Now this is the language of Scripture, exclusively. Does it speak of "life-sufferings" justifying, or of death, of blood, and that alone? I know, of course, that "life-sufferings from Bethlehem to Calvary" are meant to include the cross. All I ask here is, Does Scripture teach us to so mix up His life and death together, as together justifying?

It is quite true that I have omitted purposely, as yet, the passages which speak, not of justifying, but of righteousness. My reason is, that I desire to keep the things distinct from one another which Scripture in its wisdom, which is perfect, distinguishes.

"Righteousness" is in three places, and in three only, in the New Testament, a "righteous act" or "sum of righteous acts" (Rom. 2:26; 5:18; 8:4). In every other case, it is a quality. That is, it was the being righteous, His character as such. This, declared by the death of Christ, (Rom. 3:26), is revealed in the gospel as the hope and confidence of lost and guilty men, (1:17), for as surely as Christ died for sinners, the sinner who shelters himself in Him is safe by the very fact that God is righteous.

Righteousness for a man, a sinner, is a character he is credited with: he is accounted righteous, righteousness is reckoned or imputed to him. That is, not a sum of righteousness, -- so much doing -- but a certain character, as I have said. In one place (Rom. 4:6-8), righteousness imputed, is just sin not imputed. But if "Christ is made unto us righteousness" (1 Cor. 1:30), this of course goes very much further; nay, as being in Him before God, every believer is necessarily "righteous as He is righteous," (1 John 3:7); all the value of Christ, of Him was imputed upon God, whether by life or death, attaches to him.

Thus "by the obedience of One shall many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19). I have no intention, as I have no desire, to exclude His blessed life from this "obedience." But this is not life-suffering, even though He suffered doubtless in the path of obedience, nay, "learned obedience by the things that He suffered." This means, He learned what it was -- a new thing for "the Son" to obey, and to suffer in obeying.

So again, that "He became obedient unto death," that is, that death itself, lying in His path, was not refused by this obedient One, is surely true. Obedient He was in a life tested by suffering which had no equal; and obedient in death, where that was "even the death of the cross." By this obedience, perfect and entire throughout, one whole in life or death, we are made righteous, I again say. And here all that is really precious for the heart in the thought "He lived for us" as well as died for us, finds its expression and its justification.

But this is not the justification of the thought of a "vicarious life." By this term is intended, of course, His being in our place, Sin-bearer therefore, from His birth. The place of sinners, -- our place, -- would be necessarily for Him that of a sin-bearer, Let me express this in the language of a very popular writer, extreme language, no doubt, but it is well to see where such thoughts carry us.

Says Dr. Horatius Bonar thus:

"He was Himself the true Sacrifice, the bearer of sin, as such He lived and died. In all that He did, and in all that He abstained from doing; in the places which He visited, and in the places which He abstained from visiting, He kept this in view. He was loaded with our sin, our curse, our condemnation, our leprosy; and as such, must keep at a distance from the holy and the clean. 2 The last sentence will be disclaimed as expressing the views of many, perhaps. I would fain trust so. Still it is the language of one whose writings have widespread acceptance among Christians, and those so-called "evangelical" at the present day. And the general thought is one which is evident from the statement that the Lord’s "life-sufferings from Bethlehem to Calvary are the true ground of our justification." Here His "life-sufferings" are looked at as the penalty endured in our

1. The first word is "dikaioma," the second, "dikaiouomai." "The termination -- ma, denotes the result of an action, and is Affixed to verbs in these stems. Thus, prasso, prag-, gives pragma, a thing; and the obsolete rheo, rhe-, forms rhema, a thing spoken, a word.


In Rev. 19:8, the word is really a plural, "dikaiomatia," "the righteousnesses of the saints."
The system which speaks of Christ’s law-fulfilling as our righteousness, speaks on this wise. It puts you down as one under the law, to get to heaven by. The law promises heaven or eternal life to obedience. It denounces the curse on disobedience. Now, then, it is not only necessary to have our sins borne, our curse taken for us. That would still leave us without a positive title to heaven; it would free us from hell but no more. And there comes in the necessity of a positive meritorious fulfilling of the law for us being needed, as well as curse endured.

Space fails just now for the consideration of this system. I propose rather to set side by side with it the Scriptural one, for the establishment of this will of course suffice to set aside the other.

Scripture then speaks of man, if under law, as the law-fulfilling of the law for us being needed, as well as curse endured.

To the difference between this and the whole previous part of our Lord’s life, no Christian can be altogether blind. But it is a marvel that any should not see that here alone is the sinner’s place taken, -- the sinner’s due received, -- that here alone was that fulfilled, He was “made a curse for us.” Where and where was this? Mark further -- “as it is written. Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree” (Gal. 3:13).

But we have not yet done with this doctrine of vicarious life. The law! what about the law? Was Christ not “made under the law?” Did He not fulfill it in our stead, and thus work out our robe of righteousness? And if the Cross alone is what meets our sins, is not His law-fulfilling the righteousness which fits us for, and entitles us to heaven?

Scripture answers --

Christ was “made under the law”; did fulfill it therefore, and that perfectly, as He must, being under it and the perfect One. So far all is plain. But there is a wide gap between this and what follows in men’s thoughts. The moment I say, “He fulfilled it in our stead,” I say it without Scripture. “He magnified the law, and made it honorable” -- true. Not a step further will the Word carry you in this track. Why is it, it NEVER says, “His law-fulfilling is our righteousness?” Because it has a very different, -- a contradictory thing to this, to say.

Now did the last Adam take up the first Adam’s responsibilities to fulfill them, and so secure the blessing which he failed to obtain. It is a mistake and a serious one. The first Adam and the last are not only type and antitype: they are, on that very account, contrasts. The first man, Adam, was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening Spirit. The first man is of the earth, earthly; the second man is the Lord from heaven” (1 Cor. 15:45, 47). Now as are the two, so are their responsibilities, and so is the work with which each is connected. To the first Adam it was never said, “Do this, and you shall go to heaven,” but on the other hand, “Do this, and you will die.” His responsibility was to retain his place, not acquire a new one. Nor can any law-keeping on his part have entitled him to a higher place than that in which he was created. No creature can do more than duty, and none can acquire a title to be raised above his natural condition. Hence the law which was the test of man, never says, “The man that doeth these things shall go to heaven,” but “shall live in them.” Had it found the perfect man for which it looked, he would not have died and gone to heaven; no, he could not have died at all. But all died. Yes, because “all have sinned.” The law says, “There is none righteous,” and leaves man there.

And now comes the work of the last Adam. Not being a mere creature, He can merit. But instead of putting Himself under the first Adam’s responsibility to restore the condition of the earthy, He closes for those who believe in Him their entire connection with it, giving them in Himself (His work completed, and He in the value of it, as man, gone up to God), a new place of blessing, heavenly, in the Divine favor which rests upon Himself. This place was never attached to law-keeping; no man fulfilling that could ever have hoped for it, be He the Adam the first or any of his sons.

And to say that the law, the measure of mere man’s obedience, was the measure of His, by whose obedience many are made righteous, is to confound the lowest with the highest, man’s work to keep his first estate, and Christ’s to bring men out of the ruin of it to the heights of glory where He Himself sits, “not by law, but by grace.” Was He no more than perfect man? was His work no more than Adam should have done? and are the results no more than if the first man had walked in his integrity? Alas, where have we got, if it be needful to ask such questions.

Doubtless He fulfilled the law, for the greater includes the less, and His obedience was beyond and above law altogether. Not in our stead did He fulfill the law, but by dying took us out of the condition to which law attaches, to give us a new place in grace which nought but grace could give, and which will be the wonder of eternity that grace could give us.

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Was Our Lord’s Life Vicarious?

Our correspondent asks, “How is it proved that our Lord’s life-sufferings and obedience were not vicarious? Presbyterians teach that ‘His life-suf ferings from Bethlehem to Calvary were the true ground of our justification,’ and that, ‘He obeyed the law in our stead.’ Again, ‘What is meant by His being ‘made under the law,’ or by His being ‘obedient unto death’? How did He ‘learn obedience by the things which He suffered?’ (Heb. 5:8), or in what sense was He ‘made perfect through suffering’? (Heb. 2:10).”

Let us first look briefly at the question of justification. In Scripture usage, justification is always from sins and guilt, -- acquittal, -- clearance from charge and accusation. It has no idea in itself of giving merit or title to reward. Thus “by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39); “he that is dead is justified from sin” (Rom. 6:7, marg). Again, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?” (Rom. 8:33). Or again, “I know nothing, by (i.e. against) myself; yet I am not thereby justified, but he that judgeth me is the Lord” (1 Cor . 4:4). Once more, “The free gift is of many of fenses unto justification” (Rom. 5:16).

Now when God becomes “the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus,” what is the ground upon which according to Scripture He justifies one who is a sinner, and ungodly? Let the Scripture answer: “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” -- “redemption through His blood” (Eph. 1:7), -- “whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood” -- (Rom. 3:24). “That, being now justified by His blood” (Rom. 5:9). Or again, “he that is dead is justified from sin; now if we be dead with Christ” -- (ch. 6:7, 8).