

Aspects of the Doctrine of Justification According to Reformed Theology

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I. Heaven must be merited by Christ's imputed righteousness

Reformed theology teaches that heaven must be merited by a complete and perfect righteousness. The active and passive obedience of Christ constitutes that righteousness which is imputed to the believer. Christ's imputed righteousness, by itself, apart from the inherent righteousness wrought in us by the Spirit, is what qualifies and entitles us to enter the state of glory.

Calvin: "What have these most pestilential Sophists left to Christ on which to exert his virtue? They say that he merited for us the first grace, that is, the occasion of meriting, and that it is our part not to let slip the occasion thus offered. O the daring effrontery of impiety! Who would have thought that men professing the name of Christ would thus strip him of his power, and all but trample him under foot? The testimony uniformly born to him in Scripture is that whose believeth in him is justified; the doctrine of these men is, that the only benefit which proceeds from him is to open up a way for each to justify himself. I wish they could get a taste of what is meant by these passages: 'He that has the Son has life.' 'He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me,' 'is passed from death unto life.' Whoso believeth in him 'is passed from death unto life.' 'Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.' 'He that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him.' God 'has raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ.' 'Who has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.' There are similar passages without number. Their meaning is not, that by faith in Christ an opportunity is given us of procuring justifications or acquiring salvation, but that both are given us. Hence, so soon as you are engrafted into Christ by faith, you are made a son of God, an heir of heaven, a partaker of righteousness, a possessor of life, and (the better to manifest the false tenets of these men) you have not obtained an opportunity of meriting, but all the merits of Christ, since they are communicated to you." (*Institutes*, III.xv.6 - all Calvin quotes are from Beveridge, except where otherwise noted)

Francis Turretin: "The obedience of Christ has a twofold efficacy, satisfactory and meritorious; the former by which we are freed from the punishments incurred by sin; the latter by which (through the remission of sin) a right to eternal life and salvation is

acquired for us. For as sin has brought upon us two evils - the loss of life and exposure to death - so redemption must procure the two opposite benefits - deliverance from death and a right to life, escape from hell and an entrance into heaven.” (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. II, p. 447)

Turretin: “Therefore when we say that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us for justification and that we are just before God through *imputed righteousness* and *not through any righteousness inherent in us*, we mean nothing else than that the obedience of Christ rendered in our name to God the Father is so given to us by God that it is reckoned to be truly ours and that it is *the sole and only righteousness* on account of and by the merit of which we are absolved from the guilt of our sins and obtain a right to life.” (*Institutes*, vol. II, p. 648)

Jonathan Edwards: “I would explain what we mean by the imputation of Christ’s righteousness ... By that righteousness being imputed to us, is meant no other than this, that that righteousness of Christ is accepted for us, and admitted instead of that perfect inherent righteousness that ought to be in ourselves: Christ’s perfect obedience shall be reckoned to our account so that we shall have the benefit of it, as though we had performed it ourselves: and so we suppose that a title to eternal life is given us as the reward of this righteousness.” (Quoted in Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. III, p. 148)

George Smeaton: “Christ’s vicarious sacrifice alone, apart from any accessory work or merit of a supplementary description, secured for His people a place in the heavenly inheritance. [Here, Smeaton quotes John 14:2-6] The words intimate that heaven, once shut against mankind, is reopened by the satisfaction of the Son of God, and that His entrance secures that of His people ... A place was prepared for the disciples by Christ, first, by annihilating the cause of the estrangement, or putting away sin by the sacrifice of Himself; and next, by taking possession of the inheritance in His people’s name, as their representative and Head. Thus, apart from any supplementary work of man, or any merit of our own appended to the work of atonement, Christ’s going to the Father prepared a place for the redeemed; and His disciples enter heaven simply on the footing of His atoning sacrifice.” (*Christ’s Doctrine of the Atonement*, pp. 401ff)

William Cunningham: “Papists unite with Arminians in denying the necessity of a perfect righteousness, as the ground or basis of God’s act in accepting men’s persons, and giving them a right and title to heaven ... As the Scriptures indicate that a perfect righteousness is necessary, as the ground or basis of our acceptance and admission to a right to life, as well as a full satisfaction as the ground or basis of our forgiveness or exemption from punishment, so they set before us such a perfect righteousness as available for us, and actually benefiting us, in the obedience which Christ, as our surety, rendered to all the requirements of the law.” (*Historical Theology*, vol. II, pp. 49, 51)

Robert L. Dabney: “The Catechism defines justification as a pardoning of all our sins, and an acceptance of us as righteous in God’s sight. It is more than remission, bestowing also a title to God’s favour, and adoption to that grace and glory which would have been won had we perfectly kept the Covenant of Works ... Since Christ steps into the sinner’s stead, to fulfil in his place the whole Covenant of Works, He must, in order to procure to us full salvation, both purchase pardon for guilt, and a positive title to favour and life. The sinner needs both ... Guiltlessness is not equal to righteousness; e.g., Adam, the moment he entered into the Covenant of Works, was guiltless, (and in one sense righteous). God could not justly have visited him with inflictions, nor taken away from his present natural happiness. But did Adam, therefore, have a title to that assured eternal life, including all the blessings of perseverance, infallible rectitude, and sustaining grace, which was held out in the Covenant, as the reward to be earned by obedience? Surely not. Now this is what the sinner needs to make a complete justification - what Christ gives therein ... Both parts of Christ’s righteousness are imputed for justification ... He undertook to stand in our law-stead; and do for us, what the Covenant of Works demanded of us for our eternal life ... It remains forever true, that a perfect obedience is requisite to purchase eternal life. And such a compliance is rendered to the covenant of works for our justification, namely, by our Surety.” (*Systematic Theology*, pp. 624-26, 636)

John. L. Girardeau: “The obedience which Christ, as the representative of his elect seed, rendered to the law is perfect; it is finished. The eye of justice, the scrutiny of Omniscience detect in it no blemish. It has been examined at the divine bar and judicially pronounced satisfactory. It cannot be invalidated; there is no contingency of failure in its results. But Christ’s seed representatively rendered that obedience in him. It therefore grounds, with absolute certainty, their everlasting holiness and happiness, their complete and indefectible life. The federal representative is in glory; the federal constituency must also be glorified. If not, the principle of representation is a figment, and the covenant of redemption breaks down amidst the jeers of hell.” (*The Federal Theology: Its Import and Its Regulative Influence*, with introduction by W. Duncan Rankin [Reformed Academic Press, 1994], pp. 45-46)

Charles Hodge: “Justification includes or conveys a title to eternal life. Pardon is purely negative. It simply removes a penalty. It confers no title to benefits not previously enjoyed. Eternal life, however, is suspended on the positive condition of perfect obedience. The merely pardoned sinner has no such obedience. He is destitute of what, by the immutable principles of divine government, is the indispensable condition of eternal life. He has no title to the inheritance promised to the righteous. This is not the condition of the believer. The merit of Christ is entitled to the reward. And the believer, being partaker of that merit, shares in that title ... The Church in all ages has recognized this truth. Believers have always felt that they had a title to eternal life. For this they have praised God in the loftiest strains. They have ever regarded it as intuitively true that *heaven must be merited*. The only question was, Whether that merit was in them or in Christ. Being in Christ, it was a free gift to them; and thus righteousness and peace kissed each other. Grace and justice unite in placing the crown

of righteousness on the believer's head ... As the work of Christ consisted in his doing all that the law of God, or covenant of works, requires for the salvation of men, and as the righteousness is freely offered to every one that believes, every such believer has as valid a claim to eternal life as he would have had, had he personally done all that the law demands. Thus broad and firm is the foundation which God has laid for the hopes of his people. It is the rock of ages; Jehovah our righteousness." (*Systematic Theology*, vol. III, pp. 129, 164-65)

A. A. Hodge: On WCF VIII:5: "That thus [Christ] has, according to the terms of the everlasting covenant, not only secured in behalf of those whom he represented remission of sins and propitiation of divine wrath, but also an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of glory. The sufferings of Christ secure the remission of the penalty; and by his active obedience, according to the terms of the covenant made with Adam and assumed by Christ, he purchases a right to life and eternal blessedness." (*The Confession of Faith*, p. 150)

Heinrich Heppe: "What we receive [in justification] is (1) the forgiveness of sins or the removal of the guilt of the sins, (2) assurance of eternal life. The latter also belongs to the nature of justification; the law itself promises eternal life, on the condition fulfilled by Christ that it should be fulfilled completely. - BURMAN (VI, v, 18): 'The imputation of Christ's righteousness consists of two parts: (1) remission of sins, (2) the adjudgement of eternal life. It is not merely pardon that is here involved.' - LEIDEN SYNOPSIS (XXXIII, 8): 'There are two parts in justification: the imputation of passive righteousness or absolution from sins, and the imputation of active righteousness. By the former of these we are delivered from liability and condemnation, and exempted from eternal death. By the latter we are also deemed worthy of a reward and receive the right to eternal life and it is adjudged to us, Rom. 5:17, 18; 8:3-4.' Moreover the sins which God forgives men in justification are not merely past sins but man's generally, since by justification God declares the sinner to be one who has a right to the inheritance of eternal life. -- HEIDEGGER (XXII, 49): '... Now to justify is to regard a man as one who may rightly ask and look for the reward of eternal life.'" (*Reformed Dogmatics*, pp. 551-52)

Heppe: "This work and this righteousness is the redeeming work of Christ which he has consummated for the elect and which therefore in virtue of its objective value is a 'meritorious and material cause of justification', because, *purely for the sake of this work* which He assigns and appropriates to the elect Himself, God acquits him of his sins and *institutes him heir of eternal life*." (*Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 546)

II. Two possible methods of justification

Reformed theology teaches that there are only two possible methods of justification and hence of obtaining the right and title to eternal life: (1) by perfectly obeying the law ourselves, or (2) by Christ's perfect fulfillment of the precepts and penalty of the law in our place. There is no tertium quid of justification by or "in accordance with" non-meritorious works.

Calvin: "In the same manner, a man will be said to be justified by works, if in his life there can be found a purity and holiness which merits an attestation of righteousness at the throne of God, or if by the perfection of his works he can answer and satisfy the divine justice. On the contrary, a man will be justified by faith when, excluded from the righteousness of works, he by faith lays hold of the righteousness of Christ, and clothed in it appears in the sight of God not as a sinner, but as righteous. Thus we simply interpret justification, as the acceptance with which God receives us into his favor as if we were righteous; and we say that this justification consists in the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ." (*Institutes*, III.xi.2)

Calvin: "They gain nothing by quoting from Paul to the same effect, that 'not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified,' (Romans 2:13.) I am unwilling to evade the difficulty by the solution of Ambrose, that Paul spoke thus because faith in Christ is the fulfillment of the law. This I regard as a mere subterfuge, and one too for which there is no occasion, as the explanation is perfectly obvious. The Apostle's object is to suppress the absurd confidence of the Jews who gave out that they alone had a knowledge of the law, though at the very time they were its greatest despisers. That they might not plume themselves so much on a bare acquaintance with the law, he reminds them that when justification is sought by the law, the thing required is not the knowledge but the observance of it. *We certainly mean not to dispute that the righteousness of the law consists in works, and not only so, but that justification consists in the dignity and merits of works.* But this proves not that we are justified by works unless they can produce some one who has fulfilled the law. That Paul had no other meaning is abundantly obvious from the context. After charging Jews and Gentiles in common with unrighteousness, he descends to particulars and says, that 'as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law,' referring to the Gentiles, and that 'as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law,' referring to the Jews. Moreover, as they, winking at their transgressions, boasted merely of the law, he adds most appropriately, that the law was passed with the view of justifying not those who only heard it, but those only who obeyed it; as if he had said, Do you seek righteousness in the law? do not bring forward the mere hearing of it,

which is in itself of little weight, but bring works by which you may show that the law has not been given to you in vain. Since in these they were all deficient, it followed that they had no ground of boasting in the law. Paul's meaning, therefore, rather leads to an opposite argument. The righteousness of the law consists in the perfection of works; but no man can boast of fulfilling the law by works, and, therefore, there is no righteousness by the law." (*Institutes*, III.xvii.13)

John Owen: "There is also a twofold justification before God mentioned in the Scripture. First, 'By the works of the law,' Rom. 2:13; 10:5; Matt. 19:16-19. Hereunto is required an absolute conformity unto the whole law of God, in our natures, all the faculties of our souls, all the principles of our moral operations, with perfect actual obedience unto all its commands, in all instances of duty, both for matter and manner: for he is cursed who continueth not in all things that are written in the law, to do them; and he that breaks any one commandment is guilty of the breach of the whole law. Hence the apostle concludes that none can be justified by the law, because all have sinned. Second, there is a justification by grace, through faith in the blood of Christ; whereof we treat. And these ways of justification are contrary, proceeding on terms directly contradictory, and cannot be made consistent with or subservient one to the other. But ... the confounding of them both, by mixing them together, is that which is aimed at in the distinction of a first and second justification. But whatever respects it may have, that justification which we have before God, in his sight through Jesus Christ, is but one, and at once full and complete." (*Works*, vol. V, pp. 139-40)

Turretin: "However, we must premise here that God, the just Judge, cannot pronounce anyone just and give him a right to life except on the ground of some perfect righteousness which has a necessary connection with life; but that righteousness is not of one kind. For as there are two covenants which God willed to make with men - the one legal and the other of grace - so also there is a twofold righteousness - legal and evangelical. Accordingly there is also a double justification or a double method of standing before God in judgment - legal and evangelical. The former consists in one's own obedience or a perfect conformity with the law, which is in him who is to be justified; the latter in another's obedience or a perfect observance of the law, which is rendered by a surety in the place of him who is to be justified - the former in us, the latter in Christ. Concerning the first, Paul says, 'Not the hearers, but the doers of the law shall be justified' (Rom. 2:13); and 'Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law. That the man which doeth those things shall live by them' (Rom. 10:5). Concerning the other, he says, 'The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth, for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith' (Rom. 1:16, 17); and 'Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus' (Rom. 3:24) ... Hence a twofold justification flows: one in legal covenant by one's own righteousness according to the clause, 'Do this and live'; the other in the covenant of grace, by another's righteousness (Christ's) imputed to us and apprehended by faith according to the clause, 'Believe and thou shalt be saved.' Each demands a perfect righteousness.

The former requires it in the man to be justified, but the latter admits the vicarious righteousness of a surety. (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. II, p. 637)

James H. Thornwell: “There are, then, but two conceivable dispensations - one of law, the other of grace; and consequently but two possible methods of justification - one by inherent righteousness, and the other by the free mercy of God ... To justify is to pronounce righteous. A holy God cannot, of course, declare that any one is righteous unless he is so. There are no fictions of law in the tribunal of Heaven - all its judgments are according to truth. A man may be righteous because he has done righteousness, and then he is justified by law; or he may be righteous because he has received righteousness as a gift, and then he is justified by grace. He may be righteous in himself, and this is the righteousness of works; or he may be righteous in another, and this is the righteousness of faith. Hence, to deny imputed righteousness is either to deny the possibility of justification at all, or to make it consist in the deeds of the law - both hypotheses involving a rejection of the grace of the Gospel.” (*Collected Writings*, vol. III, pp. 348-49)

Girardeau: “It is indispensable to a just apprehension of this vitally important subject, to notice that what was a covenant of redeeming grace to his seed was a covenant of works to Christ. It was they, not he, who needed to be redeemed; they, not he, who were to be debtors to grace. He stood under the covenant, as the second Adam, a probationer, required and undertaking to render perfect personal obedience to every demand of law, in order to the justification of his seed in him ... Both the first and second Adams were probationers under the provisions of a legal covenant, which conditioned justification upon perfect, personal obedience to law. The difference between them is, that in the one case the stipulated reward was missed, and in the other it was won.” (*The Federal Theology: Its Import and Its Regulative Influence*, pp. 18, 20-21)

Heppe: “Gospel justification is thus distinguished from the legal kind not *quoad essentiam* but solely *quoad circumstantias*, since Christ takes the place of the sinner. - LEIDEN SYNOPSIS (XXXIII, 5): ‘Justification is of two kinds, legal and gospel; the former by the law and its works, the latter by faith ... by the former after the fall no one is justified, by the latter everyone endued with the true faith in Christ ... Nevertheless the law or righteousness legal and of works is not simply opposed to God’s righteousness in Christ or to Christ’s. We are not justified contrary to the law, as that which Christ fulfilled both by suffering the punishment due to our sins, thereby destroying guilt, and by displaying all righteousness and obedience to the law, by which he laid down the condition of eternal life ...’ - HEIDEGGER (XXII, 15): ‘And to this extent it does not cease to be legal righteousness, since [it differs] from evangelical not essentially, which consists in looking to the cause or *dikaioma*, but as regards the circumstances alone, Christ being put in the sinners’ place, fulfilling the *dikaioma* of the law.’ (*Reformed Dogmatics*, pp. 547-48)

III. Spirit-wrought inherent righteousness not sufficient

Since the believer's Spirit-wrought inherent righteousness does not retroactively cover our past, and even in the forward direction is imperfect, it cannot be the required righteousness by which we are qualified and entitled to enter heaven. In fact, if judged by the strict standard of God's perfect righteousness, Spirit-wrought inherent righteousness would only earn God's just condemnation.

Calvin: "Osiander objects that it would be insulting to God, and contrary to his nature, to justify those who still remain wicked. But it ought to be remembered, as I already observed, that the gift of justification is not separated from regeneration, though the two things are distinct. But as it is too well known by experience, that the remains of sin always exist in the righteous, it is necessary that justification should be something very different from reformation to newness of life. This latter God begins in his elect, and carries on during the whole course of life, gradually and sometimes slowly, so that if placed at his judgment-seat they would always deserve sentence of death ... But herein is the wondrous method of justification, that, clothed with the righteousness of Christ, they dread not the judgment of which they are worthy, and while they justly condemn themselves, are yet deemed righteous out of themselves." (*Institutes*, III.xi.11)

Calvin: "Hence also it is proved, that it is entirely by the intervention of Christ's righteousness that we obtain justification before God. This is equivalent to saying that man is not just in himself, but that the righteousness of Christ is communicated to him by imputation, while he is strictly deserving of punishment. Thus vanishes the absurd dogma, that man is justified by faith, inasmuch as it brings him under the influence of the Spirit of God by whom he is rendered righteous. This is so repugnant to the above doctrine that it never can be reconciled with it ... That this was the Apostle's view is abundantly clear from another sentiment which he had expressed a little before: 'As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous,' (Romans 5:19.) To declare that we are deemed righteous, solely because the obedience of Christ is imputed to us as if it were our own, is just to place our righteousness in the obedience of Christ. Wherefore, Ambrose appears to me to have most elegantly adverted to the blessing of Jacob as an illustration of this righteousness, when he says that as he who did not merit the birthright in himself personated his brother, put on his garments which gave forth a most pleasant odor, and thus introduced himself to his father that he might receive a blessing to his own advantage, though under the person of another, so we conceal ourselves under the precious purity of Christ, our first-born brother, that we may obtain an attestation of righteousness from the presence of God. The words of Ambrose are, - 'Isaac's smelling

the odor of his garments, perhaps means that we are justified not by works, but by faith, since carnal infirmity is an impediment to works, but errors of conduct are covered by the brightness of faith, which merits the pardon of faults,' (Ambrose de Jacobo et Vita Beatus, Lib. 2, c. 2.) And so indeed it is; for in order to appear in the presence of God for salvation, we must send forth that fragrant odor, having our vices covered and buried by his perfection." (*Institutes*, III.xi.23)

Calvin: "Thus those who pretend that justification by faith consists in being regenerated and made just, by living spiritually, have never tasted the sweetness of grace in trusting that God will be propitious. Hence also, they know no more of praying aright than do the Turks or any other heathen people. For, as Paul declares, faith is not true, unless it suggest and dictate the delightful name of Father ... This he expresses more clearly in another passage, 'In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him,' (Ephesians 3:12.) This, certainly, is not obtained by the gift of regeneration, which, as it is always defective in the present state, contains within it many grounds of doubt. Wherefore, we must have recourse to this remedy; we must hold that the only hope which believers have of the heavenly inheritance is, that being in grafted into the body of Christ, they are justified freely. For, in regard to justification, faith is merely passive bringing nothing of our own to procure the favor of God, but receiving from Christ every thing that we want." (*Institutes*, III.xiii.5)

Calvin: "There is no controversy between us and the sounder Schoolmen as to the beginning of justification. They admit that the sinner, freely delivered from condemnation, obtains justification, and that by forgiveness of sins; but under the term justification they comprehend the renovation by which the Spirit forms us anew to the obedience of the Law; and in describing the righteousness of the regenerate man, maintain that being once reconciled to God by means of Christ, he is afterwards deemed righteous by his good works, and is accepted in consideration of them. The Lord, on the contrary, declares, that he imputed Abraham's faith for righteousness, (Romans 4:3,) not at the time when he was still a worshipper of idols, but after he had been many years distinguished for holiness. Abraham had long served God with a pure heart, and performed that obedience of the Law which a mortal man is able to perform: yet his righteousness still consisted in faith. Hence we infer, according to the reasoning of Paul, that it was not of works ... For the righteousness of Christ (as it alone is perfect, so it alone can stand the scrutiny of God) must appear in court on our behalf,* and as a surety represent us judicially. Provided with this righteousness, we constantly obtain the remission of sins through faith. Our imperfection and impurity, covered with this purity, are not imputed but are as it were buried, so as not to come under judgment ... It is, indeed, an easy matter for these indolent Rabbis to carry on such discussions sitting in their soft chairs under the shade, but when the Supreme Judge shall sit on his tribunal, all these blustering dogmas will behoove to disappear. This, this I say, was the true question: not what we can fable and talk in schools and corners, but what ground of defense we can produce at his judgment-seat." (*Institutes*, III.xiv.11, 12, 15) [*The words "appear in court on our behalf" are Battles' translation. The rest is Beveridge.]

Charles Hodge: “Again, justification according to the Scriptures gives a title to eternal life. For this our own righteousness is utterly inadequate. So far from anything in us being meritorious, or entitled to reward, the inward state and the exercises of the holiest of men, come so far short of perfection as to merit condemnation. In us there is no good thing. There is ever a law in our members warring against the law of the mind. Indwelling sin remains. It forced even Paul to cry out, ‘O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death.’ (Rom. 7:24). ‘No believer ever performed one work which, if tested by the strict judgment of God, could escape condemnation.’ (Calvin, *Institutes* III.xiv.11) ... If these fruits [of regeneration] are, as our consciousness testifies, defiled by sin, how can they merit eternal life? How can they cancel the handwriting which is against us? How can they be the ground of Paul’s confident challenge, ‘Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?’ It is not what is within us, but what is without us; not what we are or do, but what Christ is and has done, that is the ground of confidence and of our title to eternal life.” (*Systematic Theology*, vol. III, p. 131)

John Murray: “Justification is an act, complete and irrevocable. It is not a progressive nor a comparative judgment, and so it must have respect to a righteousness that is undefiled and undefilable. So we ask; what is this righteousness?

“1. *Not a righteousness generated or wrought in us*

“(i) We must remember that an infused righteousness even though it were perfect and eliminated all future sin would not be adequate to what is included in justification. For such would not obliterate the sin and unrighteousness of the past. But justification includes the remission of all sin and judicial liability ...

“(ii) The righteousness infused in regeneration is never in this life perfect. Consequently the infused righteousness does not measure up to the standard required for a perfect justification. Only a perfect righteousness can supply the ground of a complete, perfect and irreversible justification.

“(iii) We must bear in mind that justification secures eternal life (Romans 5:17, 18, 21). But even perfect inwrought righteousness cannot ground the reward of eternal life. We must therefore look elsewhere for the righteousness that is to validate this justifying act.” (*Collected Writings*, vol. II, pp. 210-11)

Murray: “The parallel instituted in Romans 5:12-19 as a whole is that between the way in which condemnation passes upon men through the sin of Adam and the way justification comes to men through the righteousness of Christ. In the case of the righteousness of Christ (designated *dikaioma* in verse 18 and *hupakoe* in verse 19) this righteousness comes to the justified through no other medium than that of union with Christ; it is not mediated through the righteousness inwrought in the believer in regeneration and sanctification ... It would be contradictory of Paul’s doctrine of justification to suppose that the righteousness and obedience of Christ become ours

unto justification because holiness is conveyed to us from Christ or that the righteousness of Christ is mediated to us through the holiness generated in us by regeneration. The one ground upon which the imputation of the righteousness of Christ becomes ours is the union with Christ. In other words, the justified person is constituted righteous by the obedience of Christ because of the solidarity established between Christ and the justified person. The solidarity constitutes the bond by which the righteousness of Christ becomes that of the believer. Once the solidarity is posited there is no other mediating factor that could be conceived of as necessary to the conjunction of the righteousness of Christ and the righteousness of the believer. This is to say that the conjunction is immediate.” (*The Imputation of Adam’s Sin*, p. 70)

IV. Why God’s justifying sentence is in accordance with the truth

Reformed theology teaches that God’s justifying sentence is just and in accordance with the truth, not because of the Spirit’s work of creating inherent righteousness within us, but solely because of the imputed righteousness of Christ.

Calvin: “To justify therefore, is nothing else than to acquit from the charge of guilt, as if innocence were proved. Hence, when God justifies us through the intercession of Christ, he does not acquit us on a proof of our own innocence, but by an imputation of righteousness, so that though not righteous in ourselves, we are deemed righteous in Christ.” (*Institutes*, III.xi.3)

Calvin: “Justification, moreover, we thus define: The sinner being admitted into communion with Christ is, for his sake, reconciled to God; when purged by his blood he obtains the remission of sins, and clothed with righteousness, just as if it were his own, stands secure before the judgment-seat of heaven.” (*Institutes*, III.xvii.8)

Turretin: “Hence it follows that God cannot show favor to, nor justify anyone without a perfect righteousness. For since the judgment of God is according to truth, he cannot pronounce anyone just who is not really just. However, since no mortal after sin has such a righteousness in himself (nay, by sin he has been made a child of wrath and become exposed to death), it must be sought out of us in another, by the intervention of which man (sinful and wicked) may be justified without personal righteousness.” (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. II, p. 647)

Turretin: “Christ having been destined and given of God to us as a surety and head, in virtue of this union it happens that whatever was done by him (or endured for the perfect fulfillment of the law as to its precepts as well as to its penal sanction) is reckoned ours, as done in our place, and is imputed to us by God as if it had been

performed by ourselves. From this imputation of his most perfect righteousness flow two benefits - both remission of sins and the bestowal of a right to life or adoption.” (*Institutes*, vol. II, p. 657)

Cunningham: “We can give no distinct or intelligible statement or explanation of how either the satisfaction or the meritorious obedience of Christ bear upon, and affect, the forgiveness and acceptance of sinners, except by saying that they were rendered in the room and stead of men, and that they were rendered, by being made over to them, and put down to their account, so that they in consequence are regarded and treated as if they had endured and done them themselves.” (*Historical Theology*, vol. II, p. 53)

Cunningham: “The righteousness of Christ, including the whole of His perfect and meritorious obedience to the law, as well as His suffering, was a great and infinitely important reality. It was intended to effect and secure the salvation of all those whom God had chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. It is in due time, and in accordance with the arrangements which God in His infinite wisdom has laid down, bestowed upon each of them, through his union to Christ by faith, not in any mere fiction of law, but in actual deed; and being thus really, and not merely putatively or by a fiction, bestowed upon them, it is, of course, held or reckoned as theirs, and thus becomes the ground - the full and adequate ground - on which God further bestows upon them the forgiveness of their sins, and a right to the heavenly inheritance, and to all the privileges of sonship.” (*Historical Theology*, vol. II, pp. 55-56)

Charles Hodge: “[Justification] is a declarative act in which God pronounces the sinner just or righteous, that is, declares that the claims of justice, so far as he is concerned, are satisfied, so that he cannot be justly condemned, but is in justice entitled to the reward promised or due to perfect righteousness ... The righteousness of Christ is in justification imputed to the believer. That is, is set to his account, so that he is entitled to plead it at the bar of God, as though it were personally and inherently his own.” (*Systematic Theology*, vol. III, p. 118)

A. A. Hodge: On WCF XI: “Justification is a judicial act of God, whereby he declares us to be conformed to the demands of the law as the condition of our life; it is not an act of gracious power, making us holy or conformed to the law as a standard of moral character ... Christ’s righteousness is imputed, or its rewardableness is so credited to the believer that all the covenanted honours and rewards of a perfect righteousness henceforth rightly belong to him.” (*The Confession of Faith*, pp. 180-83)

Murray: “Since [justification] is obviously an act of God which is concerned with a radical change of relationship, it must mean that God constitutes a new judicial relation to himself in virtue of which the person may be declared to be righteous in his sight. And since it is by ‘the obedience of the one’ that this relationship is constituted, there can be but one conclusion, that by an act of grace the obedience of Christ is brought to bear upon the person concerned in such a way that the judgment registered with respect

to that person is the judgment which the obedience of Christ elicits and demands.” (*The Imputation of Adam’s Sin*, p. 87)

Murray: “[The righteousness of Christ] measures up to the demands and requirements of a full, perfect, and irrevocable justification. And not only does it meet these demands and requirements, but since it is divine and therefore *perfectly correspondent with the inherent justice of God it always elicits the divine approbation* whenever it comes into operation. That is to say, not only does it warrant the justifying act but it demands the same. The justifying judgment must supervene upon it whenever it is bestowed.” (*Collected Writings*, vol. II, p. 213, emphasis Murray’s)

V. The precise role of Christ’s merit

Reformed theology denies that the merit of Christ is sufficiently connected with our justification and righteousness before God by merely affirming that Christ merited the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit in order to create inherent righteousness within us.

Turretin: “Although [Romanists] do not appear to exclude entirely the righteousness of Christ, inasmuch as they hold that by it he merited that God should communicate to us by the Holy Spirit internal righteousness and thus it is a condition of the formal cause (i.e., of inherent righteousness that it may be given to man), still they maintain that the right to seek life depends upon inherent righteousness and that on account of it God justifies us ... On the other hand, the orthodox think far differently. For although they do not deny that inherent righteousness was purchased for us by the merit of Christ and by his grace conferred upon us so that by it we are and can be denominated truly just and holy, still they deny that it enters into justification in any way, either as a cause or as a part ... For the righteousness of Christ alone imputed to us is the foundation and meritorious cause upon which our absolutary sentence rests, so that for no other reason does God bestow the pardon of sin and the right to life than on account of the most perfect righteousness of Christ imputed to us and apprehended by faith. Hence it is readily gathered that we have not here a mere dispute about words (as some falsely imagine), but a controversy most real and indeed of the highest moment. In it we treat of the principal foundation of our salvation, which being overthrown or weakened, all our confidence and consolation both in life and in death must necessarily perish ... Nor is this absurdity [that justification is by inherent righteousness] removed by saying that all this righteousness depends on Christ, who obtained that also for us ... The Pharisee is no less condemned, although giving thanks to God he professes that he has all that he has from him, not from himself (Lk. 18:11, 12, 14) ... [The Romanists] so limit the

benefit of the imputation of Christ's merits to obtaining the effect of infused grace that this imputation is made for no other end than to merit for us infused grace, in virtue of which we obey the law and, being righteous in ourselves, are justified ... It is evident that the question here is Are the righteousness and satisfaction of Christ so imputed to us by God as to be the only foundation and meritorious cause in view of which alone we are acquitted before God of our sins and obtain a right to life? Our opponents deny; we affirm." (*Institutes*, vol. II, pp. 638-39, 643, 650)

VI. Any and all works excluded

Reformed theology teaches that when Paul affirms that we are justified by faith "apart from the works of the law," the works excluded are not merely works done apart from grace or in a sinful attempt to merit God's favor, but any and all works whatsoever, including the Spirit-wrought obedience and good works that are the necessary fruit of justifying faith.

Calvin: "The Sophists, who delight in sporting with Scripture and in empty cavils, think they have a subtle evasion when they expound works to mean, such as unregenerated men do literally, and by the effect of free will, without the grace of Christ, and deny that these have any reference to spiritual works. Thus according to them, man is justified by faith as well as by works, provided these are not his own works, but gifts of Christ and fruits of regeneration ... But they observe not that in the antithesis between Legal and Gospel righteousness, which Paul elsewhere introduces, all kinds of works, with whatever name adorned, are excluded, (Galatians 3:11, 12.)" (*Institutes*, III.xi.14)

Owen: "We shall take our fourth argument from the express exclusion of all works, of what sort soever, from our justification before God. For this alone is that which we plead, -namely, that no acts or works of our own are the causes or conditions of our justification; but that the whole of it is resolved into the free grace of God, through Jesus Christ, as the mediator and surety of the covenant. To this purpose the Scripture speaks expressly. Rom. 3:28, 'Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law.' Rom. 4:5, 'But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.' Rom. 11:6, 'If it be of grace, then is it no more of works.' Gal. 2:16, 'Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.' Eph. 2:8-9,

‘For by grace are ye saved through faith ... not of works, lest any man should boast.’ Tit. 3:5, ‘Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us’ ... [T]he law, in every sense of it, and all sorts of works whatever, that at any time, or by any means, sinners or believers do or can perform, are, not in this or that sense, but every way and in all senses, excluded from our justification before God. And if it be so, it is the righteousness of Christ alone that we must betake ourselves unto, or this matter must cease forever. Our adversaries are extremely divided amongst themselves, and can come unto no consistency, as to the sense and meaning of the apostle in these assertions ... Some say it is the ceremonial law alone, and the works of it, that are intended ... or ... the law given on mount Sinai, abstracted from the grace of the promise ... Some of late among ourselves ... affirm that the works which the apostle excludes from justification are only the outward works of the law, performed without an inward principle of faith, fear, or love of God ... Some say that it is works with a conceit of merit, that makes the reward to be of debt, and not of grace, that are excluded by the apostle. But no such distinction appeareth in the text or context ... Some contend that the apostle excludes only works wrought before believing, in the strength of our own wills and natural abilities, without the aid of grace ... But this whole plea, and all the sophisms wherewith it is countenanced, have been so discussed and defeated by Protestant writers of all sorts against Bellarmine and others, as that it is needless to repeat the same things ... The apostle excludeth all works, without distinction or exception ... All the works of the law are excluded: therefore all works wrought after believing by the aids of grace are excluded; for they are all required by the law ... The works of believers after conversion, performed by the aids of grace, are expressly excluded by the apostle. So are those of Abraham, after he had been a believer many years, and abounded in them unto the praise of God. All works are excluded that might give countenance unto boasting ... But this is done more by the good works of regenerate persons than by any works of unbelievers ... Some affirm that the apostle excludes all works from our first justification, but not from the second; or, as some speak, the continuation of our justification. But we have before examined these distinctions, and found them groundless.” (*Works*, vol. V, pp. 278-85)

Owen: “From what hath been discoursed, these two things are evident in the confirmation of our present argument:-first, That the law intended by the apostle, when he denies that by the works of the law any can be justified, is the entire rule and guide of our obedience unto God, even as unto the whole frame and spiritual constitution of our souls, with all the acts of obedience or duties that he requireth of us; and, secondly, That the works of this law, which he so frequently and plainly excludeth from our justification, and therein opposeth to the grace of God and the blood of Christ, are all the duties of obedience,-internal, supernatural; external, ritual,-however we are or may be enabled to perform them, that God requireth of us. And these things excluded, it is the righteousness of Christ alone, imputed unto us, on the account whereof we are justified before God.” (*Works*, vol. V, p. 289)

Owen: “That faith whereby we are justified is most frequently in the New Testament expressed as receiving [John 1:12; Col. 2:6; Rom. 5:11,17; Acts 26:18] ... That the

nature of faith, and its acting with respect unto all the causes of justification, consisting in receiving, that which is the object of it must be offered, tendered, and given unto us, as that which is not our own, but is made our own by that giving and receiving. This is evident in the general nature of receiving. And herein, as was observed, as no other grace or duty can concur with it, so the righteousness whereby we are justified can be none of our own antecedent unto this reception, nor at any time inherent in us. Hence we argue, that if the work of faith in our justification be the receiving of what is freely granted, given, communicated, and imputed unto us, -that is, of Christ, of the atonement, of the gift of righteousness, of the forgiveness of sins, -then have our other graces, our obedience, duties, works, no influence into our justification, nor are any causes or conditions thereof; for they are neither that which doth receive nor that which is received, which alone concur thereunto.” (*Works*, vol. V, pp. 291-92)

Owen: “It hath been said, that faith is the receiving of Christ as a priest, and a lord, to be saved by him, and ruled by him. This sounds excellent well. Who is so vile that, endeavoring to believe, is not willing to be ruled by Christ, as well as saved by him? A faith that would not have Christ to be Lord to rule us, is that faith alone which James rejects. He that would be saved by Christ, and not ruled by him, shall not be saved by him at all. We are to receive a whole Christ, not by halves; -in regard of all his offices, not one or another. This sounds well, makes a fair show, and there is, in some regard, truth in what is spoken; but ‘Latet anguis in herba’ [a snake is hiding in the grass], -Let men explain themselves, and it is this: The receiving of Christ as a king, is the yielding obedience to him. But that subjection is not a fruit of the faith whereby we are justified, but an essential part of it; so that there is no difference between faith and works or obedience, in the business of justification, both being alike a condition of it ... Others at length mince the matter, and say, that faith and works have the same respects to our justification that shall be public and solemn at the last day, at the day of judgment ... How they will justify themselves at the day of judgment for troubling the peace of the saints of God, and shaking the great fundamental articles of the Reformation, I know not ... It is true, then, we acknowledge, that faith receives Christ as a lord, as a king; and it is no true faith that will not, doth not do so, and put the soul upon all that obedience which he, as the captain of our salvation, requires at our hands. But faith, as it justifies (in its concurrence, whatever it be, thereunto), closeth with Christ for righteousness and acceptation with God only. And, give me leave to say, it is in that act no less exclusive of good works than of sin. It closeth with Christ in and for that, on account whereof he is our righteousness, and for and by which we are justified.” (*Works*, vol. IX, pp. 24-26)

Girardeau: “To the extent to which, as justifying, [faith] embraces or exhibits any extraneous quality, to that extent Christ is displaced. Holiness is in its place indispensable, but faith, so far as it is the instrument of justification, has nothing to do with it; it has no eye, no ear for anything but a justifying Saviour: it reaches out both empty palms to him. The dread of Antinomianism, real or imaginary - and the imaginary is the Calvinistic Federal Theology - generates a wisdom superior to God’s, a concern for righteousness more conservative than his, and clamors for a little infusion

of ethics into faith, for fear a simple reliance upon Christ and His righteousness for justification might prejudice sanctification and damage the interests of holiness.”
(*Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism*, pp. 540-41)

Murray: “There is harmony between faith as the instrument, on the one hand, and the judicially constitutive and declarative nature of justification, and the righteousness of Christ as the ground of justification, on the other. Now why is there this congruity? It is not because faith is the gift of God. Sometimes that is given as the reason and Ephesians 2:8 is dragged in to do service for this truth. If the mere fact that faith is the gift of God were the explanation, then we could discover no reason why faith rather than repentance, or love, or hope, or patience is brought into this relation to justification. For all of these exercises of the regenerate person are due to the grace of God as much as is faith ... They are all the gift of God in the sense of being graciously wrought in us by the operation of the Holy Spirit. We shall have to look in some other direction then for the differentia of faith whereby its congruity with justification can be established. The differentiating quality of faith is that the nature and function of faith is to rest completely upon another. It is this resting, confiding, entrusting quality of faith that makes it appropriate to and indeed exhibitiv of the nature of justification. It is consonant with its source as the free grace of God, with its nature as a forensic act, and with its ground as the righteousness of Christ. Faith terminates upon Christ and his righteousness and it makes mention of his righteousness and of his only. This is the Saviour’s specific identity in the matter of justification—he is the Lord our righteousness. And in resting upon him alone for salvation it is faith that perfectly dovetails justification in him and his righteousness. Other graces or fruits of the Spirit have their own specific functions in the application of redemption, but only faith has as its specific quality the receiving and resting of self-abandonment and totality of self-commitment. This is both the stumbling-block and the irresistible appeal of the gospel. It is the stumbling-block to self-righteousness and self-righteousness is the arch-demon of antithesis to grace. It is the glory of the gospel for the contrite and brokenhearted—if we put any other exercise of the human spirit in the place of faith, then we cut the throat of the only confidence a sinner conscious of his lost and helpless condition can entertain. Justification by faith is the jubilee trumpet of the gospel because it proclaims the gospel to the poor and destitute whose only door of hope is to roll themselves in total helplessness upon the grace and power and righteousness of the Redeemer of the lost. In the words of one, ‘cast out your anchor into the ocean of the Redeemer’s merits.’ Faith is always joined with repentance, love, and hope. A faith severed from these is not the faith of the contrite and therefore it is not the faith that justifies. But it is faith alone that justifies because its specific quality is to find our all in Christ and his righteousness.” (*Collected Writings*, vol. 2, pp. 216-17)

VII. Judgment “according to works”

Reformed theology teaches that, for the elect, the purpose of the eschatological judgment “according to works” is to determine degrees of rewards - not to determine whether we shall inherit eternal life, nor to pronounce a second justification, nor to prove that God’s verdict of justification is just and in accordance with the truth.

Girardeau: “Salvation - the salvation of Paul and the penitent thief - is entirely of grace, the rewards of the heavenly state are all purchased by the merit of Christ alone; but the proportion in which the rewards will be administered to individuals will be determined by fatherly justice in accordance with the fidelity of the saints on earth. In this paternal rule over God’s own house there is no element of retribution. The government is wholly disciplinary. Punishment gives way to chastisement. The Ruler and Judge is both Father and Saviour. It is needless to say that this sort of probation is not legal in the sense that it is in order to justification. Justification is presupposed. Nor is it in order to salvation. It is in order to the degree in which glory shall be experienced.” (*Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism*, pp. 464-65)

Murray: “While it makes void the gospel to introduce works in connection with justification, nevertheless works done in faith, from the motive of love to God, in obedience to the revealed will of God and to the end of his glory are intrinsically good and acceptable to God. As such they will be the criterion of reward in the life to come. This is apparent from such passages as Matthew 10:41; 1 Corinthians 3:8-9, 11-15; 4:5; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:7. We must maintain therefore, justification complete and irrevocable by grace through faith and apart from works, and at the same time, future reward according to works. In reference to these two doctrines it is important to observe the following: (i) This future reward is not justification and contributes nothing to that which constitutes justification. (ii) This future reward is not salvation. Salvation is by grace and it is not as a reward for works that we are saved. (iii) The reward has reference to the station a person is to occupy in glory and does not have reference to the gift of glory itself. While the reward is of grace yet the standard or criterion of judgment by which the degree of reward is to be determined is good works. (iv) This reward is not administered because good works earn or merit reward, but because God is graciously pleased to reward them.” (*Collected Writings*, vol. II, p. 221)

Owen: “There is that in the Scripture assigned unto our first justification, if they will needs call it so, as leaves no room for their second feigned justification; for the sole foundation and pretence of this distinction is the denial of those things to belong unto our justification by the blood of Christ which the Scripture expressly assigns unto it. Let us take out some instances of what belongs unto the first, and we shall quickly see how little it is, yea, that there is nothing left for the pretended second justification. For,

-- [1.] Therein do we receive the complete ‘pardon and forgiveness of our sins,’ Rom. 4:6, 7; Eph. 1:7; 4:32; Acts 26:18. [2.] Thereby are we ‘made righteous,’ Rom. 5:19; 10:4; and, [3.] Are freed from condemnation, judgment, and death, John 3:16, 19; 5:25; Rom. 8:1; [4.] Have peace with him, and access into the favour wherein we stand by grace, with the advantages and consolations that depend thereon in a sense of his love, Rom. 5:1-5. And, [6.] We have adoption therewithal, and all its privileges, John 1:12; and, in particular, [7.] A right and title unto the whole inheritance of glory, Acts 26:18; Rom. 8:17. And, [8.] Hereon eternal life doth follow, Rom. 8:30; 6:23 ... And if there be anything now left for their second justification to do, as such, let them take it as their own; these things are all of them ours, or do belong unto that one justification which we do assert. Wherefore it is evident, that either the first justification overthrows the second, rendering it needless; or the second destroys the first, by taking away what essentially belongs unto it: we must therefore part with the one or the other, for consistent they are not.” (*Works*, vol. V, pp. 142-43)

Thomas Boston: On the General Judgment: “The book of the law shall be opened. This book is the standard and rule, by which is known what is right and what is wrong; as also, what sentence is to be passed accordingly on those who are under it ... But what seems principally pointed at by the opening of this book, is the opening of that part of it which determines the reward of men’s works. Now the law promises life, upon perfect obedience: but none can be found on the right hand, or on the left, who will pretend to that, when once the book of conscience is opened. It threatens death upon disobedience, and will effectually bring it upon all under its dominion. And this part of the book of the law, determining the reward of men’s works, is opened, only to show what must be the portion of the ungodly, and that there may be read their sentence before it is pronounced. But it is not opened for the sentence of the saints; for no sentence absolving a sinner could ever be drawn out of it. The law promises life, not as it is a rule of actions, but as a covenant of works; therefore innocent man could not have demanded life upon his obedience, till the law was reduced into the form of a covenant, as was shown before. But the saints, having been, in this life, brought under a new covenant, namely, the covenant of grace, were dead to the law as a covenant of works, and it was dead to them. Wherefore, as they shall not now have any fear of death from it, so they can have no hope of life from it, since ‘they are not under the law, but under grace’ (Rom. 6:14). But, for their sentence, ‘another book is opened’ ... ‘Another book’ shall be ‘opened, which is the book of life’ (Rev. 20:12). In this the names of the elect are written, as Christ said to His disciples (Luke 10:20), ‘Your names are written in heaven.’ This book contains God’s gracious and unchangeable purpose, to bring all the elect to eternal life; and that, in order thereto, they be redeemed by the blood of His Son, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and raised up by Him at the last day without sin. It is now lodged in the Mediator’s hand ... Then shall the Judge pronounce this blessed sentence on the saints, ‘Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’ (Matt. 25:34) ... This sentence is passed on the saints, ‘according to their works’ (Rev. 20:12); but not for their works, nor for their faith, as if eternal life were merited by them ... They were redeemed by the blood of Christ, and clothed with His spotless

righteousness, which is the proper cause of the sentence ... And the saints will so far be judged according to such works, that the degrees of glory amongst them shall be according to these works. For it is an eternal truth, 'He that soweth sparingly, shall reap also sparingly' (2 Cor. 9:6). Thus shall the good works of the godly have a glorious, but a gratuitous reward; a reward of grace, not of debt; which will fill them with wonder at the riches of free grace, and at the Lord's condescending to take any notice, especially such public notice, of their poor worthless works.'" (*Human Nature in Its Fourfold State*, pp. 413-18)