

March 14

Impute the Tail on the Donkey, Blind-folded?

It's been years since I played pin the tail on the donkey, and not just because of the frustration of never quite hitting the appropriate spot. People just aren't playing the game as much as they used to. I guess it's old-fashioned. I suspect Lutherans were involved in the original development of the game – 1886 in Milwaukee. But we really don't know. How much fun would it be to play the game without a blindfold? Everyone would win all the time! No losers but kind of boring....

To me, the word "impute" relates to the ultimate exercise of pin the tail on the donkey. The player is trying to place or *impute* the tail upon the donkey in order to give it a specific attribute.

The word "imputed" is a big hit in the King James Version (KJV) translation of Romans chapter 4, occurring in verses 6, 8, 11, 22, 23, and 24. Consider the following section of three consecutive verses and how the word is used.

⁶ Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, ⁷ Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered. ⁸ Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. [emphasis added] (Rom. 4:6-8, KJV)

A Google "Ngram" search, (an application which measures word usage over time), reveals how "impute" has fallen out of popularity since the early 1800s. Chronology, culture, and word usage do intertwine. The King James Version was, after all, "authorized" by King James and first published in 1611. In more recent times, use of "impute" has the air of stuffy, almost despotic authority. For that reason, I suspect, it's not a very popular word today.

Note that in the KJV, God "imputes" righteousness, (verse 6), and "imputes" sin, or not (vs. 7); based upon faith in God's forgiveness. Actually, the word Paul uses for "impute" is an accounting term which is often translated in any of these ways: "considered, reckoned, counted, taken into account."

God as an Accountant does some astonishing record-keeping. Jesus mentioned that His Own ministry was about fulfilling the Law down to the smallest Hebrew letter, and even beyond that, the tiniest "horn." (A "horn" was a small projection on a Hebrew letter which would distinguish it from another letter, Mt. 5:18.) Something else God does is completely mess up the books! He assigns guilt where there should be none whatsoever, and He assigns innocence where there is only guilt! Yet God is not some stumbling game player. At the Cross of Calvary, He imputes upon Jesus the guilt we deserve (I Corinthians 5:21). And He puts upon us the righteousness/goodness of Christ. Some people have a hard time accepting His words and actions in 2024, but He knows what He's doing and always has.

As "King of Righteousness" (Hebrews 7:2), Jesus has the authority to impute His righteousness as He is gracefully inclined. This is what the Word and sacraments do. We, like the donkey in the game, lack something - completeness, faith, and righteousness. God in His grace imputes faith (Eph. 2:8,9) and righteousness. We are blessed who hold these gifts pinned to (and in) our hearts!

Prayer: *Lord Jesus Christ, You have all authority. You can place upon us Your Righteousness. You can give us the gift of faith. You chose to be counted as the world's greatest sinner. We praise You that You have reckoned us as righteous, and You were pinned to the cross with our sin. Mercy me! Thanks be to God! Amen.*