



Justification and the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness

Q. *How are you righteous before God?*

A. *Only by a true faith in Jesus Christ; that is, though my conscience accuse me that I have grievously sinned against all the commandments of God and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil, yet God, without any merit of mine, of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never had nor committed any sin, and myself had accomplished all the obedience which Christ has rendered for me; if only I accept such benefit with a believing heart.*

(Heidelberg Catechism, Q. & A. 60)

Though it is not always adequately appreciated, the principal difference between the classic Protestant and Roman Catholic views of justification relates to their respective understanding of the ground of the believer's justification. The long-standing conflict between reformational and Roman Catholic teaching was never primarily about the nature of the justifying verdict.¹ While it is generally acknowledged today that justification is a forensic act, which involves God's pronouncing a verdict and accepting sinners into his favour, disagreement emerges at the point of the basis or ground for this verdict. Does God justify sinners partly on the basis of his grace in Christ and partly on the basis of their own works, performed in cooperation with his grace? Or does God justify sinners wholly on the basis of the righteousness of Christ, which is freely granted and imputed to believers? The nub of the issue, therefore, can be stated in terms of the question: Does the believer's justification depend wholly and entirely upon an imputed righteousness? Or does it partly depend upon an infused righteousness, namely, the believer's own works of obedience that stem from the prior working of God's grace by his Spirit?

No matter how one evaluates the older disputes between Protestant and Roman Catholic on the doctrine of justification, it is readily apparent that the issue of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer was the critical bone of contention. Whether one speaks of faith as the exclusive instrument of justification (*sola fide*) or of Christ's mediatorial work as the exclusive basis for justification (*solo Christo*), the essential point remains the same: God's righteousness in Christ is the gracious and only ground upon which the sinner can stand justified before God. The righteousness by which sinners are justified is not their own but is an alien, or external, righteousness. Only on account of Christ's obedience to the requirements of the law, and of his substitutionary endurance of its liability (his so-called 'active' and 'passive' obedience) can the sinner find favour with God. Justification through faith, on account of the work of Christ, requires a gracious transaction, a granting and imputing of the righteousness of Christ to believers so that it becomes theirs as much as his. Only by way of a participation or union with Christ through faith, so that the saving work of Christ becomes beneficial to the believer, can anyone find acceptance or favour with God. In the traditional Protestant understanding, this participation is precisely what is effected by way of imputation.

Considering the principal importance of the doctrine of imputation to the historic dispute regarding the subject of the sinner's justification, it is noteworthy how often the doctrine is either criticized or minimized today. Among authors of the so-called 'new perspective on Paul', the doctrine of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to believers is generally repudiated.² In the recent documents, 'Evangelicals and Catholics Together' and 'The Gift of Salvation', which purport to give a consensus statement of the doctrine of justification by evangelical and Catholic authors, the

doctrine of imputation receives short shrift. In the first of these statements, the subject of imputation is omitted, and in the second, it is mentioned as an item about which no consensus was reached.³ There is considerable need, therefore, to revisit the doctrine of imputation and determine whether it enjoys the kind of Scriptural warrant that the historic symbols of the Reformation claim for it.

An Examination of Several Key Passages: Rom. 4:2-6 (Gen. 15:6)

The first passage that is of special importance for the doctrine of imputation is Romans 4:2-6.

'For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness". Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works.'

In this passage, the apostle Paul directly links justification with imputation. In order to illustrate that Abraham's (and, therefore, the believer's) justification was not 'by works', the apostle appeals to Genesis 15:6 where Abraham's faith is said to be 'counted to him for righteousness'.⁴ Because God's justification of Abraham involved his act of 'crediting' or 'accounting' Abraham's faith for righteousness, he justified Abraham 'apart from works'.

Though this passage places the idea of imputation in the centre of Paul's understanding of justification, it presents an immediate problem. When Paul quotes Genesis 15:6, *'It (that is, faith) was counted to him for righteousness'*, he seems to treat faith as though it were Abraham's righteousness before God. On this reading of the text, Paul could be teaching that Abraham's righteousness consisted of his faith. If that were the sense of the text, then the conclusion seems unavoidable that Paul understood justification to be based, not upon Abraham's works (of obedience) but upon his faith, which stands in lieu of his works. This reading would mean that the righteousness that was the ground or basis for Abraham's justification was not something external to him, but his own act of believing God. Even though imputation is central to Paul's understanding of justification, the righteousness imputed, so far as this text is concerned, is not the righteousness of Christ, as in the historic Protestant view. Rather, it is a kind of subjective righteousness, a righteousness that is equivalent to Abraham's act of believing God. In this understanding, we might say that Abraham was justified not only 'by' but 'on account of' his faith.⁵

There are several reasons, however, that decisively count against this understanding of Paul's language and use of Genesis 15:6.⁶

First, it should be noted that the expression Paul uses, 'counted for righteousness', contains a preposition (eis) that is best rendered 'with a view to' or 'in order to'. If we were to render Paul's language in literal, albeit clumsy English, still we would read the expression to say that Abraham's faith 'was counted with a view to righteousness'. This is different from saying that Abraham's faith 'was counted in the stead of righteousness', an expression that would suggest that his faith was his righteousness before God. In Romans 10:10, Paul uses the same preposition in a way that clarifies its meaning, when he says that 'with the heart one believes unto (eis) righteousness'. In this passage faith is that which moves toward and lays hold of Christ himself as our righteousness. As J. I. Packer puts it, commenting on Romans 4:2,

*'When Paul paraphrases this verse (Gen. 15:6) as teaching that Abraham's faith was reckoned for righteousness (Rom. 4:5, 9, 22), all he intends us to understand is that faith—decisive, whole-hearted reliance on God's gracious promise (verse 18ff.)—was the occasion and means of righteousness being imputed to him. There is no suggestion here that faith is the ground of justification.'*⁷

Second, in the context of Paul's appeal to Genesis 15:6, he utilizes the connection between wages and debts to illustrate how the imputation that is central to justification occurs, not in the manner of

wages earned but as a free gift. *'Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness'* (4-5). The point of this illustration is to draw a sharp contrast between wages that are accounted to a wage-earner, and the gracious gift that is accounted to a non-wage-earner (one who does not work). When God accounts or reckons Abraham's faith for righteousness, it is equivalent to his granting Abraham a free, unearned gift. This emphasis and understanding of God's act of imputation in justification does not fit with the idea that the righteousness imputed to Abraham consists of his (subjective) faith. Though faith may be the occasion and instrument for the reception of this righteousness, it can hardly be the righteousness that is the ground of Abraham's justification. If that were the case, the point Paul is making – that the imputation of Abraham's faith for righteousness is like the free gift that is accounted to someone who has not worked for it – would be undermined.⁸

Thirdly, there are several indications from the broader context of Paul's argument in Romans 3-4 that the righteousness of faith is an external righteousness that is granted and imputed to believers, not a subjective righteousness. In Romans 4:16, for example, the apostle sets forth the great reason justification is 'by faith' and not 'according to works': *'That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his (Abraham's) offspring – not only the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham.'* Faith is instrumental to receiving the gift of justification precisely because it looks outside of itself to God's gracious promise in Christ. The apostle also insists that, because justification is an act toward the ungodly, it must occur apart from works (Rom. 4:5). It requires a positive imputation of righteousness to the believer. Immediately after his appeal to Genesis 15:6, therefore, he cites David as an Old Testament example of the way God 'counts righteousness apart from works'. Though David was a sinner, the Lord did not count his sins against him (v. 8, quoting Psalm 32), but accounted him righteous. The words Paul uses to speak of David's justification, 'counted him righteous', is equivalent to his earlier phrase, 'to justify the ungodly'. It is also equivalent to the language of Romans 3:28, *'For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.'* The point of all these expressions is to exclude any thought of an inherent righteousness as the basis for God's free justification. Justification involves a free and positive granting, or imputing, of righteousness to the believer, which is received by, but does not and cannot consist in, faith.

Admittedly, in these passages Paul does not explicitly identify the righteousness that God imputes to the believer as the righteousness of Christ. However, as we shall see in other passages yet to be considered, this is the obvious implication of Paul's teaching. How could it be otherwise, when the faith, by which sinners receive God's gift of righteousness, trusts *'in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification'* (Rom. 4:24-25)? The object of faith is the crucified and risen Christ, who is the believer's righteousness from God (see 1 Cor. 1:30).

Romans 5:12-19

Though Romans 4 may not explicitly identify the righteousness that is the basis for the believer's justification, there are several key passages in Paul's epistles that clearly identify this righteousness as the righteousness of Christ. These passages affirm that in justification God freely grants and imputes the righteousness of Christ to believers. The first of these passages is Romans 5:12-21, especially verses 16-21:

'And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many transgressions brought justification. If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and 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. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin

increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

This passage, which closes the apostle Paul's summary treatment of the doctrine of justification in Romans 3-5, draws a far-reaching comparison and contrast between the first Adam and the second Adam, Christ. Just as all who are 'in Adam' are subject to condemnation on account of his one trespass, so all who are 'in Christ' receive justification and life on account of his one act of righteousness. Though this passage bristles with difficult questions of interpretation, our treatment of it will have to focus only on those things that directly bear upon the subject of imputation and justification.⁹

In order to appreciate what this passage teaches about imputation and justification, it is necessary to begin by noting the way the apostle Paul connects the one trespass of the first man, Adam, with the fact that *'all sinned'* (verse 12) and are under the reign of death. Though there are those who attempt to explain the phrase 'all sinned' by taking this language to refer to the actual sins of all men, this explanation does not fit well with the nature of Paul's argument. The burden of Paul's argument is that there is an immediate link between the one trespass of the one man, Adam, on the one hand, and the reign of death and the judgment that brings condemnation upon the many, on the other. For this reason, he emphasizes that death reigned from Adam to Moses, *'even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come'* (verse 14). Even though the trespass was Adam's, and Adam's alone, the consequence of this trespass, death, reigned over all. Accordingly, the apostle insists that the *'one trespass led to condemnation for all men'* and *'the many were made sinners'* (verses 18-19). By virtue of the union of all with Adam in his one trespass, God imputes or reckons to all men the guilt of this trespass and its judicial consequence, death. This is the sense in which we may say that 'all sinned' in Adam, and all bear, as a consequence, the judicial liability of condemnation and death.

In a similar way, the apostle links the one man's obedience (literally, 'the act of righteousness of one') with the making righteous of the many. Just as death reigned through the disobedience of the first Adam, so *'the free gift of righteousness reign(s) in life through the one man Jesus Christ'*. So far as the doctrine of imputation is concerned, the critical phrase in these verses is 'the free gift of righteousness'. The many who are made righteous, who receive justification and life through the work of Christ, are not made righteous through their own deed or deeds. Nothing that they are or do constitutes them righteous or beneficiaries of God's favourable verdict and acceptance. Rather, God's grace 'super-abounds' toward the many who are, through union with Christ, made partakers of his righteousness.

For the purpose of understanding the doctrine of imputation, the critical point in Paul's argument is his insistence upon the direct (or immediate) participation of all who are united with Christ in his one act of obedience. Just as Adam's sin (and not the sins of all men) constitutes all as sinners under the judicial sentence of condemnation and death, so Christ's obedience (and not the obedience of the many) constitutes the many as righteous and under the judicial sentence of justification and life. The dominant thread in Paul's argument, both with respect to the participation of all men in Adam and with respect to the participation of the many in Christ, is the judicial implication of our union with the first Adam and with the second. God counts or reckons as guilty all who are in Adam; and he counts or reckons as innocent all who are in the second Adam, Christ.

One question that arises in this connection relates to the meaning of Paul's expression, 'the one act of obedience/righteousness'. Does this refer, to use the language of theology, to Christ's passive obedience alone (his cross)? Or does it refer to Christ's active and passive obedience, using the language of 'one act' to summarize the whole of his life of obedience? John Murray provides a helpful answer to this question:

If the question be asked how the righteousness of Christ could be defined as 'one righteous act', the answer is that the righteousness of Christ is regarded in its compact unity in parallelism with the one trespass, and there is good reason for speaking of it as the one righteous act because, as the one trespass is the trespass of the one, so that one

*righteousness is the righteousness of the one and the unity and the person and his accomplishment must always be assumed.'*¹⁰

Christ's obedience upon the cross epitomizes his whole life of obedience. The cross does not exhaust Christ's obedience, but reveals it in its most striking form (as in Philippians 2:8, Christ became *'obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross'*). Indeed, were it not for the entirety of Christ's obedience from the beginning to the end of his ministry, it would not be possible to speak of his having died *'the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God'* (1 Pet. 3:18).

Philippians 3:8-9

'Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have 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.'

This remarkable testimony of the apostle was written in the context of his fierce and unyielding opposition to certain persons who were placing their confidence before God on their own flesh (verse 3). Though the apostle does not explicitly identify his opponents, it appears that they were persons who were boasting of their own religious pedigree and credentials, particularly circumcision, on the basis of which they sought to commend themselves before God. In his initial reply to these opponents, the apostle engages in an extended *ad hominem* argument. If his opponents would place their confidence before God in such things, the apostle Paul has even more right to do so:

'Circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness, under the law blameless.'

Unlike these opponents, however, Paul's boast or confidence is not in *'a righteousness of my own that comes from the law'*. His boast, rather, is in *'the righteousness from God that depends on faith'*. This righteousness of God comes *'through faith'* to those who are *'found in Christ'*. Though Paul does not explicitly speak of God as imputing or reckoning the righteousness of Christ in these verses, the idea is certainly present. Those who are united with Christ through faith receive, on that account, a righteousness from God. This righteousness, Paul insists in the most emphatic terms, is not his own righteousness but a righteousness that comes from *'outside of himself'* as God grants it to him. Paul's righteousness, as is true of any believer's, consists in the free bestowal of an *'alien'* righteousness, granted by God to all who are in union with Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:19-21

'In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.'

Perhaps no passage in Scripture more clearly teaches the doctrine of imputation than this one. The reconciling work of God in Christ took place when Christ, who *'knew no sin'*, was *'made to be sin'*. In an inscrutable manner, God regarded the sinless Christ as though he were sin. On the other hand, God did *'not count (our) trespasses against (us)'*; he did not treat or regard us in a manner consistent with our condition and circumstance as sinners. By these means – not counting our sins against us, making and treating Christ as though he were sin – we are *'become the righteousness of God in him'*. In this passage, as in those previously considered, the apostle Paul does not expressly speak of the granting and imputing of Christ's righteousness to believers. However, no

other interpretation can legitimately claim to do justice to this passage. It is only by virtue of our union and participation in Christ that we come to benefit from his saving and reconciling work. Charles Hodge's comments on this passage express this truth well:

Our sins were imputed to Christ, and his righteousness is imputed to us. He bore our sins; we are clothed in his righteousness ... Christ bearing our sins did not make him morally a sinner ... nor does Christ's righteousness become subjectively ours, it is not the moral quality of our souls ... Our sins were the judicial ground of the sufferings of Christ, so that they were a satisfaction of justice; and his righteousness is the judicial ground of our acceptance with God, so that our pardon is an act of justice ... It is not mere pardon, but justification alone, that gives us peace with God.¹¹

The biblical basis for the doctrine of imputation includes more passages than those we have had occasion to consider briefly. However, these are sufficient to illustrate the biblical teaching that the justification of sinners occurs by means of the reception of the righteousness of Christ, granted and imputed to them by God and received through faith. No other basis than that of Christ's righteousness – comprising the entirety of his mediatorial work, not only his death for sin but also his perfect life of obedience – can make a sinner acceptable to God.

Sola Fide, Solo Christo

In the classic reformational view of justification, the expressions 'by faith alone' (*sola fide*) and 'on account of Christ alone' (*solo Christo*) are used to affirm precisely what the doctrine of imputation affirms. We are said to be justified 'by faith alone' (*sola fide*), not because the faith that alone justifies is an alone faith (without works), but because it is the exclusive instrument or means to receive the free gift of righteousness that is the basis for our acceptance with God. If the doctrine of imputation emphasizes that the ground of justification lies outside of us in a righteousness that God grants and imputes to us, then faith alone answers to the nature of the act by which God justifies sinners. A gift can only be received. It cannot be earned. Faith, therefore, as a receiving instrument, is just the response that answers to the granting and imputing of righteousness that justification requires. Similarly, to say that our justification is 'on account of Christ alone' (*solo Christo*) is equivalent to saying that it is on account of the righteousness of Christ that becomes ours through imputation. The doctrine of imputation serves as an indispensable safeguard against the teaching that sinners can find acceptance with God on the basis of any righteousness other than that of Christ alone.

Substitution, Union and Imputation

Even as imputation affirms what is expressed by the language of 'faith alone' and 'Christ alone', it also affirms what belongs to the biblical doctrines of Christ's substitutionary atonement and the believer's union with Christ. If Christ's life, death and resurrection occurred by God's design for or in the place of his people, then it follows that all that he accomplished counts as theirs, so far as God is concerned. How could Christ's work on their behalf and for their benefit not be reckoned to their account, if indeed it is just as though they had performed it! Furthermore, when believers become united to Christ through faith, they come to participate in all the benefits of his saving work. Faith is the 'empty hand' by which believers acknowledge and receive all that Christ has accomplished for them. To say that God grants and imputes the righteousness of Christ to believers is, accordingly, to acknowledge what is required by the doctrines of Christ's substitutionary atonement and believers' union with Christ through faith.

Luther, in his well-known sermon, 'Two Kinds of Righteousness', illustrates this point by appealing to the analogy of the bride's intimate union with the bridegroom:

Therefore a man can with confidence boast in Christ and say: 'Mine are Christ's living, doing, and speaking, his suffering and dying, mine as much as if I had lived, done, spoken, suffered, and died as he did.' Just as the bridegroom possesses all that is his bride's and she

*all that is his – for the two have all things in common because they are one flesh – so Christ and the church are one spirit.*¹²

A 'Legal Fiction'?

The biblical doctrine of imputation is often charged with being a 'legal fiction'. God is said to regard sinners as though they were righteous, even though they remain sinners still. For the same reason that many object to the imputation of the guilt of Adam's sin to his posterity – the guilt is 'alien', not personal and real – imputation is often decried as a cold, legal transaction that leaves sinners in the same condition as before.

There are two critical problems with this objection. The first problem, which is not so much our concern here, is that it ignores the way Christ by his Spirit simultaneously sanctifies the believer whom he justifies. God, who declares the sinner righteous in justification, also makes the sinner righteous through the process of sanctification. The second problem, which is our concern, is that this objection ultimately charges God, who declares the ungodly righteous on account of the work of Christ, with declaring to be real what remains only a fiction. The same objection in principle could be offered against God's declaration that all are subject to condemnation and death on account of the one trespass of the one man, Adam. But the verdict of innocence that God pronounces in freely justifying sinners for the sake of Christ's saving work is no fiction. Rather, it is a divinely ordained and accomplished reality.¹³ What could be more real than the perfect obedience and satisfaction of Christ, which are graciously granted and imputed to believers who place their trust in Christ alone? Perhaps the best answer to this objection, therefore, is the words of the apostle Paul:

'Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us?'

(Rom. 8:33-34)

Conclusion

The story is told that J. Gresham Machen, shortly before his death, sent a telegraph to his colleague John Murray with the words: *'I'm so thankful for active obedience of Christ. No hope without it.'*¹⁴ Though Machen's words express the truth more poignantly and personally than does the language of *'the imputation of the righteousness of Christ'*, they capture the heart of this biblical teaching. The doctrine of imputation is simply a way of asserting that Christ's life, death and resurrection are the sole basis upon which sinners are set right with God and become heirs of eternal life. Clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ, believers may have confidence in the presence of God. They know that the wages of their sins were fully paid by Christ. They know that the obligations of obedience were perfectly fulfilled by Christ. They know that Christ, as their Advocate, continues to intercede for them before God. In short – being found in Christ, they know with the confidence of faith that *'there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus'* (Rom. 8:1). And so they sing:

*Man's work faileth, Christ's availeth;
He is all our righteousness.
He, our Saviour, has forever
Set us free from dire distress.
Through His merit, we inherit
Light and peace and happiness.*

(Fortunatus, c. 530-609)

Cornelis P Venema

Endnotes:

¹ Though the traditional Roman Catholic view confuses justification and sanctification, the Council of Trent's definition of justification includes an emphasis upon the sinner's 'reputation' and acceptance with God: 'We are not only reputed, but are truly called, and are just, receive justice within us, each one according to his own measure' [Sixth Session, chapter 7; quoted from *The Creeds of Christendom*, ed. by Philip Schaff, vol. 1: *The Greek and Latin Creeds* (Grand Rapids: Baker reprint, 1985 (1931)), p. 95. Cf. *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 13: 'Justification is the forgiveness of sins..., liberation from the dominating power of sin and death (Rom. 5:12-21) and from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:10-14).'

² Cf. N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said. Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 98: 'The result of all this should be obvious, but is enormously important for understanding Paul. If we use the language of the law court, it makes no sense whatever to say that the judge imputes, imparts, bequeaths, conveys or otherwise transfers his righteousness to either the plaintiff or the defendant. Righteousness is not an object, a substance or a gas which can be passed across the courtroom.' Not only does this comment present something of a caricature of the Protestant view, but it also misstates it. The Protestant view is not that the Judge (God) transfers his righteousness to us, but that he provides his Son as a substitute and surety whose righteousness becomes ours through imputation.

³ For a summary and critical treatment of these two statements, see R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995); and *Getting the Gospel Straight: The Tie That Binds Evangelicals Together* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999). For a recent defence of the doctrine of imputation against its contemporary critics, see John Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ: Should We Abandon the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness?* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002).

⁴ For a treatment of the Old Testament background to the use of 'to count' or 'to reckon' in Genesis 15:6, see O. Palmer Robertson, 'Genesis 15:6: New Covenant Exposition of an Old Testament Text', *Westminster Theological Journal*, 42 (1980), pp. 259-89; and James R. White, *The God Who Justifies* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2001), pp. 111-17.

⁵ This language and distinction was expressed by the older Protestant writers on justification in the following dictum: *Fides iustificat non propter se, ut est in homine qualitas, sed propter Christum, quem apprehendit* ('Faith justifies not because of itself, insofar as it is a quality in man, but on account of Christ, of whom faith lays hold').

⁶ For a more extensive argument against the view that the believer's righteousness 'consists of his faith, see John Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, vol. 5 of Owen's *Works* (London: Banner of Truth, 1965 [1850-53]; and John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1 (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), pp. 353-9. Though Murray holds the view that Genesis 15:6 takes Abraham's faith for his righteousness (incorrectly, in my judgment, as I shall shortly argue), he argues that this cannot mean that Paul regarded faith as the ground or basis for the believer's justification.

⁷ 'Justification', *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), p. 596. Cf. Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 262: 'The language ("counting Abraham's faith for righteousness") could suggest that his faith is considered as the 'equivalent' of righteousness that God sees Abraham's faith as itself a 'righteous' act, well pleasing to him. But if we compare other verses in which the same grammatical construction as is used in Gen. 15:6 occurs, we arrive at a different conclusion. These parallels suggest that the 'reckoning' of Abraham's faith as righteousness means "to account to him a righteousness that does not inherently belong to him".'

⁸ Cf. John Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ*, p. 57: 'Would not the wording of verse 4 rather tell us that in Paul's mind "faith being credited for righteousness" is shorthand for faith being the way an external righteousness is received as credited to us by God namely, not by working but by trusting him who justifies the ungodly.'

⁹ For a more extensive treatment of Romans 5:12-21 and its implications for the imputation of Christ's righteousness, see Piper, *Counted Righteous in Christ*, pp. 90-114; and John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed reprint, 1959).

¹⁰ *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1, pp. 201-2. Cf. Piper, *Counted Righteous*, pp. 110-14.

¹¹ *1 & 2 Corinthians* (1859; reprinted Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), pp. 526-7.

¹² 'Two Kinds of Righteousness', in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. By John Dillenberger (New York: Anchor, 1961), pp. 86-7.

¹³ Cf. James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification* (1867; repr. London: Banner of Truth, 1961), p. 337: 'When we are brought face to face with such realities as these, it is vain to talk of "legal fictions", whether under the Law or under the Gospel; for while condemnation, on the one hand, and justification, on the other, are strictly forensic or judicial act, and must necessarily have some relation to the Law and Justice of God, and imputation of their guilt and righteousness to those whom they respectively represented, can own nature real and true, and not, in any sense, fictions or imaginary.'

¹⁴ As quoted by Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: a Biographical Memoir*, 3rd ed. (1954; repr. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), p. 508.