



The Reflector

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Calvinistic Imputation

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It would be hard to overstate Calvinism's impact on religious thought over the last 450 or so years. Almost all of the mainline Protestant denominations have elements of Calvinism in their various creeds and articles of faith. In the short history of churches of Christ in America, they have done a relatively good job of exposing the fallacy of the basic tenets of that system of theology. In fact, many members left churches that embraced Calvinism when they obeyed the simple gospel plan of salvation and became New Testament Christians, so they rejected the errors of Calvinism in favor of the truth of the gospel. Also in our recent history, every few years, for whatever reason, a vocal group of preachers, mostly younger ones, arise to trouble the church with repackaged elements of the system that their forefathers had studied themselves out of and rejected. As we write, we are in such a period.

Because of the tendency for Calvinism to resurface periodically we must give due diligence to try to keep people informed about the nature of various aspects of the system, so they can recognize it for what it is and deal with it when it troubles the congregations where they worship. In this article we will be dealing with the Calvinistic concepts of imputation. According to Dictionary.com, impute in theology means: "to attribute (righteousness, guilt, etc.) to a person or persons vicariously; ascribe as derived from another." In other words, it is to transfer an attribute of one person to

another person. It is this kind of thing that we mean by Calvinistic imputation.

Imputation of Sin

1. *The imputation of sin to man.* Calvinism teaches that Adam's sin was imputed to all of his decedents – the whole human race. Thus, all people inherit a sinful nature. This is the basis of their doctrine of total hereditary depravity. All are alleged to be sinners not because of anything they have done, but because of what was transferred to them by the imputation of Adam's sin.

One of the practical applications of this doctrine is that since we did nothing to become guilty of sin then we can do nothing to solve our guilt problem. We must wait for the Holy Spirit to decide to enter our hearts and change our sinful nature and pardon us of sins without any action on our part. We all became sinners not because of what we have done, but because we have been given the sins of another.

In the first three chapters of Romans, Paul is making the case for the need to preach the gospel to all men – Jew and Gentile. After making the case that the Gentiles were guilty of sin in chapter one, he makes the case that the Jews are likewise sinners in chapter 2, then in chapter 3:9 that "we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin." He makes the case not on the basis that both segments of humanity had inherited their guilt from Adam, but because they themselves had sinned. In 3:10 he declares that

“there is none righteous, no not one.” Was it because they had been **born** sinners? No. It is because “They are all **gone** out of the way, they are together **become** unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (v. 10 - emp. mine -eob). They were sinners because “all have sinned” (v. 23), not because all had another’s sin imputed to them.

We became sinners because we chose to sin. We are freed from sin when we choose to “yield ourselves” to obey the Lord (Rom. 6:16-18).

2. *The imputation of sin to Christ.*

Calvinism teaches when Jesus went to the cross, God imputed man’s sins to him (at least those of the “elect”). Thus, Jesus became a sinner for us. We recently heard a young man preaching in a gospel meeting graphically depicting Jesus as experiencing the “cesspool of sin” when he went to the cross. Thus, he went to the cross with the guilt of our sins imputed to him and thus he suffered the full penalty for those sins for us – both physical and spiritual death. But, what is the penalty for our sins. It is everlasting punishment (Matt. 25:46). Jesus did not suffer **everlasting** punishment on the cross. Jesus did not go to the cross with the guilt of our sins. He was the perfect Lamb of God (sin offering) to atone for the sins of the world. He did what the blood of bulls and goats (O.T. sin offerings) could not do. As the perfect and ultimate sin offering he did take away sin by the offering of himself as an *offering* for sins. He was not a substitute for us, but a perfect atoning *sin offering* for us.

The main proof text used by Calvinists to prove(?) that Jesus literally became a sinner for us is 2 Corinthians 5:21: “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” In the Old Testament, one word (chatta'ah) is translated both “sin” and “sin offering” depending on the context. Well over 100 times it is “sin-offering.” In the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament, the word for “chatta'ah” is “hamartia” (the word for “sin” in 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Like in the Hebrew text, the context determines whether “sin” or “sin-offering” is meant. Thus, the word for “sin” in 2 Corinthians 5:21 could have just as well been translated “sin-offering.” That would be in harmony with the teaching in Hebrews about Jesus being the anti-type of the animal sin offerings under the Law of Moses.

As part of Jesus’ allegedly suffering spiritual death, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34) is cited. This supposedly proves that God forsook Jesus on the cross because he had all of our sins upon him and that the forsaking (separation from God) was punishment for those sins. There are at least two passages (John 8:28-29; 16:32) that indicate that Jesus was not forsaken.

“Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.” (John 8:28-29 KJV) “Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.” (John 16:32 KJV)

Brother Maurice Barnett in one of his newsletters aptly comments on these verses:

In the phrases in 8:29, He says the Father “*is with me.*” That is a *present indicative* verb meaning *continuously with Him* through the time He would be on the Cross. Jesus then states it negatively, “he hath not left me alone.” He emphasizes it both ways. We understand that there would never be a time while He was on the earth, including the cross, that the Father would desert Him. 16:32 adds to the emphasis. The disciples deserted Him from the the time He was

captured in the garden till His resurrection. *All of that time*, the Father was still with Him, He was not left alone. These verses deny any such desertion of the Father. (*The Reminder*, June 24, 2012)

Why did Jesus then cry with a loud voice “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” If it had been just directed to His Father, then there would be no need to shout it out. He could have quietly addressed his prayer to the Father. That it was for the benefit of those Jews present would make more sense. This was the opening statement of Psalm 22. This Psalm clearly prophesies his crucifixion. His shouting this out would call their attention to that whole Psalm and that they were witnessing the fulfillment of it.

Imputation of Righteousness

The foundation of the once saved always saved doctrine of Calvinism is the doctrine of imputed righteousness. Just as God imputed Adam’s sin to man, the believing sinner has Christ’s righteousness imputed to him while still in a sinning state. This is part of Calvinism’s grace only doctrine. The idea that God judiciously imputes (charges) the righteousness of Christ to the believing sinners account. So, that though he is still a practicing sinner his sins are not taken into account by God because He only sees in him the righteousness of His Son. As one Calvinist writer put it:

The righteousness of God is imputed to all who believe on Christ so that they may stand before Him in all the perfection of Christ. Every saved sinner has been “made” the righteousness of God (1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 5:21-23). This imputed righteousness is not something man does or earns. It is all of God’s grace.

God sees the believer as a living part of His own Son” by our

identification with Him by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We are members of His body (1 Cor. 12:13; Jn. 15:1, 5). God sees us “in Christ” and justifies us forever. He sees us clothed in the righteous garments of Christ.

Therefore, God loves you and me as much as He loves His own Son (Jn. 17:23). He accepts us as He accepts Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:6; 1 Pet. 2:5). He sees us the same way He sees His own Son (2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 3:22; 1 Cor. 1:30). Christ is the righteousness of God, and those who believe on Him are made the righteousness of God by being in Christ.” We are complete in Christ (Col. 2:10); therefore, God the Father sees us perfected forever (Heb. 10:10, 14). (Wil Pounds on *Abide In Christ* website)

So, you see, according to Calvinism, a saved person does not have to be so careful about obeying and avoiding sin. He is covered by the righteousness of Christ. As he sins, God does not take that into account because He only sees the righteousness of His Son in that person. The Calvinist often quotes Romans 4:8: “Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.” The idea is that though he sins, God does not charge it to his account, because he as already covered him by charging Christ’s righteousness to his account. But, in context, the sins that is not imputed to one’s account is the forgiven sin (v. 7). This becomes even more clear when you go back to the Psalm of David quoted here.

1 Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. 2 Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile. 3 When I kept silence, my bones

waxed old through my roaring all the day long. 4 For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah. 5 I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah. (Psalm 32:1-5 KJV)

The sin not imputed is covered, forgiven, acknowledged, and confessed sin. In verses 3 and 4 he describes his misery as an unforgiven sinner while the sin was still imputed to him. Then in verse 5, he tells how he became a blessed man to whom God does not impute sin – a man who had been forgiven upon meeting God’s conditions (acknowledgment and confession) of pardon.

There are a growing number among us who are teaching a grace based salvation that covers at least some if not all of our sins even as we sin. They need to realized that such a doctrine is based on the imputed righteousness doctrine. They have a lot to say about sins of ignorance and inadvertent sin and other “what abouts.” That is whittling at God’s end of the stick. We must do all we can to avoid sin of any kind and follow God’s pattern in every detail. Whether these people realize it or not they are encouraging “wilful” ignorance (cf. 2 Peter 3:5) and wilfully sinning (Heb. 10:26). How so? By telling Christians their salvation is not obedience or pattern based and that God’s grace covers us even as we sin. Another practical results of this doctrine is that it allows one to extend grace (fellowship) to other sincere “believers” who may not be strictly obeying God’s commands or following “our understanding” of the New Testament pattern.

When we teach on this we are often charged with “legalism” and even “perfectionism.” No, it is not “perfectionism,” but it is an “ism” of “striving toward perfection” by doing our best to not sin, while depending on God’s grace for forgiveness

through Jesus our advocate when we acknowledge our sins and ask his forgiveness. (1 John 1:7-2:1). Of course, none of us are absolutely perfect in our faith, our trust, our love nor our obedience and need to constantly grow in all of these. We trust in God to know if we have grown sufficiently and to righteously judge us. We constantly strive to improve in all these while acknowledging our short comings and praying without ceasing to God to forgive us, having “committed [ourselves] to him that judgeth righteously.” (Cf. 1 Peter 2:23).

As sinners we became sinners by being draw away from God with our own lusts (James 1:14-15), not by having Adam’s sin imputed to us. As Christians we have been made righteous by believing and implementing God’s plan of salvation. We are kept righteous by “walking in the light” or “practicing righteousness” (1 John 1:7; 3:7 NKJV) and by asking and receiving God’s forgiveness when we sin (1 John 1:9), not by having Christ’s righteousness imputed to us. Christ took our sins to the cross only as our perfect sin offering for our sins and not by becoming guilty of our sins through imputation. ■

Voter Confusion

I heard of a fellow whose wife kept nagging him to “join the church.” It was one of those churches that required one’s telling an “experience” before “voting him in” and baptizing him. The nagging finally got to him, so at the next “revival” he responded to the invitation. He told of a very moving experience that he had. Impressed, the church “voted him in.”

His conscience got to bothering him, so he went back to the church and told them that he had made the whole “experience” story up. They immediately “voted him out.” The man told his wife, “Now that is a pretty come off, I told them a lie and they voted me in. Then I told them the truth and they voted me out.” - EOB