

What is the biblical evidence for the imputation of Adam's Sin?

[January 23, 2006](#) / by [Matt Perman](#) / Topic: [Imputed & Original Sin](#)

The doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin means that when Adam first sinned, that sin (and its blame) was rightly regarded by God to be our sin as well. John Piper writes:

The problem with the human race is not most deeply that everybody does various kinds of sins—those sins are real, they are huge and they are enough to condemn us. Paul is very concerned about them. But the deepest problem is that behind all our depravity and all our guilt and all our sinning, there is a deep mysterious connection with Adam whose sin became our sin and whose judgment became our judgment. (John Piper, "Adam, Christ, and Justification: Part 1")

God ordains that that there be a union of some kind that makes Adam's sin to be our sin so that our condemnation is just. ("Adam, Christ, and Justification: Part 5")

The biblical basis for this doctrine of imputed sin is discussed thoroughly in John Piper's five sermons on Romans 5:12-21. Here we will simply seek to summarize some of the primary evidence from this text.

Sin Entered the World Through One Man

First, Paul states in 5:12 that all sinned in Adam: "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." Paul seems to be equating the "because all sinned" with "through one man sin entered into the world."

Sin is Not Imputed Where There is no Law

Second, in verses 13-14 Paul adds a clarification which confirms that he does indeed have the imputation of Adam's sin in view in the phrase "because all sinned" rather than our individual sins. He states: "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." In other words, Paul concedes that personal sin was prevalent in the world before Moses ("until the Law sin was in the world..."). *But* he adds that these personal sins were not the ultimate reason people died in that time period: "But sin is not imputed when there is no law. *Nevertheless* death reigned from Adam until Moses." As Piper summarizes:

People died even though their own individual sins against the Mosaic law were not the reason for dying; they weren't counted. Instead, the reason all died is because all sinned in Adam. Adam's sin was imputed to them. (John Piper, "Adam, Christ, and Justification: Part 2")

Death Reigns Even Over Those Who Did Not Sin Like Adam

Third, Paul's statement at the end of verse 14 further clarifies that he does not have personal sins in view as the reason for human death: "Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, *even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam* ." Piper notes:

In other words, yes Paul concedes that there are other kinds of laws before the

Mosaic Law, and yes people broke those laws, and yes, one could argue that these sins are the root cause of death and condemnation in the world. But, Paul says, there is a problem with that view, because death reigned "even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam." There are those who died without seeing a law and choosing to sin against it.

Who are they? I think the group of people begging for an explanation is infants. Infants died. They could not understand personal revelation. They could not read the law on their hearts and choose to obey or disobey it. Yet they died. Why? Paul answers: the sin of Adam and the imputation of that sin to the human race. In other words, death reigned over all humans, even over those who did not sin against a known and understood law. Therefore, the conclusion is, to use the words of verse 18: "through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men." (Ibid)

So the purpose of verses 13 and 14 are to clarify verse 12 in this way:

At the end of verse 12 the words, "death spread to all men, because all sinned" mean that "death spread to all because all sinned in Adam." Death is not first and most deeply because of our own individual sinning, but because of what happened in Adam. (Ibid)

Paul's Emphasis Upon the *One* Transgression

Fourth, at least five times in the following verses Paul says that death comes upon all humans because of the *one* sin of Adam:

Verse 15: by the *transgression of the one* the many died

Verse 16: the judgment arose from *one transgression* resulting in condemnation

Verse 17: by the *transgression of the one*, death reigned through the one

Verse 18: through *one transgression* there resulted condemnation to all men

We are all condemned not ultimately because of our individual sins, but because of *one sin* (verse 18). We die not ultimately because of personal sins, but because of Adam's *one transgression* (verse 17). It is not ultimately from our personal sins that we die, but rather "by the *transgression of the one* the many died." Paul states over and over again that it is because of *one sin* that death and condemnation belong to us all. In other words, we are connected to Adam such that his one sin is regarded as our sin and we are worthy of condemnation for it.

The Direct Statement of Verse 19

Fifth, verse 19 provides us with a direct statement of imputation:

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.

Paul here says that we are made sinners by the sin of Adam. Due to his disobedience, we are regarded as sinners. We cannot take "made sinners" here to be referring to original sin in which we become inherently sinful because it is paralleled with "made righteous." The phrase "made righteous" in this context is referring to the great truth of justification. Justification does not concern a change in our characters, the infusion of something inherent in us. Rather, it involves a change in our standing before God. In justification, God declares us righteous because He imputes to us the righteousness of Christ--not because He makes us internally righteous (cf. 2

Corinthians 5:21). Thus, when Paul says "made righteous" here, he means "imputed with righteousness" not "infused with righteousness." Since "made sinners" is paralleled with "made righteous," it must also be referring to imputation. Thus, Paul is saying that we are all made sinners in the sense that we are *imputed* with Adam's sin.

Further Resources

John Piper, "Adam, Christ, and Justification"

John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin*

John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 5:12-21.

Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 5:12-21.

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What is the biblical evidence for original sin?

[January 23, 2006](#) / by [Matt Perman](#) / Topic: [Imputed & Original Sin](#)

There are several lines of biblical evidence for the historic Christian doctrine that we are all born into the world with sinful natures, due to the sin of Adam.

Scripture says that we are born sinners and that we are by nature sinners

Psalm 51:5 states that we all come into the world as sinners: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." Ephesians 2:2 says that all people who are not in Christ are "sons of disobedience." Ephesians 2:3 also establishes this, saying that we are all "*by nature* children of wrath." If we are all "by nature children of wrath," it can only be because we are all by nature sinners--for God does not direct His wrath towards those who are not guilty. God did not create the human race sinful, but upright. But we fell into sin and became sinful due to the sin of Adam.

Scripture speaks of humans as unrighteous from infancy

There are also verses which declare that we are all unrighteous from the time that we are born. Proverbs 22:15 says "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child." Genesis 8:21 declares, "...the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth." Jonathon Edwards, in his classic work *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended*, remarks that on this verse: "The word translated youth, signifies the whole of the former part of the age of man, which commences from the beginning of life. The word in its derivation, has reference to the birth or beginning of existence...so that the word here translated youth, comprehends not only what we in English most commonly call the time of youth, but also childhood and infancy."

Humanity is Often Described in General Terms as Unrighteous

Unrighteousness is often spoken of in Scripture as something belonging to the human race as a whole. This implies that it is the property of our species. In other words, sinfulness is considered a property of human nature after the fall. Thus, it must be concluded that we are all born sinners, since we are all born human and sin is regarded as a property of humanity. In this vein, consider Ephesians 2:1-3:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Paul is here reminding Christians of what they were like before their conversion to Christ ("you were dead in your trespasses...in which you formerly walked"). Thus, all people, until and unless they are converted, are sinners. Paul goes on to make it absolutely clear that all Christians came from this state ("...we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh") and that all non-Christians are still in this state ("...and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.") Thus, Scripture regards all people before they are saved by Christ as sinners and thus deserving of punishment from God. Which is to say that from the inception of our existence, we are sinful.

In Psalm 14:2, 3 we read: "The Lord has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men, to see

if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one." Here again we see unrighteousness as a property of the human race: "they have all turned aside...there is no one who does good."

Job 15:14 similarly declares that sinfulness is a property of humanity: "What is man, that he should be pure, or he who is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?" Verses 15-16 then speaks of the human race as a whole in shocking terms expressing our general corruption: "Behold, He puts no trust in His holy ones, And the heavens are not pure in His sight; How much less one who is detestable and corrupt, Man, who drinks iniquity like water!"

Jeremiah 17:9 says that "the heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it." This seems to assume original sin--wickedness is a property of the human heart. Ecclesiastes 9:3 declares a similar truth: "...the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil, and insanity is in their hearts through their lives." Again, the human heart is sinful, and therefore all humans are sinful.

These texts indicate, then, that human nature is corrupt. Therefore, even infants are corrupt because they are human. And if infants are corrupt, then this is the same as saying that we are born corrupt--which means we are born with original sin. One may, however, object that these texts speak nothing of infants, only those who are old enough to make moral decisions. All of those people are sinful, but this doesn't mean that infants are.

This is an ingenious objection, but it does not succeed. First, the texts do not seem to restrict themselves to people who are old enough to make intelligent decisions. They seem to speak of human nature as a whole, a classification under which infants certainly fall. Second, as Jonathan Edwards pointed out, "...this would not alter the case...For if all mankind, as soon as ever they are capable of reflecting, and knowing their own moral state, find themselves wicked, this proves that they are wicked by nature."

In other words, even if these verses were only speaking of people old enough to mentally understand sin, they would still be teaching original sin. For on that view, these verses would be saying that all people, as soon as they know good from evil, find themselves sinners. But if all people, as soon as they are capable of moral decisions, find themselves sinners, this proves that they are that way by nature.

Third, Edwards also says, "why should man be so continually spoken of as evil, carnal, perverse, deceitful, and desperately wicked, if all men are by nature as perfectly innocent, and free from any propensity to evil, as Adam was the first moment of his creation?" (Edwards, *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin*, 188).

Infants die, therefore they are not innocent

Death--both physical and spiritual--is a result of sin (Romans 5:12; 6:23). Thus, death only comes upon those who have sinned. Since infants die, they therefore must be sinners. It could be objected that Christ was sinless, and yet He died. But He willingly gave up His life, and He did it to conquer the curse of death that we were under. In fact, God imputed to Christ our sins on the cross, and Christ died in punishment of those sins.

If humanity is not born in sin, wouldn't we expect there to be some people who have "beaten the odds" and never sinned?

If we are born innocent and good, why aren't there at least some people who have continued in this state and remained sinless? The fact that everybody sins needs some explanation. The best

explanation is that we are sinners by nature. Someone might argue that the reason all people sin is because society is sinful, and thus society renders it impossible for anybody to keep themselves entirely pure. But that only pushes the question back one step. How did society get sinful in the first place? If people are born morally good, then how did it come about that they congregated into societies that influence all people to sin?

Further Resources

Jonathan Edwards, *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Volume I*, pp. 143-233.

Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, chapter 24, "Sin."

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What is the difference between original sin and imputed sin?

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The terms "original sin" and "imputed sin" refer to the two main effects that Adam's sin had on the human race.

First, as a result of Adam's sin we all enter the world with a fallen nature. This is *original sin*--the sinful tendencies, desires, and dispositions in our hearts with which we are all born. Thus, original sin is something *inherent in us*--it is a morally ruined character. The original sin that we are all born with manifests itself throughout our lives in actual sins--the actions, thoughts, and feelings we have that violate God's moral commands. So our sinful hearts (original sin) cause us to make sinful choices, think sinful thoughts, and feel sinful feelings (actual sins). We are not sinners because we sin; rather, we sin *because we are sinners*. We are all born totally imprisoned in original sin. There is no island of goodness left in us.

Second, the guilt of Adam's sin is credited not just to Adam himself, but to us all. We are regarded as having sinned *in Adam*, and hence as deserving of the same punishment. This is *imputed sin*. Thus, we not only receive polluted and sinful natures because of Adam's sin (original sin), but we are also regarded as having sinned in Adam such that we are guilty of his act as well (imputed sin). Imputed sin is the ruin of our *standing* before God and is thus not an internal quality but an objective reckoning of guilt, whereas original sin is the ruin of our *character* and thus is a reference to internal qualities. Both original sin and imputed sin place us under the judgment of God.

Since the consequences of Adam's sin are twofold (original sin and imputed sin), the remedy of our salvation is also twofold. John Piper writes:

So we have seen two things that need a remedy. One is our sinful nature that enslaves us to sin, and the other is our original guilt and condemnation that is rooted not first in our individual sinning but in our connection with Adam in his sin. The book of Romans—indeed the whole Bible—is the story of how God has worked in history to remedy these two problems. The problem of our condemnation in Adam God remedies through justification in Christ. The problem of our corruption and depravity he remedies through sanctification by the Spirit. Or to put it another way: The problem of our legal guilt and condemnation before God is solved by his reckoning to us the righteousness Christ; and the problem of our moral defilement and habitual sinning is solved by his purifying us by the work of Spirit. The first remedy, justification, comes by imputed righteousness. The other, sanctification, comes by imparted righteousness. Justification is instantaneous; sanctification is progressive – and we will deal extensively with it in Romans 6-8, just we have dealt with justification in Romans 3-5. (John Piper, "[Adam, Christ, and Justification: Part IV](#)")

Further Resources

John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin*.

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Why is the doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin important?

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Aren't our own individual sins enough to condemn us? Why, then, does it matter whether we believe that *Adam's* sin is imputed to us as the ultimate basis of our condemnation? John Piper writes:

Now someone might say, why does this matter? Doesn't Romans teach in 3:23 that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" individually? And doesn't Romans 6:23 teach that the "wages of sin is death"? And so if our judgment and condemnation are what the sins we do every day deserve, why does it matter if you can find a deeper cause of our guilt and death and condemnation—namely our union with Adam in his sinning at the beginning? ("[Adam, Christ, and Justification: Part II](#)")

There are at least three reasons why this doctrine is very important.

Crucial for Grasping Justification in Romans 5:12-21

First, it is crucial to understanding Paul's teaching on justification in Romans 5:12-21. Piper writes:

What's at stake here is the whole comparison between Christ and Adam. If we don't understand "because all sinned" in 5:12 as "because all sinned in Adam," the entire comparison between Christ and Adam will be distorted and we won't see the greatness of justification by grace through faith for what it really is.

Let me try to illustrate what's at stake. If you say, "Through one man sin and death entered the world and death spread to everybody because all sinned individually," then the comparison with the work of Jesus could be, "So also through one man, Jesus Christ, righteousness and life entered the world and life spread to all because all individually did acts of righteousness." In other words, justification would not be God's imputing Christ's righteousness to us, but our performing individual acts of righteousness with Christ's help and then being counted righteous on that basis. When Paul saw that as a possible misunderstanding of what he said, he stopped to clarify.

But what does it say about the work of Christ, if we take the words, "because all sinned" to mean "because all sinned in Adam"? Then it would go like this: "Just as through one man sin and death entered the world and death spread to everybody because all sinned in Adam and his sin was imputed to them, so also through one man Jesus Christ, righteousness entered the world and life through righteousness, and life spread to all who are in Christ because his righteousness is imputed to them." That is the glory of justification by grace through faith. The basis of our vindication and acceptance before God is not our righteous deeds, but Christ's righteousness imputed to us. But this would be all distorted if the words "because all sinned" at the end of verse 12 meant "because all sinned individually," and not because all sinned in Adam and his sin was imputed to us.

The parallel Paul wants us to see and rejoice in is that

just as Adam's sin is imputed to us because we were in him,
so Christ's righteousness is imputed to us because we are in him.

One of the best reasons for thinking this is what Paul meant is to look at verse 18 where he really does complete the comparison he started here. "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." In Adam we all were condemned; in Christ we all are justified. Adam's transgression was imputed to us; and Christ's righteousness is imputed to us (see 1 Corinthians 15:22).

But all that would be lost if at the end of verse 12 the words "because all sinned" referred to individual sins and not to our sinning in Adam. ("[Adam, Christ, and Justification: Part II](#)")

Highlights the Global Significance of Christ

Second, the doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin highlights the global significance and universality of Christ. Piper writes:

If Adam is the father of all human beings, and if the fundamental problem with all human beings is found in how we are related to Adam and what happened to us when Adam sinned, then everybody in the world, no matter when or where or who—whatever tribe or language or culture or ethnic identity—everybody has the same fundamental problem. And this means that if Jesus Christ is not just a Jew who died as a Jewish sacrifice for sins, but is also the "last Adam" or the "second man" (as Paul calls him in 1 Corinthians 15:45, 47), who provides a righteousness better than what we lost in Adam, then Jesus is no tribal God, or limited, local Savior. He is the one and only remedy for the divine judgment of condemnation that rests on every human soul. Which means he is a great Savior able to save persons from all times and all places and all peoples. ([Ibid](#))

Highlights the Global Significance of the Doctrine of Justification

Third, the connection between justification and the imputation of Adam's sin means that the doctrine of justification is not simply a Western doctrine. Piper writes:

Now let's drive this home for our missionaries and for all our evangelism here at home. Do not think that the doctrine of justification by grace, based on the imputation of the obedience of Christ through faith apart from works, is a mere concoction of a western European worldview that got off the ground with the guilty conscience of a monk named Martin Luther. That's not true. It can't be true, because it is the historical remedy in the person of Jesus Christ for the historical damage in the person of everybody's first ancestor.

The doctrine of justification by grace through faith cannot be replaced by a redemptive analogy. If Paul had merely said for example, "Sin is like drowning in the ocean, and salvation is like being pulled out of the water into a boat by a strong man," then you might go to a people group somewhere far from oceans and boats and say, "Sin is like sinking in quicksand and salvation is like being pulled onto a firm rock by a strong man." That's fine. But you can't do that with this doctrine of justification - not now, not after Romans 5:12-21.

Why not? Because now Paul has connected it with Adam. And Adam is the historical ancestor of every people group on the face of the earth. This is not a myth; it's not an analogy; it's not an illustration. It is historical fact. Adam, the first human being, sinned and in him all human beings sinned, and all died and all are condemned. And the remedy for that is another historical Person - the God-man, Jesus Christ, who came in space and time to undo what Adam did. He trusted and obeyed God perfectly, so that all who are in him by faith have that obedience imputed to them and become right with God forever. ("[Adam, Christ, and Justification: Part I](#)")

Further Resources

John Piper, "[Adam, Christ, and Justification: Part I](#)"

John Piper, [Adam, Christ, and Justification: Part II](#)

John Piper, "[Adam, Christ, and Justification: Part V](#)"

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