



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

“Effects of the Fall, Concluded: The Imputation of Adam’s Sin”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the privilege of the study of the Scriptures again. We thank Thee for the word of God and we thank Thee for the ministry of Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit, and we pray that he may teach us in this hour, enable us to understand things that will help us in our spiritual lives.

We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] Tonight, we are concluding our study on the “Imputation of Adam’s Sin” which is the first of the “Effects of the Fall” that we want to look at. And this is the outline that we followed last week. Let me again introduce the message with just a brief introduction, and then we’ll look at the second part of our outline, which I’ll substitute for that one.

But we have been considering the “Fall of Man,” and we have looked at the nature of the sin that caused it. And we tried to point out that the sin by which Adam fell was the sin of unbelief; that that is the root of all sin, that unbelief issues in rebellion, and finally, in immorality and that that is the root of all of our sin. We’re now looking at the

“Effects of the Fall” and last time I made reference to the fact that one of the effects of the Fall is the universality of sin, and what we want to do in our study of imputation is to try to seek to establish a connection between it, that is the universality of sin and Adam’s sin. And that involves us in a consideration of the doctrine of the imputation of sin.

What is imputation? And why is it important? Well let’s take the first question first. What is imputation? There are two words that are used in the Bible, one in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament which are very commonly translated “impute” or which mean to impute. *Logiozomai*, the Greek word, means “to impute” or “to reckon.” And in our own language it means “to put to one’s account.”

Now, I’d like for you to turn with me for just a moment to Philemon verse 18 and let’s read an occurrence of the verb there or a word that is closely related to it, which belongs to this group of words on imputation. Philemon verse 18. Paul says, this is just before the Epistle to the Hebrews, Philemon verse 18. “But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account.” “Charge that to my account.” To impute is to put to someone’s account. If we were to say a certain statement was imputed to a man, we mean, that it is reported that he said it or it is claimed that he said it. So to impute means to put to one’s account. In the legal and theological sense of the word it means to put something to someone’s account upon adequate grounds as the judicial reason for reward or punishment. So that to impute sin means to impute the guilt of sin. The obligation to satisfy justice that is guilt, the guilt of our sin. If we are guilty, we have an obligation to satisfy God’s justice. To impute sin is to impute the guilt of sin.

It is generally thought by reformed theologians that there is a parallel between the imputation of Adam’s sin to us and the imputation of Christ’s or God’s righteousness to us, as well as, of our sins to Jesus Christ. And we will come to that briefly later on in our study tonight. But to impute then means to put to one’s account. In Bible doctrine it means to put guilt to our account or to put righteousness to our account or to put guilt to Jesus Christ’s account in his death for us. Now, why is it important? Well, I think you

may have already guessed why the imputation of sin is important because there is a parallel between the imputation of Adam’s sin to us and the imputation of God’s righteousness to us, and the imputation of our sin to Jesus Christ. So it is by this method of divine reckoning that our salvation comes to pass. So imputation is at the heart of the Christian doctrine of salvation.

Well now tonight, we have discussed the Old Testament biblical account of the effects of Adam’s sin. We discussed the serpent’s judgment, the woman’s judgment, the man’s judgment, and then we looked at the biblical teaching on the universality of sin, pointing out that not only does the Bible testify to it but religion and philosophy as well, testify to the universality of sin. And then we sought to begin the study of the biblical theology of the connection between Adam’s sin and the universality of sin. And I had made a few comments concerning the objections to this connection that have been offered by some men. The Pelegians, as you might expect, and the semi-Pelegians, and neo-orthodoxy and I think at the end we were talking about the proof of this connection and that’s where we want to pick it up.

And our question tonight is “Does the Bible say that God condemned the race for Adam’s apostasy? Does the Bible say that God condemned the race for Adam’s apostasy?” And here is the evidence and we want to turn to a passage first in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verse 21 and verse 22. So take your New Testaments and turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verse 21 and verse 22. We’ll analyze this text for a moment and then we want to turn over to Romans chapter 5, which is the great text on the imputation of Adam’s sin to us. First Corinthians chapter 15, verse 21 and verse 22.

Now, notice Paul’s statements “For since by a man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead.” Notice the parallel between death coming through a man and resurrection from the dead also coming through a man. And to explain further Paul says “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” Now, these are the points that Paul makes in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verse 21 and verse 22. First of all, he

says that there is such a thing as death. Now, that is something that we should bear in mind. Death is a fact. It is a penal evil. It is something that comes to us because of sin. It is not something that we naturally suffer because we are created beings, but it is related to our sin. It is a penal evil. It is a judgment.

Now it is a reality, and there are some religious people who need to be told that it is a reality. I have a Christian friend who told me a story about a mutual Christian friend that we had about a year or so ago. He said that my friend, who is a Bible teacher of some note, visited the Christian Science building at the World’s Fair asking to speak to Mary Baker Eddy. He walked right in, went up to the counter, and said, “I understand that Mary Baker Eddy is the founder of this religion and I would like to speak to her.”

Now, of course, you know that the Christian Scientists have believed that death is not a reality, but it is an error of the mortal mind, and if we really understood reality as we should we would not believe that there was any such thing as sin or death. So he said he received the reply “She’s not here.” Now then he asked, “Well, when can I see her?” And the man behind the counter said “She won’t be here.” He said “Later?” “No, she won’t be here later.” He said “Well, I would like to write a letter to her.” And they said behind the counter “She doesn’t have a mailing address.” He said “Well can I give her a call on the telephone?” And the man behind the counter said “You cannot reach her by telephone.” And finally, in the midst of this questioning, he blurted out “She’s dead.” And the Bible teacher said “You bet she is.” And then I think he added “Death is not an error of the mortal mind.”

Well my friend who told me this story said he told some students at Moody Bible Institute this story and after he had told the story in the morning, he came back to the Institute and got on the elevator in order to go upstairs and one of the students came in whom he had told this story to in the morning. And the boy saw him on the elevator and he said “You know what I did?” And he said “No.” He said “Well, I went over to the Christian Science reading room, and I went over and I asked to speak to Mary Baker

Eddy. He said “Well, what did they say to you?” He said “Well they said, you’ve got to be kidding.” [Laughter] So as far as the Bible is concerned, sin is a reality. Death is a reality and it doesn’t help us one bit to claim that it is only an error of the mortal mind. It is a fact. So Paul says that death is a reality.

Now, the next thing that Paul says is that “For since by man came death, so death is through a man.” My text has here in verse 21 “For since by a man.” Now, the next verse makes it plain that it is a man, who is Adam, that is in view. So death is through a man, and that man is Adam. And also, we can say that all are affected “For since by a man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead, for as in Adam all die.” So all die in a man whose name is Adam. Now, that is what Paul says in verse 21, 22 of 1 Corinthians 15. In some way, all men die in the one man Adam. All men sin in this one man. All men come under the penal judgment of death in this one man.

So let’s turn over to our next passage now. Romans chapter 5, verse 12 through verse 19, and see what the apostle has to say there. Romans chapter 5, verse 12 through verse 19, and I think we’re going to see that the same general truth is taught by the apostle here but this time there is a great deal more detail. And he too stresses the fact that all men have died in Adam. He says in the 12th verse “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin, so death spread to all men because all sinned.”

It’s a very difficult thing for people to admit the reality of death. Some years ago, I was preaching on the coast of Mississippi on the subject of Romans chapter 5, 12 through 21, giving a series of messages. As a matter of fact, on this 5th chapter, I think I gave four or five messages in that series. And during the course of it, after one of the messages, a relatively young man came up to me and said that he’d like to tell me of an experience that he had had as a businessman, which illustrated the fact that men do not like to think about death. He was a man who worked for the Hardware Mutuals Insurance companies, and since they had just bought a life insurance company at that time, they had asked him

to train these new life insurance salesmen in the business of selling life insurance. And he said most of the men that were sent in were men who had been in the fire and casualty business. And he said, of course, they were used to approaching a prospect and saying something like this, “Now, if something happens to you are you prepared for the eventuality?”

And he said he had the hardest time getting them to say in their practice sessions, the hardest time saying, “Now, when you die.” They kept saying “Now, if you should die” or “If this should happen to you” instead of “When you die.” And finally, he concluded that it was not just that they were selling fire and casualty insurance up to this time, but really what was involved in it was this very point that it is difficult for men to face the fact that they are destined to die if Jesus Christ, of course, does not come and they do not belong to him.

Well now Paul says in verse 12 “Therefore, just as through one man, sin entered into the world and death through sin, so death spread to all men because all sinned.” So Paul states the sin of one man is the sin of all. Now, he continues in verse 13 “For until the law, sin was in the world.” Now, he means by this that there was sin and, therefore, there was a law that was broken and there was imputation. So he means that from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, men had broken some law. They were constituted sinners before God, but he adds in the next clause of verse 13 “But sin is not imputed when there is no law.” Well now, there was no Mosaic Law, and yet they were sinners. What law had they then broken? If the Mosaic Law had not yet been given and yet they were constituted sinners before God and you’re not a sinner until you have broken a law. They must have broken some law not related to the Mosaic Law. Verse 14 he continues. “In spite of the fact that there was no Mosaic Law during that time, yet nevertheless, death reigned from Adam unto Moses.” So they must have broken some law during the period of time between Adam and Moses when there was no Mosaic Law.

Now, the Mosaic Law was not reckoned to have been broken. As a matter of fact then, these people must have broken some other law. If we were to say it is some unwritten law, well that would really not satisfy the demands of the context either because he goes on to say “And even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of Adam’s offense.” Now, those who sinned in the likeness of Adam’s offense were those who broke some law. Now here are people who have not broken any law. They have not sinned after the likeness of Adam’s transgression. They have not broken the Mosaic Law. They have not broken any unwritten law, for they have not sinned after the likeness of Adam’s transgression. And yet they died. Why did they die? If they have not broken Mosaic Law, if they have not broken any law like Adam’s law; unwritten or written, why is it that they die? Why is it that they are reckoned sinners?

Well, let’s take the illustration that Paul must have had in mind. Let’s take infants or idiots, for he speaks of those who have not sinned after the likeness of Adam’s transgression. That is, those who have not broken any particular law and yet they die. Let’s take an infant that dies. Why does that infant die? It is not broken any law. It does not even know law. There is no moral self-determining act of sin in their case. Or take a person who has been so malformed by nature that we call that person an idiot. That person has not broken law and yet they die. Why do they die? Well obviously, Paul is reasoning, they have broken a law. That’s why they are sinners. That’s why death follows, but the law that they broke was broken by their representative Adam, and his broken law is reckoned to them. They have not broken any, but yet they are sinners and they die. Why? Well, because Adam was their federal head and so they died because Adam broke the law of Genesis 2:17. That’s Paul’s point.

Well now, he goes on to say in verse 15 “But the free gift is not like the transgression.” By the way, he says at the end of verse 14 concerning Adam “Who is a type of him who is to come.” So you see, that Paul has set up a likeness between Adam on the one hand and Jesus Christ on the other. The act of Adam affects all of his

posterity. The act of Jesus Christ affects all those that are identified with him. Adam is the representative of all men. Jesus Christ is the representative of those who put their trust in him. So these two men are alike, in the sense that, the act of each one affects a large number of people. But, of course, in the case of Adam, his act affects them for their ill. Jesus Christ’s act affects them for the good.

Now, notice how Paul develops this. He says, “But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one, the many died.” Well who is the one? Well the one is Adam. “Much more did the grace of God and the gift of the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For on the one hand, the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose out of many transgressions resulting in justification.” Notice the one, one, one sin all the way through. “For if by the transgression of the one, the one man, death reigned through the one. Much more, those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ. So then as through the one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through the one act of righteousness (that’s the cross) there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one the many will be made righteous.” Now, you can see this 19th verse, which is the climax of the section, indicates clearly that our legal relations are determined by our relation to the two men. In the case of the one, we are constituted sinners. In the case of the other, we are constituted righteous. So our relationship to Adam determines our sin and death. Our relationship to Jesus Christ determines our justification.

Five times in Romans 5:12 through 19 our condemnation is traced to the act of one man. Now, I know that people react against this kind of truth because it seems to suggest some things that we will say something about in a moment. That is it seems to suggest that God is unjust. But let me remind you that when we turn to the Bible, it is not our

first business to question the things that God says. Now, we do not originate truth when we expound this too, by the way. We are simply seeking to show what the Bible itself says. And if you quarrel with this, your quarrel is, if what I am saying is true, your quarrel is with the Lord. So let’s go on from this point and try to examine the reason for this imputation of sin, which Adam committed to us, and what that means to us in the light of God’s plan of salvation.

So capital C -The Ground of the Connection. There could be no justification in imputing the sin of Adam to others if there were no connection between them. So what we have to do here is to show that we are related to Adam. In other words, there has to be a union between Adam and his descendants. There was no such union between Adam and the angels and that’s why the angels are not involved in this. There is no such union between Christ and the angels and that’s why the angels when they sin, do not have a mediator dying for them. Is there a connection between Adam’s seed and Jesus Christ? So let me seek to show you the ground for it.

First of all, the Bible sets forth Adam as the natural and federal head of his posterity. I don’t guess we really have to point to a text to show that Adam is our natural head. Most of us would believe that. We think Adam is the first man naturally and that we are all descendants of him. We can say “All of us in this room can say Adam is our great-great-great-great-great et cetera, grandfather.” And thus, we are all related in this sense. The Bible, however, does in a couple of places say this specifically. First Chronicles chapter 1, verse 1. I know you’ve wondered why we ever have the first 6 or 8 chapters of the Book of Chronicles in the Bible. Well that’s one reason, because there we have genealogical evidence of the fact that Adam is our father, naturally. Luke chapter 3, verse 38 also says that. In our Lord’s genealogy, it is traced back to Adam, so he is the first man.

But Adam is also our federal head, our representative head. By the way, when we speak theologically of “federal headship,” we are speaking of legal headship. We’re

talking about covenant headship, so federal headship is covenantal headship or legal headship. So Adam is our natural head. Adam is also our federal head. He is our representative.

Now, how do we know this? Well, in the first place, promises were given to Adam, which were promises for him and for his seed. Further, threats were made to Adam, which were threats that for Adam and his seed. He was told that if he should eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, he would die. But also we know that not only would Adam die but all of his seed would die. So Adam’s action is determinative for those who were with him in covenant. He and his seed were banished from the Garden of Eden. It was impossible for his seed to say “I didn’t sin when my father sinned. I want back into the Garden of Eden.” So Adam’s act was a federal act.

Now, we have suffered in execution of the penalty and for the satisfaction of justice so that our evils are penal evils, sin and death. Adam is our natural head. He is our federal head. His sin is the judicial ground of our condemnation, and Jesus Christ’s work of righteousness is the judicial ground for our justification.

Second, this representative principle pervades the Bible. It is seen also in everyday life. Let me read you a couple of texts that show it in the Bible itself. Exodus chapter 34, verses 6 and 7. Here we read “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering and abundant in goodness and truth. Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. And that will by no means clear the guilty.” Now, notice these words “Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children unto the third and fourth generation.” Now, there is the representative principle. Jeremiah chapter 32, verse 18. Jeremiah says “Thou showest loving kindness unto thousands and recompenses the iniquities of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them.” There is the representative principle. Esau sold his birthright and as a result of Esau selling of his birthright, he shut out his descendants from the covenant promise. They were not able to come and say “Esau sold my birthright. I

want my birthright back.” Esau acted on the representative principle, and so his act was an act that prevented them from entering into their blessings.

Third, the denial of imputation overthrows the doctrine of justification. If we deny the principle that a representative man may act for us then, in effect, we have denied that Jesus Christ can be our representative in our salvation. There is a parallel you see between the two. Jesus Christ is our representative so that we might be saved. Adam is our representative and through him we are lost. If we were to deny that Adam could be our representative then how can we say Jesus Christ can be our representative for good? It’s obvious that this principle of representation is a principle that pertains to Adam, but it also pertains to Jesus Christ and to deny the justice of Adam’s representation of us also strikes at the foundation of the justice of Jesus Christ’s work for us.

By the way, this is at the heart of the Old Testament offerings. Do you remember what the Old Testament offerer did when he came to the priest? Well he brought his offering to the priest and the priest took the offering and he slew the offering. But ordinarily, take the case of the burnt offering, he would place his hand upon the head of the offering. Now, the offerer would do that in token of the fact that he was transferring his guilt to the offering. So that when the animal was slain, it was slain typically as under the judgment of God. And so the sin of the offerer was bore by the offering. That is the principle of representation. That animal, which of course looks forward to Jesus Christ, represents the offerer who comes. That also teaches that sin must have a covering too and that is why the animal is slain, and atonement is vicarious atonement. But right at the heart of it is the idea of representation so the animal represents me.

Now, let’s come to the explanation of this connection. And here we are going to seek to try to explain the exact nature of the connection between us and Adam. So let’s turn back to Romans chapter 5 in verse 12, Romans chapter 5 in verse 12. There have been three principle interpretations of the connection between Adam’s sin and our sin.

And they are the theories of mediate imputation, the theory of realistic imputation, and the theory of immediate or federal representative imputation.

Now, let’s look at them for just a moment. And first of all, the theory of mediate imputation. Just what is our connection with Adam’s sin? How do we come under the judgment of it? The theory of mediate imputation originated at a place in France called Saumur. S-A-U-M-U-R. And the theologian, who is responsible for it, was a theologian by the name of Laplace or Placeus, which was his Latin name, also teaching in that school was a man by the name of Amyraut and another man by the name of Cappel. They were Calvinists, but they were four point Calvinists. That is, they were men who believed in universal redemption. In addition, they also originated the theory of mediate imputation. Their views were later condemned by the Calvinists in their councils, and consequently, the Amyraldian view of the atonement has been a mild form of heresy among Calvinistic theologians. So Laplace was responsible for the theory of mediate imputation. He taught this; he taught that it is our corrupt nature derived from Adam that is the ground of our condemnation. That Adam sinned. That as a result of his sin Adam’s nature became corrupt. And that Adam communicates his corrupt nature to every one of us.

Now, no one questions the fact that that is true. Adam’s nature is communicated to us, and it is on the basis of the nature that has been communicated to us that men are condemned. Now, Placeus said that we were also guilty of Adam’s first sin, but that was dependent upon our part in his depraved nature. In other words, the depraved nature that we possess, made us guilty of Adam’s first sin because our nature was the nature that committed that sin.

But this theory cannot be correct. If you’ll just think for a moment, you’ll realize that if my corrupt nature is the reason for my condemnation then I should ask this question. If my corrupt nature is the reason for my condemnation, is my corrupt nature a punishment? Well, everyone would say “Yes, it’s a punishment. It’s something that has

happened to me because of Adam’s sin, and I am being punished for that by being given a corrupt nature.” Well now if my corrupt nature is a punishment, punishment comes because of guilt. What then is the guilt that produced the punishment of the corrupt nature? And so you see it’s obvious that if this corrupt nature is a punishment, the guilt must precede it and there is no guilt possible but the guilt of Adam’s first sin. So the reason that we have a corrupt nature is because we’re guilty of Adam’s sin.

Consequently, we are not guilty because of our corrupt nature. Our corrupt nature is a punishment for our guilt that we already have.

Furthermore, this destroys the parallel between the work of Jesus Christ and the work of Adam. And in addition, it cannot handle those verses that we just read in Romans 5, for there it is said five times that the reason that we are condemned is not our corrupt nature, but what? What? The one sin of Adam. Five times it is said we are condemned for the one sin of Adam. So the imputation of Adam’s sin to us then is not mediate. That is, it does not come to us through the medium of our sin nature. That is the product of our condemnation.

Now, second, others have said “No, the explanation of how Adam’s sin is imputed to us is realistic imputation.” Now, another group of men are responsible for this theory. One of the most famous of them is the fine theologian by the name of Shedd. Jonathan Edwards in one chapter in his book on original sin also proclaims this view. In the rest of the book, he teaches immediate imputation, which would seem to suggest that he was slightly confused. When a man teaches things that are contrary to one another, we would suggest that he was confused.

Now, this group of men have taught that Adam and each of us, the race, are one numerically. In other words, we’re not to think of Adam and a lot of men. We’re to think of one person, Adam, and all of us in him and the whole human race is one. In fact, we are numerically one in the same sense in which a tree is one during the whole process of its growth. The tree from the time it is an acorn is one. For the time it is a young sapling

it is still one. When it has grown to be a giant tree and is shedding its acorns, as mine is in my back yard at the present time. Where are the squirrels in my part of the city? I wish they would come and get all of these acorns that are falling around my back yard. But anyway, that tree is one. Just as the tree is one, so we are all one. Therefore, when Adam sinned, it wasn’t just Adam who sinned. It was I who sinned. Literally. Actually. For I was in Adam seminally. That is, I was part of Adam’s body. Seminally. The Latin word “semin” remember means seed. So I was seminally in Adam. S-E-M-I-N-A-L-L-Y. Now, this is a very popular view. Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in Askelon, but some of the brethren on the Dallas Theological Seminary faculty teach this; that we were actually seminally in Adam. So that when he sinned, well, when Adam’s body sinned, so did we because we were in him.

Now, I want to object to that theory, because I think there are some very serious objections that someone may raise to it. First of all, in our passage in Romans chapter 5 again, remember, the condemnation is traced to the sin of one man. Not the sin of all men in the one, in the sense that they all did what Adam did physically. But the sin of man is traced to the act of one man, not the act of all men. But second and more important, it has no support from the consciousness of men. Do you remember when you sinned in Adam? Do you remember the exact time when you took of that fruit in the midst of the garden and actually ate of it? Now mind you, in the federal theory, you don’t have to remember that because he acted as your representative. But in this theory of realistic imputation, you actually committed the sin in Adam. Do you remember that?

No, you don’t remember it. As a matter of fact, you weren’t even in existence. No matter how old you are, you weren’t in existence. Some of you say “I’m as old as Noah” but you’re not as old as Adam. Well, let me ask you a question. Can a non-entity act? You were a non-entity then. Can you act? No, a non-entity cannot act.

Further, let’s just suppose for a moment that this is the true theory. Maybe you’ve heard somebody express themselves along this way line. Why are we not held liable then

for Adam’s later sins? Why should we be just held responsible for Adam’s first sin? If the reason we’re responsible for sin now is that Adam sinned and we really sinned in him and that’s the only reason, then why are we not responsible for his later sins? When he sinned the next day, and the next day, why are we not responsible for them? Well, to make it more ridiculous, why are we not responsible for all of the descendants of Adam who stand in line in front of us, if we are responsible for sin on the basis of being a part seminally of our ancestors?

And then, of course, this does not harmonize with the analogy of Jesus Christ’s work of justification for us. For you see in the case of Adam, if we participated in Adam’s sin, to draw the parallel, and Adam is a type of Jesus Christ, to draw the parallel, that would suggest that we actually participated in what Jesus Christ did on the Cross. And how is it possible for us to participate in his righteous act? Participate seminally. That would suggest that just as we were in Adam seminally, so we were in Jesus Christ seminally. That’s ridiculous. So I do not accept the seminal theory. It has too many difficulties. I cannot accept it.

So I come to the theory of immediate imputation. That is, the moment that Adam sinned, in the mind of God all of Adam’s descendants came under the judgment of sin and under the judgment of death, for Adam acted as a federal head. In virtue of his natural and federal headship and the union between us, his descendants, and Adam in this relationship, his sin although not my act, is imputed to me. And it becomes the judicial ground of the penalty of sin and death that is executed upon me. Now, someone may say, “Why are we not guilty for all of Adam’s other sins under this?” Well you see, if we are really in covenant relationship to Adam and he sinned the covenant’s broken. And, therefore, we are responsible for the first sin and not for his other sins and everything makes good sense. So Adam acted as our representative and when Adam failed then we came under the judgment. Adam’s act was our act but not seminally. It was our act, how? Federally or legally. Legally.

What is the support for this view? Well this view enables us to understand, I say, why only the first sin of Adam is imputed to us. Covenant’s broken. That’s the only sin that is ours, according to the covenant that was made and thus broken. Further, it harmonizes with our text in Romans chapter 5. Let’s turn again here and notice. In verse 12 he says “All die because all have sinned. Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world and death through sin, so death passed or spread to all men because all sinned. All die because all have sinned.”

Now, in verses 5:15 through 19 he says “All die because one sinned.” Five times. So in verse 12 “All die because all sinned.” Verses 15 through 19 “All die because one sinned.” What is he saying? Well he’s saying that there is a plurality, and yet there is a singularity in the same event. The sin of the all is the sin of the one. There must be some kind of solidarity between them, and the solidarity is the solidarity of a legal relationship, a covenant representation. So when we say then there is imputation of Adam’s sin to us, we’re talking about Adam as our covenant representative, and he acted for us. And so when he sinned, we legally come under the judgment that our covenantal head came under, for he is our federal head.

Now, that makes all things very plain because you see, in the case of Adam and his sin, it is imputed to us federally. We do not participate in his sin. It is imputed to us federally, and we participate in it legally, not seminally. Now, when we turn to Jesus Christ and his work of righteousness, which he has done for us, we do not participate seminally in what he has done. But his work is legally imputed to us so that the righteousness of God becomes ours legally. So everything is in perfect order. The analogy is perfect over here. The analogy is perfect over there and it all makes good sense.

Now, what about the objections to this particular theory? There are a couple of texts in the Bible that seem to teach otherwise and I’m going to read the texts, say just a brief word about them. First is the text Deuteronomy chapter 24, verse 16. So

why don’t you take your Bibles and turn over there to Deuteronomy chapter 24, verse 16 and let’s take a look at these texts. Deuteronomy 24, verse 16. Here Moses writes “Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers. Everyone shall be put to death for his own sin.” Well that seems to strike against all the theories of imputation, doesn’t it? “Everyone shall be put to death for his own sin.” Oh, the context is quite different from imputation in Deuteronomy chapter 24. He’s talking about imperfect human magistrates, and they’re exhorted to act contrary to the principle set forth by imputationists, so it is said.

But the passage has to do with guilt against society, not guilt against God. Magistrates exist in order to preserve order. The children of murderers are clear of guilt against society and for the magistrates to shed their blood would be to shed innocent blood. And so he says, “The fathers of everyone shall be put to death for his own sin.” The situation is not parallel with imputation at all. In the case of the one, we have to do with human relations, not relationship to God. So the text really doesn’t have anything to do with imputation at all. You’ll remember that this principle of imputation does pertain in the case of collective relationships. When Achan sinned in connection with the Babylonish garment, what does the Bible say about Achan’s sin? Well the Bible says Israel has sinned. But in the case of this, this is simply a human thing.

Now, will you turn over to Ezekiel chapter 18, verse 1 through 23. Ezekiel chapter 18, and I’ll just read verse 20. Ezekiel chapter 18, verse 20. Oh, perhaps we better read the first part of the chapter. Verse 1, Ezekiel chapter 18.

“Then the word of the Lord came to me saying; What do you mean by using this proverb concerning the land of Israel saying; the fathers eat the sour grapes, but the children’s teeth are set on edge. As I live, declares the Lord God, you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel any more.”

Now, what was their problem? Well, their problem was this; they were suffering. And do you know what the Israelites were saying? Well, they were saying, “The trouble’s not really with us. The trouble’s with our parents. The fathers eat the sour grapes. The children’s teeth are set on edge. We’re suffering because of our fathers. We’re suffering because of their disobedience.” Now then, in verse 20, the answer comes from God.

“The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son’s iniquity. The righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked be upon himself.”

And it said, how can we harmonize the principle of imputation with this? Well, it says that every man shall again, die for his own sins. Well, what God is really saying here, is simply this; that he will not, under the law’s terms, punish sons for sins they disapprove of and avoid. If those children of Israel who are saying “We are in this difficulty because our fathers sinned, and we are innocent” if they were really were to acknowledge their guilt and desire to be forgiven for it, God would forgive them for it. But they must remember that in God’s program, each dies for his own sin. The person who sins, he will die. A man will die for his own sin. This doesn’t have anything to do with imputation either. It has to do with the life of Israel in their own community. So these are not objections that really make much sense. The rational objection is a more difficult one for us. It’s said that it’s unjust to punish one person for the sin of another. Why should we be punished because Adam has sinned?

Now, if you’ve never felt that, if you’ve never felt the force of that objection, I think it’s probably because you’ve never thought about imputation. But if you have thought about imputation, whereby God declares that we are under sin and under

judgment for something Adam did, I’m sure that you have thought “Is not that unjust for us to be punished for the sin of the other?”

Now, we’ll have to leave the question of justice to God, because we remember, the Bible says, “Shall not the judge of all the earth do right.” And even if we come to the conclusion that the Bible teaches just this very thing, the question of justice, ultimately, will be something that God himself will set straight. It may be that we have misunderstood his teaching. I doubt it. The teaching is so plain, but at any rate, I’m not going to accuse God of being unjust, under any circumstances. I think I can show that this principle of federal representation is a benevolent thing. That is, a good thing. And if it’s true to its goodness, it’s probably true to his justice because it’s impossible for anything to be true, really true to its goodness, and not at the same time true to his justice because those attributes hang together.

I just merely say this right now before we look at how we can justify this. Now, we know this principle operates in human life. What happened when Edward VIII decided that he would give up the throne of England for “The woman I love.” He should have said “The woman I now love” because he had had other loves before this one. But, nevertheless, he said that he was going to give up the throne for “The woman I love.” Now, what happened to any possible descendants? Well, it’s obvious they lost their right to the throne because of his abdication. Could they say that’s unjust? Well they might say it’s unjust but, nevertheless, the law of kings and royalty would exclude them.

Or to bring something down more to home, what kind of reception do you think you would get if you march to Washington and say you would like to renounce any liability whatsoever for the three hundred billion national debt that we now have? I don’t think the brethren in our Congress would pay you much mind or attention, even in an election year. You see, this question of representation is something that is woven into the head and foot of our national life, of our very existence. If my father, for example, were to inherit a large sum of money and waste it through profligate living, would I have any

claims? No, I wouldn’t have any claims. We recognize that there may be representation, acts that affect us.

So let’s come to the benefits of representative imputation. As someone may say at this point, “Well, it’s not right that something Adam did should affect my eternal lot.” Let me remind you, my dear friend, that something that Adam did, does not affect your eternal lot. Adam’s deed does not determine our destiny, our physical death, but not our spiritual death. What, you say “Well, are we not spiritually dead?” Yes we are but remember God has given us the good news that we may be delivered from our spiritual death by virtue of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, who has been given. So it is not right to say something that Adam has done determines my eternal lot. It affects it perhaps, but it does not determine it. And if you do not have any desire to turn to the Lord and be delivered from sin and death, well then do not blame God for that.

Anyway, I said I was going to say representation was to my advantage, and this is why. I believe that this is the finest system that any person could ever have devised. Now, if you listened to me on the attributes, you would know, of course, that it had to be so because God is omniscient. Therefore, whatever he has done is obviously the best thing that could be done because he doesn’t do second best things. He does only what is the wisest thing and he has devised the scheme of representation. So there must be something good about it. As I’ve thought about this, here are some of the things I can think that are good about it.

The first place, I think it was good that Adam was my representative because to tell you the truth I’m quite sure that if I had been in the place of standing for my eternal destiny that I would never have stood as long as Adam stood. And so the fact that Adam stood for me, knowing my own heart, knowing the possibilities of sin, that does not make me feel sad at all. Furthermore, remember in the case of Adam, he was the most brilliant man who ever lived. He was the man who was taught by Jesus Christ personally. And further, he was taught while he was in the image of God. Now, he surely was taught

through the threats and the promises that were given to him that his act affected his destiny. He was told to be fruitful and multiply.

The simplest question that Adam would have asked right at the beginning would have been, “If I sinned in my destiny are my sons and my sons and their sons, are they affected?” So he knew his relationship as a federal head. Now, knowing his relationship as a federal head he, therefore, had a sense of responsibility that you or I would not have, if we stood by ourselves. So that if each of us stood for our own sin, stood a test on our own, then we would not have the sense of responsibility and the incentive to obedience that a federal head would have had. So you see, God is doing as he usually does; the most for us. He does the maximum, not the minimum.

You will notice in the case of the angels, they do not have any federal head, and when they sin, they sin and that’s it. That’s final. But in our case, we have a representative. In addition, since we are ones who have sinned in a responsible federal head then it is easy for God to send a second federal head in order to take our sin upon himself. So the federal system allows him to send another federal man who may stand for those who will believe. But if every man is for himself then that does not allow any such system of representation for deliverance. So you see, I like this system. As a matter of fact, to tell you the truth, I love it. I love representation. I love that I sinned in Adam because now in my representative Jesus Christ, I may receive a righteousness that is acceptable to God by imputation upon the simple basis of trust in him, receiving this as a free gift. So I love it. When the father strikes oil, the children get rich, and we’ve hit a gusher in Jesus Christ.

Now, the three great imputations. The three great imputations are the imputation of Adam’s sin to his posterity. That’s what we’ve been talking about tonight. Adam’s sin and condemnation are imputed to us so that every one of us is born in sin and under condemnation. He was our federal head.

The second imputation is the imputation of our sin to Jesus Christ. As our text that I have put up there says “He was made sin for us.” So that Jesus Christ has imputed or reckoned to him, he had no sin, our sin. He was made sin for us, who knew no sin that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

And so the third imputation is the imputation of God’s righteousness to us because Jesus Christ bears the penalty of our sin. So Adam’s sin is imputed to us. Our sin is imputed to Jesus Christ. God’s righteousness is imputed to us through the obedience of the Lord Jesus in his death on Calvary’s Cross. So the first effect of Adam’s sin is the imputation of his sin and judgment to us. Now, we’ll pick up our story next week. Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the teaching of Scripture. We thank Thee for the great representative, federal, covenantal system which Thou hast in Thine infinite wisdom devised. We rejoice in our covenant head, Jesus Christ, who has through his saving obedience made it possible for us to be established as righteous in Thy sight. Help us, Lord, to be grateful and thankful.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.