

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

ANTHROPOLOGY

The Doctrine of Humanity

Created, Fallen, and Redeemable — What It Means to Be Human Before God

UNIT 8

The Unity of the Human Race and the Headship of Adam

Lesson 24

Federal Headship

Adam as the Representative of the Human Race

“How One Man’s Act Determined the Destiny of All”

Key Texts: Romans 5:12–21; 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, 45–49; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hosea 6:7

“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.”

Romans 5:19, NASB 1995

Dr. Joshua Nichols

Pastor, Theologian, Author

faithfultotheword.com

Introduction

Lesson 23 established the monogenetic unity of the human race: all human beings descend from a single pair of first parents, Adam and Eve, and the entire diversity of the world's peoples constitutes a single family with a single origin and a single set of first parents. Lesson 24 turns from the biological unity of the human family to the covenantal structure that makes that biological unity theologically decisive: the doctrine of federal headship, the teaching that Adam stood before God not merely as a private individual whose transgression affected only himself but as the covenantal representative of all his natural posterity, so that his obedience or disobedience would be legally reckoned to all those he represented. Federal headship is the doctrine that answers the specific theological question: why does Adam's transgression affect me? The answer is not merely that I have inherited a corrupted nature from a corrupted ancestor, though that is true and forms part of the doctrine's account. The answer is that Adam stood in the covenant of works as my covenantal representative, so that when he transgressed, he transgressed as my representative, and his guilt is legally reckoned to me as the guilt of the one who represented me in the transaction.

The doctrine of federal headship is not a peripheral theological curiosity; it is the structural architecture of the entire biblical account of sin and redemption. The Pauline theology of Romans 5:12–21, the most sustained single biblical account of the relationship between the first Adam's transgression and the Last Adam's obedience, builds the entire parallel between condemnation in Adam and justification in Christ on the foundation of the representative structure that both Adam and Christ occupy in relation to those they represent. If Adam does not represent the human race in the covenant of works, the imputation of his guilt to his posterity lacks its adequate structural ground, and the entire doctrinal edifice that Romans 5 erects on that foundation, including the imputation of Christ's righteousness to those who believe, loses its most secure analogy. The doctrine of federal headship is not merely the doctrine of Adam's representative role; it is the doctrine that establishes the representative structure through which the gospel works, and any weakening of the doctrine's account of Adam's representation is a weakening of the analogy on which the gospel's account of Christ's representation depends.

This lesson proceeds in six sections. We begin with the definition of federal headship and its biblical grounding in the covenant of works established in Lesson 15. We then examine the primary Pauline text, Romans 5:12–21, with the exegetical precision its theological density requires. The third section examines the three principal views of the imputation of Adam's sin: the realistic view, the federal view, and the mediate imputation view, with the arguments for and against each and the Reformed tradition's predominant endorsement of the federal view. The fourth section examines the Adam-Christ typology in Romans 5:14 and 1 Corinthians 15:45–49: the way in which Adam's federal headship is the type of Christ's federal headship, and the way in which the doctrinal structure of condemnation in Adam is the mirror image of the doctrinal structure of justification in Christ. The fifth section addresses the justice of federal headship, the objection that the imputation of Adam's guilt to those who did not personally commit his act is unjust, with the theological arguments that the Reformed tradition has brought to the question. We close with the pastoral doxology that the doctrine of federal headship produces: the specific humbling and the specific exaltation that come from understanding that the same representative structure that condemns us in Adam is the representative structure that saves us in Christ.

A note on the doctrinal density of this lesson: the doctrine of federal headship is one of the most technically demanding topics in the entire Anthropology series, requiring careful attention to distinctions that the history of the doctrine has developed with considerable precision. The lesson does not attempt to reproduce the full technical discussion of the Reformed scholastic tradition's treatment of the imputation question; it presents the main positions and the main arguments with the clarity and the balance that the pastoral context requires. The student who wishes to pursue the technical dimensions of the debate in depth is directed to the resources recommended in the practical application section.

I. Federal Headship Defined: Adam as Covenantal Representative

The Doctrine That Makes the Human Race's Solidarity in Sin Theologically Intelligible

A. *The Meaning and the Biblical Grounding of Federal Headship*

Federal headship is the doctrine that Adam stood before God as the covenantal representative, the federal head, of all his natural posterity, so that his act of transgression in the covenant of works was legally reckoned to all those he represented, just as the obedience of the Last Adam (Jesus Christ) is legally reckoned to all those He represents in the covenant of grace. The term “federal” derives from the Latin *foedus*, meaning covenant: Adam is the federal (covenantal) head of the human race in the same sense that a nation’s ambassador or representative is the federal agent whose acts are binding on the nation he represents. When the ambassador signs a treaty, the nation is bound by the treaty; when Adam transgressed the covenant of works, the entire human race represented by Adam was bound by the consequences of the transgression.

The biblical grounding of federal headship has been examined in earlier lessons of this series. Lesson 15 established the covenant of works, the pre-fall arrangement in which God placed Adam under a probationary condition, promising life for obedience and threatening death for disobedience. Lesson 23 established the monogenetic unity of the human race, the fact that all human beings are Adam’s natural posterity. Together these two doctrines establish the structural foundation of federal headship: Adam stood in the covenant of works as the representative of the entire human family he would father, and the covenant’s terms, life or death, blessing or curse, were determined by Adam’s representative act in the probationary arrangement God established with him. Hosea 6:7’s reference, “But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant; there they have dealt treacherously against Me” (NASB 1995), is one of the most direct Old Testament references to the covenantal character of Adam’s transgression, identifying Adam’s act as the transgression of a specific covenant arrangement rather than merely the violation of a specific prohibition.

The representative character of Adam’s headship is not an imposition on the human race from outside; it is the specific form that God designed for the covenant arrangement He established with Adam. The created relationship between Adam and his posterity, the biological parent-child relationship through which the entire human family would descend from him, was the natural basis on which the covenantal representative relationship was established. Adam was the representative of the human race not because of an arbitrary divine decree disconnected from the natural order but because he was the first human being, the progenitor of the entire human family, the one in whose existence the whole of the human race was present in potential. The biological and the covenantal dimensions of Adam’s headship are not separable; the covenantal representative relationship is the theological interpretation of the biological parental relationship, and the two together constitute the complete doctrine of federal headship.

B. *The Scope and the Structure of the Federal Headship*

The scope of Adam’s federal headship is the entire natural posterity of Adam, all human beings who descend from Adam by ordinary generation. The Westminster Confession’s account is precise: Adam and Eve were “the root of all mankind,” and “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” (chapter 6, section 3). The qualification “by ordinary generation” is theologically significant: it establishes that Jesus Christ, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin, not by ordinary generation from a human father, is not included in the scope of the Adamic federal headship. This is precisely what makes possible Christ’s role as the Last Adam: He is born into the human family without sharing in Adam’s guilt, because His birth was not by ordinary generation from Adam’s line in the relevant sense, and He can therefore stand as the representative head of the new humanity without the disqualification of the inherited guilt that ordinary generation would have conveyed.

The structure of the federal headship has two dimensions that must be distinguished even as they are held together. The first is the imputation of guilt: Adam's guilt for the specific transgression of the covenant of works is legally reckoned (imputed) to all his posterity, so that every member of the human family is born under the condemnation that Adam's transgression incurred. This is the forensic dimension of the federal headship, the legal reckoning of Adam's act to his posterity by the divine judge who holds the covenant's terms binding. The second dimension is the transmission of corruption: Adam's transgression not only incurred guilt before God but also corrupted the nature that Adam passed on to his posterity, so that every member of the human family is born not only under the condemnation of Adam's guilt but with the corrupted nature that Adam's transgression produced in him. The two dimensions are distinct but inseparable: the imputed guilt and the inherited corruption are the two faces of the single consequence of Adam's representative transgression, and the Reformed tradition's account of original sin encompasses both.

The relationship between the imputed guilt and the inherited corruption has been the subject of the most sustained intra-Reformed debate about the doctrine of original sin, and it is the debate that the three views of imputation examined in Section III address. The Reformed tradition's commitment to the priority of the forensic dimension, the imputed guilt as the ground of the condemnation, with the inherited corruption as the consequence of the judicial act rather than the cause of the condemnation, is the characteristically Reformed account of the relationship between the two dimensions. The mediate imputation view, by contrast, treats the inherited corruption as the ground of the condemnation rather than its consequence, effectively reversing the relationship between the forensic and the natural dimensions of the Adamic inheritance. Section III will examine these positions in detail; the present section establishes the structural framework within which the debate occurs.

“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.”

Romans 5:12, NASB 1995

II. Romans 5:12–21: The Primary Pauline Account of Federal Headship

Exegetical Precision on the Most Theologically Concentrated Passage in the Doctrine

A. The Meaning of Romans 5:12 and the ‘Because All Sinned’ Clause

Romans 5:12 is the most important single verse in the entire biblical doctrine of original sin and federal headship: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned” (NASB 1995). The verse’s most debated phrase is the closing clause, “because all sinned” (eph’ ho pantes hemarton, ἐφ’ ὃ πάντες ἡμαρτον), which has been interpreted in three principal ways corresponding roughly to the three views of imputation. The realistic interpretation understands “all sinned” as the statement that all human beings were present in Adam in a seminally realistic sense and therefore genuinely participated in Adam’s sin as the sin of the whole human nature present in him. The federal interpretation understands “all sinned” as the forensic statement that all human beings are reckoned as having sinned in Adam by virtue of Adam’s representative act, the sin is imputed to all because Adam sinned as the representative of all. The mediate imputation interpretation understands “all sinned” as referring to the actual personal sins that all commit on the basis of the corrupted nature inherited from Adam.

The exegetical case for the federal interpretation of “because all sinned” rests on several converging considerations. First, the verb “sinned” (hemarton) is in the aorist tense, pointing to a specific past event rather than to the ongoing experience of personal sin that the mediate imputation interpretation would require. All sinned, in a specific, completed event, at a specific past moment, rather than all sin habitually or all sin in their

own persons. Second, the parallel that Paul develops in verses 15–19 uses the same forensic language of “reckoning” and “condemnation” and “justification” that Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith uses, strongly suggesting that the structure of the imputation he is describing is the same forensic structure: just as Christ’s righteousness is imputed to believers without their having personally performed it, so Adam’s guilt is imputed to the entire human race without their having personally committed the transgression. Third, verses 13–14 establish that death reigned even over those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam’s transgression, i.e., even over those who did not have a specific divine command to violate as Adam did. This specific observation makes no sense if the condemnation is grounded in personal sin; it makes clear sense if the condemnation is grounded in Adam’s representative transgression imputed to all.

The movement of the passage as a whole confirms the federal interpretation. Paul’s primary concern in Romans 5:12–21 is not to provide a comprehensive account of the human condition of sinfulness but to establish the parallel between the two federal heads, the first Adam and the Last Adam, whose representative acts determine the covenant standing of all those they represent. The passage’s christological goal is the demonstration that the same representative structure that makes condemnation in Adam intelligible is the representative structure through which justification in Christ operates. The Adam of Romans 5 is the federal representative of the human race, not merely the biological ancestor whose nature is corrupted, because the Christ who is his antitype is the federal representative of the new humanity, not merely the moral example whose influence transforms. The parallel requires the federal interpretation of Adam’s headship.

B. Romans 5:15–19: The Parallel Between Adam and Christ Unpacked

Romans 5:15–19 is the most sustained single development of the Adam-Christ parallel in the Pauline corpus, and its specific language establishes the forensic character of the federal headship with unmistakable precision. Verse 15: “But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many.” The parallel is between the transgression of the one and the grace of the one: the single act of the one representative (Adam’s transgression; Christ’s obedience) produces consequences for the many (condemnation and death; grace and justification). Verse 16: “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 from many transgressions resulting in justification.” The judgment and the gift are both forensic categories: condemnation is a legal verdict, and justification is a legal verdict. The one representative’s act produces the legal verdict that determines the standing of the many.

Verse 17 introduces the concept of the “reign” of death and life, establishing the comprehensive scope of the two representatives’ acts: “For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.” The death that reigns through Adam’s transgression and the life that reigns through Christ’s obedience are both comprehensive, they determine the entire existence of those who stand under each representative’s headship. And verse 18 provides the most compressed and the most symmetrical statement of the parallel: “So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.” One transgression; condemnation to all. One act of righteousness; justification of life to all. The symmetry is perfect, and it confirms that the structure through which condemnation comes is the same structure through which justification comes: federal representation.

Verse 19 is the capstone of the passage and the most theologically precise statement of the federal headship: “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.” The phrase “made sinners” (katestathasan hamartoloi, κατεστάθησαν ἁμαρτωλοί) is the federalist’s most important text: the verb kathistemi in this context carries the sense of being legally constituted or appointed in a status, not of being made genuinely personally sinful by one’s own acts. The many are constituted as sinners in Adam by virtue of Adam’s representative act, legally reckoned as sinners before

God, in the same way that the many are constituted as righteous in Christ by virtue of Christ's representative act, legally reckoned as righteous before God. The forensic structure is unmistakable, and the parallel with the imputation of Christ's righteousness confirms the imputation of Adam's guilt as the corresponding structure on the condemnation side.

III. The Three Views of Imputation: A Careful Examination

The Realistic, Federal, and Mediate Imputation Accounts and Their Theological Merits

A. The Realistic View and the Federal View

The question of how exactly Adam's guilt comes to be reckoned to his posterity has generated one of the most sustained and most technically refined debates in the history of Reformed theology, organized around three principal positions. Understanding these positions requires distinguishing the question of the mechanism of the imputation, how does Adam's guilt come to be reckoned to his posterity?, from the fact of the imputation, which all three positions affirm. All three positions hold that Adam's guilt is indeed reckoned to all human beings; they differ on the theological account of how that reckoning is grounded.

The realistic view (associated in the Reformed tradition primarily with the American theologian W. G. T. Shedd, though with roots in Augustine and the medieval tradition) holds that all human beings were seminally present in Adam, that the entire human race was contained in Adam's loins in a numerically real sense, as the acorn contains the oak that will grow from it, and therefore that all human beings genuinely participated in Adam's sin as the sin of the whole human nature that was present in him. On this view, the "because all sinned" of Romans 5:12 is a statement of literal historical fact: all human beings who have ever lived were genuinely, numerically present in Adam when he sinned, and the sin was therefore genuinely their own sin and not merely imputed to them from without. The realistic view has the advantage of providing a robust account of the genuine personal character of the guilt that is imputed: if all human beings genuinely participated in Adam's sin, there is no sense in which an external guilt is imposed on those who had no part in the act. But the realistic view faces significant difficulties: the concept of a numerical presence of all humanity in Adam's loins is philosophically problematic, the precise account of what it means for all future human beings to have been seminally present in a first parent is metaphysically obscure, and the view may undermine the analogy with Christ's imputed righteousness, since believers were not seminally present in Christ in the same way that the realists claim all humans were present in Adam.

The federal (or representative) view (the predominant position in the Westminster Standards and the broader Reformed confessional tradition, associated especially with Francis Turretin, Herman Witsius, Charles Hodge, and the Princeton theology) holds that the ground of the imputation is Adam's covenantal representative status rather than the human race's numerical presence in Adam. On the federal view, Adam sinned as the designated covenantal representative of the human race, the one appointed by God to stand in the covenant of works on behalf of all his posterity, and his transgression is legally reckoned to his posterity by the same divine act that constituted him their representative. The "because all sinned" of Romans 5:12 is understood on the federal view as the forensic statement that all are reckoned as having sinned in Adam, the sin is "theirs" not in the sense that they personally committed it but in the sense that their representative committed it on their behalf. The federal view has the decisive advantage of providing the precise parallel with the imputation of Christ's righteousness that Romans 5:15–19 requires: just as Christ's obedience is imputed to believers without their having personally performed it, so Adam's guilt is imputed to the human race without their having personally committed it. The representative structure is symmetrical, and the symmetry is what the Pauline argument requires.

B. The Mediate Imputation View and the Reformed Tradition's Assessment

The mediate imputation view (associated primarily with the seventeenth-century French Reformed theologian Josue de la Place and opposed vigorously by Francis Turretin) holds that the ground of the condemnation is not

the immediate imputation of Adam's guilt but the inherited corruption that all human beings receive from Adam by natural generation. On this view, all human beings are condemned not because Adam's guilt is directly imputed to them by the divine judge but because they are born with the corrupted nature that Adam's transgression produced and that they have inherited from him. The imputation of Adam's guilt, on the mediate view, is mediated through the inherited corruption: the corruption is the immediate ground of the condemnation, and the guilt is imputed on the basis of the corruption rather than the corruption flowing from the guilt. The mediate view was condemned by the Swiss Formula Consensus (1675) as inconsistent with the Reformed confessional tradition's account of original sin, and the Reformed tradition has consistently regarded it as theologically inadequate.

The primary theological difficulty with the mediate imputation view is its reversal of the relationship between guilt and corruption that the forensic character of the Pauline account requires. Romans 5:15–19's account of the parallel between Adam and Christ is explicitly forensic: the condemnation comes through one man's transgression, and the justification comes through one man's obedience. The parallelism requires that the condemnation is grounded in Adam's representative act in the same way that the justification is grounded in Christ's representative act, i.e., immediately, by imputation, rather than mediately, through a consequence that then becomes the ground. If the ground of condemnation in Adam is the inherited corruption rather than the imputed guilt, the parallel with Christ breaks down: believers are not justified on the basis of a transformed nature that then becomes the ground of the legal verdict of righteousness; they are justified on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Christ that precedes and produces the transformation of the nature. The forensic asymmetry of the mediate imputation view, the corruption grounding the guilt on the Adam side, while the righteousness grounds the transformation on the Christ side, is theologically incoherent within the structure of the Pauline parallel.

This series endorses the federal view as the exegetically most defensible and the theologically most coherent account of the imputation of Adam's sin. The federal view provides the precise parallel with the imputation of Christ's righteousness that Romans 5:15–19 requires; it grounds the condemnation in Adam's representative act rather than in the inherited corruption, maintaining the priority of the forensic over the natural in the account of the original sin's transmission; and it provides the most intelligible account of the justice of the imputation, an account that Section V will develop in full. The realistic view is a legitimate minority position within the Reformed tradition whose strengths are acknowledged; the mediate imputation view, by contrast, has been consistently assessed by the Reformed confessional tradition as theologically inadequate and has been explicitly rejected in the Swiss Formula Consensus.

“For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.”

1 Corinthians 15:22, NASB 1995

IV. The Adam-Christ Typology: The First and Last Adam

How the Type Illuminates the Antitype and the Antitype Surpasses the Type

A. Adam as the Type of the Coming One: Romans 5:14

Romans 5:14's declaration that Adam “is a type of Him who was to come” (NASB 1995) is one of the most theologically compressed and the most doctrinally rich single statements in the Pauline corpus. The typological relationship between Adam and Christ is not a superficial analogy between two historical figures who happened to occupy similar positions in the biblical narrative; it is the divinely designed correspondence between the two federal heads of the two humanities, the old humanity under condemnation and the new humanity under justification, whose representative acts determine the covenant standing of all those they represent. The type illuminates the antitype, and the antitype surpasses the type: Adam's federal headship is the shadow of which

Christ's federal headship is the substance, and the understanding of Christ's representative role in the covenant of grace is deepened and illuminated by the corresponding understanding of Adam's representative role in the covenant of works.

The specific points of the Adam-Christ typological correspondence are developed in Romans 5:15–19 and in 1 Corinthians 15:21–22 and 45–49. In Romans 5, the correspondence is primarily juridical: as Adam's disobedience produced condemnation for the many, so Christ's obedience produces justification for the many; as death reigned through Adam, so life reigns through Christ. In 1 Corinthians 15, the correspondence is primarily anthropological and eschatological: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive" (v. 22), and the contrast between Adam as the first man, from the earth and earthy, and Christ as the second man and the last Adam, from heaven (vv. 45–48). The two passages together establish the full scope of the typological correspondence: the first Adam is the head of the old humanity in its condition of sin, death, and the earthly nature; the Last Adam is the head of the new humanity in its condition of righteousness, life, and the heavenly nature.

The typological relationship is asymmetrical in the direction of the antitype's surpassing of the type: Paul emphasizes in Romans 5:15–17 that the grace of God is "much more" than the trespass, that the gift "abounds" in ways that the trespass does not, that those who receive the abundance of grace reign in life rather than merely being preserved from death. The Last Adam does not merely undo what the first Adam did; He accomplishes more than the first Adam could have accomplished even had he obeyed. The eschatological state to which the Last Adam's obedience leads, the glorified, resurrection existence of 1 Corinthians 15:45–49, bearing the image of the heavenly man as those who have borne the image of the earthly man, surpasses the pre-fall Edenic state of the first Adam in the same way that the eschatological exceeds the protological: what the first Adam forfeited by his disobedience was the Edenic state; what the Last Adam secured by His obedience is the eschatological glorification that the Edenic state was pointing toward.

B. *1 Corinthians 15:45–49: The Two Adams and the Two Humanities*

1 Corinthians 15:45–49 provides the most developed New Testament account of the anthropological contrast between the two federal heads and the two humanities they represent: "So also it is written, 'The first man, Adam, became a living soul.' The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly" (NASB 1995). The passage develops the Adam-Christ typology in its eschatological dimension: the contrast is not merely between Adam's guilt and Christ's righteousness (as in Romans 5) but between the entire character of the two humanities, their origin, their nature, and their destiny.

The "earthy" humanity of the first Adam is characterized by its material origin (from the earth, from the dust of Genesis 2:7), its natural constitution (a living soul, psyche, rather than a life-giving spirit), and its mortal destiny (returning to the dust from which it was taken, as Genesis 3:19 declares). The "heavenly" humanity of the Last Adam is characterized by its heavenly origin (the second man is from heaven, reflecting the eternal pre-existence of the Son who took on human flesh), its life-giving constitution (the Last Adam became a life-giving spirit, communicating the resurrection life to all who are united to Him), and its glorified destiny (bearing the image of the heavenly man in the eschatological resurrection body). The image-bearing that the present life's bearers of the earthy Adam's image will exchange for the image of the heavenly man is the transformation from the mortal, corruptible, dishonored, weak body of the present existence to the immortal, incorruptible, glorious, powerful resurrection body of the eschatological state.

The pastoral significance of the 1 Corinthians 15 account of the two Adams is the eschatological hope it generates for those who are united to the Last Adam: the present bearing of the earthy Adam's image, the mortal, corruptible, struggle-marked existence of the fallen human creature who is being renewed toward the image of

Christ, is the temporary condition of those whose destiny is the bearing of the heavenly man's image in the resurrection. The Christian who understands the two-Adam typology will not despair of the present existence's mortal limitations; she will understand them as the conditions of the earthy Adam's image that she is presently bearing, and she will hold them within the eschatological hope of the Last Adam's image that she will bear when the mortal puts on immortality and the perishable puts on the imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:54).

V. The Justice of Federal Headship: Answering the Objection

Is It Fair That All Are Condemned for One Man's Act?

A. *The Objection Stated and Its Theological Force Acknowledged*

The most persistent and the most practically urgent objection to the doctrine of federal headship is the justice objection: is it fair that all human beings are condemned for the transgression of a man they never knew, in a garden they never visited, in a covenant they were never personally consulted about? The objection is not trivial and should not be dismissed without genuine engagement. The intuition that personal guilt requires personal act has deep roots in both the moral philosophy of every culture and in the legal traditions of civilized societies: the person is held accountable for what she personally did, not for what someone else did on her behalf without her consent. If federal headship imputes to all human beings the guilt of an act they personally did not commit, it appears to violate the most basic principle of individual moral accountability.

The force of the objection is best acknowledged before the response is offered. The Reformed tradition has not pretended that the doctrine of federal headship is self-evidently obvious to the natural moral intuition; it has recognized that the imputation of Adam's guilt to his posterity is a specifically theological doctrine whose justification requires theological rather than merely intuitive arguments. The person who objects that it is not obvious why she should bear the guilt of Adam's transgression is not being obtuse; she is recognizing something genuine about the moral phenomenology of individual responsibility that the doctrine of federal headship presents in a challenging form. The theological response to the objection does not dismiss the intuition but seeks to show that the doctrine is compatible with a deeper account of justice than the individualistic account that the objection presupposes.

It is also worth noting that the justice objection, if successful against federal headship, would be equally successful against the imputation of Christ's righteousness to those who believe. If it is unjust for God to reckon to me the guilt of an act that I did not personally commit (Adam's transgression), then it is equally unjust for God to reckon to me the righteousness of an act that I did not personally perform (Christ's obedience). The same representative structure that imputes Adam's guilt is the representative structure that imputes Christ's righteousness; and the person who objects to the former on justice grounds has undermined the latter as well. This is not a knockdown argument against the objection, but it is a significant consideration: the objector who wishes to preserve the imputation of Christ's righteousness while rejecting the imputation of Adam's guilt must provide a principled account of why the one imputation is just while the other is not, an account that the history of the debate has found very difficult to supply.

B. *The Theological Response: Representation, Consent, and Divine Wisdom*

The Reformed tradition's primary theological response to the justice objection is the representation argument: the imputation of Adam's guilt to his posterity is not the imposition of an external guilt on innocent parties but the legal consequence of a representative arrangement that God established for the entire human race in the most favorable possible conditions. Adam was the optimal representative: he was created in righteousness and holiness, without the corrupted nature that his posterity would inherit from him, possessed of the full moral and spiritual capacity to obey the covenant's condition, and placed in the ideal environment of the pre-fall garden with every advantage that the created order could provide. If any representative of the human race could have passed the probationary test, Adam was that representative; and if any representative could have secured the covenant's

blessings for the entire human family, the obedience of this representative would have done it. The arrangement was not designed to disadvantage the human race; it was designed to give the human race the best possible opportunity for the covenant's blessing through the optimal representative.

The consent argument supplements the representation argument: the objection that the human race was never personally consulted about the arrangement assumes that consent is the necessary condition of legitimate representation, but this assumption is not self-evident and is not universally applicable. Nations are bound by treaties their ambassadors sign without individual citizens having personally consented to the treaty terms; children are bound by contracts their parents make on their behalf without having personally agreed to the terms. The principle of representation, that a designated representative's act is binding on those he represents, is not unique to the doctrine of federal headship; it is a principle embedded in the structures of human social, legal, and political life. The question is not whether representation can be legitimate without individual consent but whether God's establishment of Adam as the representative of the human race was the kind of legitimate representative arrangement that binds those represented, and the Reformed tradition's answer is that it was, precisely because it was established by God Himself and because it gave the human race the optimal representative in the optimal conditions.

The most theologically satisfying response to the justice objection, however, is not the abstract argument about the legitimacy of representation but the specific demonstration that the same principle that condemns us in Adam saves us in Christ. The person who objects to the federal headship of Adam is the person who, if consistent, must also object to the federal headship of Christ. The same divine wisdom that established Adam as the representative of the first humanity established Christ as the representative of the new humanity; and the same forensic structure that imputes Adam's guilt to those he represents imputes Christ's righteousness to those He represents. The doctrine of federal headship is not a theologically isolated oddity imposed on the creation order; it is the expression of the Creator's consistent pattern of governing the human community through designated representatives whose acts are binding on those they represent. And in the gracious purposes of God, the representative structure that brought condemnation in the first Adam has become, in a way that the first Adam's failure could never have predicted, the structure through which the Last Adam's obedience brings the justification and the life that the first Adam failed to secure.

“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

2 Corinthians 5:21, NASB 1995

VI. The Pastoral Doxology: Humbled Before Adam, Exalted in Christ

The Doctrine of Federal Headship as the Engine of the Gospel's Humility and Joy

The doctrine of federal headship is not a theological curiosity designed for academic discussion; it is the structural architecture of the gospel's most fundamental announcements, that every human being stands condemned before God, and that every human being can stand justified before God through the representative obedience of the Last Adam. The pastoral power of the doctrine is the pastoral power of the gospel itself: the humbling recognition that we stand condemned not because of our own righteousness but because of Adam's transgression, which produces in the gospel's recipient the specific posture of the one who has nothing to contribute to her own justification; and the exalting recognition that we stand justified not because of our own righteousness but because of Christ's obedience, which produces in the gospel's recipient the specific posture of gratitude and wonder that the grace of God's provision through the Last Adam's representative work demands.

The humbling dimension of the federal headship doctrine is its most immediate pastoral contribution: it dismantles every form of human self-righteousness at its deepest level. The person who stands condemned in Adam cannot appeal to her own relative goodness, her own moral achievements, or her own comparative standing with other members of the human race as grounds for her justification before God. She stands under the legal verdict of the covenant's Judge, condemned because the representative whose act determined her covenant standing transgressed the covenant's condition, and no personal goodness, however genuine, can undo a legal verdict that does not derive from personal wickedness. The condemnation in Adam is the most comprehensive possible dismantling of every self-justifying strategy the fallen human creature can devise, because it is a condemnation that precedes and grounds every personal act rather than deriving from them. The person who has understood federal headship has understood that she stands before God not as the accumulation of her personal moral achievements but as a member of the condemned race of the first Adam, and that nothing she can do from within that standing can change the standing itself.

The exalting dimension of the federal headship doctrine is its most profound pastoral contribution: it grounds the justification of the sinner in a work that is entirely outside the sinner's own doing and entirely adequate for the sinner's need. 2 Corinthians 5:21's account of the great exchange, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (NASB 1995), is the most compressed statement of the imputation that the federal headship of Christ generates: the Last Adam's obedience, imputed to all who are united to Him by faith, is the basis of the standing before God that no human being could establish by her own righteousness. Just as the condemnation in Adam is the legal consequence of a representative transgression that the condemned person did not personally commit, so the justification in Christ is the legal gift of a representative obedience that the justified person did not personally perform. The symmetry is perfect, and its perfection is the ground of the gospel's joy: the person who knows that she is condemned in Adam knows that the condemnation was through no fault of her own goodness; and the person who knows that she is justified in Christ knows that the justification is through no merit of her own righteousness. Both the condemnation and the justification are the consequences of representative acts, the first humbling beyond all self-congratulation, the second exalting beyond all self-despair. This is the doctrine of federal headship's specific and irreplaceable pastoral power: it drives the sinner to the cross because she has nowhere else to go, and it keeps her at the cross because she has found there the only righteousness that the Judge will accept.

The lesson that began with the monogenetic unity of Lesson 23 and the federal headship of Lesson 24 now prepares the theological ground for the final two lessons of the series: Lesson 25's account of the fall's comprehensive devastation of the human creature's original dignity and Lesson 26's doxological conclusion. The two headships, the first Adam's condemnation and the Last Adam's redemption, are the two poles of the entire Anthropology series' theological arc: from the creation of the image-bearing creature in its original righteousness and dignity, through the representative transgression that brought the entire race under condemnation, to the representative obedience that secured for all who believe in the Last Adam the righteousness, the life, and the eschatological glorification that the first Adam's failure forfeited and that the sovereign grace of God has more than restored. The whole of the human story, creation, fall, redemption, glorification, is the story of two federal heads and two representative acts, and the Christian who has grasped this structure has grasped the architecture of the entire biblical gospel.

"Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly."

1 Corinthians 15:49, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Federal Headship	The doctrine that Adam stood before God as the covenantal representative (the federal head) of all his natural posterity, so that his act of transgression in the covenant of works was legally reckoned to all those he represented. The term “federal” derives from the Latin foedus (covenant): Adam is the covenantal head of the human race in the sense that a nation’s ambassador or representative is the federal agent whose acts are binding on those he represents. Federal headship is distinguished from mere biological ancestry: Adam’s influence on his posterity is not merely the biological transmission of a corrupted nature but the legal (forensic) imputation of the guilt incurred by his representative transgression of the covenant of works.
Imputation	The legal (forensic) act by which God reckons, credits, or charges something to a person’s account. In the doctrine of federal headship, Adam’s guilt is imputed to his posterity: God legally reckons Adam’s guilt to all those Adam represented in the covenant of works. The parallel imputation in the doctrine of justification is the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to those who believe: God legally reckons Christ’s obedience to those He represents in the covenant of grace. The same forensic structure governs both imputations, establishing the parallel between condemnation in Adam and justification in Christ that Romans 5:12–21 develops.
The Realistic View (of Imputation)	The view, associated primarily with W. G. T. Shedd and rooted in Augustine’s tradition, that all human beings were seminally present in Adam, that the entire human race was numerically contained in Adam’s loins, and therefore that all human beings genuinely participated in Adam’s sin as the sin of the whole human nature present in him. On the realistic view, the “because all sinned” of Romans 5:12 means that all human beings literally sinned in Adam because they were present in him. The view provides a robust account of the genuine personal character of the guilt but faces metaphysical difficulties about the nature of the seminal presence and may undermine the analogy with the imputation of Christ’s righteousness.
The Federal View (of Imputation)	The predominant position in the Westminster Standards and the broader Reformed confessional tradition, holding that the ground of the imputation is Adam’s covenantal representative status rather than the human race’s numerical presence in Adam. On the federal view, Adam sinned as the designated covenantal representative of the human race, and his transgression is legally reckoned to his posterity by the divine act that constituted him their representative. The “because all sinned” of Romans 5:12 is a forensic statement: all are reckoned as having sinned in Adam because their representative sinned. The federal view provides the precise parallel with the imputation of Christ’s righteousness that Romans 5:15–19 requires and is endorsed by the Reformed confessional tradition as the most theologically adequate account.
The Mediate Imputation View	The view of Josue de la Place (17th century French Reformed) holding that the ground of condemnation is not the immediate imputation of Adam’s guilt but the inherited corruption all human beings receive from Adam by natural generation. On this view, all are condemned because they are born with the corrupted nature inherited from Adam, and Adam’s guilt is imputed to them on the basis of the

	corruption rather than the corruption flowing from the guilt. The view was condemned by the Swiss Formula Consensus (1675) and rejected by the Reformed confessional tradition as reversing the proper forensic priority: it makes the corruption the ground of the guilt rather than the guilt preceding and producing the corruption as the judicial consequence of Adam's representative transgression.
The Adam-Christ Typology	The typological correspondence between Adam and Christ as the two federal heads of the two humanities. Romans 5:14 declares Adam to be "a type of Him who was to come," establishing the divinely designed correspondence between Adam's representative role in the covenant of works and Christ's representative role in the covenant of grace. The type (Adam) illuminates the antitype (Christ): Adam's condemnation of the many by his disobedience is the shadow of which Christ's justification of the many by His obedience is the substance. The antitype surpasses the type: the grace of the Last Adam's obedience "abounds much more" than the trespass of the first Adam (Romans 5:15–17).
The Last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45)	Paul's designation of Jesus Christ as the eschatological completion and surpassing fulfillment of the Adam-typology: "The last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (1 Corinthians 15:45). The "last" indicates that Christ is not merely the second in a series but the final, eschatological representative whose obedience closes the history opened by the first Adam's disobedience. Where the first Adam is earthy, mortal, and death-producing, the Last Adam is heavenly, life-giving, and the source of the resurrection life that 1 Corinthians 15:22's "all will be made alive" promises to all who are in Him.
The Great Exchange (2 Corinthians 5:21)	Paul's compressed statement of the double imputation that the gospel's justification involves: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." The great exchange is the imputation of the believer's sin to Christ (the sinless Son of God is made to bear the guilt of sin) and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer (the guilty sinner is made to bear the righteousness of the obedient Son). The great exchange is the soteriological expression of the federal headship structure: just as Adam's guilt is imputed to his posterity by his representative transgression, so Christ's righteousness is imputed to his people by his representative obedience.
Hosea 6:7	The Old Testament text most directly referencing the covenantal character of Adam's transgression: "But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant; there they have dealt treacherously against Me" (NASB 1995). The verse identifies Israel's sin as comparable to Adam's specific sin: both involve the transgression of a specific covenant arrangement with God rather than merely the violation of a general moral principle. The verse is significant for the federal headship doctrine because it confirms the covenantal interpretation of Adam's transgression: Adam did not merely violate a prohibition but transgressed a covenant, and the covenant's federal character is what makes the representative consequences of the transgression theologically intelligible.
Swiss Formula Consensus (1675)	The Swiss Reformed confessional statement (Formula Consensus Helvetica) issued in 1675 in response to the Salmurian theology of the French Reformed academies at Saumur, particularly the mediate imputation view of Josue de la Place and the hypothetical universalism of Moise Amyraut. The Formula Consensus rejected mediate imputation and affirmed the immediate imputation of Adam's guilt to his

	posterity as the ground of the condemnation, establishing the precedence of the forensic over the natural in the account of original sin's transmission. The document is the most explicit confessional rejection of mediate imputation in the Reformed tradition.
--	--

Practical Application

A. *For the Mind: What Must We Believe?*

We must believe the doctrine of federal headship with the theological seriousness that its place in the architecture of the gospel requires. The imputation of Adam's guilt to his posterity is not a peripheral doctrinal detail; it is the structural foundation of the entire biblical account of original sin, and the representative structure it establishes is the same representative structure through which the imputation of Christ's righteousness operates. The person who weakens or abandons the federal headship of Adam has not made a minor concession to cultural pressure; she has undermined the analogical foundation of the gospel's account of justification. The Reformed tradition's consistent insistence on the priority of the forensic over the natural, on the imputed guilt as the ground of the condemnation rather than the inherited corruption, is the insistence that the structure of condemnation mirrors the structure of justification, and both are forensic before they are experiential.

We must also believe the specific content of the Adam-Christ typology with the eschatological seriousness that 1 Corinthians 15's account of the two Adams requires. The earthy image that the first Adam's bearing posterity presently bear is not the permanent condition of those who are in Christ; it is the temporary condition of those whose destiny is the bearing of the heavenly man's image in the resurrection. The Christian who understands the two-Adam typology will not despair of the present existence's mortal limitations but will hold them within the eschatological hope of the transformation from the earthy to the heavenly that the Last Adam's resurrection has secured.

B. *For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?*

Let the federal headship doctrine produce in you the specific combination of humility and gratitude that the gospel always produces when it is genuinely understood. The humility is the humility of the one who knows that she stands condemned before God not because of her own personal wickedness but because of the representative transgression of the first Adam, a humility that dismantles every form of comparative self-righteousness because the condemnation is prior to and independent of personal moral achievement. The gratitude is the gratitude of the one who knows that she stands justified before God not because of her own personal righteousness but because of the representative obedience of the Last Adam, a gratitude that is unmixed with self-congratulation because the justification is entirely the gift of Another's merit.

Desire the specific quality of wonder at the great exchange that 2 Corinthians 5:21 describes: that the One who knew no sin was made to be sin for us, and that we who are sinners in Adam are made to be the righteousness of God in Him. The wonder is appropriate to the magnitude of the exchange: the Last Adam bears the guilt of the first Adam's race so that the first Adam's race might bear the righteousness of the Last Adam's obedience. This is the most extraordinary transaction in the history of the universe, and the person who has understood federal headship will never read 2 Corinthians 5:21 again without the specific quality of awestruck gratitude that the great exchange demands.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

- Read Romans 5:12–21 slowly and carefully, attending to the specific development of the argument through each verse. For each element of the Adam-Christ parallel (one man's transgression / one man's obedience; condemnation / justification; death / life; the many made sinners / the many made righteous), identify: (a) the specific forensic or representative character of the element; (b) the way in which the element confirms the federal rather than the realistic or mediate imputation interpretation; and (c) the specific pastoral implication of the element for the understanding of either the human condition of condemnation or the gospel's provision of justification. After working through all five parallel elements, write a one-paragraph

summary of what the passage teaches about the federal headship structure and why that structure matters for the gospel's proclamation.

- Prepare a clear and accessible explanation of the three views of imputation, the realistic view, the federal view, and the mediate imputation view, suitable for a theologically literate congregation member who has heard the terms but does not fully understand the differences. The explanation should: (a) state each view's account of the ground of the imputation; (b) identify the specific strength of each view; (c) identify the specific weakness or theological problem with each view; and (d) explain why the federal view is the most exegetically defensible and the most theologically adequate of the three. After preparing the explanation, identify the single most common misunderstanding of the imputation doctrine that you encounter in the congregation and develop a specific strategy for addressing it.
- **Read Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, volume 2, chapter 8 ("The Imputation of Adam's Sin").** Hodge's treatment is the most comprehensive and the most accessible English-language account of the three views of imputation and the Reformed tradition's theological arguments for the federal view. His engagement with the realistic view (which he rejects), the mediate imputation view (which he rejects more decisively), and the federal view (which he defends) provides the historical and theological depth that the imputation debate requires. For the Adam-Christ typology in its exegetical detail, John Murray's *The Imputation of Adam's Sin* (1959) is the most exegetically rigorous treatment of Romans 5:12–19 available in the Reformed tradition and is indispensable for the serious student of the federal headship doctrine.
- Practice the pastoral application of the federal headship doctrine with a specific scenario: a congregation member who is struggling with the sense that her faith is inadequate, that her personal righteousness is too thin, her repentance too shallow, and her love for God too inconsistent to be acceptable before God. How does the doctrine of federal headship, specifically the teaching that justification before God depends entirely on the Last Adam's representative obedience imputed to the believer rather than on the believer's personal moral achievement, address this specific pastoral situation? Prepare a five-minute pastoral counsel, grounded in Romans 5:15–19 and 2 Corinthians 5:21, that communicates the gospel's specific comfort for this specific form of spiritual distress.
- Spend time meditating on 2 Corinthians 5:21 as the most compressed single statement of the great exchange that the federal headship structure makes possible. For each element of the verse, "He made Him who knew no sin"; "to be sin on our behalf"; "so that we might become the righteousness of God"; "in Him", ask: what does this element reveal about the character of the exchange? What does it reveal about the character of the One who made the exchange possible? What does it reveal about the specific position of the believer before God as a result of the exchange? And what does it reveal about the ongoing significance of the believer's union with the Last Adam as the ground of the righteousness she has received? Let the meditation produce the specific quality of gratitude and wonder that the great exchange demands, and let that gratitude and wonder be the pastoral posture with which you bring the gospel's comfort to those who have lost sight of the sufficiency of the Last Adam's representative work.

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- Before working through this lesson, how clearly did you understand the difference between the inheritance of a corrupted nature from Adam (the natural dimension of original sin) and the imputation of Adam's guilt to his posterity (the forensic dimension of federal headship)? Did you hold the doctrine of original sin primarily in terms of the inherited corruption, primarily in terms of the imputed guilt, or in terms of both? Has the lesson clarified or complicated your prior understanding of the doctrine, and in what specific way?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read Romans 5:12–21 carefully. What specific features of the passage most clearly establish the forensic (legal) character of the imputation Paul is describing? In particular, attend to: (a) the aorist tense of “all sinned” in verse 12; (b) the terms “condemnation” and “justification” in verses 16–18; (c) the verb “made sinners” and “made righteous” (*katestathasan*) in verse 19; and (d) the scope of the condemnation and the justification in verses 18–19. For each feature, explain how it contributes to the forensic interpretation and how it bears on the three views of imputation.
- Read 1 Corinthians 15:20–49 in full. What is the specific argument Paul is making about the resurrection in this passage, and at what specific points does the Adam-Christ typology enter the argument? What are the specific contrasts Paul draws between the first Adam and the Last Adam in verses 45–49 (soul/spirit; earthy/heavenly; mortal/immortal; bearing the image of the earthy/bearing the image of the heavenly)? How do these contrasts illuminate the eschatological dimension of the typology, the movement from the earthy Adam's image to the heavenly Adam's image that the resurrection makes possible?
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:14–21. What is the specific context in which Paul makes the “great exchange” declaration of verse 21? How does the declaration of verse 21 (“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”) relate to the new creation language of verse 17 and the reconciliation language of verses 18–20? And what does the phrase “in Him” (*en auto*) in verse 21 establish about the ground on which the believer's justification rests?
- Read Hosea 6:7. What is the specific comparison Hosea draws between Israel's sin and Adam's transgression? What does the identification of Adam's act as the “transgression of the covenant” establish about the covenantal character of the first sin? How does this Old Testament reference to Adam's covenantal transgression support the federal headship interpretation of the relationship between Adam's act and its consequences for his posterity?
- Read Romans 5:15–17, attending specifically to the words “much more” and “abound” that Paul uses to describe the relationship between the grace of Christ and the trespass of Adam. In what specific ways does Paul claim that the grace of the Last Adam exceeds the trespass of the first Adam? Is the “much more” primarily quantitative (more people are justified than are condemned) or qualitative (the justification is more glorious than the condemnation was devastating) or eschatological (the eschatological state to which justification leads exceeds the Edenic state that the first Adam occupied)? What specifically does the “much more” of the Last Adam's obedience imply about the nature of the eschatological inheritance that the redeemed receive?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson presents the realistic view, the federal view, and the mediate imputation view as three competing accounts of the mechanism of imputation, all of which affirm the fact of imputation. Some interpreters have argued that the distinctions between the three views are primarily scholastic refinements that have little practical theological significance, since all three affirm that all human beings stand under the condemnation of Adam's sin and that the ground of justification is entirely in Christ. Do you find this argument persuasive? Are there specific theological stakes, in the doctrine of original sin, in the parallel with

the imputation of Christ's righteousness, or in the account of the justice of the condemnation, that make the distinction between the three views genuinely significant rather than merely scholastic?

- The lesson argues that the mediate imputation view reverses the proper forensic priority by making the inherited corruption the ground of the guilt rather than the guilt preceding and producing the corruption. Is this reversal as theologically significant as the lesson suggests? Does it matter whether the corruption precedes the guilt (mediate view) or the guilt precedes the corruption (federal view)? What specific doctrinal consequences follow from each ordering, and which ordering is most consistent with the Pauline account of the parallel between condemnation in Adam and justification in Christ?
- The justice objection to federal headship, that it is unfair to condemn those who did not personally commit Adam's transgression, is one of the most persistent objections to the Reformed doctrine of original sin. The lesson's response focuses on the representation argument (Adam was the optimal representative in optimal conditions), the consent argument (representation can be legitimate without individual consent), and the symmetry argument (the same principle that condemns in Adam saves in Christ). Which of these responses do you find most theologically compelling? Are there dimensions of the justice objection that these responses do not adequately address?
- The Adam-Christ typology of Romans 5:14 establishes that Adam is the "type of Him who was to come." The type-antitype relationship in biblical typology typically involves the antitype surpassing and fulfilling the type. In what specific ways does the Last Adam's obedience surpass the first Adam's potential obedience, i.e., even if Adam had obeyed perfectly, would the outcome have been the same as the outcome of the Last Adam's obedience? Or does the "much more" of Romans 5:15–17 imply that the Last Adam's eschatological achievement exceeds what a merely obedient first Adam could have secured?
- The lesson's closing section argues that the doctrine of federal headship produces a specific combination of humility (we stand condemned in Adam not because of our own wickedness) and gratitude (we stand justified in Christ not because of our own righteousness). Does the doctrine actually produce these pastoral effects in practice? What specific failures of preaching, teaching, or pastoral care most commonly prevent the federal headship doctrine from generating its intended pastoral fruits, and what specific formation would most effectively develop the doctrine's humbling and exalting pastoral power in the congregation?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson argues that the weakening of the federal headship doctrine undermines the analogical foundation of the gospel's account of justification by faith. In the congregation you serve, how clearly is the connection between the imputation of Adam's guilt and the imputation of Christ's righteousness communicated? Do congregants understand that the same forensic structure that makes their condemnation in Adam intelligible is the structure that makes their justification in Christ possible? What specific preaching, teaching, or catechesis would most effectively establish this connection in the congregation's theological understanding?
- The pastoral doxology of the federal headship doctrine, the humbling before Adam and the exaltation in Christ, is the doctrinal engine of the specific combination of repentance and joy that genuine gospel preaching produces. How adequately does the preaching in the congregation you serve communicate both dimensions of this pastoral doxology? Is the preaching more effective at producing the humility that the condemnation in Adam requires or the joy that the justification in Christ produces? What specific adjustments in the content, the emphasis, or the pastoral application of the preaching would most effectively develop the underdeveloped dimension?
- The mediate imputation view's reversal of the forensic priority, making the inherited corruption the ground of the guilt rather than the guilt preceding the corruption, produces a specific practical distortion in the pastoral care of those struggling with sin: it locates the problem in the experiential corruption rather than in the forensic standing, and it therefore directs the solution toward the management of the corruption rather than toward the forensic standing before God that the imputed righteousness of Christ provides. Do

you recognize this distortion in the pastoral culture of any congregation you have served or observed? What specific preaching and pastoral care would most effectively correct it?

- The “much more” of the Last Adam’s obedience, the excess of grace over trespass that Romans 5:15–17 emphasizes, is the specific theological ground for the Christian’s eschatological hope: the inheritance of the Last Adam’s obedience exceeds anything the first Adam could have secured, even had he obeyed perfectly. How vividly and how specifically does the congregation you serve hold this eschatological hope? Is the “much more” of the Last Adam’s work a living, motivating, hope-generating reality in the congregation’s theological imagination, or is it a doctrinal affirmation that has not been translated into the specific forms of expectation and longing that 1 Corinthians 15:49’s promise of bearing the image of the heavenly man generates? What specific formation would most effectively translate the doctrinal affirmation into the living eschatological hope that the Last Adam’s surpassing work deserves?
- The Anthropology series is approaching its conclusion. Lessons 25 and 26 will address the fall’s comprehensive devastation of the human creature’s original dignity and the doxological conclusion of the entire series. Before entering Lesson 25, reflect on the cumulative theological formation that the twenty-four lessons of the series have provided. What specific convictions about the human creature, its creation in the image of God, its original righteousness, its covenantal accountability, its cultural mandate, its solidarity in Adam, its condemnation in the first Adam’s representative transgression, have been most significantly deepened or clarified? And how has the developing understanding of the human creature’s condition in Adam prepared you to receive and to communicate the doctrine of the fall’s comprehensive devastation that Lesson 25 will present?

Prayer Focus

Open this twenty-fourth lesson of the Anthropology series with a meditative reading of Romans 5:1–21, taking the entire passage as the prayer’s scriptural frame. Begin with verses 1–11’s account of what the justified person now possesses: peace with God (v. 1), access into grace (v. 2), the hope of the glory of God (v. 2), the Spirit poured out in the heart (v. 5), the love of God (v. 5), and the reconciliation that Christ’s death has secured (v. 10). Read these verses as the inventory of the Last Adam’s gift, the specific goods that the representative obedience of the One who knew no sin has secured for all who are united to Him by faith. Then read verses 12–21 as the theological account of the two representative heads whose acts determined the availability or the deprivation of these goods: the first Adam through whom sin and death entered, the one transgression that produced condemnation for the many, the reign of death; and the Last Adam whose obedience produces the grace and the gift and the justification of life that abound much more than the trespass. Read the passage as the theological map of your own standing before God: you stand in the condemnation of the first Adam by birth, and you stand in the justification of the Last Adam by faith. Let the reading produce the specific combination of sober realism about the condemnation and doxological wonder at the justification that the passage is designed to generate.

Spend time in Trinitarian adoration, allowing the doctrine of federal headship to deepen your worship of the Triune God who designed the representative structure, appointed the Last Adam as the representative of the new humanity, and accomplished in the Last Adam’s obedience what the first Adam’s transgression forfeited. Begin with the Father, who in His sovereign wisdom and grace established the covenant of works with Adam as the representative of the human family, who was not surprised by Adam’s transgression but had already determined the remedy in the eternal counsel of the Triune God, and who sent His own Son as the Last Adam to accomplish the representative obedience that the covenant of grace requires. Adore the Father who designed both the representative structure through which the condemnation came and the representative structure through which the justification comes, who holds both in the single counsel of His sovereign and gracious purposes for the creature He made in His own image. Move to the Son, who took on the humanity of the condemned race of the first Adam without sharing in the guilt of the first Adam’s transgression, who stood in the covenant of grace as the representative of the new humanity that the Father had given Him, who bore the guilt of the first Adam’s race in His own body on the cross and secured by His representative obedience the justification that the many receive in Him. Adore the Last Adam whose act has accomplished more for those who are in Him than the first Adam’s obedience could ever have secured for those who would have been in him: not merely the Edenic state of the original creation but the eschatological glorification of the new creation, the bearing of the heavenly man’s image in the resurrection body that death and resurrection have made possible. Conclude with the Spirit, who unites the believer to the Last Adam by faith, who applies the benefits of the Last Adam’s representative obedience to the individual who receives the gospel, and who is at work in the heart of the believer producing the specific quality of humility before the condemnation in Adam and the specific quality of gratitude before the justification in Christ that the doctrine of federal headship is designed to generate.

Pray together as this twenty-fourth lesson approaches the culmination of the Anthropology series in three specific directions. First, for the theological formation that the doctrine of federal headship requires: that the congregation would hold the federal headship with the theological precision and the pastoral richness that the doctrine deserves, understanding the forensic priority of the imputed guilt over the inherited corruption, the parallel between the condemnation in Adam and the justification in Christ, and the specific pastoral doxology that the great exchange of 2 Corinthians 5:21 generates. Second, for the specific humility and the specific gratitude that the doctrine is designed to produce: pray that the condemnation in Adam would drive the congregation to the foot of the cross without the self-justification that pretends the condemnation is less comprehensive than the federal headship declares, and that the justification in Christ would fill the congregation with the unmixed gratitude that the imputed righteousness of the Last Adam deserves. Third, in anticipation of the final two lessons of the series: pray for the theological attentiveness that Lesson 25’s account of the fall’s comprehensive devastation will require, the honest reckoning with the depth and the breadth of what the first Adam’s

transgression has done to the image-bearing creature that the twenty-four lessons of this series have been studying, and for the doxological readiness that Lesson 26's concluding celebration will call for: the praise of the One who made the image-bearing creature, who did not abandon it in its condemnation, and who in the Last Adam has secured for it a destiny more glorious than its original dignity.

“Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Romans 5:20–21, NASB 1995

Key Texts: *Romans 5:1–21; 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, 45–49; 2 Corinthians 5:14–21; Hosea 6:7; Genesis 2:15–17; Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 6*

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Dr. Joshua Nichols

josh@faithfultotheword.com | faithfultotheword.com