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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Romans 5:12-21

“Three Great Imputations: The Imputation of Adam’s Sin of His Posterity” TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Now, will you listen as we read beginning at verse 12 of Romans chapter 5.

“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. (Now, it is evident from this that if men after Adam died, but sin was not imputed when there is no law and the law did not exist then, nevertheless, men died. They must have died by reason of Adam’s sin. That’s Paul’s point. Verse 15. So he’s going to draw the analogy between Adam and Christ, which is largely an analogy of contrast rather than comparison). But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. But not as it was by one that sinned (Adam), so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man's offence (Adam’s sin) death reigned by one (through Adam); much more they which

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receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. Therefore as by the offence of one (Adam’s sin) judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one (Jesus Christ) the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience (Adam’s) many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one (Jesus Christ) shall many be made righteous. (Now, one might say, “Well, what about the law?” And so Paul says), Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound (to show us our sin). But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Now, that is a difficult section. But it is safe to say it is one of the most important in all of the New Testament. Let’s look to the Lord in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the Scriptures which so beautifully set forth the relationship between the first Adam and the last Adam. And we are grateful that Thou hast not only provided one representative man. For that one representative man who came first plunged us into sin and condemnation. But Thou hast also provided a second representative man. The last Adam, Jesus Christ, who by his one righteous act has made it possible for many to be justified and brought to life. And so, we want to give Thee thanks and praise for the divine arrangements. We thank Thee that Thy plans and Thy purposes proceed from an omniscient God. We thank Thee that Thou didst not have to have a conference with any other person, that the conferences of the persons of the Trinity are sufficient for eternity and that there is no question about what is best for Thou dost by virtue of who Thou art know the best plan. We know that Thou art not in doubt about that which is best. And so, we recognize that these plans which come from Thee are the best plans for us.

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And so, we thank Thee that Thou art an omniscient God, an omnipotent God, able to carry out Thy plans, an omnipresent God, always nearby, at hand, to see that the divine program is carried through to its beautiful and wonderful completion. And we thank Thee, Lord, that we are in the plan of God. And accept our thanks for this most wonderful, amazing, astounding fact that we have come to know Thee and know that Thou art for us. Lord, we pray that Thou wilt give us some of Thy wisdom. And as we look to Thee for guidance with regard to the future, we pray that Thou wilt guide and direct, that Thou wilt enable us to glorify Thee, that there may be always the sense of Thy presence and Thy working in our midst. Today, Lord, as the word is proclaimed be with us.

We pray for our country, for any who are unable to be here with us, for the entire church of Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for the peace that comes from knowing that as we commit the affairs that concern us and others into Thy hands we have committed them to one who is people. And so, with confidence we commit them to Thee. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] Since it is my privilege to preach to you for three Sundays before I leave for North Carolina and my porch and put my feet on the banister and rest for a month or so, I want to speak on three great theological texts. And the general theme of these three messages will be three great theological imputations or the Imputation of sin, satisfaction, satisfaction of Jesus Christ, and salvation. And today, particularly on the imputation of Adam’s sin to his posterity.

The Christian church has lost the sense of the importance of theology and consequently the Christian church is weak. We often hear the cliché “deeds are everything while beliefs are unimportant.” And really there could not be any statement that is more damaging to the truth of the word of God than the statement “belief is unimportant, deeds are everything.” Dr. Samuel Johnson said to Boswell over 100 years

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ago with reference to a man who denied the existence of a moral order, “If he does really think that there is no distinction between virtue and vice, why sir, when he leaves our house, let us count our spoons.” [Laughter] And I think it is true to say that what a man believes determines what he does. And so when we see a person doing certain things, it is almost always the product of what he really believes. And so consequently it is the beliefs that really matter. It is not the deeds for they are secondary.

Now, if we were to turn to the Bible and say beliefs are unimportant, but deeds are everything, it is obvious that we have the cart before the horse.

Now this was illustrated in my experience recently when I was in Memphis preaching. I stayed at the home of one of the leading lawyers of the city of Memphis, an outstanding Christian man, one of the elders of the First Evangelical Church and a teacher of one of the adult classes, and a man who was very knowledgeable in the Bible. And we got in quite a few friendly discussions and one of the first friendly discussion, mild argument, occurred on the breakfast of the second day I was there because in the course of discussion, he made a statement to the effect that seemed to depreciate theology. And consequently I spoke up and said, “Now wait a minute, George. Theology is the most important thing that we have.” And I gave a little discourse on what I thought was the importance of theology [Laughter] and he replied, “Well, theology is for you preachers and professors. I’m interested in that which is practical and useful for my daily life.” And so with that, the discussion closed and I thought, well I have four or five more days to try to convince him of the truth. And so I let it drop. [Laughter]

Well, we had made an arrangement. He had made an arrangement whereby he gave us the use of his car for the morning Bible class. And the two of us, two preachers, were staying with him, Stanley Collins from Scotland and from Forest Home in California. And so at 10:10, we left or made our preparations to leave to go to the church, which was about ten minutes away. For the first meeting of the morning began at 10:30. Well, he had passed the keys to his car to Stanley Collins and as we went out the door, Stanley

handed me the keys. And since he was a Britisher and I wasn’t too certain of his skill behind the wheel, I took the keys readily and went over and got in the driver’s seat and it was a Ford Thunderbird of a couple of years ago. And as you do when you sit in a car for the first time, I looked around for the keyhole to put the key in, and I found that, and I put it in. And then I looked at the dashboard and began to try to figure out exactly where I was, and I noticed the brake was not on. And so I just inadvertently reached over and pushed in the foot brake and I guess I was trying to absentmindedly test it or something.

And then I looked for the release because I was getting ready to leave. And I couldn’t find the release. And I looked and I looked this side, and I looked that side, and I remember leaning over almost in Stanley’s lap to try to find some release. [Laughter] Then finally I got a little excited because we only had ten minutes to waste [Laughter] and I got out of the car, opened the door, I looked up under the dashboard and I still couldn’t find any release. And finally I got a bright idea. I said, “Stanley, get the book. Get the manual. I hope he has one.” And so he opened the pocket and there was a manual. And so here the two preachers were with the manual between them. [Laughter] He was trying to thumb one side of it. I was trying to thumb the other to find out how in the world to get that brake release off and finally we saw a statement to the effect that I think, I think I remember what it said. It was something like this. That when you turn on the ignition and the car is going, when you take it out of gear, then the brake is released automatically. [Laughter] And so we did that and we managed to get there and as I got to the church, I turned to Stanley and I said, “Now I’ve got my illustration and I cannot wait until George gets home from his office tonight to tell him the importance of theology. Because you see it’s what’s in the book that really gets us out of the practical difficulties of life.” [Laughter] And so theology enables you to drive a car.

Well you know, really that is true about divine things. It is what is in the book that really determines our spiritual life. And we cannot say theology is for the preachers

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and the professors, or people who are serious about theology. It is for the average man. It is the one thing that really enables him to handle the daily problems of life.

Well one of the great theological words is imputation. Now what does imputation mean? Fortunately, this word means practically identically what it means in English. To impute, the biblical term to impute means to think.

Now we have in Romans chapter 2 and verse 3 an occurrence of the word that is basic to the doctrine of imputation where we read by Paul, “And thinkest thou this, O man.” It means to think there. In chapter 4, verse 3 in Romans we read, “For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.” There it is translated to count. In chapter 4, verse 6 we read, “Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness.” The Greek word *logizomai*, which is the word that Paul is using in these places, then means to think, it means to count, it means to impute. In chapter 6, verse 11 it is rendered reckon. “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin.” To count, to impute, to reckon, to think, that is what imputation means. And when we speak about the imputation of sin, for example, the imputation of Adam’s sin to his posterity, we are talking about the reckoning, the counting, the imputing of Adam’s sin to others.

Now, there are three great acts of imputation. And these three great acts of imputation are the core of the three basic doctrines of Christianity. And they are these.

First, there is the imputation of Adam’s sin to his posterity, the reckoning of Adam’s sin and its guilt in its results to Adam’s descendants. That’s the first great imputation. That is fundamental to the understanding of the Bible. It is safe to say if we do not understand that, it is hopeless for us to understand thoroughly the word of God.

The second imputation is the imputation of sin to Jesus Christ. That imputation is obviously fundamental to the truths of Christianity.

And the third imputation is the imputation of God’s righteousness to the elect. It is obvious that we cannot understand the Bible if we do not understand that.

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So, the first imputation has to do with the doctrine of sin. The second imputation, the imputation of sin to Christ, has to do with the doctrine of satisfaction, Christ’s work on the cross. The third great act of imputation has to do with the imputation of righteousness to the elect. It has to do with salvation. And so we have sin, we have the satisfaction of Jesus Christ, we have the salvation of those who have Jesus Christ or God’s righteousness imputed to them, and this is the core of the three great doctrines of Christianity. So if we do not understand imputation, how is it possible for us to understand the Bible?

Well, today we’re going to look at the first of these acts, the imputation of Adam’s sin to his posterity.

Now, the minute we mention the term sin there are questions that are raised. Is the doctrine of sin important? Well yes, it’s important because Jesus Christ came to deal with sin. “His name shall be called Jesus because he shall save his people from their sins,” so Joseph was told. And it is obvious that if Jesus Christ came to deal with the sin question, that sin must be significant.

But is the human situation today the same as it was in Paul’s day? I think a fair reading of the Apostle Paul and a fair reading of human beings today will reach the conclusion that Paul is not dated. He is vindicated every day. The doctrine that he taught is the doctrine that we see expressed in the life of the 20th century.

In other words, men are characterized by unbelief. They’re characterized by pride. They are characterized by all of the other effects of sin, which include, of course in our day so tremendously, materialism. Even in our TV advertisements we see it. A man drives up a few years ago in his car into a quick wash place. He rolls up his windows and while the water pours around him, plugs in his electric razor and shaves himself. And as he drives out, he lowers the window, sticks his head out, announces ecstatically to his audience, “It’s a wonderful world when a man can have a car wash and a shave all in

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one minute.” And we think oh brave new wonderful modern world, which has such beautiful gadgets in it. And everything is going to be wonderful, but it’s not.

Someone has said the possession of money does not bring happiness. Although it may relieve our anxieties a little bit. But is Paul’s diagnosis true? It is tenable?

Communism has said that the trouble with the world is the capitalistic system. Liberals say essentially that the trouble with the world is its unscientific attitudes. If we were to properly educate ourselves, if we were to properly control our environment, then we should not have our difficulties and problems. But the facts are after thousands of years man does sin because he is sinful. And even men who at one time were very liberal in their thinking have come to understand at least that Paul was right in this.

Some of us who keep up with theological things noted with some interest the death of Reinhold Niebuhr because this man made a tremendous impact on religious liberalism of our day. Niebuhr himself said somewhere “Christian people had begun to put their trust in a God without wrath who brings men without sin into a kingdom without judgement through the ministration of a Christ without a cross.” But we now know as a result of the human situation that sin does exist and that Paul’s words are written as if they were written by a participant in the 20th century.

Now, let’s look at our text for we’re going to spend our entire time this morning on Romans chapter 5 and verse 12. Paul says, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”

Now when you see a text that begins with a wherefore, you want to be sure that you understand the connection.

Now the Greek words really should be rendered on account of this or for this cause. For this cause. Well now Paul, what cause? When you look back in the context you discover that what Paul has been saying is essentially this up to this point in Romans. We have salvation through the activity of one man, Jesus Christ. So, for this cause, since

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we have salvation by one man, Jesus Christ, there exists a likeness between this one man, Jesus Christ, and Adam. And the likeness, which Paul is trying to set forth, is essentially this. Through one man, Adam, we have sin, we have condemnation and we have death. But through another man, the last Adam, we have righteousness, we have justification and life. And there is obvious then a relationship between the two. One is like the other. In fact, as Paul says in verse 14, “Adam was a figure of him that was to come.” So, just as a tremendous thing happened when Adam, one man sinned, there came sin and condemnation and death. So, when one man died on the cross at Calvary tremendous things took place for there we have righteousness, the basis of it established, the basis of justification established and the basis of life established. And so the master thought of this section is the unity of the many in one. And all in Adam fall. All in Christ are made alive.

Now, that’s Paul’s essential point and he wants to develop it. There is a solidarity that exists in the human family. And my dear friend if you have come in here this morning and you do not understand a thing of what I am saying, let me assure you that if you will test your experience and the experience of what you have seen in humanity with the facts of Paul, you will come to the conviction that whatever Paul says, whether it is from God or not, it is true to the facts as you see them in human existence.

Now let’s look at the text phrase by phrase. Wherefore. For this cause. Since we have salvation by one man. There exists a likeness between Christ and Adam.
“Wherefore, as by one man.”

Now notice. He says “It is through one man that sin entered the world.” We have many of our modern theologians who tell us that the Genesis account, particularly the first eleven chapters of the Book of Genesis is largely religious myth. That is, it is not really an historical account of the origins of the human race. Although it contains truth, contains religious truth. Professor Niebuhr himself, for example, did not deny the ultimate truthfulness of Genesis 1 through 11, but he said, of course, the things did not happen as they are set forth there. But we do have in those things a true picture of the nature of

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man, at least in large degree. It is evident to me that Paul accepted the historicity of the Genesis account.

Now he does not say, I grant, he does not say, “Parentheses. Now, I regard the Genesis account as historical.” But it is evident that he regards Adam, one man, as the means by which sin entered into the race. He accepts, so far as we can tell, the historicity of the Genesis account. And in this he followed our Lord. For our Lord also implicitly accepted the historicity of the Genesis account. For he himself refers to Adam and he refers to Eve as if they were real persons in Matthew chapter 19. So, Paul then is taking a look back to Genesis 2 and Genesis 3.

Now, let’s for just a moment recount the story. You remember that when God created man he gave him dominion over the fish of the sea, over the fowl of the air and over every living thing that moved upon the earth. And he set him in the garden that he had made, which was beautiful and sufficient in every way and he said to the man whom he had put in the Garden of Eden “to dress it and to keep it. Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” In other words, Adam was given the full run of the garden. He was given complete control over it with one exception. That exception was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. I do not think that this in any way was a provocation on God’s part because the maximum was allowed him and the minimum was forbidden. Every tree he had full access to, full control over, so far as we can tell, and he can even stand by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he could sit down under its branches and shade himself from the sun, by that tree. The one thing that was forbidden him was to partake of its fruit.

Now I would say that God has given him the maximum, he has limited him in the minimum. What was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Well, there have been many interpretations of this, some positively silly. For example, in the Middle Ages when the notion of celibacy was introduced into the church and the natural union of men and

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woman was consequently regarded as evil, some taught that the forbidden fruit was the sex act in spite of the fact that right in this very context man was told to be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth. Others have said, “No. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the fruit of it was, well it was a grape tree. And the fruit of it was the grape. And what God was saying was that drinking wine would make men drunk. And therefore they should not eat of the fruit of the tree which was in the midst of the garden.”

Now, I think that is silly, of course. Because when we turn to the New Testament our Lord, when he instituted the Lord’s Supper, he took wine as the symbol of that institution because wine produces joy. And further, it is like blood. In fact, in the Old Testament grape juice is called the blood of the vine. And so it was evident that that had tremendous symbolical significance for our Lord and there is not one thing in the Bible, so far as I can tell, which forbids the taking of wine.

Now, there’s a great deal in the Bible against drunkenness, but nothing against the partaking of wine. And in the Lord’s Supper, wine was the element which the early church used.

Now, that is evident. Because in Corinth, when they had difficulties people were coming to the Lord’s table and they were getting drunk. And I have never yet seen anyone who was able to get drunk off of Welch’s Grape Juice. [Laughter] So, it is evident that they were using real wine. But that is surely not what is meant here when it is said the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We frankly do not know what the tree was. And it does not really matter to us. The important thing is that it became a test of man’s dependence upon God. Will he obey the word of God? Will he believe the word of God? “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” Will he believe that?

Now then Paul continues. He says, “Wherefore, as by one man sin.” Now, let’s stop for a moment. Sin. What is sin? Well, it’s obvious that sin is not immorality necessarily.

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Now, of course, immorality is sin. But sin is not essentially immorality. For Adam and Eve did not commit any such immorality. Sin is not murder, though murder is a sin. Adam and Eve sinned, but they did not murder. Immorality, you see, is a product of sin. Further, sin is not rebellion, although Adam and Eve did rebel. Eve rebelled and Adam rebelled. Well, really what made Adam and Eve rebel? Why, unbelief. They did not believe the word of God. Consequently, because they did not believe “in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” But you remember the tempter came to them and said, “You shall not surely die. It’s not a matter of life and death.” But it was. And so, out of distrust of the word of God they rebelled against God and ultimately Cain slew his brother, for that’s the product of rebellion, which in turn is the product of unbelief. And consequently, it does matter what a man believes. For you see the deeds that a man commits are the product of what he believes. And so, the sin of the Garden of Eden was the sin of unbelief.

Now, since that time, sin has entered into the world and everybody has participated in it. Would any of you like to stand up and say, “I have never committed a sin? I am not a member of the human race in this respect. I stand absolutely unique. I have never done anything wrong.” Would you like to stand up and give us your confession and tell us your secret? No, you wouldn’t like to at all. Because you know even our little infants manifest that. They come into the world. And how do they come into the world? Well, they come in crying. They’re objective right in the beginning. [Laughter] They’re rebelling. Furthermore, if you look at them you will notice their hands are clenched [Laughter], their feet are up, they are kicking and squirming and fighting and crying. They come in actively aggressive. And as one of the professors at the University of Edinburgh put it, he said, “Every infant that I have ever brought in comes in aggressive and rebellious and in every way potentially a criminal.” Who taught children to sin? Why, they are rebellious and autonomous before they have an opportunity to observe any of the rest of us. And my dear young people, you cannot blame your sin on the

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examples of your adults. Because you see, you have come with the same nature. So, who taught children? Well, no one taught them. They learned it naturally. And you can see it in the little baby. Here is a little baby sixteen months old, beautiful little girl. And there are forty-three toys in the room. And there is a little boy by, just about the same age. And the little girl has forty-two of the forty-three toys [Laughter] that are in the room and is not happy until she is able to get her hands on the forty-third. Now what’s the cause of that? Why it is sin. Sin entered.

Now, you will notice that Paul does not say that sin originated. He does not say sin originated with Adam. He says simply that sin entered through Adam. For you see, sin originated in heaven. It originated through the sin of Lucifer. But it entered through the temptation into the human race. And so that is why we talk about original sin. What is original sin? Why, it is the sin that Adam committed, which has been transmitted to the human race. That’s the doctrine of original sin. And if there is any doctrine that can be empirically demonstrated, it is the doctrine of original sin. So, sin entered.

Now, Paul doesn’t stop there. He says, “And death by sin.” So, not only did sin enter, but the resultant judgement of sin came because God said, “In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”

Now, there is only one penalty for sin and that penalty is death. But it has its aspects. For example, the moment that Adam sinned he did not die physically, he died spiritually. He lost communion with God. So when God came down in the garden and he said, “Adam, where art thou?” Adam was hiding. He had on his [indistinct] garment of fig leaves. And I’ve often said why he selected fig leaves I don’t know. Have you ever put a fig leaf next to your skin? It is the itchiest, scratchiest kind of garment. [Laughter] But anyway, he was hiding. He was spiritually dead. He had died. He had not died physically, but he was a walking corpse. And that, of course, is what humanity is apart from Christ. They are walking corpses. They are dead. They are dead in their sins. The

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contact between man and God was severed and it can only be restored through the saving work of Jesus Christ.

Now, this spiritual death manifests itself in physical death. That’s why men die. Men don’t die because of disease. They don’t die because of cancer. They don’t die because of an accident. They die ultimately because of sin.

The obituary column ought to read something like, “The results of sin.” That’s the way I read it. Every time I look at the obituary column looking for my name. Every time I see it, I think of Genesis chapter 3. That’s why we have it. And try as our scientists may to discover the secret of life and also the ability to preserve life, more power to them. We shall discover that God shall always be able to exact his penalty because that penalty is physical death because we are spiritually dead.

Now, of course, if we persist in our spiritual death, we not only die physically, but our spiritual death is prolonged into eternity and so the Bible speaks of eternal death, or the lake of fire. So, when men sin they came under the judgement of death, spiritual death, which led to physical death, which in turn, if persisted in, leads to eternal death. Dust is our origin, dust is our future.

It reminds me of the story of the little boy who kept asking his mother questions about life’s origin. And he said, “Mother, where do we come from?” And she knew something about the Bible and she said, “From dust.” And she told the story of Genesis 2. And then one day he asked, “Mother, where are we going?” And she said, “We are going to become dust when our bodies die.” Later, he was seen looking under a bed and as his mother came in the room he said, “Hey Ma, there’s somebody dead under here, but I don’t know whether they’re coming or going.” [Laughter]

Well, as a result of man’s sin, man was driven from the Garden of Eden, remember, and the cherubim were placed eastward of the garden and a flaming sword which prevented man from returning.

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I heard of a country preacher who said very vividly that Adam used to take his boys by the entrance to the Garden of Eden in order to teach them the effects of sin. And as he took his boys by he would point in and he would say in the language of the country preacher, “Take a good look in there boys. There’s where your ma eat us out of house and home.” [Laughter] So, Paul says, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin.”

Now, I do not think that there is any better explanation of what happens in humanity than Paul’s words in Romans chapter 5. It is because of the sin of the one man that there exists death.

Now, he doesn’t stop there. He has spoken about the origination of human sin and death, but now he speaks of the imputation of sin and death. He says in verse 12, in the second part of the verse, “And so death passed upon all men.” In other words, there is a universal diffusion of sin and death among men. Let me read you a text from Psalm 58 and verse 3. For this is not only Pauline doctrine, this is biblical doctrine. In Psalm 58 and verse 3 we read, “The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.” And so there is the universal diffusion of sin and death. “Death passed upon all men,” including Christian scientists who say, “Death is an error of the mortal mind.”

Now, I have a good preacher friend and he told me a story not long ago when I was in Canada about a mutual friend of ours. And this Bible teacher, Bible teachers are an ornery lot, as you probably have noticed. This mutual friend of ours decided that he would go out to the Christian Science building at the World’s Fair. And he was going to get over the fact that men really do die to the Christian scientists, hoping, of course, that he might cause them to think about spiritual things. So, he walked in their booth at the World’s Fair and he said, “I would like to speak to Mary Baker Eddy.” And the attendant said, “She’s not here.” [Laughter] And he said, not deterred by that, said, “When can I see her?” Said, “Well, she’s not here and I don’t know when she will be.” He said, “Will she

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be here this afternoon?” He said, “No. She won’t be here this afternoon.” “Well will she be here any time in the next few days, so I can see her?” “No. She won’t be here.” “Well do you mind then giving me her mailing address? I would like to write her.” “I’m sorry, sir, but she does not have a mailing address.” “Well does she have a telephone number? Can I call her by telephone?” “No. You cannot reach her by telephone.”

Finally, after a few more questions like this, the attendant blurted out “She’s dead.” And our Bible teacher friend said, “You bet she is.” [Laughter] Well, this mutual friend of ours told this story to the Moody Bible Institute student body. And he said an afternoon or two later he got on the elevator at the Moody Bible Institute and there was a young man got on with him and he looked over and recognized him and he said, “You know what I did today?” He said, “No.” He said, “I visited the Christian Science reading room.” He said, “What did you say?” “Well, I asked to speak to Mary Baker Eddy.” And my friend said, “Well, what did they say?” He said, “Well, the attendant in there said, ‘You got to be kidding.’” [Laughter] For you see, death has passed upon all men and women including Mary Baker Glover Patterson Eddy.

Now, the last clause of Paul’s statement is the foundation of this imputation. “So death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” Now this has been a theological battleground, this clause. How should we render this? Should we say, “And so death passed upon all men, for all sinned when Adam did?” Or should we say, “All have sinned.” That is, we have all committed some act of transgression.

Now, the Pelagians, and you know they’re not my favorite class of people theologically, they have taught that the meaning of Paul’s text is that all men have committed an act of sin and that’s what Paul means when he says, “So death has passed upon all men because all have committed an act of sin.” They have taught that sin is the product of man’s free will. And consequently, when the time came when he had, having free will, reached his majority so to speak and was able to make his decision, man sinned. He had the will to refuse to sin. He had the will to sin. And consequently, when the

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time came, out of his free will, he decided that he was going to do that which was contrary to the will of God and he sinned. And so all have committed acts of sin. And that’s why we’re condemned. Don’t question the fact that all have committed acts of sin.

But I’d like to ask my Pelagian friends why is the effect so uniform? Why is it that everyone, when he comes to this place of free will and free decision, always acts in the same way? Why is it? If there is an equipoise, why is it that everybody inevitably decides to sin? Why is it? We should at least have a few around who don’t. In fact, we ought to have more. Well, of course, that’s obviously something a Pelagian cannot really answer and so many of them said it’s not only a question of the product of the free will, but it’s the bad examples that men are provided with. And because we give them such bad examples, well then everybody in the making of the decision has failed. Well, I should ask again. Why is it so universal? There at least ought to be somebody around who would look at the example of falling into sin and would decide that that was a horrible thing, a repulsive thing and to decide to do the opposite. Because that’s what we do about other things, when we see somebody as a bad example or something is a bad example, we are repelled by it and we decide we’re not going to do it. But why is it so universal?

And, you know, there did come a man once who provided us with a perfect example, the only man, our Lord Jesus Christ. He never sinned. But no one took the cue from the good example and we have never had any apart from Christ who have not fallen. No, the Pelagian explanation is not a good one.

Others have said well all this simply means is that we inherit a depraved nature from Adam. Just as light begets light, so like Adam has begotten one with a nature like his and therefore they speak of mediate imputation. That is, an imputation that is mediated through human begetting. And we inherit Adam’s nature. And because we inherit Adam’s nature, we exhibit the same spirit. We are depraved.

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Well, of course, I believe that. I think we do have Adam’s nature. But Paul is not really speaking about that here; he talks all through this passage about the act of the one man plunging us into sin. Five times he says it’s by the one man’s act. And so, Reformed theologians, I think, much closer to the truth have spoken about an immediate representative imputation. That is, Adam stood as a representative for humanity by divine appointment. And when he sinned, the guilt of his sin was imputed immediately to all of his descendants. And we stand under the guilt of sin because our representative has sinned. And as a result of that, of course, we partake of his nature and we also manifest the same spirit, which manifests itself in sins.

Now, this is much closer to the truth and I am inclined to think it expresses almost all of the truth found here. Because I notice that five times in this section death is traced to the act of the one man. Listen as I read beginning at verse 15. “But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead.” Verse 16, “Not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift.” Verse 17, “For if by one man's offence death reigned by one.” Verse 18, “Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men.” Verse 19, “For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners.” And so, the sin of all in verse 12 is the sin of one in verse 15. It becomes obvious that Paul means when Adam sinned we sinned because our representative sinned and we sinned in our representative. As he puts it in 1 Corinthians 15, “In Adam all die.” “In Adam all die.” And so we have his guilt, we have his corruption, we have his sins and we shall have his death.

Now some of my friends, and I respect them very much, have wanted to make this relationship a little closer than immediate imputation to each descendent of guilt and condemnation. They have sought to teach that just as Levi was in Abraham when Abraham paid tithes, so we were in Adam really, and when Adam sinned, we acted.

Now, that’s nonsense. They speak of seminal relationship. They speak of a natural headship. I believe that Adam was our natural head, as well as our representative

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head. But the analogy is broken. If it were true that by the one act of Adam we were plunged into death because we acted then, Paul draws an analogy with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ gaining us salvation. Is it true that I was in Christ and I performed the act of the cross? No. No one who held that view would say that. But Paul draws this analogy. With Paul, you see, it is a legal thing. It is a representative thing. It is one man who acts as our representative and plunges us into sin. It is another man who acts as representative in whom I may come and participate in his destiny.

I was a nonentity when Adam sinned. There was no Lewis Johnson except in the mind of God. I was a nonentity. It’s nonsense to speak of me acting. I don’t remember that. You don’t remember that. You didn’t make any responsible decision then. That is an attempt to get away from the difficulty of why should something that Adam has done effect me. And it’s natural for us to think that way.

So, I think then when Paul says, “For all have sinned,” we should render that “For all sinned.” We sinned in Adam. We come under Adam’s condemnation. We have his guilt. We have, of course, his nature derived from him. We do the same thing as Adam did in proof of our condition by law and by practice.

Now, I know what you’re going to say. It’s not right that something Adam has done affects my eternal lot. What doesn’t affect your eternal lot? It affects your present situation. And the facts wonderfully support it. For if I look at you and you look at me, you cannot help but believe that whatever Paul says it’s true, we are in sin. And, as a matter of fact, we recognize this representative principle among us. Edward VIII may abdicate the throne; affect all of his descendants if he had any.

I am, at the present time, horribly in debt. I owe three hundred and fifty plus or minus billion dollars. Imagine. That’s what the national debt is. And that’s my debt. Or we also see a rich man may waste all of his money and all of his descendants suffer. I read this week that thrift is a wonderful virtue especially in an ancestor. [Laughter] But you see, a wealthy man may have a lot of money and throw it all away. But his son

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cannot come forward in law and say, “Wait, my father wasted that. It’s not right that something my father did should involve me.” But we recognize the principle of representation.

In fact, to tell you the truth I am delighted that there was a first Adam because since there was a first Adam who acted for me, there can now be, apparently as a result of this, a last Adam who may also act for many. And since Adam is my representative, it is possible for someone else to be my representative. The angels were no so favored. For the angels that fell, and fell into sin and condemnation, do not have an opportunity, for they had no representative. They fell in their own right.

Now, I’m delighted because, you see, if I had been in the Garden of Eden, I’m sure I would have sinned a long time before Adam did. Further, Adam had all of the motivation to live a life well pleasing to the Lord because he knew that his actions affected his posterity. And so with all of that motivation, in spite of that, he still sinned. I would surely have fallen. And I’m so delighted that there is now a last Adam given by God as a new representative man who answers to the old, but who has performed one mighty act on the cross at Calvary and now an invitation is given to all to believe come to be in him and partake of righteousness and justification and life. I fell through no personal fault of my own through Adam because of his sin, but through no merit of my own I am in the last Adam, the second man, and I have eternal life.

Now, if it’s true that I am affected by Adam’s sin, the other is then also true. I may be affected by what Christ has done. When the father strikes oil, the children get rich. And I want to tell you, we have struck a gusher in Jesus Christ. Because you see, by being in him we have righteousness, justification and life through our representative who stood for us upon the cross at Calvary. And my eternal lot is not affected by what Adam did. My present situation is.

Now, if I refuse the gospel message, then I justly am condemned for my sins. And the Bible puts it that way, for my sins. But if I should say I don’t like the idea that

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anything Adam did should affect me, I will not turn, then my dear friend, you have no excuse. God has offered the salvation universally. And you sitting in this audience may have it when you recognize your condition and that the Son of God has paid the price and that you come to him and do what Adam failed to do, rest in his word. May God help you to do that. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful for this great principle of representation. We thank Thee that the first Adam represented us. And we thank Thee that his fall has been made so manifest in the history of the human race. But most of all, we thank Thee that there has come a last Adam, the last, for there is no other. And who by his one righteous act, has...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]