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The Imputation.

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"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the *Word of Reconciliation*," 2 Cor. 5, 19. If the king issues an amnesty and does not send his messengers, men or letters, to publish it, it will profit no one. Therefore God has sent His apostles, and the words of St. Paul, spoken at Antioch, "That through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins," Acts 13, 38, have for nineteen hundred years continued to ring throughout the nations. The gates of the prison are shattered; God's messengers are standing on the threshold and cry, "Go forth!" Is. 49, 9; 61, 6; Luke 4, 18—21. Is it God's fault if some remain in it because they love their dungeon? Freedom was granted to all the captive Jews in Babylon, but those who desired to remain there did not come into possession of it. He, however, who hears God's message and goes forth is free; him God, for the sake of the perfect satisfaction rendered by Christ, regards as righteous.

This justification does not coincide with the atonement on the cross, but is rather its fruit. God justifies you by not only announcing grace to you, but by truly and actually receiving you into the relation of grace and sonship. The verb *to justify* occurs thirty-eight times in the New Testament,¹⁾ and in all these thirty-eight passages it signifies a forensic act. It means *to regard as righteous, to declare righteous, not to infuse righteousness*. This may be seen most clearly Luke 10, 29. The lawyer, "willing to

1) Matt. 11, 19; 12, 37; Luke 7, 29. 35; 10, 29; 16, 15; 18, 14; Acts 13, 39 (twice); Rom. 2, 13; 3, 4. 20. 24. 26. 28. 30; 4, 2. 5; 5, 1. 9; 6, 7; 8, 30. 33; 1 Cor. 4, 4; 6, 11; Gal. 2, 16 (three times); 2, 17; 3, 8. 11. 24; 5, 4; 1 Tim. 3, 16; Titus 3, 7; Jas. 2, 21. 24. 25.

justify himself, said to Jesus, And who is my neighbor?" That certainly cannot be rendered: "He wanted to infuse righteousness into himself," but: "He wanted to be his own judge and acquit himself." Luke 16, 15 Jesus chides the Pharisees: "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts." Would He have chided them if they had endeavored to bring a gift of righteousness into their hearts? I rather think they wanted *to be regarded as righteous* without changing their heart. Luke 7, 29 it is said of the publicans that they even "justified God, being baptized." Does that really mean: they infused righteousness into God? A heathen would be ashamed to talk such nonsense. No; Luther translated correctly: "*Sie gaben Gott recht*"; that is, they confessed by their act that God is "just and the Justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Rom. 3, 26. When, therefore, Scripture says: God justifies the sinner, then this means: He regards him righteous, He acquits him; not: He infuses something into him. Else how could God's justifying and condemning be placed in direct antithesis to each other? But this is done, Rom. 8, 33, 34: "It is God that justifieth. Who will condemn?" And Rom. 5, 16: "The judgment was by one to condemnation; but the free gift is of many offenses unto justification"; and Matt. 12, 37: "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." This is the language employed already by the Seventy who translated the Old Testament. Is. 50, 8; Deut. 25, 1. But lest any one doubt that God's justifying is indeed a judicial sentence, which declares us to be free, we call attention to equivalent expressions in which the Holy Ghost says the same thing in other passages: John 3, 18: "not to be condemned," and John 5, 24: "not to come into condemnation."

Our Judge, then, acquits us, and that by grace. Rom. 3, 24. But in Scripture "grace" means "God's favor with which He wishes us well and is gracious to us." (Luther.) And that is why the sentence is rendered "*freely*." Rom. 3, 24. Happy are we beggars! For naught we were sold; we shall be redeemed without money. Is. 52, 3; 55, 1; Rev. 22, 17. Yes, altogether without our merit. Not as Joseph, who found grace in the sight of Potiphar because he was a prosperous man. Gen. 39, 2—4. And even though we had the virtues of Joseph, God's eyes are not the eyes of Potiphar, but flames of fire, before which no one can stand. Within us there is no merit, no worth, whereon the sentence of God is based; on the contrary, we are conceived in sin, and on account of thousands of sinful deeds we are worthy of death. In us, O Lord, Thou

findest no source of blessing, but a fountain of condemnation. Nevertheless Thou justifiest us freely and by grace!²⁾ True, not without cost on the part of God; for we are justified freely by grace only on the basis of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Rom. 3, 24. This, then, is the real procedure in God's judgment: Just as He, on the one hand, imputed our sin to His beloved Son, who knew no sin, even so He, on the other hand, imputed the righteousness of Christ to us, who knew no righteousness. 2 Cor. 5, 21. That God imputes a foreign righteousness is said Rom. 4, 6 and Phil. 3, 9; but that this righteousness is Christ, we read 1 Cor. 1, 30 and twice in Jeremiah. Jer. 23, 5. 6. Therefore the *Formula of Concord* correctly says: "On account of the complete obedience which He [Christ] rendered His heavenly Father for us, by doing and suffering, in living and dying, God forgives our sins, regards us as godly and righteous." (*Triglotta*, 919 f.)

"Regards us as righteous," not "makes us righteous." The very first passage in the Bible where this word occurs which has caused so much controversy is victoriously clear: "God counted it to Abraham for righteousness." Gen. 15, 6. [Jas. 2, 23: "It was *imputed* unto him for righteousness."] True, there is also an imputation "of debt," that of the hire to the laborer. Rom. 4, 4. But according to the expressed testimony of the Holy Ghost the imputation of which we are here speaking does not take place as "of debt." The former has its ground in man, to whom something is imputed; the latter in Him who imputes, in God. Rom. 4, 5. Just as Christ was numbered with the transgressors, not because He had done evil, but for our sakes, because it so pleased God. Is. 53, 12; Mark 15, 28. And this remains the rock on which the pure doctrine of the imputed righteousness rests: according to 2 Cor. 5, 21 God makes us righteous in the same way as He makes Christ a sinner, and in no other. The papists persist in objecting that an imputed righteousness, which does not dwell in the hearts, is a dream. Very well, if it is a dream indeed, then the vicarious satisfaction of Christ together with His suffering is a dream too. The bitter reality of the one guarantees the truth of the other. For just as little as our own unrighteousness dwelt in Christ as wickedness and was nevertheless truly imputed to Him, so much so that His God forsook Him, just so little does the righteousness which makes us righteous before God dwell in us, and is nevertheless truly

2) "*Nihil invenis, unde salves; multum autem invenis, unde damnes; et tamen ex misericordia propter Christum nos recipis.*" — *St. Augustine.*

imputed to us, so much so that we are of good cheer even in the face of death. Behold, the Holy One in Israel cries on the cross, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" and the sinner Polycarp rejoices in the agony of death, "Lord God, I praise Thee that Thou hast in this day and in this hour counted me worthy to partake, with all Thy martyrs, of the cup of Thy Christ for the resurrection of soul and body in the incorruptibility of the Holy Ghost!" Is it not this way: The Man on the cross bore, by imputation, foreign sin, and the man on the pyre, by imputation, foreign righteousness? He wore it as a garment. This picture is used by Scripture to hold up before our eyes the imputed righteousness of Christ. Isaiah sings: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God, for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness." Is. 61, 10. And Christ advises the bishop of Laodicea to buy of Him white raiment that the shame of his nakedness do not appear. Rev. 3, 18. Whosoever is not clothed in the wedding-garment which the King requires, because He furnishes it Himself, will be cast out of the wedding-hall. Matt. 22, 11—13. The same picture is employed when Scripture speaks of "putting on Christ," Gal. 3, 27; often also in such passages where it is said that we are or should be *in Christ*. In Christ we are blessed, Eph. 1, 3; in Christ we have grace, Eph. 1, 6; in Christ we have redemption, Eph. 1, 7, and victory, 2 Cor. 2, 14. That is to say, blessing, grace, redemption, victory — all these we shall have only when Christ covers us with His merits as with a garment. Thereby both things happen at once: the garment flows about your shoulders, and you are no longer naked. If God bestows the righteousness of Christ on a man, He grants him the forgiveness of sins. That is the reason why Scripture sometimes calls the imputation of Christ's merits "justification," at other times "forgiveness." Acts 13, 38, 39. In fact, those passages in which justification is treated most extensively define the imputation of righteousness simply as the forgiveness of sins. Rom. 4, 6, 7 it is said: "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." That is the doctrine of the Fathers also. And what is more natural? Even our sin has its positive and its negative side [*"ihr Ja und ihr Nein,"* i. e., "its yea and its nay"]: positive, wickedness; negative, unrighteousness. So grace comes and blots out the

negative by imputing the righteousness of Christ and the positive by granting forgiveness.³⁾

However this justification, or imputation, or forgiveness — choose whichever name you will — is an act of God which takes place in time. And, mark you, for every man individually. The justification of Paul did not come to pass at the same time as that of Cornelius; but as often as a heathen forsakes his idols, or a Jew his Talmud, so often, and much more often does God justify. Come he must, of course. For he that does not come, that is, “believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him,” John 3, 36.
