**2017 6 18**

***THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK"***

***“For it is not the hearers of the Law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the Law who will be justified.”***

To understand this most profound statement of St. Paul we must first understand some of our most precious Orthodox theology (forgive me again for being theological). We must understand what the terms ***“righteousness”*** and ***“justified”*** mean in the above passage.

Being righteous is not a moral category but it is entering into the life of God by keeping His commandments. On the surface, this sounds a bit legalistic but it is not. Keeping the commandments and being forgiven of our debts (sins) is not a change of our legal status before God, it is rather an act of Love by our God. To keep our Lord’s commandments is to love Him and to love our fellow humanity. To sin is a failure to love and that is precisely the debt (or ransom) that our Lord paid on the cross. The cross, in its most profound meaning is that He has freed us from an inability to love by recreating us to be able to love. To truly love is to die to ourselves and to live for others. This understanding of salvation takes us out of the category of doing right and wrong and puts us into the category of loving or failing to love.

Sin (or our debt) is in its very essence a failure to love. St. Paul writes; ***8 Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Rom 13:8-10 NKJ)***

It is also in this same way that we, as Orthodox understand what being “justified” means. This is not a legal term that means simply “to be rendered righteous, or to go from guilty to not guilty before God” (as is so often explained in western theology). It has a much deeper and more subtle meaning. Its meaning can be approached if we read another passage from St. Paul; ***“Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. (Rom 5:18 NKJ)”*** To be justified, means to have life infused into us by God- and that life is love itself. To be justified means to be resurrected to life, to a life of love. And this love does not come from ourselves, but is given to us, is recreated in us by God Himself as a free gift. Read what St. John writes: ***We love Him because He first loved us. (1Jo 4:19 NKJ.*** It is indeed a free gift which has been given to each and every one of us; each of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus and who partake of His Holy Body and Blood, and who strive to love Him by keeping His commandments.

Beloved in Christ Jesus, everything we need has been given to us by our Lord as a free gift. This everything is the ability to love God and to love our neighbor. We must, however, open this gift up and make it our own. We must make it real by using it, by cherishing it, by protecting it at all costs in our relationships with others and with our Lord. We must reject all self-centeredness, all selfishness, and become compassionate and merciful in all that we do. We must forgive others, if we are to be forgiven. We must ultimately die to ourselves and live for our God and for others. This, beloved, is what it means to be a doer of the law. Amen.