and “Behold the *Lamb* of God Who takes away the *sin* of the world” (Joh 1:29). These are hardly a coincidental

⁵⁷ Mark Seifrid, *Christ Our Righteousness: Paul’s Theology Of Justification*, p.174-175

⁵⁸ Some beg to differ despite the fact that their attempts to “force the square peg into the round hole” only makes their theological acumen look even worse. One example is R. Scott Clark, whose take on these verses is to somehow see them as speaking of one act which characterizes the entirety of both Adam’s and Christ’s life. The problem is, it forces him to see Adam as a consummate sinner before the Fall: “Adam’s entire life to that point is characterized by his disobedience.” R. Scott Clark, CJPM, p.248

⁵⁹ “(In regard to Rom 5:18-19) Paul is saying that the one act of obedience that justifies is Christ’s death on the cross and that it secures the forgiveness of sins. This is clear from Romans chapters 3 through 5.” Shepherd, p.265

⁶⁰ See his blog article at: www.teampyro.org/2009/09/active-obedience-revisited.html

⁶¹ חָפֵץ (chaphets) – “to delight in, to be well-pleased.” The ESV does a poor job of translating this, choosing the Septuagint rendering (βούλεται -“to will or determine”) over the original Hebrew.

choice of words by the inspired writers of Scripture or something that should be ignored when attempting to correctly understand what is being taught through this important event. However, seeing it as statement referring to yet another step in Jesus' long journey of earning our righteousness does just that. And it gives biblical support to where none can legitimately be found.⁶²

7.1.3.2. It is absent from the symbols of atonement in the NT.

The words of Norm Shepherd and Richard Lusk adequately explain and support this point:

*"The Lord has given us two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's supper, both of which point to Christ's one sacrifice finished on the cross as the source of eternal life. There are no sacraments that point to the imputation of active obedience, even though it is actually the imputation of active obedience that secures eternal life for us according to the covenant of works scheme."*⁶³

*"Neither sacrament (Baptism or the Lord's Supper) symbolizes or enacts transfer of merits or active obedience..."*⁶⁴

7.1.3.3. It is absent from the symbols of atonement presented in the OT.

Again, the following quotes from Shepherd and Lusk should suffice to make the point:

*"One of the strongest arguments against the imputation of active obedience is found in the sacrificial system of the OT. This system, of course, was given to serve as a blueprint for Christ's work. A worshipper would bring a spotless animal to the tabernacle or temple. The cleanness of the animal obviously represented Christ's perfect obedience. The worshipper would lay hands on the animal, incorporating himself into the sacrifice, and setting the animal apart to the 'office' of representative substitute. But the reverse action was never performed; never did the animal lay its hooves on the worshipper, never was anything transferred from the animal to the worshipper. After the worshipper is united to the animal, the animal must die for the sin of the one he represents. Thus, the animal is killed and its blood presented for propitiation—pointing forward to the cross. After-wards, the animal carries the worshipper into the Spirit-fire of the altar, and ascends before the Lord's throne as a sweet smelling aroma. This entire pattern corresponds to cross-resurrection-ascension-glorification. Thus, the sacrifices provided a comprehensive preview of the whole work of Christ...nothing (however) in the Levitical rites corresponds to the imputation of Christ's active obedience."*⁶⁵

"There is abundant evidence in the Old Testament that forgiveness is secured through the shedding of blood, and the sacrificial system of the Mosaic economy is designed to prepare us for the coming of Christ and his mediatorial accomplishment on the cross. But there is nothing in the liturgical regulations of the law that corresponds to the

⁶² What I find personally to be the most nonsensical, is the fact that those who make such "crack-pot", "out-of-context" interpretations are the very ones who scream the loudest about the importance of context to the process of biblical interpretation!

⁶³ Shepherd, p.267

⁶⁴ Lusk, p.133, Fn 31

⁶⁵ Ibid.

imputation of active obedience. We read that the sins of God's people were laid on the animals that were slain; but there was no imputation of the legal obedience of the animals to God's people."⁶⁶

7.1.3.4. It is against the purpose of the Law.

According to Paul, the Law was *never* given for the purpose of meriting or earning righteousness before God (Gal 2:21, 3:21). Merit or works-based soteriology is completely antithetical to both God's redemptive plan for man as well as his reasons for giving laws to man. Law, as was discussed before, functioned only to maintain our Justification (by faith through grace) never to gain it (Gal 3:12⁶⁷).

7.1.3.5. It annuls the sufficiency of Christ's cross-work and death.

Assuming this view to be correct leaves one wondering why the cross at all? Since according to its proponents, righteousness ultimately comes through the imputation of Christ's active obedience. Is it not conceivable then, that Christ could have simply lived an obedient life and then been "raptured" back to heaven? Clearly there are examples in the Bible of similar events (ex. Enoch, Elijah). These questions are the logical consequence of the "Passive Plus Active Obedience" view. It calls into question and essentially annuls the sufficiency of Christ's cross-work and death.⁶⁸ At the very least, it pushes those events to the background of God's redemptive plan, making instead His obedient life the foreground. In Scripture however, it is the other way around—the central focus is the death of Christ, not His life.⁶⁹

7.1.3.6. It aids in the propagation of the false gospel of antinomianism (easy-believism).

Consistently applying the "Passive Plus Active Obedience" view has historically produced the false gospel of antinomianism and easy-believism which Jesus and the NT writers warn against (Luk 6:46-49; Mat 7:15-29, 24:42-25:30; Rom 6:1-23; Jam 2:14-26; 2Pe 2:1-22, 1Jo 2:4; Jud 3-4).⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Shepherd, p.266

⁶⁷ This verse is one of the most abused in all of the NT. Many read it as teaching that man needed to "do" in order to gain righteousness before God. The problem is, that is neither what the original context (Lev 18:5) was teaching nor what Paul is saying. We are to "do" so that we might "live" —which communicates not only that life has already been given (i.e. spiritual life to those once dead) but also the purpose of the law: to maintain that life (i.e. "to live").

⁶⁸ "The cross can keep us out of hell, but it cannot get us into heaven." Shepherd, p.272; In addition consider: Daniel Kirk's work, *Nothing But The Blood*. He demonstrates that those support the imputation of active obedience run the risk of actually denying the sufficiency of Christ's death for salvation.

⁶⁹ "In the covenant of works scheme the death and resurrection of Christ lose the centrality they have in Scripture, and the imputation of active obedience takes their place as the source of eternal life." Shepherd, p.267

⁷⁰ In 1765, John Wesley in response to the antinomian effects of PO+AO view, preached: "In the meantime what we are afraid of is this: lest any should use the phrase 'the righteousness of Christ', or, 'the righteousness of Christ is imputed to me', as a cover for his unrighteousness. We have known this done a thousand times. A man has been reproved, supposed for drunkenness: 'Oh said he, I pretend no righteousness of my own: Christ is my righteousness'. Another has been told that, 'the extortioner, the unjust, shall no inherit the kingdom of God', he replies with all assurance, 'I am unjust in myself, but I have a spotless righteousness in Christ'. And thus, though a man be as far from the practice as from the tempers of a Christian, though he neither has the mind which was in Christ, nor in any respect walks as he walked; yet he has armor of proof against all conviction, in what he calls the 'righteousness of Christ'." Similar words were spoken in a most recent Reformed Conference of our own day by Kevin DeYoung—an avid supporter of PO+AO --echoing again its dangerous antinomian effects, "If people hear us

7.1.3.7. It abates (i.e. lessens) the true purpose of Christ's active obedience.

Though some within the "Passive Plus Active Obedience" camp think to deny this view, means also to deny the necessity of Christ's active obedience altogether, nothing could be further from the truth. Though Christ's active obedience did nothing to "merit" or "earn" our righteousness, it did allow Him to do what would ultimately gain that righteousness for us: it qualified Him to be our spotless sacrificial lamb for sin. Christ's active obedience was therefore the necessary pre-requisite to His passive obedience—and not the other way around.⁷¹

7.2. The Biblical View Of Imputation: Passive Obedience Only

7.2.1. Explanation

According to the NT, what is actually applied to the person who puts faith in Christ is only His suffering, death and resurrection. In other words, it is the imputation of Christ's Passive Obedience (PO) alone which secures justification before God.⁷² This does not negate the importance of Christ's Active Obedience (AO). It does however, mean that where such obedience becomes important is somewhere other than imputation. It is in the realm of preparation (versus imputation) where one finds the soteriological significance of Christ's Active Obedience. Like the sacrificial lambs of the OT, Christ needed to be "spotless"—which in the case of human beings-- refers not to physical blemishes but moral. Therefore, His life of sinless, perfect obedience before His death was to qualify as the One God would accept as the elect's vicarious payment for sin. Beyond this, the only other reason Scripture provides for Christ's submission in this way, was to be an example for His followers⁷³. This then represents the "righteousness of Christ" according to the Scriptures—His Passive Obedience—His atoning death which washes away sin. It is important to note however, that the righteous/justified state to which one attains through such faith in Christ, is not alien—or other than their own. Though the means by which they are made righteous is through the atoning work of Christ alone and therefore completely apart from them or their own efforts, once applied, they themselves become righteous also—since that which makes them unrighteous has been removed/washed

talking about justification and don't almost think that we are giving them a license to sin, we aren't preaching grace strong enough." These words were no doubt adopted from M. Lloyd Jones who was the first to speak very similar words. See "The New Man: An Exposition On Romans Six", M. Lloyd Jones.

⁷¹ PO actually becomes the pre-requisite to AO in the PO+AO view since the removal of sin (PO) precedes the imputation of Christ's righteousness (AO). Consider again the PO+AO Diagram. If this is not true, then the only other alternative I see possible is what I propose under "v.": PO becoming completely irrelevant, since in their system, it is AO which ultimately makes us righteous. This again then begs the question, "Why did Christ die at all?"

⁷² Per our definition, this means it is exclusively through Christ's atoning death and resurrection that believers are placed into a righteous, redeemed, reconciled and renewed state/standing with God. Once such has been attained, what more is needed?

⁷³ Consider: Joh 13:15; 1Co 11:1; 1Pe 2:21

away.⁷⁴ In other words, it is a real righteous state/standing in which the believer exists before God, not simply “legal fiction.”⁷⁵

In summation then, the Bible teaches:

7.2.1.1. Our justification/righteous standing before God requires only the imputation/application of Christ’s atoning death and resurrection (i.e. His PO).⁷⁶ His life of perfect obedience before His death is not a part of what is imputed/applied to those who have faith in Christ (i.e. His AO).⁷⁷

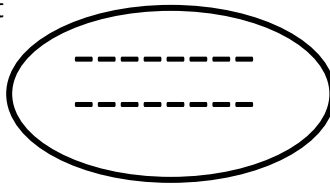
7.2.1.2. Christ’s Active Obedience was only for the purpose of preparation (as our atoning sacrifice) and being our example for living the Christian life.

7.2.1.3. Once Christ’s Passive Obedience (i.e. His atoning death which washes away sin) is imputed/applied to a person, they themselves become righteous before God since that which made them unrighteous (i.e. sin) has been removed.

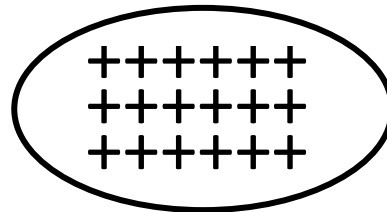
As before, consider the following diagram for further clarification:

PO-O DIAGRAM

State of Sin: Man w/o Christ



State of Righteousness: Man w/ Christ’s PO⁷⁸



7.2.2. History

⁷⁴ This in no way denies the forensic or declarative aspect of righteousness. It simply makes it secondary. In other words, the reason God declares us righteous, is because through the death of Christ, we are actually made righteous. God therefore is just recognizing what we have truly become.

⁷⁵ This is what the Roman Catholics leveled against the Reformers’ view of “forensic only” justification. To them, it seemed as though the Reformers were teaching that God’s view of the believer as righteous/justified was pretend, since it was –in their view—only declarative and the righteous state which the believer now possessed was not his own, but Christ’s.

⁷⁶ This means there exist no “State Of Innocence” as taught by the PO+AO view. Such a state is at best, “theological fiction” and at worse, a move in the direction of Roman Catholic anthropology which teaches Man’s original state to be one of innocence or moral neutrality.

⁷⁷ “Paul never says Christ’s Torah-keeping is imputed to us; rather when he unfolds the substance of imputed righteousness, he always turns to Christ’s death and resurrection. If the doctrine of imputed active obedience is so important, surely Paul would have mentioned it more explicitly, or given it greater prominence.” Rich Lusk, *A Faith That Is Never Alone*, p.134

⁷⁸ The plus-signs within the circle do not represent Christ’s AO, but rather our righteous state/standing as a result of what the NT sees as Christ’s righteousness—His PO.

The “Passive Obedience Only” view is not new to Christianity—including the Reformation. Though the heretical view of “Passive Plus Active Obedience” became the prominent view by the end of the 16th Century, not all held to this view nor was that the view of the Reformers themselves. For instance, men like John Calvin, the great Swiss Reformer, and Dr. Zacharias Ursinus, drafter of the Heidelberg Catechism both held to sound-biblical view of “Passive Obedience Only.” For them Christ’s atoning death and resurrection was enough to secure righteousness before God—something attested to in their writings and commentaries.⁷⁹

In relation to Calvin consider:

“To justify means nothing else than to acquit of guilt him who was accused, as if his innocence were confirmed...After pardon of sins has been obtained, the sinner is considered as a just man in God’s sight.

*It is obvious, therefore that those whom God embraces are **made** righteous solely by the fact that **they are purified when their spots are washed away by the forgiveness of sins.***

Trembling consciences find repose only in sacrifice and cleansing by which sins are expiated, we are duly directed thither; and for us the substance of life is set in the death of Christ.”⁸⁰

In relation to Ursinus consider:

“During his whole life on earth, but especially at the end, Christ sustained in body and soul the anger of God against the sin of the whole human race.”⁸¹ “Justification and the forgiveness of sins are, therefore the same...Evangelical justification is the application of evangelical righteousness or, it is the imputation and application of that righteousness which Christ wrought out for us by his death upon the cross, and by His resurrection from the dead.”⁸²

It is clear then, that the position predominant today, was neither been held by the original Reformers nor has it ever been the unanimous view within the Reformed tradition. However, in spite of where the historical lines are drawn over this doctrine, the final court of authority must be the Scriptures themselves.

⁷⁹ “The doctrine of the imputation of active obedience was developed in the latter part of the sixteenth century as a correlate of the doctrine of the covenant of works. Prior to that development, in Reformed churches, justification was seen as forgiveness of sins based on Christ’s passive obedience. In the covenant of works scheme, justification is both the imputation of Christ’s passive obedience which forgives our sins thus keeping us out of hell and the imputation of Christ’s active obedience which is necessary for us to get into heaven. This warped the Reformed church’s understanding of both justification and sanctification.” Norman Shepherd, *A Faith That Is Never Alone*, p.250 “For Calvin the righteousness of Christ that obtains forgiveness of sin is the passive obedience of Christ... There is no mention (in Calvin’s writings) of or reference to the imputation of active obedience because (for Calvin) justification is the remission of sins, and this forgiveness is not grounded in the imputation of active obedience.” Shepherd, p.251

In contrast to the Reformers, the Roman Catholic Church stated at the Council of Trent, “justification ipsa quae non est sola peccatorum remissio (justification is not the remission of sins solely).” This further demonstrates the view of the Reformers as “Passive Obedience Only.”

⁸⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:508-752. Though Calvin saw Christ’s passive obedience as simply securing our forgiveness (versus also our reconciliation and renewal in Holy Spirit power), he nonetheless believed the Scriptures to teach only passive obedience as necessary for a person to be righteous before God. The imputation of His active obedience was never even on his radar.

⁸¹ Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 37

⁸² Dr. Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Z.U. on the Heidelberg Catechism*, p. 326-327

7.2.3. Biblical-Theological Support

Any time the Bible speaks about soteriological righteousness/justification, it is always only in reference to Christ's atoning death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins (i.e. His Passive Obedience). This is also the picture presented in the animal sacrifices: atonement for the forgiveness of sins. And it is by such atonement—or forgiveness of sins, whether through Christ or the animal, that the worshipper is portrayed as becoming justified/righteous.⁸³

(Lev 16:30 w/ Joh 13:10-11 and Heb 10:19-22;⁸⁴ Isa 53:4-11; Rom 3:23-26, 4:1-8, 25, 5:1-21, 8:33-34; 2Co 5:21; Gal 3:13-14; Col 1:22; Heb 10:1-14, 13:12; 1Pe 2:24)

7.2.4. Supposed Objections

7.2.4.1. Christ could have died as a child.

This is the argument made by Wayne Grudem against the "Passive Obedience Only" view.⁸⁵ The problem with this view is that it completely overlooks the role of Christ as our High Priest before God. To make sacrifice on our behalf, Christ not only needed to be perfect (or "spotless"), but also function as our High Priest, since it is only through the mediatorial work of the priest that a person can approach God. This is the paradigm established for us in the OC and what the book of Hebrews teaches as necessary under the NC. As such, the age for entering the priestly office was thirty—the same age Christ began His public ministry and shortly thereafter went to the cross. Christ therefore could not die as a child, since He would have been prohibited to carry out this vital aspect of His atoning work, the role/office of priest at such a young age. This then, does not refute the "Passive Obedience Only" view but rather strengthens it.

7.2.4.2. Negation of God's requirement of perfect obedience.

Another supposed objection against the "Passive Obedience Only" view is that it negates or destroys God's requirement of perfect obedience. RC Sproul says as much in his teaching on the Covenants of Works and Redemption.⁸⁶ However, the assumption that God requires perfect obedience in order for a person to be righteous is one of the reasons why Covenant Theology is unbiblical! Such thinking stems from a work-based soteriology completely foreign to the pages of Scripture. As mentioned earlier, Christ's perfect obedience was primarily for the purpose of preparing Himself to be our atoning sacrifice before God. And it was never to earn or merit righteousness. Even when

⁸³ As discussed previously, the righteous state/standing gained through the animal sacrifices was "pass-over" only. In other words, it could not truly make payment for sin. Only in Christ would that be accomplished (cf. Heb 10:1-4). It was however accepted by God as such until His coming and the "time of reformation" (cf. Heb 9:10; Rom 3:25). This means if there was ever a time when righteousness/justification was "forensic only" or "legal fiction", it was before Christ, not after. It must be stated again that I believe justification becomes more than simply redemption—or the forgiveness of sins in Christ (see JR 2, V. Definition for further explanation and support). However, forgiveness of sins is clearly the basis for what follows and therefore legitimate "shorthand" demonstrating the consistency of God's justifying work through Redemptive History.

⁸⁴ When considering these texts together, it becomes clear that being made spiritually "clean" through atonement, is the same as being made righteous, since the NT sees the two words as synonymous.

⁸⁵ www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/active.html

⁸⁶ www.youtube.com/watch?v=p1n214d8XQo&feature=related

speaking of believers under the OC or NC, this requirement of perfect obedience is absent. God's people were always instead called to be faithful—which includes making use of God's provision for sin (Deu 28:2; 1Jo 1:9). Where perfection then does become important is as it relates to compliance. Believers are to have perfect compliance to God's law as our accepted standard since this is the key to being considered faithful. However, this is not a means to earning or meriting righteousness, but rather to maintain what has already been granted by God's grace and the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

7.2.4.3. In Philippians 3:9 Paul claims he does not possess a "righteousness of (his) own."

The context of Philippians chapter 3:1-11 is the same as Galatians chapters 2 and 3. It is addressing the issue of righteousness gained through adherence to the law (most especially the "clean laws" of circumcision, etc.). Paul's point in both is that righteousness can never be gained through adherence to the law; it is only through faith in the Righteous One—Christ that such righteousness is gained. In this way then, it is not "(his) own" righteousness (i.e. his own righteous works). The state however, he now stands in before God—because of Christ—is indeed his own. In other words, Paul is now, truly a righteous person (something not attainable under the law) versus somehow "borrowing" that state from Christ. Again, this was not because of his own work, but the work of another (Christ). And in verses 10 and 11, Paul makes it clear that the work which Christ has done to make this possible is His death and resurrection (i.e. His Passive Obedience).

8. REALITY

Whereas many Biblical texts and subjects become irrelevant, nonsensical or even somewhat contradictory if one holds to the views of Justification popular among the Evangelical-Reformed of today; embracing the sound-biblical views addressed in this series makes them relevant, cogent and completely complementary. In essence, all of Scripture becomes a practical reality in the life of the Christian. For example, consider:

8.1. The Bible speaks of judgment according to our works/deeds. (Mat 12:36-37, 25:31-46; Rom 2:6-8; 2Co 5:9-10; Rev 20:11-15)

8.2. The Bible identifies people as being righteous because of their deeds. (Gen 6:9, 7:1; 1Ki 8:32; Psa 11:5; Pro 20:6-7; Eze 18:26-27, 33:12-13; Luk 1:6, 23:50; 1Jo 3:7)

8.3. The Bible expects obedient works be done by us if we are to be justified by God and at the same time expresses justification as only by faith yet admits not tension between them. (Mat 6:14-15; Rom 2:3-13; Jam 2:14-26 w/ Rom 3:21-28; Gal 3:1-12)

8.4. The Bible connects justification to the covenant community. (Mat 18:17)

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