

June 17, 2007 by Steve Brandon



Not Our Ways: Imputation

Romans 5:12-19

1. The Imputation of Adam's Sin

2. The Imputation of Christ's Righteousness

Happy father's day. In some measure, no father can be happier than I am. Two and a half weeks ago, I became a father for the fifth time, when our son, David Andrew Brandon, was born. Over the years, it has been interesting to hear the advice that the nurses have given to us regarding how we should set our babies down in their crib. Their concerns have mainly been to prevent SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome).

When Yvonne was discharged from the hospital two weeks ago, the nurse at the hospital gave her clear instructions as to how our baby should lie down. At night, she was told, to place the baby on his back (or on his side). During the day, she was instructed to place him on his tummy for naps. The nurse gave several reasons why "tummy time" was important. First of all, it helps him develop his neck muscles. Also, it helps to prevent a flat head shape.

This advice is a bit different than the advice we received four years ago, when our youngest daughter, Stephanie, was born. At that time, the nurse who gave Yvonne her final directions before going home was instructed her to place Stephanie down on her tummy only when she was awake for playtime and can be closely monitored. On all other occasions, Stephanie should be placed on her back or on her side.

About four years before that, our daughter Hanna was born. The instructions for her were a bit different. Yvonne was instructed never to place Hanna down on her tummy. She should always be on her back or on her side. (This was the same advice given with our oldest two as well.)

About a week and a half ago, when my sister visited us to see our new baby, Yvonne and I were sharing this with her about these things. She has a sixteen year old, who is four years older than our oldest, which means that she had her first baby before we ever even thought about how one should place a baby to rest in the hospital crib. She told us of how she was in the hospital and had placed her son, Wesley, on his back. When the nurse saw this, she was very animated and very upset, saying, "Never place your baby down on his back!"

Being a father can be confusing. ... It seems to me that the medical professions doesn't quite know which way is best to place a baby down. Over time, things change. The way today is a bit different than the way a few years ago. Perhaps even, the way tomorrow will be different again. Our ways today aren't necessarily the ways that things will be done in the future.

This is a perfect lead in to our sermon series this summer. As most of you know, throughout this summer, we are in the midst of a topical sermon series entitled, "Not Our Ways." I have taken the idea for these messages from a sermon preached in the early 1800's by Edward Payson, which he entitled, "God's Ways Above Men's." In this sermon, Payson made a great case for how God has created this universe in a manner that is far different way than we would have naturally thought a world should be created. In the heart of his sermon, he provides eight different, specific examples of how this is the case. Throughout eight weeks this summer, I plan on taking up each of these topics as the basis of my messages.

Last week, we began with a look at the presence of evil in the world. Had we created a world, I don't think that any one of us would have created a world where evil was permitted to bring its devastating effects like it does in our world. But, God has permitted wickedness and sin and misery to take its course in this world. Such a fact has caused many not to believe in the God of the Bible, by questioning the nature of God, ... "How could an all-powerful God tolerate evil if He is so good? Either God isn't powerful enough to stop the evil. Or, God isn't good enough to want to stop the evil. Surely, such a God doesn't exist" they say. We spent last week thinking about the phenomenon of evil in the world. We saw that the Bible teaches that God uses evil to accomplish His purposes, while remaining sinless Himself.

This week, we pick up the next topic that Edward Payson used to demonstrate that God has created a world in which things are different than we might naturally think. He addresses the topic of the covenantal headship of Adam. Edward Payson writes, ...

In appointing Adam to be the covenant head and representative of the human race, so that if he stood his posterity should stand, and if he fell, his posterity should fall, God, did not act as we probably should have done. That he has done this, is evident from fact: for we find that sin and its consequences do descend to every individual of the species; and we are told, that in Adam all die. But we should have thought it best to have no such constitution; but to have had the condition of every individual independent of that of every other. This method God did adopt with angels; and why he thought fit to adopt a different method with respect to us, he has not seen fit to inform us, and we cannot tell. It is however evident that in this particular, God's thoughts and ways are above ours.

Payson puts forth here the idea of imputation. To many of you, that may be a new word. And if my message this morning means that you learn a new word, great. I believe that it is so profitable for you to know the meaning of this word that I am entitling my message this morning,

“Imputation.”

At its most fundamental level, imputation describes the process of thinking, counting, regarding, reckoning or crediting. Theologically, the word is used to describe the process of transferring responsibility for an action to someone else who wasn't involved in the action in the first place. Imputation describes what takes place when someone else is the recipient of the fruit that comes as a result of my actions. It means that you are regarding another with the responsibility.

Perhaps the best way to understand this concept is to illustrate it for you. A great place where this is illustrated comes in Joshua, chapter 7. This chapter records the story of Israel, as they begin their military conquest of the land of Palestine. The previous chapter records for us the wonderful victory at Jericho. Perhaps you remember what took place. The people of Israel were told to march around the city once each day for six days (Josh. 6:12-14). On the seventh day, Israel marched around the city seven times. When they had finished, they blew their trumpets and shouted, and “the wall [of the city] fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight ahead, and they took the city” (Josh. 6:20). “They utterly destroyed everything in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword” (Josh. 6:21).

At this point in the life of Israel, things were going very well! They are riding high on the victory just gained. And then, we come to Joshua, chapter 7. This chapter records for us the defeat at Ai. Israel had come against them, but were defeated, thirty-six of them were killed (Josh. 7:5). When this took place, Joshua was very distressed. As verse 6 records, “[He] tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face” for much of the day, and sought the LORD in prayer, “Alas, O Lord GOD, why did You ever bring this people over the Jordan, only to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us?”

The LORD answers his prayer in verse 10, “Rise up! Why is it that you have fallen on your face? Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. And they have even taken some of the things under the ban and have both stolen and deceived. Moreover, they have also put them among their own things.” The LORD then tells them to gather the nation of Israel and choose a single family by lot. In verse 15, the LORD gave command, “It shall be that the one who is taken with the things under the ban shall be burned with fire, he and all that belongs to him, because he has transgressed the covenant of the LORD, and because he has committed a disgraceful thing in Israel.”

In response to these things, Joshua gathered all of the tribes of Israel before Him and cast lots. The lot fell on the tribe of Judah (Josh. 7:16). And so, Joshua gathered the tribe of Judah before Him and cast lots. The lot fell on the family of the Zerahites (Josh. 7:17). And so, Joshua brought the family of the Zerahites to him and cast lots. The lot fell on the household of Zabdi (Josh. 7:17). And so, Joshua came the household of Zabdi and cast lots.

The lot fell on Achan (Josh. 7:18). And Joshua said to Achan, “My son, I implore you, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give praise to Him; and tell me now what you have done. Do not hide it from me.”

Achan came forward and confessed his sin, “Truly, I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel, and this is what I did: when I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar and two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold fifty shekels in weight, then I coveted them and took them; and behold, they are concealed in the earth inside my tent with the silver underneath it.”

When it was confirmed that Achan was telling the truth, verses 24-26 record what took place next. ...

Joshua 7:24-26

Then Joshua and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah, the silver, the mantle, the bar of gold, his sons, his daughters, his oxen, his donkeys, his sheep, his tent and all that belonged to him; and they brought them up to the valley of Achor. Joshua said, “Why have you troubled us? The LORD will trouble you this day.” And all Israel stoned them with stones; and they burned them with fire after they had stoned them with stones. They raised over him a great heap of stones that stands to this day, and the LORD turned from the fierceness of His anger.

This is imputation. It is the process of transferring responsibility for an action to someone else who wasn't involved in the action in the first place. In this case, Achan sinned. He coveted the material possessions, which the LORD had placed under the ban (Josh. 7:1) and took them for himself (Josh. 7:21). As a result of his sin, he, and his family (!), were stoned and burned! Achan's sons were stoned and burned because of the sin of their father. Achan's daughters were stoned and burned because of the sin of their father.

This is imputation. Achan's guilt was imputed to his children! They died because of his sin. Achan's children bore the responsibility of his sin, and received the punishment along with him.

In general, people don't like this type of imputation. I know that many children don't like it when this takes place. For instance, suppose that one of your children, Johnny, is playing with a specific toy. He is seated on the couch, content with life. The toy is giving him much pleasure. He's occupied and enjoying himself. And then, along comes his sister, Chrissie, who sees how much fun little Johnny is having with his toy. Chrissie comes up and takes the toy away from Johnny. A fight ensues. From the other room, you hear the commotion. So, you get up and go over to see what the problem is.

Acting as judge, you interrogate your suspects. You hear the various stories from your children. Finally, you decide, “If this toy is going to cause so much trouble between both of you, nobody gets to play with the toy.” The judgment has been pronounced, and nobody's happy, especially Johnny, who feels that he got the bum end of the deal. He was happy and minding his own business, when Chrissie came up and ruined his day. In some measure, he feels cheated.

That's what some think about the story of Achan. In being stoned for the sins of their father, the children of Achan were cheated. “That's not

fair" is the common cry. But, that's imputation: Achan's guilt was imputed to his children! His sin was credited to their account. They died because of his sin. Achan's children bore the responsibility of his sin, and received the punishment along with him.

To solve this problem, people often turn to their logic. God is a God of justice. He will only punish you for your sin. He can't punish you for the sins of others. And so, they might surmise that Achan's children were accomplices in the crime, as they participated, they too were guilty.

The difficulty in saying this is that the text doesn't give any indication that this was the case. In fact, if anything, the text seems to go the other way. When Achan confessed his sin, it was entirely in the first person. He said, "Truly, I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel, and this is what I did: when I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar and two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold fifty shekels in weight, then I coveted them and took them; and behold, they are concealed in the earth inside my tent with the silver underneath it." Four times in this verse, Achan says that he was the one responsible. Not once does he give a hint that His children were involved in these matters.

Moreover, the text specifically applies the guilt of this one man to all of Israel. Joshua 7:1 reads, "But the sons of Israel acted unfaithfully in regard to the things under the ban, for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, from the tribe of Judah, took some of the things under the ban, therefore the anger of the LORD burned against the sons of Israel." It says here that "the sons of Israel acted unfaithfully" although it was only one person who sinned. It also says that "the anger of the LORD burned against the sons of Israel," even though, there was only one who sinned! The sin of the one was imputed to many.

Furthermore, when this situation is referenced at the end of Joshua, it describes one man's sin, whose judgment came upon others. "Did not Achan the son of Zerah act unfaithfully in the things under the ban, and wrath fall on all the congregation of Israel? And that man did not perish alone in his iniquity" (Joshua 22:20).

The text of Joshua is clear: one man's sin affected many. He "did not perish alone in his iniquity" (Josh. 22:20). His family was stoned and burned. Thirty-six of the Israelites died at the hands of the men of Ai, because the LORD was not with them (Josh. 7:5).

This is imputation. There are many who don't like it. There are many who try to explain it away. This is the point of my message. God's ways and not our ways.

This is by no means the only instance in which this is the case. Perhaps you remember back in Genesis 20, when Abraham came to Abimelech, king of Gerar. Because of the beauty of Sarah, his wife, Abraham told Abimelech, "She is my sister" (Gen. 20:2, 5). And so, Abimelech sent and took Sarah and brought her into his harem (Gen. 20:2). Soon afterwards, the LORD visited Abimelech in a dream in the night saying, "[Abimelech] Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is married" (Gen. 20:3).

Abimelech responded by saying, "Lord, **will You slay a nation, even [though] blameless?** Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this." (Gen. 20:4-5).

Then God said to Abimelech, "Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. Now therefore, restore the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if **you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours.**"

Think carefully of what God says, "if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours" (verse 7). Abimelech's sin would be visited with death upon him and upon all who are his. Abimelech interpreted this to be entire country that would incur the guilt of his sin (verse 4). This is imputation: God regarding many responsible for the sin of the one. It's all over the Bible.

Perhaps you remember the story of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. They (along with two hundred and fifty other men) arose in rebellion against Moses and Aaron. They said, "You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?" (Numbers 16:3).

After a few interchanges back and forth, Moses told the people to get away from their tents, because of the coming judgment. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram continued in their rebellion, boldly standing at the doorway of their tents, "along with their wives and their sons and their little ones" (Numbers 16:27). Moses then declared, "By this you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these deeds; for this is not my doing. If these men die the death of all men or if they suffer the fate of all men, then the LORD has not sent me. But if the LORD brings about an entirely new thing and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that is theirs, and they descend alive into Sheol, then you will understand that these men have spurned the LORD" (Numbers 16:28-30).

Sure enough, as soon as Moses stopped speaking, "the ground that was under them split open and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah with their possessions" (Numbers 16:31-32). Men, women and children were all swallowed up by the earth, because of the sin of the men. This is imputation. The Lord held these men (and their families) responsible for the sin that the men committed. And they died for it.

Imputation is the thrust of Exodus 34:7, when the LORD shares that he "will by no means leave [the guilty] unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations." This is an important word to hear on Father's day. Men, be careful how you live, because your iniquity will be visited upon your children and upon your grandchildren and upon your great-grandchildren and upon your great-great grandchildren.

Now, in saying all of this, let me be clear. This doesn't absolve us of individual responsibility. Ezekiel 18:4 is clear: the soul that sins will die. God will hold each and every one of us responsible for our own sins. That is just as clear in Scripture as this concept of imputation is. But, in saying these things, you need to see that God also has another sphere of accountability, that may not be wrapped up in your own individual world.

We, as Americans don't think this way. In the Declaration of Independence, it is stated that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed, by their Creator, with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." Much of this talk is so individualistic, that we easily come to believe that everything in this life comes to us individually. In other words, we shouldn't have to bear the responsibility for the sins of others. On a human plane, this is exactly right. But, on a divine plane, things are a bit different. God doesn't always act in accordance with individual responsibility. There are times when the sin of one is imputed to the sin of another.

In fact, I go further than this. Every single one of us are responsible for the sin of another, our common father, Adam. Let me show you what I mean. Turn with me now to the book of Romans, chapter 5. We will spend the rest of our time this morning here in this passage, as it is the clearest, most important, most foundational Scripture where we find imputation being taught. We will focus our attention upon verses 12-21. Consider this passage carefully.

Romans 5:12-19

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. 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 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. 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. 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.

In my message this morning, I have two points. Let's look at the first:

The first is this:

1. The Imputation of Adam's Sin

We see the concept of imputation coming in verse 12, where we read, "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." In other words, verse 12 says, that one man did one thing and the consequences of that action has come upon all of us. When Adam sinned, we all shared in that sin. The consequences of that sin has come to us.

What's the consequence of sin? Death. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). As Adam sinned, he received his wages: death. But, he wasn't the only one who received it. We all received it. We all will die. Why? Because we all sinned in Adam. That's what verse 12 says. Consider it again, "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."

This is imputation. There are several theories regarding how it is that we become responsible for Adam's sin. The first theory is called, ...

a. The Realistic View.

This view regards us as being in the loins of Adam, and so, in some sense sinning with him. Those who advocate this view will often quote Hebrews 7:9-10, which says, "And, so to speak, though Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him." The idea here is that Levi (who was yet to be born) is considered as really participating in the act of Abraham when he paid tithes to Melchizedek, though he was not yet born. This is what some say took place in the garden. We were in the loins of Adam when he sinned. And so, in effect, we sinned with Him. We were there in the garden. Thus, we are responsible for his sin because we too committed the sin.

The second view is called, ...

b. The Representative View.

Those who advocate this view say that we are guilty in that Adam represented us. It's a bit like our government. We don't live in a true democracy. In a true democracy, the entire nation would have the opportunity to vote on every issue. But, that's not how our government operates. We elect those who will represent us. Our elected representatives go to Springfield and Washington and cast their votes for us. As we have chosen them to represent us, we bear the responsibility for their actions.

It's the same with Adam. He was our representative. We bear the responsibility for his actions. Only, we didn't vote. God appointed Adam as the first man in the garden as our representative. Nevertheless, as he is our representative, we are responsible for his sin.

This week, I tried to figure out which view was the most Biblical, but was unable to do so, as I'm not smart enough to figure it all out. What I do know, however, is that God holds us responsible for the sin of Adam, which is the point of verse 12, as explained in verses 13-14. At the end of verse 12, most translations have a dash or a colon or some sort of indicator that there is a break right here in the text. In verses 13 and

14, Paul goes on to explain exactly what he meant in verse 12 by this expression, "because all sinned." These verses demonstrate that Adam's sin was in fact imputed to us. Consider the verses, ...

Romans 5:13-14

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.

Paul takes us back into history from the time between Adam and Moses, more than 2,000 years of history. Think about life during those days. All they knew of God was what Adam had experienced. There was no written law. There was no direction from God given to the people. Certainly, sin was in the world during this time. Cain killed his brother Abel (Gen. 4:8). A few generations later, we read of Lamech, murdering another man. Eventually, we see the whole world so corrupt that the LORD destroyed it all with a flood, preserving the life of only eight people, Noah and his family. By the time the earth is repopulated, again we see great wickedness on the earth. The patriarchs are far from righteous people. Though Abraham is known as the father of faith, there were many ways in which he failed to trust God. He committed adultery at the urging of his wife. On several occasions, he was a bold-faced liar. Isaac follows in his father's steps, putting forth the same lie about his wife, saying to the same man, Abimelech, king of the Philistines in Gerar, that Rebekah was his sister. Isaac and Rebekah played favorites with their children. Isaac loved Esau, while Rebekah loved Jacob. These two sons treat each other with deception. Jacob took advantage of Esau's hunger one day and coerced him to sign away his birthright. Jacob deceived his father, Isaac, and stole Esau's blessing. Jacob's sons weren't so good either. They treated their brother with contempt, selling him into slavery.

Paul's statement about this time is very interesting. He said, "sin is not imputed when there is no law." In other words, if you don't have a law that is written down, you can't hold people guilty for breaking the law.

For instance, suppose that you went down to the local Walmart in town and bought some groceries for your family. On the way home, imagine being stopped by a policeman. When you roll down your window to speak with the policeman, you ask, "Sir, what's the problem?" He says, "I noticed that you were just shopping at Walmart. Can I check your bags?" You say, "Well, sure...." You get out of your car, open your trunk and show him all that you purchased at Walmart. As he rummages through your bags, he discovers that among the items you bought, you purchased two items: aluminum foil and some liquid Drano. Upon seeing both of those items, he puts handcuffs on you and takes you down to the police department.

While in the back of the squad car, you ask the police officer, "Sir, what did I do wrong?" He said, "You purchased two items at the same time. Aluminum foil and liquid Drano can be used to make a bomb. You will probably spend the night in jail." You reply, "But, officer, I didn't know that it was against the law to purchase these things together during the same trip." He said, "Well, there isn't exactly a law against this. It's just that we at the police station have decided that it is illegal for you to do this, as it shows signs of the evil you are planning to do. And so, we have begun a policy to arrest those who purchase aluminum foil and liquid Drano on the same trip to the store." We wouldn't consider this fair at all.

This is Paul's point. When there is no law, you can't be guilty of breaking the law. From Adam until Moses, there was no written law of God upon the books. He hadn't given the law to those who lived on the earth. Without the law, God won't punish people for their sins. And yet, what did Paul say in verse 14? "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." In other words, the penalty of death came upon everybody who lived from Adam to Moses. All you need to do is read the fifth chapter of Genesis and you will see how everybody in the genealogy died. In fact, that's the theme of Genesis 5: Death has come!

But, God didn't give them any laws that promised that they would die if they committed those particular sins. But, Adam had such a law. God told him, "In the day that you eat [the fruit from that tree] you will surely die" (Gen. 2:17). He ate, and he died. There was a spiritual death that he experienced on that day, as he was suddenly fearful of the LORD (Gen. 3:8). And 930 years later, he experienced physical death that came as a result of his sin. But, those who lived from Adam until Moses didn't have such a law. In fact, it was impossible for anyone else to ever eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, as the LORD "stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life" (Gen. 3:24).

Those who lived from Adam until Moses couldn't sin like Adam sinned. They had no law given to them. And yet, what does Paul point out? "Nevertheless less death reigned from Adam until Moses" (verse 14). Here's the question that makes the logic of the text clear, "Why is it that people who lived between the time of Adam and Moses died?" Because, the guilt of Adam was imputed to them. They were responsible for the sin of Adam. Indeed, that's what the last phrase of verse 12 says, "because all sinned."

It's not that they "have sinned" and die because of the sin that they committed. No. It's because they sinned when Adam sinned, even though they were never born. The same is true for us today. Every single one of us will die. In large measure, we will die because of the sin of our great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather, Adam, with whom we sinned in the garden.

There are those who have come to read these things and say, "That's not fair. That can't be. God would never punish anybody for a sin that another committed. It must be that the last phrase in verse 12 means that death spread to all men, because everyone has sinned of their own accord. People die because of their own sin."

Now, such an explanation may hold up in the logic of people. But, such an explanation doesn't hold up to the context, particularly verses 13 and 14, which are written to explain that last phrase in verse 12. And this is the point of my message. I don't care whether or not it sounds fair or not to you. I don't care whether it makes logical sense to your or not. The plain fact of the word of God is this: Adam was our representative and we bear the responsibility for the sin that he committed. We all die because of Adam's sin. God's ways are not our ways.

In our society, we hold each individual responsible for their own sins, and rightly we should. But, God holds us responsible for the sin of Adam.

At this point in my message, let me ask you a searching question. Do you like this? Do you like the way that the LORD has established the universe? Do you like the rules that He has set in place? Do you like the fact that you are responsible for the sins of others? Do you like the way that God imputes Adam's sin to you?

With my second point, I hope to cause you to love this doctrine. We have seen (1) The Imputation of Adam's Sin. Now, let's turn to ...

2. The Imputation of Christ's Righteousness

There is another parallel story going on here in Romans, chapter 5, which I have not yet brought to your attention. I have done so purposefully, because I wanted for you to really grapple with the dark side of imputation, that God counts the sin of Adam against us. I attempted to paint the dark side so black that the bright side of this passage is so glorious, that you can barely contain yourself from the joy that arises out of it! Indeed, Romans 5:12-21 is about two men, who committed two acts, which had two results.

The two men are Adam and Jesus. The two acts are clear: Adam committed the sin in the garden. Jesus died upon the cross. The two results are clear as well: Adam brought the entire race into condemnation and death. Christ brought the many into justification and life.

To see these two things clearly, let's skip ahead to verses 18 and 19, where we see Paul's conclusion to his point. In fact, these two verses pick up the thought from the dash given in verse 12, ending his parenthetical thought. Each of these verses communicate essentially the same thing, only using slightly different terminology.

Romans 5:18-19

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.

First up in verse 18 is Adam. "Through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men." We have been over this before. This is the reality of verse 12, which is explained in verses 13-14. Adam's one transgression brought condemnation to the entire human race, because his sin was imputed to us.

And then comes the good news in the second half of verse 18. "Even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men." This is talking about the cross of Christ. When Jesus came and died upon the cross as our righteous substitute, it was a righteous act. Jesus "committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed" (1 Peter. 2:22-24). His act of righteousness had a result. It results in "justification of life."

As we believe in Jesus Christ, we are justified before God, the Father. This is the point of Romans 4:5, "To the one who ... believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness." How do we receive our righteousness? By imputation! -- The same way that we received our guilt! This is why imputation is so great! The same way that we received our guilt--by Adam's sin being imputed to us--is the same way that we have received our righteousness--by Christ's righteousness being imputed to us! It is an exact parallel.

If you want to say that it's not fair of God to hold you responsible for the sin of Adam, then, you will be obliged also to say that it plain isn't fair that the LORD would be able to give you the righteousness of Jesus Christ. If you reject the imputation of Adam's sin to you, you must reject the imputation of Christ's righteousness to you, because this is the parallel that God's word gives to us. If you want to say to God, "It's not fair that you condemn me for the sin of Adam. I want to be held responsible for my own sin." Then, you must say to God, "It's not fair that you justify me for the righteous act of Jesus upon the cross. I want to be declared righteous for my own righteous acts." And if you do this, you are in trouble! --- You are dead in your sins!

Praise the Lord that He has woven imputation into the fabric of the way that this world works. Without it, we go the path of Adam without hope! But, God has been gracious to establish a world where the concept of imputation is valid. It's the only way we stand a chance of being righteous before God! ... by having another impute His righteousness to us, that we would be considered righteous, and not guilty.

Verse 19 says the same thing, "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." When Adam sinned, we all were made to be sinners. Adam fell from a state of grace to a state of sin. At that moment, though we weren't yet even born, we were made to be sinners, along with everyone else who ever lived. But, when Christ obeyed the Father during the days He walked in the flesh, we too are made righteous in Him. When Jesus died upon the cross, He took our sin. When Jesus died upon the cross, He gave us His righteousness. He did so through imputation. God considers us righteous because of what Jesus has done for us.

If you balk at the idea of being with Adam in the garden, then you must also balk at the idea of being with Christ in His death. But, this is how the Bible speaks. Even before we existed, our sins were placed upon Jesus on the cross. Colossians 2:14 says that our sins were nailed to the cross. The cross existed 2,000 years ago. By now, it has rotted or been burned (though the Roman Catholic Church may contend otherwise). And yet, your sins were nailed to the cross. The way this can be is if we were joined to Christ in some way 2,000 years ago, like we were joined to Adam, thousands of years before that. In Romans 5:8 we read of how Christ died for us, "While we were yet sinners." Christ died 2,000 years ago for us, when we were sinners--long before we were even born.

I want to mention here why it is so important for you not to embrace the theory of evolution. A proper understanding of your salvation is at stake. The argument of Romans 5 necessitates us to believe in a literal Adam, who committed a literal sin, which plunged the human race into literal death. It's important that our sin came to us through one man, because that is how our righteousness comes. It comes through one man! If evolution is true, there were many people evolving from apes into humans around the same time. And the parallel would need to be for us to have many Christs as well to bring us out of the fall. But, there is only one Christ who imputes His righteousness to us. So also, there was only one Adam whose sin was imputed to us!

I also want to show you here of the necessity of the virgin birth. Had Jesus come to earth in the same manner as the rest of us (with an earthly father and an earthly mother), He would have been guilty from day one. And it would have been impossible for Him to be the sinless one to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29). But, with the virgin birth, it was possible for Jesus to enter the world apart from the sin of Adam, so that 2 Corinthians 5:21 might be true: "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 virgin birth is far more than a nice Christmas story. It makes it possible for us to have a sinless Savior.

Let's finish this morning looking at verses 15-17. It's where the light shines bright!

Romans 5:15-17

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 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. 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.

These verses point out the same thing that verses 18 and 19 did, only they say it in a little different way. Rather than focusing on the similarities between Adam and Christ, these verses point out the differences (as in verses 15-16). These differences bring the gospel into glorious focus. In other words, as dark as the imputation of Adam's sin to us was, the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us shines even brighter! Notice the words in verse 15 which makes the act of Christ so much better than the act of Adam, "much more did the grace of God ... abound to the many." Again in verse 17, "much more those who receive the abundance ... will reign in life."

Adam plunged us into sin, and that was bad. But, the restoration was much better. Not only did it put us back to where we started, but it placed us better than we ever were before. Do you love the fact that God's ways include imputation?

I close with a poem that captures the main point of my message this morning.

By One Man

By one man, we came to know sin,
Condemned without hope when death entered in.
But by one man, there's freedom again -- He offered the gift of life.

By one man, who would not obey,
Our birthright of joy was taken away.
But by one man, we are righteous today -- He offered the gift of life.

And this gift of life is given through Jesus (life through Jesus),
In the name of Jesus Christ, God's grace abounds to all.

By one man, called Adam, by name,
Our judgment was sealed and covered with shame,
'Til God's own Son, Lord Jesus, He came -- to offer the gift of life.

By one man, who stood in our place,
Redeeming by blood those lost in disgrace,
Now we stand, forgiven by grace -- embracing the gift of life.

He gave us the gift of life -- Lord Jesus, the gift of life. [\[1\]](#)

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on June 17, 2007 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] My wife and I heard these words sung as a song on the radio, some eight years ago. We quickly recorded the song and transcribed the words (changing them slightly). The Haven Quartet sang it. If you are interested, here is a place you can purchase a CD containing this song: <http://www.singers.com/gospel/haven.html>. It's the only place on the internet that I was able to locate the song.