

Death through Birth and Birth through Death!
Romans 5:12-21
Dr. Jerry Nelson

Pages 16 through 46 are additional notes and resources on the subjects of original sin, the imputation of righteousness, the fate of the infants, “universalism,” etc.

What thinking person in the church hasn't wondered - “What do Jesus and an event 2000 years ago have to do with me and my life today?”

Here's another and more technically involved way of asking the same question:

The Bible declares that all human beings are lacking the one thing they need to have a relationship with a holy God - righteousness.

The very nature of a holy God, by definition, demands that all unholiness be banished from his presence - or as the Bible says it, “Without holiness, no man will see the Lord”.

The Bible further says that every person has sinned and “falls short of the glory of God” - we lack a righteousness required to be with God.

After making that “bad news” point over and over again in the book of Romans, which we have been studying together, Paul, the author, finally gets to the “good news”:

Chapter 3:21 “But now a righteousness from God has been made known...this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ.”

He goes on to say in verse 25 that we are made right with God, through what Jesus Christ did on the cross - his death makes it possible for us to be credited with God's righteousness.

That is well-known theology to many of you but it does raise that same important question:

“How can the death and resurrection of a man who lived 2000 years ago personally affect me?”

More specifically, “How can his righteousness be credited to me?”

Please understand that your relationship with God hangs on the answer to this question!

Look, please, in your Bible at Romans chapter 5 beginning at v12. In these next verses Paul is going to respond to that implied questions.

Romans 5:12-21 “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—¹³ for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law.¹⁴ Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come.¹⁵ But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!¹⁶ Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man’s sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.¹⁷ For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.¹⁸ Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.¹⁹ For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.²⁰ The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more,²¹ so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

To describe how Christ's righteousness can be credited to you, Paul uses an analogy.

The analogy Paul will use here is Adam's relationship to people compared and contrasted with Christ's relationship to people.

So how can what Christ did 2000 years ago be relevant to me?

In Romans 5, the Bible declares that all people stand in relationship to one of two people - either Adam or Christ.

Furthermore **the actions of those two people determine the eternal destiny of everyone who belongs to each of them.**

It is still true today that what Adam did thousands of years ago determines what his people do.

And it is equally true that what Christ did two thousand years ago still determines what his people do.

- Those who belong to Adam are under the sentence of death.
- Those who belong to Christ are assured eternal life.

This will be hard work today. This a very theologically and logically technical passage, so I want you to look at your Bible and see how Paul has constructed his comments.

Notice first of all that what he starts in verse 12 he doesn't finish until verse 18.

Romans 5:12-13 "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned— 13 for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law.

Verse 13 doesn't finish the thought of v12.

Skip with me down to verse 18 and notice that the thought of verse 12 is repeated,

Romans 5:18 "Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, **(but this time the thought is**

completed) so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.

And verse 19 is a rephrasing of the same complete idea.

If you will follow along in verse 19 as I read it you will see and hear the comparison Paul is making in the analogy of Adam that he uses.

Romans 5:19 “For just as through the disobedience of the one man (Adam) the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man (Christ) the many will be made righteous.

But to understand the significance of verses 18-19, we must understand the analogy Paul will use.

So in verse 12 Paul starts his analogy with a simple statement of the facts:

First, sin came into the world through one man - Adam (He is named in v14).

Paul is not here dealing with the ultimate origin of sin -he is simply describing how it came into our **human** existence.

Secondly, the text says, “Death came through sin.”

We know from the Genesis account that Adam did sin and the penalty of death was introduced into human existence.

That death was not only physical but it also included spiritual separation from God.

Thirdly, the passage says, “and in this way death came to all men, “In this way,” means **through Adam – through Adam** death came to all men.

Fourthly, death came to all “**because all sinned.**”

What does Paul mean when he says “because all sinned?”

Does Paul simply mean that we all imitate Adam by also sinning and therefore we all deserve to die?

Now that is certainly true as we saw in Romans 3:23 “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” and as we will see in Romans 6:23 where it says, “The wages of sin is death.”

But that is not Paul’s point here.

In this part of the text Paul is talking about two devastating consequences of Adam’s sin.

The first consequence is quite obvious – everyone dies as a result of Adam’s sin.

Both physical and spiritual death were thrust on the human race as a result of Adam’s sin.

This consequence is sometimes called “original sin.”

“Original sin” is not merely a reference to the first sin committed by a human being.

Much more importantly it denotes **the condition resulting from Adam’s sin**; it speaks of the corrupted nature of all human beings because of Adam’s sin.

This corruption of our very human nature explains what Paul said earlier in Romans 3:10-12 “There is no one righteous, not even one;

¹¹ there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.

¹² All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”

The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah says the problem goes deeper than actions. Jeremiah 17:9 “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

The Psalmist David touches on this subject when he writes, Psalm 51:5 “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

“Original sin” speaks to our fallen, sinful, condition.

“Total depravity” is another concept that relates to this idea of original sin.

“Total depravity” doesn’t mean a person is as bad as they could possibly be as when someone says so-and-so is totally depraved.

“Total depravity” means that every aspect of our human nature is affected by original sin.

I refer you to Paul’s earlier description of the human condition where in chapter 3 he spoke of our thoughts, our words and our actions all affected by sin.

There is no part of our nature that is not corrupted by the results of original sin and hence it affects every motive, thought, word and action.

Death is one way to describe that condition.

From conception, the seeds of death are planted and working in us.

The first devastating consequence of Adam’s sin is “original sin,” a fallen, corrupted human nature, “total depravity;” it is death, physical and spiritual.

This is an issue of our character, our very nature.

God will address this problem through what we call sanctification.

Over our lifetime, by his Holy Spirit, he will correct the damage done and will restore the image of God, the image of Christ in us.

But the second devastating consequence of Adam’s sin is a legal issue; it is our standing before God. We are guilty and condemned before God.

It is this issue that Paul most wishes to point out in his analogy in Romans 5.

And the point is that when Adam sinned something changed for us. When Adam sinned, **we** sinned – we became guilty.

I didn’t say that **after** Adam sinned, we **also** sinned.

That is true; as we have already seen, one devastating result of Adam's sin is what we know as "original sin" – we now have that sinful nature.

But the second consequence of Adam's sin is different:

I said that when **Adam** sinned, **we** actually sinned.

Watch Paul's logic carefully or you miss a very important point.

It is this point that Paul will most use later to describe to us how the righteousness of Jesus becomes ours.

So again look at verse 12. "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned"

Before going on with his comparison of Adam and Christ, Paul wishes to drive home his point that **we all sinned in Adam**.

So in verses 13-14 he answers an implied question:

"Paul, you just said that death came into the world as a result of sin but what about those who haven't sinned by breaking the law?"

First of all, in verse 13, Paul answers that we all know sin was in the world before the Law was given through Moses.

Cain murdered his brother, the rampant sinfulness prior to the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah in the time of Abraham, and so much more illustrate the universality of sin prior to Moses and the Law.

Paul knows that you might then think that death is simply the result of everyone sinning on his or her own and not the result of everyone having sinned **in Adam** .

"Wait a minute," Paul says, "It is true that even before the Mosaic Law, people sinned against the "law," the "law" written on their hearts.

But remember this, "sin is not taken into account when there is no law."

But wait a minute; between the truth of God revealed in creation (chapter 1), the unwritten law of the conscience (chapter 2) and the written law of God (chapter 3), Paul has already made it clear that the whole world stands accountable to God.

Who has not broken the law and sinned in one of those ways?

I think Paul has in mind infants and by inference, the mentally incompetent.

They are the only ones of whom it can be correctly said that they have no law to which they can be held accountable.

And yet, to prove Paul's point that we all sinned **in Adam**, Paul writes, in verse 14, "Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam."

Only of infants can it be said that they did not willfully sin against the laws of God.

"Nevertheless" they too received the sentence of death.

How is that possible? How can that be fair?

Only because all, everyone, infants included, were **in Adam** and so when Adam sinned, we all sinned.

(See the resources at the end of this sermon for discussion on the salvation of infants)

Romans 5:12 says that when Adam sinned, death passed to all humans, "because all sinned."

The only way for that sentence to make sense, as difficult as it is to comprehend, is that all humanity was somehow in Adam so when he sinned we sinned.

The point here is that somehow in Adam we all sinned – we sinned when he did – his sin was credited or imputed to us.

Everyone suffers death, physical and spiritual, **because everyone has sinned - in Adam.**

It is not just that Adam sinned and we pay the consequences.

No, death is not a natural consequence- death is a divine consequence, a punishment.

God does not say “your brother stole something so I’ll cut your hand off.”

The only way we are held accountable for sin is if we sin.

The Bible here teaches that **we did sin - in Adam.**

Let me prove that is what the Bible and Paul teach:

In the following verses, even though he makes additional points, Paul emphasizes this point.

And again I remind you it is not just that we all eventually sin on our own but that we all sinned in Adam.

V15 “many died by the trespass of the one man.”

V16 “the result of the one man’s sin”

V16 “the judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation”.

V17 “by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man.”

Still don’t believe it?

V18 “just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men”

V19 “just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners.”

In every verse he reiterates it. Think Paul wants to make a point?

Death is the result of a single, solitary sin – Adam’s sin.

Adam’s sin was credited to us; Adam’s sin was imputed to us because we were in Adam when he sinned – WE SINNED.

We find that difficult to accept because our culture has so emphasized individualism.

We see ourselves as related to other people but not connected.

Asians and Africans, I am told, don't have as much trouble with this concept.

The Jews didn't either - cf Heb 7:9ff "Levi, who was born 500 years later was in Abraham when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizadek - he was "still in the loins of his ancestor..."

The Israelites were judged for the sin of Achan - the "Israelites acted unfaithfully". It was not just Achan's sin but also Israel's sin.

Our connectedness to Adam and to all other human beings is a concept difficult for us but nonetheless biblical and true.

The poet John Donne spoke to the concept when he wrote:
 "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a (house) of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

Regarding human solidarity "in Adam," one author writes,
 "Perhaps...we should ...be content with the conclusion that Paul affirms the reality of a solidarity of all humanity with Adam in his sin without (our) being able to explain the exact nature of that union." (Moo, Romans, 328 footnotes)

Paul's point is that by our connection to Adam we are **not** born neutral.

We are **not** just born with a propensity to sin, which is also true. But more devastating is the fact that we have **already sinned in Adam.**

His sin is imputed or credited to us so that his sin is also ours.

But as I have said, remember that Adam's sin credited to us is the analogy.

And so having made his point that we are condemningly connected to Adam, Paul turns to the positive side - our connection to Jesus.

Both Adam and Christ bring something to the people connected to them.

In verses 15-17 Paul contrasts that connection.

First of all in verse 15 we read, "The gift is not like the trespass"

In other words: "Jesus gracious act yields a very different result than our sin in Adam."

Adam's sin (and our sin in him) resulted in death

Yes, the text says "many".

"Many" simply means a great number and so the context must determine how many "many" means.

And if we look at v12 we see it means "all people."

Adam's sin resulted in the death of everyone BUT Jesus' act of death, on our behalf, resulted in the gift that came by the grace of the one man Jesus Christ. - That "gift" we are told throughout *Romans* is "eternal life".

Adam brought death, Jesus brought life.

His point?

Connection to Adam means death.

But just as surely, connection to Jesus means life.

Next, look at verse 16: Again the gift is not like the result of Adam's sin.

Adam's sin resulted in condemnation BUT Jesus brought justification.

His point?

Connection to Adam means condemnation - everlasting separation from God.

Just as surely connection to Jesus means justification - no longer held guilty for your sin in Adam or any sin committed on your own.

But notice also in verse 16, the work of Christ is far more powerful than Adam's.

Adam's one sin brought death BUT Christ's death covered not only one sin but many sins – our sin in Adam and every other sin.

If one sin brings condemnation, what should many sins bring?
Of course, it should bring greater condemnation.

But Grace has a different arithmetic! (From Boice?)

Cranfield, "That one single misdeed should be answered by judgment this is perfectly understandable: that the accumulated sins and guilt of all the ages should be answered by God's free gift, this is miracle of miracles, utterly beyond human comprehension." (Cranfield, *Romans*, Vol 1, p286)

And in verse 17 Paul declares another contrast between what happens to those who are connected to Adam compared with those connected to Jesus:

Through Adam, death reigns - how true that appears!
BUT through Christ, those connected to him will reign in life.

What reigns, what controls in your experience? Death or life?

Do you live as one under death's sentence and control or do you live as one who is alive and knows that even if you suffer the temporary consequence of physical death, you will reign in life following the resurrection?

If your perspective truly covers only the here and now, then death reigns, death controls you.

We look around and see death everywhere.

Death seems so final.

Our own lives so often seem futile - we eat, breath, work, play, and sleep and then, too soon, it's over.

You look at pictures of yourself as a baby - and you realize how time is slipping by.

You hear of deaths of people your own age or younger and you realize there is no guarantee you will live through today.

You see pictures of people who lived hundreds of years ago and you wonder about their thoughts - what did they imagine about their future? - Did they see themselves as important just as we do?

Look at them now - we don't even know their names.

Whether they lived or not makes no difference to us.

They are the nobodies of history.

Are we the future nobodies of history?

Is there really something after life? Or is it just death?

If there is no life after this life of here and now then either we take all we can from this life or we just hunker down and wait for the inevitable – death.

One person grabs at life, another lives depressed, and another just passes time but all are living under the shadow of death - dominated by it - death reigns!

But oh, miraculous reality, this is not all there is!

Look again at v17: “Those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through Jesus Christ.”

All those who are connected to Jesus by faith are not controlled by death but are and will reign in life.

And so coming back to where he left off at the end of verse 12, Paul sums it up in Romans 5:18-19

“Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. ¹⁹

For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”

Now to what I believe is the major point of the passage:

Back in chapter 4 Paul wrote, 4:3 “Abraham believed God, and it was **credited** to him as righteousness.”

And again in verse 5 he wrote, “However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is **credited** as righteousness.”

At the beginning of this message I asked the questions I think this text is answering, “**How can the death and resurrection of a man who lived 2000 years ago personally affect me?**”

More specifically, “How can his righteousness be credited to me?”

And here’s the answer:

Just as Adam’s sin was credited to us, because we sinned in Adam, so Christ’s righteousness is credited to us, because we were in Him when he died and rose again.

The first verses of chapter 6 will specifically say that we are united with Christ in his death and resurrection.

Romans 6:4 “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

Yes, in Adam we all sinned and the consequences are devastating – we are born in sin and we continue to sin.

But now, by amazing grace, **in Christ** we are justified, the guilt and penalty of sin are removed, and we are **credited** with Jesus’ righteousness.

Remember this, you were not in trouble with God merely because you have sinned since you were born.

No, you were in trouble with God **before** you were born, because you sinned in Adam, before you did one other thing wrong on your own.

But hear this, and this is the truth Paul has been trying to drive home since the middle of chapter 3:

You are God's friend now, not because you have straightened up and are trying to do it right.

No, you are God's friend now because, by God's grace, you were "in" Christ when he died and rose again and **you are credited with his righteousness.**

If you are trusting in Jesus, then of what can you be certain?

You are "in him" and being "in him" his righteousness has been credited to you.

And if you are here this morning questioning whether you have received God's free gift of forgiveness, justification, righteousness and life - please hear me carefully.

As a part of Adam's helpless race you are sinful and condemned to death - eternal separation from God

God sees you as his enemy.

But God in Christ offers you forgiveness on the basis of Christ's death for your sin AND he offers you his righteousness, his very life.

Just as surely as you are now "in Adam," so by trusting Jesus, you prove that you are "in Christ."

PRAYER

Following are nearly 35 pages of additional notes on:

Physical death before Adam;

Does the "all" of verse 18 mean universalism (all will be saved)?

What about infants who die?

The subject of "imputed/credited" righteousness;

The subject of "original sin;"

There is another emphasis in these verses. It is on the power and scope of the Gospel.

If the consequence of sin is powerful, and it is, look at verses 15 and 17: “How much more” will grace bring powerful results. Again from verse 15, see the word, “overflow” – sin flows but grace overflows.

Again from verse 17, if sin brought one result, “God’s abundant provision” brought more.

Look at verse 20, “where sin increased, grace increased all the more.”

We sometimes get and give the impression that Christianity and God are barely hanging on in the world and that evil is winning.

I also think we have the idea that in the end, in the judgment, most people will go to hell and only a few will be with God.

That’s not what these verses sound like and when you read the book of Revelation, it definitely is not the case.

God promised to Abraham offspring as great in number as the stars in the sky and sand on the seashore.

In Revelation 7:9 we read, “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb...”

John Calvin wrote, “(For) if the fall of Adam had the effect of producing the ruin of many, the grace of God is much more efficacious in benefiting many, since it is granted that Christ is much more powerful to save than Adam was to destroy.” (in Stott, 161).

Grace overwhelms our sin and the death it deserves.

For a discussion of physical death before Adam’s sin see:

Douglas Moo in *Romans*, 188ff. Biblical evidence suggests that at least plant “death” occurred before Adam’s sin (cf “seed bearing plants” of Genesis 1:11ff), but what about animals? Many animal fossils have been found with other animal fossils within, obviously having been eaten. Then what about humans? This raises the issue of the origin and dating of human beings? The Bible clearly presents Adam as the first human. (Genesis 1-3, Matthew 19:4, Acts 17:26, etc).

See also John Stott, *Romans*, 164ff.

No less a scholar than John Stott suggests that homo sapiens may have existed for millennia but not until later did God create man in the image of God, breathing into him a living soul. So while death may have been part of the experience of plants and animals, it was not part of man created in the image of God until Adam’s sin.

Does the “all” in verse 18 mean that all will eventually be saved (Universalism)?

The two uses of “all” of verse 18 must be explained. Does “all” mean every person without exception? Everything Paul has said thus far in Romans and emphasized here in Romans 5 demands that “all men” of 18a must be every person without exception. Does that then mean that the “all men” of 18b must likewise include every person without exception? Do these verses teach a universalism, that every person will eventually be saved? The Bible is very clear that some will spend eternity separated from God. 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 “He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.⁹ They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.” Matthew 25:46 “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” It is also true that the word “all” must be interpreted in its context. In Acts 2:17 “I will pour out my Spirit on all people” does not mean every person without exception. In Acts 19:10 “all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord” clearly does not mean every person without exception. So here the “all” of “life for all men,” must be interpreted in its context. Our relationship to Adam is by birth; the “all” includes all who are physical descendants of Adam. Since we are all born, the “all” means every person without exception. But our relationship to Christ is by faith (5:17 “receive”); the “all” includes those who belong to Christ.

To avoid a complete contradiction with the rest of the Bible, it must be that we interpret “all” in light of the context. Specifically we must define “all” in each case with the person who is the head – Adam or Christ. **See 1 Corinthians 15 – each “Adam” delimits the “all.”** 1 Corinthians 15:45-49 “So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being” ; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.

⁴⁶ The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. ⁴⁷ The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. ⁴⁸ As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹ And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.

First Adam, last Adam; first man, second man, etc. Christ was not the second person who ever lived (that was Eve). Each clearly implies a unique relationship to other humanity - each as the head of

those who follow. Adam is the first, the head, the source, of all who follow him, to those who are **physically** born (hence, every human being). Christ is the head, the source, to all who follow him, to all who are **spiritually** born (hence, all those who are born again).

In verse Romans 5:19 Paul changes words using “many” instead of “all.” It seems reasonable to assume that the two words are used by Paul as synonyms and the same rules apply to their interpretation – “context is king.”

For a discussion of the fate of infants who die see:

Douglas Moo, *Romans*, 191.

From an epitaph on a gravestone in the cemetery at St. Andrews in Scotland, believing that children who die in infancy are saved by God's grace:

"Bold (unbelief), turn pale and die.
 Beneath this stone four sleeping infants lie"
 Say, are they lost or saved?
 If death's by sin, they sinned, for they are here.
 If heaven's by works, in heaven they can't appear.
 Reason, ah, how depraved!
 Turn to the Bible's sacred page, the knot's untied:
 They died, for Adam sinned;
 They live, for Jesus died." Ironside, *Lectures on the Epistle to the Romans* 1928 p71

See also “Are Those Who Died in Infancy Saved?” by Sam Storms
 Nov 6, 2006

<http://www.enjoyinggodministries.com/article/are-those-who-die-in-infancy-saved>

“If human nature is corrupt and guilty from conception, the consequence of Adam's transgression, are those who die in infancy lost? The same question would apply to those who live beyond infancy but because of mental retardation or some other handicap are incapable of moral discernment, deliberation, or volition.

This is more than a theoretical issue designed for our speculation and curiosity. It touches one of the most emotionally and spiritually unsettling experiences in all of life: the loss of a young child.

I was first confronted with this issue on a personal level in the late 1970s. I received a phone call from a family in our church which had just experienced the premature birth of twin girls. Upon arriving at the hospital I was informed that one of the girls had died. I never anticipated the question that came my way as I walked into the room of the grieving mother: "Sam, is my baby in heaven?" A few years later the young child of a good friend was killed in a car accident. The parents asked me to perform the funeral, once again putting me in the position of having to think through and articulate in a biblical and compassionate way what I believed about the eternal destiny of their child. So, what conclusion did I reach? Let's take a look at the variety of options that have been suggested.

(1) *The sinlessness of infants* - One view insists that those dying in infancy are saved for the simple reason that there is nothing in them or done by them that merits condemnation. In other words, they are born in a state of moral neutrality or moral equilibrium. They do not possess a sin nature nor are they corrupt. They are, in a word, characterless. They lack moral standing. There is nothing in their souls that is properly the object of divine judgment. Hence all dying in that state are saved for no other reason than that they are not condemnable. Several texts would seem to contradict this view, among them Pss. 51:5; 58:3; Prov. 22:15; Gen. 8:21; Job 15:14-16; Eph. 2:3.

(2) *Universalism* - Another viewpoint simply asserts that all will be saved, inclusive of those dying in infancy. None will suffer eternal condemnation. God's saving grace extends effectually to the entire human race. Again, countless texts could be cited to disprove this idea, among them Mt. 7:13-14, 21-23; 8:11-12; 10:28; 13:37-42; Luke 16:23-28; 2 Thess. 1:9; Jude 6; Rev. 14:10-11; 20:11-15.

(3) *Post-Mortem Salvation* - Based on a certain interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18-19 and 4:6, it is asserted that those who die without having the opportunity to hear the gospel of Christ and make a cognitively and morally informed decision will be granted a "second chance" (it is, in fact, a "first" chance if they never had a legitimate opportunity in this life). As for infants in particular, it is said that God will bring them to a state in which they are sufficiently mature to understand and choose responsibly.

There are several problems with this view.

First, how can they be brought into a state of maturity by God without the influence of parents, education, peers, experience, etc. which contribute to our own intellectual and spiritual framework and on the basis of which we ourselves make an informed choice? Would they be brought into a state of moral equilibrium, having had no history of personal sin that has so decisively shaped who we are? If God is the one who somehow directly educates and nurtures them, has he not then prejudiced their minds/wills in a way that is altogether different from the way we are educated and nurtured? The problems associated with this are innumerable.

Second, the two texts on which they base their view say nothing about post-mortem evangelism for either those dying in infancy or pagans who never hear the name of Jesus. I will address both these texts in a future installment of *Deciphering Difficult Texts*.

Third, from a pastoral point of view, this theory does nothing to ease the anxieties of parents who want to know if their baby is in heaven. For there is no guarantee, on this view, that even if given an opportunity after death that they will respond in faith.

(4) *Infant Salvation via Infant Baptism* - Certain traditions within Christianity have affirmed baptismal regeneration, according to which the waters of baptism are used by God to effect the regeneration, spiritual cleansing, and forgiveness of the infant. Needless to say, this view is only as cogent as is the case for baptismal regeneration, and the case for the latter is poor. In addition, it fails to address the question of what happens to the vast majority of infants in the history of the world who died without the benefit of Christian baptism.

(5) *The Roman Catholic Concept of "Limbo"* - The Roman Catholic Church has acknowledged the possibility of a state of natural blessedness or happiness in which unbaptized infants experience a form of eternal peace but not the consummate joy of heaven itself. Rome has neither formally affirmed nor denied this teaching.

(6) *Salvation of the Infants of Believing Parents* - Others have appealed to 1 Cor. 7:14-16 to argue that the infants or children of a believing parent or parents are, for that reason, granted special salvific privilege in the kingdom of God. Again, this view is only as cogent as is that particular interpretation of 1 Cor. 7.

(7) *Elect Infants are Saved* - Another view advocated by some Reformed theologians is that some who die in infancy are elect, and

therefore saved, while others are non-elect, and therefore condemned.

(8) *All those dying in Infancy are Elect* - The view that I embrace is that all those dying in infancy, as well as those so mentally incapacitated that they are incapable of making an informed choice, are among the elect of God chosen by him for salvation before the world began. The evidence for this view is scant, but significant. First, in Romans 1:20 Paul describes people who are recipients of general revelation as being '*without excuse*.' Does this imply that those who are *not* recipients of general revelation (i.e., infants) are therefore *not* accountable to God or subject to wrath? In other words, those who die in infancy have an "*excuse*" in that they neither receive general revelation nor have the capacity to respond to it.

Second, there are texts which appear to assert or imply that infants do not know good or evil and hence lack the capacity to make morally informed and thus responsible choices. According to Deut. 1:39 they are said to 'have no knowledge of good or evil.' This in itself, however, would not prove infant salvation, for they may still be held liable for the sin of Adam.

Third, is the story of David's son in 2 Sam. 12:15-23 (esp. v. 23). The first-born child of David and Bathsheba was struck by the Lord and died. In the seven days before his death, David fasted and prayed, hoping that "the Lord may be gracious to me, that the child may live" (v. 22). Following his death, David washed himself, ate food, and worshipped (v. 20). When asked why he responded in this way, he said that the child "has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me" (v. 23). What does it mean when David says "I shall go to him?" If this is merely a reference to the grave or death, in the sense that David, too, shall one day die and be buried, one wonders why he would say something so patently obvious! Also, it *appears* that David draws some measure of comfort from knowing that he will "go to him." It is the reason why David resumes the normal routine of life. It *appears* to be the reason David ceases from the outward display of grief. It *appears* to be a truth from which David derives comfort and encouragement. How could any of this be true if David will simply die like his son. It would, therefore, *appear* that David believed he would be reunited with his deceased infant. Does this imply that at least *this one particular infant* was saved? Perhaps. But if so, are we justified

in constructing a doctrine in which we affirm the salvation of *all* who die in infancy?

Fourth, there is consistent testimony of Scripture that people are judged on the basis of sins voluntary and consciously committed in the body. See 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Rev. 20:11-12. In other words, eternal judgment is always based on conscious rejection of divine revelation (whether in creation, conscience, or Christ) and willful disobedience. Are infants capable of either? There is no explicit account in Scripture of any other judgment based on any other grounds. Thus, those dying in infancy are saved because they do not (cannot) satisfy the conditions for divine judgment.

Fifth, and related to the above point, is what R. A. Webb states. If a deceased infant

"were sent to hell on no other account than that of original sin, there would be a good reason to the divine mind for the judgment, but the child's mind would be a perfect blank as to the reason of its suffering. Under such circumstances, it would know suffering, but it would have no understanding of the reason for its suffering. It could not tell its neighbor - it could not tell itself - why it was so awfully smitten; and consequently the whole meaning and significance of its sufferings, being to it a conscious enigma, the very essence of penalty would be absent, and justice would be disappointed of its vindication. Such an infant could feel that it was in hell, but it could not explain, to its own conscience, why it was there" (*The Theology of Infant Salvation* [Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1981], 288-89).

Sixth, we have what would appear to be clear biblical evidence that at least *some* infants are regenerate in the womb, such that if they had died in their infancy they would be saved. This at least provides a theoretical basis for considering whether the same may be true of all who die in infancy. That is to say, "if this sort of thing happens even once, it can certainly happen in other cases" (Ronald Nash, *When a Baby Dies* [Zondervan, 1999], 65). These texts include Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:15.

Seventh, some have appealed to Matthew 19:13-15 (Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17) where Jesus declares, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.' Is Jesus simply saying that if one wishes to be saved he/she must be as trusting as children, i.e., devoid of skepticism and arrogance? In other words, is Jesus merely describing the *kind* of people who enter the kingdom? Or is he saying that these very

children were recipients of saving grace? But if the latter were true, it would seem to imply that Jesus knew that the children whom he was then receiving would all die in their infancy. Is that credible?

Eighth, Millard Erickson argues for the salvation of deceased infants in an unusual way. He argues that notwithstanding Adam's sin, there must be a conscious and voluntary decision on our part to embrace or ratify it. Until such is the case, the imputation of Adam's sin to his physical posterity, as is also true of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to his spiritual posterity, is *conditional*. Thus, prior to reaching the "age of accountability" all infants are innocent. When and in what way does this ratification of Adam's sin come about?

Erickson explains:

"We become responsible and guilty when we accept or approve of our corrupt nature. There is a time in the life of each one of us when we become aware of our own tendency toward sin. At that point we may abhor the sinful nature that has been there all the time. We would in that case repent of it and might even, if there is an awareness of the gospel, ask God for forgiveness and cleansing. . . . But if we acquiesce in that sinful nature, we are in effect saying that it is good. In placing our tacit approval upon the corruption, we are also approving or concurring in the action in the Garden of Eden so long ago. We become guilty of that sin without having to commit a sin of our own" (*Christian Theology*, 2:639).

But there are at least two problems with this. First, if we are born with a corrupt and sinful nature, as Erickson concedes we are, our willing ratification of Adam's transgression and the guilt and corruption of nature which are its effects is *itself* an inevitable effect of the corrupt nature to which we are now ostensibly giving our approval. In other words, how else *could* a person who is born corrupt and wicked respond but in a corrupt and wicked way, namely, by ratifying Adam's sin? If Erickson should suggest that such a response is *not* inevitable, one can only wonder why it is that *every single human being* who ever lived (except Jesus) ratifies and embraces the sin of Adam and its resultant corruption of nature. Surely someone, somewhere would have said No. Erickson would have to argue that at the point when each soul becomes morally accountable it enters a state of complete moral and spiritual equilibrium, in no way biased by the corruption of nature and wicked disposition with which it was born. But that leads to the second problem, for it would mean that each of us experiences our own Garden of Eden, as it were. Each

human soul stands its own probation at the moment the age of moral accountability is reached. But if that is so, what is the point of trying to retain any connection at all between what Adam did and who/what we are? If ultimately I become corrupt by my own first choice, what need is there of Adam? And if I am corrupt *antecedent* to that first choice, we are back to square one: my guilt and corruption inherited from Adam, the penal consequence of *his* choice as the head and representative of the race.

Ninth, an argument that is entirely subjective in nature (and therefore of questionable evidential value) may be noted. We must ask the question: Given our understanding of the character of God as presented in Scripture, does He appear as the kind of God who would eternally condemn infants on no other ground than that of Adam's transgression? Admittedly, this is a subjective (and perhaps sentimental) question. But it deserves an answer, nonetheless. Personally speaking, I find the first, third, fourth, fifth, and ninth points convincing. Therefore, I do believe in the salvation of those dying in infancy. I affirm their salvation, however, neither because they are innocent nor because they have merited God's forgiveness but solely because God has sovereignly chosen them for eternal life, regenerated their souls, and applied the saving benefits of the blood of Christ to them apart from conscious faith.

For an excellent discussion of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us see

John Piper, "[Adam, Christ, and Justification: Part IV](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/BySeries/2/24_Adam_Christ_and_Justification_Part_4/) See also parts I-III. http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/BySeries/2/24_Adam_Christ_and_Justification_Part_4/

For discussion of imputation and original sin see here also: JONATHAN EDWARDS ON ORIGINAL SIN WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO HIS CONTRIBUTION TO UNDERSTANDING THE DOCTRINE OF IMPUTATION

by David S. Brown

<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Forum/3505/JonathanEdwards.html>

I. Original Sin - The Treatise

Jonathan Edward's *The Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* (1758) was written in response to Dr. John Taylor's *Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin Proposed to a Free and Candid Examination* (1741), which presents the Arminian arguments for actual sins rather original sin. Being a thoroughbred Calvinist and "the last Puritan" (as J. I. Packer calls him), Edwards was solidly committed to the Augustinian/ Reformation doctrine of original sin, which in his day as it is in our's is a major offense to many, if not most, people. Pascal once observed that the doctrine seems an offense to reason but once one accepted it it makes total sense of the entire human condition. John Gertsner comments that Edwards' work, *Original Sin*, "may be the most profound articulation and defense of that Reformed doctrine ever written." Edwards' reason for going after Taylor was his deep, abiding concern that Taylor's Arminian theology would destroy the Scriptural basis of the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone:

"I look on the doctrine [of original sin] as of great importance, which every body will doubtless own it is, if it be true. For if the case be such indeed, that all mankind are by nature in a state of total ruin, both with respect to the moral evil of which they are subjects, and the afflictive evil to which they are exposed, the one as the consequence and punishment of the other; then doubtless, the great salvation by Christ stands in direct relation to this ruin, as the remedy to the disease; and the whole Gospel, or doctrine of salvation, must suppose it; and all real belief, or true notion of that gospel, must be built upon it."

In this paper I will give particular focus on Edwards' unique and, I think, helpful philosophical and theological insights on the imputation of Adam's sin and guilt to us.

II. Original Sin - the Doctrine

The doctrine of original sin (first coined by Augustine) doesn't so much refer to the first or original sin committed by Adam as it does to the result of the first sin i. e. the corruption of the human race and the fallen condition into which we are all born and in which makes natural men "enemies of God". In short, the classic doctrine, while maintaining that God made Man upright (Eccles. 7:29), holds the entire race is corrupt and culpable. Edwards also viewed the Fall as the loss of the spiritual nature (original holiness and righteousness) that belonged to the human race as the created *imago dei*. Therefore, Man has a twisted heart prior to any actual sin. This inner sinful disposition or motivation is the root of all sin and it derives to everyone of the human race in a mysterious but real way through our first parent, who was our representative before God.

The doctrine is therefore the basis for the familiar formulation: we are not sinners because we sin but rather we sin because we are sinners. ("Surely I was sinful at # birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." Ps. Ps. 51:5). The Westminster Confession brilliantly captures the results of the Fall:

By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death

in sin, and corrupted nature, conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly disposed, disabled and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.

Edwards subscribed to this Reformed understanding but he perhaps moved into the doctrine more deeply and with a more unique, fresh perspective than perhaps anyone save Augustine. He writes of two principles God implanted in Man. One, the “natural” (or call the flesh) is self love, passions, natural appetites etc. The other refers to as “divine” (or Spirit) which is the image of God and is the superior principle that is to dominate the heart or affections. When Man sinned, the divine principle left the heart and the “Holy Spirit, that divine inhabitant, forsook the house.” When that happened, Man was given over to his inward, private affections. Consequently, the “natural principle”, not the “divine”, now reigned, cosmic treason occurred, God is forsaken and the imago dei is shattered. Thus, it is God’s absence from us i. e. the withdraw of His Spirit, not His presence, which explains sin.

By original sin, Edwards meant that “innate sinful depravity of the heart” Consistent with classic doctrine, Edwards believed, not that we tend always to sin, but we always have a disposition to sin. Evidence for this innate tendency of corruption as the prevalent, universal condition of man, Edwards contended, is readily found in observation, experience and Scripture. On the other hand, Taylor to support his moralism supposedly looked at the same evidence and saw a preponderance of good and virtue in the tendencies of the race to support. Taylor’s conclusion, like that of other Arminians, suggests that it is not necessarily the evidence about the twisted heart of man that is want but either the sufficient strength of the lens through which it is examined or the absence of spiritual lens at all.

Edwards argues that we humans are born into and retain only a physical nature which is completely “bereft” of the “things of religion”. We are by nature totally depraved, that is every part of our being is permeated with sin - it is at our core - and we are alienated from God. Our will (which Edwards defines as the mind choosing) is so corrupted that we cannot by nature choose God apart from His affecting grace. Although we have a rational capacity, it is corrupted in spiritual things and cannot see sin for what it is.

In his *Freedom of the Will*, Edwards argued that we are free to always choose according to our strongest desire at the moment of choosing. The problem is that in our fallen state we cannot choose God because we do not desire Him. We have freedom to choose what we would have but we will not have God in our lives. We do not have liberty to choose God because our nature lacks Edwards’ divine principle.

III. Adam As Federal Head

Edwards saw Adam as a representative through whom God covenanted with the entire human race, not only in a parental sense but more particularly in a federal sense. Adam as the federal head of the race was tested and when he sinned as the public person, he thus sinned for all of us. His fall, as well as his guilt, is ours. When God punished Adam by

withdrawing His grace and communion and by giving him over to his own affections and desires, Adam lost or forfeited his original righteousness and the same consequences attend all his posterity. We follow after Adam willingly and like Adam hide ourselves from God, cover ourselves with our own works of righteousness and seek peace, as Edwards said, with false gods. Therefore no infusion of evil was necessary for us to sin in Adam. Edwards contended that it is privation of God's divine love that explains man's wickedness and therefore, its cause is internal, not external or environmental. No external act belongs to a person "otherwise...than as his heart was in it." Yet because the human race's heart is inclined to Adam's act, his act is the race's act as well. For Edwards all it takes is for God in response to Adam's sin to withdraw special grace from him and create his posterity without it.

Edwards thought the most excruciating of all theological problems was how, in the case of Adam who was created fresh from the hand of God with holiness and righteousness, can a good tree can bear bad fruit. From whence did Adam's disposition or inclination come? As much as this challenged Edwards' acute intellect and as much as he labored with it, it is even more of an unfathomable mystery to us. But Edwards waded into its depths concluding based on Scripture that a perfectly righteous person, which Adam was, may will that which he knows to be unrighteous. Yet Edwards held fast to Scripture that God could not be and is not the author of the # sinner but the sinner is himself morally responsible for his choices. John Gertsner at this point helps place this gordian knot into some perspective at least by suggesting that "God intends the question of the origin of sin as an academic thorn in the flesh. There must be an answer to the question but no one has yet discovered it. Edwards mistakenly believed he had." Edwards did, however, succinctly capture the essence of the pattern of sin and guilt in the following brilliant explanation:

"The depraved disposition of Adam's heart is to be considered two ways. (1) As the first rising of an evil inclination in his heart, exerted in his first act of sin, and the ground of the complete transgression. (2) An evil disposition of heart continuing afterwards, as a confirmed principle, that came by God's forsaking him; which was a punishment of his first transgression. This confirmed corruption, by its remaining and continued operation, brought additional guilt on his soul.

And in like manner, depravity of heart is to be considered two in Adams's posterity. The first existing of a corrupt disposition in their hearts is not to be looked upon as sin belonging to them, distinct from their participation of Adam's first sin; it is as it were the extended pollution of that sin, through the whole tree, by virtue of the constituted union of the branches with the root; or the inheritance of the sin of that head of the species in the members, in the consent and concurrence of the hearts of the members with the head in that first act...But the depravity of nature, remaining an established principle in the heart of a child of Adam, and as exhibited in after-operation, is a consequence and punishment of the first apostasy thus participated, and brings new guilt. The first being of an evil disposition in the heart of the child of Adam,, whereby he is disposed to approve of the sin of his first father, as fully as he himself approved of it when he committed it, or so far as to imply a full and perfect consent of heart to it, I think, is not be looked upon as a consequence of the imputation of that first sin, any more than the full consent of

Adam's own heart in the act of sinning; which was not consequent on the imputation of his sin to himself, but rather prior to it in the order of nature. indeed the derivation of the evil disposition to the hearts of Adam's posterity, or rather the coexistence of the evil disposition, implied in Adam's first rebellion, in the root and branches, is a consequence of the union, that the wise Author of the world has established between Adam and his posterity: but not properly a consequence of the imputation of his sin; nay, rather antecedent to it, as it was in Adam himself. The first depravity of heart, and the imputation of that sin, are both the consequences of that established union: but yet in such order, that the evil disposition is first, and the charge of guilt consequent; as it was in the case of Adam himself.

In addition to the antipathy Arminians and others have toward to the doctrine of original sin and total depravity, there is their persistent objection to what they see as the inherent unfairness of judging anyone in another. The imputation of Adam's guilt to his posterity is a real issue for them, although they do not seem to rail against the imputation of sinners' guilt to an innocent Christ and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to guilty sinners. How Edwards dealt with the problem of Adam's imputation was one of his most unique and original philosophical insights.

IV. Objections Answered - A Doctrine Deepened

In answering Taylor on imputation, Edwards framed the concept of personal identity whereby Adam and his posterity are constitutionally united in the divine order of things. The issue of why human should bear responsibility for Adam's sin is no more of a philosophical problem for Edwards than why humans should bear responsibility for their own past deeds. He said that God sovereignly orders and sustains unity and continuity of all created substances (and their effects) - in nature, in a person and in the race.

Edwards' central point about imputation was that God in his dealings with Adam under the covenant of works (Gen 2: 16-17) "looked on his posterity as being one with him." He further explains that man's innate corrupt disposition is not a judicial punishment for Adam's guilt but really is our own because of our participation (being one with) in the sinful inclination that preceded Adams's sinful act, what Edwards called "extended pollution of that sin". John Gertsner puts it this way, "there was a divinely constituted unity between Adam and those he represented. This constituted unity, being in tact, when Adam sinned, all sinned. The order of imputation is actually the same in Adam and in mankind: first, sin; second, imputation of guilt; third, pollution." Adam's case and ours are parallel, not sequential and are the same except the first appearance of evil and the first act are the same event which turned the heart away.

Edwards believed in a "real union between the root and the branches of the world of mankind, established by the author of the whole system of the universe...and the full consent of the hearts of Adam's posterity to the first apostasy...and therefore the sin of the apostasy is not theirs merely because God imputes it to them but it is truly and properly theirs and on that ground God imputed it to them." Edwards viewed depravity and imputation as stemming from this union of Adam and his posterity. God so identified

Adam with us that his choice and act was our choice and act. We too would have, had we physically been there in the garden, told Eve “pluck the fruit and eat it!”

God dealt “more immediately” with Adam but he did so as the root of the whole tree and also with all the branches “as if they had been existing in their root.” Based then on unity and identity, the only difference between Adam’s sin and our own is that Adam’s is first and we are merely repeating what he did. While the acorn that comes from a century’s old giant oak is distinct from it, it bears in it, however, constant succession of common nature by continuous divine creation. As Edwards saw it, when God deals with the whole tree He has sovereignly chosen to deal with each individual branch as well. This is what Edwards says is meant in Scripture by the oneness or personal identity of Adam and his posterity. He argues that “God, according to an established law of nature, has in a constant succession communicated to it many of the same qualities...as if it were one.”

Likewise Edwards argued the mature person’s body is one with the infant body from which he or she developed and although its substance has changed greatly over time God sovereignly caused a “communication” between the infantile and the mature body so that he treats the individual as one body. He argued the same way for the mind and body in that when considered individually they are very different but by God’s contributions they are strongly united and become one. While we are not the same as our past existence, Edwards contends that God chooses to treat all new effects in us as a single identity resulting from His continuous creation. Since God chooses me to be the same as yesterday’s person I am also the same person as Adam. All the parts of the world “are derived from the fruit of the kind as from their root and fountain and the entire human race “partakes of the sin of the fruit apostasy.” There is unity and continuity in all created substance. In other words, just as there is by divine power a consistency and connectedness in all created entities and their derived effects so there is between sin and guilt past and sin and guilt present. Not only did we have a hand in Adam’s sin, but it was actually our sin. Edwards characterizes what happened this way:

“Adam’s posterity came by corruption of nature by God’s withholding his Spirit and image from them judicially for their breach of the first covenant. It is not derived down naturally but God withholds his Spirit from them in judgment for their sin viz. for their eating the forbidden fruit...They are looked upon as having eaten the forbidden fruit as well as Adam. They transgressed in Adam and therefore are subject to the same judgment...The guilt of the breach of the covenant of works is imputed to them and so they suffered the consequences and ill fruits of it which with loss of spiritual and holy principles and the consequent reigning of corruption is one...Adam’s posterity were as much concerned with the covenant of works as he himself.”

It really does become our sin because of the real union that exists between the root - Adam - in each of us. In Adam, God judged the entire human race guilty, but only in Jesus Christ is this fact fully understood, as when on the Cross He cries out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me.” (Mk 15:34, Isa 53:4-6, 2 Cor, 5:21).

V. Conclusion

Joseph Bellamy, Edwards’ intimate friend and neighbor, well states in his book, which Edwards endorsed, what in the final analysis stands behind the issue of imputation:

Obj. But I was brought into this state by Adam's fall.

Ans. Let it be by Adam's fall, or how it will, yet if you are an enemy to the infinitely glorious God, your maker, and that voluntarily, you are infinitely to blame, and without excuse; for nothing can make it right for a creature to be a voluntary enemy to his glorious Creator, or possibly excuse such a crime. it is, in its own nature, infinitely wrong; there is nothing, therefore to be said; you stand guilty before God. it is vain to make this or any other pleas, so long as we are what we are, not by compulsion, but voluntarily. And it is in vain to pretend that we are not voluntary in our corruptions, when they are nothing else but the free, spontaneous inclinations of our own hearts. Since this is the case, every mouth will be stopped, and all the world will become guilty before God, sooner or later."

The Edwards-Taylor debate continues today perhaps with less devotion to and knowledge of sound Biblical exegesis and even less appreciation for why its important to even discuss the great doctrines of sin and salvation publicly. Nevertheless, Conrad Cherry in his work puts his finger on what's really at stake in properly understanding the context of human sin:

"Central to Edwards' interpretation is his attempt to show how original sin illuminates the Pauline 'justification by faith alone. Salvation by grace thorough faith means God accomplishes for man what man cannot do for himself; confidence in God's power to deliver has as its correlate a conviction that man needs deliverance by a power not his own. The abandonment of the Calvinist doctrine that all men are totally corrupt coram deo has as its counterpart the abandonment of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. For the depravity of man and the glorious majesty of God's saving grace mutually illuminate each other. That is why Edwards insists that sin is a fall of the race in Adam (the continuity of guilt being maintained by the direct power of God) and not simply a series of separate human acts. It is a corruption of heart that reaches deep into the human subject, a corruption to be estimated primarily by comparing the selfishness of man with the overflowing love of the infinite God. The divine deliverance appears in its true light when one acknowledges that man cannot lift himself out of the mire of his own sin."

Am I Really Blamed for Something I Did Not Do?

A Study of Original Sin

by Geoff Volker

<http://www.ids.org/pdf/classic/blame.pdf>

Defining Our Terms

When was the last time that you heard a message on the subject of ORIGINAL SIN? Quite frankly, I can't remember. The subject of ORIGINAL SIN seems to be as popular as ants at a picnic! Why is this so? Before I go on it is absolutely necessary that I define

exactly what I mean when I say ORIGINAL SIN. What I don't mean is a description of Adam's first sin. I admit that the terminology may be a bit misleading, but our study has nothing to do with the specifics of that first sin. When I say I am studying ORIGINAL SIN I mean that I am examining the consequences of Adam's first sin for the rest of us (i.e. all mankind since Adam).

The Locus Classicus

Where do we begin? The "Locus Classicus" (that portion of the Bible that we go to when we are beginning our study of a particular subject, the primary passage of scripture that speaks to the truth that we are studying) of ORIGINAL SIN is Romans 5:12-21. Here we find the Apostle Paul describing the method by which we are saved. In order to properly describe how it is that we are saved by Jesus Christ Paul finds it necessary to first relate how it is that we come to be condemned.

Stating the Problem

The first point to be noted involves the ending of verse 12. Paul is stating an argument that he is unable to finish until verse 18. No matter what translation you may have it ends verse 12 in a rather peculiar way.

"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned -- " Romans 5:12 (NIV)

It is just as if Paul was interrupted by his listeners. Now we know that this could not literally be the case, for Paul was writing his letter to the church at Rome. But that notwithstanding, Paul writes his letter in such a way as to give the appearance of a speaker being interrupted and forced to stop his message and make a detour in order to answer the complaint. In this passage the interruption takes place at the end of verse 12, and it is not until verse 18 that he picks up his original train of thought.

All Die = All Have Sinned

The argument that Paul uses in verse 12 is that all men die because they have sinned. Now the problem that we are faced with is this, are there individuals who have died that have not sinned? In answer to this question we can put forth two categories of people:

1. The heathen in "Altoona" (those who have not heard the gospel).
2. The "Innocent" (children who die before they are able to distinguish between right and wrong, this includes the unborn child).

In verse 13 we are told that the first time any law was put down in black and white (in "stone") was with the giving of the Mosaic Law on Mt. Sinai (c. {Around} 1400 BC). The argument that is being put forth states that someone cannot be held accountable to obey the law if the law has not yet been revealed to them. Now in saying this, we must understand there must have been some law passed down orally from Adam to his ancestors, for the Lord punishes

Cain in Genesis 4 for murdering his brother Abel. God could not have judged Cain guilty if he had not broken one of God's laws. In addition to this we find in scripture the law of the "conscience."

"Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them." Romans 2:14-15 (NIV)

The law of the "conscience" is that imperfect standard of right and wrong that resides within us as a result of our being made in the "image of God."

So even though there may have existed a heathen in "Altoona" who was never exposed to the written law, we know that he was exposed to the law of "conscience," and very possibly, if he were living in the patriarchal era, he was confronted by the oral law. Yet, as far as the argument of Romans 5:12-14 is concerned the only law that is of any relevance is the written or Mosaic law. The point that is being made is how do we account for the death of everyone who lived before the written law.

"For before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come." Romans 5:13-14

It is at this juncture that we must examine that second category of individuals mentioned above, namely, those dying before they reach the age of "accountability" (unable to distinguish between right and wrong).

Since the scripture is clear that you do not die unless you have sinned, the only explanation for infants dying is that they must have sinned in some way. The only option available is that Adam's sin is applied to their account. Or to put it another way, they are blamed for Adam's sin.

"Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men," Romans 5:18a (NIV)

Realism, a Way Out?

It is a clear biblical fact that we are condemned for Adam's sin. The issue that plagues us is how we can be blamed for something that we did not do. One answer to this dilemma is the "REALISTIC" approach. To state it in simple terms, we were "really" there when Adam sinned. If we were really there then it could be said that "we" sinned in Adam, and the sting of being blamed for something we did not do is removed. A key proof text for this view is found in the book of Hebrews.

"One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor." Hebrews 7:9-10 (NIV)

Here we have the account of Abraham rescuing Lot in Genesis 14. On his return from the battle Abraham is met by Melchizedek the king of Salem, who is also a priest of the Most High God.

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Abraham is described as being blessed by Melchizedek, and then he, that is Abraham, gives him a tenth of all the spoils. The argument that is put forth is that since Levi was a descendant of Abraham, and the Levites were given the responsibility of collecting the tithes from the Israelites, one could say that when Abraham paid his tithe to Melchizedek it was also Levi paying his tithe to Melchizedek. Now, I may have been physically in Adam in some way, yet the issue at stake is whether "I" as an act of my will participated in Adam's fall. The answer to the above is a straightforward "NO." I don't care how you play with it, the "REALISTIC" approach does not make our being blamed for Adam's sin any easier to accept. The bottom line is that we are blamed for something that we did not do!

The Ethics of the Almighty

Is it ethically right for the Lord God to blame me for what Adam did? Here we are appealing to the American sense of fair play. Surely God owes me a chance to make or break it myself. What do the Scriptures say?

"Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?" Romans 9:21 (NIV)

The answer to our question is quite simple. As our creator, God has the right to do with us whatever he wants to do. We are his clay. I admit that this is not a very settling thought, but it is the biblical answer.

The problem seems to be that we keep getting confused as to what is our true identity. We like to see ourselves as only a "bit" lower than God, and surely on debating terms with Him. But the Bible does not see it this way and we are reminded of it in no uncertain terms. The bottom line is this, is the God of ORIGINAL SIN the God we love? Nothing else than eternal life is at stake.

"Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." John 17:3 (NIV)

To reject the God of ORIGINAL SIN is to reject the God of the Bible. Indeed, your God may not blame us for the sin of Adam, but the God of Scripture has.

It's All or Nothing

Now that the guilt of Adam's sin for all his posterity has been established is ought to be stated that the purpose in Romans 5 for delving into ORIGINAL SIN is to describe the method used for our salvation.

For just as the guilt of Adam's sin was applied to those whom he represented, so also the salvation that Jesus Christ purchased on the cross was applied to those whom he represented. This is the truth of Romans 5:18.

"Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men." Romans 5:18 (NIV)

Let me point out that in both cases you and I are left out of the initial decision-making process. If you hold that the basis of our condemnation to be immoral, then you must also hold that the basis of our salvation is also immoral. The method in both instances is identical.

The answer to the question, who are the "all men" that Jesus represented on the cross? Is found not in Romans 5, for this passage only describes the method of salvation. If you want to answer that question you must go to 1 Corinthians 15:20-23!

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A Closing Note

ORIGINAL SIN consists of two parts. We come into this world with both a BAD RECORD (that is we are blamed for Adam's sin) and a BAD HEART (a corrupted heart that causes us to come into the world as a God hater). In this study we have only focused on the BAD RECORD. I will save the study of the BAD HEART for a future Review.

“Adam’s Fall and Mine”

Dr. R.C. Sproul ©

http://www.the-highway.com/fall_Sproul.html

ANOTHER difficult question that shrouds the doctrine of predestination is the question of how our sinful nature can be inherited from Adam. If we are born with a fallen nature, if we are born in sin, if we are born in a state of moral inability, how can God hold us responsible for our sins?

We remember that original sin does not refer to the first sin but to the result of that first sin. The Scriptures speak repeatedly of sin and death entering the world through “one man’s transgression.” As a result of Adam’s sin, all men are now sinners. The Fall was great. It had radical repercussions for the entire human race.

There have been many attempts to explain the relationship of Adam’s fall to the rest of mankind. Some of the theories presented are quite complex and imaginative. Three theories, however, have emerged from the list as the most widely accepted. The first of these I will call the Myth Theory of the Fall.

THE MYTH THEORY OF THE FALL

The myth theory of the Fall, as the name suggests, holds that there was no factual, historical fall. Adam and Eve are not considered historical persons. They are mythological symbols drawn to explain or represent the problem of man’s corruption. The story of the Fall in the Bible is a kind of parable; it teaches a moral lesson.

According to this theory the first few chapters of Genesis are mythological. There never was an Adam; there never was an Eve. The very structure of the story suggests parable or myth because it includes such elements as a talking serpent and such obviously symbolic objects as the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

The moral truth communicated by the myth is that people fall into sin. Sin is a universal problem. Everyone commits sin; no one is perfect. The myth points to a higher reality: Everyone is his own Adam. Every person has his own private fall. Sin is a universal human condition precisely because every person succumbs to his own private temptation.

The attractive elements of this theory are important. In the first place, this view absolves God entirely of any responsibility for holding future generations of people responsible for what one couple did. Here, no one can blame their parents or their Creator for their own sin. In this scheme, my fallenness is a direct result of my own fall, not of someone else's.

A second advantage of this view is that it escapes all need to defend the historical character of the beginning chapters of the Bible. This view suffers no anxiety from certain theories of evolution or from scientific disputes about the nature of creation. The factual truth of a myth never needs to be defended.

The disadvantages of this view, however, are more serious. Its most crucial failing is that it actually offers nothing by way of explanation for the universality of sin. If each one of us is born without a sinful nature, how account for the universality of sin? If four billion people were born with no inclination to sin, with no corruption to their nature, we would reasonably expect that at least some of them would refrain from falling. If our natural moral state is one of innocent neutrality, we would statistically expect that half of the human race would remain perfect. I grant that to account for one innocent person's fall presents an enormous intellectual problem. But when we compound that difficulty by the billions of people who have fallen, the problem becomes several billion times more difficult. We also grant that if one person created in the image of God could fall, then it is indeed possible that billions can likewise fall. It is the statistical probability here that is so astonishing. When we think of one person falling, that is one thing. But if everybody does it, without exception, then we begin to wonder why. We begin to wonder if man's natural state is all that neutral.

The standard reply of the advocates of the myth view is that people are not universally born in an idyllic environment like Eden. Society is corrupt. We are born into a corrupt environment. We are like Rousseau's "innocent savage" who is corrupted by the negative influences of civilization.

This explanation begs the question. How did society or civilization get corrupt in the first place? If everyone is born innocent, without a trace of personal corruption, we would expect to find societies that are no more than half corrupt. If birds of a feather flock together, we might find societies where all the corrupt people band together and other societies where no evil is present. Society cannot be a corrupting influence until it first becomes corrupt itself. To explain the fall of an entire society or civilization, one must face the difficulties we have already pointed out.

In another one of Jonathan Edwards's famous works, his treatise on original sin, he makes the important observation that because the sin of man is universal, even if the Bible said nothing about an original Fall of the human race, reason would demand such an explanation. Nothing screams more loudly about the fact that we are born in a state of corruption than the fact that we all sin.

Another thorny question that arises concerns the relationship of sin and death. The Bible makes it clear that death is not "natural" to man. That is, death is repeatedly said to have

come into the world as a result of sin. If that is so, how do we account for the death of infants? If all men are born innocent, with no innate corruption, God would be unjust to allow as yet unfallen babies to die.

The mythological view of the Fall must also face the fact that it does radical violence to the teaching of Scripture. The view does more than merely interpret the opening chapters of the Bible as non-factual. In so doing the view sets itself in clear opposition to the New Testament view of the Fall. It would take intellectual gymnastics of the most severe sort to argue that the Apostle Paul did not teach a historical Fall. The parallels that he draws between the first Adam and the second Adam are too strong to allow this, unless we argue that in Paul's mind Jesus was also a mythological character.

We grant that the Genesis account of the Fall has some unusual literary elements in it. The presence of a tree that does not follow the pattern of normal trees follows certain images of poetry. It is proper to interpret poetry as poetry and not as historical narrative. On the other hand, there are strong elements of historical narrative literature in Genesis 3. The setting of Eden is located in chapter 2 in the midst of four riverheads, including Pishon, Gihon, Hiddekel (or Tigris), and Euphrates.

We know that parables can be set in real historical settings. For example, the parable of the Good Samaritan is set in the geographical context of the road to Jericho. Therefore the mere presence of real historical rivers does not absolutely demand that we identify this section of Genesis 'as historical narrative.

There is another element of the text, however, that is more compelling. The account of Adam and Eve contains a significant genealogy. The Romans, with their penchant for mythology may have no difficulty tracing their lineage to Romulus and Remus, but the Jews were surely more scrupulous about such matters. The Jews had a strong commitment to real history. In light of the vast difference between the Jewish view of history and the Greek view of history, it is unthinkable that Jewish people would include mythological characters in their own genealogies. In Jewish writing, the presence of genealogy indicates historical narrative. Note that the New Testament historian, Luke, includes Adam in the genealogy of Jesus.

It is much easier to account for a real tree serving as a focal point of a moral test and thereby being called a tree of the knowledge of good and evil than it is to accommodate genealogy to a parable or a myth. This of course could be done if other factors demanded it. But no such factors exist. There is no sound reason why we should not interpret Genesis 3 as historical narrative and multiple reasons why we should not treat it as parable or myth. To treat it as history is to treat it as the Jews did, including Paul and Jesus. To treat it otherwise is usually motivated by some contemporary agenda that has nothing to do with Jewish history.

THE REALIST VIEW OF THE FALL

Remember the famous television series from the 1950s called “You Are There”? It took viewers, through the magic of television, to famous historical scenes. But in fact no electronic device has yet been invented to transport us back in time, H. G. Wells notwithstanding. We live in the present. Our only access to the past is through books, artifacts of archaeology, and the memories of ourselves and of others.

I remember teaching a course on the Bible that involved a brief study of Roman soldiers. I mentioned the Roman standard that carried the initials SPQR. I asked if anyone knew what those letters stood for. A dear friend who was in his seventies piped up, “*Senatus Populus Que Romanus*, ‘The senate and the people of Rome.’” I smiled at my friend and said, “You are the only person in this room old enough to remember!”

None of us is old enough to carry memory images of the fall of Adam. Or are we? The realist view of the Fall contends that we are all old enough to remember the Fall. We should be able to remember it because we were really there.

Realism is not an exercise in a Bridey-Murphy kind of reincarnation. Rather, realism is a serious attempt to answer the problem of the Fall. The key concept is this: We cannot morally be held accountable for a sin committed by someone else. To be accountable we must have been actively involved somehow in the sin itself. Somehow we must have been present at the Fall. *Really* present. Hence the name *Realism*.

The realist view of the Fall demands some kind of concept of the preexistence of the human soul. That is, before we were born, our souls must have already existed. They were present with Adam at the Fall. They fell along with Adam. Adam’s sin was not merely an act for us; it was an act *with* us. We were there.

This theory seems speculative, perhaps even bizarre. Its advocates, however, appeal to two pivotal biblical texts as warrant for this view. The first is found in Ezekiel 18:2-4:

What do you mean when you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying:

*“The fathers have eaten sour grapes,
and the children ’s teeth are set on edge?”*

*As I live, says the Lord God, you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel.
Behold, all souls are Mine;
The soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine;
The soul who sins shall die.*

Later in this chapter, Ezekiel writes:

*Yet you say, “Why should the son not bear the guilt of the father?”
Because the son has done what is lawful and right, and has kept all My statutes and done them, he shall surely live.*

The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself. (Ezekiel 18:19, 20).

Here the realist finds a definitive text for his case. God clearly declares that the son is not held guilty for the sins of his father. This would seem to pose serious difficulties for the whole idea of people falling “in Adam.”

The second pivotal text for realism is found in the New Testament Book of Hebrews:

Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him (Hebrews 7:9, 10).

This text is part of a lengthy treatment by the author of Hebrews concerning the role of Christ as our Great High Priest. The New Testament declares that Jesus is both our king and our priest. It labors the fact that Jesus was from the line of Judah, to whom the royal kingdom was promised. Jesus was a son of David, who also was of the line of Judah.

The priesthood of the Old Testament was not given to Judah, but to the sons of Levi. The Levites were the priestly line. We normally speak, therefore, of the Levitical priesthood or the Aaronic priesthood. Aaron was a Levite. If this is so, how could Jesus be a priest if he was not from the line of Levi?

This problem vexed some ancient Jews. The author of Hebrews argues that there was another priesthood mentioned in the Old Testament, the priesthood of the mysterious figure named Melchizedek. Jesus is said to be a priest of the order of Melchizedek.

This lengthy portion of Hebrews is not satisfied, however, merely to prove that there was another priesthood in the Old Testament besides the Levitical priesthood. The major point of the argument here is that the priesthood of Melchizedek was *superior* to the priesthood of Levi.

The author of Hebrews rehearses a bit of Old Testament history to prove his point. He calls attention to the fact that Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, not Melchizedek to Abraham. Melchizedek also blessed Abraham; Abraham did not bless Melchizedek. The point is this: In the relationship between Abraham and Melchizedek it was Melchizedek who served as the priest, not Abraham.

The key thought to the Jew is cited in verse 7: “Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better.”

The author of Hebrews continues to weave the thread of his argument. He argues that, in effect, the father is superior to the son. That means that Abraham is ahead of Isaac in the patriarchal pecking order. In turn, Isaac is ahead of Jacob, and Jacob ahead of his sons,

including his son Levi. If we carry this out, it means that Abraham is greater than his great-grandson Levi.

Now if Abraham is greater than Levi and Abraham subordinated himself to Melchizedek, then it means that the priest Melchizedek is greater than Levi and the entire line of Levi. The conclusion is clear. The priesthood of Melchizedek is a higher order of priesthood than the Levitical priesthood. This gives supreme dignity to the high priestly office of Christ.

It was not the chief concern of the author of Hebrews to explain the mystery of the fall of Adam with all this. Yet he says something along the way that the realists jump on to prove their theory. He writes that “Levi paid tithes through Abraham.” Levi did this while he was “still in the loins of his father.”

The realists see this reference to Levi doing something before he was even born as biblical proof for the concept of the preexistence of the human soul. If Levi could pay tithes while he was still in the loins of his father, that must mean that Levi in some sense already existed.

This treatment of this passage of Hebrews begs the question. The text does not explicitly teach that Levi really existed or preexisted in the loins of his father. The text itself calls it a “manner of speaking.” The text does not demand that we leap to the conclusion that Levi “really” preexisted. The realists come to this text armed with a theory they did not find from the text and then read the theory into the text.

The argument from the text of Ezekiel also misses the point. Ezekiel was not giving a discourse on the fall of Adam. The Fall is not in view here. Rather, Ezekiel is addressing the commonplace excuse that men use for their sins. They try to blame someone else for their own misdeeds. That human activity has gone on since the Fall, but that is about all this passage has to do with the Fall. In the Fall Eve blamed the serpent, and Adam blamed both God and Eve for his own sin. He said, “The woman whom *You* gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate” (Gen. 3:12).

Ever since, men have tried to pass the buck of their own guilt. Still, the realists argue, a principle is set forth in Ezekiel 18 that has bearing on the matter. The principle is that men are not held accountable for other people’s sins.

To be sure, that general principle is set forth in Ezekiel. It is a grand principle of God’s justice. Yet we dare not make it an absolute principle. If we do, then the text of Ezekiel would prove too much. It would prove away the atonement of Christ. If it is never possible for one person to be punished for the sins of another, then we have no Savior. Jesus was punished for our sins. That is the very essence of the gospel. Not only was Jesus punished for our sins, but his righteousness is the meritorious basis for our justification. We are justified by an alien righteousness, a righteousness that is not our own. If we press Ezekiel’s statement to the absolute limit when we read, “The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked

shall be upon himself,” then we are left as sinners who must justify themselves. That puts us all in deep weeds.

To be sure, the Bible speaks of God’s “visiting” the iniquities of persons on the third and fourth generations. This refers to the “fallout” or consequences of sin. A child may suffer from the consequences of his father’s sin, but God does not hold him *responsible* for his father’s sin.

The principle of Ezekiel allows for two exceptions: the Cross, and the Fall. Somehow we don’t mind the exception of the Cross. It is the Fall that rankles us. We don’t mind having our guilt transferred to Jesus or having his righteousness transferred to us; it is having the guilt of Adam transferred to us that makes us howl. We argue that if the guilt of Adam had never been transmitted to us then the work of Jesus would never have been necessary

THE FEDERAL OR REPRESENTATIVE VIEW OF THE FALL

For the most part, the federal view of the Fall has been the most popular among advocates of the Reformed view of predestination. This view teaches that Adam acted as a representative of the entire human race. With the test that God set before Adam and Eve, he was testing the whole of mankind. Adam’s name means “man” or “mankind.” Adam was the first human being created. He stands at the head of the human race. He was placed in the garden to act not only for himself but for all of his future descendents. Just as a federal government has a chief spokesman who is the head of the nation, so Adam was the federal head of mankind.

The chief idea of federalism is that, when Adam sinned, he sinned for all of us. His fall was our fall. When God punished Adam by taking away his original righteousness, we were all likewise punished. The curse of the Fall affects us all. Not only was Adam destined to make his living by the sweat of his brow, but that is true for us as well. Not only was Eve consigned to have pain in childbirth, but that has been true for women of all human generations. The offending serpent in the garden was not the only member of his species who was cursed to crawl on his belly.

When they were created, Adam and Eve were given dominion over the entire creation. As a result of their sin the whole world suffered. Paul tells us:

For the creation was subjected to futility not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now (Romans 8:20-22).

The whole creation groans as it awaits the full redemption of man. When man sinned, the repercussions of the sin were felt throughout the whole range of man’s domain. Because of Adam’s sin, not only do we suffer, but lions, elephants, butterflies, and puppy dogs also suffer. They did not ask for such suffering. They were hurt by the fall of their master.

That we suffer as a result of Adam's sin is explicitly taught in the New Testament. In Romans 5, for example, Paul makes the following observations:

“Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin” (v. 12).

“By the one man's offense many died” (v. 15).

“Through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation” (v. 18).

“By one man's disobedience many were made sinners” (v. 19).

There is no way to avoid the obvious teaching of Scripture that Adam's sin had dreadful consequences for his descendents. It is precisely because of the abundance of such biblical statements that virtually every Christian body has composed some doctrine of original sin linked to the fall of Adam.

We are still left with a big question. If God did in fact judge the entire human race in Adam, how is that fair? It seems manifestly unjust of God to allow not only all subsequent human beings but all of creation to suffer because of Adam.

It is the question of God's fairness that federalism seeks to answer. Federalism assumes that we were in fact represented by Adam and that such representation was both fair and accurate. It holds that Adam *perfectly* represented us.

Within our own legal system we have situations that, not perfectly but approximately, parallel this concept of representation. We know that if I hire a man to kill someone and that hired gunman carries out the contract, I can justly be tried for first-degree murder in spite of the fact that I did not actually pull the trigger. I am judged to be guilty for a crime someone else committed because the other person acted in my place.

The obvious protest that arises at this point is, “But we did not hire Adam to sin in our behalf.” That is true. This example merely illustrates that there are *some* cases in which it is just to punish one person for the crime of another.

The federal view of the Fall still exudes a faint odor of tyranny. Our cry is, “No damnation without representation!” Just as people in a nation clamor for representatives to insure freedom from despotic tyranny, so we demand representation before God that is fair and just. The federal view states that we are judged guilty for Adam's sin because he was our fair and just representative.

Wait a minute. Adam may have represented us, but we did not choose him. What if the fathers of the American republic had demanded representation from King George and the king replied, “Of course you may have representatives. You will be represented by my brother!” Such an answer would have spilled even more tea in Boston Harbor.

We want the right to select our own representatives. We want to be able to cast our own vote, not have somebody else cast that vote for us. The word *vote* comes from the Latin *votum* which meant “wish” or “choice.” When we cast our vote, we are expressing our wishes, setting forth our wills.

Suppose we would have had the total freedom to vote for our representative in Eden. Would that have satisfied us? And why do we want the right to vote for our representative? Why do we object if the king or any other sovereign wants to appoint our representatives for us? The answer is obvious. ‘We want to be sure that our will is being carried out. If the king appoints my representative, then I will have little confidence that my wishes will be accomplished. I would fear that the appointed representative would be more eager to carry out the wishes of the king than my wishes. I would not feel fairly represented.

But even if we have the right to choose our own representatives, we have no guarantee that our wishes will be carried out. Who among us has not been enticed by politicians who promise one thing during an election campaign and do another thing after they are elected? Again, the reason we want to select our own representative is so that we can be sure we are accurately represented.

At no time in all of human history have we been more accurately represented than in the Garden of Eden. To be sure, we did not choose our representative there. Our representative was chosen for us. The one who chose our representative, however, was not King George. It was almighty God.

When God chooses our representative, he does so perfectly. His choice is an infallible choice. When I choose my own representatives, I do so fallibly. Sometimes I select the wrong person and am then inaccurately represented. Adam represented me infallibly, not because he was infallible, but because God is infallible. Given God’s infallibility, I can never argue that Adam was a poor choice to represent me.

The assumption many of us make when we struggle with the Fall is that, had we been there, we would have made a different choice. We would not have made a decision that would plunge the world into ruin. Such an assumption is just not possible given the character of God. God doesn’t make mistakes. His choice of my representative is greater than my choice of my own.

Even if we grant that indeed we were perfectly represented by Adam, we still must ask if it is fair to be represented at all with such high stakes. I can only answer that it pleased the Lord to do this. We know that the world fell through Adam. We know that in some sense Adam represented us. We know that we did not choose him to be our representative. We know that God’s selection of Adam was an infallible selection. But was the whole process just?

I can only answer this question ultimately by asking another question — one the Apostle Paul asked. “Is there unrighteousness in God?” The apostolic answer to this rhetorical question is as plain as it is emphatic. “God forbid!”

If we know anything at all about the character of God, then we know that he is not a tyrant and that he is never unjust. His structure of the terms of mankind’s probation satisfied God’s own righteousness. That should be enough to satisfy us.

Yet we still quarrel. We still contend with the Almighty. We still assume that somehow God did us wrong and that we suffer as innocent victims of God's judgment. Such sentiments only confirm the radical degree of our fallenness. When we think like this, we are thinking like Adam's children. Such blasphemous thoughts only underline in red how accurately we were represented by Adam.

I am persuaded that the federal view of the Fall is substantially correct. It alone of the three we have examined does justice to the biblical teaching of the fall of man. It satisfies me that God is not an arbitrary tyrant. I know that I am a fallen creature. That is, I know that I am a creature and I know that I am fallen. I also know that it is not God's "fault" that I am a sinner. What God has done for me is to redeem me from my sin. He has not redeemed me from his sin.

Though the federal representational view of the Fall is held by most Calvinists, we must remember that the question of our relationship to Adam's fall is not a problem unique to Calvinism. All Christians must struggle with it.

It is also vital to see predestination in light of the Fall. All Christians agree that God's decree of predestination was made before the Fall. Some argue that God first predestinated some people to salvation and others to damnation and then decreed the Fall to make sure that some folks would perish. Sometimes this dreadful view is even attributed to Calvinism. Such an idea was repugnant to Calvin and is equally repugnant to all orthodox Calvinists. The notion is sometimes called "hyper-Calvinism." But even that is an insult. This view has nothing to do with Calvinism. Rather than hyper-Calvinism, it is anti-Calvinism.

Calvinism, along with other views of predestination, teaches that God's decree was made both *before* the Fall, and *in light of* the Fall. Why is this important? Because the Calvinistic view of predestination always accents the gracious character of God's redemption. When God predestines people to salvation he is predestinating people to be saved whom he knows really *need* to be saved. They need to be saved because they are sinners in Adam, not because he forced them to be sinners. Calvinism sees Adam sinning by his own free will, not by divine coercion.

To be sure, God knew before the Fall that there would most certainly be a Fall and he took action to redeem some. He ordained the Fall in the sense that he chose to allow it, but not in the sense that he chose to coerce it. His predestinating grace is gracious precisely because he chooses to save people whom he knows in advance will be spiritually dead.

One final illustration may be helpful here. We bristle at the idea that God calls us to be righteous when we are hampered by original sin. We say, "But God, we can't be righteous. We are fallen creatures. How can you hold us accountable when you know very well we were born with original sin?"

The illustration is as follows. Suppose God said to a man, “I want you to trim these bushes by three o’clock this afternoon. But be careful. There is a large open pit at the edge of the garden. If you fall into that pit, you will ‘not be able to get yourself out. So whatever you do, stay away from that pit.”

Suppose that as soon as God leaves the garden the man runs over and jumps into the pit. At three o’clock God returns and finds the bushes untrimmed. He calls for the gardener and hears a faint cry from the edge of the garden. He walks to the edge of the pit and sees the gardener helplessly flailing around on the bottom. He says to the gardener, “Why haven’t you trimmed the bushes I told you to trim?” The gardener responds in anger, “How do you expect me to trim these bushes when I am trapped in this pit? If you hadn’t left this empty pit here, I would not be in this predicament.”

Adam jumped into the pit. In Adam we all jumped into the pit. God did not throw us into the pit. Adam was clearly warned about the pit. God told him to stay away. The consequences Adam experienced from being in the pit were a direct punishment for jumping into it.

So it is with original sin. Original sin is both the consequence of Adam’s sin and the punishment for Adam’s sin. We are born sinners because in Adam all fell. Even the word *fall* is a bit of a euphemism. It is a rose-colored view of the matter. The word *fall* suggests an accident of sorts. Adam’s sin was not an accident. He was not Humpty Dumpty. Adam didn’t simply slip into sin; he jumped into it with both feet. We jumped headlong with him. God didn’t push us. He didn’t trick us. He gave us adequate and fair warning. The fault is ours and only ours.

It is not that Adam ate sour grapes and our teeth are set on edge. The biblical teaching is that in Adam we all ate the sour grapes. That is why our teeth are set on edge.

Author

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