

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 so to 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*.¹ Thus the “righteousness of God” is His 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 who glorified God on earth, whether by life or death, attaches to him.

1. The first word is “dikaioma,” the second, “dikaiosune.” “The termination -- ma, denotes the *result of an action*, And is affixed to verbal stems. Thus, prasso, prag-, gives pragma, a *thing done*, an *action*; and the obsolete rheo, rhe-, forms rhema, a thing spoken, a word.”

“Substantives in osune, connected with adjective stems in on-, rarely in o-, denote a *quality*; as . . . dikaiosune, righteousness.” (Handbook to the Grammar of the New Testament, published by the Religious Tract Society of England, pp. 154, 156).

In Rev. 19:8, the word is really a plural, “dikaiomata,” “the righteousnesses of the saints.”

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, He 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 evidently implied in 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

2. “The Banished One bearing our banishment,” in *The Christian Treasury*, 1861, p. 314.

behalf, -- are mixed up with the entirely contrasted sufferings on the cross, -- and are made the ground of a justification which, if it could have been effected in that way, would have absolutely rendered the *death* of the Lord unnecessary. That is not meant of course, I know; but it is right to show the consequences involved in that which those who hold it do not follow out to its consequences.

But let me ask now, where is the proof from Scripture, that the Lord bore sin for us “from Bethlehem to Calvary?” I read, “Who His own self bare our sin in His own body ON THE TREE,” (1 Pet. 2:24). People have tried to make even this text speak another language. The marginal reading here gives “or *to* the tree,” and many have tried to elaborate their own doctrine out of this. But it is impossible.³ And the same thing will be found elsewhere in this very epistle, as 3:18, “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God, *being put to death* in the flesh,” &c. So universally: “Without shedding of blood is no remission”; “and having made peace through the blood of His cross”;⁴ “the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.”

And thus when He cometh into the world, saying, “Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body hast Thou prepared Me,” what takes the place of these many ineffectual sacrifices of the law? was it a sacrificial *life* or *death* that did so? Of which does Scripture speak when, having produced that saying of His, “Lo! I come to do *Thy will*, O my God,” it adds, “By the *which will* we are sanctified, through the *offering* of the body of Jesus Christ once?”

If then, “without shedding of blood is no remission,” did His “*life-suffering* from *Bethlehem*” put away sin? If “by the blood of the *cross*” He has made peace, did He bear sin all His life through, unavailingly till then?

Scripture declares in the most decisive way, that it

3. The word “bare” is the ordinary word for sacrificial bearing; and the word for “upon” the very word which has that meaning more simply and positively than any other word in the language. Alford and the Bible Union revisions both reject “to” and give “upon.”

4. It has been actually attempted to make the shedding of His blood in *circumcision*, of the the same character and value with the “blood of the Cross.” How decisively this is denied here, I need scarcely say.

was the suffering outside the gate of Jerusalem, -- the suffering of the cross therefore, -- which gave sanctifying power even to His blood-shedding. “For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high-priest for sin, are *burned without the camp*; wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered *without the gate*” (Heb. 13:11, 12). How distinct the place and character which such words give the Cross! The only place where atonement was or could be made, is the only place where He could be the Sin-bearer.

I shall touch the question of the law presently. Let me first ask my reader’s attention to the consequences of this doctrine of the Lord’s being “loaded with our sin, our curse, our condemnation” all His life. For these consequences are to obscure the glory of His Person, and take away from the preciousness of His having “lived for us.”

What was He in the world? The Light of it. What was that light? “The glory of the Only-begotten of the Father,” the One “*in the bosom* of the Father.”

But, I ask, Could there be the *shining forth* of the glory of One in the Father’s bosom, in any due and proper way, in One all His life under wrath and curse? Sure I am, that the simple reader of Scripture, following step by step the course of that Son of the Father upon earth, would never dream of *His* being then in the sinner’s place, bearing that sinner’s due, when the Father’s voice gave its witness of delight in Him; when upon the mount of transfiguration “He received from God the Father *honour and, glory*, “when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory,” &c., (2 Pet. 1:17). Surely “honour and glory” are not the sinner’s due; and one who, as Dr. Bonar tells us, “kept in view” His being in the place of Sin-bearer, “in the places which He *visited*, and in the places which He abstained from visiting,” and who, “if permitted to resort to Jerusalem,” he further tells us, “could only do so as a stranger or way-faring man, who comes “in with the crowd during the day, but retires at night --”⁵ surely One in such a position and with such constant remembrance of it, could never even have “visited” the “holy mount!”

But enough of this. Till the Cross, the whole Gospel

5. “The Banished One bearing our banishment,” in *The Christian Treasury*, 1861, p. 314.

history is witness, He was *not* in the sinner's place. No, He was declaring the Father, doing the works of the Father, the Father hearing him always and always with Him. How different when that awful shadow fell upon the Cross, and the sufferer on it took up the language of the 22nd psalm:

“My God! my God! why hast Thou forsaken me? why art Thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God! I cry in the daytime, and Thou HEAREST NOT . . . Be not far from me, for trouble is near, for there is none to help . . . But be not Thou far from me, O Lord, O my strength, haste Thou to help me.”

There were other sorrows, I know. What element of bitterness did not then enter into the cup of the man of sorrows? But above all, *this* sorrow -- a far-off God -- was the crushing, decisive sorrow of the Cross.

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.” When 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 fulfil 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* fulfil 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, “He fulfilled the law in our stead?” Why is it, that it *never* says, “His law-fulfilling is our righteousness?”

Because it has a very different, -- a contradictory thing to this, to say.

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 under the condemnation of it merely, a lost sinner. For such, as soon as they believe in Christ, not only is His blood the purging of their *sins*, but they themselves are, in the death of Him who died for them, “dead,” and passed away from before God as sinners, part of the old creation. They are in this way, “dead to *sin*” (Rom. 6), “dead to the LAW,” (Rom. 7), and no longer “living (alive) in the *world*” (Col. 2:20). As another way of expressing it, they are “not in the flesh” (Rom. 7:5, 8:9). Thus then, there is no fulfilling for men belonging to the old creation, begun and ruined in the first Adam, the responsibilities attaching to *that* condition. No, it is ended and over before God on the Cross of His Son, with all that belongs to it. And those who have their place in Christ before God have a place under the *last* Adam, in *new* creation, new creatures altogether, old things passed away, and all things become new (2 Cor. 5).

Nor did the last Adam take up the first Adam's responsibilities to fulfil 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, earthy; 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 could *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 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 is for us now. 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 fulfil 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.

Helps by the Way, vol. 1.

Present Truth Publishers

825 Harmony Road

Jackson NJ 08527 USA

Made and printed in USA 2002

Web site: presenttruthpublishers.com

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-sufferings 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 offences 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).