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# THE IMPUTATION OF ADAM'S SIN

DS212—Doctrine of Humanity

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## ORIGINAL SIN AND IMPUTATION

- Sin is a covenant-historical reality. This is seen clearly when we consider the sustained analogy that Paul draws between the historical Christ and the first man, Adam.
  - Adam and Christ serve as representatives of distinct ages or epochs in human history. They are *the* two public people, who summarize God's dealings with man. Every single person is either represented by Adam or by Christ.
  - The transition from grace (broadly considered) to wrath in history (Adam) is followed by a transition from wrath to grace in history (Christ).
- Adam's original sin affects us all. But, we must ask precisely how this original sin is transmitted to Adam's posterity.
  - Romans 5:12–19—<sup>12</sup> Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— <sup>13</sup> for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. <sup>14</sup> Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. <sup>15</sup> But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. <sup>16</sup> And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. <sup>17</sup> For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. <sup>19</sup> For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.
  - While there are similarities between this text and 1 Corinthians 15, we should also note some of the important differences.
    - The two passages look at Adam from different covenant-historical points of view. In Romans 5, Adam is considered *after* the fall. 1 Corinthians 15 considers Adam and Christ more broadly. Adam is not fallen, but is considered here *as created*.
    - While they have some important differences, the two passages provide a covenantal-historical foundation and structure for Pauline (and NT) theology.
- As we consider the doctrine of imputation, we need to focus on Romans 5:12 “Death spread to all men, because all sinned (ἐφ’ ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον).”
  - First, Murray argues that there is an “immediate conjunction” of the sin, death and condemnation of Adam, and the sin, death and condemnation of his posterity.
    - Verse 15b εἰ γὰρ τῷ τοῦ ἐνὸς παραπτώματι οἱ πολλοὶ ἀπέθανον “For if many died through one man's trespass.”
      - Verse 15b is the protasis, and 15c is the apodosis.
        - This bears the structure of an *a fortiori* argument (from the lesser to the greater).

- The many die without reference to their own, actual sin, just as they live without reference to their own actual righteousness.
- Notice also that this verse does not reference any personal depravity or sinful activity. The grounds of death consist in being represented by disobedient Adam.
- Neither inherent depravity nor pollution accounts for the death of sinners following Adam. It is an *immediate conjunction* between Adam's one trespass and the death of sinners. This is even clearer looking at verse 17.
  - Verse 17—εἰ γὰρ τῷ τοῦ ἑνὸς παραπτώματι ὁ θάνατος ἐβασίλευσεν διὰ τοῦ ἑνός “For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man . . .”
    - Again, there is an immediate connection between Adam’s one transgression and the reign of death in the human race.
    - The relationship between Adam’s sin and our death is immediate.
- Second, there is an immediate conjunction between the sin of Adam and the *condemnation* of all.
  - Verse 16—“For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation”
  - Verse 18—“Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men . . .”
- Third, not only is there an immediate conjunction between Adam’s death and condemnation and our death and condemnation, there is also an immediate conjunction of Adam’s sin and the *sin* of all (verses 12, 19).
  - In verse 12, Paul says that when Adam sinned, “all sinned.” Because Adam is a public person, his acts stand for those whom he represents.
  - Adam’s sin is our sin, Adam’s guilt is our guilt, and Adam’s condemnation is our condemnation.
  - The imputation of sin is therefore not entirely a “foreign” or “alien” imposition upon a guiltless or uncorrupt sinner.

## THE NATURE OF THE SIN IMPUTED

- While the language of imputation is not used explicitly in Romans 5, the concept or reality is certainly present (see Psalm 32:2; Romans 4:8; 5:13 and 2 Cor 5:19). Imputation introduces the idea that sinners are constituted guilty independent of and prior to their own personal sin.
- Paul makes a sharp though parallel comparison between the representative acts of Adam/Christ and the result of those acts.
  - Adam’s sin results in death for Adam as well as those whom he represents. However, the righteousness of Christ results in justification and eschatological life for Christ and those whom he represents.
  - The correlation between the sin, transgression and disobedience of Adam can be seen in the following:
    - First, the sin of Adam (vs. 12) is a trespass of the divine will.
      - 5:15a—“τὸ παράπτωμα” Adam’s trespass is specifically in view.
      - 5:15b—“τῷ τοῦ ἑνὸς παραπτώματι” through one man’s trespass.
      - 5:17a—“τῷ τοῦ ἑνὸς παραπτώματι ὁ θάνατος ἐβασίλευσεν διὰ τοῦ ἑνός” because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man.
      - Remembering Vos’s comments from his taxonomy of different theories of sin, sin is relational. It occurs within a covenantal relationship with God our Creator.

- Second, trespass and condemnation are interrelated.
  - 5:18—δι’ ἑνὸς παραπτώματος εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς κατάκριμα “Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men.”
  - The transgression of the divine will renders Adam and those whom he represents judicially liable to condemnation. This follows from the arrangement within the Covenant of Works.
- Third, not only are Adam’s people *judicially liable* to condemnation but they are in fact also *sinners*. This is a broader way to consider what has happened.
  - Look at verse 19: “by the one man’s disobedience (διὰ τῆς παρακοῆς τοῦ ἑνὸς ἀνθρώπου), the many were made sinners.”
  - Sin is trespass, brings guilt, and an objective judicial declaration of condemnation to Adam and his people.
- In *antithetical contrast* to sin and its consequences, the righteousness of Christ, understood as obedience, brings justification and life.
  - First, sin stands in direct contrast to righteousness as each is descriptive of the work of either Adam or Christ (5:18).
    - Adam’s sin stands *over against* Christ’s one act of righteousness.
    - Paul makes this point explicit in 5:18: “Therefore, as one trespass (δι’ ἑνὸς παραπτώματος) led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness (δι’ ἑνὸς δικαιώματος) leads to justification and life for all men.”
    - The one act of righteousness answers directly to the one man’s trespass. And if the trespass involves a *violation* of the divine will and invokes condemnation, then righteousness involves *conformity* to the divine will and invokes justification.
  - Second, the trespass led to condemnation for all, but the one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all.
    - 5:18: “Therefore, as one trespass led to *condemnation* for all men (ὡς δι’ ἑνὸς παραπτώματος εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς κατάκριμα), so one act of righteousness leads to *justification and life* for all men. (οὕτως καὶ δι’ ἑνὸς δικαιώματος εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους εἰς δικαίωσιν ζωῆς).”
    - Condemnation is forensic and declarative and is the result of the one man’s trespass. Justification is also forensic and declarative. It is the result of the one act of righteousness.
    - Justification answers to the problem created by condemnation.
  - Imputation covers the “reckoning” of sin in the first case as well as righteousness in the second. There is also a third imputation of believers’ sin to Christ, who dies for our transgressions.

## HISTORICAL VIEWS OF ROMANS 5:12–20

How should we understand the clause “death spread to all men because all sinned” (ἐφ’ ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον) in verse 12? Here are different views:

### PELAGIAN VIEW

- The Pelagian view holds that “all sinned” simply refers to the actual sins committed by all men after the sin of Adam. Adam’s sin only affected himself.

- In other words, all die because all commit sins in the likeness of Adam. Adam and his posterity die because of *sins they personally* committed.
- The Socinians, Anabaptists, and Remonstrants held to this view.
- Surprisingly, William Hendriksen interprets Romans 5:12c in this manner. He writes: “in all probability, this (“because all sinned”) refers to all sins committed *after* people were born . . .”<sup>1</sup>
  - This point appeals to common sense. It is plausible that people would be rendered guilty and liable to death because of their own sins.
  - Moreover, the Pelagian position claims that it would be unfair and contrary to God’s justice of God to punish one person for the sin of another.
  - In addition to that, Murray notes that the aorist tense (ἤμαρτον) does not in and of itself disprove the Pelagian interpretation.
- Notwithstanding, there are several exegetical arguments against the Pelagian interpretation:
  - First, not all die in history on the basis of voluntary, actual sin. For example, infants die even before having an opportunity to commit voluntary actual sin.
  - Second, Paul states (vv. 13, 14) the *very opposite* of the Pelagian view. Death reigned over those who *did not sin* in the *likeness of Adam*.
  - Third, the “*one* trespass” of the “*one* man” is the reason for the death and condemnation of the many.
    - Romans 5:17a—“For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man”
    - But on Pelagian premises, only the sins of the many/all entail the death and condemnation of the many/all—it’s one for one.
  - Fourth, the Pelagian interpretation destroys the analogy between Adam and Christ.
  - Fifth, if the sin and guilt of Adam cannot be imputed to the unbeliever, then there is no basis for the obedience and righteousness of Christ to be imputed to the believer.
- Therefore, there must be some sense in which Adam’s guilt and sin is imputed to his posterity. That is the reason they stand condemned and die.

## ROMAN CATHOLIC VIEW

- Roman Catholics hold that a sinful state results from Adam’s sin. They call this habitual sin, which is a sinful orientation or an inherited proclivity to sin.
- There are several issues with this view.
  - Romans 5:12–19 does not speak of the transmission of sin specifically at birth. It speaks of an immediate conjunction between Adam and his posterity even in his one act of disobedience.
  - “Habitual sin” would certainly not be the one sin of Adam. Rather, it would be a state that makes us tend toward personal sin.
  - Original sin involves a solidaric bond with Adam, not a transmission of a disposition or habit.

## THE CLASSICAL PROTESTANT VIEW

- Murray argues that the one trespass of the one man in verses 15–19 is the same sin denoted by the language “all sinned” in verse 12.
  - This is the basis for universal sin, death, and condemnation.

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<sup>1</sup> William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 178.

- This argument depends on a connection between those two verses. Verse 12 begins an unfinished comparison that is not picked back up until verse 15–19.
- Syntactical support for this connection:
  - ὡςπερ / καὶ οὕτως in 5:12a and 5:12b begins an unfinished comparison.
    - Verse 12 establishes that just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, so also all men sinned.
    - Verses 13–14 is a parenthesis in the argument.
  - Paul's picks up his unfinished thought from vs. 12, continuing it in vs. 19. The syntax of ὡςπερ / οὕτως καὶ in 19a and 19b connects to verse 12.
  - Verse 19 is itself structured in a parallel fashion (“For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.”). The one act of disobedience that results in sin and death is compared specifically to another act of obedience that results in righteousness and life.
- Theological support for connecting verse 12 with 15–19:
  - Theologically, we can base the connection upon Paul’s two-Adam Christology.
  - As we mentioned earlier, Adam and Christ serve as the two public persons who cover all of covenant history. Adam represents the age of disobedience (v. 19a), sin (v. 12), death (v. 12), and condemnation. Christ represents the age of obedience, righteousness, life, and condemnation.

## IMMEDIATE AND MEDIATE IMPUTATION

- The classical Protestant view maintains that human sin, guilt, and condemnation are the *immediate consequences* of Adam’s one transgression. *Mediate imputation* argues that we inherit *pollution* from Adam, and that guilt arises only from our own acts of disobedience.
  - On this latter view, we receive a corrupt nature from Adam, but we are considered guilty and condemned only on the basis of our actual sin.
  - Proponents of this view argue that guilt arises only from the sinner’s personal transgressions.
- Adam’s descendants become guilty only at the time-point of actual sin. A timeline:
  - T1: Adam’s descendant is morally inclined toward sin, but this moral inclination does not yet constitute them guilty.
  - T2: Adam’s descendant approves of Adam’s sin and sins as he did.
  - T3: Then, only *after* the sinner actually sins, God imputes the sinner’s *own guilt* to him. Hence, guilt is not immediately imputed by virtue of the sin of Adam; rather, it is imputed through the *mediation of the sinner’s own sinful actions*.
- To the contrary, immediate imputation maintains the following:
  - T1: Adam’s descendent is co-implicated by a solidaric bond in the guilt of Adam’s first sin.
  - T2: At birth, on account of the solidaric bond between Adam and his posterity, God imputes the guilt of Adam to his posterity.
- Mediate imputation cannot be sustained in light of Paul’s argument in Romans 5. Nonetheless, what *specifically* accounts for the solidarity between Adam and his descendants?

# THEORIES EXPLAINING ADAM'S UNION WITH HIS POSTERITY

## BIOLOGICAL UNION

- The corruption of Adam is passed to his posterity by ordinary or natural generation and his guilt is imputed to his posterity, based *solely* on biological concerns.
- Compare this view with the Westminster Confession of Faith 6:1–3.
  - Our first parents, being seduced by the subtlety and temptation of Satan, sinned, in eating the forbidden fruit (Gen 3:13, 2 Cor 11:3). This their sin, God was pleased, according to His wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to His own glory (Rom 11:32).
  - By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion, with God, (Gen 3:6–8, Eccl 7:29, Rom 3:23) and so became dead in sin (Gen 2:17, Eph 2:1), and wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body (Titus 1:15; Jer 17:9; Rom 3:10–18).
  - They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed; (Gen 1:27–28; 2:16–17, Acts 17:26; Rom 5:12,15–19; 1 Cor 15:21–22, 45, 49) and the same death in sin, and corrupted nature, conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation. (Ps 51:5; Gen; 5:3; Job 14:4; Job 15:14).
- It seems to follow that the ground for the imputation of Adam's guilt resides in the fact that Adam and Eve are the "root" of all mankind. So when Adam sinned, his sin would certainly pass to his descendants. Moreover, the means for the imputation is "ordinary generation." Ordinary generation from a common biological head is the means by which Adam's guilt is imputed to his descendants.

## REALISTIC UNION

- The realist takes the general notion of "humanity" to be an *independent substance*.
  - All human beings are united with one another through this singular substance. Human nature is generically and numerically one.
  - W. G. T. Shedd takes this position. For Shedd, human nature existed *in its entirety* in Adam and is individualized in every member of the human race.
- There are several problems with this view.
  - If Christ has a fully human nature, and human nature in its entirety was corrupted in the fall, then Christ was not born without sin (compare Heb 4:15).
    - Hence, if you want to maintain that Christ was born without sin, then on realist premises he cannot have a truly *human* nature.
    - Either Christ was not born without sin or Christ was born without sin because he was born without a truly human nature.
  - One might respond that Christ was not born by ordinary generation, so he is not corrupt.
    - That is true, but it does not follow from the realist's own terms.
    - Christ bears a human nature, and corruption is spread through the realistic union all humans have with Adam via the singular human substance.
- Compare with the Three Forms of Unity
  - Canons of Dort, Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine, Article 2
    - Man after the fall begat children in his own likeness.<sup>1</sup> A corrupt stock produced a corrupt offspring.<sup>2</sup> Hence all the posterity of Adam, Christ only excepted,<sup>3</sup> have derived corruption from their original parent,<sup>4</sup> not by imitation, as the Pelagians of old asserted, but by the propagation of a vicious nature, in consequence of the

