

## Salvation—Justification (7<sup>th</sup>)

(In this podcast we continue studying imputation and the relationship of it to the doctrine of justification.)

In the previous podcast we pointed out that justification is generally presented to be something that God imputes, accredits, or assigns to an individual when he exercises faith. The scriptural passage to support this teaching is usually Genesis 15:6 which says, “And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.” This is referring to Abraham believing the promised seed pledged by God in the previous verse. While many theologians, preachers, and Bible teachers set forth that it is the faith of Abraham that is “counted” (imputed) “to him for righteousness,” we quoted clear passages from both the Old and New Testament that it is the righteousness of God that is the ground of justification and not the faith of the individual. Furthermore, we identified the righteousness of God as that righteousness that was produced by the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, we closed the previous study quoting from Albert Barnes whereby he affirmed that the “it” in Genesis 15:6 “refers to the *act* of believing” and not “to the righteousness of another.” Barnes does not stand alone here. Note the language of John Calvin regarding Genesis 15:6.

*And he believed in the Lord.* None of us would be able to conceive the rich and hidden doctrine which this passage contains, unless Paul had borne his torch before us. (Romans 4:3.) But it is strange, and seems like a prodigy, that when the Spirit of God has kindled so great a light, yet the greater part of interpreters wander with closed eyes, as in the darkness of night. I omit the Jews, whose blindness is well known. But it is (as I have said) monstrous, that they who have had Paul as their luminous expositor; should so foolishly have depraved this place. However it hence appears, that in all ages, Satan has labored at nothing more assiduously than to extinguish, or to smother, the gratuitous justification of faith, which is here expressly asserted. The words of Moses are, “He believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness.” In the first place, the faith of Abram is commended, because by it he embraced the promise of God; it is commended, in the second place, because hence Abram obtained righteousness in the sight of God, and that by imputation.

Note that Calvin, after maligned “the greater part of interpreters” that “so foolishly have depraved this place” said, “In the first place, the faith of Abram is commended, because by it he embraced the promise of God; it is commended, in the second place, because hence Abram obtained righteousness in the sight of God, and that by imputation.” In clear words, he said that “Abram obtained righteousness in the sight of God, and that by imputation” by his (that is, Abram’s) faith. In other words, Calvin affirmed that it is by imputation that Abram obtained righteousness. However, the meaning of imputation is to *count*, *compute*, or *calculate* something and not to make, formulate, or compose something. Calvin’s interpretation is no different than the thoughts set forth by the Arminian, Adam Clarke. Note the following comments of Clarke:

And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness—This I conceive to be one of the most important passages in the whole Old Testament. It properly contains and specifies that doctrine of justification by faith which engrosses so considerable a share of the epistles of . . . Paul, and at the foundation of which is the atonement made by the Son of God: And he (Abram) believed *האמן* *heemin*, he put faith) in Jehovah, *לו ויהשבה* *vaiyachshebeita lo*, and he counted it—the faith he put in Jehovah, to Him for righteousness, *צדקה* *tsedakah*, or justification;

though there was no act in the case but that of the mind and heart, no work of any kind. Hence the doctrine of justification by faith, without any merit of works; for in this case there could be none—no works of Abram which could merit the salvation of the whole human race. It was the promise of God which he credited, and in the blessedness of which he became a partaker through faith.

I emphasize that Clarke said, “This I conceive to be one of the most important passages in the whole Old Testament. It properly contains and specifies that doctrine of justification by faith . . . It was the promise of God which he credited, and in the blessedness of which he became a partaker through faith.” As can be easily seen, these quotes (and many other such-like citations could be supplied) are different from the following comments by John Gill regarding Genesis 15:6. He said as follows:

**and he counted it to him for righteousness;** not the act of his faith, but the object of it; and not the promise he believed, but what was promised, and his faith received, even Christ and his righteousness this was imputed to him without works, and while he was an uncircumcised person, for the proof of which the apostle produces this passage, Romans 4:3; wherefore this is not to be understood of any action of his being esteemed and accounted a righteous one, and he pronounced and acknowledged a righteous person on account of it; for Abram was not justified before God by his own works, but by the righteousness of faith, as all that believe are, that is, by the righteousness of Christ revealed to faith, and received by it: what is imputed is without a man, and the imputation of it depends upon the will of another; such the righteousness of Christ without works imputed by God the Father. This is the first time we read of believing, and as early do we hear of imputed righteousness.

As Gill said, “This is the first time we read of believing, and as early do we hear of imputed righteousness,” but this is not the first time historically that faith was exercised. Hebrews 11:8 informs us that it was by faith that Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees. Additionally, prior to Genesis chapter fifteen, we find that Abram (Abraham) was a worshiper of God. In Genesis 12:7, he built “an altar unto the Lord.” In the following verse, Abram built an altar at Bethel “and called upon the name of the Lord.” After leaving Egypt, he went back to Bethel and worshiped the Lord, Genesis 13:4. Later, while living “in the plain of Mamre, which *is* in Hebron,” Abram built another “altar unto the Lord,” Genesis 13:18. After rescuing Lot, Melchizedek, “the priest of the most high God,” blessed Abram, Genesis 14:19. These passages, along with other references, clearly set forth Abram (Abraham) as a man of faith and worshiper of God and resting in the Person and work of the Messiah; that is, he was justified in the sight of God based on the righteousness of God. How much he understood about the details of this prior to Genesis fifteen we are not told, and it appears that at that time he was given more insight regarding the Seed, which was his righteousness. Nevertheless, the Scriptures clearly reveal that Abram (Abraham) was saved and a worshiper of the Lord prior to leaving Ur. His salvation (nor his regeneration) did not begin at Genesis fifteen. Here is a man who traveled at least one thousand miles over several years, prior to Genesis 15, and worshiped the Lord. Surely this does not convey the idea that Abraham was a lost man. Yet, his believing plainly manifested his salvation and that the “it” that was the ground of his justification was the Seed, which is Christ, mention in Genesis 15:5. Also, it may well be said that Abram’s faith clearly manifested that the Seed was already imputed to him and that it did not originate with his faith.

In accordance with this and to emphasize the meaning of imputation, notice the words of Robert Girdlestone from his book entitled *Synonyms of The Old Testament*. He said that the word *imputation* “signifies a mental process whereby some course is planned or conceived.” After giving many passages to support this definition, he further states, “In all these passages a mental process is involved whereby a certain thing or a course of action is subjected to a sort of estimation as to value or position. It is not an

artificial proceeding, a mere fancy, but a distinct judgment, founded either upon the nature of things, or upon the mind of him who is passing certain things under review. Sometimes the word is used in our ordinary sense of reckoning—that is to say, to represent the arithmetical process of counting up.” Then in summation he declares, “We see therefore that to reckon, to impute, and to account are one and the same thing, and that the word is used in Scripture to indicate what may be called a mental process whereby the love and mercy which exists in the Divine nature, and which was embodied in Christ, is brought to bear upon the case of every individual who believes in (and acts upon) the Word of God.” (See my book *Justification: The Heart of the Gospel*, page 87 and Robert Baker Girdlestone, *Synonyms of The Old Testament*, 2d ed., (n.p., 1897; repr., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), pp. 171-174.)

When it is stated, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3), what actually happened? Hear the words of Geoffrey B. Wilson: “... it is obvious that ‘faith’ is not to be understood as a work which is reckoned *as* righteousness by God. The preposition (*eis*) must rather mean that faith is *unto* righteousness; it is the instrument through which the believer becomes personally interested in the justifying righteousness of Christ.” It was not when Abraham was legally constituted righteous before the bar of justice. It was that act of God whereby Abraham received the righteousness of Christ which was the ground of his justification. As Wilson says, it is that act by which the believer comes to know that the righteousness of Christ is his. And this righteousness shall be received by everyone that believes because the Scriptures declare, “Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification” (Romans 4:23-25). (See my *Justification* book, pp. 87-88 and Geoffrey B. Wilson, *Romans: A Digest of Reformed Comment* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), p. 67.)

Other suchlike quotes could be supplied but these should be sufficient. Hopefully, these few will clarify the subject of imputation regarding justification or the phrase “justification by faith.” However, our time is up for today. Farewell.