

Romans 3:21-31

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[0 : 00] Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 5, 21. That really famous verse we looked at last week.! God made him who had no sin. to be sin for us.

So that in him we might become the righteousness of God. There's an outline. Having an outline is like a sign of defeat.

When I see an outline it fills me with utter dread. And so I hope not. What it'll do tonight, it'll help me just in getting through the material. I've probably got far too much material. And I want to get through it.

Imputation. So this is the third talk on imputation. And tonight we come to the part where we're going to speak of how God imputes Christ's righteousness to us.

It's a righteousness that is completely outside of ourselves. And we can say it's alien to us. And it is credited to us by God. I became a Christian when I was 17.

[1 : 08] I put my trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. And it's at that point when you become a Christian that God justifies us. He declares us to be and he regards us forever as completely righteous.

When I trusted Christ I didn't understand that. I didn't understand at that point that the righteousness of Christ had been imputed to me. When I became a Christian I'd not understood many of the implications of believing in Jesus.

I guess thinking back those 30 years. I thought being a Christian was being forgiven because of the cross. And then getting on as best as I could with following Jesus.

My point is this. That God did not wait until I had understood the imputed righteousness of Christ. Before he accounted it to me. He justified me.

He clothed me with his son's righteousness. More than that he adopted me into his family. He took away the lordship of sin in my life. He put me in union with Jesus Christ.

[2 : 14] And I was completely unaware of it. I didn't know that I needed those things to be done to me. But God did them. As I put my trust in Christ. And God did the same for you as you put your trust in Christ.

And he does that for every Christian without exception. Even while I had no comprehension of those blessings at all. Do you see what I'm saying? My ignorance was no barrier to God doing those things for me.

In other words for these essential blessings in the Christian life. God does not first have to persuade you that they're true. And then persuade you to agonize.

And pray for them until he finally gives them to you. You know it's not like that at all. It's never like that. Rather he grants them to you in his grace.

And then for the rest of your life you come to understand. You come to understand more and more the privileges that we have in being a believer. In being an ordinary disciple of the Lord Jesus.

[3 : 18] And so the experience of imputation I think is a bit like the man digging in a field. And he stumbles across treasure that greatly enriches our appreciation of the grace of God.

So we're going to look tonight at the imputation of Christ's righteousness to everyone who believes. Point number one. Imputation is common in the Bible and in the world. It's common in the Bible and in the world.

Let me remind you again of what this word imputation means. It doesn't mean infuse like a blood transfusion. That provides you new energy. It doesn't mean inhale.

Like inhaling oxygen. That helps you survive. It doesn't mean impart. As if God were supplying you with part of Christ's blessing.

Imputation is different. It's a change of status. It's often translated as to count as. To account. To reckon with. Imputation is a declaration by God that your sin has been dealt with by Christ.

[4 : 23] And Jesus' righteousness has been credited to you. And so I want to give you some examples to show you how in little details during the Old Testament this concept of imputation was there.

It was a daily attitude. So firstly, Leviticus 7 and verses 17 and 18. All the passages are on your sheet. It gave instruction about peace offerings. And you brought an animal to the altar.

And you sacrificed it. And its death brought pardon for your sin. You ate a portion of it. And the priest ate a portion of it. And then Moses writes this.

He says, But what remains of the flesh of the animal on the third day should be burnt up with fire? If any of the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offering is eaten on the third day, he who offers it shall not be accepted.

Neither shall it be credited to him. It's tainted. And he who eats of it shall bear its iniquity. Moses is saying that the worshipper will miss the benefits of the sacrifice, forgiveness and reconciliation, if he hangs on to the sacrifice for more than two days.

[5 : 30] The benefits of pardon will not be imputed to him. He must destroy the uneaten portions on that third day. He needs to make fresh offerings for fresh sins.

Or again, the same idea as Genesis 3 verse 31, 14 and 15. Rachel and Leah. They're reasoning to themselves about their deceptive father's strange, unloving attitude to them.

What's their dad doing? They say, Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house? Are we not regarded as foreigners? For he sold us.

And he has indeed devoured our money. They weren't foreigners. They obviously were not foreigners. And their father, Laban, was treating them as if they were. Selling them.

Taking all their money. He was imputing to them the status of an alien. In his mind. And by his actions. He was changing the standing of his own daughters.

[6 : 32] He was treating them, regarding them like foreigners. That again is imputation. When the Israelites committed wholesale adultery with Midianite women.

God punished them with a plague. And then Phineas, the priest, took a spear. And he impaled one of the men. And his lover. It was a judicial covenant act.

And it ended the spread of the plague. And according to the narrative in Numbers 25. The Lord rewarded his actions with the promises of blessing. Later. The psalmist recounts the events.

And he puts it like this. Then Phineas stood up and he intervened. And the plague was stayed. And that was counted to him as righteousness. From generation to generation forever.

You are not a criminal murderer, Phineas. For ending their lives. But a righteous man. God said. That again is imputation.

[7 : 34] Apostle Paul in the New Testament. He demonstrates his gracious spirit. In the second letter to Timothy. Where he tells them. He says.

At my first defense. No one came to stand by me. But all deserted me. And then he says this. May it not be charged against them. In other words.

May God be merciful. To those people that abandoned Paul in his hour of need. May their guilt not be imputed to them. So it's really common. This crediting something to a person's account.

Or of regarding a person. As if what was charged to their account was now his. Those who did not stand with Paul. They were guilty of cowardice.

Certainly a lack of loyalty and lack of love. And yet Paul doesn't want that guilt imputed to them. So it's a common enough concept. Both in the ancient world.

[8 : 33] And also today. Imputation is everywhere. You see it in the New Testament. We saw it in Philemon didn't we? Who told this slave owner in Philemon.

That if the runaway slave is in debt to him. For any valuables. That he might have stolen from him. Reckon all that to Paul's account. Impute the debt to me Paul says.

I don't know whether you've seen this in the New Testament. But the Holy Spirit is always taking ordinary relationships. And ordinary business transactions.

And he compares them. To how it is between the Lord Jesus and us. Number one. We were slaves. But our ransom price has been paid.

And now we're free. Two. We are married to Jesus Christ. From heaven he came and sought us to be his holy bride. Number three. We're like a branch.

[9 : 33] That is grafted into a tree. We've been grafted into Christ the true vine. Number four.

We've been adopted into God's family. Number five. We've been made joint heirs with Jesus Christ.

So those pictures are from real life aren't they?

And there are many many more. And we perceive don't we from them how comprehensive. How rich. How full salvation is. God has made creation.

Imputation. With his beloved son's redemption in mind. And so it is with imputation. There is this salvation picture.

Firstly of Christ being credited with something. Our sin. And then secondly. Us being credited with something. Christ's own righteousness. Number two.

Imputation is taught in the Old Testament. Where do you see it first? You see it first in Genesis 3. When our first parents Adam and Eve fell.

[10:35] They're naked. They're ashamed. And they hid from God. And do you remember what God did? God took two animals. And he killed. And he skinned them. And he clothed Adam and Eve in those skins.

God did it. God took the initiative. They didn't suggest to God for him to do that. God. And doesn't that sow in our minds.

A tiny seed. Of what our God is like. He is the God who provides. Again you see the idea.

Embedded. In one of the very names of God. Jehovah Sidkenu. Which means the Lord our righteousness. It comes up twice in Jeremiah. Yeah. Robert Murray McShane.

Took that title. And wrote the most amazing hymn. It's on your sheets. It's not in many hymn books. Because Joseph. Jehovah Sidkenu is not easy to put to music. But listen to this verse.

[11:35] You can read the rest of the hymn. Before you go to bed. But I once was a stranger to grace and to God. Then he says. When free grace awoke me. By light from on high. Then legal fears shook me.

I trembled to die. No refuge. No safety. In self could I see. Jehovah Sidkenu. My saviour must be. Again the prophet Isaiah.

Tells us that something wonderful has happened to him. He says. He's been clothed in the garments of salvation. I delight greatly in the Lord. My soul rejoices in my God.

For he has closed me with garments of salvation. And arrayed me in a robe of righteousness. As a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest. And as a bride adorns herself with jewels.

God is going to cover all his people with righteousness. And again that picture of the mere Christian. Dressed in robes of righteousness.

[12:34] As you look through church history. As Christians have understood that. It has turned into doxology and praise. It has been in church history.

A great source of adoration of God. And so for the past three weeks. What have we sung? We've sung Jesus. Thy blood and righteousness. My beauty are thy glorious dress.

Midst flaming worlds in these arrayed. With joy shall I lift up my head. This spotless robe the same appears. When ruined nature sinks in years. No age can change its glorious hue.

The robe of Christ is ever new. And can it be no condemnation now I dread. Jesus and all in him is mine. Alive in him my living head. And clothed in righteousness divine.

Bold I approach the eternal throne. And claim the crown through Christ my own. When he shall come with trumpet sound. Oh may I then in him be found.

[13:36] Dressed in his righteousness alone. Faultless to stand before the throne. And so we've been prepared. For the imputation of the righteousness of Christ.

In the Old Testament. And then imputation thirdly is taught in the New Testament. Let me show you three passages. Think of Romans. So logical isn't it? So logically and affectionately declaring.

The real and great achievements of Jesus Christ. And the letter is like a great sermon. And Paul sets out his text. Early on in the opening chapter. He says for in it the gospel.

The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. As it is written. The righteous shall live by faith. The gospel. The good news of the Lord Jesus. Is about righteousness. And how can that be good news to anyone?

That's our problem isn't it? We have none. While God is all righteousness. How can the righteousness of God be good news to any sinner? And you'll know how Paul goes on in this letter.

[14:39] That he first establishes the futility of you and I. Trying to construct a righteousness of our own. Both Jew and Gentile. We're all under the just condemnation of God. It's like building a ladder out of sand.

It will never reach Hamlet. And then he goes on to announce. Doesn't he? In chapter 3. But now the righteousness of God. Has been manifested apart from the law. Although the law and the prophets bear witness to it.

The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ. To all who believe. Do you see this righteousness that Paul is speaking about?

It's not something flat and static. Like the Ten Commandments written on stone tablets. This righteousness is. It's dynamic and stirring and moving.

It's coming to you. And it's on his way to every single believer. And it's coming right up to him and into his mind and heart. And as he hears the gospel. And he embraces it.

[15:37] It embraces him and covers him. It is upon him from head to foot. Inside and outside. It is upon all who believe. It's not a righteousness that condemns us and smites us.

No, it's the imputed righteousness of Christ. That is received and revealed through faith. All who will believe will certainly receive this righteousness as God's gift.

You go to Philippians chapter 3 and verses 8 and 9. Paul says, Indeed, I count everything as loss. Because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

For his sake. I've suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish. In order that I may gain Christ and be found in him. Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law.

But that which comes through faith in Christ. The righteousness from God that depends on faith.

When we ask our friends, Why is it that they don't come to church?

[16:47] Or when we ask them what they think our message is. Tragically, they think that our message, And they think the church's message is try harder. It's tragic in that a lad from the rugby club came and he brought his wife who wasn't a Christian.

And she came for a couple of weeks and then she said to her husband, And she said, I don't really want to go because it just seems Paul is telling us to do better. I'm so gutted by that.

And that's what the world often hears, isn't it? But do you see what Paul is saying in Philippians 3? He's saying, I tried that. I tried the moralism. I've been there.

I've done that. I've tried to live a righteous life and I was utterly lost. I turn away from that message. I think of my morality as rubbish. There's just one thing that I want.

To gain Christ, to be found in him, To have his righteousness through trusting in him. It's as far from moralism as you can get, isn't it? God's righteousness comes to you.

[17:55] See it alive, vibrant, homing in on you. Here it is today in irresistible grace. Through trusting in Christ. And the first time that you receive it, from then on, day by day, from faith to faith.

In Romans chapter 5, there's two great solidarities spelt out. All mankind is either in Adam or in Christ.

Everyone in this room, everyone in this city, everyone in this world is either in Adam or Christ.

There are no unaligned people to be found. No neutrals permitted.

Two camps. In Romans 5, we are showing the parallel between these two. How Adam's work affected his posterity. And then how Christ's work affected all those who are in him.

Adam affected all those who are attached to him. Christ affected all those who are attached to him.

Adam's sin, verse 15, brought death. Judgment. Condemnation, verse 16. To the human race without exception.

[19:09] There's no hidden kind of valley in the Himalayas that nobody knows about whose inhabitants have escaped the effect of the fall. There's no deep tribe in some jungle that have never seen a westerner and so they're living in primitive peace and joy.

No. In Adam, all die. But Christ's work is full of hope for all who are in him. Look what it says in Romans 5.

It results in God's grace, verse 15. Justification. Righteousness. Coming to sins. This gift came by the grace of the one man, verse 15. It resulted in justification.

Verse 17. This gift is called the gift of righteousness. It is through a wonderful divine present of righteousness from Jesus Christ that justification comes to men and women, boys and girls.

Listen to the dignity and the power of the language in verses 17 and 18 and 19. You must grasp this. He's saying it's through Jesus. One act of righteousness. That is through the whole of Jesus' life and ministry.

[20:14] This gift of righteousness comes to sinners. This, the apostle says, results in justification that brings life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience, the many were made sinners, so

by the one man's obedience, the many will be made righteous.

Christ's obedience will result in many being made righteous. By imputation. In the same way all men were made sinners by the disobedience of Adam by imputation, the gospel of Christianity declares that on the basis of the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ, his righteousness is imputed to all who believe.

That's the point of the parallel between Adam and Christ. Number four. Stick with me. What is the righteousness of Christ? What is the righteousness of Christ?

Let's start at the most basic level. It is the real day-to-day righteousness of another human being. It has nothing to do with movement of gas or court of law.

The righteousness of Jesus Christ was sweaty, painful, tough, achieving of righteousness. For Christ to obtain righteousness wasn't a breeze.

[21 : 35] It is rather the only kind of righteousness that you can obtain by sacrifice. By the plucking out of the right eye type of righteousness. The righteousness of the man, Jesus Christ, is the accumulation of trillions of thoughts and feelings and words and deeds over 33 years by one true and good man.

This righteousness is not an attribute of God that Jesus brought into the world from heaven. That righteousness had been displayed eternally up there in his love to his Father and to the Holy Spirit or in his graciousness towards angels.

But it's not that at all. Such righteousness, that's a reality. But we're not first of all talking about that. We're considering human righteousness for a minute.

Consider, Paul tells us that Jesus was born of a woman just like us, bone of bone, flesh of flesh. His birth gave his mother pangs and pains. He came painfully into the world like every human being. He entered into a world of pain. The first Adam had been asked to fulfill righteousness in paradise. The last Adam fulfilled righteousness in a groaning creation.

[22 : 53] It was a world of human cruelty and human weakness and hunger and thirst. There was scourging in the world that Jesus grew up in. There was torture.

There was mockery. There was ridicule. They stoned women to death. They crucified men. There were nails and hammers and gambling. There were demon-possessed men who were bound with chains and left to survive for themselves in graveyards.

And into one such cemetery, Jesus went to fulfill all righteousness. Into that kind of world, in the concreteness of a human body, and in his flesh and blood reality, God the Son came, and he came to love God totally and to love man as himself.

And God did not build into the body of Jesus an immunity to pain. He was not sheltered from overwhelming grief. Pain came seeking him once his ministry began, and it never left him.

It was very taxing for him to fulfill all righteousness. There were times when he'd get away from it all to keep sane. It cost him everything. He could hold nothing back.

[24 : 08] And I'm insisting on this, you see, that Christ fulfilled all righteousness with the human brain and human arms and human legs and human physical energy. Day by day, the Lord Jesus presented his body as a living sacrifice to God.

That was his reasonable service. And alongside his body was an inseparable human psychology. A human mind, a human soul, a human psychology.

A human way of knowing and at times of not knowing. That was how the righteousness of God, Christ, increased over his lifetime from one month old to 33 years old.

It was in his human body and human mind that he maintained and created this righteousness. And I'm saying that this human righteousness grew and it developed by the whole range of human emotions and fears and sorrows and amazement and joy that he experienced.

It was not like a shadow or a cobweb. It grew tough and strong as Satan came to him. And it tempted him without any restraints. It was approved and it was a tested righteousness.

[25 : 21] At every point, Jesus was tempted not to live a righteous life and yet he did live it day after day. So Paul reminds us, doesn't he, that Christ was born of a woman and then he adds this that Christ was born under the law.

that structured his righteousness. There was the moral law of God, the Ten Commandments.

Jesus lived with no other God besides the law. He did not make or serve an idol. He did not misuse the name of the Lord. He remembered the Sabbath day to keep it holy. He honored his father and mother, not murdering, not committing adultery, not stealing, not giving false witness, not coveting.

That is how Christ lived each day. And the law, of course, is inward in its demands, isn't it? And Jesus kept it not just outwardly but inwardly from his heart, not reluctantly but lovingly. He desired no law-breaking ever. And then there's the ceremonial law. In other words, the Son of God submitted himself to circumcision, to the feasts in Jerusalem, to the keeping of the Sabbath day, to the going to the synagogue, to the paying of a temple tax.

[26 : 33] He did it all through his life. The Lord Jesus kept the civil law, the civil requirements of the books of Moses. He paid taxes to Caesar, the things that were Caesar's.

He went the extra mile when he was required. All the civil legislation and Jesus kept it. The God of Sinai became incarnate and he fulfilled all righteousness by keeping the law which he himself had given.

And that is the active obedience of Jesus Christ. So when the Bible says that the righteousness of Christ was imputed to every man or woman who believes in him, it is the righteousness of a human being that's being referred to.

Bone of our bones. It is the righteousness of someone born under the law who fulfilled all righteousness by keeping the law. However, he was not like any other man.

Even though he was the best of man, the perfect man, Jesus, the word made flesh was not only human but divine. The word was in the beginning and the word was with God and the word was God and whatever constituted God, Jesus had.

[27 : 42] Whatever is in the essence of God, Jesus had that too. Whatever God is, then Jesus was that too. He had every single perfection of God and every attribute.

He was infinite, eternal, unchangeable, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, omniscient, omniscient. Jesus had the glory of God, the likeness of God, the nature of God, the being of God, the names of God, the prerogatives of God.

And so his righteousness had all those qualities too. It was a true human righteousness achieved by living in the same fallen world under the same pressures that you and I live under.

attempted and tested righteousness but it was also a divine and infinite and eternal and enduring and unchangeable righteousness because it was the righteousness of the God-man.

And so the righteousness of Christ is immeasurably vast. It's enough to cover every atom and electron and neutron in the cosmos. In the Old Testament there were holy pots and holy palaces and pans and garments and holy places and a holy city.

[28 : 52] That is those things were set apart to God. In the world to come everything will be set apart to God. The righteousness of God could cover every grain of sand, every blade of grass, every drop of rain, every insect, bird and animal, every planet, star and galaxy.

I'm saying that there is nothing in all of creation that the righteousness of God could not come upon. and transform it. And one day it will do just that.

Because one day there will be a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness will dwell and the cosmos will be redolent with the righteousness of Christ. And even after that there will still be an infinite, an endless righteousness in all the fullness of Christ that could cover another million fallen universes.

And then there will still be more because Christ's righteousness is infinite. And yet Jesus' own the carpenter from Nazareth it was a real human righteousness.

One that you can identify with and be familiar with. Not the righteousness of a spirit in heaven. but of men and women like you and I who have to keep the law of God in this world.

[30 : 16] That is the divine human righteousness of Jesus Christ. Okay, last point. It's not enough that the righteousness of Christ has been imputed to us.

It's not enough. It seems strange to say that. The righteousness of Christ is indispensable but it's not enough. Because the righteousness of Christ it covers our sins but it does not atone for our unrighteousness.

It transforms our status forever but it does not obtain a pardon for my transgression. Because for that the Lamb of God not only had to live blamelessly he must set his face to Jerusalem and die. It's not enough for his righteousness to be imputed to those who believe our sin must be imputed to him and condemned in him. It is not enough for him to obey the law for us.

He must pay its penalty too. We need the saviour don't we to do both in our place. The life that I've not lived as well as the death I dare not die were both his singular achievements and that is our hope as we come to the table tonight.

[31 : 30] On another's life on another's death I stake my whole eternity. That is what the Lord Jesus has done. He not only lived the blameless life that I should live but he's tasted the death that I deserve to die.

Jacob tricked his father didn't he? He tricked his father into giving him a blessing covering his arms with skins and bringing in a dish of wild game and he deceived his father into thinking he was Esau and so he received the firstborn's blessing but there's no way that we could ever cover ourselves in anything that will deceive God.

There is only one robe of righteousness that exists in all the universe and so be clothed in that today. There is one God-man alone one mediator between God and man one name given amongst men whereby we must be saved.

In the gospel we do not get God's blessings by deceit but by imputation and so there's one person to go to tonight he's the one who made sin for us who has made sin for us and is the same one who has made the righteousness of God for us and because of imputation we can justly God can justly look at me and in his sight all my sin is gone forever dealt with exhaustively and eternally on Golgotha here's the last thing to say the righteousness of Christ is sufficient to cover the sins of the whole human race but sinners still perish unless they make Jesus Christ their only plea unless they make the Lord Jesus their only defence their hope their confidence forever and so unless a sinner will say nothing in my hands

I bring and I plead his blood and righteousness and with that plea and that plea alone God is satisfied and so what did Paul do he pleaded with men be reconciled to God and so I must say to you tonight go to God and say please have mercy on me do not hold me guilty impute that righteousness to me or I die I need what Jesus did for favoured sinners or I have nothing at all regard me in Christ hold me answerable in Christ hold me up and set my feet on Christ the solid rock how good are you how good are you before a holy God you're not very good at all how good is Jesus before a holy God as good as God himself don't you want to be treated as the Lord Jesus himself is treated the devil will say to you it's too good to be true imputation will say yes you can be in Christ a new creation without condemnation a glorious imputation is offered to you that God will impute your sin to his son and his son's righteousness to you and so plead with him to do that be reconciled to God and may this great transaction be done tonight be done in you once and for all and then live a life from one day to another of trusting him from faith to faith let's pray again to a of a ending