

Of the Imputation of Adam's Sin to All His Posterity.

by John Gill

Adam's posterity are made sinners through the imputation of his disobedience to them, which vindicates the righteousness of God and shows that they are guilty and punishable for Adam's sin.

Scripture: Genesis 2:17, Psalm 51:5, Jeremiah 19:4, Ezekiel 18:2-4, John 9:2-3, Romans 5:12, Romans 5:18-19, 1 Corinthians 15:22, 2 Corinthians 5:21

Topics: "Federal Headship", "Imputation of Sin"

Description

John Gill expounds on the doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin to all humanity, emphasizing that through Adam's disobedience, all his descendants are made sinners. He clarifies that this imputation is not based on imitation or personal sin but is a judicial act where Adam's guilt is legally attributed to his posterity. Gill argues that this concept is foundational to understanding both the nature of sin and the necessity of Christ's righteousness for salvation. He highlights that while Adam's sin brought death and condemnation, Christ's obedience offers justification and life to many. The sermon ultimately underscores the significance of federal headship in the relationship between Adam and humanity.

Transcript

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity

Book 3--Chapter 10

OF THE IMPUTATION OF ADAM'S SIN TO ALL HIS POSTERITY

Having considered the disobedience of our first parents, and the sad effects of it to themselves, I shall next consider the concern their posterity have in it, and how much they are affected by it. There are two things follow on it with respect to them; the imputation of the guilt of it to them, and the corruption of nature derived to them from it. I shall begin with the first, as being previous to the other, and the foundation of it, and which is expressed in very strong terms (Rom. 5:19).

"For as by one man's disobedience man were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous". The apostle is upon the doctrine of justification by the righteousness of Christ; and whereas it might be a difficulty in the minds of some, how any could be justified by the righteousness of another; and he had to do greatly with Jews as well as Gentiles; the former of which might better

understand the doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity; or how all men are made sinners by his sin, than the doctrine of justification by Christ's righteousness; he observes, it is as easy to conceive how men may be made righteous by the obedience of another, namely, through the imputation of that obedience to them, as it is to conceive how all men are made sinners by the disobedience of one man, even through the imputation of that disobedience to them.

To set this doctrine in the best light I can, I shall, 1) Observe the act of disobedience, by which men are made sinners. 2) Who they are that are made sinners by it. 3) In what sense they are "made" so through it. 1. First, The act of disobedience; whose it is, and what. 1a. Whose it is: it is sometimes expressed by "one that sinned"; and more than once called, the "offence of one" (Rom. 5:15-16,18), and yet more clearly; "By one man sin entered"; and is called, "one man's offence", and "one man's disobedience" (Rom. 5:12,17,19), for it is not the sin of one of the apostate spirits, by which men are made sinners; but the sin of one of their own species, one of the same nature, even the common parent of all mankind, and who is expressed by name (Rom. 5:14), where this offence and disobedience is called "the transgression of Adam"; and so in (1 Cor. 15:22).

"In Adam all die", being all in him, and having sinned in him, death comes upon them for it; but then this is to be understood of Adam not to the exclusion of Eve, who was also in the transgression, and first in it, and was the mother of all living. They both have the same name, the same appellative name, "man"; the same proper name, Adam (Gen. 5:1-2), were of the same nature; nay, Eve was formed out of a rib of Adam; was flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone; a part of himself; and by their marriage relation became one flesh (Gen. 2:21-24), they had the same law given them, which forbid the eating of the fruit of a certain tree; the same covenant was made with them, and they were both guilty of the same act of disobedience; and had a sentence of punishment pronounced on them both; and which did not rest on their own persons only, but is common to all their posterity, and still continues; which shows that their posterity had a concern in their act of disobedience, in the guilt of it, since they share in their punishment, as all the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve do; as in the toil and labour of the one, and his return to the dust; so in the pains of childbearing in the other, and subjection to the man. 1b.

What this disobedience was; which appears from what has been already said, it was disobedience to the law and will of God, in eating the fruit which he had forbid; so disbelieving the word of God, and giving credit to the serpent. Now it was this one act of disobedience, by which Adam's posterity were made sinners; and therefore is sometimes called the one sin, and the one offence; so in Romans 5:16 some copies read *enōv amarthmatoV*, "by one sin"; and so in Romans 5:17 *en tw eni paraptwmati*, "by one offence"; and so Romans 5:18 may be translated as it is in the margin of our Bibles; it was a single sin, and the first sin committed in our world; I say in our world, because sin was committed before in the world above, in heaven, by the apostate spirits, the angels that sinned; but with their sin men have no concern; or they are not made sinners by it; but by that sin which first entered into our world, by the one man, Adam; and this the only one of his sins, and that which was first committed by him, and not any after sins of his; it is what, and it is the only one that was committed by him, while he stood the federal head of his posterity: that he was a covenant head to us has been proved already; and that he was such when this was committed by him is plain, because his posterity were then considered in him, as a federal head, and sinned in him, which brought death upon them all (Rom. 5:12).

But no sooner had Adam committed this first sin, by which the covenant with him was broke, but he ceased to be a covenant head; the law given him, as a covenant of works, was no more so; the promise of life by it ceased; the sanction of it, death, took place; and he was no more in a capacity of yielding sinless

obedience; and so could not procure life for himself and his; wherefore he no longer standing as a federal head to his posterity, they had no more concern with his later sins, than with his repentance and good works, both of which, no doubt, were performed by him; yet by his repentance they are not reckoned repenting sinners; nor are his good works accounted to them. 2.

Secondly, Who they are that are made sinners by the disobedience of Adam. They are said to be many; not only Adam and Eve, who were transgressors, and so became guilty and polluted sinners, through their disobedience, as they most certainly did; as appears from their consciousness of nakedness; from the shame and confusion of face that covered them; from the fear and dreadful apprehensions of the wrath and vengeance of God; and from their fleeing from his presence, and hiding themselves; but even all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation, were made sinners hereby; for though they are only said to be "many", these many signify "all"; the reason of the use of this word, is to answer to the next clause, to the "many" that are "made righteous by the obedience of one Man"; and yet the "many" there, signify all that are in Christ, as their covenant head; even all his spiritual seed and offspring, given to him and chosen in him: and so all the natural seed and offspring of Adam, to whom he stood as a federal head, are all made sinners by his disobedience; which is thus strongly expressed, "As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that or in whom all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12).

And again, "By the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation (Rom. 5:18). I say, all descending from him by ordinary generation, are made sinners by his sin, and none else. Had God made more worlds than one, as he could if he would, and worlds of men too; yet as these would not have descended from Adam, they would have had no concern in his sin: had God raised up children to Abraham out of stones, which he could have done; yet such so raised up, in such a miraculous manner, and not descending from Adam, could not be affected with his sin; and for a like reason the human nature of Christ must be excepted from any concern in it, and from any effect of it, guilt, or pollution; for though he was a partaker of the same human nature, of the same flesh and blood with other men, and made in all things like unto them, yet not by ordinary generation; he was made of a woman, but not begotten by man; God, his Father, prepared a body for him in covenant; and in the fulness of time his human nature was formed by the Holy Spirit, in a wonderful manner; it was an extraordinary production; it was a new thing, which God created in the earth, and so an holy thing; was holy, harmless, and separate from sinners, without spot and blemish, and any consciousness of sin; and thus as it was clear of the taint and corruption of nature from Adam's sin, so it was exempt from the guilt of it; (see Luke 1:34-35).

And besides that, Christ not descending from Adam by ordinary generation, could not be a federal head to him on that account;[1] so neither because of the dignity of his person; the human nature being personally united to the Son of God, could never be under a creature as its federal head, or be represented by one. Moreover, Christ was the head of another and better covenant than Adam's, and was previous to it, even before Adam and his covenant were in being. Christ was an head to Adam, as he was chosen in him, given to him in covenant to be redeemed and saved by him; but Adam was no head to him; "The Head of Christ is God", and he only (1 Cor. 11:3). 3.

Thirdly, In what sense all Adam's posterity are made sinners by his disobedience. 3a. Not by imitation, as say the Pelagians; men may become more sinful by imitation, but they do not first become sinful by it: men may, by example, be drawn in to commit sin more frequently, and to commit greater ones; and therefore the company of wicked men is to be shunned, since "Evil communications corrupt good manners"; especially persons of power and authority, their examples have great weight and influence; as civil

magistrates, ministers, parents, and masters.

So Jeroboam caused Israel to sin, was the occasion of it, and drew them into it by his authority and example. But this cannot be the case here; for, 3a1. Death, the effect of Adam's sin, and the punishment inflicted for it, takes place on such who never "sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression" (Rom. 5:14), namely, infants dying in their infancy; who, though not without the corruption of nature in them, yet without any actual sin committed by them, like to that of Adam's transgression; dying so soon, they have neither capacity nor opportunity of committing any sin similar to his; that is, any actual transgression; and therefore said, in that respect, to be innocent (Jer 19:4), not free from the taint, but from the act of sin.

Now since death, which is the punishment of sin, takes place on them, that supposes guilt, or otherwise punishment could not in justice be inflicted on them; and as they are not made sinners by Adam's sin, through imitation of it, they must become guilty, or be made sinners in some other way. 3a2. Death, the effect of Adam's sin, and the punishment of it, takes place on such who never heard of it, and consequently cannot be made sinners by it, through imitation of it; for death passes upon all men, all nations of the world, and all individuals in it, through the sin of one man, Adam; even on such who never heard of the law which forbid the eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge; nor, indeed, ever heard of the law of Moses, and the sins forbidden by that; are acquainted only with the law and light of nature; the law written in their hearts, according to which their minds, consciences, and thoughts, accuse or excuse one another; and yet they that are without law, perish without law, being sinners; and therefore as they cannot be made sinners by Adam's sin, through imitation of it, they must be made so another way; (see Rom. 2:12-15). 3a3.

This sense makes a man no more a sinner by Adam's disobedience than he is by the disobedience of his immediate parents, or any other whose ill examples he follows. Adam seems to be too remote an ancestor to imitate; more likely immediate parents; and yet this is not always the case; children do not always follow the examples of parents, bad or good. Some may have evil parents, and, like the Jews, fill up the measure of their fathers' sins, and do as they did, and appear to be a generation of vipers: and others have good parents, who give them a religious education, and set them good examples, and yet they take very bad courses; and so not by imitation, at least of their parents.

And indeed, sin in general does not come by imitation; but it is from a corrupt nature; and there are many sins which are never seen committed, yet are committed by those who never saw them; as murder, acts of uncleanness, &c. Did Cain sin by imitation when he murdered his brother? Did Lot's daughters sin by imitation when they contrived to commit incest with their father, and did? It is possible that all these defects in nature may meet in one man, as to be born blind, deaf, and dumb; and so not capable of seeing and hearing, and knowing what sins are committed, and yet be as vicious as any of the sons of Adam. 3b.

Nor is the sense of the phrase, "made sinners by one man's disobedience," what the more modern Pelagians and Arminians give into; that by a metonymy of the effect, sin being put for the punishment of it, men become sufferers, or are obnoxious to death, and suffer death on the account of Adam's disobedience; but this is to depart from the common and constant sense of this word, "sinners". Nor can any instance be given of the apostle's use of the word in this sense, either in the context or elsewhere; it always signifying a sinful, guilty, and defiled creature; one that is guilty of a crime, and obnoxious to death for it; it is contrary to the apostle's scope and design in the context, which was to show how death came into the world, namely, by sin; and to the distinction he all along makes between sin and death; the one he represents as the cause, the other as the effect; whereas this sense confounds cause and effect, sin and

death, together; and makes the apostle guilty of such bad reasoning as can never be charged upon him, and which a man of such large reasoning powers, abstracted from his being an inspired writer, could never be capable of; for then the sense of these words (Rom. 2:12).

"Death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned", must be, death passed upon all men, because it has passed upon all men; or all men are obnoxious to death, and suffer it, because they are obnoxious to it, and suffer it. Besides, it is granting us too much for themselves; it makes their cause indefensible, and even destroys it, and cuts the throat of it; for if men are obnoxious to death, even though but a corporal death, which is what they mean, and suffer such a death on the account of Adam's sin, they must have a concern in it, and be, in some way or other, guilty of it; or such a punishment, in justice, could not be inflicted on them.

What greater punishment is there among men, for the most enormous crime, than death? And why should men suffer death for Adam's sin, of which they are in no sense guilty? Let this be reconciled, if it can be, to the justice of God. 3c. Nor is the sense of the phrase, "made sinners by one man's disobedience," that Adam's posterity derive a corrupt nature from him, through his sin; this is indeed a truth, but not the truth of this passage; it is true that all men are made of one man's blood, and that blood tainted with sin; and so a clean thing cannot be brought out of an unclean; what is born of the flesh is flesh, carnal and corrupt; every man is conceived in sin, and shapen in iniquity, as David was; but then there is a difference between being "made" sinners, and "becoming" sinful, the one respects the guilt, the other the pollution of nature; the one is previous to the other, and the foundation of it; men receive a corrupt nature from their immediate parents; but they are not made sinners by any act or acts of their disobedience.

Wherefore, 3d. It remains that the posterity of Adam are only "made" sinners through the imputation of his disobedience to them. And this imputation is not to be considered in a moral sense, as the action of a man committed by himself, whether good or bad, is condemned and reckoned unto him as his own, whether in a way of praise or dispraise; as the zealous good work of Phinehas in slaying two persons in the very act of sin, was "counted unto him for righteousness"; that is, was judged, reckoned, and esteemed a righteous, worthy, and commendable action; but in a "forensic", judicial, and legal sense; as when one man's debts are in a legal way placed to the account of another, as if they were his, though not personally contracted by him.

An instance of this we have in the apostle Paul, who said to Philemon, concerning Onesimus; "If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee anything", ellogei, "let it be imputed to me", or placed to and put on my account. And thus the posterity of Adam are made sinners by Adam's disobedience, that being imputed to them, and put to their account, as if it had been committed by them personally, though it was not. And this sense is to be confirmed and illustrated, -- 3d1. From the signification of the word here used, *hatestaqhsan*, "constituted" in a judicial way, ordered and appointed in the dispensation of things, that so it should be; just as Christ was made sin, or a sinner by imputation, by the constitution of God, laying upon him, reckoning, placing to his account the sins of all his people, and dealing with him as though he was the guilty person, and as if he had committed the sins, though he had not; and not imputing trespasses to them, though they were the actual transgressors; (see Isa. 53:6; 2 Cor. 5:19,21). 3d2.

From its being the disobedience of another, by which men are made sinners; and therefore they can in no other way be made sinners by it, than by the imputation of it to them; just as the righteousness of Christ being not our own, but his, another's; we cannot be made righteous by it, but by the imputation of it to us. 3d3. From the punishment inflicted on persons for it. The punishment threatened to Adam in case of

disobedience to the law and will of God, was death (Gen. 2:17), which includes death, corporal, moral, and eternal; a corporal death has been taken notice of already, and which is allowed to be suffered on account of the sin of Adam; and if so there must be guilt; and that guilt must be made over to the sufferer; and which can be done in no other way than by the imputation of it.

A moral death is no other than the loss of the image of God in man, which consisted in righteousness and holiness; and particularly it is a loss of original righteousness: in the room of which succeeded unrighteousness and unholiness; and is both a sin, and a punishment for sin: it is a sin as it has malignity in it, and a punishment for sin; and so it was threatened to Adam, and came upon him as such; and so to all his posterity, by the ordination and appointment of God; for which there can be no other foundation but the imputation of Adam's disobedience to them; nor can anything else vindicate the righteousness of God; for if the law of nature was sufficient, why should this original taint infect men, rather than the sins of immediate parents?

Now if this comes upon men as a punishment, it supposes preceding sin; and what can that be but Adam's disobedience, the guilt of which must be made over to Adam's posterity, or it could not in justice take place; and that could no other way be made over to them but by imputation. And if eternal death is taken in to the punishment, as it must be; for the wages of sin is death, even death eternal; and this can never be inflicted on guiltless persons; if men are thus punished for Adam's sin, the guilt of that sin must be imputed to them: in Romans 5:18 it is said, "By the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation"; that is, the righteous sentence of God passed upon the whole posterity of Adam, to the condemnation of them for his offence; be that condemnation to a corporal, or to a moral, or to an eternal death, to any or all of them, it supposes them guilty of that offence, and that the guilt of that offence is made over to them, and reckoned as theirs; which can only be done by imputation; or they cannot be righteously condemned and punished for it in either sense. 3d4.

That this is the sense of the clause, "made sinners by the disobedience of one", appears from the opposite clause; "So by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous": now the many ordained to eternal life, for whom Christ died, and whom he justified, are made righteous, or are justified only through the imputation of his righteousness to them; and he is made sin by the imputation of their sins to him (2 Cor. 5:21). In like manner are Adam's posterity, or all men, made sinners through the imputation of his disobedience to them.

And this is the sense of this clause, notwithstanding what may be objected to it. It is no objection, that Adam's disobedience or sin is not now in act; as soon as it was committed as an act, it ceased; and therefore not to be imputed. The same may be objected to the obedience of Christ; or rather a course of obedience, a series of actions, which when performed, ceased to be in act; but then the righteousness arising from them continues; and is in Christ, The Lord our Righteousness; and is unto all and upon all that believe.

And so Adam's sin, though it ceased to be in act, the guilt of it continues, and is imputed to all his posterity. In like manner the sins of the saints, before the coming of Christ, ceased to be in act as soon as committed; and yet Christ died for the redemption of transgressions that were under the first Testament, and the sins of all the people of God were laid upon him by imputation. Nor is it any objection to this truth, that Adam's posterity were not in being when his disobedience was committed, and so could have no concern in it: but though they had not an actual being, yet they had a virtual and representative one; they were in him both seminally and federally; and "sinned in him" too (Rom. 5:12), as Levi was in the loins of

Abraham, and paid tithes to Melchizedek (Heb. 7:9,10).

I say, both seminally and federally; and it is their being in him seminally that is the foundation of their being in him federally, and makes it reasonable that so they should be; and this may be greatly illustrated and confirmed by modern philosophy, according to which all kinds of plants of the same sort to be produced in all following ages, were actually formed in the first seed that was created; and that all the "stamina" and "semina", not only of plants but of animals, and so of men, were originally formed by the almighty Parent, within the first of each respective kind, and to be the seed of all future generation:[2] thus all mankind being formed in the first man, in this manner, it easily accounts for it, how they came to have a share in the guilt of his sin, and that to be imputed to them; as also to have the corruption and pollution of it derived to them.

Nor does this act of imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity, make God the author of sin; since this act makes men sinners not inherently, but imputatively; it puts no sin in them, though it reckons sin to them; and though this imputation is God's act, it makes him no more the author of sin, than the imputation of Christ's obedience, makes God the author of that obedience; as not God, but Christ, is the author of the obedience imputed; so not God, but Adam, is the author of that disobedience imputed to his posterity: nor is this doctrine chargeable with cruelty and injustice; it has never been reckoned either, that children should suffer for the sins of their parents; or rather, that parents should be punished in their children; God describes himself as a God visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate him; and yet it is impossible that he should be guilty either of a cruel or unjust action: when Achan sinned, his sons and his daughters, and all that he had, were ordered to be brought forth, and they were all burnt with him.

The Amalekites, for the injury they did to Israel, when they first came out of Egypt, Saul had orders, some hundreds of years after, to go and smite them, and utterly destroy all they had, men and women, infants and sucklings, and all their cattle: the blood of all the righteous persons that had been shed from the beginning of the world to the times of Christ, was then avenged on the wicked Jews. And such a procedure in subjecting children to penalties for the sins of their parents, is justified by the laws, customs, and usages of all nations, who make treason punishable in the posterity of men.

A nobleman, when he commits treason against his sovereign, he is not only stripped of his titles, honour, and estates himself, but his children are also, and reduced to poverty and misery, until the attainder is taken off. And if treason against an earthly king is punishable in this manner, then much more treason against the King of kings, and Lord of lords, as Adam's sin was. The text in Ezekiel 18:2-4 is not to the purpose; that the proverb, "The father's have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge", should be no more used in Israel, but the soul that sins should die; since this speaks not a word of Adam, and his sin, nor of his posterity suffering for it; nor even of such men that commit the same sins their fathers have; but of good men and just men, that do not follow their fathers evil ways, and so shall not be punished for any sins of theirs, and is restrained to a certain case and time.

The case of the man born blind, is also quite impertinent; since that also respects not Adam's sin, but the sin of the man and his parents, and a particular disaster, blindness. The disciples put this question to Christ upon it; "Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Christ's answer is, "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents": not but that they had both sinned, but their sin was not the cause and reason of his blindness; but the sovereign will and pleasure of God, "That the works of God should be made manifest in him"; that there might be an opportunity for Christ to give proof of his Deity and

Messiahship, by performing such a cure as was never heard of before (John 9:2,3).

To close this point; let it be observed, that the ground of the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity, is not his being the natural head, and common parent of them; for so are immediate parents to their respective offspring; but their particular sins are not imputed to them; Adam, being the common parent of mankind, may be considered as the ground of the derivation of a corrupt nature to them; and yet the justice of that will not clearly appear without their being considered as made sinners by the imputation of Adam's sin to them: but the ground of this imputation is the federal headship of Adam, or his standing as a covenant head to all his posterity; so that what he did as such, is reckoned as if done by them; which is not the case of immediate parents; and therefore their sins are not imputed: that Adam stood in the relation of a federal head to his posterity, has been proved in a former chapter, and vindicated from exceptions to it.

ENDNOTES:

[1] See more of this in Vol. II. of this Work, Book II. Chap. 1. See 4 Topic on "Incarnation" 950

[2] See the Philosophical Transactions abridged, vol. ii. p. 912. Nieuwentyt's Religious Philosopher, vol. ii. contempl. 23. s. 13. p. 711. ed. 5. Wolaston's Religion of Nature, s. 5. p. 160, 164. ed. 8.

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