

The Gospel of the Council of Trent (II)

“And therefore it was IMPUTED to him for righteousness.” – Romans 4:22

In my last newsletter article (8/06/07), I pointed out that when it comes to truly understanding the gospel presented to us in God’s Word...IT IS CRUCIAL that you really understand the biblical definition of words like “justification”, “justifies”, and “justified”. For instance, when you read *“Therefore, since we have been JUSTIFIED freely through faith...”* (Rom 5:1a), you need to know that this word justified does not just mean you have been forgiven of your sins. A man that has committed a burglary can be forgiven by his victims, but still be sentenced by a judge to go to jail for the crime. Forgiveness does not remove guilt. At the same time, it is possible for that burglar to serve only half of the jail time he was sentenced to by the judge...when he receives a “pardon”. A pardon releases that man from having to continue paying the penalty for his crime. Once again, a pardon does not declare that person is “innocent”...it just simply is a legal pronouncement that the “convicted” burglar can be released from the consequences of his actions.

Being “justified” by God is MORE than being “forgiven” of your sins (for you would still stand before Him “guilty” of those sins!). Being “justified” by God is MORE than being “pardoned” from having to pay the consequences that your sins deserve (for you would still stand before Him in a state of “unrighteousness”!). When the Bible says we have been “justified” by God, it means that we have NOT ONLY been “forgiven” of our sins AND “pardoned” from having to pay the consequences, BUT IT ALSO means we have been “declared” righteous (i.e. holy, sinless, perfect, not guilty, etc., etc.) by God (Rom 4:5-8; Eph 1:4; 2Cor 5:21). God “justifies” a person IN SPITE OF THE FACT that this person continues to struggle with sin even after he has been “born again” (Jn 3:3; Rom 7:21-25). Thus, a biblical Christian is a person who is “justified” and declared “righteous” in God’s eyes EVEN THOUGH that person still has an indwelling sinful nature.

This biblical doctrine of “justification” naturally leads to some IMPORTANT QUESTIONS: How could a person with a sinful nature ever be declared “justified” or “righteous” in the eyes of God? If it is impossible for God to lie (Titus 1:2), then how could God call someone “righteous” (holy, sinless, and perfect) when they still sin? The answer to these questions is what contributed to the PROTESTANT movement away from the Catholic Church. Catholicism and Protestantism do NOT agree on how God “justifies” a sinful man. Martin Luther (Germany), Ulrich Zwingli (Sweden), and John Calvin (France) in the early 1500’s believed that the Bible clearly taught that a person could be “justified” apart from good works or obeying laws (Rom 5:21-25). As I wrote last week, the Catholic Church strongly condemned the Protestants’ arguments for “justification by grace alone” at the Council of Trent (1545-1563). To understand Catholicism’s views on how to get “justified” before God, study closely how they refuted the Protestants’ views on justification:

“If anyone says that the justice received (i.e. justification) is NOT preserved and also NOT increased before God THROUGH GOOD WORKS, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the cause of its increase, let him be anathema.” (H.J. Shroeder, translator, 7th session, Canon 24, p. 45)

The Catholic believer... “is advancing from virtue to virtue...faith cooperating WITH good works, (believers do thereby) INCREASE in that justice (justification) received through the grace of Christ and are further justified...”

(H.J. Shroeder, translator, 7th session, Canon 24, p. 36)

If you read carefully just these two (of many similar) Council of Trent condemnations of Protestant doctrine, you should see OBVIOUS differences between the Catholic “gospel” (which Pope Benedict XVI recently said was the only true gospel) verses the Protestant “gospel” that I preach as the pastor of Northbridge Baptist Church (which I believe is based solely on God’s Word!). Catholicism teaches that to be “justified” by God a person must do GOOD WORKS in addition to having FAITH in Jesus Christ. Believing in Jesus begins the “process” a believer goes towards being “justified” (i.e. literally “righteous”) before God. They reject the claim of Protestants that the Bible teaches God calls a new believer “righteous” in His sight, IMMEDIATELY upon conversion, without that person first DEMONSTRATING RIGHTEOUSNESS through good works (i.e. participating in the Sacraments of the Catholic Church!).

For you to decide for yourself which “gospel” you will believe, you first need to also understand the biblical definition of the words “IMPUTE” or “CREDIT”. God chose to communicate to us *“spiritual truths in SPIRITUAL WORDS”* (1Cor 2:13b). Paul made it clear that these words were *“not taught by human wisdom but in WORDS taught by the Spirit...”* (1Cor 2:13a). One of the words that Paul used strategically to explain the gospel was the Greek word “logizomai” which is translated into English as “imputed”, “reckoned”, “counted”, or “credited”. It was used as an accounting term to legally account for a financial transaction. For instance, when you bring \$100 to your

bank to be deposited into your checking account, the bank teller will “impute” or “credit” your checking account \$100. So, to “impute” is to make an official “credit” to a person’s account.

The Scriptures reveal that God has made three major “imputations”: (1) The sin of Adam was IMPUTED to all mankind (Rom 5:12-14), that’s why we all have sin natures; (2) The sin of all mankind was IMPUTED to Christ when He was on the Cross (2Cor 5:21); and (3) The RIGHTEOUSNESS of God was IMPUTED to those who believe (Gen 15:6; Rom 3:22, Rom 4:3, Rom 8:21-25, Philemon 17-18). This means that when God “justified” us by faith, He not only chose to wipe out our “debt” (i.e. sin) through forgiveness, but also He chosen to “impute” (i.e. to credit) to our account HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS. The Protestant Reformers taught that God does not lie when he calls a believer with a sin nature “righteous”, because the righteousness God see’s is His own that He placed in the believer’s account THE MOMENT he believed in Jesus, through FAITH (Rom 5:30). The Catholic response from the Council of Trent on the doctrine of “imputation” includes:

“If anyone says that men are justified either by the SOLE imputation of the justice of Christ ...or that the grace by which we are justified is ONLY the good will of God, let him be anathema.” (H.J. Shroeder, 7th session, Canon 11, p. 43)

My next article will continue to show how Catholicism refutes the biblical gospel! - **Pastor Louis**