

## Imputed Righteousness

“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.” – a Christian.

### Introduction

Christians are *imputationists*. Paul was an imputationist. He strove hard after, and spoke clearly of, a righteousness fully given to him from his Lord. He lost everything for it and gained everything in it. It was not merited, but he had received it. Each generation must fight to preserve this biblical truth. This understanding has been demanded of us more drastically since the Reformation. Like Arias and so many of his followers exposed the church to the need for trinitarian affirmation, so the popes and their counsels much later showed it the need for a doctrine of justification by faith alone. For a doctrine of imputation. Dr. RC Sproul taught me that if you wanted to boil down to just one word what the Protestant Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century was ultimately all about, that the word “imputation” was it. The biblical understanding of imputation was set forth clearly in Scripture. Our duty is to maintain it. It’s *not* that all believers prior to certain centuries were unsaved because they didn’t articulate things as later generations did. Not at all. Instead, each generation simply stands taller than the former on more shoulders to see the truth. Truth is not developing. It has always been there in Scripture. Truth is not developing; truth-tellers are. I am humbled yet must affirm that I *should* know more about God than Christians did in the first century just like I *should* know more than Moses. It’s not because they had less of him. It’s because they had less of the picture. Many had less time to ponder it and less tools to do so with. Perhaps not even a full canon. Moses had to ask God what name he should call God. I don’t. Abram had no ancestry to associate the God of his fathers with. I do. The Gospel of grace, of the righteousness of faith, was more critically expounded than ever before in the Reformation era. It marked out the biblical Gospel from what had developed in the Catholic system. For the reformers, a rejection of the justification of Christ by faith *alone* (imputation) came to be not a denial of some minor idea, but a wholesale denial of the Cross. *The message of the Cross is the imputation of Christ’s perfect righteousness to believers*. The church has grown up in this truth today just as it has with every single other major biblical doctrine.

Churches grew up into trinitarian formulation over a four-hundred-year period. Churches grew up into a grasp of the necessary two natures of Christ over a five-hundred-year period. We came to learn how we needed a theology for Jesus’ very human nature to compliment his very divine one. Churches grew into views on appropriation or non-appropriation of art in worship over an eight-hundred-year period. Errors have helped. The church has come to more robustly reject any semblance of polytheism and an embrace of the utter uniqueness of the triune and eternal God even more as a result of our rejection of the claims of the Latter-Day Saint group and its views which have obviously come very recently. We have come to reject 21<sup>st</sup> century material prosperity selfism as a result of those who see it as more worthy to talk about than the Gospel. The true church has always come to see ancient truth more clearly by error. This is a glaring and necessary reality of history. Future generations will say so of our time as well. Churches have

grown up in an understanding of inspiration, sexuality, covenant, ecclesiology, etc., not by adding to the Scriptures, but by God directing the saints back into Scripture with each new generation's students examining the text alongside each new generation's challenges. And none of this is really ever complete because each new generation, in a sense, each has the need to live out the Gospel and the full counsel of God for itself.

The truth of imputed righteousness is among the most important things we can learn from the Bible. This subject is nothing short of the Gospel's mechanics. It is how the Gospel works. Understanding this doctrine is like knowing what makes a flashlight work. While a user only needs to know to insert the batteries with a proper polarity and flip the switch, the engineer needs to know the mechanics of *how* flipping a switch actually generates light. Christians are invited to become wise in the Faith. When a person is called of God through the Gospel and responds in repentance, the switch has been flipped. The Scriptures, however, take us beyond the superficial and show us precisely how that faith was produced in us. Cf. 2 Corinthians 4:6. The doctrine of imputation squarely centers all of our redemption on Jesus Christ. The grace of God being itself both necessary and entirely sufficient to do so. The doctrine of imputation alone eliminates boasting, establishes the Law and upholds the truth of a righteousness purely by faith, or of a justification by faith apart from works. *Imputation is what it means to have a theology of the Cross.* Anything else ends up not being the Gospel. May we not be content to merely flip the switch as disciples of Jesus. Ephesians 1:17-19.

Before we move on, I want to take a moment to highlight the massive scope of the reality of a justification apart from works. It's from a part of that which Paul makes so much of in the beginning of Romans. My treatment here in this letter is by nature inherently polemical against Rome, but it's not *just* against Rome. Rome's perversion of grace in its sacerdotalism stands for me as but one of many models obliterating grace seen similarly in every other works-righteous system that calls itself Christian. Rome does not deny grace. Of course not. Satan is far craftier than that. But in all its attempts at feigning the contrary, any serious study of Rome's modern view of justification reveals that it is ultimately a system of self-salvation through sacrament. In the end it ends up being such and cannot be reduced beyond this sad reality. Learning from its errors helps us refine proper views. That's why I'll talk on it so much. You need a stone to sharpen a blade after all. Catholicism is irreducibly a system of cooperation whereby an adherent must merit or at least maintain justification with God. It is a justification that can be lost and gained again. It is a probationary "eternal life" with the adherents themselves, not Jesus, ultimately completing the work through purgation. Rome's is a system ultimately of false works from its view on water baptism onward. In similar discussions on grace, however, with Catholics, Mormons, United Pentecostals and others who similarly "tip their hats" to grace while proclaiming their gospels there's been a sometimes subtle, but recurring theme that's emerged in my experience. It is the idea that when we read, "works of the law" from Paul that we must narrow our gaze *only* to Jewish works done under the Mosaic Covenant. There is some truth to this, of course. There are works spoken of very well in Scripture and there is the perverse understanding of works as meritorious for grace. There are category distinctions to be made. The danger here is that someone may get us to dismiss or re-classify their *non-Jewish* forms of self-righteousness in works because it's not explicitly what Paul's on about in Romans that they assert. Perhaps they got their definition of righteousness from a quorum, an experience, or a papal council much later. In other words, Paul's use of the Law of Moses to show the futility of justification by obedience to Law, of one by works, should not be discounted to show us why we

dismiss the false claims of Islam's five pillars as a means of justification as well. All "works" views stand in contrast to grace. I want to point out how Paul's writings in Galatians and Romans help us so much here. I want us to consider Abraham and his faith well. I know this isn't new, but it's the job of every teacher to teach in his or her sphere, and so my joy is in trying to bring this subject to light where I'm called to. God's given example of the Law of Moses shows anyone laboring under it, or any other system in any other day, why they too must come to Christ and Christ alone for justification. I say we have warrant to widen our gaze on works far outside Judaism by apostolic revelation and that doing so helps us see the beauty of Christ's imputation not just against a misuse of the Law of Moses that had developed among many in the days of Christ and the Apostles, not just against the sacramental priesthood of Rome that developed in the medieval period, not just against the godhood preparation of the nineteenth century Mormon, but against all ideas, whether they call themselves true to the Scriptures or not, that each fundamentally affirm that Jesus alone himself *simply cannot save*. Now there is no dispute from me that Paul's argumentation in Romans focuses on the Mosaic Law when he speaks of works. In the general sense, of course that is the locus of his thought in all his writings. But there's something fascinating to me about his articulation of grace to Abram that I find incredibly useful everywhere. Throughout this letter, for a few reasons, I may refer to Abraham by that name or by Abram. You'll just have to get used to it, but I mean the same man. God's dealings with Abram is a massive part of where the doctrine of grace alone, or imputation, comes from in Scripture. *Sola gratia* goes all the way back to Adam after the Fall, but it's so clearly refined by Abram's day. Today in Christ, as my Italian friends say: "fawgettabowtit," we see it without question in Jesus if we're looking with regenerate eyes and teachable hearts. If God is our teacher, we will understand imputation. And furthermore, I must add in this treatment that it's all completely in harmony with James' teaching on Abraham's demonstrated faithfulness decades after being justified by faith alone in his writing. We declare a justification by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone. It's crystal clear that Paul goes to Abram to establish with his readers the fact that God's saving grace and love toward Israel have *always* been by grace alone. That his covenantal graces to Abram and to his seed have always been based on a unilateral promise. But it's Paul's talk of Abram finding a justification "apart from works" that widens our gaze.

Abram lived hundreds of years before Moses was even born. Beginning in the first verse of Romans four and going all the way through the end of the chapter, Paul explains that Abram was imputed righteousness by faith alone, even before circumcision, and that he has nothing to boast of in what Paul describes as the complete forgiveness of his sin. God's grace to Abram is the foundation stone of our doctrine of imputation and it was given to him apart from works. If you deny that for a synergistic view of "grace" please breeze on over and consider now Romans 11:6. Paul then strategically cites David as well, who came long after Moses, so now we have Abram long before and David long after, to attest to this as well. Paul's point is that Abram believed the promise and was credited righteousness. This shows us that if he had cooperative works, or works "done in grace" that contributed to it, he would be able to boast, but not according to "the law of faith" (NASB) in Romans 3:27. Not according to the righteousness which comes by faith in Christ that Paul found at the Cross and that he explains in Philippians 3 autobiographically. Jesus gets all the credit in this grace, and that is sadly something no self-righteous system can consistently ever hope to do. The very works apart from which Abram himself was justified simply *cannot* be made exclusively to mean "works of the Law under Moses" because the Law hadn't yet been given in Abram's day. So what Paul's saying is that nothing anyone ever does can justify them. This takes us to understand the sin problem of man in

the Fall of Adam, etc. Despite the fact that Abram lived long before the Law was given to and through Moses around 1450 BC, Paul seamlessly talks about the reckoning or imputation of righteousness to the man Abram “apart from his works” in Romans four. By the end of the chapter we’re told we too must receive the righteousness we now know comes from Jesus just as Abram did—by faith alone.

My point here is that we must always be careful. We must be watchful. There are *other* works of *other* laws that we who have fled to take hold of refuge in Jesus must also deny, or we can be quickly ensnared. Do you have a system of self-righteousness that you too have built for yourself? Did you build it from your dad or mom? Does going to church, not watching certain things on TV, reading so many Bible verses a night or tithing keep you in the grace of God? What systems do we have that we set ourselves up as the arbiters of? Those too cannot save. We must learn not to trust in anything the Bible does not surely teach us to trust in by being aware of our traditions so that we can always seek to test them against the Scriptures. The Law of Moses and the Jewish typology here forms the center of why we now do so in light of the Cross, but Rome’s developed sacramental heresies, the Latter-Day Saint’s claims of eternal progression, the United Pentecostal’s views on water baptism and tongues, and more, all demonstrate works-righteousness mentalities akin to if someone in Ur of the Chaldeans had offered a pilgrimage to a holy shrine to their god for justification in Abram’s day. Errors like these help us test our own traditions. For example, we can’t let the Romanist dismiss our dismissal of their, “Our works are done in grace” mentality just because they’re not quoting rabbinical traditions. Any system that fundamentally denies the necessity and full sufficiency of grace in salvation through the Cross ends up becoming a works-righteous system in the end and constitutes another gospel. Imputation stands apart from it all in equal force.

Reader, as we come to consider Christ, we are made to consider the Cross. As we come to consider the Cross, we are made to consider how Jesus, through it, saves us from our sins. We are made to ask how this works? Sin is the problem. The Cross is the solution. The Cross is meaningless without the Lord Jesus who died upon it and rose again from the dead afterward, but the life of Christ, and the grace worked through him to us, would not be available to us without the Cross. Christians are saved because of Jesus. If we affirm this last sentence, we must work to understand what the Cross communicates to us and how. My entire premise in this letter is that the Cross was a work done by the Lord for him as the Godman to share himself with his people. What we need is righteousness, and with God there’s no such thing as an imperfect righteousness. The Cross warrants the free distribution of Jesus’ own personal righteousness to his people. This is imputation. This is Christianity.

### **A Brief Word on Protestant Tradition**

What the reformers fought over, when they fought over things worth fighting over, was the sufficiency of grace. What this means is that grace was not only necessary, but that it was sufficient. It finished the job of our justification. Nothing more needs to be added to it by our works. Nearly everyone says that grace is needed. The biblical Gospel demands, however, that we affirm that God’s grace is not only necessary, but that it’s also sufficient to save. *Sola Gratia*. Sufficiency is imputation. Such stands contrary to Rome’s idea of the infusion of righteousness. Infusion is the modern Catholic idea of man’s cooperation with Jesus which in the end stands contrary to the biblical doctrine of imputation, or justification by faith alone.

Because it always helps us see truth when we contrast it with error, I want to cite at least some of the opposition's views. Opposition to truth is nothing new. Jesus dealt with it. The Apostles dealt with it. We will in every age have to deal with it too. This idea is nowhere near foreign to the Bible. Following the Protestant Reformation, there was a Roman Catholic Reformation of sorts. Some say it was merely a Protestant counter-reformation. I'd like to offer just a tiny piece from some of its canons to show a bit of the two sides here. Rome stated its position against the heart of all that I'm contending for here at the Council of Trent which met for just a few years between the years 1545 and 1563. Below are just a few canons (decrees) from its sixth session dealing with its views on justification. Listen to part of what they concluded and declared at Trent:

Canon 9: If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be anathema.

Canon 12: If any one shall say that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in the divine mercy pardoning sins for Christ's sake, or that it is that confidence alone by which we are justified...let him be accursed.

Canon 14: If any one saith, that man is truly absolved from his sins and justified, because that he assuredly believed himself absolved and justified; or, that no one is truly justified but he who believes himself justified; and that, by this faith alone, absolution and justification are effected; let him be anathema.

Canon 24: If any one saith, that the justice received is not preserved and also increased before God through good works; but that the said works are merely the fruits and signs of Justification obtained, but not a cause of the increase thereof; let him be anathema.

Canon 30: If any one saith, that, after the grace of Justification has been received, to every penitent sinner the guilt is remitted, and the debt of eternal punishment is blotted out in such wise, that there remains not any debt of temporal punishment to be discharged either in this world, or in the next in Purgatory, before the entrance to the kingdom of heaven can be opened (to him); let him be anathema.

I hope you see the errors here more clearly by the time we're concluded. The word "anathema" means condemned to hell. Some in modern-day Catholic circles want to try to soften this, but ultimately they're going after Paul's use of the word in Galatians. Just in case you think that the canons here are just "old news" they've long-since changed their views on I'd like to show you what the current Catholic catechism states: "The ministry of catechesis draws ever fresh energy from the councils. the Council of Trent is a noteworthy example of this. It gave catechesis priority in its constitutions and decrees. It lies at the origin of the Roman Catechism, which is also known by the name of that council and which is a work of the first rank as a summary of Christian teaching." (Catechism of the Catholic Church. Prologue. Section II. Handing on the Faith: Catechesis. Paragraph 9). The divide between Protestants and Catholics has only grown wider since the sixteenth century. It's against these such ideas that the Scriptures shown forth brilliantly in the Protestant Reformation. The reformers taught nothing new. They simply went back to the source, the Bible. Though they didn't succeed equally in all areas, they went back to the Bible to test their traditions by the only thing we have in the possession of the church that both Protestants and Catholics would both agree can alone be truly called "inspired,"

the Bible. And we know that this always contained only 66 books. Sola Scriptura. The reformers were also students of writers long before them. They studied from Christians throughout history and long before there was first a Roman Catholic church nearing the end of the sixth century. They championed a great many things from the very first writings of Christians in the church.

### **Imputation and Sacrifice**

What exactly is imputed righteousness? Where does the idea come from in Scripture? Several things can help us. We'll look primarily at Paul's treatment in Romans four and consider his writings to the Galatians as well in this letter. First, let's look at the picture of the exchange of sin in the Old Covenant (OC) Law. To understand it better let's employ some definition and/or conceptualization groundwork. The Hebraic ceremonial concept of the imputation of sin to offerings becomes very clear through the numerous sacrifices prescribed by God under the Mosaic Law. All of the depth and sometimes seemingly awkwardly exhaustive details of the OC Law is to show us just how much had to be remedied for men to hope to stand anywhere near God. That there was serious enmity to be overcome. The Law shows true worshippers of God that we don't just approach him however we see fit. Ideas even of ceremonial uncleanness communicated this to God's people. Uncleanness wasn't necessarily sin, but it still also showed the divide between God and man. The symbolism in sacrifice alone is very rich. Sometimes OC offerings were made for individuals. Sometimes they were done for the entire nation of Israel. The Law contained information even about sins of omission and not just those of commission. In offerings for sin, sin was imputed from the sinner(s) to the sacrifice(s) symbolically.

What we must remember is that the OC was always to lead to the NC in God's overarching plans. Its purposes are actually lost without this. I would argue that we only really establish the Law when we recognize its subordinate role now to the NC. It stood alone without the NC. The NC cannot stand without the OC, but the OC is still now less than the NC. In this section, along with some other considerations on the Law, we'll consider the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement to help us solidify in our minds the typology of imputation. This is under the Law of Moses. The Torah contains the law code covering sacrifices. We'll move back and forth here a bit considering the Law's role as a whole and the covering of sin in the OC. When we look to the Law we're now chronologically between Abram's day and the apostolic illumination of what all of the Law means. In other words, it's in Jesus' teaching and the subsequent apostolic revelation that we truly learn how all of the types and shadows of the first covenant worked to communicate God's grace. The Day of Atonement was a yearly ritual in Israel. This was a part of the Passover celebration, and was actually a weeklong observance that began around 1450 BC at the Exodus and, though interrupted in history at times, was an ordinance being observed, though not well, throughout Jesus' life and during the week that he died. It was the big day pointing to God's forgiveness of the people for their sin. Note: it was to end with Jesus. Many sacrifices were offered for the sins of the people both for the current high priest himself and for the populace of Israel. There was a sacrifice of a goat. In it, sin was symbolically transferred from the sinners to the scapegoat. Israel's national annual Day of Atonement needed to be offered for both the sins of commission and omission as already noted. Here the animal sacrifices themselves typologically bore the sins of the people before God. They were offered up for the sins of the people, and sin was covered, in both a national and individual sense, by it every year. Blood had to be shed. It was harsh. It was nasty. The shedding of blood speaks to what's at stake

in it all—life itself. This actually has precedence even long before Israel was a nation. God himself slew the first animal to cover Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:21. God tells us clearly that “...without shedding of blood there is no remission,” Hebrews 9:22-23. This has been true from the Fall and is actually not one bit less true for you and me today. We too, each of us, in 2019 need a blood sacrifice to be saved. We’ll come back to this often in this letter. *The symbology or typology of sins being imputed to sacrifices offered in the OC had strong spiritual significance to them as God ordained, but we now know post the New Covenant’s (NC) commencement that it was all primarily a prefiguring of the imputation of sin that was yet to come with Jesus.* By the sacrifice of himself, like the scapegoat, Jesus bears the sins of his people. But his sacrifice is far greater. God says in Hebrews that, “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” Hebrews 10:4. They weren’t saved by animal sacrifices per se; they were saved by God’s grace alone. We will see this clearly laid out in Scripture. In light of God’s own respect to the promises he made to their father Abram at the start, he later commanded animal (and other) sacrifices for various reasons. These reasons are made far clearer in Jesus than they ever were before. The God who saved them gave them those sacrifices to perform as part of his work throughout the ages, not to merit his already guaranteed grace, but to call them to action in response to it. The prescribed sacrifices were a part of the Mosaic Covenant. Part of the Law. The Law was, “...added because of transgressions...until the seed would come to whom the promise had been made,” Galatians 3:19. That is, between God’s promises to Abram and Jesus, we have Moses and the Law “added” in the middle that contained the prescribed animal sacrifices. It was in the interim. It’s vital that we remember that the Law did not renegotiate the terms of God’s promises to Abraham or to his seed. Paul understands this very well and writes that, “The Law...does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.” Galatians 3:17-18. We will examine this further here in this letter. God’s saving grace to Abram was ultimately predicated upon one main thing—the coming of one of his descendants. We now know that that descendant is Jesus the Christ himself. Jesus, like with David, is both Abraham’s seed *and* Abraham’s Lord. God saved Israel (Abraham’s seed through Isaac) looking forward to the Messiah to come as the very reason for his doing so. The London Baptist Confession of 1689 can help here:

Although the price of redemption was not actually paid by Christ till after his incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefit thereof were communicated to the elect in all ages, successively from the beginning of the world, in and by those promises, types, and sacrifices wherein he was revealed, and signified to be the seed which should bruise the serpent's head; and the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, being the same yesterday, and to-day and forever. (Chapter 8, paragraph 6).

Christ himself upon the Cross would be made an offering for all of the SIN of his people. The triune God would offer up God the Son for the people of God. Jesus would be imputed with the sins of his people. OC sacrifices couldn’t ever actually take away or fully pardon sin unlike the solitary sacrifice of Jesus eventually would, Hebrews 10:11-14. Sins were nonetheless covered over by a repetitious typological transfer of the sins of the people by the sacrifices made under the Mosaic Law. All of this looked forward to Jesus. Not all offerings were blood offerings, but the covenants both old and new were both principally commemorated by blood offerings. Hebrews 9:19-24. The OC’s sacrifices are called “types” or “shadows.” Jesus’ sacrifice is the “anti-type” of them all. This term may seem strange to us, but anti-type here basically just means that Jesus’ sacrificial work is the thing to which all the other sacrifices (or

types) pointed. Jesus' sacrifice is not a type. It means that Jesus is the actual City of Cleveland that the interstate signs for Cleveland (whether five or a hundred miles out) all point to. The Apostles John and Paul refer to Jesus as a sacrificed lamb in John 1:29 and 1 Corinthians 5:7 respectively alluding to the Passover Lamb from the Book of Exodus. This is the ultimate power in the message of the Law. In the Exodus with Moses itself, we clearly see the typology of sin being passed over by the blood of a sacrifice. They offered up the animal and applied its blood to their doorposts, Exodus 12:22-23. That night, because of the blood, God's angel did not kill their children. The correlated ideas of life, death and the covenantal preservation of life are not easily missed in all of this. The idea that the sins of God's people were covered over by the blood of another is not exclusive to the NC; it is the heart cry of all the redeemed from start to finish. Understanding the massive history of sacrifice in Israel's history is meant to show us Christ in bold relief. That these sacrifices symbolically dealt with the sins of the people is clear. The godly Jew was looking to the mercy of his God to save him, and those who did so found exactly that. God's faithful knew that their sin could be forgiven by God's mercy alone, and that their sacrifices were to honor that fact. They knew that sacrifices were ultimately about the heart offering them, and not just a matter of ritual. They looked back to God's covenant with Abram for this and offered their sacrifices in the sure hope of it.

Do not marvel," she says, "that righteousness has loved me." Although I have become dark through sin and have dwelt in gloom by my deeds, the bridegroom made me beautiful through his love, having exchanged his very own beauty for my disgrace. After taking the filth of my sins upon himself, he allowed me to share his own purity, and filled me with his beauty. He who first made me lovely from my own repulsiveness, has showed his love for me. (Gregory of Nyssa (A.D. 335-394) in his commentary on the Song of Songs).

Let's go back to Leviticus 16 in our present consideration of the Law and sacrifice as a whole. This chapter prescribes the Law of Atonement for the Levites. There was a bull, two rams and a goat to be slain along with prescriptions about the sprinkling of the blood, the disposal of the whole, and the use of incense that day inside the tabernacle, etc. In 16:21-22, following the other works for atonement and ritual purity, we have the works with the scapegoat: "And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: and the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness." Here, along with the other offerings, sin was clearly imputed to the scapegoat to be symbolically taken away. The animal, which was sinless by the way, was reckoned or accounted it, and it literally then bore the sins away. Like a sack hung across its back, the animal was said to carry the sin. The Hebrew words and notions seen in the sacrifices with words like *chashab* which means to "count" or "reckon" relate precisely to the Greek's *logizomai*, the word for "imputed." The Greek term is used many times in this manner in the NC alone. *Logizomai* is primarily defined as follows: "To reckon, count, compute, calculate, count over." Sin was imputed (reckoned, counted, computed, calculated or counted over) to the scapegoat. The confessor was to place his hands upon it and confess the sins of the people to God. As we consider this concept and how it relates to our own current standing before God, it'll soon bring us to see more about how our sin is explicitly said to have been imputed to Jesus on the Cross. So, regarding man's sin guilt, the idea of imputation modeled in the OC is the concept of sin being passed over or at least temporarily excused because of a sacrifice made, or of sin being transferred from sinners to sacrifices. The biblical idea of Christ as a propitiatory sacrifice is



called in theology “penal substitutionary atonement.” It is a reality in Scripture that I affirm one hundred percent.

How can we ever say as Paul says, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand” in Romans 5:1-2a? How can Christians now presently have peace with God when one sin utterly shattered humanity on earth? Have we not read how many sacrifices needed to be continually carried out by God’s people under Moses? Men have been bringing sacrifices to God since Adam was sent out of the garden and they never in themselves “fixed” anything. They had to keep offering them. And now, since the Fall, peace with a holy God has now been restored in believers? We’re done with sacrifices for sin? That’s a bold claim. Why should we ever make such a claim? We can humbly declare this presently as saints because *just as Jesus never sinned, yet became sin, so we, though never righteous, are made righteous by the faith he gives.* This is imputed righteousness. This is grace. It’s been wonderfully called “the great exchange.” We’ll look more at this later.

It is always offensive and scandalous to the carnally minded or self-righteous to say that Jesus alone can remove sin. Unlearned or foolish men cannot abandon themselves to God. To call him Savior. To another degree, to the same carnally-minded or self-righteous, it’s perhaps even more offensive to say that to imagine you’ve some credit for his work in you to remove your sin is even more wrong. The poor in spirit and heavy laden by sin rejoice in it above all things! It is so very, very precious to people being saved that they have laid down all works. The most zealous believer should be the one most sure that the righteousness upon which he lives is not his own.

In Isaiah’s great heavenly vision in the year King Uzziah died we have the seraphim touching Isaiah and purging his sin. Isaiah 6:1-6. The word for this purging (כַּפָּרָה (kaphar)) is the Hebrew word used to cover or make atonement. This is the word used for the offerings throughout the entirety of the OC. But here a coal in the hands of an angel from the presence of the Almighty touched Isaiah and purged away his sin. This is always how God purifies his elect. This is another clear type of the coming finished work of Christ. Of justification by God. Of cleansing from something outside of us. From something or somewhere else. Paul writes in Romans 9 what I believe perfectly summarizes the heart of all idolatrous religions that tip their hats to grace but deny the power of the Cross. He writes:

“What shall we say then? – that the Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness obtained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith, but Israel even though pursuing a law of righteousness did not attain it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but (as if it were possible) by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, just as it is written, “Look, I am laying in Zion a stone that will cause people to stumble and a rock that will make them fall, yet the one who believes in him will not be put to shame.” Romans 9:30-33 (NET).

And again, as we widen our gaze both to ancient Israel along with anything else contrary to imputation, how perfectly does the following not sadly demonstrate the problem of the futility of any system not properly understanding sin, and not properly esteeming the sacrifice of Jesus? All pagan religions will invariably present two false realities: 1) sin isn’t that bad. 2) God isn’t sovereign.

“Brothers and sisters, my heart’s desire and prayer to God on behalf of my fellow Israelites is for their salvation. For I can testify that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not in line with the

truth. For ignoring the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking instead to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law, with the result that there is righteousness for everyone who believes." Romans 10:1-4 (NET).

False religion will not submit to the righteous requirements of the law. To the needed perfection it demands without apology. They always have a law that makes exceptions and a grace that yet needs help. False religion will thus fundamentally never appraise grace rightly. The views spoken of by Paul in the two references just above are recycled in a number of false religions in our day as well. Self-righteousness to any degree is not of the Faith. We need a perfect righteousness. We can't earn it in any way and have it still remain perfect, Romans 11:6. Our sin, because we are the criminals, makes us wholly in need of a remedy *from outside of us*. We must quite literally be born again or we will never be able to stand before God. Just as we spoke of all the OC showing us that we don't just approach God however we want in all its detail, we have this even more so shown to us in Christ. We don't just approach the triune God however we want. We must come as he demands, or not at all. Jesus' righteousness, Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf, is that perfection we need to ever hope to draw near to God at any time, Hebrews 10:22. And oh how sweet it is to draw near to him. To be invited in. Jesus made the way, Hebrews 10:19-20. Jesus is all we need to be able to now draw near. False religion will always deny this by saying, "No, but you must." They'll often thank God for some view of grace, but then turn around and curse it by saying it's not enough. No! To the Scriptures we must go and affirm the grace of God in its perfection. Devils will add a circumcision (see Galatians), a water baptism ceremony, a pair of undergarments, an evidence of some tongue, a ritual by the offices of their clergy. They'll say smooth things like, "It's because of grace that we must now do this" or this is our faith, "Working through love" but it's always something to control grace and thus they remove grace by feigning a meriting of that which is only attainable when unmerited. To mitigate it. To mediate it through themselves. They'll often get a lot of money in all of this. In this, they deny the Cross as they stumble over its almighty implications. Aslan is not a tame lion. Such views will never have a proper view of the effects of the Fall on mankind. Sin will always wound instead of kill in a false religion making grace therefore nothing but a band-aid instead of life from death. They're selling something. But Christ will have none of it! He stands post the Resurrection and demands no one proclaim his work undone! It is a blood sacrifice where he has born away our sin in a way all the signs never could. Christ came and far from being defiled by us, he touched us and cleansed us. He is like that coal in Isaiah's vision that purges what it touches. In order to maturely understand imputed righteousness we must understand Jesus as our propitiatory sacrifice. Isaiah 53. The Law pointed to this in all the sacrifices made for the people. Later, the sins of all of God's people were laid upon the head of Christ. It was the Father who offered him up. Isaiah 53:10-11; Acts 4:27-28; Matthew 26:39; Acts 2:22-34; Hebrews 10:5, etc. Not annually, but forever only once was Jesus' sacrifice to be made, Hebrews 9:28; 10:14; John 19:30. Sin was not symbolically imputed to Jesus. It was actually imputed to him. It is because of that that we have a living hope in what's now actually imputed to us by grace alone. This leads to an understanding of justification in the Bible.

### **The Perfect and Perfecting Sacrifice**

"Jesus is better." Better than the angels, better than the temples and tabernacles combined, better than the prophets, better than Moses and better than the OC priests. The Book

of Hebrews was written principally to Jewish believers in the first century tempted to “go back” to the old ways of Judaism. To give up. To turn back to the Jewish system of things. The problem with this is that there’s nothing to go back to. The Jews continually offered up sacrifices as they were ordered to. God received them. Just a few generations before Jesus first entered a synagogue in public ministry, due to the ever-changing political climate in the region, the sacrifices took on a bit less of a central role in Jewish life as the importance of the synagogue as a place of teaching increased. Teaching became a more central facet in the lives of the Israelites than perhaps ever before after the time of the Maccabean revolt. This was during the time of what scholars refer to as the Intertestamental Period. This is roughly the time from which the Apocryphal writings come, the time between the chronological close of the OC and the start of the NC. Many Jewish people were prepared to see their Messiah in Jesus by the teaching of the Law and the prophets that they had heard preached every Sabbath in their cities. By the time of Jesus, some historians have described what they see as “Messiah fever” in Israel in the actions and writings of the people. But what the Messiah came to do would not be fully understood by anyone until he himself explained it to his own after the Resurrection. Jesus revealed to his disciples the fullness of the revelation of the Bible that had been given before him. What he came to do was to offer himself to God the Father. He came to purchase his predestined people from death. This was his principle mission. I would call the following statement from Jesus the main descriptor of what he came to do: “The Son of Man (cf. Daniel 7:13) did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” Matthew 20:28. Our understanding of this is obviously crucial. The full disclosure of what Jesus came to do by his life, death and Resurrection fills the pages of the Bible. The Book of Hebrews is especially extensive as to the nature of the Atonement he made on the Cross of Calvary. Jesus was to be known as the Resurrected Messiah. I believe this is why he told his followers on more than one occasion not to tell of many of his miraculous works. Because he was to be known post the Resurrection for what he truly was. For what Messiah truly means. It could only be understood after the Cross. This came to be known in its fulness only after he’d finished the work.

To call Jesus Savior, mediator or intercessor, we must understand the Cross as a sacrifice made for sin. A study of the Book of Hebrews (especially chapters 7-10) is one of the best places where this truth is spelled out for us. Jesus is the sacrifice to end all sacrifices for sin. He did all he did to bring in a new covenant for the church in the world. We don’t know who wrote Hebrews. Only God could produce any letter of the Bible. That we know. I say it was Barnabas, but no one knows for sure. We are sure that whoever wrote Hebrews, however, was under the same inspiration as any other scriptural author. He knows that Jesus came to die for sin. Since the shedding of blood was required for the forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 9:22-23) the writer knows that Jesus took on a body to shed his blood. He writes: “After saying above, “SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS AND WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND *sacrifices* FOR SIN YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, NOR HAVE YOU TAKEN PLEASURE *in them*” (which are offered according to the Law), then He said, “BEHOLD, I HAVE COME TO DO YOUR WILL.” He takes away the first in order to establish the second.” Hebrews 10:8-9. Jesus “took away the first.” The first what? The first covenant. Jesus took it away by fulfilling it in order to remove it and initiate what we now call the New Covenant (NC) or New Testament (NT). In one place, the writer of Hebrews even speaks of the NC like a will that could not go into effect until Jesus died. “For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it.” Hebrews 9:16. Such is perhaps the largest reason I believe in much of what’s called covenantal theology. The Son lived under the OC. The NC is the same covenant of grace made to God’s people with its fulfillment only coming in the

Messiah. It is radically better, but it's all God's grace since the Fall that he's offered. All of the animals died on credit (including the one in Genesis 3:21) looking forward to the shedding of Jesus' blood that would end it all. Jesus came to pay the bill. God inspired Hebrews 10:1-4 as, "For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." What was just described is *not* Christianity. What was just described is Judaism...by a Christian. Jesus' sacrifice is infinitely better than all the OC sacrifices combined. It does not just temporarily cover sins, it removes them entirely. Unlike the OC, it actually makes the worshiper spiritually perfect. The writer speaks of Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross by saying, "By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Hebrews 10:10. *Once* for all. Jesus' present mediation is based upon his sacrifice. What Jesus mediates to the Christian in the NC is redemption through his Cross.

"But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting *Him* to grief; if He would render Himself *as* a guilt offering," Isaiah 53:10. I like the way the NASB puts this. This passage reflects on the work of the triune God showing the work of the Father and the Son in redemption. If we're going to understand imputation in the NC, we have to understand what it's based upon. To understand this, we must understand Jesus himself as a once for all time sacrifice for sin on the Cross (Hebrews 7:27; 2:9; 1 John 2:2, et al.). This then becomes the basis of imputation. Imputation demands a finished work given to the member of the NC in its totality. If Christ did it all then it's literally all done. We simply then need to define what *it* is. The perfection that's his intrinsically corresponds to the perfection of his work which corresponds to the perfection of his righteousness offered which corresponds to the perfection of our redemption in him. Jesus died once and he is no longer on the Cross. It is a one-time finished work done since about AD 30. The Cross must not be seen as occupied in our minds. It's been vacant for over two-thousand years. The wood is now a symbol of a finished work. Just as much as the tabernacle, if it were to be seen again, would be a symbol of offerings done, so the Cross, if actually seen again, would be nothing more than a symbol of what men now stand in by that sacrifice. The blood is no longer wet. More than even the blood of all those animals, we're to be glad it's done! It is only based upon that ended sacrifice that Jesus can distribute his righteousness to us as a mediator for us. Isaiah 53:10 shows the deal, if you will, between God the Father and the Son. This is the plan the triune God made and has fulfilled. He could've done it however he wanted to. He wanted this. He saves fallen sons of Adam only because he died and now lives. The Father receives the payment of the Son as the Son honors the Father. The Spirit honors both to the honor of all. The foundation of Jesus' current mediation from heaven is his propitiation on the Cross. In Hebrews, God says of Jesus' single sacrifice the following: "Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We have such a high priest, one who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister of the sanctuary and the true tabernacle that the Lord, not man, set up. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. So this one too had to have something to offer." Hebrews 8:1-3. Jesus took on flesh to offer his body as a sacrifice. Hebrews 10:5-7. He had to have something to offer. Something with blood was therefore what was offered. Remember, life's what's at stake because of sin, and the life of the flesh is identified in the blood of it. Jesus had to shed his own blood to redeem the humanity he came to save. All that will believe. All that we have with him now is because he did so. Because he gave his life.

Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 17:11, 14; Deuteronomy 12:23; Matthew 26:28; 1 Peter 1:19; Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 10:16; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:20; Hebrews 9:12; 13:12; 1 John 1:7; Revelation 1:5; 19:13. He was more than willing, Philipians 2:5-11. His life and death here was *above all things* a demonstration of his love to the Father, John 14:31. Jesus offered himself once, and now eternally mediates the grace of it to whomever he pleases.

But what does this one sacrifice look like? Remember I said that a subtitle for the Book of Hebrews could be that, “Jesus is better”? So how? Simply put it’s better because Jesus has himself come and done it. Again, let’s read from Hebrews 10: “And every priest stands day after day serving and offering the same sacrifices again and again – sacrifices that can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, he sat down at the right hand of God, where he is now waiting until his enemies are made a footstool for his feet. For by one offering he has perfected for all time those who are made holy.” Hebrews 10:11-14. Jesus is better. *His one offering of his blood, of his life, did what all the rest combined, and even ten-million more if given the time, never could.* Hebrews 10:4. It’s important for me to briefly note that God was not ignorant of the reality that the death of the animals couldn’t remove sin. It wasn’t his plan a with Jesus coming in as a plan b when that plan failed. As we say in the Army, Jesus was not the a, c, or e in God’s primary, alternate, contingency and emergency (PACE) plan. Blood was shed so that no blood would be shed for sin again any longer after Christ. Hebrews 10:18 is crucial to understand the finished and superior perfecting work of Jesus on the Cross in the hearts of the partakers of the NC: “Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer *any* offering for sin.” There is nothing we have to offer to ask for grace from God. *Our Great High Priest has himself no more offerings to give.* This is what Hebrews conveys. This shows its intended superiority over all. Jesus has asked for and purchased the grace for all who believe in him, and the Father is most happy to grant it to honor the Son. There’s nothing more we need to offer for sin if we’re truly forgiven. Not only that, there’s nothing more we *dare* offer for sin if we wish to claim to be a partaker of this grace in this covenant. Any additional sacrifices say that Christ didn’t actually finish anything. Any additional offerings for sin, so as to request forgiveness thereby, shout that one needn’t a Savior, but merely needs more time to offer more offerings to save himself. This perfecting and all-sufficient propitiation that’s been accomplished by Jesus on the Cross is the very heartbeat of the Gospel. “Where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer *any* offering for sin.” This is in the context of the writer’s brief summation and citations from Jeremiah 31 of what the NC actually looks like. Blood was redeemed by blood. The Son took up all that was needed to be redeemed. Life was redeemed by life. Blood showed the severity of sin. Notice again that it was an offering that Jesus gave. An offering from the Son to the Father. As previewed with Abraham, God did indeed himself provide a ram for the sacrifice. Genesis 22:13. A son was given who did what Isaac never could have. Furthermore, as we read already in Isaiah 53:10, it was an offering made specifically for sin. Jesus would see his seed if he did it. Who are the seed he would see? This Hebrew word is the word זֶרַע (*zera*), translated as σπέρμα (*sperma*) in the Septuagint. This is the word in the Greek from which we get the words for offspring or descendants. But Jesus had no kids. Here are the seed: “For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one *Father*; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, “I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE.” Hebrews 2:11-12. Cf. John 6:37; 1 John 2:2. Because of the honor the Son has for the Father, the Father adopts men and women into the church. Galatians 4:4-7, etc. All of this was done by a

better sacrifice and is part of a radically better covenant in his blood. Hebrews 8:6. What Jesus did he did for his people. John 3:16. The Father loves and honors the Son in this. Romans 8:32.

It bears repeating. Consider how great Jesus' work on the Cross must be to speak of it in the following way: "Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, waiting from that time onward UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified." Hebrews 10:11-14. Again, unlike the OC sacrifices, this sacrifice literally makes men perfect before God. And that so now. There is a fulness to come yet still, but we now stand perfected. Simul justus et peccator. The phrase means simultaneously justified and sinner. Dr. Luther understood this well. This is what Jesus promises his own in John 5:24, 11:25, or what Paul writes passionately about in Romans 8:1-4, 5:1-2, Philippians 3:8-10, or 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. This is no legal fiction except for those who reject the reality of the perfecting work of Jesus on the Cross, those who reject imputation. Jesus is better. Jesus' sacrifice was so perfect that it in one offering it forever perfects those for whom it is applied. All of the previous sacrifices in Israel were made by sinners for sinners. Jesus' was something far greater for sinners. *His is a perfect sacrifice*. To assume it was made to offer anything other than a perfect righteousness is to miss the point entirely. To assert that it was made not to perfect those for whom it was made is to miss the point.

### **Righteousness as Standing**

We looked at "imputation." We considered Jesus' sacrifice. Next, we move to briefly consider the term "righteousness." From the Hebrew *tsēdaqah* to the Greek *dikaioσynē*, when we consider the terms and how they relate to our own present standing before God, we can aptly define it as: "Righteousness (as vindicated), justification, salvation" or, "The doctrine concerning the way in which man may attain a state approved of God." This is what we read in Romans 5:1-2. It is, Paul says, a "...grace in which we stand." This is not just a future reality. It is a present one. Most Christians would agree with the statement, "Jesus is our righteousness," but have very little meat on those bones. *The meat of it is imputed righteousness*. Understanding this is precisely why Edward Mote so long ago wrote that beautiful hymn *My Hope is Built on Nothing Less* which says:

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand; all other ground is sinking sand.

Mote had read Matthew 7:24. To declare that you stand upon Christ alone is to begin to understand imputed righteousness. Righteousness then, as an attribute of the godly, is what God has given us in Christ. We stand in it. We stand by it. Of old, David wrote: "As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness." Psalm 17:15. David longed for it. Righteousness and life are almost interchangeable ideas in the NC. Consider Romans 8:10: "And if Christ *is* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin, but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness." Cf. Galatians 3:21; Romans 5:17; 5:21; Proverbs 12:28; 11:19; 21:21. Righteousness is a spiritual quality present *only* in those alive in Christ. In many other places,

writers speak of righteousness as something evidenced by works. It's the ultimate, "Put your money where your mouth is." James 2:18 says: "...Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works." The idea is that righteousness proves itself in us by our actions. It isn't just what we say, but what we do that establishes us as the elect. This is how God has designed it. The laboring farmer benefits in the harvest. No man can say he loves his wife when pursuing another woman just as no man can say he loves God without pursuing him. God always knows those who are his (2 Timothy 2:19) but our works identify us among the church and the world. The Bible speaks of true righteousness as joyous, life-defining practices that mark our lives. In this sense, righteousness is not just an internal characteristic, but is *what we do* as "righteous people." Every believer is a saint. We need only read almost every NC letter's introduction to see believers addressed as such. As we battle with our ever-present and on-going sins (1 John 3:7) we will not be defeated or marked by them. We will instead be marked by holiness. In fact, without holiness no one will go to heaven. Hebrews 12:14. This is what we call "sanctification." Righteousness will be apparent in us if we have God. The fact is that righteousness in the life of the believer is natural. Just like CO<sub>2</sub> will be produced if someone's breathing, so righteousness will be seen in the life of the living. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that it's certainly not our righteousness or righteous deeds that save us. I love the way God has balanced this for us in his word! *Nothing we ever do ever forgives our sins.* We needed Jesus precisely because this was always so! This was equally true in the OC. It was *always* by grace alone that anyone was in covenant with God. And they were. The godly Hebrew stood in righteousness with God by his grace. Works only come into play subsequent to the loving acceptance of our condescended God. Fallen Adam and Eve were covered only after God first did something. Noah was saved because God came to him. Abram's obedience only justified him as James speaks after God called him from Ur and gave him the unilateral promise. The obedience of those baptized into Moses only mattered after they were first taken from Egypt. David received his kingly blessing, and us all the assurance of that throne to endure after him (2 Samuel 7:25-29) only after Samuel was first sent to his home. You and I are likewise only saved because God has made it possible. He came to us. Otherwise to hell we would run. Our love for God and others only shows forth our hearts after God saves us. We are always responders. Even today, we need something far bigger than a system for a complete salvation; for that we need a perfect Savior. If it's *our* righteousness that saves then we're sunk. Even our good works are all contaminated. Isaiah 64:6. We cannot stand upon them. No, it's not based upon our own righteousness or good works or religious obedience that God saves. Titus 3:4-5 says this clearly that, "...when the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." Passages like this and Ephesians 2:8-9 serve for us as a central interpretive motif to help us harmonize as responders in grace to all Scripture says about the nature of sanctifying, and *not justifying*, works. Sometimes sanctifying works are spoken of as justifying ones. And sometimes it's the opposite. Consistent context determines it. Several clear passages help us not to destroy the Gospel as we prioritize the Cross.

We need to see how the righteousness of Jesus can become the Christian's right standing with God, or his sacrifice will forever seem non-applicable. The Bible is very clear in many ways that Christ is the rock upon which we, the church, stand. In Matthew 16, Jesus asks some questions about who people think that he is. The disciples provided some of the people's various answers. Then Jesus asked them to tell him who *they* thought he was. Peter then, as spokesman,

said to Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Undoubtedly, other disciples shared this profession. Nathanael had said as much at the start. Cf. John 1:49. Jesus notes before them all that the nature of Peter’s conviction expressed could only come from God the Father and God the Holy Spirit (vs. 17). Peter knew who Jesus was because God gave him spiritual understanding. Cf. Mark 4:10-12. The rock himself then says, “I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church.” In the Greek it’s, “καὶ ἐγὼ δέ σοι λέγω ὅτι σὺ εἶ Πέτρος καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν.” Roman Catholicism stakes its entire claim on a most faulty interpretation of this passage. Peter is not the focus; Jesus is. The differentiation between Πέτρος (little stone, masculine noun) and πέτρα (large stone, feminine noun) aren’t the best arguments to make against Rome’s mistakes here. You can make that argument about the large and small rock in the Greek, but the clear contextual flow of this entire passage is Jesus’ self-revelation as part of the triune Godhead. This is a much clearer argument. To say, “You are Peter and upon *you* I will build...” would help make sense of their view. But Jesus doesn’t say that. He instead says that he’ll build his church, Peter and those like him given the revelation from above, upon himself. He says, “You are Peter and upon *this rock* I will build...” Just consider in normal phraseology what it would mean between you and someone else if they said, “You are my friend and *upon our friendship* we will do this or that...” It’s simple really. Peter was a disciple with a Savior who saved him. The context of Jesus’ talk here from vv. 13-20 is himself. Jesus is the focus. Peter wasn’t. *Jesus himself is the rock.* It is his righteousness against which he cannot hold out. It’s his mediation, based upon his work, that saves us, but that mediation is not by an intermediary. Christianity is not a belief in mere ideology. It’s an ideology that instead demands a belief in *someone*. In Jesus. In a living Jesus even. If he didn’t physically Resurrect after death then there is simply no Christianity. 1 Corinthians 15:12-19; Acts 2:23-32, etc. It is he himself that we need as Apostle and Great High Priest (Hebrews 3:1; 4:14-15; John 8:18) of such a magnificent profession as saying we now have peace with God. We cannot separate Jesus’ righteousness from Jesus. You can’t have one without the other. This is vital. *Jesus didn’t teach that he had a way, or even that he had the only way. He said that he himself was the only way.* John 14:6, etc. Christianity, unlike nearly all the lies of Satan with their interchangeable or dispensable founders, is primarily about a him, not an it. This is one of the ways it’s so different. *He himself is our righteousness,* 1 Corinthians 1:30; Philippians 1:11; Romans 10:4. This church is built on him. Peter speaks of himself as one made righteous *by the righteousness of his Savior, his rock.* He wrote a letter, “To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.” 2 Peter 1:1. The Christian religion is a living righteousness because Jesus is living. *We do not have faith in faith; we have faith in Christ.* That is our religion. We must wrap up all we have in the very person and work of Jesus. It’s only in this way that we ourselves can be called righteous, Romans 5:19; 1 Corinthians 15:34; Ephesians 4:24; 6:14. Reference the rock of Christ upon which the church stands, in his writing on Matthew 16, Augustine of Hippo once wrote:

...he was before called Simon. Now this name of Peter was given him by the Lord, and that in a figure, that he should signify the church. For seeing that Christ is the rock (Petra), Peter is the Christian people. For the rock (Petra) is the original name. Therefore Peter is so called from the rock; not the rock from Peter; as Christ is not called Christ from the Christian, but the Christian from Christ. Therefore, he says, you are Peter; and upon this Rock which you have confessed, upon this Rock which you have acknowledged, saying, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God, will I build My church; that is upon Myself, the Son of the living God, will I build My church. I will build you upon Myself, not Myself upon you. (Augustine (A.D. 354-430) Sermon 26 on the New Testament).



Augustine, despite the understandable confusion of his day on authority as the church took its leaps forward in the Roman government, knew that the foundation of the church was Jesus. Again, we do not have faith in faith; we have faith in Christ. Righteousness, Jesus' quality of righteousness, is what we need. If we have it, we have him, and we are saved. If we do not have it then we do not have him, and we are going to hell. You cannot receive it and not live like it, but no one fools God and lives like it in their own strength. Reader, a perfect righteousness is what we need, and who among us is perfect? Please remember this: "There shall by no means enter [heaven] anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie." Revelation 21:27. *We literally need to be perfected to dwell with God in the way we're one day called to.* We need a perfect righteousness, and the Bible only speaks of one now available to anyone anywhere who believes. John 3:16. We need Jesus' righteousness. The Bible sets up the Jewish Levitical system as the quintessential example of a fastidious religious system that will fail every time *unless* one has its substance—God's joyous mercy. I believe strongly that it was always a misuse or misunderstanding of the Law for anyone to see it as a means of justification before God. I don't believe David saw it as such. I don't believe any of the faithful did. Aside from those who looked to the mercies of God's grace, it's as if we're to consider all the zeal those men had, and sadly some still attempt today in what's mainly a modified form, and ask, "If all of that will be futile before God for the forgiveness of sin, what other system on earth could ever hope to be effective?" One former devotee of Judaism, Paul (see Philippians 3:6) said that it was a misunderstanding of the Law to see it as a means of righteousness. That it could save no one. Romans 3:20. It can't because we can't actually honor it perfectly, Galatians 3:11. Cf. James 2:10-11. He said this only in his understanding the Cross, and the perfect righteousness of faith brought to him in Jesus. There is no religious system more complex, more exhaustive, more zealous than the one that literally chased Jesus to his death, and Paul said that it, if made into a perverted system, could forgive nothing. He literally said it's rubbish, or feces. The message of Judaism is that God alone was always the only way anyone could be forgiven. That both those given the Law and those not given the Law needed to be forgiven for the sin of Adam by God through a righteousness clearly never their own. That the Messiah would be the deliverer of his people from bondage, and that he was already so. It's not that Judaism was feces. Not at all. It was feces when it did not do what it was supposed to do, which was point people to the mercies of a free God in salvation. It was only feces when made a self-righteous system to stand upon. Paul said the Law leads the godly to Jesus to be justified by faith! Galatians 3:24. The righteousness of faith was pointed to by it all. This was its beautiful use. Read Psalm 119 sometime to see how wonderful the Law was when it was understood. God has chosen to disclose this fully in his incarnation. Friend, if you've sinned, you're like the rest of us (Paul included) and you too need a Savior. You need something else to stand on if you've sinned other than your own goodness because you have none. You are a sinner and so you break the Law. Just look at the Ten Commandments and you'll see your sin nature on display. The religious system of Judaism taught this without question. It is God's mercy to teach us this by the Law. The blood shed in all the sacrifices before Jesus reminded the saints of the foundation of mercy they must have been made to stand upon with their covenant keeping God. With the God of their fathers. God gave grace, then Law and sacrifice, then grace through one sacrifice at the end to teach his own of his tender mercies toward those he loves. Sin had to be dealt with. God did it. There are no balancing scales of righteousness with God, and he does not play around with sin because he's good. He's holy. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the pronouncement of the way of salvation. It

is the announcement of what Jesus has done. It is the announcement of good news that God's mercy has been made available. It is an invite to abandon the Titanic before it strikes the iceberg and take refuge on a rock the size of the Milky Way. That it is a rock to stand upon for all those who hope in God.

### **Details of the Gospel That Demand Affirmation of a Perfection Possible Only in a Righteousness Untouched by Man**

*Imputed righteousness is the doctrine that Jesus' very own individual righteousness is what's given to Christians.* The Cross as a finished work *is* our theology. All of the OC looked forward to the Cross, and all of the NC looks back to it. It's in a reflection upon the Cross that we read (key verse): "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." 2 Corinthians 5:21. The "we" matters here. It means the church, the redeemed, or the elect. Our sins were imputed to Jesus on the Cross. Understanding the imputation of our sins to him helps us to understand the flow of his righteousness back to us in the Faith. *Just as he who never sinned was made sin, so we who were never righteous are made righteous.* This is the work of God, and it is humbly beautiful! Sin and its punishment was imputed to Jesus on behalf of all those who would believe. Isaiah says it this way:

"But the LORD was pleased  
To crush Him, putting *Him* to grief;  
If He would render Himself *as* a guilt offering,  
He will see *His* offspring,  
He will prolong *His* days,  
And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.  
As a result of the anguish of His soul,  
He will see *it and* be satisfied;  
By His knowledge the Righteous One,  
My Servant, will justify the many,  
As He will bear their iniquities." Isaiah 53:10-11.

Imputed righteousness is seen best in a conquering Gospel. Jesus (God the Son) was a willing sacrifice for the sins of many in the hands of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. He came to save his elect. He said: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." Matthew 20:28. Sounds exactly like Isaiah 53. Hebrews reveals that Jesus gives aid to the seed of Abraham. Hebrews 2:16. This means that he became a man, specifically a man born an Israelite under the Law, to save many men. This is obviously a specific aid or specific sacrifice made on behalf of a specific people with an intended end. Christians (all Gentiles) are said to become descendants of Abraham (something impossible genealogically) *by faith* in Jesus in Romans 4:16-25. By becoming a Christian, men are made descendants for whom Jesus has rendered his aid. They are born into or adopted into the family of faith with believing Abraham. Jesus will see his "seed" because he died for them and intercedes for them, but they're not natural his descendants. This is what's called in theology a limited atonement. It is based upon this atonement that Jesus now intercedes. In Hebrews 2, Jesus is said to have given himself *for the people given to him* from the Father (vs. 13). The writer says in 2:11, "...both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified *are* all of one..." It's only because the Father gave the Son his congregation (or brethren) that the eternal

Son came and tabernacled or lived (John 1:14) with us and why, "...He is not ashamed to call them [us, the church] brethren." This directly correlates to two other passages in John's Gospel. In John 17, before Jesus prays for all of the future elect (his brethren) for which he also came to die (vs. 20) he says in vs. 9: "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours." Earlier in John 6:37 we can see: "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me..." In that Jesus' single sacrifice was made on the Cross to redeem all the elect from every generation literally from Adam to the last it is the same Gospel that says, "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." 1 John 2:2. Of course, not all are given to the Son by the Father. Jesus' atonement was an accomplishing work. It was a definite work. It was a conquering work. It was a purchasing work. It was a God-the-Father-and-God-the-Holy-Spirit-glorifying work. The work of the Cross is primarily an inter-trinitarian action. God met the conditions of it for his church, his bride. God laid the sins of the world (the elect from its every corner and generation) on the Son so that in time the righteousness of the Son could be laid upon all the whosoever. One sacrifice for all the elect. That is what John means here when he says, "He Himself is the propitiation...for the whole world" in 1 John 2:2. When this work is seen in its foregone intention it shines brighter. This is plan a with God.

Imputed righteousness is best seen in light of an exalted Lord. The Son is said to mediate for believers in many places. In Hebrews 8:6 God says that Jesus, "Has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises." Jesus mediates, but *only* because he first gave himself for his people. It is this giving that creates a bona-fide offer of salvation for all men. What was Jesus' offering? Was it merely his death? No. It was *both* his life *and* his death that was proven accepted in the heavens by his miracles, teaching, Resurrection and Ascension. Jesus was always God. There was never a time when the Son was not. He laid aside the prerogatives of Deity to live here for a time. Philippians 2:5-9. In that passage, Paul says,

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death*, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name.

Notice the "therefore" at the start of vs. 9. Regarding mankind, why was Jesus, "Given the name which is above every name?" Ever heard of someone, "Making a name for themselves?" Jesus did that among men to a much higher degree than any mere man ever could. His name was made on earth, above the earth, and under the earth. It is because of the obedience of Jesus that God the Father is said to have exalted him. He was worthy of that exaltation for all eternity being always truly God, but his works are what they were in real time. Among his creation, he now has the highest name. It is *because of that exaltation* that he now can be said to be living to make intercession for his church. Hebrews 7:25. We have a living righteousness based on the present intercession of righteous Jesus. That current intercession is based solely upon his forever-finished Cross-work. So, we don't only have a righteousness in Jesus *because he died*; we have a righteousness in Jesus because he died *and now lives*. I've been in the military for over twenty years. I now have four kids all under twelve years old. At one point, none of them had an ID card of their own. On numerous occasions, as we approached a military

installation or Army fort, I'd ask them how they were going to get on post? I would then relate it to how any of them will ever get into heaven. They don't get on post with their own ID card. They get on post *because they're with me*. Likewise, no one gets into heaven with their own righteousness. At no age does that become so. People will get into heaven because (and only because) they're with Jesus. Being with Jesus means being born again. It is Jesus' name that opens the gate. He earned that name. "And one of the elders said to me, "Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals." Revelation 5:5. Even though he was always God over us, he was not always The Resurrected Godman. His plan, from before we were made, was this world and the earning of that glorious name. Everyone reading this will bow before that name in one way or another. Philippians 2:9-11. It is by the righteous name of Jesus, the exalted one, that we're saved.

Imputed righteousness is best seen in light of the perfect intercessor. After considering Jesus' eternal mediation based upon his finished Cross, consider how the following statement from Job relates to the idea of the scapegoat in Leviticus 16:21-22, Isaiah's vision of the cleansing coal in Isaiah 6, our righteousness based on the rock who is Christ alone (numerous), and to Isaiah's propitiatory sacrifice in Isaiah 53. Job said:

*"If I am condemned,  
Why then do I labor in vain?  
If I wash myself with snow water,  
And cleanse my hands with soap,  
Yet You will plunge me into the pit,  
And my own clothes will abhor me.  
"For He is not a man, as I am,  
That I may answer Him,  
And that we should go to court together.  
Nor is there any mediator between us,  
Who may lay his hand on us both.  
Let Him take His rod away from me,  
And do not let dread of Him terrify me.  
Then I would speak and not fear Him,  
But it is not so with me."* Job 9:29-35.

As Peter would much later explain, Job, along with all of the OC saints, in their various ways, was looking ahead and "...prophesied of the grace *that would come* to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the Gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into." 1 Peter 1:10-12. The problem of unrighteousness had come from Adam. All types of angels were there to witness it. Job, like all the prophets of God before Jesus, was looking for a worthy mediator *that he knew he did not himself have*. We now have it. We have what Job longed for in a perfect mediator. Job longed for someone to mediate between him and God. He knew that God was not a mere man to be convinced or to be contended with. We see hints in this of the necessity of a man who is more than a man. Of an intercessor distinctly more qualified than any human defense attorney. To go between God and man, who more fitting than a man who is truly God? Job longed in the

sufferings of his life that someone would go between him and God. Reader, this was Job looking forward to Jesus the Christ. Job, like us, needed a mediator. We know who he is. 1 Timothy 2:5. When Jesus died and rose he redeemed Job also. Job didn't know that in a sense, his mediator was right there the entire time. He simply hadn't become flesh in that day. If you could today take the message of the Gospel to Job in that ash heap, what might you begin to tell him?

Imputed righteousness is best seen in light of an innocent Savior. Christ was imputed sin. The wrath Jesus entered in to was not earned by him. Jesus didn't deserve the wrath that was poured out on him. Jesus didn't earn the punishment for sin because he had sinned. He never sinned. Hebrews 4:15; 7:26; 1 Peter 1:18-19; John 8:46; 1 Peter 2:22. Instead still he was imputed with sin. He was for a brief time counted as a sinner. He was "numbered with the transgressors" as Isaiah said (53:12) being killed on a cross like ten thousand others, and with criminals on both sides of him. Jesus said in John 3:14-15 that he would be "lifted up" just as Moses once lifted up a bronze statue of a snake on a pole in Numbers 21:4-9. The symbol of the serpent has always been one of sin since the Garden of Eden. Jesus made himself the anti-type of the statue's type they later called Nehushtan. 2 Kings 18:4. A bronze image of a serpent was lifted up on a pole? That's odd imagery until Christ came and died on the Cross. Jesus was "made sin" on that Cross outside Jerusalem. He epitomized sin. He represented fallen humanity on it to represent redeemed humanity after it. Romans 5:19. Whoever looks to Jesus lives eternally just as they were healed temporally with Moses who looked to that bronze serpent. Jesus healed from a far deadlier snake bite. The perfection of this type of healing is entirely lost unless the idea of an imputed grace is brought to bear upon it. "Just look and you're healed?!" That's an imputed healing. Just look and you're forgiven? That's an imputed sort of salvation. It wasn't "look to the serpent and then suck out the poison" or drink this antidote. Jesus was punished on the Cross as the embodiment of sin in a way no mere human sinner ever could be. *Namely—In an imputed way.* Mary could not suffer for sinners. Moses could not. Abraham could not. Peter could not. You could not. I could not. All of us are sinners. Romans 3:23. Christ alone, the only exception to Romans 3:23, is sinless and is also, as God, the one to whom restitution for sin was due. Therefore he sets the terms for its pardon. He suffered the full and infinite wrath of God in a finite period of time on the Cross. That was the cup he *alone* could drink, and which no mere human could because he alone was sinless. Matthew 20:22; 26:42. *Reader, imputation carries the idea in Scripture of something not earned yet received.* In this sense, every good gift given to us is imputed by God in most senses of the term in that they are all unmerited. Grace is imputed to us. Forgiveness is imputed. Love is imputed, etc. 2 Corinthians 5:21 is all over this letter on purpose. It reads: "He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." There is a two-way imputation I want you to see here. Christ was sinless yet was literally imputed SIN. So, to the second part of the passage, "...that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Here we have imputation of something now to us. It is righteousness we receive and furthermore a righteousness that is "in Jesus." *The idea must be carried over that we no more earned this righteousness than Jesus earned our sin. Both were proportionately imputed things.* God made him sin to make us righteous. This is the Cross in imputation.

He himself took upon himself the burden of our transgressions; he gave his own Son as a ransom for us, the holy one for sinners, the blameless one for the wicked, the righteous one for the unrighteous, the incorruptible one for the corruptible, the immortal one for mortals. For what else could cover our sins except his righteousness? Who else could justify wicked and ungodly people like us, except the only Son of God? Oh, sweet exchange! Oh, unsearchable work! Oh, blessings

that surpass all expectation! The wickedness of the many has been swallowed up in a single righteous one; the righteousness of one has justified a multitude of transgressors! Even before Christ came, God showed us that our nature was incapable of achieving life. Now, having revealed the Savior, who is able to save what could not previously be saved, God has willed by these truths to persuade us to trust in his kindness, and reckon him as our nourisher, Father, teacher, counselor and healer, our wisdom, light, honor, glory, power and life. (Letter to Diognetus. Chapters 9-10. Circa AD 130).

Imputed righteousness is best seen in light of its perfection. Righteousness, in the truest sense, can only be righteousness in perfection. Partially poisoned water is poisonous water. Even our righteous deeds are never in this life entirely free from our sin. When we say however, for example, that “God is righteous” what we have in mind is his righteousness in its perfection. I contend here in this letter, dear reader, that this is the only sort of righteousness God will accept, and hence this is why we need the literal righteousness of Jesus to ever overcome judgment. The satanic pseudo-hope that God calls us even to somehow combine the righteousness of the Son with a righteousness by obedience is destructive on par with those who mixed circumcision with the Gospel in Galatia. Galatians 5:2-12. To add a treasury of merit is to subtract Christ’s merit. *We are not brought into the Faith or made perfect by the flesh!* We are made perfect by the Spirit *only* in imputation. This is what helped change Luther from his monkery, when he understood Romans 1:17 as speaking of that righteousness whereby God justifies his children, and not of the righteousness whereby God is himself righteous. Luther, in his commentary on Romans, wrote:

I greatly longed to understand Paul’s epistle to the Romans, and nothing stood in the way but that one expression ‘the justice of God,’ because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore, I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. [...] Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that, ‘the just shall live by his faith.’ Then I grasped that...through gift and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. When I saw that Law meant one thing and Gospel another, I broke through.

We too need to see this righteousness as a perfect gift to us. It is the gift of the Son himself. Righteousness is life, and it doesn’t come without the Son any more than the Son comes without this righteousness. “He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.” 1 John 5:12. No one with more than a cursory understanding of the Christian religion needs help connecting the very person of Jesus with the life we invite all men to. Jesus grants us his righteousness. It is that alone that brings us to life to walk in the newness therefore! Romans 6:4; 8:2. This is why Paul contrasts NC righteousness with what he once thought was OC righteousness in Philippians 3:9. When he saw the Son on that blessed road, the veil was lifted and he intrinsically understood imputation from that very day on. He rejoiced in a righteousness in Christ that was one hundred percent already his (Romans 5:1-2) that was one hundred percent perfect (Romans 4:5) and yet one hundred percent “not his own!” Not “of the Law” or “of his flesh” etc. We must hear Paul about his Messiah. He wrote that at the end of his ever-laborious life he knew to pray to, “...be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith.” Faith. Life. Christ. 1 Corinthians 1:30. Paul was granted the righteousness that Jesus the Godman earned by his earthly work. He was granted life in Christ. This righteousness he left all for is one hundred percent perfect because Jesus is one

hundred percent perfect. It's *his righteousness*. It is the pearl of great price when spoken of in doctrinal and not personal form. Matthew 13:45-46. It's untouched by any other man. This is its purity. We destroy it by opening the box. Metaphorically speaking, just like something hermetically sealed is immediately contaminated if taken out of its package, no matter our disillusioned intentions, we sinners cannot handle a perfect righteousness without dirtying it. Without defiling it. Without nullifying it. This is Paul's letter to the Galatians. To imagine we can is to in essence say we needed two men to die on the Cross for us. Like certain waters are fine to drink until you stir up the sediment beneath, we cannot at all muddy this righteousness. A righteousness of faith can only be trusted if you have no hands in it. Oh, we will strive in all we do to honor it, but not to in any way merit it. This is not a doctrine for carnal men. I've often thought of this in the following metaphor. Imagine you're given the task of packing your own parachute, and those of your family, and that you have no experience packing parachutes. Would you trust them with your lives? Now, what if your chute was packed by a world-renowned parachutist with over 10,000 jumps under her belt? She's packed them for you, and has signed off on them legally saying they're good to go? How about then? I used to be a parachute rigger myself for military aircraft of both assault and passenger style. I packed hundreds of the ACES-II ejection seat chutes for A-10 aircraft. I assure you, it's a most technical process. Would you feel safer if that person had packed your chute? Imputed righteousness is somewhat like that. The moment our work becomes a part or measure of righteousness's stability it's called into question at best. No. Instead, Christ has himself packed the chute. It's perfect. He's the best parachute rigger in the universe. He is world-renowned. The foundations and fundamentals of what's gone into the packing of the chutes are sound. A new covenant righteousness is one that entirely removes the efforts of those forgiven thus making every believer literally, "...sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Hebrews 10:10. Read all of Hebrews 10:1-10 for a perfect description of the perfection we have received via our relationship to the living Jesus. Cf. Hebrews 7:19. A perfect righteousness is the only explanation for a grace this intact. Our hope is in the faithfulness of God entirely. That's why we can trust it. He has brought his promises to pass. We have the Spirit as the inherited promise to all of Jesus' seed. Isaiah 53:10; Romans 8:29; Galatians 3:14; Ephesians 1:13; Acts 2:33; Joel 2:28. Our hope, based upon the righteousness brought to us in Jesus is one that literally, "...We have as an anchor of the soul, a *hope* both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." Hebrews 6:19-20. If we have Jesus, we have the righteousness he has earned. It cannot be otherwise. This is how our sin is forgiven in him. It is forgiven by imputation. I'm not trying to separate Jesus' righteousness from Jesus. That cannot be. I'm trying to highlight how receiving him equals receiving his righteousness. He is who we need and his righteousness is that which we need.

There was a glorious day that I became a Reformed believer. I was greatly troubled by God, and I went to a field in Tampa, FL around sunrise with a Bible in hand to wrestle with John 6, 17 and Romans 9. I believed I was understanding Jesus and Paul and I was very pensively stepping forward after months of agony. I left my tiny apartment that morning a bit mad at John and Paul and told my wife I had to go and "get this settled." I left that large grassy field off Fletcher Avenue nearing sunset fully convinced that God was sovereign in salvation. During that at times verbal shouting struggle, God through the Scripture was removing all of my hopes for salvation from my works. Some of it was easy. Some was really hard. On that day, I saw salvation in its Romans 8:29-30 context. He removed evangelism. I did a lot of that. In the light

of John 6 and Romans 9, Scripture said, “That’s not why I love you.” He took away water baptism. I had done that. God said, “That’s not why I love you.” He took away my resisting fornication with my new wife before we were married, and resisting all the fornication before I met her for two years before as well. God said, “That’s not why I love you.” God was taking away false assurances to establish the true. Looking back, I can now describe it like this. I felt like I was standing on the edge of a bottomless pit on top a stack of flimsy plywood sheets. It felt like falling would mean death. Each sheet was being yanked out from underneath me one at a time and I didn’t like it. I felt unstable and at risk of falling off. It felt like I was losing my footing and was going to fall. As each sheet was pulled out, I’d stumble onto the next one in the stack just below it. God soon pulled out the “my decisions” sheet or the sheet often called “free will.” God said, “That’s not why I love you.” It wasn’t because I made the right choice to believe that he loved/redeemed me. That’s a conditional love. All of those sheets of plywood God removed were me putting my hands in the mix and muddying the waters of Christ’s grace. They would pollute it. They are leaven. Titus 3:1-5 told me it was of no works. Cf. Ephesians 2:8-9. Romans 9 showed me that God chose me, and why that was my only boast. I fell off that cliff after the last sheet was removed and was caught by Christ. I understood something after God made me fall off the cliff. It was the most stable foundation I’d found. I had him. Suddenly I knew what it truly meant to stand upon so firm a foundation. Just like I can’t trust a parachute I had packed, Christ was a sure foundation because I did not have my hands in his work. To stand upon Christ means you’re indeed one hundred percent saved by works, *just not yours*. This is imputed righteousness. It is righteousness from the perfect Christ, because of the perfect Christ, and in the perfect Christ. It is a foundation so firm that heaven and earth will pass away before it does. This is the rock that Abraham, Job and Isaiah couldn’t yet fully articulate, but that Peter, Paul and the rest rejoiced on. And I have no basis to stand on it unless I’m in Jesus.

It is this “New Covenant righteousness” that Paul explained in Philippians 3:7-9 as was cited at the very outset of this letter. *It is this righteousness the Jew was to in one sense abandon the Law for.* Galatians 3:24-25; Romans 9:30-33; Galatians 2:16. Our forgiveness in Christ’s perfect righteousness should be as clear to us as our perfect condemnation was made by the Law. “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all.” James 2:10. You’re either under the condemnation of the Law, or you’re under the forgiveness of the Lord. Romans 7:1-6. Both are easily understood.

Consider the contrast made by this former zealot Paul in Romans 10:5-9. Try and read the following passage with one question as a handrail: “Can one’s performance ever be part of such a righteousness?” “For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, “The man who does those things shall live by them.” But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down *from above*) or, “Who will descend into the abyss?”” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” Like the serpent on the pole, look up! Be healed from the serpent’s bite. Look to Jesus. He lifts up the head. This righteousness of faith is a present and now at hand reality. It is not a proclamation of what one can achieve, but a proclamation of something achieved. By this “you will be saved.” It is a “Hear ye, hear ye, the door to heaven is now open over here” kind of a thing. On the Cross “...Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished...said, “It is finished!” And bowing His head, He gave up His



spirit.” John 19:28a, 30b. You don’t ascend for what’s where you are. You don’t descend to what’s right next to you. There’s nothing you can do to attain this except trust in him. You can only receive what’s already done for sinners.

*So, where does our righteousness come from?* It comes from Jesus, not at all from ourselves. He is our Savior without co-savior. It is *his* righteousness we receive when we receive him. This righteousness is his intrinsically in one way and earned in another. He is the king forever, but he earned his name through his life’s work among us as I’ve already discussed. It is not by our merit, but by an inheritance bought for us that we are brought near to God. Titus 3:4-7.

The idea of adoption is presented to us in Christ. Adoption is when a non-child is made a child by a would-be parent. Consider well Galatians 4:4-5: “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.” Cf. Ephesians 1:5. It is not our “adoptability,” but the fact that God wanted to adopt us that made us his sons and daughters.

Another lucid description of this “other righteousness” is what we read from Paul in Romans 3:21-22 where he writes: “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe...” Martin Luther called this a righteousness that is “outside of us” using the Latin phrase “extra nos.” “Outside of us” is just Luther’s way of saying “inside of Christ.” We can indeed rightly speak of it as an “alien righteousness.” It is a righteousness foreign to us. Alien to us. By the Gospel, it’s sown in our lives like seeds from a sower, Jesus said. Mark 4:1-20.

This righteousness is never separate from the actual person of Christ. 1 John 5:11. We have this righteousness in life *only* because we are in fellowship with Jesus the Christ himself. Because he called us by name to come to him. John 6:44. Still, it can aid many of us to conceptualize our marital union with him as something external to him, or as something of a thing exchanged between us like rings in a wedding. It isn’t something we take to ourselves away from him, but such analogies can help us conceptualize it in its “gift-like” manner. Especially when we know we’ve sinned and can hardly imagine him present. The Apostles clearly speak of “it” as something we receive from God, but the gift of righteousness *cannot* be without the person in whose name it comes. Again, I simply wish to stress that the only way one can receive this gift is to be in a marital like union with Christ. Romans 7:1-6.

Another way to think of an imputation of righteousness is to compare it to a monetary debt. Let’s say that a person’s sins against God incur a one billion dollar fine. The doctrine of imputed righteousness teaches that Christ’s righteousness being applied to that sinner pays one billion dollars toward the debt and not one fraction of a penny less. It is a full payment. This is therefore a “perfect payment.” The gift is life in Christ itself, John 8:12; 17:3; 3:15; 2 Timothy 1:10; John 10:10; Psalm 36:9; Ephesians 2:8-9. That life is perfect.

Receiving a perfect righteousness is receiving the perfect Savior. I once heard a story. Its author is unknown to me. I’d like to share it as I believe it illustrates and underscores a wonderful analogy of the Gospel.

A wealthy man and his only son loved to collect rare works of art. They had everything in their collection, from Picasso to Raphael. They would often sit together and admire the great works of art. When the Viet Nam conflict broke out, the son went to war. He was very courageous and died in battle while rescuing another soldier. The father was notified and grieved deeply for his son. About a month later, just before Christmas, there was a knock at the door. A young man stood at the door with a large package in his hands. He said, "Sir, you don't know me, but I am the soldier for whom your son gave his life. He saved many lives that day, and he was carrying me to safety when a bullet struck him in the heart and he died instantly. He often talked about you, and your love for art. The young man held out his package. "I know this isn't much. I'm not really a great artist, but I think your son would have wanted you to have this." The father opened the package. It was a portrait of his son, painted by the young man. He stared in awe at the way the soldier had captured the personality of his son in the painting. The father was so drawn to the eyes that his own eyes welled up with tears. He thanked the young man and offered to pay him for the picture. "Oh, no sir, I could never repay what your son did for me. It's a gift." The father hung the portrait over his mantle. Every time visitors came to his home he took them to see the portrait of his son before he showed them any of the other great works he had collected. The man died a few years later. There was to be a great auction of his paintings. Many influential people gathered, excited over seeing the great paintings and having an opportunity to purchase one for their collection. On the platform sat the painting of the son. The auctioneer pounded his gavel. "We will start the bidding with this picture of the son. Who will bid for this picture?" There was silence. Then a voice in the back of the room shouted, "We want to see the famous paintings. Skip this one." But the auctioneer persisted, "Will someone bid for this painting? Who will start the bidding? \$100, \$200?" Another voice shouted angrily, "We didn't come to see this painting. We came to see the Van Goghs, the Rembrandts. Get on with the real bids!" But still the auctioneer continued, "The son! The son! Who'll take the son?" Finally, a voice came from the very back of the room. It was the longtime gardener of the man and his son. "I'll give \$10 for the painting." Being a poor man, it was all he could afford. "We have \$10, who will bid \$20?" "Give it to him for \$10. Let's see the masters." "\$10 is the bid, won't someone bid \$20?" The crowd was becoming angry. They didn't want the picture of the son. They wanted the more worthy investments for their collections. "Going once, twice, SOLD for \$10! The auctioneer pounded the gavel. A man sitting on the second row shouted, "Now let's get on with the collection!" The auctioneer laid down his gavel, "I'm sorry, the auction is over." "What about all the other paintings?" some shouted. "I am sorry. When I was called to conduct this auction, I was told of a secret stipulation in the will. I was not allowed to reveal that stipulation until this time. Only the painting of the son would be auctioned. Whoever bought that painting would inherit the entire estate. The man who took the son gets everything!"

Christians believe in imputed righteousness. It's about the perfect gift of Jesus himself. Imputed righteousness is the only counter to the damnable sin of self-righteousness. If you're picking apart the story above in self-righteousness saying, "But the gardener gave \$10," it's just a story, and such will always fall short somewhere. The point is that it's the son's image taken by the gardener that prompted the inheritance by the will of the dad. The story above parallels the God-breathed parable of the Pearl of Great Price in Matthew 13:45-46 in many ways. When we see the Son, when we know the Son (like the gardener) we'd not only give 10\$, but everything to honor him.

### **Setting the Stage for the Clarity of Romans Four**

Perhaps the key to understanding the perspicuity of the doctrine of imputation is found in Romans chapter four. In it, Abraham is referenced in some detail, Moses and the Mosaic

covenant is alluded to, and David is mentioned before Paul reveals that he's taken us through it all to explain the inner workings of the NC itself in the lives of believers today. And all for a very strategic purpose—to explain the fullness of a righteousness by faith alone to a church that's now to both know and steward the fullness of God's revelation to humanity in Jesus the Messiah. Jude 3. To fully understand the tactical point of chapter four, it helps to understand at least something of the first three chapters. In summary, the first three chapters show us the empirical fact of Original Sin. We're all born sinners and we all live that out. Romans 3:9-18 is God's anthropology. At the very least, we must understand Romans 3:21-31 to fully understand why chapter four begins with a deduction. Romans 4:1 begins with, "What then...?" Paul continues with his message about a righteousness of faith at the end of chapter three into chapter four and his talk on Abraham and the rest.

I'd like to post Romans 3:21-31 (NASB) as we move to consider Romans four.

But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. Or is God *the God* of Jews only? Is He not *the God* of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one. Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law.

When's the last sermon you heard on the "law of faith?" I will attempt to summarize this passage with verse 24 that Christians are now, "...justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." This is justification by faith alone, aka the, "Righteousness of God through faith." I must resist commenting on just about all two hundred and twenty-two English words here so that I can move on to a primary focus in chapter four, but I simply cannot resist just a few summary comments that I trust will help as we go on. Here, in this most delectable passage, from its start and throughout it respectively, we see that something amazing has been revealed by God in Paul's day. "But now..." he says at the start. Of course, this is all in light of the Cross that Paul understands by faith as an Apostle. Paul wants to tell of it, and he has been preparing his readers for it by first presenting mankind's deep-rooted predicament to them for nearly three chapters. This "Righteousness of God" (vs. 21) is newly understood, is revealed by the whole OC, and now, after the Ascension of Jesus, has been revealed as a righteousness "Apart from the Law." What is it? It is the universal (Jew and Gentile sized) teaching about "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ" (vs. 22) which comes to all by faith and faith *alone*. We see that everyone (Jew and Gentile) has sinned (vs. 23). What does that mean? It means that the Law (think Ten Commandments) is a witness against us all before God and that we'd all do well to heed its dreadful report. Have you broken the Law? God's answer: yes. We can see that the "justification" we're now hearing of that comes from Paul's Gospel is one given, "As a gift by His [God's] grace" (vs. 24). Justification is our full pardon before God, and it is a "gift." Such an idea is literally a theological synonym for imputed righteousness. To teach imputation is to teach unmerited grace. To teach imputation is to teach gift. A case Paul's to make more clearly in chapter four. Justification means to be actually and completely presently

pardoned. In 3:24, we see that this justification or “redemption” (gorgeous word) is one available only “in Christ.” After all, no one else died and rose again who’s God. Jesus is indispensable. We see that Christ’s blood was shed (vs. 25). Remember how we talked already about the need of this? We see the “propitiation” concept clearly related to Jesus’ own blood offering here. He is the sacrifice made. Again, recall our context from the OC sacrificial system. We see that there is no “boasting” in oneself *by virtue of the very mechanics of this now manifested-apart-from-the-Law type of righteousness* (vs. 27). No one can boast in themselves *and* in this “Christ-kind” of a righteousness. A key truth is in vs. 28. Here we see that the justification mentioned is, “Apart from the works of the Law.” That means it doesn’t come by the Law at all. Vv. 27-28 then show a remarkable contrast between what we speak of as “works righteousness” and “Christ righteousness.” Many men, not all, but many men in Israel misunderstood the grace that was given to Abraham at the start and came to feel that their bloodline or performance under the Law (think rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-22 or the arrogant Pharisee in Luke 18:9-14) was enough. The Hebrews were to pursue God in the Law, but they were not to trust in themselves in that pursuit. The prophets knew this. They were to bank on mercy. They were to trust in God’s promise of grace to their people, and to obey the Law in light of it. Paul will soon reveal why because he’s seen its pinnacle truth in Jesus. The fact now revealed in the reality that *no one was ever justified by the Law* says Paul, shows that there’s something else to the Law. It’s not useless or ineffective because no one can keep it. There’s another reason it was given between the times of Abraham and Jesus. That something is grace. *Sola Gratia*. It was the black velvet placed under the diamond. That grace is what Paul’s now detailing strategically in Jesus. His objective is to magnify the Cross. There is no boasting in this kind of perfect righteousness except in the perfection of this righteousness. There is no room for self-exaltation. No achievement system. No meritorious accreditation. No treasury of merits open for deposits or withdrawals. *There is simply no self-righteousness in it for those in it.* Why? Because it’s not man’s righteousness! If we could be sinless there would be boasting. The truth of this NC righteousness makes honorable, profitable and useful all of the Law of God. Vs. 31. Again, both the Law and the prophets (vs. 21) most certainly do bear witness to this righteousness splendidly. They all show us who Jesus is, why we call him righteous, and then help us understand the necessity of the grace he freely provides. Again, we cannot pack this parachute and still trust it fully. It must rest solely on Jesus. If it does, if we can trust in Christ alone, as counter-intuitive as it is when we partake still of milk, then we’ve begun to understand the Faith. If we learn this, we’re simply learning well about the rock of our righteousness, the rock upon which the church was built. If we learn this, then by God’s grace we can truly be assured of his love and covenant faithfulness to his people.

### **Romans Four and Galatians Three**

Romans 4:1: “What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?” This is the first time Abraham is named in Romans. Now, what was the centerpiece of Paul’s reasoning in 3:21-31? A righteousness whereby men are justified in a way that is witnessed to, attested to, or made evident by both the Law and the Prophets. I see this as both Law and Prophets standing behind what Jesus taught constantly saying, “Uh huh, yep, that’s right.” Paul doesn’t speak that much about prophets in this section, but references to the Law abound. Anyone who reads the Bible knows the association of Law with Moses. The Mosaic Covenant is the covenant of the Torah. Now, the Exodus with Moses is most often dated to about

1445 B.C. But when did Abraham live? About 2100 B.C. Paul now jumps in time back past Moses to Abraham. Abraham came long before Moses. This is so very important since Abraham is the principle patriarch of the Jewish religion. God comes to him first. Abraham's story begins in Genesis 11 and ends in Chapter 25 covering about a 100 year period. Abraham is a grandson of Noah's son Shem. That's how far back he goes. He is first before Moses hence patterns set with him in the Faith become patterns throughout. That's exactly what Paul wants us to see! God showed him this in Christ. Paul has set us up for a talk on Abraham for three full chapters now. He's about to begin talking about the solution to the SIN problem that chapters 1-3 reveal. We are made to see the predicament over all first so that we can see more clearly the answer of God's grace that's been given throughout nearly all of human history with Abram and his seed. Grace teaches us to deal with Abram. We can understand why God came to anyone in light of grace. But grace not only teaches us to deal with him. Grace teaches us to deal with Adam and Eve after the Fall, with Cain after Abel's death, with Noah, with Melchizedek, etc. No sinner merits grace yet God's giving it. Then we see him get specific to a seed with Abram very early on. We see the dreadful anthropology of God over all of humanity summarized in 3:9-18. We see that the Law can't justify in 21-31. Why go back to Abraham then? Paul wants us to understand precisely where all of the hopes of Israel came from. That it did *not* start with Moses. That God did *not* renegotiate what he said to Abraham between Abraham's time and their own, but that the Law with Moses instead comes after the promises made to Abraham to further root them in Christ. God is shown as the laborer at work in his vineyard preparing a global harvest. The Law gives cognitive depth to the grace of God promised to Abraham and his descendants, which included those to whom the Law was given, like black velvet reveals the sparkle in a diamond. While Paul is *not* discarding the Law, what Paul wants us to know is that the hope of Israel wasn't *in Israel's* Law code keeping or even in Israel's Law code itself. It was instead always in the free mercy and faithfulness of Israel's God. In the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Please hear me: the covenant God made with the Hebrews officially began with Abraham. And that covenant (which was again made long before Moses) was based on a promise from God. We need to understand that promise if we're to understand the justification Paul wants us to understand. It is what Paul says, "...that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?" (vs. 1).

All of the points to follow will not directly relate to the doctrine of imputed righteousness, but I want you to know some things about this man Abraham who all those in Christ can rightly call a "father." Since the doctrine of grace alone is so closely linked to imputation, this can help us in many ways.

Though he's referenced throughout the Bible, Genesis 11-25 is Abraham's story. Moses, the greatest prophet of the OC, is given the story of Abraham by the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit. Abram, whose name was changed by God to Abraham in Genesis 17:5, was the primary patriarch of the people of Israel. Abram was a grandson of Shem, Noah's son. It's just after the Tower of Babel that the Scriptures trace his bloodline. His dad, Terah left Ur (modern day southern Iraq) and moved to Haran (modern day Syria). Luke, under inspiration, records how Stephen, the first NC martyr in Acts 7:2, tells us that God had appeared to Abram while they were still in Ur, before Terah had moved them to Haran. Many Bible translators rightly choose the past tense "...had said to Abram" in Genesis 12:1, I believe, for this purpose. After his father's death, Abram moves down south to Canaan. Abram's story really picks up in chapter twelve. He was seventy-five years old when he left Haran (12:4). He goes to Egypt because of a

famine in the land and is made even more wealthy while there. It doesn't say he was wealthy in 12:5, but it is implied. He had servants. By 13:2, however, he's surely rich. This is after leaving Egypt. God funded his people through Egypt a lot. After he separates from Lot (13:14) the land promised to him and his kids is reiterated to him by God in greater detail, in the specific place of modern Israel.

It's in Genesis 15:6 that the word "imputation" is first used reference the righteousness given to Abram by God. Paul makes a great deal of this and shows us why we must too. Genesis 15:6: "Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness." (NASB). The Hebrew word for "reckoned" here is the verb **כָּשַׁב** or *chashab*. Strong defines it as: "To think, plan, esteem, calculate, invent, make a judgment, imagine, count." It's translated as **ἐλογίσθη** in the LXX, and is used by Paul here in Romans 4:3 (and elsewhere) as **λογίζομαι** or *logizomai*. Righteousness was imputed (credited or reckoned) to Abram upon his belief in God's promise for the first time, specifically regarding the promise of descendants. Abram got a promise from the God who called him from Ur, he believed it, and he was credited or reckoned righteousness in doing so. I will stop for a brief moment to cite just a few of the numerous sweeping parallels that this has to the Gospel of Jesus Christ that we are similarly to believe: John 6:28-29; 5:24; 6:47; 11:26; Acts 13:39; 13:48; 15:11; 16:31; Romans 10:9-10; Mark 1:15; 1 Corinthians 1:21; Galatians 2:16; 3:6; 3:22; Ephesians 1:13; 1 Timothy 1:16; Hebrews 4:3; 10:39; James 2:23; 1 Peter 2:6; 1 John 3:23; 5:5.

God's guarantee to Abram of the land grant is with the animals in 15:9-21, but this was only ratifying what Scripture says plainly was previously credited to Abram already when he believed the word of God's promise beforehand. Briefly, in case the reader is unfamiliar, in the ancient near east, covenants were often ratified between two parties when an animal was cut in two pieces and the parties would walk through the midst of them together. It is odd to us, but it's just how it was often done. Here's the chronology thus far: God approached Abram and made him a promise, Abram then left his homeland with his family, God later reiterates the promise to Abram and we're shown some of its details, Abram believed God's promise, Abram is reckoned or credited righteousness in believing God, then various establishments for Abram's sake ensue here to show Abram that God is committed. In Genesis 15:7, after faith is reckoned in 15:6 and after he's told that he and his family (though at this time he has exactly zero children) is to inherit the country he's in, Abram asks for some sort of a proof. He asks "...how may I know that I will possess it?" (vs. 8). God responds to this, *after righteousness has already been imputed*, and tells him what to do. God knows Abram's customs (vs. 9). He is condescending to communicate his commitment to redeem people from Adam's sin. Abram prepared the prescribed animals. God delays the ratification. Abram then falls asleep and "horror and darkness" fall upon him, and *in his sleep, in a vision*, God shows him that he (God) alone moves through the animals for them both. *It is clearly meant to portray a one-sided thing*. It's not that Abram's not involved. There are always the recipients. Always the participants. It's just that Abram simply couldn't bring any of it to pass. Always remember that it was God who first approached Abram in Ur to start it all. I've been to the site of Abram's alleged home in southern Iraq. I've walked in it. I'm sure it was the region, but no one really knows exactly where the man lived. If it's it, or even close to where the man actually lived, it sits only about fifty meters from the Ziggurat of Ur which dates to Abram's time there. That ziggurat was not built to honor Yahweh. His people were not in fellowship with the God who called him out from them. If God did not come to him, Abram never would have entered into anything with God. In the custom,

Abram would have expected to walk through the animals with God, the other party to the covenant. But he doesn't. He's fast asleep in vs. 12. Can you see the significance of this? It's a one-sided promise. We have to ask why God entered covenant with a man this way? Scripture doesn't expound upon the significance of God alone walking through the animals directly, like its authors do on the unmerited grace of God in the covenant it conveys, but I venture based upon all of the Bible that the picture of God's sovereignty in it all would've been incomplete if God hadn't set it up as a mutual agreement *and then* put Abram to sleep to show him that he alone passed through the animals. Abram sees a vision of God passing through the animals in vs. 17. Both parts here involve Abram but communicate the mechanics of God's covenant with Israel of grace alone. God's dealings with Abram here are essentially his way of saying, "Abram, I've got this." His descendants would need to remember this throughout their history. Romans 9:29.

Galatians and Romans contain many doctrinal parallels. Permit me an excurses to Galatians for just a moment to aid the subject we're in. By chapter three, Paul is explaining the fundamentals of how they, his readers themselves in Galatia's various churches, had been made alive in Christ. Galatians 3:2-3. It may sound strange to us today to think of people needing to have it explained to them just how they were saved, but it isn't. Now, the Gospel gets presented, and God calls men to life thereby. That's the standard pattern. It's simple. It was through hearing alone that faith came to them and bore its normal fruit among them. They (many of them) had received God's Gospel when Paul first preached it to them. Then, after he left to continue that missionary trip, they (at least some of them) were abandoning it in the serious doctrinal confusion being introduced in the region. He explains to them in his letter to them how people are made Christians alone by hearing the Gospel. Now again, we may take for granted at times the understanding that the Scriptures bring us in salvation today, but these first century Galatians didn't have 66 books to ponder at their leisure throughout the decades. Like us all, but in a much more pioneering sense, these people had to be taught how God saves. This is how God did it. Through written letters. This is how we now know too. As heresies came into Galatia after Paul left, he had to write to them to explain some other things concerning what he had preached to them already, and why/how it was that God moved in their hearts. He had to distinguish it from the reports of what some others in the region were teaching. What he explained to them forms the basis for the doctrine of imputation that I'm arguing for here.

Many of the Galatians had been called through the Gospel. And so, those who heard it were naturally obeying it. Many were loving God and loving their neighbors as any Christians would by virtue of their new hearts. They were seeking Jesus, and thus turning from sin. They saw Paul's miracles. But they were being told afterward by others that just faith alone was not enough and some of them believed it. This problem was widespread in the days of the Apostles. And somewhat understandably so. The church as a whole was in her infancy. We see in Acts 15:1 what prompted the first big pow wow of the Apostles over the false teaching on circumcision in Antioch. Here it is: "And certain *men* came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." It was much the same that was going on in Galatia with the Judaizers there. By the same twisting of those who presented themselves as believers in Jesus and of grace there was a serious problem that Paul, the Apostle of peace, adamantly and emphatically condemned as "another gospel." 1:8-9. We see that at least some of the Galatians were beginning to, "...observe days and months and seasons and years." Galatians 4:10. This means they were sort of seeking to bring in all the customs of Judaism back on top of the Cross of Jesus as necessary parts of the NC. These false

teachers were saying that certain works were required to be obeyed for Jesus to actually save anyone. Paul had to tell them how adding works to faith, or even just one work, *even one as historic as circumcision*, was as bad as denying the Faith altogether. Quickly let me say that the danger here is in *adding works to justify*. Works do sanctify us, but we dare not imagine that they justify us. Christ's righteousness imputed justifies us. Solus Christus. Christ alone. If we never did one single work of devotion, like a thief on a cross who yet comes to him, we would have all of our sins pardoned as God saw fit to draw us in and would be that day in paradise with Jesus if we died. Justification is that state in which we have peace with God, and it comes entirely apart from works. God puts us there, we don't. The "foolish Galatians" (3:1) weren't doing works to honor salvation. That would be expected. No, they were believing that their works merited their salvation. That was the problem being addressed and condemned in the letter. Jesus plus anything equals nothing. If they saw it as the consummation of God's grace in them, they would be perverting grace to something entirely no longer of grace. This gets Paul into his great discourse on the difference between Law and Gospel. Galatians 5:3, etc. One compliments the other until you confuse which one justifies. They were in danger, not of losing any true salvation, as if that were possible, but they were in danger of making a doctrinal mishmash of the Gospel and "falling from grace" in the sure understanding of its truth. All of this matters in Paul's message to the Galatians because he here will talk about what Abraham means to the Christian Faith in remarkable ways. The Galatians must understand the difference between promise and works or they will not understand justification by faith alone. If they don't understand that they've been justified by faith alone they will seek perfection falsely when they don't need to. For some, this may lead them to destruction. For others, it may just confuse them. To both, and for all, God inspired this letter through Paul. Reader, Moses was justified by faith alone just like Abraham was. We will not polarize Law and Gospel if we understand the Cross.

It is not by obedience to the Law, but by "...hearing with faith" (Galatians 3:5) that Paul reminds them that first drew their hearts to Jesus by the Spirit. God justifies us without compulsion. He doesn't justify those who can justify themselves by obedience. Now it should be mentioned that Law keeping for the godly Jew wasn't bad. They were commanded to keep the Law. Now that Christ has come, however, to try to continue under the Law is actually a rejection of both the Law and of God altogether. The Law was to give way to the Gospel of Christ (Galatians 3:24-25). Paul is zealous in the letter to his beloved Galatians to demonstrate that salvation is by God's grace "alone." They didn't earn it any more than Paul did. Any more than Abram did at the start. God elected. God calls. Hearing and obeying the commandments given to you, at any time, is the evidence of God's calling. Such is the vocation of the heart of flesh. There is no room for any meritorious works in Christ because there's no room in this righteousness for any boasting in ourselves.

Paul expounds upon God's promise made to Abram here for the Galatians as well to underscore the same point he belabors for the Roman Christians in Romans 4 and throughout—that God saves by the free gift of righteousness. By imputation. By grace. The point is faith in Christ through God's grace alone. As he does in Romans, to teach them this Paul goes back to the covenant God made with their father Abraham for a reason. Paul reveals to them that the Gospel of God is actually a plan that included all the nations from the start. His point is that faith and faith alone is how men are brought into the perfect justification they enjoy in Christ. Consider all we've talked about already about Abram in Genesis as you read the next text. Paul says in Galatians 3:15-18:



Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is *only* a man's covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it. Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as *referring* to many, but *rather* to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ. What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

Abram is fast asleep as God alone symbolically walks through the pieces. That's the ratification of the covenant that is based on God's promise alone here. This cannot be altered afterward. What's fascinating is how Paul directly links the promise made to Abram to Jesus himself. When we connect Abram with Jesus directly, as heads in the covenant, we see that circumcision was not prerequisite for Abram to partake of the covenant either. They were anathematized by Paul who taught otherwise. Paul is teaching that Christianity is the fulfilment of the promise that the Law complimented, not an outworking of Law keeping or circumcision. In the passage above, Paul teaches that the promise was made to Abram yet was ultimately contingent upon Jesus. It was a promise made to Jesus, a (the) descendant (Seed) of Abraham. "...the promises were spoken to Abraham and to [his] seed"...that is, Christ." Vs. 16. It's not that the promise meant little to nothing to anyone until the time of Jesus. Not at all. But what we can say ultimately today is that the promise to Abram included the Gospel to the world that didn't begin going out in its NC scale until the first century. Its fulness was enacted only as the NC in Christ's blood was. The triune God granted righteousness to the elect in and around the Hebrew people's times, in any sense that they were ever to be found a people, as those looking forward. We now, the redeemed among all the nations, look back to the same incarnation as the basis for our salvation as the work of the triune God. Even before Abram, the Cross was the only reason God forgave. The only reason God saved eight people on the ark was because of what the Son would come and do. The only reason God covered Adam and Eve in their sin was because of what the Son would come and do. The only reason God delivered Israel from Egypt is because of what the Son would come and do. All of God's elect in any age have the grace of God by faith. This is only made more precise with the children of Abraham and laser-focused to the participants of the NC. Ultimately, God is justified in extending righteousness to sinners in every age because of what Jesus did during the incarnation. This is the essence of promise. Without the life and works of Jesus there would be no forgiveness truly possible. God would be unjust to forgive anyone for anything outside of the Cross. I know that I beat the same drum as I write, but I know how repetition helps. Paul's teaching is that salvation, from the start, was ultimately always based upon promise, and not in obedience to the Law the nation was much later given.

The Mosaic Law came 430 years after Israel, near the end of his life, had the promise reiterated to him by God as he moved down to Egypt around 1875 BC. The God of his father Isaac, and his grandfather Abraham reiterated the promise to him. The promise was always given to the Israelites as something given by God to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The promise was carried through from the triune God through the triplex patriarchs. *The Law was added to the promise; not the other way around.* Paul is teaching the Galatians, as he taught the Romans, that just as Abraham received a promise and so was credited righteousness, so had they heard a promise directly from God and also

therefore, by the same pattern of grace alone, were credited righteousness. We all needed to learn this. Thank God for the Judaizers. And yes, I meant to say that. All of God's grace toward his people is communicated to us by faith and, as always, apart from works. We are all of us, as regarding our justification, like slumbering Abram. Then we work like Abraham too when we're made alive in the Spirit, James 2:17; John 8:39; Romans 3:27; Ephesians 2:10; Titus 3:8; Matthew 3:8; 7:21; 1 John 5:2; Philippians 2:12. Paul shows that God made a covenant pact with himself and that he never renegotiated it. Not with Moses, not ever. It's all of grace alone by faith alone that we partake of it. The triune God will do it. The promise is both made and met within himself, included Abraham, and as such eliminates all boasting in true religion while bringing many sons to glory. Like in Romans, Paul then goes on to reason that the given righteousness of Christ in no way contradicts the Law. The inheritance is everything, but it doesn't come with the Law. This means it doesn't come because of our obedience. It doesn't come because anyone's good enough on their own. If it could then Paul says clearly that such an idea would, "Set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness *comes* through the law, then Christ died in vain." Galatians 2:21. Paul is a wonderful extremist. The inheritance is received. The inheritance is what Abraham was promised. We now know that that inheritance includes the Gospel (salvation in Christ for all the elect). Paul teaches the Galatians clearly that, "If the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise." 3:18. What's the point? Justification by faith alone is the point. It's that our glorious inheritance is based on promise. This will not nullify the Law unless we mess up the order of things. Promise. Folks: "He [Abram] believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it [the inheritance and everything we now know has to do with it] to him as righteousness." We have to try to wrap our minds around this. From the hour this was granted it was never revoked. Everything and everyone involved with it was promised fully. It all came with God's prescriptive will, but we know it's all according to his eternal secret will because it's all of grace. Ephesians 1:11; Deuteronomy 29:29. God swore it and God did it. God's covenant faithfulness is the only reason we can have hope in Christ. The Galatian and Roman Christians were made to see this too.

Abraham knew that the promise was of a son through Sarah. He knew it was a promise of protection. He knew it was a promise of land. We now know that it was ultimately a promise of the Christ who would much later come through his preserved descendants. All of this was the promise he in seed form believed and was thus credited righteous by. I will resist commenting through all of Hebrews 6:13-20, but I highly recommend the reader go there and read it before proceeding.

God made a sure and unchangeable promise to Abram and to his descendants. If you're in Christ tonight, in God's mind, you were part of it. In his promise, he literally swore by himself to fulfill it! Hebrews 6:13 says, "When God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself." The significance of this cannot possibly be underemphasized in any good theology. This was a unilateral covenant. This would be a bit like you and I entering into a binding contract with two signature lines at the bottom for us both to sign, me never signing it, but you still upholding every promise made in it on your end because you never asked for my signature. And that the line for my signature was placed there to remain blank for a reason. There were no expectations put on Abram to do "his part" for God to fulfill

his promises to him...or to us. In many ways this is the point of this letter. When we consider why God chose Abram the only thing we can be certain of is that it was *not* because of Abram! God is adamant about this man and his posterity inheriting more things than even he could ever fully comprehend. God swears he'll do it in one of the only places in the Bible where he ever swore at all. God was making a wonderful point here in it all. The Cross shouts it loudest. Bible Commentators Jamieson, Fausset and Brown make a terrific comment on this saying:

The patriarch did not pass between the sacrifice and the reason was that in this transaction he was bound to nothing. He asked a sign, and God was pleased to give him a sign, by which, according to Eastern ideas, He bound Himself. In like manner God has entered into covenant with us; and in the glory of the only-begotten Son, who passed through between God and us, all who believe have, like Abram, a sign or pledge in the gift of the Spirit, whereby they may know that they shall inherit the heavenly Canaan.

Wow! Reader, I pray with all my heart as I write this here in my little study in Germany that you know this. Ephesians 1:17-23 is my prayer to God for each person ever reading this. I've been writing this letter for at least a year off and on, and much in the past few days as the "mood hit me." Today alone I've been writing for nearly 15 hours straight. I want you to know how this is all about you too. If you love Jesus, then the promises to Abraham are yours. The promise was given in this manner for us as well as for Abraham.

Between the promise first being made to Abram and his being credited righteousness for his belief therein, God first calling him Abraham in Genesis 17:5, and Abraham actually receiving Isaac through his wife Sarah (the son who is literally a fulfilment of the promise) roughly twenty-five years had passed. What have you waited for that long? Abraham had patience. Cf. Hebrews 6:15. In Genesis 21:5, Abraham is one-hundred years old when Isaac is born to Sarah, and Isaac is the very first son circumcised at eight days old in accordance with God's command given about a year prior to his birth in 17:12. In Genesis 16, Abraham has Ishmael through a servant in his home, Hagar. Abraham was eighty-six years old at the time. 16:16. Abraham is ninety-nine years old when he himself is circumcised in 17:24. Scripture makes it clear in 17:25 that Ishmael is thirteen years old when he's circumcised. God blesses Ishmael, but Ishmael is *not* the fulfillment of the promises made to Abram so long ago referencing directly his descendants. Isaac alone would be. 17:21. God is very clear on that. God said that Abram and Sarai (her name becoming Sarah in 17:15) would have a son together. God delayed that birth beyond Sarah's normal years of capability on purpose to show that Isaac was a miracle for the same reason that he took Gideon's mighty men from over twenty thousand to three hundred in Judges 7. Just as it would be clear that God had delivered Israel from the Midianites under Gideon, so it would be clear that God brought Isaac out of Sarah and Abraham miraculously to prevent them from thinking of Isaac as just another baby. At the behest of his first wife Sarah, Abraham puts Hagar and Ishmael out of his house in chapter 21. He's reluctant, but he does it with God's assurance of a blessing remaining upon Ishmael. Paul later reflects on the spiritual meaning of all this in Galatians 4:28-31. After Sarah died in 23:2, and very long after Hagar had been sent away, Abraham took another wife named Keturah in 25:1 who bore him more kids than both Sarah and Hagar combined, but still Isaac alone was the one through whom God's promises made to Abram at the start were carried on. In a sense, not trying to become an Origenist, it is Isaac that formally made Abram Abraham. Materially, it was God. *It is because of the promise made to Abram and carried on through Isaac that I'm a Christian today.* It is beyond the scope of this letter, but Jesus being a descendant of Abraham is the outworking

of God's words to Eve back in Genesis 3:15. Genesis 15:6 is the outworking of Genesis 3:15, spoken of as we've seen here in Galatians 3, and showing up in Revelation 5:9.

In Genesis 22, Abraham is actually told to kill his *only son* (יִיְדִי (interesting phrase)) Isaac. It's interesting because he had Ishmael with him up until just before this when he's sent away in 21:10 with his mother. Abraham is now left with only Isaac. Isaac is the only son he has of Sarah. The son of promise. Abraham is therefore told by God to effectively cancel the promise he'd waited twenty-five years to see fulfilled in his birth. Imagine this. While you do, also imagine that Isaac's probably about fourteen or so years old at this time, so Abraham had been promised something in Isaac now, with all that he'd gone through, for about forty years when he's told to kill him. God provided the ram for sacrifice because of what Jesus would much later come and do. This was another type. Abraham does not end up offering Isaac on the altar. It was a test, but reader, this next part is absolutely crucial to maintaining consistency in our understanding of God's grace. *It was a test, but we must remember that the promise was unilaterally given and righteousness already fully and irrevocably credited to Abram all the way back in Genesis 15:6 roughly forty years earlier.* This means that Abram's crediting of righteousness, which was full and in no way partial, cannot be somehow waiting to be credited or in any way based upon his much later obedience here. If his failure to obey here in offering Isaac could nullify the promise already long before ratified, then all would be lost in talking about the unilateral promise and God's swearing to do anything. If such a case could exist, then every promise of God would solely be based upon every obedience of man, and not one promise I say would ever have been fulfilled. Could anyone seriously even try to carry that through anyone's history except for Jesus'? Could we base God's faithfulness to his promise on Israel's faithfulness as his covenant people? Let's ask Hosea. Of course we couldn't. We must try to wrap our minds around the amazing surety of God's promises brought through this man and through Israel. They literally could not screw it up. Such is why I'm no synergist!

The Apostle James talks of Abraham as well. Some of you reading this knew this part was coming. Many have confused James' words throughout the years. I stand on many of their shoulders thanking them that I think I no longer do...because of them. God is the author of these 66 books. In certain chapters of his book he deals with different issues in different ways. It's masterful beyond us all. I find James' words like a second lung, a perfect complement to God's free grace and all that Paul said. His inspired contribution on works are like a right hand working perfectly opposed with the left hand of grace in the full counsel of God. Just as a body has many members, so does a theology. We must have a sound theology of both works and grace. James' words show us beautifully how much we must never proclaim this salvation by grace alone apart from works. His epistle is written to, "The twelve tribes scattered abroad." James 1:1. Part of his message to his audience is to tell them to get to work. Just as no farmer can expect to reap a harvest without sowing seed, so no Christian should expect holiness without obedience. Churches are made up of individuals. Individuals must bear fruit to be said to be members of the church. Jesus said plainly that, "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit." Matthew 7:18. In vv. 15-23, in what's a sweeping litmus test for both teachers and individuals before God, Jesus here talks to us of being able to know what's inside trees by their fruit. By what they produce. By what's on the outside. This is for us, not for God. God infallibly knows what's on the inside. 2 Timothy 2:19; John 21:17; 2:25; Isaiah 46:9-11, etc. Jesus gave similar teaching in many parables about fruit demonstrating true and false conversion insofar as we sinners can hope to tell. This seeking of fruit works both in right belief and right living.

James calls his people to action with statements like, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” James 1:22. This is exactly what Jesus said all over his teaching with statements like: “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” Luke 6:46. Jesus called men to believe to be justified (John 6:29; Luke 18:9-14; Matthew 11:28-30) then to get to work to be sanctified. Matthew 5:16; 21:28-32; John 6:27 (again there are no works to justification, but there is no sanctification without them). James is no different in this application than his master is. Neither is any other inspired writer. Good trees bear good fruit. Christians calling others to that is healthy. James was filled with a righteousness not his own also. That new life he’d been given prompted him to action. As an Apostle of Jesus, that action prompted a letter.

James, directly indicating his intention for writing the letter, asks his readers plainly: “What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?” James 2:14. A faith without works is a dead faith. Vs. 26. *That kind of faith* doesn’t save because that kind of faith doesn’t exist. That’s not faith. Only one kind of faith comes from God and it always produces fruit. Pastors today, following the pattern of Christ and the Apostles or Scripture writers, will speak to groups collectively in which they know there’s some bearing fruit, and some not bearing fruit. Their words will be delivered in such a way as to encourage what can be encouraged, and to correct what can be corrected. That is what we see with James to his readers. Faith is a living faith as much as Jesus is a living Savior. We will not all be an Apostle James, but we will all love God and neighbor if Jesus is in our everyday lives as author and perfecter of our faith, Hebrews 12:2. The writings of both James and Peter are chalk full of this. So are Paul’s and everyone else’s. James is teaching nothing different. Luther couldn’t see this in his milieu. And I can hardly fault a man for having a weak western front when he’s been engaged viciously to the east for years. How does a teacher “perfect” his students learning? With assessments and practice. How does God teach his own? With assessments and practice. This is not the enrollment. A father disciplines a son born to him as the son grows and the son had no say in under whom he was born. Those enrolled are those being taught. James’ readers are showing favoritism and disrespect to poor people. James 2:1-4. They are failing on several fronts in at least one of their congregations in unjust partiality, and James is correcting them. James is essentially telling them that their walk has got to match their talk. This is not a message exclusive to him.

Alistair Begg, in a book introduction to the Epistle of James, wrote:

James continually called for obedience to the law of God. He never referred to the ceremonial law, but to the moral law. While some people think James is at odds with Paul about the Christian’s relationship to the law, both authors actually combine to give us a solid understanding of the OT law. Paul showed believers that Christ met the demands of the law and, thus, brings us to salvation. James showed believers that their obedience to God’s moral standards is an indication of a living faith, which is a life lived in step with the one who met the demands of the law. Some choose to oversimplify the distinctions between the OT and the NT and say the OT is grounded in works and the NT is grounded in faith, but James brings both testaments together to show that faith and works are intricately related in both the old and new covenants. (CSB Spurgeon Study Bible. 2017).

All of the Scriptures show God’s grace, both OC and NC. There is perfect complement in God’s inerrant word throughout. No one teaches a justifying grace without works. No one teaches works that merit justification. Luther failed to harmonize James’ words with Paul’s which to me is very sad. When James mentions Abraham offering his son on the altar, he spoke

of this work also “justifying him” (James 2:24) just as I can say that an exhale justifies an inhale or vice versa. God tested Abraham and after he obeyed God said, “. . .now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.” Genesis 22:12. But God had already imputed him righteousness and entered into covenant with him unilaterally and by an oath on his own name forty years earlier. So, is this knowing for God, or for Abraham? It’s for Abraham. God tested him to perfect his faith. Once we understand that Abraham’s inheritance was fixed as it was by faith alone then we can see how works justify or perfect him. In this sense, every single solitary work we do for Christ justifies us. But none of them are our “justification.” This is crucial. Justification is always imputed by the gift of God’s grace alone through faith alone. Nothing could stop the promise from day one on because God swore by himself that he would do it from the start. We looked at this. The promise included Abraham by the righteousness credited to him alone. This is nearly all of Paul’s theological argument in Romans four. If James in James 2:22 is not read consistently in that manner that works compliment grace in the human heart then he does indeed plainly contradict Paul to the Galatians who says we’re *not* made perfect by the flesh in Galatians 3:3. No, there is no contradiction.

James in James 1:4 invites all believers to be “perfected” or “justified” by obedience just as Abraham was. Vv. 2-3. James points out the need for tests and trials and uses Abraham as an illustration that such is nothing new. He tells them to expect them in Christ and to rejoice in them all. They confirm calling. Trials and testing from God are the means whereby God produces in us his intended ends. Paul likewise throughout his teaching calls people to examine themselves over time by *how they live*, i.e. by what fruit their lives are producing alongside the canon of truth. He calls the Corinthians to examine themselves and speaks of them perhaps failing the self-test. 2 Corinthians 13:5. James’ call to action in contrast to “dead faith” is exactly the same here for his readers. His pointing out what they *ought* to be doing is a call for them to examine themselves. His pointing back to Abraham’s obedience to God forty years after he was called is a test for them if they’ll examine their own actions according to the words of Christ that they had already been given. Both Paul and James, mouthpieces of God, both teach obedience (fruit) as sure evidence, and salvation by grace through faith alone made evident in Abraham’s life.

A good theology must include both the call to action and a dutiful distinction between them and the unmerited faith giving rise to them. God sent James and Paul here to teach us. We all know that one violin is enough, but two violins in harmony are simply gorgeous. Both men know of Abraham’s story, the grace given to him by faith alone, and also the grace brought to them on the Cross. James is writing to people who profess faith but fail to show it. He likens such to demons. James 2:19. Such are hearers, and not doers. They’re building a house upon sand. Living faith creates no such thing. John clearly addresses the same in his epistles. Obedience (fruit) always makes the difference between types of children. Such must be met with the kind of talk of consummation James confronts them with. What sort of husband loves his wife who never embraces her? How incomplete is the love a mother has for her daughter if she never kisses her cheeks? What sort of a fisherman never catches a fish? Theirs was a dead faith, and not the living faith Christ gives. One might as biblically talk about a cold sun, a good sinner, or a sinful Jesus as a dead faith.

Paul basis everything on a righteousness before and apart from all works. Remember, circumcision long preceded Moriah, and Paul says that Abram was credited righteousness years before he was even circumcised. Romans 4:10. This was not a probation period through Genesis 22. What Abraham found (4:1) in Genesis 15:6 was a righteousness that fully pardons sins and

justifies a person (6-8) and was entirely apart from all meritorious works. 4:5. We'll look at this more in a bit. The righteousness of faith (Romans 3:21-31) was imputed to Abram forty years before Moriah. If we forget this fact, we may fall for the delusions of the papists who deny the sufficiency of all that God gave Abram by faith by removing the "alone" idea they claim Luther put there. Luther was not alive in Abram's day. No, God swore by himself the promise to Abram and *that's where the "alone" was put in, baby*. If we forget imputed righteousness, we forget grace. If we forget grace, we forget the Cross. If we forget the Cross, we forget Jesus. If we forget Jesus, like the now anathematized papists, we may become modern day anathematized Judaizers tipping our hats to grace while seeking to establish our own righteousness by the works of men that we have done. Abraham's earthly story ends in 25:8 when he dies at one-hundred and seventy-five years old. His story of faith continues forever in the church of Jesus Christ. But the only reason we care about Abraham is because of Abraham's God.

In Genesis 12:2-3, God tells Abram, "I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." Because Jesus came through Abraham's line, through Isaac, through Israel, we can now see how the promise was actually fulfilled in God's overall redemptive history through this bloodline. It's impossible to imagine that this man could see the populace in Revelation 5 as the specific fulfillment of this, but he did know he'd be the father of many nations. That's what Abraham means.

How others saw the promises of God fulfilled in their time is abundantly clear. Between the promise first being made to Abram and the NC, there's a time span of roughly two thousand years. In Luke 1:67-75, the dad of John the Witness speaks of it in this way:

Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant— as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old— salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES, and FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US; to show mercy toward our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to Abraham our father, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.

Zacharias knew of the promise to Abraham. The Holy Spirit had shown all of the faithful this. Stephen clearly sees the protection of Israel in Egypt up to the Exodus as part of God fulfilling his promises as a whole in Acts 7:17 when he speaks of, "...the time of the promise...approaching which God had assured to Abraham." Genesis 15:13-14. Then there's my favorite minor character of the NC, Simeon. Dear Simeon. I really can't wait to meet this man. In Luke 1:29-32 he says, "Now Lord, You are releasing Your bond-servant to depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation, Which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, and the glory of Your people Israel." This is what the infant Jesus means to him in Jerusalem. It is providentially astounding that Simeon makes this statement about Jesus on the eighth day of Jesus' earthly life when he's being circumcised. Anna also in Luke 1:38 "At that very moment...came up and *began* giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem." My point in citing these various passages is to show just how woven into the Jewish culture of Jesus' day was the promise made to Abraham. There are many more verses we could cite. God started it all with Abram. He's our pattern therefore in so many things.

## Romans Chapter Four

The Christian Gospel, if we're to understand it maturely, demands an understanding of imputation. I've attempted to frame that argument well before going through this chapter. We've looked to many places. To Jesus, to Paul, to Isaiah, to Moses, to Hebrews, to Luke, to Peter, to John, to Abraham and more. We contrasted it with Romanism briefly. We did all this to look with more focus. We must see the perfection of who Jesus is and what he's done to see the perfection which he offers. Scripture frames that perfection. As we now go through it briefly verse by verse, I hope you can see more clearly how strategic it is of Paul in Romans to take his readers all the way back to Abraham after writing to his readers in detail about the condition of sin in a world fallen in Adam. You should be able to draw heavily from our previous examination as you move through Romans four. Briefly below *seriatim*.

Romans 4:1: "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?" Remember, this is a conclusion Paul is drawing from in his previous argument at the end of chapter three. He goes all the way back to Abraham here on purpose. If no one is justified by the Law of Moses, and if all of the nations, even those not given the Law, demonstrate this fact, then what can we say about Abraham who came long before? What did he "find" with God? What did God give him?

4:2: "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God." With our mention of promise with Abraham and Law or works with Moses, I trust you can see why Paul would easily be able to make the juxtaposition here between the two with his readers. "Justified by works" is not a concept fully introducible until the Law was given. It is under the Law that performances under it begin to be measurable. It is by the Law we can see we fail by the Law. Please reference Galatians 3:24 as what I feel perfectly complements Romans 3:31. Yes, Abraham had circumcision. Yes, he was obedient to God's command to offer up Isaac, but none of this preceded Genesis 15:6 where he was imputed the righteousness that set him entirely and irrevocably at peace with God. Romans 4:6-8. None of this preceded that same day when the promise was made sure by God ratifying the entire promise unilaterally with Jesus next to snoring Abram. Sin became Adam's problem when he lost his freedom of will and fell by sinning into death. Genesis 2:17; Ezekiel 18:4. He then reproduced after his kind himself being the head of humanity. We all born afterward then were born dead in him. Romans 5:12; John 8:34; Ephesians 2:1-3. Sin is mankind's problem. Sin was therefore Abraham's problem too. *But Abraham would have no problem with God at the judgment from Genesis 15:6 on.* Paul is the one who makes this much of it here in Romans four. Whatever Paul is saying here reference Abraham and the idea of being "justified by works" it's evident that if Abraham had any such claims to his being credited righteousness as a result of his works, even those with Isaac on the mountain, then he would have something to boast of. If Abraham had *anything at all* to point to for why he was the inheritor of all of his blessings from God *other than the condescension of God himself*, then he would surely have boasting. Since his faith is like ours, by grace alone through faith alone, he had nothing to boast of. The reason Abraham cannot boast is the exact same reason we can't boast who are in Christ today. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." Ephesians 2:8-9. The righteousness of faith (Romans 3:21-31) denies boasting entirely. Things being as though they were—totally unilateral, Abraham found a righteousness entirely boastless. This is the patterned start.



4:3: “For what does the Scripture say? ‘ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.’” There it is. What did Abraham do to be credited righteousness? He believed God. Cf. John 3:16. Did he offer up Isaac to be credited this righteousness? No. He believed. Did he obey circumcision to be credited this righteousness? No. He believed. Did he depart from Ur to be credited this righteousness? No. It hadn’t even been disclosed yet. He believed when it was given. Did he intercede for Sodom and Gomorrah to be credited this righteousness? No. He believed. Did he rescue his nephew Lot in allegiant warfare with many of the kings in his day to be credited this righteousness? No. He believed. Did he give tithes to Melchizedek to be credited this righteousness? No. He believed. Did he take Hagar to be his wife to be credited this righteousness? No. He believed. Did he *not laugh* at the announcement of Isaac’s birth when he was nearly one-hundred to be credited this righteousness? No. He believed. *Before everything he did in response to the promise* that perfected his belief throughout the last hundred years of his life, he first simply believed. Thus he is God’s saved child. And to hell with any who give him the credit to boast. Before anything he did in response, he was imputed righteousness. The basis of Abraham’s righteousness is God’s unmerited grace toward a sinner like him. Sound familiar? I hope it does. It’s the same foundation in grace you and I can have today. *Reader, Paul is going to teach you here in Romans four that by grace through faith alone is exactly how you and I receive our righteousness as well.* We must respond, but before we can even do that, God must come to us. God had to come to Abram in Ur like he must come to us in ours. All the rest is footnotes after that. In Abraham we have the model of imputed righteousness for the faithful in what we now have the privilege of calling Christianity. No other righteousness will do than one that comes intact and unmixed from God alone. As it was with Abraham, so it must be with us. As it was with Abram, so it was with all of the faithful throughout Israel’s spotted history. The idea is later developed in redemptive history by the sacrifices for sin as a foreshadowing of the life of Christ that must be given to make it all possible, and thus of his sinless blood that must be shed, but from the beginning we have been taught that the sacrifice of the Son alone can atone for man’s sin. The NC is clear that Christ accomplished what nothing else could regarding mankind’s sin. Abram simply partook of that righteousness on credit. Abraham’s righteousness is a specific shadow, just like the lamb’s blood spread on the doorposts in Egypt prior to the Exodus was, while Christ’s righteousness is the figure casting its shadow over it all. All of God’s dealings with Israel were of Jesus’ free grace. Once you add this fact to the fact that everything Abraham received, he received only as part and parcel of that initially imputed righteousness then the doctrine of imputation will be fully established and traceable throughout all of the Bible. It will undergird the Law as Paul wants it to. God wants us to know that our righteousness in Christ, the one that Paul proclaimed, the one made perfect through all that we’ve learned and endured, is not based upon anything except that we too believed a promise. We can then trust this parachute without doubt, “...for He who promised is faithful.” Hebrews 10:23.

4:4: “Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due.” There is no point to this passage unless that point affirms that what Paul means to communicate here is the utter freeness of God in this covenant. God does not hire laborers who earn the wage of his forgiveness. If I work for the United States Government, my paychecks are not gratuitous. They owe me. If I don’t get paid by DFAS on the first and fifteenth, I can complain about it. Paul’s point is that there’s no such paychecks with God. That God is no man’s debtor in salvation. Such an idea would introduce boasting. If I’ve worked and I don’t get paid, my argument to my employer is that I’ve performed my end of the bargain and so I “deserve” my

pay. No such argument can be made by Abraham. This verse says exactly what Ephesians 2:8-9 says: “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” It is amazing just how much the doctrine of free grace ties together the entire Bible.

4:5: “But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.” Such is the case with all who are of the Christian Religion. You cannot work *for this grace* and think you’ll get anything. That’s not a salvation by the Cross. This knowledge should put us hard at work. We work for Jesus! God justifies “the ungodly.” He does not first, by man’s merits, seek to make the ungodly godly in order to do this. He justifies the ungodly. Justification is not the end of our road, it’s the start of it. Such is why we have earth-shattering statements like Romans 5:1-2 after the pattern set here in chapter four. God doesn’t have Paul carry forward his thoughts on Abraham here by citing Abraham again by name. Paul could have accurately said here, “Abraham did not work, but only believed in Him who justifies the ungodly, and his faith was credited as righteousness.” He could have said it like this, but his teachings here clearly go beyond Abraham to apply to all more broadly. He purposefully begins in this sentence with, “But to the one who...” to expand the reader’s thinking to the reader himself. This is a purposeful transition that constitutes the point of the chapter—namely that Abraham’s kind of promise/imputation-based righteousness is exactly like the righteousness given to believers in the Gospel of Jesus Christ today by faith alone. We next see that the concept of justifying free grace was known to King David as well.

4:6-8: “Just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: “BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED. “BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT.”” This is what Abraham “found” with God. Notice the repeated broad terminology used again here. It is strategic to make this OC teaching NC teaching. By necessity, since Paul’s now citing David who lived about a thousand years after Abraham, we have to see that what Paul’s stringing together here is the pervasiveness of God’s free grace throughout the entire OC. The OC figureheads of Abraham, Moses and David are all purposefully in view with Paul in this discourse because God’s grace through imputation was the hope of them all. This is to say that God himself was their hope. Because we’re now talking about a myriad of the redeemed in the OC, and since David’s being brought in to testify, Paul speaks purposefully about people besides Abraham. *Any man*, like Abraham, to whom God “credits righteousness” is blessed in this way. Paul is expanding his reader’s view here purposefully. Abraham is a type, but he’s not the only one who received this imputation. This is to all who are of like faith with Abraham. No doubt this is exactly what Paul conveys here. What Abraham found with God, how he found it, and when, is everything to every one of us. Paul is laboring the point of grace here. We can’t easily miss it. Notice further that it is, “Apart from works.” This passage only fits with a salvation entirely of grace from start to finish. Further notice of critical necessity that this righteousness spoken of here is one that places a person firmly in the position described. Any person in this righteousness, like Abraham once was, will not have his sin held over him by God. Period. That’s perfection. That’s just what Jesus does. That’s what this righteousness looks like. He’s forgiven for his lawless deeds. He’s blessed to that degree that he has peace with God. If just one sin shattered the globe in Adam, then I surely cannot have one sin still between me and God if I now am said to have peace. All of my sins must have been dealt with. Where? On Calvary. That’s where. “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die

to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.” 1 Peter 2:24. By his wounds...I... This is precisely why Jesus says things to his own like: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.” John 5:24. The idea here is that the believer has *already* passed into life. That he will not come into judgment. It’s an already thing. Paul says Jesus’ same words like this: “BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT.” When would I have to give account to God for my sin? At my judgment. If I have Christ, however, he’s told me that I will not ever enter that kind of judgment. This is peace with God. I have it. I have it by the Cross. This is why Paul can later in the book say, “...WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.” Romans 10:11. This is why John later reflects that, “Whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” 1 John 5:4-5. This is what Abraham found with God. Abraham found Christ’s imputed righteousness. Abraham found Jesus. He just didn’t know it like we do.

4:9: “Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also?” For we say, “FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.” One of the major themes of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that the wall between Jew and Gentile has been broken down. Ephesians 2:11-22; Galatians 3:28; Acts 15:12-19; John 3:16; Matthew 28:19-20; Colossians 1:27. We are both groups given access to God by the same splendid faith. All the believing (John 3:16) have access to God by faith in Jesus Christ. Here we also see how Abraham’s “belief” is called “faith.” That it was Abraham’s “faith” in God’s promise that was his credit of righteousness. Faith is itself the credit of righteousness from God. With it comes everything. Do you have true faith in Christ? Then you have everything of him you can ever have as a direct result. You should grow in holiness, in sanctification, but you cannot grow in justification except that you can grow in the knowledge of justification. This faith in the NC is spoken of as a gift obliterating boasting? Why? For the same reason such was true of Abraham, because it is apart from works. Vs. 2. This imputation of grace is for the world. Abraham was promised this.

4:10: “How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised.” Again, God commanded circumcision long after Ishmael was born. It was given to Abraham many years after the promise was, and just before Isaac was born. Paul’s point in this is very simple and of utmost importance. It is one of chronology that leads to theology. If Abraham was credited righteousness *before* he was circumcised, then the righteousness he received from God logically simply *cannot* be contingent upon the obedience of circumcision. Paul is saying that Abraham was justified *before all works*. Understanding this is the very apex of what it means to say that Abraham was credited, reckoned or imputed righteousness “based on promise” or “by faith alone.” Again, I cite what was said earlier: “For if the inheritance *is* of the law, *it is* no longer of promise; but God gave *it* to Abraham by promise.” Galatians 3:18. God gave it to Abraham, all of it, by promise, not by Law, not by works. All that is of faith is of promise. All that is of promise is of grace. All that is of grace is of God. Paul is the one that shows us the significance of Genesis 15:6. This grace was never renegotiated by God as we saw. Not in Israel. Not among the Gentiles. We today are saved in Christ in this exact same manner of grace. John 3:16; 11:25-26.

4:11-12: “And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, and the father of circumcision

to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.” Over in Galatians 3:8 Paul said that, “The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, “ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU.” Abraham was justified by imputation to set a pattern that fits Jews coming to Christ, and heathen coming to Christ as well. We all receive signs when we believe. I was water baptized after I believed as is fitting. I have taken of the Lord’s Supper after I believed. I have evangelized many after I believed. There are many works I’m commanded to obey. They all perfect my faith. They are all signs of my love for Jesus. But the Cross is my salvation. I am a responder. Nothing more than a recipient of mercy by God’s free grace.

4:13: “For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.” “Heir of the world” is not a phrase we see in Genesis. I can easily, however, tie this apostolic expression to the promise to Abraham in Jesus. I can tie it in thematically that Jesus, the Last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45) regained what the first Adam lost. Genesis 1:26. Jesus teaches: “Blessed *are* the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” Matthew 5:5; Psalm 37:11. If you have Christ you have everything that is inheritable with God. This truth prompted Paul to ask these same believers a few chapters later: “...if God *is* for us, who *can be* against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” Romans 8:31-32. Peter speaks of the inheritance we have when we are in Christ in 1 Peter 1:4, etc. Abraham had the triune God’s personal promise. We do too. It’s the same God over us both. This phrase here “the righteousness of faith” is precisely where we started out in this treatment. It is this “righteousness of faith” that Paul is zealous to reveal to the world having seen it delivered in the Cross of the Messiah. Jesus died according to the Scriptures. Paul is proving it through the promise fulfilled and showing in this why the Law actually never failed even though all men failed under it. Jesus did not fail under it. He was sinless in all ways. He exalted it and made it honorable for over thirty years as a man, and throughout eternity. He came to fulfill it as such. Matthew 5:17. And then to institute a better covenant in his own exalted name. We don’t get our inheritance through the Law. No one did. We get it through the one who fulfilled the Law. Solus Christus. Soli Deo Gloria.

4:14: “For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified.” Repetition is the mother of all learning. The redundancy of this text ensures that we don’t miss it. Paul is saying here that if obedience to Moses’ Law renegotiated the terms of the promise made to Abraham then everything has changed. If law-keeping, even just if we imagine this to one’s best ability, brings about the blessing then God has changed the terms of his grace by adding a condition to it. This, Paul says, wouldn’t just augment the promise, but it would “nullify” faith. This is precisely why he responds how he does in Galatians. Because it would make the promise in Christ “void” to add our works as the means of attaining this grace. Performance measuring would destroy it. He says that if that’s the case then the promise to Abraham has been completely voided out. This is not the case! Obedience was never a prerequisite, even if it is a necessary proof after the fact. You needn’t be circumcised to inherit this promise. Neither did Abraham, the one to whom it was first given. God gives all of his saving graces freely or not at all. But none of this means the Law served no purposes. Not at all. We’ve talked about this throughout in many ways. It led men to Christ to be justified by faith, Paul said. Galatians 3:24. It was and still is pedagogical. It still teaches. It still directly addresses

the conscience. It is still, as CH Spurgeon called it, “Our ablest auxiliary” in preaching. It still leads men to Christ to be justified by faith. It takes them to the end of the Grand Canyon to show them the distance between them and God. It takes them to the door of the plane at thirty thousand feet and bids them to jump so that they’ll look for the parachute Christ alone can pack. Just look at how Jesus used the Law throughout his preaching to do so. Remember, teaching imputed righteousness, the righteousness of faith, establishes the Law. Romans 3:31. *If the Law was the means of righteousness, then God failed in giving it.* Since it was never the means of attaining righteousness, which is exactly what we’ve proven here, then we establish it in every way in its actual functions in grace.

The Law was added by God among his nation for many reasons. I can point to at least a few of them. It reflected his character, held them accountable for sin, established the very definition of “good” whereby God’s people would see the uniqueness of their Christ later on, helped form the basis for their entire legal code and more. None of these functions was to remove the promises made so long before to Abraham, a patriarch higher than Moses. Men need a rule to obey. Jesus didn’t leave us without commandments either. The Law’s purpose was to point us to the need for a salvation apart from it. Just like a soldier is made to appreciate his soft bed after a month in the field, so the Law spaded the hearts of the elect for the seed of the Gospel. Such preparation by the Law, when in the hands of the Spirit, makes Christians. In Galatians 3:19, Paul asks and answers, “Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions...” The Law showed what sin was. It was a target set up that all men had to pass by and ask themselves why they could never hit its bullseye. In Romans 7:7, Paul writes, “...I would not have come to know sin except through the Law.” Because of the Law the wise know the great need they have of the Savior. The fool casts its message behind them. There is a principle in Scripture that has served me very well to remember. It’s this: “...he who is forgiven little, loves little.” Luke 7:47. Like our dear sister that day with Jesus, as well as what appears to be recalcitrant Simon, we too need to know what we’re delivered from. Such helps us love much. *The Law hammers home just how much we’re to love.* So, by God giving us a Law so expansive, so deadly, so accurately diagnosing our fallen condition, he increases our knowledge of his grace and mercy respectively. Our conscience then becomes a witness of the Law to the Lord Jesus. He is indeed both, “...just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” Romans 3:26. The Law shows us our just condemnation. God is not evil. We are. The Law shows us the depth of the amazingness of his unmerited grace. The Law shows us what’s so amazing about grace at all.

4:15: “For the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation.” The Law makes men transgressors. A written code becomes a witness. Even for just the establishment of civil governments on earth it was amazingly wise of God to give us Law. God defined sin to leave the church with no reason for not understanding SIN. Seeing the pervasive nature of sin in all men, Romans 3:23, connects us to the Fall of Adam in a way that evidences the Genesis of the problem none of us were there to witness. God says that the Fall of our first parents has affected us all. That in fact we’re all born spiritually dead as a result of it. Romans 5:12. How can we know? None of us were there. No human Scripture author was there. One sure way is the Law given to Moses bearing witness to the universal sin problem we all have. The Ten Commandments define sin for us all. 1 John 3:4 reads, “Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.” No matter how badly we may miss what sin is in the heart, we have a legal definition that brings a sober clarity to the matter that cannot be denied by any conscientious person. Adam received a verbal command while still in the

garden to not eat from one tree. It was from the receipt of it that his rebellion became transgression, free will was lost, and death came in. It is the same with Israel who'd received the Law. Romans 5:14. Even the consciences of the Gentiles have always born testimony to the Law of God in many ways. Romans 2:12-15. No one is guiltless. Even Gentiles are judged in part by a violation of their own consciences. On top of this, Israel's awareness of sin was heightened with every jot and tittle of the Law. The Law, in that we've all broken it, showed the Hebrew, and shows us still the only other option—grace. Question: where did God first begin to reveal that only other option? I hope you see how clear it is that God began to reveal the solution to humanity's problem with Abraham. Jesus did it all.

4:16-17: "For this reason *it is* by faith, in order that *it may be* in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, (as it is written, "A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU") in the presence of Him whom he believed, *even* God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist." The latter part here, dealt with again in the next part of the text, talks of God bringing Isaac as the one through whom the covenant would continue from Abraham and Sarah in a miraculous way, beyond their ages of normal fertility. Genesis 17:17. Isaac's name means laughter and will forever bear witness to God's works with them. The first part of the text is seen in its NC unfolding. We see here that it was all done from the beginning "in accordance with grace" for a reason: so "that the promise will be guaranteed..." throughout the Gentile nations and first beginning in Israel. Grace is the foundation of it all in the Christian religion. Sola gratia. Here Paul shows us that God's works with Abraham were perfectly positioned so as to never exclude the Gentiles later in Christ. It was to Israel that the Law and the prophets of old were given. No doubt about it. Some were saved before and during the OC who weren't Jewish, but it was an exclusively Jewish covenant still from the start. Romans 3:1-2. It goes out to all, but it started with one nation being brought in as it grew. When Joshua said to his own people: "If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the river, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" in Joshua 24:15, this choice wasn't an option for people in South America. It was only an option for Joshua because God saved Joshua's ancient grandfather Abraham and made a covenant with him and his descendants making the choice to serve God acceptably even possible. No other nation did this. No other nation had this option. None. Salvation is certainly of the Jews as Jesus said in John 4:22. However, God's plan as we've already said, has always included Gentiles. Paul knows this as the very Apostle to the Gentiles. Romans 11:13; Galatians 2:8; 3:8; 1 Timothy 2:7. Since this global reality was made evident to all of the Apostles through the teaching of God the Holy Spirit, Paul here teaches us that Abraham's freely granted faith was done prior to the Law, and prior to circumcision we also saw already, in order to typify the imputation of faith to men who aren't at all Jewish from around the world. Gentiles are made children of Abraham when they're adopted into Jesus' family. Galatians 4:5-7. "Abraham...is the father of us all" he says here. That's both Jews and Gentiles. All the descendants is a wonderful new idea that fulfills God's promise to Abraham that through his seed he would bless *all nations*. Jesus came and ministered only to the lost sheep of Israel. He knew, however, that his work was for the world. When Jesus said, "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock *with* one shepherd" in John 10:16, I have no doubt that he had in mind the same group he speaks of in John 17:20 where he prays for

believers *yet to come* as his first disciples would go out to obey his Great Commission. The NC church of Jesus Christ is made up of both Jews and Gentiles. We are all of us united in Christ. This ties us all back to Abraham by faith. No Jew today has ties to Abraham that involve God for his salvation unless they be in Christ.

4:18-22: “In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, “SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE.” Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. Therefore IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.” The promise of descendants was in view from the start. God had plans much bigger than Isaac, but it all included Isaac. Abraham believed what he could see. Abraham was a man of faith. Hebrews 11:8; 17. Here we see more meat put on the bones regarding what Abraham’s belief in God looked like. Instead of just hearing simply that “Abraham believed” we see that he was, “Fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.” *That’s what genuine faith looks like.* Who of God’s elect would that not describe? Reader, when Jesus says in John 11:25-26, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die” do you believe him? Are you, “Fully assured that what God promised, He is able also to perform?” I pray you are. He raised several people from death to show who he was, and then also he himself Resurrected from the dead unto eternal life to show who he was. If you believe that Jesus is able to perform all that he has promised you, then you can know that, “Those who *are* of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.” Galatians 3:9. *Sola fide.*

4:23-24: “Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.” It’s for our sake today that God told Moses how he saved our father Abraham. Here we see the purpose clearly set forth of why Paul’s been saying all that he’s been saying in Romans thus far. He is introducing the Gospel, the answer to the problem presented to us in chapters one to three. If we get this, we have the foundation for imputed righteousness in Christ plainly set forth. Abraham was imputed the righteousness of faith by faith alone. “He believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.” Genesis 15:6. *Only a veiled man could miss that Paul tells us explicitly here that we’re justified in Christ today by the imputation of righteousness.* When Paul? When you believe the promise given to you! “...as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.” By promise. Do you know just how detailed that promise has become for us? Do you understand the depth of the riches of the Christian’s inheritance in Christ? It is laid out in holy writ. Do you understand how amazing it is that all of the prophets spoke about this promise that has been fulfilled in Jesus? In our day? It is God’s great grace on display for us that he loved us in the Cross. Jesus has risen. He has made propitiation. Believe the good news and you will be saved. It’s a promise. “For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us—by me and Silvanus and Timothy—was not yes and no, but is yes in Him. For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God...” 2 Corinthians 1:19-20.

4:25: “*He* who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.” Jesus, our sacrifice, was imputed our sin so that we could be imputed his

righteousness. This is the communication of a holy God's grace. This is our justification. This is the basis for our sanctification. This is the footing for the sure hope of our coming glorification.

To Corinth, Paul wrote the following:

If anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.

In Acts 13, Paul is preaching (go figure) in Antioch, a major Gentile church community in his day. He says some amazing things here. It's beneficial before you read this to recall that Paul cites David from Psalm 32 in Romans 4:6-8 attesting to imputed righteousness. I'd love you to see this here toward the end of this letter:

From the descendants of [David], according to promise, God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus... "Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and those among you who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent. For those who live in Jerusalem, and their rulers, recognizing neither Him nor the utterances of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled *these* by condemning *Him*. And though they found no ground for *putting Him to* death, they asked Pilate that He be executed. When they had carried out all that was written concerning Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. But God raised Him from the dead; and for many days He appeared to those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, the very ones who are now His witnesses to the people. And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this *promise* to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.' *As for the fact* that He raised Him up from the dead, no longer to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: 'I WILL GIVE YOU THE HOLY *and* SURE  *blessings* OF DAVID.' Therefore He also says in another *Psalm*, 'YOU WILL NOT ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.' For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers and underwent decay; but He whom God raised did not undergo decay. Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses. Therefore take heed, so that the thing spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon *you*:

'BEHOLD, YOU SCOFFERS, AND MARVEL, AND PERISH;  
FOR I AM ACCOMPLISHING A WORK IN YOUR DAYS,  
A WORK WHICH YOU WILL NEVER BELIEVE, THOUGH SOMEONE SHOULD DESCRIBE IT TO YOU.'" Acts 13:23 and 26-41.

### Concluding Remarks

Sola gratia, sola fide, solus Christus, sola Scriptura, soli Deo gloria. Jesus is the Savior. What he came to bring was his righteousness to man. I pray you see the wonderful continuity of Scripture. I pray you see how clear it is that the inheritance of all of God's people from the start, even from Abraham himself, was always by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to the glory of God alone and that we know all this through the Scriptures alone. I pray that this frees



you in Jesus to serve him. If faith is active in you, the evidence will be that you love him. That you value him above all the devil offers. All we merit is eternal hell. “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).” Ephesians 2:4-5.

*Reader, this is all my Gospel.* It is because of the Cross that I have this message of reconciliation to present to you. Consider your sin before God. I pray that the Spirit of God convince you of it today, and that he shows you the remarkably gracious provision he’s made for men on the Cross. God has saved us. That is our hope. That is our boast. That is our freedom. That is our Gospel. We needed Jesus and we who have come to him have found him the most perfect and blessed Savior. We stand before God cleansed, not because of our own righteousness, but in the righteousness of faith promised to all who are in Christ, the children of believing Abraham, the father of us all.

Thank you for your attention to this letter.