

(Devotional #41) *What is The True Gospel? – The Third Imputation – Part 1*
The Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness

For as through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of One, the many will be made righteous – Romans 5:19

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him – 2 Corinthians 5:21

And Abram believed in Yahweh, and righteousness was imputed to him¹ – Genesis 15:6

Today, as we begin our study of the third of the three divine imputations, **THE DOCTRINE OF IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS**, we should review briefly what we have learned so far:

- What we mean by the term '*imputation*' is '*the crediting of something to the account of another upon adequate grounds and as the judicial basis for reward or punishment.*'
- There are three acts of divine imputation in Scripture that – when considered together – illuminate our understanding of the broader Doctrine of Salvation.
 - (**1st IMPUTATION**) – The imputation of the single transgression of Adam to the human race, resulting in *universal condemnation*, and the *spiritual death* of all men. (**WE CALL THIS FIRST IMPUTATION, 'THE DOCTRINE OF ORIGINAL SIN.'**)
 - (**2nd IMPUTATION**) – The imputation of the sins of the world to the Son of God, Jesus Christ, as he died on the cross. The death Christ died completely satisfied the wrath of the Father, and on the basis of Christ's death, God is *reconciling all believers* to a just and right relationship with Himself. (**WE CALL THIS SECOND IMPUTATION, 'THE DOCTRINE OF DIVINE SATISFACTION.'**)
 - (**3rd IMPUTATION**) – The imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the Elect, the body of believers, who across the span of human history have believed the Word of God and have trusted in God's provision for their salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. (**WE CALL THIS THIRD IMPUTATION, 'THE DOCTRINE OF IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS.'**)

Now considering the Scriptures cited at the beginning of this lesson, Romans 5:19 and 2 Corinthians 5:21 sound a lot alike. The reason these passages sound similar is because the same principle is at work in each: **THE PRINCIPLE OF DIVINE IMPUTATION**. On the one hand, through one act of **DIVINE IMPUTATION**, all men are identified with Adam's transgression unto **condemnation**, while on the other hand, the Elect are identified with Christ's death unto **eternal life**, through another act of **DIVINE IMPUTATION**. And between these two divine acts is **THE CENTRAL MESSAGE** of our last devotional, viz., **when Jesus died on the cross, God imputed to Him ALL THE SINS OF THE HUMAN RACE**. This included *Adam's Sin* and *the guilt that spread to all men* as a result of it. And it included **ALL THE PERSONAL SINS AND TRANSGRESSIONS** committed by all men over the course of human history. This is what Paul meant in Romans 5:16, when he wrote:

THE GIFT is not like that which came through 'the one who sinned' (ADAM) for ON THE ONE HAND, the JUDGMENT arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but ON THE OTHER HAND, the GIFT arose from many transgressions, resulting in justification – Romans 5:6.

¹ See also Romans 4:1-3 and Galatians 3:6-9

What Adam did was egregious, but ***WHAT JESUS DID WAS GREATER THAN ADAM'S SIN***, for Christ died not only for the single transgression of Adam that brought death to all men, but He died for ALL transgressions of ALL time committed by ALL men, so that the message of reconciliation can be preached to ALL men.

Now I want to make a comment about how Paul sometimes uses language. In Romans 5:12, in Romans 5:18, and in 2 Corinthians 5:14 – Paul uses the term 'ALL.'

- “Death spread to ALL men because ALL sinned” (**Romans 5:12**)
- “Condemnation (is the lot of) ALL men” (**Romans 5:18**)
- “One died for ALL, therefore ALL died” (**2 Corinthians 5:14**)

But in Romans 5:15 and 5:19 - Paul uses the term 'MANY.'

- “By the transgression of ONE, MANY died” (**Romans 5:15**) ... and –
- “Through ONE man’s disobedience, MANY were made sinners” (**Romans 5:19**) ... and then,
- “Through the obedience of ONE, the MANY will be made righteous” (**Romans 5:19**) ... So how are we to understand his use of these two terms ('ALL' and 'MANY')?

The key to understanding Paul is found in Romans 5:17 and 2 Corinthians 5:20.

- In Romans 5:17², Paul **QUALIFIES** what he means by 'ALL,' limiting 'the ALL' to “those, who **RECEIVE** the gift of righteousness.”
- Then in 2 Corinthians 5:20, he appeals to man’s volition by saying, “**BE RECONCILED**.” Make a decision for Christ!

So according to Romans 5:17, *who are the MANY? ... THEY ARE THE ELECT*, those who by faith '**RECEIVE THE GIFT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS**,' then in the Corinthian passage, Paul exhorts all men, '**BE RECONCILED**,' even though he knew *not all men* would believe the gospel, *nor would all men be reconciled to God*.

Paul is not confused ... and neither should we be unclear about what he said. When Paul uses the term 'MANY,' if you notice the context, he is drawing a simple comparison between 'the singular and the plural.' *One transgression brought about plural consequences.* Adam’s single act brought consequences upon ALL the human race (viz., ALL die), while the single, righteous act of Jesus reconciled MANY (viz., the Elect of God).

So, the scope of 'ALL' and 'MANY' is exactly the same: Adam’s sin was imputed to ALL men so that the human race in its entirety stands condemned before God, while ... Christ died for ALL men, enabling the universal proclamation of the gospel, but **NOT** the salvation of ALL men.

Clearly Paul is **NOT** saying only 'some men' were impacted by the Fall, nor is he suggesting that ALL men are reconciled to God by the death of Christ. Said another way, **the Atonement is UNLIMITED in its SUFFICIENCY**, i.e., it is sufficient to save all who will believe the gospel, but **it is LIMITED in its APPLICATION**, being applied only to those, “**upon whom God chose to make known the riches of His glory, upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand**” – **Romans 9:23**.

Now consider 2 Corinthians 5:21 – In this verse, two of the three imputations are mentioned. Paul does **NOT** mention the imputation of Adam’s transgression to mankind – though it is assumed – but he **DOES** mention the imputation of man’s sin to Christ. He says, “**HE made HIM**,”

² *For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness, will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ’ – Romans 5:17.*

(i.e., *God the Father made God the Son*) ... *to be sin on our behalf.*” Notice how Jesus is described: *“He who knew no sin.”* Upon the unblemished Lamb of God was placed the sins of the world, or as Peter said, *“For Christ also died for sins, once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit” – 1 Peter 3:18.*

So how does Christ ‘bring us to God’? How is sinful man made worthy of such a blessing as to be brought into a relationship with God? Well, it is by the third imputation ... the imputation of the righteousness of God to man through the death of Christ on the cross.

Now ‘God’s Righteousness’ is different from ‘man’s righteousness.’ S. L. Johnson defined ‘God’s Righteousness’ this way: *‘The Righteousness of God is that Righteousness, which His Righteousness requires Him to require.’ (I want you to reread that definition as many times as necessary until its meaning becomes clear to you.)* In other words, God’s Righteousness is so perfect that by its very nature, it requires that same righteous standard – (a perfect righteousness) – from every aspect of God’s Creation.

EVERY ATTRIBUTE OF GOD IS ABSOLUTE. This is hard for us to grasp. In Romans 3:23, Paul tells us, *“For all sinned and are falling short of the glory³ of God,”* i.e., *all men are falling short of the standard God’s Attribute of Absolute Righteousness Requires.* The problem is ... men have no innate understanding of what God’s standard is. Human standards are relative ... proportionate – *‘what can be expected under the circumstances.’* But God’s standard is absolute. God will not admit anyone into His presence, who falls short of His standard of Absolute Righteousness. Remember, *‘The Righteousness of God is that Righteousness, which His Righteousness REQUIRES Him ... to REQUIRE.’* It’s not an option!

Let’s consider for a moment some of the super-heroes of the Bible ... men like Job, Isaiah, Jeremiah (and not to leave out the New Testament), men like Peter and Paul. Surely, they meet God’s Standard!

JOB: In Job Chapter 29, Job gives a panorama of his life. In verse 12 he says of himself: *“I delivered the poor who cried for help and the orphan who had no helper.”* He goes on to say, *“I made the widow’s heart leap for joy” – Job 29:13.* Then he says, *“I put on righteousness and it clothed me” – Job 29:14.* Now these are just some of the things Job puts to his credit ... there are many more ... so surely Job meets God’s standard. (According to his own self-assessment, he is the Mother Teresa of the Old Testament.) But at the end of his book, in the section that records Job’s repentance, he finds himself (in a poetic sense) in God’s presence, and he writes: *“I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore, I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes” – Job 42:5-6.* The word ‘retract’ is the Hebrew term **וָשַׁבְתִּי** – (pronounced ‘ma’as’) it is the Hebrew word for refuse and in some translations, it is rendered, ‘I despise myself.’ What happened to *“I put on righteousness and it clothed me?”* Well, it was the wrong kind of righteousness. It was Job’s righteousness, man’s righteousness. We can spend our lives serving the poor, giving to the needy, offering a hand to those in need ... (remember Job’s assertion, *“I delivered the poor who cried for help and the orphan who had no helper”*?) There is nothing wrong with doing good – I made that point explicitly clear in the first lesson of

³ As I mentioned in the first devotional on the subject of divine satisfaction, Paul uses the word, ‘glory’ (δόξα – pronounced ‘doxa’) to refer to an exalted state. In its absolute sense, it is a state to which only God can attain. It is that condition in which God the Father in heaven exists and lives, and to which Christ has been exalted, and it is the state to which the imputation of Absolute Righteousness exalts believers, when they put their faith in Christ.

this series – but we do so out of gratitude for what God has done for us, not to gain favor with Him.

ISAIAH: Surely the Prophet Isaiah will fare better in God’s presence than Job did. Isaiah was privileged to see a vision of God. The vision came to him in 740 B.C. In his vision he saw the Lord enthroned, lofty and exalted. The Seraphim stood above Him, repeating these words: **“HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is the Lord of Hosts ... the whole earth is full of His glory.”** So how did Isaiah self-evaluate his righteousness up against the Righteousness of God? He said: **“Woe is me, for I am ruined, (I am) a man of unclean lips ... (and) I live among people of unclean lips ... and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts”** – *Isaiah 6:1-5 (partial)*.

JEREMIAH: In Matthew Chapter 16, Jesus was in Northern Galilee, in the District of Caesarea-Philippi, and he asked his disciples, **“Who do the people say that I am”?** One of the responses was, **“Some people say you are Jeremiah.”** Now that’s a pretty major compliment for Jeremiah to be confused with Jesus. But in Jeremiah Chapter 8, the prophet considers the imminent retribution of the Lord against Judah, and he says of himself, **“I am broken.”**

Well Surely the New Testament saints will give a better report of themselves:

PETER: In Matthew 26:33 we find Peter, who has just heard Jesus predict that the disciples will ‘fall away’ in fear and depression as the last events before the crucifixion unfold. Peter (*being Peter*) pledges: **“Though all may fall away because of you, I will never fall away.”** Over the next hours – (*you know the story*) – **Peter denies he knows Jesus three times.**

PAUL: Paul self-assessed himself in his First Letter to Timothy: **“It is a trustworthy saying, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all”** – *1 Timothy 1:15.*

It seems the heroes of Scripture, when confronted with their own natures – their own righteousness – fall short of God’s Standard ... How do you stack up? Well, seemingly ... man cannot produce **‘the righteousness God’s Righteousness requires Him to require,’** so there must be another means by which a righteousness that is acceptable to God can be attained ... and there is.

GOD’S RIGHTEOUSNESS IS OURS IN CHRIST BY MEANS OF IMPUTATION. You cannot work for it or produce it or earn it. It is a **FREE GIFT** that costs you nothing ... but it cost Jesus everything. **“For God made Jesus, who knew no sin, to become sin for us, that we might become the Righteousness of God in Him.**

Next week will be our last lesson on the three imputations. We will look specifically at Romans 3:21-26, which deals with the doctrine of imputed righteousness. What I am trying to give you in these lessons is ‘a look under the hood,’ a ‘glance behind the curtain,’ so you will understand something about the dynamics of the gospel. When we understand what God has done to restore fellowship with a lost world – and how He has done it – when we understand what the gospel is – we will be more astute in identifying the false gospel that Satan would like us to accept ... that somehow, by being good and doing good things, we can merit acceptance into the presence of God.

A proper understanding of the gospel of grace, also provides the correct foundation for doing good for others, because it separates what God has done already for His people from the fruitless process of seeking merit through good works. A proper understanding of the gospel obviously bears on the mission of the church itself. Our mission is not to resolve the social inequities of the godless culture in which we live – for that resolution awaits the institution of God’s Kingdom.