

The Doctrine of Imputation and Justification

by Dr. Robert L. Dean, Jr.

The problem with communicating the doctrines of imputation and justification to today's audience is that these words are rarely used and in the case of justification, not used today in everyday language with the same meaning as they have theologically.

1. Definition: The action of the justice of God whereby either condemnation or blessing is assigned, credited, or attributed to a human being. There are two categories of imputations: real imputations and judicial imputations.
2. Real imputations credit something to a person which truly belongs to him; thus, an affinity exists between what is received and the one receiving it. Real imputations include: Adam's original sin to the sin nature at birth (Rom. 5:12-21), eternal life to the human spirit (1 John 5:11-12), blessings in time to the righteousness of God in us (Eph. 1:3; 1 Cor. 2:9), and blessings in eternity to the resurrected believer (2 Cor. 5:10). Here we will deal only with the first, real imputation of original sin to the sin nature.
3. Judicial imputations occur where the justice of God credits to a person what is not antecedently his own. There is no harmony, agreement, or affinity between the imputation and the object of the imputation, i.e., our personal sins to Christ on the cross (Rom. 8:31-32) and Christ's perfect righteousness to the believer at the point of salvation (Rom. 4:3-4; 2 Cor. 5:21). Here we will focus on only the imputation of our personal sins to Christ on the cross and the imputation of His perfect righteousness to the believer.
4. Imputation derives from the Latin, *imputare*, "to reckon, to charge to one's account." The English means to charge someone with a fault or responsibility, or simply to credit something to someone. The Greek *logizomai*, has the same basic connotation. It is important to recognize that imputation is a legal or forensic concept, as such it does not refer to a concrete substance someone has or owns, but to something which one has legally. Thus imputation would not be used of giving a gift or giving something concrete to a subject, i.e., John imputed a bottle of perfume to Mary for Christmas, would not be correct.

5. Secular Usage in the New Testament

Philem. 1:18 But if he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account

6. The first real imputation: Adam's original sin to the sin nature at birth.

a. Historical Survey

Pelagian view: Pelagius was a British monk in the 5th century who substituted the word imitation for imputation. He argued that God creates every soul directly and each soul at birth is innocent and untainted by Adam's original sin and is not guilty of Adam's sin until each person imitates Adam's sin. Thus men are not born sinners and under condemnation and that death is not the result of sin. Pelagianism is the forerunner of Arminianism and was condemned at the Council of Carthage in AD 418. (modern Unitarians and many pro-liberals.

Arminianism: Jacob Arminius (1560-1609) Arminius is taught that man is not guilty because of Adam's sin. Each voluntarily and purposefully chooses to sin, only then does God impute sin to them. Rom 5:12 is not viewed as all humanity suffering the effects of Adam's sin.

Federal view: Adam is the federal or representative head of the entire human race.

Seminal view: Just as Levi paid tithes in Abraham (Heb. 7:9-10, in a similar way all humanity was seminally presence in Adam.)

Solution, 3, 4 are both true. Adam is our representative, but the sin nature is passed on genetically so that AOS is imputed to that sin nature at birth. Rom. 5:12-16

It is the sin of Adam, not our personal sins, that condemn us. 2Cor. 5:19 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.

Thus, since our personal sins are imputed to Christ, they are not the basis of judgment at the JSC.

7. The first judicial imputation is the imputation of our personal sins to Christ.

a. We are born in the image of Adam after the Fall, We share his original sin by real imputation and his sin nature by genetic transmission. Thus we share his spiritual death, His sin is our sin, his sin nature our sin nature, his condemnation our condemnation. Rom. 5:14.

b. Christ is in the image of Adam before the fall.

c. Since Jesus was born of a virgin, there is no reception of a sin nature or imputation of AOS.

d. God the Father imputed all our sins to Christ on the cross, Rom. 5:15.

8. The second judicial imputation is that of Christ's divine righteousness to man, Rom. 5:16.

9. The result then is that man is declared righteous, he is not made righteous, sin is not overlooked, it is not just as if I had never sinned. He is declared by God to be righteous not because of what he is or will be but solely because he possesses the righteousness of Christ.

10. Two Old Testament illustrations:

a. Abraham was justified by faith before the events of Gen 15:6. The Hiphel perfect of the verb '*aman*' means that this verse is a reminder of Abram's previous justification is for the blessings mentioned in Gen 15.

b. The new turban and garments placed on Joshua is a picture of the believer clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ, Zech 3:1-5.