

[Are we condemned for the sin of another? \(Part 1\)](#)

~ C Michael Patton ~

The concept of “Original Sin” has long been a vital part of Christian Orthodoxy yet is being challenged and redefined by many in the Church today. Even conservatives are beginning to question the validity of the traditional Evangelical understanding of the doctrine asking questions of its legitimacy in its current form of understanding.

Perhaps John Calvin defines Original Sin most concisely as “The deprivation of a nature formerly good and pure.” More specifically, from a Reformed Evangelical perspective, it refers to the fall of humanity from its original state of innocence and purity to a state of corruption and guilt (distinguished later). It is the cause of man’s translation from a state of unbroken communion before God to one of spiritual death and condemnation.

The term “Original Sin” is not found in Scripture; Saint Augustine coined it in the 4th century. The primary passage used to defend the doctrine of Original Sin is [Romans 5:12-21](#). Most specifically, [Romans 5:12](#) gives us the most explicit reference to this concept: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.” The “one man” is Adam. The “all men” is all of Adam’s posterity—the entire human race.

J.I. Packer clears up a possible misconception and further defines Original Sin:

The assertion of original sin means not that sin belongs to human nature as God made it (God made mankind upright, [Ecclesiastes 7:29](#)), nor that sin is involved in the processes of reproduction and birth (the uncleanness connected with menstruation, semen, and childbirth in [Leviticus 12](#) and 15 was typical and ceremonial only, not moral and real), but that . . . sinfulness marks everyone from birth . . . it derives to us in a real . . . mysterious way from Adam, our first representative before God.

This concept is not only hard to understand, but it is also quite disturbing. From perspective of traditional Evangelicalism from the time of Augustine, the west has believed that humanity is *condemned* for Adam’s sin. To state that we are condemned for the sin of another is not only offensive and unfair, but in the mind of most it is also ludicrous. It is because of this that Pascal wrote the following:

Without doubt, nothing is more shocking to our reason than to say that the sin of the first man has implicated in its guilt men so far from the original sin that they seem incapable of sharing it. This flow of guilt does not seem merely impossible to us, but indeed most unjust. What could be more contrary to the rules of our miserable justice than the eternal damnation of a child, incapable of will, for an act in which he seems to have so little part that it was actually committed 6,000 years before he existed? Certainly nothing jolts us more rudely than this doctrine . . .

It certainly does seem unfair for us to be blamed for the sin of another. My little niece used to commit various misdemeanors such as messing up the living room. She would find solace in her younger brother, who was not yet able to speak and defend himself. She would blame him for the mess that she had made, which, of course, was not right. Unfortunately, she got away with it many times before her parents caught on. Because of this, her brother was punished for crimes he

did not commit. Is it the same with Adam and humanity? Are we being punished for a sin that we had nothing to do with?

Death, Paul says, is passed down to us from Adam. But there is more to it than that. As Bob Pyne puts it, “We have no problem affirming that all people die, but what did Paul mean when he linked death to sin?” Furthermore, physical death is not the only consequence of Adam’s sin that we inherit. [Romans 5:18](#) states that the transgression of Adam resulted in our condemnation. So then, we are not only destined to die because of Adam’s sin, but we are also condemned to eternal death.

Was the sin of Adam transferred to us? If so, how? Are we condemned for the sin of another? Are Pascal’s concerns valid?

In the next few blogs, we will attempt to answer these questions. First, we will look at how the Church through the centuries has dealt with this issue. Second, we will take a closer look at the passage in question and attempt to narrow our interpretive options. Finally, we will make a synthesis by taking into account the possible interpretations along with the theological implications of each.

Initial thoughts?

C Michael Patton on 22 Aug 2007

[Anthropology & Sin](#)

[Are we Condemned for the Sin of Another? \(Part 2\)](#)

~ C Michael Patton ~

In the [last post](#) we discussed the problem of Original Sin, especially from an Evangelical Reformed perspective. Are we condemned for the sin of another. Let's get some basic terminology down so that we can surf this wave with more balance.

Proposed three types of sin:

Personal Sin: Sins committed by the individual. All people have personal sin ([Romans 3:23](#); [1 John 1:10](#))

Inherited Sin: The physical and spiritual corruption which produces a bent and inclination toward sin and a natural enmity toward God ([Eph. 2:3](#); [John 8:44](#); [Jer. 13:23](#); [Ps. 51:5](#)). This sin is mediated (inherited) directly from our parents.

Imputed Sin: God's immediate declaration of guilt to every individual for the sin of Adam. This sin is "imputed" (or credited) to all people as if they had committed the sin.

Here is where the traditions fall with regards to these three.

Reformed Evangelicals: We are *totally* corrupted physically and spiritually for Adam's sin through a *mediate* transferal from our parents (inherited sin). Because of this, we all have personal sin. We are also condemned (pronounced guilty) *immediately* by God for Adam's sin (imputed sin). This guilt is only resolved through God's sovereign redemptive action in our lives.

Arminians: We are corrupted (the degree of this corruption varies among Arminians) physically and spiritually for Adam's sin through a *mediate* transferal from our parents (inherited sin). Because of this, we all have personal sin. We are also condemned (pronounced guilty) *immediately* by God for Adam's sin (imputed sin) *after we sin in a like manner as Adam*. This guilt is only resolved through God's redemptive action in our lives as we respond to Him in faith.

Catholics: We are corrupted physically and spiritually for Adam's sin through a *mediate* transferal from our parents (inherited sin). Because of this, we all have personal sin. We are also condemned (pronounced guilty) *immediately* by God for Adam's sin (imputed sin). This guilt is only resolved through baptism.

Orthodox: We are corrupted physically and spiritually for Adam's sin through a *mediate* transferal from our parents (inherited sin). Because of this, we all have personal sin. We do not, however, have Adam's guilt imputed to us.

Short History of Original Sin

The doctrine of Original Sin was not adequately dealt with among the early Church Fathers. This is not surprising as issues were only dealt with as problems arose. Once controversy challenged "orthodoxy," orthodoxy had to define itself. Before the challenge and theological articulation, as with many issues, simple biblical language was used without interpretation (e.g. see Nicene Creed on the church and the Holy Spirit).

Pelagianism

The first time substantial discussion arose was at the time of Augustine (354-430). Augustine held that man is unable to do any good because man is inherently depraved. Augustine believed that all men are born with a predisposition to sin. This is what led him to his strong promotion of the necessity of predestination. “Give what thou command,” said Augustine, “and command what thou wilt.” At this time, believing Augustine’s position to be unfair and extreme, a British monk named Pelagius (c. 354- after 418) denied that sin was passed on from Adam to the human race. As to his interpretation of [Romans 5:12](#), Pelagius believed that, “As Adam sinned and therefore died so in a like manner all men die because they sin.” According to Pelagius, we inherit Adam’s sin neither by imputation of guilt *nor* by nature. The only effect that Adam had on the human race is the example he set. In the view of Pelagius, all men are born neutral in a like manner to Adam with no predisposition to evil. Pelagius was eventually condemned by two African councils in 416 and by the council of Ephesus in 431 which affirmed both inherited and imputed sin. In spite of his condemnation, the Pelagian doctrine of sin is still prominent in the Church today. It is the “default” position of sin for all people.

Arminians

Jacob Arminius believed that all men are considered guilty only when they partake in sin by their own free will in the same manner as Adam did. As Enns put it, “When people would voluntarily and purposefully choose to sin even though they had power to live righteously—then, and only then, would God impute sin to them and count them guilty.” Therefore, the sinful state is transmitted by natural generation, while the condemnation for the actual sin is only transmitted by partaking of sin in a like manner.

Augustinianism

Many theologians have proposed a theory called Augustinianism (also called “realism,” or “seminalism”). This theory has traditionally been linked with Augustine and has most recently been staunchly defended by Shedd. According to an Augustinian interpretation of [Romans 5:12](#), “all sinned” in that all humanity was physically present in Adam when he sinned. “[Those who hold to the Augustinian view of Original Sin] insist that we can be held accountable only for what we have actually done. As Shedd puts it, “The first sin of Adam, being a common, not an individual sin, is deservedly and justly imputed to the posterity of Adam upon the same principle which all sin is deservedly and justly imputed: Namely, that it was committed by those to whom it is imputed.” This view is attractive in that it takes literally Paul’s statement that “all sinned.”

Federalism

The federal view of humanity’s relationship to Adam proposes that Adam was selected by God to be humanity’s federal representative. This view was first proposed by Cocceius (1603-1669) and is the standard belief of Reformed theology. As Achan’s family was held responsible for his sin ([Joshua 7:16-26](#)), so it is with Adam’s family. By this view, the “all sinned” of [Romans 5:12](#) would not be taken literally. As Ryrie puts it, “No one but Adam actually committed that first sin, but since Adam represented all people, God viewed all as involved and thus condemned.” The reason that Adam’s sin is imputed to his posterity according to the federalist is because God imputes the guilt of Adam, whom He chose to represent mankind, to mankind.

Next we will look at [Romans 5](#), then we will deal with the problems.

C Michael Patton on 22 Aug 2007
[Anthropology](#) & [Sin](#)

[Are we Condemned for the Sin of Another? \(Part 3\)](#)

~ C Michael Patton ~

Continuing with our subject of the difficult doctrine of imputation, we now move to an interpretation of [Romans 5](#). The question has come down to this: Is it possible that Adam's sin has been credited or imputed to us in such a way that all men are born guilty of this sin of another *before* we ever exercise any personal sin. Evangelical Protestants and Catholics would say yes. Eastern Orthodox and Arminians would say no.

As some have wisely said, if [Romans 5:12-21](#) were never penned, this would not be an issue. Here is the passage for reference.

[Romans 5:12-21](#) 12 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— 13 for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 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. 15 ¶ But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. 16 The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. 17 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. 18 ¶ 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. 19 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. 20 The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21 so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The way in which one interprets this passage will determine which of the options presented thus far is adopted. The context of the passage has Paul explaining the believer's position in Christ by comparing it to our former position in Adam. The subject of the section is not the transgression, but the free gift (v. 15). Paul uses the analogy of Adam's sin and compares it to the free gift of Christ's righteousness.

The meaning of the phrase, "because all sinned" in verse 12 (NAS) is the initial and primary subject of debate. What is the meaning of "all sinned"? Most commentators would argue that it is very difficult to interpret the "all sinned" as an act of personal choice (*contra* Pelagius and Arminius). Why? Because of the force of the verb tense; it is likely a historic aorist (past tense referring back to the sin of Adam). If the Pelagian or Arminian interpretation were correct, the present tense would have been a much better choice for Paul in this context. Then it would naturally read, "Because all sin." Then we could answer the question "Why are all people condemned?" with "Because all people sin." But this does not seem to be the case here in Romans. The force of the verb has caused every translation that I know, except the NJB (a Catholic translation), to translate this passage "all sinned" with the implied referent to the being Adam's sin. Therefore, we are connected with the past sin of Adam. If this is correct, what Paul is saying is that when Adam sinned, we all sinned. As Morris has it, "The aorist [tense] points to

one act, the act of Adam; we would expect the present or the imperfect [tense] if the Apostle were thinking of the continuing sins of all people.”

It should be noted that the historic aorist is used in [Romans 2:23](#) in a similar but not identical way and is translated “all have sinned.” Notice there that the context only leaves room for the past tense referent to be the sin of the individual. This is brought up so that you can understand how the context of [Romans 5:12](#) plays a determining role.

Verse 12 attempts to begin the comparison of Adam with Christ but Paul then feels inclined to break off on one of his all-too-common parenthetical statements in verses 13-14 to defend his statement “because all sinned.” This is important because Paul’s understanding of what “all sinned” means is wrapped up in his defense which follows. Verse 13 begins with the conjunction “for” (*gar*). This links it with the previous statement, “because all sinned.” It is as if someone got the impression that Paul was stating that all people sin and, therefore, all people die as a consequence of *their own* sin. At this point (v. 13), Paul says that before the Law, there was sin. But people did not die on account of these personal sins, because they were not imputed as sin (“but sin is not imputed when there is no law” v. 13). Then the objection may be “How do you explain that all people still died before the law?” Paul seems to be saying that the reason people died before they commit an act of sin is because they are suffering the consequences of a sin *already committed*. They died not for personal sin, but for imputed sin. This sin was the sin of Adam. All people die because of the one sin of Adam.

With death being introduced through the avenue of Adam’s sin, we need to understand what death means. This death is most certainly to be seen as both spiritual and physical considering Pauline theology ([Eph. 2:2ff](#)). Therefore, the condemnation to which all suffer as a result in our participation in Adam’s sin is both spiritual and physical with the spiritual being evidenced by the physical (v. 13).

Less you think I am saying too much with regards to the subject, let us press on and see how the context will provide further evidence that Paul is speaking about imputed sin or guilt. Paul returns to his comparison to expound further. This comparison is between two things:

1. The effects of Adam’s sin
2. The effects of Christ’s righteousness

Whatever one does with Christ’s righteousness, one must do to Adam’s sin. First let us draw out the comparison so that it might be better seen.

Through Adams Sin | Through Christ’s Righteousness

Judgment (16) Free gift (16)

Condemnation (16) Justification (16)

Death Reigned (17) Life Reigned (17)

One Transgression=Condemnation of all (18) One Act of Righteousness=Justification of all (18)

Adam’s disobedience=many were made sinners (19) Christ’s obedience=many were made righteous (19)

The comparison is unmistakable. Whatever we do to inherit the free gift is the same thing we did to inherit judgment (v. 16). This is the force of the “just as” (*hosper*) in v. 12. Whatever we do to receive justification is the same thing we did to receive condemnation (v. 16). The effects of the “one act of righteousness” are brought about by the same means as the “condemnation of all men” (v. 18). The way in which believers are made righteous is analogous to the way all mankind was made sinners (v. 19). In order to answer the question as to how it is that “all

sinned” and all were condemned in Adam, we must answer the question as to how Christ’s righteousness is applied to us to the end that we are justified by that righteousness.

If we were to adopt the view as held by Pelagius, that Adam’s sin has no effect upon us whatsoever and that only his example has given us trouble, this means that Christ’s righteousness has no effect upon us either. He simply came to set the example. But this is not what the text teaches. It states that the many were made sinners and that the many were made righteous. The effect of these two men’s acts goes far beyond that of an example.

If we were to state, as the Arminians do, that we have Adam’s sin imputed to us only when we act in the same manner as Adam did, then we must state that we have Christ’s righteousness imputed to us only when we act as Christ acted. This cannot be true seeing as how we inherit Christ’s righteousness while we are sinners ([Rom 5:8, 10](#)).

If one were to opt for a purely Augustinian interpretation of the passage in that we all actually and realistically sinned in Adam, then we would also have to concede that we all actually and realistically were righteous in Christ. This, of course, will not do for the analogy would be rendered meaningless and would contradict Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith alone ([Rom 3:28](#); [Eph 2:8-9](#)).

Paul is attempting to explain our relationship to Christ’s righteousness by comparing it to the imputation of Adam’s sin to us. This relationship, in my opinion, is best seen in the federal headship view of imputation. As Moo puts it, “Throughout this whole passage what Adam did and what Christ did are steadily held over against each other. Now salvation in Christ does not mean that we merit salvation by living good lives; rather, what Christ has done is significant. Just so, death in Adam does not mean that we are being punished for our own evil deeds; it is what Adam has done that is significant.”

Adam, as our chosen federal head, has represented us and passed on sin and all of its consequences. Christ, as the second Adam, represents those who believe and passes on righteousness along with all its benefits. Christ’s righteousness is given to us without any participation of our own, just as Adam’s sin is given to us without our consent.

On the next blog we will deal with some of the implications and I will attempt to explain how this really can and does make sense. Please recognize that I understand the difficulty with this interpretation, but it does seem to handle the text with the most integrity. Remember, [the palatability of a doctrine does not determine its veracity](#).

C Michael Patton on 23 Aug 2007
[Anthropology](#) & [Sin](#)

[Are We Condemned for the Sin of Another \(Part 4: The Resolution\)](#)

~ C Michael Patton ~



Here is the situation: We are born with a propensity, bent, inclination to sin. Therefore, we cannot help but sin - it is our nature. Yet when we do act according to our nature and sin, we are held guilty by God and ultimately condemned to eternal punishment. Not only this, but we are *already* condemned for the sin of another - namely Adam - before we commit any personal sins. We are held guilty for something someone else did. Umm . . . Check please. I did not vote for this. I did not ask to be this way. I did not even have a chance. This seems unjust.

(We are just assuming that the argument I made in the last three blogs on this subject compel us to believe that we are held guilty for the sin of Adam: see [part 1](#), [part 2](#), [part 3](#).)

It is not hard to see why unbelievers scoff at such a foreign and seemingly cruel proposal. As well, it is not difficult to see why believers would decide to either remain agnostic concerning these issues or change their theology to look more Pelagian. Seriously. This is not an easy subject. It is absolutely shocking!

As Pascal put it, the flow of guilt seems unjust. Seeing as how the most difficult interpretation presented during this series has been adopted and defended, how do we dodge the obvious stumbling blocks? How do we avoid the unjust conclusion that we are held guilty for the sin of another? Or do we just bite our tongue, hold our nose, and swallow it? Certainly, no one would complain about the fairness of the imputation of Christ's righteousness, but the idea that condemnation is first imputed to all people *with no distinction* is difficult to grasp.

Before I propose a resolution, I would like to say something important. You and I do not have a vote in truth. Whether or not something is palatable does not determine whether or not it is true. We do not create God in our image. God could have been an evil God and He would still be God. He has never asked for a raise of hands on anything. He did not create a democracy which determines His attributes or actions. If He were to create each person and send them directly to Hell just for fun, then the truth of such circumstances, while grotesque, would still be true. In short, there is nothing you or I can do to change anything.

Having said this, I am thankful that God is not such a God. I am thankful that without my vote, He is a loving, gracious, and merciful Father.

Now, I would like to propose a possible resolution to our current subject of imputed sin by using St. Thomas Aquinas' hierarchy of angels as an illustration. Just hang with me. Aquinas

developed a system of angels in which every angel is created with a distinct nature. According to Aquinas, there is no distinct *species* named “angels.” What we refer to collectively as angels are all actually individual distinct creations of God. Because they do not reproduce of themselves there is no spiritual or physical relation to one another. This is why Aquinas believed that there is no redemption for angels ([Heb 2:16](#)). According to Aquinas, if Christ *were* to redeem the angels, He would have to identify with the angels in every way. Seeing as how each angel is a distinct species, He could not become one single species called “angels” in order to redeem the entire group. In order to redeem them, in theory, He would have to become each individual angel and die for them one at a time. Why? Because there is no solidarity found in angels for there to be a representation.

Whether or not Aquinas’ proposal about angels has any truth to it makes no difference for our present discussion; it is simply being used as an illustration. What is important is that Christ *could* become the species “man.” Since man’s being is linked with that of Adam in both physicality and spirituality, Christ could represent mankind all at once. Because we are vitally linked to the first Adam, we can be vitally linked to the second Adam, Jesus Christ.

At this point some may say that it is unfair because the proportions are different in those related to Adam and those related to Christ. While all men are related to the condemnation of Adam, not all men are related to the justification in Christ.

While this may be true, it might still be understood as a gracious act of God that we were all linked together with the first Adam. I propose that it was not a necessary act of God to link us with the first Adam. Nor do I believe that it was the natural outcome for Adam’s posterity to be linked with him in death, sin, or condemnation. God, *in theory*, could have let each individual person have the same chance in the Garden as he did with Adam. He could have caused each person to be born without any connection to Adam. Each would have been an individual creation who, if and when they sinned, would not be connected to anyone before or after. In this manner, the fall would come on an individual basis. Each person would be linked to only one person—himself or herself. Each person’s condemnation would be his or her own. There would be no linkage to the rest of humanity. Each person would be spiritually and physically autonomous. This being the case, Christ could not represent “mankind” because there would be no “mankind.” There would be no solidarity to make any representation functional. We would be like the angels of Aquinas’ hierarchy—without a redeemer.

I believe that God, in his grace, knowing that when given the chance, each individual would follow Adam in his sin, declared all people guilty of Adam’s sin, thereby creating a solidarity. This solidarity made humanity redeemable by a representative. Christ could only redeem mankind all at once, because mankind fell in Adam all at once. Therefore, God caused all men to sin “in and with” Adam (federal headship view) by an act of grace, knowing that all would choose the same as Adam. The “all sinned” in [Romans 5:12](#) is as if Adam was in the Garden and held up the piece of fruit to a crowd which consisted of all mankind and shouted, “Should I eat it?” and the entire crowd shouted back, “Go for it!” In this, “all sinned.” God, then, in his grace, declared all guilty. The link was graciously made initially in Adam so that it might be made the second time in Christ.

If this is the case, we see that there was a unique solidarity that is found in Adam that cannot be parallel to any other. It is true, as the Bible says, that the son will not suffer for the sins of his father:

[Ezekiel 18:20](#) 20 “The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son’s iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.

Yet this passage has no application to our present issues since it is dealing with individual sins, not corporate sins from a representative of the entire human race. *Adam was humanity*. Humanity fell. Humanity was condemned for this sin. Humanity was punished with spiritual and physical death. Humanity inherited the sinful inclination and humanity is held guilty for the fall. This is why the sins of another cannot be imputed to us the same way. But this is why Christ, being fully God and fully man, could represent the new race of humanity. This is why Christ is called the “second Adam.”

[1 Corinthians 15:45](#) So also it is written, “The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL.” The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

I believe very strongly that we are born with a sinful nature within a condemned race. We are guilty with Adam and God had every right to turn His back on humanity and leave us in our state of death. Yet God, in mercy and grace, intervened and sent a second representative who imputes righteousness instead of condemnation, hope instead of dread, life instead of death.

Two side notes that I will not expand upon at this time: 😊

1. This has major implications on the New Perspective on Paul which denies imputation of Christ’s righteousness.
2. This necessitates a traducian view of the creation of the soul.
3. This strongly supports a Calvinistic view of predestination.

C Michael Patton on 27 Aug 2007