

Justification as it relates to Adam and Christ within the New Covenant¹

By

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Abstract

How does one grasp the ramifications of sin without first understanding its source and how it was transmitted to all mankind? How does one understand the depth of Christ's redemptive act without first understanding the depth of sin within man? The significance of this concept in explaining the work of Christ should not be underestimated in any way. Therefore Paul teaches that all people stand in relationship to one of two men, whose actions determine the eternal destiny of all who belong to them. By the one man's disobedience many were made sinners, and by the obedience of the other, many shall be made righteous.

God's plan for man's redemption can be seen through the eyes of two covenants. The one, made with Adam and broken by him, resulted in man's death. The second covenant, through Jesus Christ, resulted in man's redemption.

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1. Introduction

One of the most prominent doctrines in systematic theology, according to Grudem (1994:494), is the doctrine of inherited sin. Furthermore, Rapinchuk (1999:427) states that a great deal of speculation has also taken place regarding the cause, transmission/imputation and consequences of inherited sin. The purpose of this paper is to address these issues through a better understanding of the federal headship of Adam and Christ.

The significance of this concept in explaining the work of Christ should not be underestimated in any way. It is virtually impossible to grasp with the mind the ramifications of sin, without understanding its source and its transmission. The source, found in the disobedience of Adam in Genesis 3:6-7, is the reason all mankind stands guilty before God. How man stands guilty before God is the question that needs to be dealt with. God ordained that Adam should act not only on his own behalf, according to Erickson (1999:652), but also on behalf of all mankind, so that the consequences of his actions have been passed on to his descendants as well.

Adam was on probation for all mankind as it were; and because Adam sinned, all mankind are treated as guilty and corrupted. Bound by the covenant between God and Adam, all of mankind are treated as if they had actually and personally committed what Adam as their representative had done.

This approach sees Adam's connection with mankind in terms of federal headship, examples of this reading are vast; (cf. Grudem (1994:494-496); Erickson (1999:631-632); Punt (1980:9-16); Moo (1996:321-329); Stott (1994:148-162). It is at this point that a number of arguments are presented. The German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg puts it bluntly: "It is impossible for me to be held jointly responsible as though I were a joint cause for an act that another did many generations ago and in a situation radically different from mine" (1985:124; see also Carter 1983:1, 267).

The question now posed is what is one to make of the provocative words of Paul found in Romans 5: “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned ...” (v. 12).³ This thought is repeated in several different ways in the succeeding verses: “for if the many died by the trespass of one man” (v. 15); “the judgement followed one sin and brought condemnation” (v. 16); for if by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man” (v. 17); “consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men” (v. 18)—“for just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners” (v. 19). It seems as if Paul sees some sort of casual connection between what Adam did and the sinfulness of all people throughout all time.

To make this a bit clearer, Paul’s claim that “*sin came into the world through one man*” would have been nothing new to anyone, argues Moo (1996:319), who knew his or her Old Testament or Jewish tradition. He further contends (1996:320), “nor would his (Paul’s) second assertion in this verse be anything new, and death through sin (came into the world).” His reason for saying this is that the unbreakable connection between sin and death, made clear in Gen 2-3, was a staple of Jewish theology (see particularly Wedderburn 1972-73:339-342).

In response to this, Rapinchuk (1999:427) argues that although it is easily demonstrated that such speculation is present in Jewish literature contemporary to Paul, this does little to prove that Paul was so engaged. See also Dunn (1988:272); Porter (1990:3-13); Käsemann (1981:147-148). One could argue that the point could be lost if one narrowly focuses on what this passage has to say about sin and fails to do justice to the theme. Moo states it thus; “the universal consequence of Adam’s sin are the *assumptions* of Paul’s argument; the power of Christ’s act to cancel those consequences is its goal” (1996:315). In saying this, one needs to understand the relationship between Adam and Christ, and how it affects mankind.

³ All scriptural quotations are taken from the New King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

2. The Two Adams

All people, Paul teaches, stand in relationship to one of two men, whose actions determine the eternal destiny of all who belong to them. Either one “belongs to” Adam and is under sentence of death because of his sin, or disobedience, or one belongs to Christ and is assured of eternal life because of His “righteous” act, or obedience (Moo, 1996:315). The action of Adam and Christ, then, are similar in having “epochal” significance but they are not equal in power, for Christ’s act is able to completely overcome the affects of Adam’s sin. Anyone who “receives the gift” that God offers in Christ finds security and joy in knowing that the reign of death has been completely and finally overcome by the reign of grace, righteousness, and eternal life (cf. vv. 17, 21).

The great theme of this paragraph is therefore the power of Christ’s act of obedience to overcome Adam’s act of disobedience. Thus, the emphasis is on the justification secured by Christ, in contrast to the condemnation introduced by Adam (vv.18-19), particularly to the critical tenet that justification is available “*for all who believe*” (Rom 3:22).

It must be stated at this point, that Paul says nothing explicitly (although inherited sin is implied through 5:12-21) about *how* the sin of one man, Adam, has resulted in death for everyone; nor has he made clear the connection—if any—between Adam’s sin (v. 12a) and the sin of all people (v.12d). What he *has* made clear is that the casual nexus between sin and death, exhibited in the case of Adam, has repeated itself in the case of every human being. No one, Paul makes clear, escapes the reign of death because no one escapes the power of sin.

One can sum it up by saying *both Adam and Jesus Christ passed on to others the affects of their disobedience or obedience*. The effect of Adam’s disobedience was sin, condemnation, and death. The effect of Jesus’ obedience was righteousness, justification, and eternal life.

Lloyd-Jones (1972:224) who has an excellent summary of these important similarities says, “Adam’s sin and its consequences was passed on to us all without exception: Christ’s obedience and

righteousness is passed on to all who believe in Him.” Haldene (1958:213) also makes the point nicely: “the two Adams are the heads of two covenants. The one, the representative of all who are under the covenant of works, communicating his image unto them: the other the representative of all who are under the covenant of grace, and communicating His image to them. By the one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, and by the obedience of the other, many shall be made righteous.”

The following section will now concentrate on the federal headship of Adam and Christ, culminating in *the New Covenant in Christ*. A few themes will be repeated, more for clarity and focus than anything else.

3. The Covenant with Adam

Although the word covenant is not used in the Bible specifically of Adam, Boice (1992:581) argues that there can be little doubt that God established a covenant with him. The pertinent words are to be found in Genesis 2:16-17, “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” The word is also used in a later passage in Hosea where, regarding the transgression of Ephraim and Judah, the prophet says, “Like Adam, they have broken the covenant—they were unfaithful to me there” (Hos 6:7). An interesting passage is also found in the apocryphal Book of Sirach, where the creation of man is described: He bestowed knowledge upon them, and allotted to them the law of life. He established with them an eternal covenant, and showed them his judgments (Sirach 17:11-12). Thus it seems clear from both canonical and non-canonical texts that the primary covenant of God was with original man—Adam.

That this is a *divine* covenant is shown both in the fact that God Himself sets all the terms or clauses—man in no way participates in what God establishes—and that it is *His* covenant with Adam. One translation of Hosea 6:7 reads: “... they have broken my covenant.” The covenant of course includes Adam, but it is not Adam or man’s covenant: it is God’s covenant with man. Furthermore, Boice (1992:581)

contends that in the same way, a covenant was made by God with Jesus Christ, it would have gone as follows, "If you will become the federal head or representative of a new humanity, taking upon yourself the task of fulfilling My divine law and then dying to make satisfaction for the sins of a people I will give to you, then that people shall be freed from sins bondage, be given eternal life, and be raised to life to reign with You in heaven throughout eternity."

4. The Terms of the Covenant

Firstly, there are two parties: God and man; second, there is a promise; third, there is an obligation or demand. Concerning the first of these, it may now be further observed that this is a *universal* covenant. Although it is made with a particular man, Adam, it is universal in that Adam is man and the progenitor of the human race. Thus, the covenant affects all mankind. In reference to the second, the covenant promises *continuing life*: the "tree of life" is included among the trees of which man may eat. If he does eat of it, he will "live forever" (Gen 3:22). Hence, there is the promise of eternal life. True life is to be found outside man in God. As man partakes of this life, physically represented or sealed in the tree of life, he will never die. This then is the law of life. Regarding the third, the covenant calls for *obedience* on man's part: he is commanded not to eat of the "*tree of knowledge of good and evil.*" Disobedience to God's will, here represented in the partaking of another tree, is thus to cut oneself off from God with the inevitable result: eternal death.

One could then say that throughout the entire history of God's dealings with man, there is one theme that is of major importance, God was moving towards Calvary, and that His final provision and work of redemption would be accomplished there. Everything God was doing was preparing men for the coming Redeemer and His work on the cross. The significance and depth of what Christ did can only be realised when one studies what has previously been referred to and discussed as the federal headship of Adam and Christ.

5. The Old Covenant

As one looks back in a brief overview of the history of God's dealing with man, there are certain things that stand out which form the background for one's present relationship with God. It is very clear that God Himself does not change, but that His dealing with man does change. God has been moving with purpose since the beginning of time, and His purpose is to bring many sons to glory and to include them in everlasting fellowship with Himself. The very nature of God is love ἀγάπη, and God's love reaches out to include all who will respond to Him.

There are many things that are difficult to understand, but it is evident from history that the working of God's purpose takes time. Christ was the Lamb "slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev 5:12) yet He died thousands of years later at the very hour appointed by God. In the Old Testament, the history of God's dealing with man up until the time of Christ, one can find that God's dealings were with certain men (such as Noah and Abraham), and then with the nation of Israel. His purpose in dealing with each is clearly stated, and the history that is available, gives evidence of what God wanted people to have, in order to form the basis of one's understanding of His present dealings. In reading the Old Testament, people not only learn history, but also see clearly the character of God and how He views things.

6. The Federal Headship of Adam and Christ

In Romans, Paul speaks much about the work Christ did on the cross. In chapter 5, he compares Adam and Christ, saying that Adam is a type of Christ. The whole human race descended from Adam, but it descended in death.

So also it is written, the first man, Adam, became a living soul. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit (1 Cor 15:45).

With the incarnation of God the Son in the person of Jesus Christ came greater revelation regarding the mystery of sin and man's redemption through divine grace. One of the most extraordinary revelations found

in the Bible is in the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans. Precisely, the fifth chapter verses twelve through twenty-one. Within these passages God has revealed two men, two acts with two results. The two men are two Federal Headships and their two representative acts, which directly affects all those connected to them. Verse twelve lays the doctrinal foundation, which the following verses build upon:

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 (Rom 5:12).

Adam, and his rebellious act of disobedience in the Garden, is the "one man" through whom sin entered into the world. When he disregarded the specific commandment of God and freely ate of the fruit from the forbidden tree (Gen 2:17), the divine penalty of death was immediately enacted and death spread to all men "because all sinned" (with Adam). The divine view presented in scripture is that Adam, as previously stated, is the *federal head* of mankind. All men born of Adam are in Adam, and "in Adam all die" (1 Cor 15:22).

The divine penalty of death referenced in Romans 5:12-14, is primarily referring to physical death. This is unlike spiritual death which reaches every individual immediately, that is, inherited or transmitted from parent to child through birth due to Adam's corrupt nature. Scripture reveals that mankind's physical death is immediate, that is, a shared penalty because of guilt with Adam, "And death spread to all men because all sinned" (v. 12). No one dies physically because of personal sins (due to an inherited corrupt nature) but because of the actual, imputed sin of Adam to all mankind. Adam's transgression involved his whole race and therefore it is under a sentence of death, which it did not bring upon itself. Only Adam died because of the result of a personal sin, which was a transgression of a specific commandment, all others die as a result of Adam's federal representative act.

But God, infinitely wise and rich in mercy and grace, did not intend to leave humanity under the first Adam, divine judgement and condemnation of death. In verse 14, Adam is called a *type* of him who was to come. Another Federal Head was anticipated and 2000 years ago. He came into the world in the person of Jesus Christ, the "second

man" whose origin was from heaven, called the "last Adam, a life-giving Spirit" (1 Cor 15:47). And according to the Scriptures, God now sees but two men, that is, two Adams, and their representative acts and each member of the human race in either one or the other. The unregenerate are in Adam; the regenerate, are in Christ and eternally benefit from the "free gift" which comes through Him. Verses fifteen through nineteen compare the two Adams, their representative acts and the direct result towards those connected to them:

But the free gift is not like the offence, for if by the one man's offence many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgement, which came from one offence, resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offences resulted in justification. For if by the one man's offence death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. Therefore, as through one man's offence judgement came through all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous (Rom 5:15-19).

It must be clearly understood that the great truth of Romans 5:12-21 is that a representative acted, directly involving those connected with him. God sees humanity either in Adam, under divine judgement and condemnation of death, or in Christ (the Last Adam), under the abundance of divine grace, eternally justified and in Him made righteous (1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9).

Those who receive Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, are no longer in Adam, but in Christ, the Last Adam, His new Federal Representative.

7. Justification

In addition to the Federal Headship hypothesis found in Romans 5:18, one is immediately confronted with what seems like a contradiction:

Therefore as through one man's offence judgement came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life (Rom 5:18).

This verse simply makes explicit what seems to be the logic of the paragraph as a whole; Adam's act has brought condemnation to all, without exception, must one not then conclude that Christ's act has brought justification and life for all? A growing number of scholars, according to Moo (1996:342), argue that this is exactly what Paul intends to say here. For instance, Hultgren (1987:54-55) states that the universal statements in this passage must be taken seriously, as descriptive of a "justification of humanity" that will be revealed at the judgement. He further contends that some people are justified by faith in this life, but those who do not accept the offer of God in this life, are nevertheless assured of being justified at the judgement. This universalistic thinking, although quite radical in the light of what has previously been said, is naturally very appealing—who likes, according to Moo (1996:342), the idea that many people will be consigned to the eternal punishment of hell? But if, as seems clear, many texts plainly teach the reality of such punishment for those who do not embrace Christ by faith in this life (cf. 2 Thes 1:8-9; Rom 2:12 and the argument of 1:18-3:20), those who advocate such a viewpoint are guilty of picking and choosing their evidence. But can one reconcile the plain universalistic statements of this verse with these texts mentioned, that speak of the reality of hell? Some deny that one can, suggesting that one faces a paradox on this point that God will resolve someday (cf. Boring 1986:269-92). Others argue that what is universal in v.18b is not the actual justification accomplished in the lives of individuals, but the *basis* for this justification is in the work of Christ. Christ has won for all "the sentence of justification" and this is now offered freely to all who will "receive the gift" (cf. Beasley-Murray 1962:136-137; Hughes 1989:174-75).

How then is one to come to any reasonable conclusion concerning this seeming contradiction? Moo's response to this is that Paul always uses "justification" language when talking of the status actually conferred on the individual, never of the atonement won on the cross itself (cf. particularly the careful distinction in Rom 3:21-26). Secondly, it is doubtful whether Paul is describing simply an "offer" made to people through the work of Christ; certainly in the parallel in the first part of the verse, the condemnation actually embraces all people (1996:343), but perhaps the biggest objection to this view is that it misses the point for which Paul is arguing in this passage. This point is that there can be an assurance of justification and life on one side that is just as strong and certain as the assurance of condemnation on the other. Throughout the passage, Paul's concern to maintain parallelism between Adam and Christ has led him to choose terms that will clearly express this. In verses 15 and 19, he uses "the many"; here he uses "all people" but in each case, Paul's point is not so much that the groups affected by Christ and respectively, are co-extensive, but that Christ affects those who are His just as certainly as Adam does those who are his. When one asks who is "in Adam" and "in Christ" respectively, Paul makes his answer clear: every person without exception is "in Adam" (cf. vv. 12d-14), but only those who "receive the gift" (v. 17; i.e., "those who believe," according to Rom 1:16-5:11) are "in Christ." That "all" does not always mean "every single human being" is clear from many passages. According to Moo (1996:344), it is often clearly limited in context (e.g., Rom 8:32; 12:17, 18; 14:2; 16:19), so this suggestion has no linguistic barrier. In Romans 5:18, the scope of "all people" in the two parts of the verse is distinguished in the context. Paul makes it clear, both by his silence and by the logic of verses 12-14, that there is no limitation whatsoever on the number of those who are involved in Adam's sin, while the deliberately worded verse 17, along with the persistent stress on faith as the means of achieving righteousness in 1:16-4:25, makes it equally clear that only certain people derive the benefits from Christ's act of righteousness.

One could summarise it as God beginning another race in Christ, but this time it is in life, that is, his life. Paul refers to these two races as the "old man" (all who are in Adam) and the "new man" (all who are in

Christ). The difference between the two is life. The question now is how is this new life manifested?

8. Identifying with Christ

When Christ came to earth, He took on Himself the form of man. In so doing, He became permanently identified with mankind. He was not born in death like others, for God was His Father. When He died on the cross, Paul says that, "our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with" (Rom 6:6). Thus the whole human race (our "old man" or "body of sin") was crucified with Christ. This was God's doing, and since believers were all in the "old man," all died with Christ. This has tremendous implications. If the old man has been crucified or put away, then God is no longer dealing "in Adam." God no longer considers what believers are according to the flesh in any way. This truth can be found throughout the entire New Testament. Paul refers to this same truth in Galatians 2:20 when he says, "I have been crucified with Christ" (past tense). It is a historic fact. In Christ, God judged the entire human race, and put away the body of sin from His sight. All God's dealings now are in Christ (the new man), and every promise is to those who are in Christ by the Spirit. This is God's beginning place, a place of life.

9. There is no Condemnation

The reason, according to Lowe (1999:231), why many evangelicals believe that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ, is because Christ died in their place and for their sins (Rom 8:1). His reason for saying this is that justification through the substitutionary atonement of Christ is one of the first precepts drummed into new believers, and Rom 8:1 is often the proof text employed to establish the point (cf. Berkhof 1958:514; Erickson 1999:953).

Further to this in 8:1-2, Christians escape condemnation because the Spirit has transformed them. That is, because they now live in such a way that condemnation is no longer warranted. The question is; does "condemnation" refer to the eschatological judgement due sin or to the enslavement in sin experienced in this age? Is it averted, asks Lowe

(1999:233) by the alien righteousness of Christ, or by transformational righteousness in union with Christ as previously discussed?

The obvious place to begin the search for answers is with the term *κατάκριμα* (“condemnation”) and its cognate *κατακρίνω* (“condemn”).

The verb *κατακρίνω* (“condemn”) first appears in the lengthy discussion of sin and judgement from Rom 1:18-3:20. Specifically, Paul warns those who criticise the sins of others while overlooking their own: “For in what you judge another, you condemn yourself, for you who stand in judgement do the same things” (Rom 2:1).

The *κατάκριμα* (“condemnation”) in view here, argues Lowe (1999:233) relates to the eschatological judgement of God: “the day of wrath and the revelation of the just judgement of God.”

God will judge sin without favouritism (2:2-6). Those who have done good will receive eternal life, as well as glory, honour and peace; those who did evil will face death, as well as wrath and anger, affliction and distress (1:32; 2:6-11). This applies equally to all, whether Jew or Gentile (2:12-16).

Yet a problem soon becomes apparent. No one fulfils the requisite condition: no one is righteous (3:9-20). There is only one way for the deserved judgement to be averted, through the redemptive and substitutionary death of Christ as a propitiation for sin, for all who believe (3:21-26).

While some ambiguities remain (cf. Davies, 1990; Schreiner 1993), they do not affect the overall thrust of these texts. It is enough to note that the condemnation in view is clearly the eschatological judgement of sin, which is escaped only through the alien righteousness of Christ. In saying this and before anything can change on the deepest level in a life, a person has to lose the identity they have in Adam. As long as that identity remains the same, their outer actions may change to some extent, but such change does not amount to much in the ultimate sense. Losing one’s identity in Adam is different to losing one’s sin nature. It must be understood that God will not set about renovating the Adamic person for use in the Kingdom. The verdict of death has already been

decreed over humanity. Romans 5:15 states it plainly: "... by the transgression of the one the many died." Earlier in Romans this message is repeatedly emphasised, "The wages of sin is death." Yet, he is able to say, "... the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:23b). God's verdict on the Adamic nature is final. Mankind will never experience freedom from the fallen nature until they die and are resurrected in a new body. What is God to do in the meantime? One solution might be to strike dead all who receive Christ immediately and take them to heaven right there and then. This solution has some obvious drawbacks. If everyone who believed in Christ immediately fell dead, Christian evangelism might become harder than it already is! Besides, who would do the witnessing?

Whether for these reasons or others, this is not the direction God has decided to go. Instead of striking all believers dead, He has judicially declared them dead by identifying them with Christ. This means God elects to view believers as though they were in Christ. That is, He views them the same way He views His Son. This is certainly good news. Their standing before God couldn't be higher! But is it real? Or is this just double talk? How can it be true that a believer having died in Christ is seated in heaven, yet at the same time they are clearly sitting right here on earth, seemingly the same as ever? There are a few points that should help clarify this concept.

First, who views believers as being "the righteousness of God? It is God Himself, who, in the first place, views them this way. Yet this should not be taken to mean that identification with Christ is just some dream in the mind of God. Actually, the status is quite real. Consider the fact that one day fallen existence will end, either in death or when the Lord returns. However, a believer's standing in Christ will never end. When one thinks of it this way, a persons' standing in Christ is even more "real" than a life in Adam.

Second, the fact that those who believe have been identified with Christ is an item of faith for Christians. 1 Corinthians 1:30 says, "by God's doing you are in Christ." This is a plain proposition which might not be fully understood, but which needs to be accepted as a direct declaration by God. A person does not need to be able to confirm this statement with some kind of experience or feeling. It is a fact of

scripture, which deserves willing belief from those who view scripture as the ultimate standard of truth. The genuine thing about believers is what God says about them. As previously stated, mankind did not sense or feel anything of Adam's fall, yet all received a fallen nature because he was the Federal Head. Although there certainly could be other explanations for mankind's selfish nature, the reason Christians believe their problems came from Adam, is because God has declared this in His Word.

God also declares that those who have trusted Christ, have died and risen with Him, though this truth cannot be felt either. Therefore, believers have the same reason for believing in their identification with Christ as in identification with Adam—God says so in His Word.

In summing up this section, one could say that the parallelism that Paul draws in Rom 5, between Adam and Christ in their relationship to believers, is impressive. He asserts that in some parallel way what each of them did has its influence on mankind (as Adam's sin leads to death, so Christ's act of righteousness leads to life). What is this parallel? If, as one might be inclined to think, the condemnation and guilt of Adam are imputed to all without there being any sort of conscious choice of his act, the same would necessarily hold true of the imputation of Christ's righteousness and redeeming work. But does His death justify all who believe by simple virtue of His identification with humanity through the incarnation and independently of whether one makes a conscious and personal acceptance of His work? And do all humans have the grace of Christ imputed to them, just as all have Adam's sin imputed to them? The usual answer of evangelicals is no; there is abundant evidence that there are two classes of persons', the lost and the saved, and that only a decision to accept the work of Christ makes it effective in ones life. But if this is the case, then would not the imputation of guilt based upon the action of Adam, albeit Adam as including all, requires some sort of volitional choice as well? If there is no "unconscious faith," can there be "unconscious sin"? And what is one to say of infants who die? Despite having participated in that first sin, they are somehow accepted and saved. Although they have made no conscious choice of Christ's work (or of Adam's sin for that matter), the spiritual effects of the curse are negated in their case. While some theologies preserve the parallelism by allowing either unconscious or

unconditional imputation of Adam's guilt and Christ's righteousness, another available alternative seems preferable.

The current form of understanding could be laid out as follows: all were involved in Adam's sin, and thus receive both the corrupted nature that was his after the fall, and the guilt and condemnation that are attached to his sin. With this matter of guilt, however, just as with the imputation of Christ's righteousness, there must be some conscious and voluntary decision on one's part. Until this is the case, there is only a conditional imputation of guilt. Thus, there is no condemnation until one reaches the age of responsibility. If a child dies before becoming capable of making genuine moral decisions, the contingent imputation of Adamic sin does not become actual, and the child will experience the same type of future existence with the Lord, as will those who have reached the age of moral responsibility and had their sins forgiven as a result of accepting the offer of salvation, based upon Christ's atoning death. The problem of the corrupted nature of such persons' is presumably dealt with in the way that the imperfectly sanctified nature of believers will be glorified.

Finally, it was said earlier that the purpose of God might be expressed as bringing many sons to glory (Heb 2:10). In the Old Covenant, however, one finds almost no mention of sonship, and what is mentioned is a very distant relationship. Israel is spoken of as God's son (Exod 4:22), but the thought of a nation being a son is very far from the intimate sonship one finds in the New Covenant. This close relationship was not possible before Calvary, but now that the matter of sin has been dealt with, the purpose God had in His heart all along can be fulfilled.

In the following section an explanation of the theme related to the topic of adoption and sonship will be discussed, and analysed.

10. The Spirit of Adoption and Sonship

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself bears

witness with our spirit that we are children of God and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together (Rom 8:14-17).

Two significant thoughts seem to dominate this passage. On the one hand, being sons of God explains why those who are placed under the dominion of the Spirit experience eschatological life (v.14, in relation to v.13). On the other hand according to Moo (1996:496), being children of God also places believers squarely in the “already—not yet” tension, created by their belonging to the new realm of righteousness, at the same time as they continue to live in the midst of the old realm of sin and death. In a word, being a “child” of God means to be an “heir” of God also, and thereby in Moo’s view one must look to the future for the full enjoyment of “sonship” (v. 17, in relation to vv. 18-30). In agreement with this view is Osten-Sacken (1975:143-44). He is among those who think that vv.14-30 is one large unit of thought, focused on the eschatological existence of the “sons of God.” These points carry the basic thrust of the paragraph, with vv. 15-16 a somewhat parenthetical elaboration and justification, in Moo’s thought (1996:496), of the assertion that those led by the Spirit are sons of God (cf. Lagrange; Ridderbos 1950:201). This paragraph then, carries forward Paul’s theme of assurance in three ways:

1. It gives further reason for the triumphant proclamation that believers who have God’s Spirit will “live.”
2. It adds to the growing list another important description—“sons of God”—of believers as God’s people, the heirs of God’s promises, and, according to Lloyd-Jones (1970-88);
3. It provides yet further justification for Paul’s categorical assertion that “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1).

The movement of thought in this paragraph, and the similarities found in Galatians 4:1-7, are clearly brought out by Moo (1996:497). He states that in both texts Paul affirms that believers are transformed from slaves to sons of God through the redeeming sacrifice of Christ, “sent” as one like us. In both, this new status is called “adoption” and is tied

to the indwelling Spirit, the Spirit who makes believers deeply aware that they now belong to God as His dearly beloved children.

11. Adopted by God

For you did not receive the spirit of bondage (slavery) again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out “Abba, Father” (Rom 8:15).

Paul could hardly have chosen a better term than “adoption.” The word denotes the Greek, and particularly Roman legal rights and privileges that would ordinarily accrue to a natural child, Moo (1996:501) (cf. Lyall 1969:458-466; 1984:67-99). The Greeks normally used this word to describe a relationship brought about by the legal act of adoption. Paul’s use of this word seems to be placed within this context (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:5-7), although scholar’s debate (cf. Cranfield 1979; Byrne 1979) whether the term υἰοθεσία (“adoption”) as Paul uses it, denotes the act of adoption or the status of sonship. The argument against this view is found in Rom 8:23, where the stress seems to be on the *act* of adopting rather than status, Moo (1996:501). Since the word almost invariably has this meaning outside the New Testament according to Scott (1992:227-36), this is probably Paul’s main focus (Paul also uses the word in Eph 1:5, but it cannot be certain whether “*act*” or “*status*” is primary). However, while the institution is a Greco-Roman one, the underlying concept is rooted in the Old Testament and Judaism. “Adoption” is one of the privileges of Israel (Rom 9:4), and Israel, as one can see in many passages, is regularly characterised as God’s “son or sons” in the Old Testament and Judaism (cf. Exod 4:22; Jer 3:19; 31:9; Hos 11:1; and, e.g., Sir 36:12; 4 Ezra 6:58). Based on the above one could confidently state that Paul’s concern right along has had to do with Gentile believers as true “sons” of Abraham that came about through the redemptive work of Abraham’s one “seed,” Christ, who made it possible for all who trust in Him to share in His inheritance as fellow “sons,” Fee (1994:406). But beyond that, such “sons of Abraham” are “sons of God” made so through Christ (Gal 4:5).

The evidence of such shared “sonship” is the presence of the Spirit of the Son, who by crying out “Abba” from within the believer, bears witness to the presence of the Son who made believers “sons,” since that is His own distinctive term of address to God his Father.

That these, according to Fee (1994:46), are Paul’s concerns is reinforced by a comparison with the passages from Rom 8:16-17 and Gal 4:4-7. He states that four matters are noteworthy:

1. Even though the language “adoption as sons” recurs in Romans 8:15, when the application is picked up in verses 16-17, Paul shifts from the term υἱοί (“sons”) to the broader term τέκνα (“children”); thus the word play on υἱοί is unique to Galatians 4:5.
2. Rather than “the Spirit of His Son” in Galatians 4:6, the Spirit is designated “the Spirit of God” Romans 8:14; he is also “the Spirit of Sonship.”
3. Rather than the Spirit crying out “Abba” as in Romans 8:15, “believers cry out by means of the Spirit” in Galatians 4:6 (which for Paul means the same thing, but this passage ties the cry more directly to the Spirit of *the* Son).
4. Although “becoming heirs is the net result in both passages, in the immediate passage, Galatians 4:7, the connection of being a “son” with being an “heir” is the main thrust, as verse 7 makes clear, whereas in Romans 8:17 the main thrust has become eschatological and focuses on believers’ shared “heirship” with Christ.

12. “Abba Father”

Therefore, in crying out “Abba Father,” the believer, as Moo rightly says (1994:502), not only gives voice to his or her consciousness of belonging to God as His child, but also to having a status comparable to that of Jesus himself. The fact that the Aramaic term “Abba” was used by Jesus himself in addressing His Father, and its preservation in the Greek Gospel of Mark (14:36) and in the Greek-speaking Pauline churches, attests to the fact that it was remembered and treasured as distinctive and meaningful. In ascribing to Christians indwelt by the

Spirit the use of this same term in addressing God, Paul shows that Christians have a relationship to God that is like (though, of course, not exactly like) Christ's own relationship to the Father. In adopting believers, God has taken no half measures; believers have been made full members of the family and partakers of all the privileges belonging to members of that family (cf. Haenchen 1966:492-94; Barr 1988:173-79). Further to this Boice (1992:842) states that this word is of great significance for believers' prayers. Jesus was the Son of God in a unique sense, and God was uniquely His Father. He came to God in prayer as God's unique Son. As previously stated, believers are not like Him. Nevertheless, Jesus revealed that this same relationship could be enjoyed by all who believe on Him, all whose sins are removed by His sufferings.

13. Conclusion

Rom 5:12-21 is very clear that through one man (Adam) sin entered the world and death came to all men. Through this one act, judgement followed; and God considered all men to be sinful. The good news is that God did not leave it at that. Romans 5:1 is clear, "for as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one man's obedience many will be made righteous." Scripture states that mankind stands in relationship to one of two men, whose actions determine the eternal destiny of all who belong to them. Either one belongs to Adam and is under sentence of death because of his sin, or one belongs to Christ and is assured of eternal life because of His righteous act of obedience.

God's plan for man's redemption can be seen through the eyes of *two covenants*. The one, made with Adam and broken by him, resulted in man's death. The second covenant, through Jesus Christ, resulted in man's redemption. God now sees humanity either in Adam, under divine judgement and condemnation of death, or in Christ (the last Adam), under the abundance of divine grace, eternally justified and in Him made righteous (1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9).

The important thing to see is that what Christ did as Saviour, was to open up the way to intimate fellowship with God by the Spirit; and to

bring believers into sonship through the infilling of the Holy Spirit. This receiving of the Spirit places one into sonship through adoption (Rom 8:15). The ultimate evidence of this “sonship” is the believer’s use of the Son’s own address to the Father in prayer, *Abba*. Through this crying out, the believer not only gives voice to his or her consciousness of belonging to God as His child, but also to having a status comparable to that of Jesus himself. In ascribing to Christians indwelt by the Spirit the use of this same term in addressing God, Paul shows that Christians have a relationship to God that is like Christ’s own relationship to the Father.

The key to the Christian experience in Pauline theology is without doubt to be found in the work of the Holy Spirit within the believer’s life. In every aspect of his theology—at least what is basic to his theology—the Spirit plays a leading role. To be sure, the Spirit is not *the* centre for Paul—Christ is, ever and always—but the Spirit stands close to the centre, making Christ known and empowering all genuine Christian life and experience.

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