

THE IMPUTATION OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Robert F. Turner

Our review of K. C. Moser's book, *Way of Salvation*, has led us to consider his rather confused statements on the nature of man, the necessity of "enabling" power (personal indwelling Holy Spirit), in order that man might meet the "obligations" of the law of Christ, and his efforts to maintain a quasi-faith-only atmosphere. We have never charged Moser with being Calvinist in any classic sense of the term. At times he seems to recognize his direction, and make an effort to hedge against Calvinistic conclusions. But he has, inadvertently or otherwise, accepted certain Calvinistic "colorings" that could be particularly harmful in our present neo-Calvinistic clime. His treatment of the "imputation of righteousness" is a case in point.

On page 118, brother Moser writes:

"Just as the disobedience of Adam is imputed on the whole human race, so is the obedience of Christ imputed to those who have faith in him. We die not because of personal sins, but because of our fleshly relationship to him who represented the whole race. Just so we live—not because of personal, subjective, righteousness, but because of faith in Christ. That is, Adam's sin becomes the sin of all mankind—"for that all have sinned". And the obedience of Christ becomes the righteousness of the believer. The believer does not have to depend upon his own imperfect obedience. He pleads the obedience of Christ. Christ is his righteousness."

There is confusion galore in this and supporting statements.

Why say the "disobedience of Adam is imputed to the whole human race" if he means only the consequences of mortality? Moser refutes himself by quoting Rom. 5:12 "*for that all have sinned*". This makes each man receive the consequences of his own sins, not Adam's. Moser has placed himself in the position of saying, (in effect) that we sinned in Adam—an error covered in earlier articles. The context of Rom. 5:12 points to spiritual death, not physical; and all men are subject to (spiritual) death "*for that all have sinned*". This principle must be kept in mind as the following verses are read. Those of verse 14, "*had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression,*" yet they *had* sinned (Rom. 2:12-14; 3:23). In the contrasts of Adam and Christ, verses 15-19, men individually come under the condemnation of Adam because men individually *partake of sin* (by disobedience, not by inheritance). This should be apparent because (a) the principle is stated in verse 12, and (b) only those who individually partake of Christ receive the blessings. (This last thought is expanded in chapter 6.) In summation of the Adam-Christ contrasts Paul writes (v. 21), "*that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign...*" and men individually *allow* sin or grace to reign in their lives (Rom 6:12-13).

But Moser says “the disobedience of Adam is imputed...” as a contrast to his concept that “the obedience of Christ” is imputed. His concept of imputation is, “the obedience of Christ becomes the righteousness of the believer.” In keeping with this, he defines the “*righteousness of God*” as “a divine righteousness, a righteousness that comes from God”; and relates this to the perfect life of obedience which Jesus lived. He says, “How much better than to depend upon human righteousness! The obedience of Christ is perfect, while the obedience of man is imperfect” (p. 119). I believe “*by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous*” (v. 19), refers to Christ’s obedience unto death on the cross (note immediate context, Rom. 5:6-11, Phil. 2:2). We are made righteous through *forgiveness* (Rom. 4:6-8). Moser also recognizes this (pp. 120-121), but seems so determined to rule out any “doing” on man’s part that (with inconsistent confusion) he embraces Calvinistic errors of “imputation”.

Romans 4 is the “imputation” chapter. The Greek *logizomai* is there used eleven times; translated “*counted*” (2), “*reckoned*” (3), and “*imputed*” (6), in the King James version. It is consistently translated “*reckoned*” in the American Standard version, and the lexicons say it means “reckon, take into account, or put to one’s account.” Now *what* is “put to one’s account?” Paul says it was Abraham’s, and our, *faith* that is reckoned for righteousness (4:3, 24). It takes a fanciful imagination to get Christ’s perfect life in here. If we can determine Paul’s use of “*faith*” in this context we can know *what* is put our account (*eis*, unto, in order to) righteousness.

In Moser’s chapter on “The Justification of Abraham” (p. 43-f) he makes the egregious blunder of assuming that Abraham’s justification was something that took place at some moment of time—the dividing line between his being an alien sinner, and his being acceptable before God. But the scriptures do not so treat the matter. The statement, “*he believed in Jehovah; and he reckoned it to him for righteousness*” is recorded in Gen. 15:6. Long before this, Abram showed an active faith in God. When he was called from Ur of Chaldea “*by faith*” he obeyed (Heb. 11:8). He built an altar and “*called upon the name of Jehovah*” (Gen. 12:7-8). After his sojourn in Egypt he returned to the same place and “*called on the name of Jehovah*” (13:4). Later, after he and Lot were separated, he built an altar at the Oaks of Mamre (13:18). Following his battle with the kings, Melchizidek blessed him saying, “*Blessed be Abram of God Most High...*” (14:19). The Genesis 15 record does not point to some moment when Abraham ceased to be an alien, but is part of a *continuing record of faithfulness* on Abraham’s part, which was “put to his account” for righteousness.

Moser is concerned with *when* (at what point) he was justified—for he wants to establish justification independent of his obedience to circumcision. But Paul’s question (4:10) is *how* (in what state) was he justified, in circumcision or in uncircumcision? Paul’s argument is that Gentiles (uncircumcised may likewise be justified through faith in Jesus Christ.) (See 4:10-12) Abraham’s justification was a continuing process, lasting throughout life. Paul calls attention to his faith “*when he was about a hundred years old*” and repeats, “*it was imputed to him for righteousness*” (4:19-22). The faithful Christian

trusts in Jesus Christ for forgiveness of his sins, and this life-altering, continuing, obedient *faith* is put to his account for righteousness.

Moser recognizes that the “*righteousness of God*” (Rom. 3:21) does not refer to an attribute of God, but he defines it as “a divine righteousness” (p. 117), and equates it with Christ’s perfect life (p. 118-119). Paul uses this expression for something men must “*know*” and to which they must “*submit*” (Rom. 10:2-3), and John says it is something man can “*do*” (1 Jn. 3:7). “*He that doeth righteousness*” (by obedient faith, submits to God’s plan for making man righteous) “*even as he is righteous*” (referring to the attribute of God). I believe brother Moser has invented a definition that is without divine sanction. We freely acknowledge, however, that he seems more concerned with negating “human righteousness” than in establishing his own brand of “divine righteousness”.

In our day some have made additional “imputed righteousness” arguments. One cites Rom. 5:10 (“*we are saved by his life*”) as proof that Christ’s perfect obedience is imputed to us. There are three parallels in immediate context: “*Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification*” (4:25), “*...being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him*” (5:9), and “*...we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son... we shall be saved by his life*” (5:10). The “*life*” under consideration is that of the resurrected Lord, not of his life before death. Reference is to the fact that “*he ever liveth to make intercession*” for us (Heb. 7:25); and that he entered into heaven “*now to appear in the presence of God for us*” (Heb. 9:24). He was “*once offered to bear the sins of many*” (death on the cross), and “*he shall appear the second time without sin unto salvation*” (Heb. 9:28). Scriptures are filled with references to these two stages in our redemption: that which was accomplished on cross, and that accomplished by our *resurrected* savior.

The perfect life of Jesus was of course important (He could not otherwise have been the perfect sacrifice), but the “imputation” of that life to us is a fanciful theory, unsubstantiated by scriptures. As Christ died once, then “*liveth unto God*”, so also we (our old man) must die “*with Him*” and become “*alive unto God through Jesus Christ*”—a purposeful life which we, as free agents, must control (See Rom. 6:3-13). Thus we are “*the righteousness of God in Him*” (2 Cor. 5:21).

Others, seeking desperately for “imputed life” scriptures, have said the “*body prepared*” (Heb. 10:5-10) is Christ’s body prepared to live that perfect life for us. The context makes it Christ’s body prepared for *sacrifice*. The chapter begins by declaring that the blood of animals cannot take away sins, v. 4. When v. 5 says “*sacrifice and offerings thou wouldest not*” it obviously refers to the animal sacrifices of the old covenant, “*which are offered by the law*” (v. 8b). It is true that Christ came “*to do thy will O God*”—perfectly keeping the law—and the first (will) was taken away (the system of law, with its curse) so that the second (justification through faith in Christ) might be established. But our sanctification is “*through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ*” (v. 10), *in order to the forgiveness of sins* (vv. 10-18).

Calvin's theory of "imputed righteousness" (as seen in his "*Institutes*") seems to be the result of his concept of the sovereignty of God. He thought it inconsistent with God's nature for man to have truly a "free will" or for his salvation to rest, in any way, upon "human implementation". As a monergist, Calvin taught that regeneration is *exclusively* the work of the Holy Spirit. The Calvinist, therefore, employs the word "imputation...in the sense of reckoning the righteousness of Christ as ours" (McClintock and Strong). But if we believe that man has been given a free will, and that regeneration involves a cooperation of divine grace and human activity (a form of synergism), the theory of "imputed righteousness" is at cross-purposes with our fundamental beliefs and can only lead to doctrinal confusion.

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