

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

HAMARTIOLOGY

The Doctrine of Sin

The Catastrophe from Which the Gospel Rescues Us

UNIT 4: THE TRANSMISSION OF SIN HOW SIN PASSES FROM ADAM TO ALL HIS POSTERITY

Lesson 10

The Imputation of Adam's Sin

How the Guilt of the One Became the Condemnation of All

The Doctrine That Explains Universal Condemnation and Makes Justification Intelligible

“Through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men” — and through one act of righteousness, justification to all

Key Texts: Romans 5:12–19; 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, 45–49; Genesis 2:17; 3:6; Psalm 51:5

“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. 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 5:18–19, NASB 1995

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Introduction

We begin Unit 4 of our Hamartiology series, which turns from the nature of sin to its transmission, from what sin is to how sin passes from Adam to all his posterity. The preceding units have established the fact of universal human sinfulness with thoroughness: Genesis 3–11 demonstrated the historical origin and escalating spread of sin; Romans 1–3 delivered the apostolic indictment that leaves every class of humanity without a word of self-defense; Lessons 7–8 defined the nature of sin through its biblical vocabulary and the distinction between original and actual sin; and Lesson 9 analyzed the gradations of moral seriousness across different categories and circumstances of sin. What remains to be addressed in this unit is the mechanism: how exactly does Adam’s sin become the universal condition of the entire human race?

The doctrine of the imputation of Adam’s sin is the theological answer to that question. Imputation is the divine act of reckoning something to the account of a person, in this case, the reckoning of Adam’s guilt to all his natural posterity by virtue of Adam’s representative headship of the race under the covenant of works. This doctrine is simultaneously the most contested and the most exegetically central element of the doctrine of original sin, because it is the specific mechanism that connects Adam’s historical transgression to the universal condemnation that Paul describes in Romans 5:12–19. And it is, as the Reformed tradition has consistently insisted, not merely a component of Hamartiology but the structural foundation of the doctrine of justification: the same logic of covenantal representation that grounds the imputation of Adam’s guilt to all his posterity is the logic that grounds the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to all who believe. To understand the first imputation is to understand the structural necessity of the second. To deny the first is, ultimately and inevitably, to undermine the second.

This lesson develops the doctrine of the imputation of Adam’s sin in six major sections. Section I examines the exegetical foundation of the doctrine in Romans 5:12–19, attending to the details of Paul’s argument with particular care. Section II addresses the two principal models of the mechanism of imputation, federal headship and seminal headship, and the theological significance of the distinction. Section III examines the major objections to the doctrine, particularly the charge of injustice. Section IV addresses the competing theological traditions: Pelagianism, the Arminian modification, and the Reformed insistence on full imputation. Section V develops the structural symmetry between the imputation of Adam’s sin and the imputation of Christ’s righteousness, establishing why the denial of the former is theologically fatal to the latter. Section VI addresses the pastoral and doxological implications of the entire doctrine.

A preliminary methodological note is in order. The doctrine of the imputation of Adam’s sin is one of the most technically demanding in the entire Hamartiology curriculum, because it requires sustained engagement with the details of Paul’s argument in Romans 5, with the Latin theological tradition’s vocabulary, and with the competing interpretive traditions that have shaped the debate since Augustine’s confrontation with Pelagius in the early fifth century. The student who works carefully through this material will emerge with a theological precision and a historical depth of understanding that equips her not merely to confess the doctrine but to defend it, to explain it, and to trace its pastoral and doxological implications with confidence. The effort is well worth making, because the doctrine of imputation is not a theological technicality of interest only to specialists; it is the structural backbone of the gospel itself, and the person who understands it well is the person who understands most clearly why the grace of justification is not merely good news but the best possible news for sinners who stand condemned before the tribunal of the infinitely holy God.

One further note: this lesson concludes the three-lesson sub-unit on the transmission of sin (Lessons 10–12) that constitutes Unit 4. Lesson 10 treats the imputation of Adam’s guilt. Lesson 11 will treat total depravity, the comprehensive corruption of every human faculty that results from original sin. Lesson 12 will treat total inability, the specific incapacity of the unregenerate person to seek God or do genuine spiritual good apart from the sovereign regenerating work of the Spirit. Together, these three lessons develop the full picture of what the transmission of sin has done to the human race: it has made us guilty (imputation), comprehensively corrupt (total depravity), and spiritually incapacitated (total inability). And the gospel’s answer to each dimension is the corresponding provision of justification (for guilt), regeneration and sanctification (for corruption), and the sovereign, effectual call of the Spirit (for inability).

I. The Exegetical Foundation

Romans 5:12–19 and the Structure of Paul’s Argument

A. *The Argument in Overview: One Man, Universal Consequences*

Romans 5:12–19 is the most formally structured and exegetically significant treatment of the relationship between Adam’s transgression and the human condition in the entire New Testament. Paul’s argument moves through three identifiable phases: the statement of the governing principle in verse 12, the evidence for and elaboration of that principle in verses 13–17, and the formal parallel between the two Adams in verses 18–19. Each phase contributes a distinct element to the overall doctrine of imputation, and each requires careful exegetical attention.

The governing principle of verse 12 is stated with the compression that characterizes Paul’s most theologically dense passages: “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.” The phrase “just as” (*hōsper*) begins the formal comparison that will not be completed until verse 18, the sentence is deliberately left open, its apodosis postponed for six verses while Paul elaborates the grounds of the principle. This structural feature of the argument is significant: Paul does not merely assert the connection between Adam’s sin and universal condemnation; he spends six verses establishing the evidence for it before delivering the formal parallel. The evidence is the universal reign of death as a judicial consequence: death reigned, Paul will argue, not because every individual committed a transgression analogous to Adam’s, but because the one man’s one transgression had representative, covenantal, legally operative consequences for the entire race he headed.

The causal phrase at the end of verse 12, “because all sinned” (*eph’ hō pantas hemarton*), is among the most exegetically debated in the New Testament. The Augustinian tradition, following the Latin Vulgate’s translation “*in quo omnes peccaverunt*” (“in whom all sinned”), understood the phrase as a relative clause referring to Adam: all humanity sinned in Adam, because all were representatively or seminally present in him. Most modern interpreters understand *eph’ hō* as a causal conjunction (“because”) rather than a relative pronoun, making the clause a statement about the universal actuality of sin rather than a specific claim about Adamic representation. The Reformed tradition has generally accepted the causal reading while insisting that the causal reading does not eliminate the need for the Adamic representation doctrine: it raises the question of why all have sinned, and the answer, supplied by Paul’s argument in verses 13–17 and the formal parallel of verses 18–19, is that all have sinned and come under condemnation because they have all been constituted sinners by virtue of the one man’s representative disobedience.

B. *The Evidence: Death Reigned Even Over Those Who Had Not Sinned Like Adam*

The most decisive exegetical argument for the doctrine of imputed guilt in Romans 5 appears in verses 13–14, where Paul offers a specific, historically grounded argument for why universal condemnation cannot be explained merely by universal personal transgression: “For until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.”

The logic of this argument is precise and powerful. Paul begins with a principle: sin is not legally counted (*ou ellogetai*, not imputed, not reckoned) when there is no law. Between Adam and Moses, there was no formally promulgated law, no written code with explicit sanctions attached. If individual personal transgressions were the basis of condemnation, and if sin is only legally reckoned when there is a specific law to transgress, then the period between Adam and Moses should have seen a reduction in the legal accountability of humanity and therefore a reduction in the reign of death. But Paul’s historical observation is that precisely the opposite was true: death reigned during this period with the same force as before and after, it reigned “even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam.”

The phrase “those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam” is most naturally understood as referring to infants and to those who, though they committed personal sins, did not sin in precisely the same form

as Adam, the deliberate violation of an explicit, specific, divinely communicated prohibition. These people died, not because their personal sins provided an adequate legal basis for their death under the conditions described in verses 13–14, but because they stood under the legal liability of Adam’s representative transgression. The reign of death over this category of persons is Paul’s own implicit evidence for original guilt: the most natural explanation for the universal reign of death is the universal liability incurred by Adam’s representative transgression, which functions as the legal basis for condemnation independently of each individual’s personal sins.

The argument is reinforced by the closing phrase of verse 14: “who is a type (tupos) of Him who was to come.” Paul identifies Adam as the type of which Christ is the antitype, establishing that the representative relationship between Adam and his posterity is the typological pattern that makes the representative relationship between Christ and His people both intelligible and expected. The type-antitype relationship does not merely illustrate the parallel; it grounds the necessity of the parallel: Christ’s representative work in salvation is the redemptive answer to Adam’s representative work in condemnation, and the structural logic of each is the same, the many are affected by the one, and the one acts on behalf of the many.

“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, for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.”

Romans 5:12–14, NASB 1995

C. The Formal Parallel: Verses 18–19 and the Structure of Both Imputations

After the elaboration of verses 15–17, which emphasize the superabundance of grace over condemnation rather than the mere equivalence of the two, Paul delivers the formal parallel in verses 18–19 that constitutes the structural heart of the entire passage: “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. 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 precision of the language in these two verses is extraordinary. Verse 18 uses the phrase “through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men” (*di’ henos paraptomatos eis pantas anthrōpous eis katakrima*), establishing that it is the one specific transgression of Adam, not the aggregate of individual human transgressions, that is the basis of the universal condemnation. The condemnation comes through the one, not through the many; it is the legal consequence of the representative’s act, not the accumulation of personal acts. This is the imputation doctrine stated as clearly and as directly as Paul ever states it.

Verse 19 elaborates with the precise language of moral constitution: “through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners.” The Greek *katestathēsan* (were made, were constituted) is not merely descriptive (“were shown to be sinners” or “became sinners through their own acts”) but juridical: they were constituted, declared, reckoned to be sinners by virtue of the one man’s disobedience. This is the imputation of guilt: the divine tribunal’s declaration that the posterity of Adam stand in the legal relationship of sinners to the divine law by virtue of their representative’s transgression. And the corresponding positive parallel, “through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous”, uses the same verb and the same logic: the many are constituted righteous not by their own obedience but by the obedience of their Representative. The symmetry is exact and is the warrant for the structural claim that both imputations operate by the same covenantal logic.

II. Federal Headship and Seminal Headship

The Two Models of Representative Connection

A. *Federal Headship: Covenantal Appointment as the Ground of Representation*

The federal headship model understands Adam's representation of the human race as the product of a specific divine appointment rather than a mere biological relationship. God constituted Adam as the covenant head of the race under the covenant of works: He gave Adam the probationary command (Genesis 2:16–17), made clear the consequences of obedience and disobedience, and established Adam as the representative whose action would determine the status of all his posterity. On this model, the imputation of Adam's guilt to his posterity is not grounded in the physical presence of all humanity in Adam's loins (as seminal headship would have it) but in the divinely constituted covenantal relationship by which Adam acted on behalf of all.

The federal headship model has several theological advantages. First, it most directly matches the structure of Paul's argument in Romans 5:12–19, which repeatedly grounds the universal condemnation in the "one transgression" of "one man" rather than in the organic participation of all humanity in Adam's act. The "one" is the emphasis: one man, one transgression, one representative act with universal legal consequences. This is the language of covenantal representation, not merely of biological transmission. Second, the federal model has perfect structural symmetry with the imputation of Christ's righteousness, since Christ's representation of His people is clearly covenantal and appointed rather than biological. Third, the federal model provides the most satisfying explanation for why the imputation of guilt is just: Adam was not merely a biological progenitor but a specifically appointed covenantal representative acting on behalf of all his posterity, and the justice of the arrangement is the justice of the divinely constituted covenant of works itself.

The historical association of federal headship with the Westminster tradition, with Francis Turretin's Institutes of Elenctic Theology, with John Owen's extensive treatment in his works on justification, and with Herman Witsius' The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man gives the doctrine a confessional pedigree of the first order. The Westminster Confession's statement in VI.3 that "the guilt of this sin was imputed" to all Adam's posterity and "they being the root of all mankind" reflects the combined federal and seminal language that the confessional tradition has employed without rigid commitment to one model over the other.

B. *Seminal Headship: Real Participation as the Ground of Shared Guilt*

The seminal headship model, associated with the Augustinian reading of Romans 5:12 and with the realist understanding of original sin, grounds the imputation of Adam's guilt in the real participation of all humanity in Adam's transgression through their seminal presence in him. On this view, when Adam sinned, all humanity sinned in him because all were seminally present in him as his biological descendants. The guilt of Adam's transgression is not merely credited to his posterity by external legal decree; it is genuinely theirs because they were genuinely present in and part of Adam when he committed it. The Hebrews 7:9–10 argument, that Levi "paid tithes through Abraham" because he "was still in the loins of his father" when Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek, provides a New Testament precedent for the kind of seminal representation that Augustine's reading of Romans 5:12 presupposes.

The seminal headship model has the theological advantage of grounding the shared guilt of Adam's posterity in a genuine moral connection rather than a purely external legal declaration: if all humanity was genuinely present in and part of Adam when he sinned, then the guilt of that sin is genuinely theirs in a sense that goes beyond merely forensic imputation. It also provides a more natural account of the transmission of original corruption: if the soul as well as the body is generated from Adam (as traducianists maintain), then the corruption of Adam's nature is literally passed on to his descendants through the act of generation, not merely credited to them by legal decree.

The limitations of the purely seminal model are equally significant. The physical and philosophical difficulties of maintaining that all human beings were literally present in Adam's loins are considerable, and the model struggles to explain precisely how moral guilt, which is a matter of personal agency rather than merely physical constitution, can be transmitted through biological generation. The model also lacks the structural symmetry with the

Christological parallel that the federal model provides: Christ's representation of His people is clearly covenantal and appointed rather than biological, and the parallel of Romans 5:12–19 seems to presuppose the same kind of representative mechanism in both directions. For these reasons, the majority of confessional Reformed theologians have favored the federal model while incorporating the insights of the seminal model into their account of original corruption.

“And even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.”

Hebrews 7:9–10, NASB 1995

III. The Objections to Imputation

Why the Charge of Injustice Fails

A. The Charge of Injustice: Holding People Accountable for What They Did Not Do

The most persistent and philosophically serious objection to the doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin is the charge that it is unjust to hold individuals accountable for an act they did not personally commit. This objection was the centerpiece of Pelagius' case against Augustine, it recurs in every generation of the church's life, and it exercises considerable intuitive force in a cultural context shaped by Enlightenment individualism and the legal principle that personal guilt requires personal agency. The objection can be stated simply: I did not eat the forbidden fruit; Adam did. How can I be guilty of Adam's sin?

The Reformed response to this objection operates at three distinct levels. The first is the level of divine authority: the imputation of Adam's guilt to his posterity is not a philosophical proposition that must be evaluated by human moral intuitions; it is a divinely revealed fact that must be received with the same submission to scriptural authority as any other revealed doctrine. The moral framework that generates the intuition that individual guilt requires only individual agency is a human framework, shaped by the legal traditions of particular cultures at particular times. The divine tribunal operates by a different logic: the logic of covenantal representation, by which the many are bound by the act of the one who represents them by divine appointment. The justice of this arrangement is the justice of the covenant's own terms, set by the infinitely wise and infinitely just God whose ways are not our ways and whose thoughts are not our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8–9).

The second level of the response is the level of covenantal logic. The objection to the imputation of Adam's guilt as unjust presupposes that the only just form of moral representation is the absence of representation, that each individual must bear only the consequences of her own acts. But this presupposition, applied consistently, would also eliminate the possibility of representative benefit. The person who rejects the imputation of Adam's guilt on the grounds of individual justice must, to be consistent, also reject the imputation of Christ's righteousness, for by exactly the same individual-justice logic, the believer has no more personal right to the righteousness of Christ than to the guilt of Adam. The Reformed tradition's response to this consistency challenge is not to abandon covenantal representation but to embrace it in both directions: the same logic that grounds the imputation of Adam's guilt (covenantal representation by divine appointment) grounds the imputation of Christ's righteousness, and both are just because both are the product of the infinitely wise covenant purposes of the God who appointed them.

The third level of the response is the level of pastoral and existential honesty. The objection that it is unjust to be held accountable for Adam's sin deserves a searching question in return: do you actually believe that your own sinfulness is explained by nothing more than the bad example and corrupting social influence of those around you? Does the honest observation of your own heart, the self-centeredness that precedes any deliberate choice, the disordered desires that are present before you have decided to entertain them, the moral orientation away from God and toward self that characterizes your inner life even in its most careful and disciplined moments, does that honest observation suggest a merely environmental or experiential explanation? The Reformed tradition has consistently found that the honest self-knowledge that Psalm 51:5 commends, “In sin my mother conceived me”,

corresponds to the experience of those who have genuinely been illumined by the Spirit to see their own condition clearly. The doctrine of imputed guilt is not a philosophical imposition on reluctant human experience; it is the theological articulation of what genuine self-knowledge, illumined by the Spirit, already knows.

B. *The Objection from Divine Sovereignty: Is God the Author of Sin?*

A second objection to the doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin, related to but distinct from the charge of injustice, is the charge that the doctrine makes God the author of sin. If God constituted Adam as the covenant head of the race, placed him in the probationary situation, and permitted the fall that resulted in the universal condemnation of the race, is God not ultimately responsible for the sin of which Adam is the proximate cause? The Westminster Confession addresses this objection directly in III.1: "God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established."

The Reformed tradition's response to the author-of-sin objection distinguishes between God's sovereign ordination of all things (including the fall) and God's moral authorship of sin. God ordains the fall in the sense that it falls within the scope of His sovereign providential governance, nothing occurs outside the scope of that governance, but He ordains it through the free, voluntary, genuinely responsible agency of the human beings who commit it, without any compulsion or manipulation of their wills. Adam sinned freely, voluntarily, and with full moral responsibility; the fact that God's sovereign governance encompasses that free act does not eliminate Adam's responsibility or transfer it to God. The distinction between efficient causation (God as the ultimate ordainer of all things) and formal causation (Adam as the morally responsible agent of the specific sinful act) is the key to maintaining both divine sovereignty and creaturely accountability without collapsing either into the other.

IV. The Competing Traditions

Pelagianism, Arminianism, and the Reformed Insistence on Full Imputation

A. *Pelagianism: The Complete Denial of Transmitted Guilt*

The Pelagian position on original sin and imputation is the most radical alternative to the Augustinian-Reformed doctrine. As we have examined in Lesson 2, Pelagius denied that Adam's sin had any transmissible effect on his posterity, neither transmitted guilt nor transmitted corruption. Each human being stands before God in the same morally neutral condition as Adam before the fall: fully capable of obedience, unburdened by any inherited condition, accountable only for the sins he personally commits. The universality of human sinfulness, on this view, is explained entirely by the bad example of Adam (whose widely imitated sin established a pattern of disobedience that humanity has followed ever since) and the corrupting influence of sinful social environments.

The Pelagian denial of imputation stands in direct contradiction to every major strand of Paul's argument in Romans 5:12–19. It cannot explain why death reigned over those who had not sinned in the likeness of Adam's offense (verses 13–14), since on the Pelagian view such people should not be under the condemnation that only personal transgression, reckoned by the law, incurs. It cannot account for Paul's explicit statement that "through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners" (verse 19), since "made sinners" by the disobedience of one man is unintelligible if each person bears only the consequences of his own acts. And it cannot account for the structural parallel between the condemnation through Adam and the justification through Christ that constitutes the formal argument of verses 18–19: if the many are not genuinely constituted sinners by Adam's disobedience, then the parallel claim that the many are genuinely constituted righteous by Christ's obedience is equally incoherent. Pelagianism, as Augustine saw clearly, does not merely modify the doctrine of original sin; it makes the entire Pauline account of salvation unintelligible.

B. *The Arminian Modification and the Reformed Response*

The Arminian tradition represents a more sophisticated engagement with the doctrine of original sin, affirming the reality of transmitted corruption (the inherited tendency toward sin) while qualifying or denying the strict imputation of original guilt. The typical Arminian account holds that the condemnation that would otherwise flow from original guilt has been universally removed by the prevenient grace of Christ applied to the entire human race, so that no individual is condemned for Adam's sin *per se* but only for his own personal transgressions committed in the face of universally available grace.

The Reformed critique of the Arminian modification focuses on several specific points. First, the Arminian account lacks clear exegetical support: Romans 5:12–19 does not describe the ground of condemnation as personal transgression but as the one representative transgression of Adam, and there is no Pauline text that explicitly attributes the removal of that condemnation to a universally applied prevenient grace. The universally applied prevenient grace of Arminian soteriology is a theological construct erected to soften the implications of the Pauline account rather than an explicit biblical doctrine. Second, the Arminian account effectively makes the decisive factor in salvation the human will's free response to universally available grace rather than the sovereign electing and regenerating grace of God, a position that the Reformed tradition has consistently identified as a form of Semi-Pelagianism regardless of how it is labeled. Third, the Arminian modification severs the structural connection between the imputation of Adam's guilt and the imputation of Christ's righteousness: if the former is universally removed by prevenient grace, the parallel that Paul establishes in Romans 5:18–19 loses its theological force.

The Reformed insistence on full imputation, the direct, immediate, covenantally grounded reckoning of Adam's guilt to all his natural posterity, is not a theological maximalism for its own sake but the most exegetically faithful reading of Paul's argument in Romans 5 and the theological position most consistent with the structural integrity of the Pauline gospel. The doctrine is demanding: it confronts every human being with a condition of condemnation that precedes and is independent of personal choice. But it is demanding in the same way that the gospel is demanding: it leaves no room for human self-sufficiency, no basis for human pride, no escape route through personal merit or moral achievement. The full imputation of Adam's guilt drives the sinner, with the same inexorable logic as the full indictment of Romans 3, to the only possible remedy: the free, unmerited, sovereignly given justification through the imputed righteousness of the One whose obedience reverses the condemnation of the One whose disobedience incurred it.

“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.”

Romans 5:17, NASB 1995

V. The Structural Symmetry of the Two Imputations

Why Denying the First Destroys the Second

A. The Double Imputation as the Structural Heart of the Gospel

The most important theological insight that the doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin yields is the structural symmetry it establishes with the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Paul's argument in Romans 5:12–19 is not, at its deepest level, an argument about sin; it is an argument about grace. Paul's extended treatment of the condemnation through Adam serves the larger purpose of establishing the structural logic of representative headship that makes the justification through Christ intelligible, necessary, and glorious. The condemnation through Adam is the dark backdrop against which the justification through Christ shines with its full glory; and the logic of the two is identical.

The formal structure can be stated as follows: just as God appointed Adam as the covenant head of the old humanity, so He appointed Christ as the covenant head of the new humanity. Just as Adam's representative transgression was reckoned to the account of all his posterity, so Christ's representative righteousness is reckoned

to the account of all who are united to Him by faith. Just as the many were constituted sinners (*katestathēmēsan*) by the one man's disobedience, so the many will be constituted righteous (*katastathēsontai*) by the one Man's obedience. The symmetry is not merely illustrative; it is ontological and legal: the same divine act of covenantal reckoning that grounds the first imputation grounds the second, and the justice that vindicates the one vindicates the other.

The practical implication of this structural symmetry is decisive: the person who rejects the imputation of Adam's guilt on the grounds of individual justice has removed the structural foundation upon which the imputation of Christ's righteousness rests. The Arminian or Pelagian who denies original imputation while affirming justification by imputed righteousness is accepting the conclusion of an argument whose premise he has rejected. The Reformed tradition's insistence on both imputations is not theological maximalism; it is theological consistency. The gospel of justification by imputed righteousness is only fully intelligible, only has its full force, its full logic, its full necessity, when it is understood as the answer to the imputation of Adam's guilt. The Second Adam makes sense only against the background of the First Adam; the gift of righteousness is only fully appreciated when it is understood as the answer to the condemnation of the one transgression.

B. 2 Corinthians 5:21 and the Cross as the Intersection of the Two Imputations

No verse in the New Testament expresses the double imputation with greater theological density and pastoral force than 2 Corinthians 5:21: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (NASB 1995). The verse is a compact theological universe: in a single sentence, Paul describes both directions of the imputation transaction that constitutes the atonement and justification. Christ "who knew no sin", who had no original sin (no inherited guilt or corruption) and no actual sin (no personal transgression of any kind), was "made sin" (had the guilt of the race imputed to Him) "so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (have His perfect righteousness imputed to us). The cross is the single event at which both imputations occur simultaneously and in the most intimate possible connection: the sin of Adam's race is transferred to the sinless Second Adam, and the righteousness of the sinless Second Adam is transferred to the guilty members of the race He represents.

The phrase "who knew no sin" (*ton mē gnonta hamartian*) is theologically loaded. It establishes that Christ was not merely comparatively less sinful than others, or morally superior to ordinary human beings, He "knew" no sin in the experiential-constitutive sense: sin had no part in His nature, no claim on His character, no legitimate presence in His person. He was genuinely, thoroughly, and constitutively without sin, both without the inherited original sin that Adam's posterity bears and without any actual sin of commission or omission. This is the significance of the virgin birth for the doctrine of imputation: Jesus was not born of Adam's natural generation and therefore did not inherit the original corruption and guilt that natural generation transmits. His human nature was genuinely and fully human, but it was a human nature formed by the creative work of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35) rather than generated through the natural line of Adam, and therefore a human nature that did not bear the original sin that makes natural generation the vehicle of the first imputation.

The word "made" (*epoiesen*, third person aorist of *poieō*, he made, he constituted) is the same conceptual category as the *katestathēsan* of Romans 5:19. Christ was constituted sin, legally reckoned, by the act of the Father at the cross, to be the bearer of the guilt that the human race had incurred through Adam's transgression and through all the personal transgressions of all those He represented. This is the vicarious atonement in its most precise formulation: not that Christ became intrinsically sinful (which would be ontologically impossible) but that the legal status of sinner, the forensic condition of bearing the guilt that sin incurs, was reckoned to Him, so that the divine wrath due for that guilt could be exhausted upon Him rather than upon those He represented. And the result, "so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him", is the parallel constituting: those who are in Christ are constituted righteous, not because they have become intrinsically righteous (that is the work of sanctification, which is incomplete in this life) but because the perfect righteousness of Christ has been reckoned to their account, so that they stand before the divine tribunal clothed in a righteousness not their own.

VI. Pastoral and Doxological Implications

What This Doctrine Does for the Soul

A. Humility Before the Tribunal: The Silencing of Every Boast

The doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin produces, when rightly received, a specific and comprehensive humility before the divine tribunal, the humility of the person who has understood that her condemnation precedes her personal choices, that it is not merely the accumulated consequence of a lifetime of sinful decisions but the inherited liability of membership in a race that was constituted guilty in its representative head. This is not the humility of self-deprecation or psychological low self-esteem; it is the ontological humility of a creature who knows herself to be, by the divine reckoning, a member of the *massa damnata*, the condemned mass of humanity from which only the sovereign grace of God can draw its elect.

This humility is the specific posture that Paul's argument in Romans 3:19 describes: "every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God." The closure of every mouth before the divine tribunal is not merely the recognition that one has committed specific personal sins; it is the recognition that one stands condemned by a representative act of which one is the legal heir, that there is no escape route through personal virtue, comparative morality, or religious privilege. The person who has genuinely understood the imputation of Adam's guilt has had every possible basis for self-congratulation before God removed, because the doctrine removes the possibility of claiming that one's moral standing before God is in any way a personal achievement. The only adequate response to this recognition is the response of the publican in Luke 18:13: "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!", an appeal, not to one's own merit, but entirely to the mercy of the God whose grace alone can reverse the condemnation that one has inherited.

B. Wonder at the Gospel: The Second Imputation as the Answer to the First

The doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin is designed, ultimately, not to produce despair but to produce the specific kind of wonder that is the gospel's most characteristic fruit in the soul that has understood it. The person who knows the full force of the first imputation, who has genuinely understood that she was constituted a sinner by Adam's representative disobedience before she had committed a single personal act, that the condemnation she bears is not merely the accumulation of her personal transgressions but the inherited liability of membership in the condemned race, is the person who is most fully prepared to receive the second imputation with the wonder it deserves: that the same covenantal logic that made her a condemned sinner by the act of one man has made her a justified righteous person by the act of another Man, and that the second reverses the first completely, permanently, and without remainder.

Romans 5:17 captures this wonder with precise theological beauty: "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 "much more" (*pollō mallon*) is Paul's own doxological exclamation, the grace that abounds through the Second Adam is not merely proportional to the condemnation that came through the First Adam; it is superabundant, overflowing, exceedingly exceeding the debt it has cancelled. Death reigned through the First Adam's transgression; those who receive the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the Second Adam's obedience. The movement is from the reign of death to the reign of life, from the condemned subject to the risen co-regent, and the mechanism in both directions is the same: covenantal representation by the divinely appointed head.

The doxological terminus of this entire doctrinal argument is Romans 11:33–36, the great eruption of praise that concludes Paul's eleven-chapter exposition of sin and grace: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." The wisdom that Paul finds unsearchable is the wisdom of the divine covenant arrangement by which the condemnation of the race through the First Adam became the occasion for the justification of the elect through the Second, the

wisdom that took the catastrophe of the fall and made it the context for the greater glory of the redemption. The imputation of Adam's sin and the imputation of Christ's righteousness are not two independent doctrines; they are the first and second movements of the single symphony of divine wisdom and grace that Paul finds himself unable to contemplate without breaking into worship. This is the doxological destination of the entire doctrine: not the grim reckoning of a universal condemnation but the astonished worship of a God whose wisdom has made the condemnation the necessary preparation for a justification that is, in every possible way, greater than what was lost.

"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

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Imputation	From the Latin <i>imputare</i> (to reckon, to credit, to count to one's account). The theological term for the divine act of reckoning something to the account of a person that was not intrinsically theirs, either reckoning guilt that was not personally committed (the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity) or reckoning righteousness that was not personally achieved (the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers). Imputation is a forensic or legal concept: it describes what the divine tribunal reckons or declares rather than what is intrinsically true of the person's moral character at the moment of the transaction. In the Reformed understanding of the double imputation, these two acts of divine reckoning are the structural mechanism of both condemnation (the first imputation, grounding universal guilt) and justification (the second imputation, grounding the believer's acceptance before God). The Greek <i>logizomai</i> (to reckon, to count, to credit) is the primary New Testament word for imputation, used extensively in Romans 4 in connection with the imputation of righteousness.
The Double Imputation	The theological formulation that describes the two-directional movement at the heart of the gospel: (1) the imputation of Adam's sin (and its guilt) to all his natural posterity, grounding the universal condemnation of the human race; and (2) the imputation of Christ's righteousness to all who believe in Him, grounding the justification of the elect. The formal symmetry of this double imputation is most explicitly developed by Paul in Romans 5:12–19, where the parallelism between the two Adams and their respective representatives makes the structural logic of both imputations visible simultaneously. The double imputation is also reflected in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (NASB 1995). Christ was "made sin" (had the first imputation, the guilt of Adam's race, applied to Him at the cross) so that believers might "become righteousness" (receive the second imputation, the righteousness of Christ, through faith).
The First and Second Adams	The theological designation for the parallel representative heads of the two covenantal humanities: Adam (the First Adam), the covenant head of the old humanity under the covenant of works, and Jesus Christ (the Last Adam, the Second Man), the covenant head of the new humanity under the covenant of grace. Paul develops the Adam-Christ typology with formal precision in Romans 5:12–19 and 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, 45–49. The designation "Last Adam" (<i>ho eschatos Adam</i> , 1 Corinthians 15:45) and "the second man" (<i>ho deuterios anthrōpos</i> , 1 Corinthians 15:47) are Paul's own formulations, establishing Christ not merely as one who reverses Adam's effects but as the One who definitively replaces Adam as the representative head of the covenant people. The Second Adam succeeds at every point where the First Adam failed: where Adam faced temptation and yielded, Christ faced temptation and held firm; where Adam's disobedience made the many sinners, Christ's obedience makes the many righteous.
Seminal Headship	The view of Adam's representation that grounds the transmission of original sin in the biological or seminal relationship between Adam and his posterity: all human beings were "in" Adam in the sense of being seminally present in him as his biological descendants, and therefore genuinely participated in his transgression in a realist sense. This view, associated with the Augustinian tradition and with Tertullian's doctrine of traducianism (the view that the soul as well as the body is transmitted from parent to child through generation), provides the ontological basis for the claim that all human beings literally "sinned in Adam" (Romans 5:12, on the Augustinian reading of <i>eph' hō</i>). In contrast to federal headship, seminal headship makes the ground of the imputation of Adam's guilt the real participation of all humanity in Adam's sin through biological descent. The Reformed tradition has generally preferred federal headship as the more exegetically precise account of the mechanism of imputation, while

Term	Definition
	acknowledging that seminal headship captures the genuine organic connection between Adam and his posterity.
Federal Headship (Review)	The view that Adam's representation of the human race was covenantal and appointed rather than merely biological, that God specifically designated Adam as the covenant head of the race, so that his act of obedience or disobedience would have consequences for all whom he represented. On this view, the imputation of Adam's guilt is grounded in the divinely appointed representational relationship rather than in the biological presence of all humanity 'in' Adam. Federal headship is the view most closely associated with the Westminster tradition and with the principal Reformed scholastic theologians (Turretin, Owen, Witsius). It has the advantage of structural symmetry with the Christological parallel: just as Christ represents His people by divine appointment rather than by biological generation, so Adam represented the race by divine appointment. The federal view also more clearly grounds the universality of condemnation in the one specific act of Adam's transgression (Romans 5:18: "through one transgression") rather than in each individual's participation in Adam's nature.
The Covenant of Works (Foedus Operum)	The pre-fall arrangement between God and Adam, by which God constituted Adam as the covenant head of the human race, placed him under the probationary command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17), and attached to that command the promise of confirmed life for obedience and the threat of death for disobedience. The covenant of works is the theological framework within which the imputation of Adam's sin is most fully intelligible: Adam sinned not merely as a private individual but as the covenantal representative of the race, and his transgression broke the covenant whose terms had been clearly set forth by the divine Lawgiver. The Westminster Confession (VII.2) states: "The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience." The covenant of works corresponds structurally to the covenant of grace: as Adam's failure under the covenant of works produced condemnation for all he represented, Christ's success under the covenant of grace (His perfect fulfillment of the law's demands as the representative of His people) produces justification for all He represents.
Traducianism	The view of the origin of the soul that holds that both body and soul are transmitted from parent to child through natural generation, that just as each human being receives his body from his parents, so he receives his soul from them as well. Traducianism was championed by Tertullian and found significant support in the Western patristic tradition, particularly in Augustine, who found it attractive as an explanation for the transmission of original sin: if the soul is transmitted from parent to child, then original corruption is naturally transmitted along with it. The alternative view is creationism, which holds that God immediately creates each individual soul at the moment of conception. The majority of Reformed theologians have favored creationism (the immediate creation of each soul) while acknowledging that the mechanism of the soul's origin remains uncertain. The imputation of Adam's guilt is, on the Reformed federal view, independent of the traducianism question: whether or not the soul is transmitted biologically, the guilt of Adam's transgression is imputed by divine covenant decree to all Adam's natural posterity.
The Pelagian Rejection of Imputation	Pelagius and his followers denied that Adam's sin had any transmissible effect on his posterity, neither the transmission of guilt (which they regarded as a violation of individual moral accountability) nor the transmission of corruption (which they regarded as impossible since human nature is created good by God and remains good). On the Pelagian view, each human being stands before God exactly as Adam stood before the fall: morally neutral, capable of perfect obedience, and accountable only for the sins he personally commits. The universal sinfulness of the human race, on this view, is explained entirely by the bad example of Adam and the corrupting influence of social environment rather than by any inherited condition. The Pelagian rejection of imputation directly contradicts Paul's argument in Romans 5:12–19,

Term	Definition
	which explicitly grounds the universal condemnation not in the imitation of Adam's sin but in the representative transgression of the one man: "through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners."
The Arminian Modification	The Arminian tradition, following Arminius' student Simon Episcopius and the Remonstrant theologians, accepted the transmission of original corruption (the inherited weakness and tendency to sin) while qualifying or rejecting the strict imputation of original guilt. On most Arminian accounts, the condemnation that would otherwise follow from original guilt is universally removed by the prevenient grace of Christ, which is applied to the entire human race, so that no individual is condemned for Adam's sin per se but only for his own personal transgressions. The Reformed critique of this position focuses on two points: first, it lacks clear biblical support, Romans 5:12–19 grounds the universal condemnation in Adam's sin, not merely in personal transgressions; and second, it effectively reinstates a form of Semi-Pelagianism by making the decisive factor in each individual's salvation the personal choice to cooperate with universally available prevenient grace rather than the sovereign election and efficacious grace of God.
Logizomai (λογίζομαι)	The Greek verb meaning to reckon, to count, to credit, or to impute, the primary New Testament word for the forensic act of imputation. Paul uses logizomai extensively in Romans 4 in connection with the imputation of righteousness: "Abraham believed God, and it was credited [elogisthē] to him as righteousness" (Romans 4:3, NASB 1995, quoting Genesis 15:6). The verb is a commercial and accounting term, meaning to enter something into an account as belonging to someone, to credit their account with what is not intrinsically theirs. In Romans 4:5, Paul describes the one who "does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly," whose "faith is credited [logizetai] as righteousness." The forensic force of logizomai establishes that imputed righteousness is a legal declaration, a reckoning by the divine tribunal, rather than an infusion of righteousness into the moral character of the person. This distinction is the foundation of the Reformation's insistence on imputed rather than infused righteousness as the basis of justification.

Practical Application

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

We must believe that the imputation of Adam's sin to all his natural posterity is not a peripheral theological refinement but the structural mechanism of the universal condemnation that Paul describes in Romans 5:12–19 and the necessary foundation of the imputed righteousness of Christ that Paul announces in Romans 3:21–26 and 5:17–19. The doctrine is the exegetical content of “through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners”, and any account of original sin that cannot accommodate the “made sinners” by the “one man's disobedience” has failed to receive what Paul actually says. The full-orbed Pauline gospel requires both the full-orbed Pauline hamartiology and the full-orbed Pauline soteriology, and the imputation doctrine is the link that connects them.

We must also believe that the structural symmetry of the two imputations is not a theological curiosity but the most powerful apologetic for the doctrine of justification by imputed righteousness. When the critic objects that it is unjust for God to reckon the righteousness of another person to my account, the answer is not a philosophical defense of vicarious righteousness in the abstract; it is the pointing to the first imputation: by the same logic, by the divinely appointed covenantal mechanism of representation, God has already reckoned to your account the guilt of another person (Adam's). If you are willing to receive the condemnation of the first imputation (which requires only that you be a member of Adam's natural posterity), you have already received the structural logic that makes the second imputation (which requires only that you be a member of Christ's spiritual posterity by faith) both intelligible and applicable. The symmetry is not merely illustrative; it is the ground of the gospel's juridical coherence.

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

The doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin should produce in the believing heart the specific humility of one who knows that his condemnation is not merely the product of his own choices, and therefore the specific gratitude of one who knows that his justification is not merely the product of his own faith. Both the condemnation and the justification are the products of divine covenantal reckoning: the one by Adam's representative act, the other by Christ's representative act. The person who has understood this knows that from the very beginning of his existence before God, he has been a recipient rather than an achiever, first of a condemnation he did not personally earn but was constituted to bear, and then of a righteousness he did not personally achieve but was constituted to receive. This double giftedness, this recognition that nothing in one's standing before God, whether condemnation or justification, is the product of personal achievement, is the foundation of the most radical and most genuine humility and the most radical and most genuine gratitude.

Desire, above all, the constant freshness of the wonder that the second imputation produces when received against the full background of the first. The person who reads 2 Corinthians 5:21, “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”, with the full awareness of what “the righteousness of God” means (the same perfect, covenantally constituted righteousness that the First Adam failed to achieve), and with the full awareness of what “to be sin” means (to be constituted the legal bearer of the guilt that the entire condemned race had incurred), is the person who reads it with inexhaustible wonder. The distance between those two poles, the guilt of the condemned race and the righteousness of God Himself, is infinite, and the fact that the exchange was made at the cross, freely, at the cost of the Son's life, on behalf of those who deserved only the continuation of the condemnation they had inherited, is the most astonishing fact in the universe.

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

- Read Romans 5:12–19 in a single sitting, at least three times: once for the general flow of the argument, once attending specifically to the exegetical details of verses 12–14 (the argument from the reign of death over those who did not sin like Adam), and once attending to the formal parallel of verses 18–19. After the third reading, write a paragraph in your own words explaining why the death of infants, on Paul's argument,

is evidence for the imputation of Adam's guilt rather than personal transgression. This exercise is one of the most clarifying ways to appropriate the specific content of Paul's argument rather than merely receiving the conclusion.

- Meditate on 2 Corinthians 5:21 in the light of the double imputation doctrine. Dwell specifically on the phrase "who knew no sin", the absolute sinlessness of the One who bore the sin of the race. What does it mean that the Person who had no original sin (because He was not born of Adam's natural generation) and no actual sin (because His entire human life was one of perfect covenantal obedience) was "made sin" at the cross? What does the bearing of the race's accumulated guilt by the sinless Son of God reveal about the severity of the condemnation and the sufficiency of the provision? And what does the phrase "become the righteousness of God" reveal about the quality and the permanence of the status that the second imputation confers?
- Study the Christological significance of the virgin birth in connection with the doctrine of imputation. Read Luke 1:35: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God." The virgin birth is not merely a supernatural event establishing Jesus' divine identity; it is the mechanism by which the Second Adam enters the human race without inheriting the first imputation. Because Jesus was not born of natural generation from Adam's line, He did not receive the original guilt and original corruption that natural generation transmits. Connect this to Hebrews 4:15 ("tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin") and to the necessity of His sinlessness for the validity of the second imputation: only One who bears no sin of His own can legitimately bear the sin of others.
- Identify a specific apologetic challenge in your ministry context that is addressed by the structural symmetry of the two imputations. If someone objects to the doctrine of original sin on the grounds of individual justice ("How can I be held accountable for what Adam did?"), how does the parallel imputation of Christ's righteousness provide the most theologically compelling response? Write out the argument, not as a philosophical proof but as an evangelical witness: "The very logic you are objecting to in the first imputation is the logic that makes the second imputation possible and joyful, and the second imputation is the best news you have ever heard." Practice this response until you can articulate it naturally and compellingly.
- Read and reflect on Romans 11:33–36 as the doxological destination of the entire doctrine of imputation. Paul's eruption of worship at the conclusion of his eleven-chapter exposition of sin, condemnation, election, and grace is the Spirit's testimony that the doctrine of imputation, in both directions, terminates not in grim theological determinism but in the worship of the God whose wisdom has made the catastrophe of Adam's transgression the occasion for the greater glory of Christ's redemption. Ask yourself: does my understanding of the doctrine of imputation produce in me the same response that Paul's understanding produced in him, the unsearchable riches, the unfathomable ways, the "for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things" of Romans 11:36? If not, what specific aspect of the doctrine, more deeply received, would move it from theological proposition to doxological wonder?

Key Texts: *Romans 5:12–19; 3:19; 11:33–36; 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, 45–49; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Genesis 2:16–17; Hebrews 7:9–10; 4:15; Psalm 51:5; Luke 1:35; Isaiah 55:8–9*

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

1. The lesson argues that the doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin is not merely a component of Hamartiology but the structural foundation of the doctrine of justification. Before working through the lesson's argument in detail, does this claim seem plausible to you? In your own prior understanding of justification, how central was the concept of imputation? And in your prior understanding of original sin, how central was the concept of representative headship? How has the lesson's development of both altered or deepened your prior understanding?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

2. Read Romans 5:12–19 carefully and trace the formal structure of Paul's argument. Where does the argument of verse 12 actually complete itself (note that "just as" in verse 12 has no apodosis until verse 18)? What is the function of verses 13–17 within the argument, are they a digression, a qualification, or a necessary elaboration of the governing principle? Specifically, how does the argument of verses 13–14 (death reigned even over those who did not sin like Adam) function as evidence for the doctrine of imputed guilt rather than personal transgression?
3. Read Romans 5:18–19 and analyze the precise grammatical and theological content of each clause. What does the phrase "through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men" (verse 18) establish as the basis for the universal condemnation, and how does this differ from what would be established if Paul had said "through the transgressions of all men there resulted condemnation to all"? What does the verb *katestathēsan* ("were made sinners", verse 19) add to the argument that would be lost if the text had said merely "became sinners" or "were shown to be sinners"?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 5:21 carefully. What does the phrase "who knew no sin" establish about the moral condition of the One who was made sin? What does "was made sin" mean, how is this different from saying that Christ became a sinner intrinsically? What does "become the righteousness of God in Him" mean, how is this different from saying that believers become intrinsically righteous? And how does the verse illustrate the structural symmetry of the double imputation?
5. Read 1 Corinthians 15:21–22 and 15:45–49. What specific titles does Paul use for Christ in these passages (the Last Adam, the Second Man)? What does each title emphasize about Christ's relationship to Adam and to the new humanity He represents? How does the cosmic scope of the Adam-Christ typology in these verses, the resurrection of the body, the transformation into the image of the heavenly Man, extend the imputation doctrine beyond the narrow question of legal guilt into the comprehensive redemption of the entire human person and the entire created order?
6. Read Hebrews 7:9–10 in its context of Hebrews 7:1–10. How does the author of Hebrews use the concept of seminal presence ("he was still in the loins of his father") to establish Levi's participation in Abraham's payment of tithes to Melchizedek? What does this passage suggest about the plausibility of the seminal headship model as an account of how Adam's posterity sinned in Adam? And how does the author's use of this argument in Hebrews 7 establish the New Testament precedent for the kind of representative moral solidarity that the doctrine of imputation presupposes?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

7. The lesson presents the federal headship and seminal headship models as the two principal accounts of the mechanism of the imputation of Adam's sin, and argues that the federal model has both exegetical and theological advantages. Evaluate this claim. What specific features of Paul's argument in Romans 5:12–19 favor the federal model? What specific features favor the seminal model? Is there a way to synthesize the insights of both models that does justice to the exegetical data without committing to either exclusively? How does the Westminster tradition's language ("they being the root of all mankind") reflect this synthetic approach?

8. The lesson addresses the charge that the imputation of Adam's guilt is unjust at three levels: divine authority, covenantal logic, and pastoral self-knowledge. Evaluate the persuasive force of each level. Which do you find most compelling as a response to the objection? Is there a form of the objection that remains after all three responses have been given? And how does the structural symmetry between the two imputations, the observation that the person who objects to the first imputation must be equally consistent about the second, function as an apologetic for the entire doctrine?
9. The lesson argues that the Arminian modification, affirming transmitted corruption while qualifying or denying imputed guilt, is a form of Semi-Pelagianism that lacks exegetical support and severs the structural connection between the two Pauline imputations. Evaluate this argument. Is it fair to the most sophisticated forms of Arminian theology? Is there an Arminian account of Romans 5:12–19 that does justice to the Pauline data while maintaining the Arminian commitment to libertarian free will and the universal availability of prevenient grace? And what specifically does the Reformed doctrine of imputation establish that the Arminian modification cannot?
10. The lesson connects the sinlessness of Jesus to the virgin birth as the mechanism by which the Second Adam entered the human race without inheriting the first imputation. Evaluate this connection. Is the connection between the virgin birth and the avoidance of original sin explicitly taught in Scripture, or is it a theological inference? How does the doctrine of the hypostatic union, the full humanity and full divinity of Christ in one person, bear on the question of whether Christ's sinlessness requires a supernatural mode of conception? Can the sinlessness of Christ be grounded on other theological foundations, or is the virgin birth specifically necessary for it?
11. The lesson concludes with the doxological observation that the doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin, fully understood, terminates in the unsearchable wisdom of Romans 11:33–36 rather than in grim theological determinism. Evaluate this claim pastorally. Is it possible to preach the doctrine of imputed guilt in a way that naturally leads to worship rather than despair? What specific homiletical and pastoral moves would be required to deliver the full weight of the first imputation and then lead the congregation through it to the wonder of the second? And what is the relationship between the depth of one's understanding of the first imputation and the depth of one's wonder at the second?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

12. The lesson argues that the doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin produces a specific and comprehensive humility before the divine tribunal, the humility of one who knows that her condemnation precedes her personal choices. How does this specific humility differ from the more common forms of humility (the acknowledgment of personal failings, the comparison of oneself unfavorably with others)? And what specifically does this pre-personal, constitutive humility add to the believer's posture before God in prayer, in worship, in the reception of the Lord's Supper, and in the everyday awareness of one's standing before the divine tribunal?
13. The structural symmetry of the two imputations establishes that the believer's standing before God is entirely the product of divine covenantal reckoning, not of personal achievement in either direction. The condemnation was not personally earned; the justification is not personally achieved. Both are received from the same divine tribunal by the same mechanism of covenantal representation. How does this understanding of the double giftedness of one's status before God address the persistent tendency toward works-righteousness in the Christian life, the tendency to ground assurance in personal performance rather than in the covenantally reckoned righteousness of Christ?
14. The virgin birth is connected in this lesson to the sinlessness of Christ as the Second Adam who enters the human race without inheriting the first imputation. How central is the virgin birth to your own understanding of the doctrine of imputation and to your preaching or teaching about the person of Christ? If the virgin birth were not genuinely historical, if Jesus were the natural son of Joseph, what specific implications would this have for the doctrine of imputation, for the doctrine of Christ's sinlessness, and for

the validity of the second imputation? This is not a merely hypothetical question; it is a way of clarifying the dogmatic stakes of the historical affirmation.

15. The lesson identifies the death of infants as Paul's own implicit evidence for the doctrine of original imputed guilt in Romans 5:13–14. How does this doctrinal principle bear on the pastoral question of the salvation of those who die in infancy? The Reformed tradition has generally held that those who die in infancy (along with those who die without the mental capacity for personal faith) are among the elect whom God saves sovereignly, by grace, through Christ, without the ordinary means of the proclaimed gospel, grounding this hope in the divine compassion and sovereign freedom of the God who is not bound by the ordinary means He has appointed. How does the doctrine of imputed guilt, combined with the doctrine of sovereign election and the universal sufficiency of the atonement, inform a pastorally hopeful account of infant death?
16. The doxological conclusion of the lesson, Romans 11:33–36 as the terminus of the imputation doctrine, points toward the need for the doctrine not merely to be believed but to be worshipped through. What would it look like for the doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to become not merely a theological conviction but a doxological reality in your worship? In what specific forms of corporate and personal worship would the double imputation most naturally find its expression: in the prayer of confession (the first imputation received as the ground of the urgency of repentance), in the Lord's Supper (the second imputation received as the ground of the certainty of acceptance), in the preaching of the gospel (both imputations declared as the framework of the human condition and its divine remedy)?

Prayer Focus

Open this lesson's time of prayer by reading Romans 5:12–21 in its entirety, slowly and meditatively, not as a theological textbook but as the declaration of the two most decisive facts about the human condition and the human hope. Read verses 12–14 as the account of the condemnation you were born into: not as a spectator observing the plight of others but as a person who was, by the first imputation, constituted a sinner in Adam before you drew your first breath, under the sentence of death by virtue of the representative transgression of the covenant head who stood for you in the probationary garden. Let the weight of that settle. Then read verses 15–21 as the account of the grace that has come in response to and in superabundance over that condemnation: the gift that is not like the trespass, the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness, the reign in life through the One who is the antitype and the answer to the one through whom death reigned. Let the comparison between “death reigned” and “reign in life” land with its full force: you were constituted under the condemnation of the one; you have been constituted under the justification of the Other. Both by covenantal reckoning; both by divine appointment; both entirely by grace. The difference between the two is the entire distance between death and life, between condemnation and justification, between the ruin of the First Adam and the redemption of the Last.

Pray in the structure of the double imputation, moving through both imputations deliberately and in sequence. Begin with the first imputation: pray in the posture of one who knows that she was born condemned, not merely prone to sin but constitutively under the legal liability of Adam's transgression, a member of the *massa damnata* before she had made a single personal choice. This is not the prayer of self-flagellation or morbid introspection; it is the prayer of ontological honesty before the God who knows the truth about our condition and who has provided for it at infinite cost. Confess the specific dimension of the first imputation that is most personally real to you: the recognition that your sinful tendencies, your constitutional self-orientation, your ingrained patterns of moral failure are not merely the product of environment and choice but the expression of an inherited condition that precedes all of these. Then move to the second imputation: pray in the posture of one who knows that she has been constituted righteous in Christ, not because of anything she has achieved but because the One who knew no sin was made sin for her, and because the covenantal logic that made her guilty through the First Adam has made her righteous through the Last. Receive the second imputation with the specific wonder that the first imputation's full weight makes possible: this righteousness was not earned; it was given; it was given at the cost of the cross; and it is as permanent, as legally binding, and as covenantally certain as the condemnation it has reversed.

Pray together in three directions. First, for those who have not yet heard the doctrine of the double imputation in its full force, who may have heard that “Jesus died for your sins” without understanding the precise mechanism by which their sin became His liability and His righteousness became their standing. Pray that the God who “gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18) would open the eyes of those in your care to the specific content and the specific beauty of the exchange that 2 Corinthians 5:21 describes. Second, for those who are struggling with assurance, who know that they have been justified by faith but who continue to ground their sense of acceptance before God in the fluctuating quality of their own performance rather than in the unchanging covenantal reckoning of Christ's righteousness to their account. Pray that the doctrine of the second imputation, the constitutive, legally binding, permanently operative reckoning of Christ's perfect righteousness to the believer's account, would become the settled ground of their assurance and the foundation from which the daily battle of sanctification is fought. Third, for your own growth in the kind of humble, wonder-filled, theologically grounded gratitude that the double imputation is designed to produce: that the “much more” of Romans 5:17, the superabundance of the grace that has outrun the condemnation, would be not merely a doctrinal proposition you affirm but a spiritual reality you inhabit, a lens through which the entirety of your relationship with God is read and the inexhaustible source from which your worship of the One who made it possible flows.

Close with a reading of Romans 11:33–36 as the doxological resolution of the entire unit on the transmission of sin. The three lessons of Unit 4 have traced the condemnation and corruption that Adam's transgression transmitted to the entire race: imputed guilt (Lesson 10), total depravity (Lesson 11), and total inability (Lesson

12). But the doctrine of total condemnation is always, in Paul's theological universe, the preparation for the declaration of total grace. "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" The unsearchable wisdom is the wisdom of the covenant arrangement by which the guilt of Adam's race was laid upon the sinless Son, and the righteousness of the sinless Son was credited to the guilty race, the wisdom of the exchange that 2 Corinthians 5:21 describes in twenty words and that eternity will not exhaust in its exploration. "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." This is where the doctrine of imputation leads: not to grim fatalism but to the worship of the God whose ways are not our ways and whose thoughts are not our thoughts, the God who turned the first imputation into the occasion for the second, and who will be worshipped for the wisdom of that turning for all the ages of eternity.

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen."

Romans 11:33–36, NASB 1995

Key Texts: Romans 5:12–21; 3:19; 11:33–36; 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, 45–49; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Genesis 2:16–17; 3:6; Hebrews 7:9–10; 4:15; Psalm 51:5; Luke 1:35; Isaiah 55:8–9; Luke 18:13

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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