

(Devotional #37) ***What is The True Gospel? – The Three Biblical Imputations:  
The Doctrine of Original Sin: Evidence from the Old Testament***

*The LORD GOD commanded the man, saying: “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat from it, **YOU SHALL SURELY DIE** – Genesis 2:16-17*

*All the years that Adam lived were 930-years, **AND HE DIED** – Genesis 5:5*

Elton Trueblood, a 20<sup>th</sup> Century Quaker, author and theologian, wrote: “*We often hear the cliché, deeds are everything, while beliefs are unimportant.*” He goes on to say, “*But this is manifest nonsense. The truth is, belief leads to actions, and acting often depends on believing.*”

One of the great errors Christians often make is substituting emotion and feelings for the propositional truth that is derived from an objective interpretation of the Word of God<sup>1</sup>. (*Keep in mind, biblical doctrine is not always in sync with our feelings.*) In fact, Solomon warned us that trusting in what seems right to us as human beings, very often leads to great tragedy. He writes in Proverbs 14:12: “***There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof is the way of death.***” We would not go far afield if we understood this to mean, “*There is a way that feels right to a man, but the end thereof is the way of death.*”

On July 16, 1999, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Jr. flew his airplane nose first into the Atlantic Ocean because he trusted what he was feeling over what his instruments were telling him ... and as is so frequently the case, “*the end thereof was indeed the way of death,*” not only for him, but also for his wife and his sister-in-law.

For the next few weeks, I want to examine three biblical doctrines that are not necessarily intuitive ... in fact, they may seem to you to be ‘*counter-intuitive.*’ But together, these doctrines make up the dynamics of the true gospel. They are important because they give us the opportunity to *look under the hood* and understand how this thing we call ‘*the gospel*’ *works*. If you will make a commitment to stay with us through this series, a lot of confusion will dissipate, and you will come away from these lessons with a clearer vision of what God has done for you.

The three doctrines we will be studying are (1) *the Doctrine of Original Sin*, (2) *the Doctrine of Divine Satisfaction*, and (3) *the Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness*. Together, these three doctrines form our understanding of *the Doctrine of Salvation* ... and there is no doctrine of more practical importance to us than this. To summarize for you what these doctrines entail, I am going to present them under the heading, ‘*Three Biblical Imputations.*’

There are three imputations that operate within the context of the gospel ... (*I will clarify what I mean by the term ‘imputation’ momentarily*) ... but for now, Scripture teaches that:

- (#1) When Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, his sin was imputed to Eve and to all of their posterity. If you have heard the term, ‘**ORIGINAL SIN**,’ this is what is in view, and today’s lesson will begin our overview of this topic.
- (#2) The Bible also teaches that the sin of the human race was imputed to Jesus on the cross. When you read in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “**He made Him, who knew no sin, to become sin for us,**” this is what is in view.
- (#3) Then in that same verse, we see our third topic – the third imputation – the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the elect, for 1 Corinthians 5:21 continues: “**... that we might become the righteousness of Christ in Him.**”

So, we see in these three doctrines a plan by which God accomplishes His eternal purpose with respect to Salvation.

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<sup>1</sup> See Judges 21:25, which explains the failures of Israel recorded throughout the Book of Judges.

## ORIGINAL SIN – EVIDENCE FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

**WHAT IS IMPUTATION?** Let's begin by defining the term 'imputation.' What does it mean and why is it important to our understanding of the gospel?

There is a class of terms we need to consider from both the Old and New Testaments<sup>2</sup>:

- The first important term is the Greek word – λογίζομαι (*pronounced 'logizomai'*). It is derived from the verb λέγω (*pronounced 'lego'*), which usually is translated 'to say' or 'to speak,' but it has as its root meaning, the idea of 'counting<sup>3</sup>.' Both 'logizomai' and 'lego' are related to the word λόγος (*pronounced 'logos'*) that is translated 'WORD' in John 1:1.
- In Philemon 18, we find a related term, ἐλλογέω (*pronounced 'ellogeo'*): "***If he has wronged you or owes you anything, 'CHARGE' ('ellogeo') that to my account.***" This is a clear example of what it means 'to impute.' It means, 'to charge or credit something to the account of another.' Paul authorizes Philemon to charge (or IMPUTE) to Paul's account any debt owed to him by Onesimus.

So 'imputation' is a term an accountant or a banker might use to describe depositing a sum of money (or transferring a debt) to someone's account.

Now this has both **theological and legal implications**. Theologically, imputation means: 'to credit something to someone's account (but) only upon adequate grounds, and as the judicial basis for reward or punishment.' So, when righteousness is imputed to a man or woman, there must be a basis for it, and likewise, if it is sin that is imputed, there must be a judicial basis for that too.

When sin is imputed to a man or a woman, it is **THE GUILT OF SIN** that is imputed ... (and in the Bible, guilt always has legal connotations). The imputation of sin always is made on the basis of an obligation to satisfy God's Perfect Justice, which is one of His divine attributes. So, when we speak of 'GUILT,' we are **NOT** speaking of 'guilt feelings' – we are speaking of a person's **LEGAL STANDING before God**. And furthermore, a person can be 'guilty' only if a law has been broken.

**[OBSERVATION #1:** When we speak of 'IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS,' we have in view 'ABSOLUTE RIGHTEOUSNESS' – It is **THE VERY RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD HIMSELF**; it is perfect, flawless, lacking nothing, and it is absolute. In contrast, righteousness that is 'ginned up' by human effort, which for clarity we will refer to as 'WORKS-RIGHTEOUSNESS,' is relative in nature (i.e., I may be 'better than some' and 'worse than others'), and if God 'graded-on-the-curve,' that 'might' work. But 'the curve' falls short of God's standard. God's standard is **ABSOLUTE RIGHTEOUSNESS**, a standard no man can meet. **The war is lost even before a person is born.** David said, "**Behold, I was brought forth in guilt, and in sin my mother conceived me**" – **Psalm 51:5**. What this means is, David already was falling short of God's requirement of Absolute Righteousness at his conception, and the reason David deemed himself guilty before he had performed any unrighteous act, is because of original sin. David was conceived with the guilt of Adam already imputed to his account – and so is every descendant of Adam<sup>4</sup>.]

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<sup>2</sup> When we examine a Greek term in the context of the Old Testament, we are looking at the Septuagint, a third century B.C. translation of the Hebrew text into Greek. Logizomai is the term the translators chose to translate the Hebrew term חָשַׁב, (pronounced hashab) the Hebrew word that is used in Genesis 15:6 for 'reckoned' or 'imputed.'

<sup>3</sup> In case you are wondering how the language gets from 'counting' to 'speaking,' it is because speech is the logical ordering of words in a sequence that results in the communication of ideas.

<sup>4</sup> See 1 Corinthians 15:22: "For as **in Adam** all die, so also **in Christ**, all will be made alive." We will unpack this verse in detail in our next lesson when I will present the evidence for original sin from the New Testament.

So, to sum up what we have determined so far, *'imputation'* means *'to credit something to someone's account upon adequate grounds as the judicial basis for reward or punishment.'*

- ***To impute righteousness*** is to credit a standing before God that is perfect and without flaw on the basis of the finished work of Christ on the Cross. When speaking of *'justification,'* we are saying that *a grant of righteousness has been given to the believer, NOT on the basis of human merit but solely on the basis of the death of Christ on the Cross that was 'certified' by His resurrection.*
- And conversely, ***to impute sin*** is to impute the guilt of sin, along with the obligation to satisfy God's Perfect Justice. It also would be correct to say in both cases, *'what is under consideration theologically is the standing of the human race before our Creator.'*

**WHY IS UNDERSTANDING IMPUTATION IMPORTANT?** Understanding the concept of imputation is necessary if we are to assess our standing before God. In the cases of the unrepentant sinner and the repentant believer, this concept – *the concept of imputation* – is the principle on which the standings of both the repentant and the unrepentant are established before God – and it is this *'standing'* that determines the eternal destinies of believers and unbelievers.

***The human condition is the result of the imputation of the sin of Adam to the human race, i.e.,*** to you and to me. Quite obviously, this is a topic many people do not like to discuss. Some may have made up their minds already that it is unfair – that in fact you and I bear no connection to the sin Adam committed millennia ago in the Garden of Eden. But that isn't how the Bible treats what happened there. Understanding the Doctrine of Original Sin is the starting point for understanding the gospel and appreciating what Jesus Christ has done for us.

*[OBSERVATION #2: If you believe the imputation of Adam's sin to you is unfair, you also must conclude that the imputation of your sin to Christ, as he died on the cross, was unfair. You cannot dismiss the imputation of original sin to you and keep the imputation of your sins to Jesus – you must accept them both or reject them both. If you accept them both, you will stand before God (in Christ) and God will see in you ONLY the Righteousness that has been imputed to you on the basis of the cross; but if you reject them both, you are on your own at the judgment seat of God Almighty.]*

Last week we looked at the tabernacle as a road map, if you will, that guides us to reconciliation with God through the gospel. The elements and furnishings in the tabernacle all foreshadow the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. I think we can agree that directions are meaningless if the traveler is unaware of his starting place. The first thing the GPS in your car needs to know ... (*before it can assist you in arriving at your destination*) ... is where you are now. Directions to Norman Oklahoma will be different if your starting point is Kansas City (*'go south'*) versus Austin (*'go north'*).

Knowing our starting point spiritually is just as important to arriving at our desired destination (*reconciliation with our Creator*) as is knowing our geographical location before setting out on a trip. In a similar fashion, when Christians use the term *'saved,'* the question that should come to mind is, *'saved from what'?* And this is where the importance of the Doctrine of Original Sin comes into play, for it defines our *'spiritual starting place.'*

Let's think about the Scripture cited at the beginning of this lesson: Genesis 2:16-17. Notice, it is **THE LORD GOD** who issues a command to Adam. When God commands us to do or not to do something, His command is not a suggestion, it is **LAW**. The term ***'commanded'*** is written in a special way in the Hebrew text; it is written in **THE INTENSIVE STEM**. This is the equivalent of underlining a term that is written in CAPITAL LETTERS, in **bold typeface**. It is a serious matter. So, the most important thing to know is this: **GOD'S COMMANDS CARRY THE FORCE OF LAW.**

Now the next thing to notice is the one to whom the command is given. It is given to **THE MAN**. In Genesis, when the Hebrew term אָדָם (*pronounced 'adam' / man / Adam*) is written **without** the definite article (*'the'*), it usually refers to the entire human race, *i.e.*, *'mankind,'* but when it is written **with** the definite article, it refers to the first man, Adam. So, here the divine command was given to one man, Adam. If we think about this *dispensationally* for a moment, Adam was under *the stewardship of law* (not **THE Dispensation of Law** as a systematic theologian might use the term) but he was under *A dispensation of law*, for God had commanded Adam not to break the one law He had established to govern life in the perfect environment of Eden.

This is supposed to be a devotional, not an hour-long lecture, so I am going to highlight only the most significant details of a story you already know. Adam broke the law God had commanded him not to break – and now he must face the consequences of being a transgressor of God's law. God had told Adam regarding the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, ***"in the day you eat from it you shall surely die"*** – ***Genesis 2:17.***

***WHAT IS DEATH?*** There is a very simple way to understand death; ***death is separation.*** Now death has two connotations for Adam, and both have to do with *'separation.'* *There is separation from God (the source of all life), and there is the separation of the material and the immaterial parts of man at physical death.* Said another way, there is a spiritual death, and there is physical death, the latter being a consequence of the former. Both spiritual death and physical death are intended by the phrase, ***"you shall surely die,"*** though they did not happen simultaneously.

And I would be amiss not to point out that if spiritual death is allowed to continue into eternity, it progresses into an eternal separation from God, a state known as ***'the second death,'*** and the eternal destiny of that man or woman is ***THE LAKE OF FIRE*** – ***Revelation 20:11-15.***

When Satan appears on the scene in the form of a serpent<sup>5</sup>, he tells Eve something that God may have said, but if He did, it is not recorded as coming from God's lips in Genesis. Satan said to Eve: ***"For God knows that when you eat from it, your eyes will be opened and you will become like God, one who knows good and evil."*** – ***Genesis 3:5.*** In this statement, there are two assertions made by Satan that are worth considering:

- One assertion is: ***"You will become like God, one who knows good and evil."*** Satan was right ... but only in this sense: ***Adam came to know good, but he no longer could do good, and he came to know evil, but he no longer could keep himself from doing evil<sup>6</sup>.***
- The other assertion is: ***"Your eyes will be opened."*** This phrase interests me greatly. The serpent presents this to Eve as a good thing. She was deceived by Satan so that she took the forbidden fruit and ate it; then she gave it to her husband, and he ate it also ... and ***THEN AND ONLY THEN*** does the text say, ***"the eyes of BOTH of them were opened"*** – ***Genesis 3:7.***

Why were the eyes of Eve not opened when she ate the fruit? Why were her eyes opened only when Adam ate the fruit? What is going on? We will address this question in detail in our next lesson, but for the sake of not leaving you hanging, ***God considered Adam to be the head of the human race.*** As such, and as Eve's husband, he also was *her 'head' – her representative;* but more important for our purposes, in this test ***Adam was the representative of the entire human***

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<sup>5</sup> If you are interested in learning more about the serpent as a Satanic figure in Scripture, see my lesson entitled, *'The Angelic Conflict Part 2: The Rahab / Leviathan Motif,'* that can be found on our Foundations Class webpage: <https://www.gracebiblechurch.org/adult-bible-classes/lessons/foundations/angelology/>

<sup>6</sup> See Romans 7:19ff

*race* in exactly the same way he was Eve's head. Theologians call this relationship 'Federal Headship.' *It means, in the eyes of God, when Adam sinned, the entire human race was put under the curse of sin and its consequences. At that moment, this single sin of Adam was imputed to the entire human race. It means every human being, born as a descendant of Adam, male or female, is born under a death sentence*<sup>7</sup>. *It means you do not have to do anything to be put on death row – you were born there.* This is the tragedy of what happened in the Garden of Eden. By the act of one man, sin was imputed to the human race. This is our unfortunate starting point.

Now no doubt, this is the bad news. But there is good news — God has not left us in this pitiful state. Though there is nothing you can do about it – though there are no sufficient merits you can earn to solve this problem – do not be dismayed, for God has done something.

In our next lesson, we will focus original sin from a New Testament perspective. Then, once we are certain we understand why we need a savior, we will spend two more weeks looking at what God has done to remedy our situation.

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<sup>7</sup> Without going into a lot of detail, this is one of the primary reasons for the Virgin Birth of Jesus. Apparently, the curse of original sin, and the resultant old sin nature that plagues us all, comes to Adam's progeny through the male. By means of the virgin birth, Jesus was not born under original sin and he did not possess an old sin nature.