

## **The Headship of Adam**

**(Boice's Abstract of Systematic Theology—Chapter 24)**

By **J. M. Boice**

THE Scriptures teach that the fall of Adam involved also that of his posterity. In the covenant, under which he sinned, he acted not merely as an individual man, the sole one of his kind, or one isolated from all others of his kind, but, as the head of the race, for his posterity as well as himself. The condition of mankind shows that they have all participated with him in the evils which resulted. The Scriptures teach that this is due, not merely to his natural headship, but to a representative or federal headship, because of which his act of sin may justly be considered as theirs, and they may be treated as though they had themselves done that act, each man for himself.

In order that a proper comparison may be made between the innocent and afterwards the sinful condition of Adam, and that which universally is found in his descendants, it will be well to recall the facts as to Adam in these respects, and those also which are seen to be true of mankind in general. The consideration of these will prepare the way for that of the relation between the parties to which the present condition of man is due.

### **I. THE FACTS AS TO ADAM.**

These may be briefly stated since they have already been set forth, and the present statement is only an epitome of that already given.

1. Adam was created perfect, because of which perfection he was not only without sin, but had a strong and controlling though not invincible inclination to holiness and obedience to God. Such must be the nature of every being that is innocent and uncorrupted.
2. This nature did not make him incapable of committing sin, but only made it very improbable that he would choose to do so. Such improbability naturally belongs to a nature whose whole inclinations are towards that which is good. But improbability is far from being impossibility.
3. The possibility of sinning necessarily inheres in every creature endowed with a moral nature and permitted freedom of choice between good and evil. This is no more than saying that a creature is fallible because he is not God, who alone is

through his own nature infallible.

4. Adam, in the trial to which he was subjected, did fall, not accidentally nor ignorantly, but deliberately, knowingly, and of his own free will.
5. Prior to this fall there were exhibited in him the nature and condition which belong to an innocent and holy man, and which must be found in any of mankind who have not been affected by his sin. Subsequent to it he possessed the nature and condition of a corrupt and guilty man, which likewise must appear in all of those who have been affected by that sin.
6. The result of that sin was inability to continue in the state in which Adam was originally created, or to return to it.
7. This inability was not merely natural, but also penal. It was to the corruption of his nature through the defiling taint of sin, which was a part of that threatened death, which, not confined to nor chiefly consisting in the death of the body, included this corruption and consequent inability of the whole man, together with the loss of the complacent love of God, and of communion or fellowship with him.

## **II. FACTS AS TO ADAM'S DESCENDANTS.**

The facts as to the descendants of Adam show that they have universally partaken of his corrupted nature, and that, not even in their earliest years, have any had the innocent nature, with its strong proclivities to holiness, which constituted his original condition.

1. They are born with the corrupted nature which he acquired, together with all the other evils set forth as the penalties of his sin. This was true even of his first children, Cain and Abel, as it has been also equally true of all others even to the present time.
2. No one of these descendants has been able to recover the nature possessed by Adam before the fall. In each of them the same inability has existed which fell upon him.
3. No one has been able to escape the complete fulfilment of the penalty of death, in all its meanings, except through the work of Christ.
4. No other reason for this universal condition has been assigned than the one sin by which Adam fell, and it has, consequently, been generally recognized as, in some way, the result of that one transgression.
5. The conscience of mankind has universally taught that this condition of their natures is sinful, and is as fully worthy of punishment as the personal

transgressions which proceed from it.

6. The Scriptures plainly assume and declare that God righteously punishes all men, not only for what they do, but for what they are. Men are indeed represented as more guilty and sinful than they know themselves to be, because, through the restraints with which God surrounds them, their natures have not been fully developed into all the sin towards which they tend. This is the argument of the first part of the Epistle to the Romans, the turning point of which is Rom. 2:1. It is also illustrated in the case of Hazeal. 2 Kings 8:12, 13.

7. It follows from the facts in these last two statements, that a corrupt nature makes a condition as truly sinful, and guilty, and liable to punishment, as actual transgressions. Consequently, at the very moment of birth, the presence and possession of such a nature shows that even the infant sons of Adam are born under all the penalties which befell their ancestor in the day of his sin. Actual transgression subsequently adds new guilt to guilt already existing, but does not substitute a state of guilt for one of innocence.

8. Not the judgement of God only, but that of man also, regards a sinful nature as deserving punishment equally with a sinful act. The law of man is necessarily confined to the punishment of the acts, because these alone give such testimony to the condition of the heart as man can correctly apprehend; but the character of any act is regarded as alleviated, or aggravated, by the character of the actor; and men are shunned or courted as they are deemed to be good or bad, without any other reference to their acts than as they testify to character.

From the above points it will be seen that men, as descendants of Adam, are invariably born, not with his original, but with his fallen nature, and, more than this, not only receive that corrupted nature which was a part of the penalty of his sin, but with it all the other penalties inflicted because of that sin. It is also plain that a condition of sinfulness is regarded worthy of punishment not only by the Scriptures, and by personal conviction of conscience, but by the universal sense of mankind; and consequently that men may be punished for the corrupt nature thus inherited, although they may not have been personally guilty of a single transgression. This naturally leads to the inquiry into the nature of the connection between Adam and his posterity through which such sad and serious results have occurred.

### **III. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN ADAM AND HIS POSTERITY.**

1. Manifestly the universal sinfulness of mankind is due to some kind of connection with Adam. Being thus universal, it cannot be accidental, nor without some controlling cause. Unless some change was made in human nature at large, or it became liable to new conditions, or there was a connection of the life and state of all with that of the one, no reason can be assigned for the fact that

invariably the fallen condition, and not the original one is found in every man. Yet it is manifest that while Adam's was the first sin, and while that was not committed according to the tendencies of his nature, all of his posterity have been born with the corrupt nature which thence ensued, with all its tendencies and its actual development in due time into personal transgressions.

2. This has not resulted from the mere imitation of an example; but is a deep rooted evil inherent in their natures. It is found there before they can perceive the example, much less imitate it.

3. Such is the natural relation borne by all men to Adam, as their common father, that nothing but his death before the birth of posterity, or some such miraculous influence as goes against nature, or at least acts apart from it, and is believed to have existed in the birth of Jesus, could have prevented all the evils which befell Adam from coming in like manner upon his posterity. By natural generation they must be born with sinful natures such as his, and must, therefore, be corrupt and guilty, eternally destitute of God's complacent love, and liable to natural death.

4. While the above would follow from mere natural law, the Scriptures teach us that Adam was not merely the natural, but also the federal head of the race. This is done not only in express language, but especially by teaching that the relation borne to Christ, our federal head in salvation, is similar to that borne to Adam in our sin.

5. This shows that the mass of mankind proceeding from Adam by natural generation sinned in him, not consciously, but representatively, and therefore are justly treated as though they had consciously sinned, because they are responsible for the act of their representative.

6. This adds nothing to the penalty which must have been suffered nor to the guilt which would have accrued from natural headship; for guilt is simply just liability to punishment.

7. In each case, whether of federal, or of natural headship, the same difficulties appear.

(1.) In each we are dealt with for an act with which we had no conscious connection.

(2.) In each we are made sinful, and therefore sinners, by that act; for the inherent corruption is spoken of and treated by God as sin in the highest degree to be reprobated and punished.

(3.) In each the consequences of sin are equally beyond escape. If it be contended that under natural headship we could not be punished until we had actually sinned, it may be replied:

(a.) That this does not appear to be the fact, for at least some of the penalties, namely, corruption and natural death, and we believe all, are inflicted before actual sin.

(b.) That it would show no more equity or justice in God, nor any advantage to us, but rather disadvantage, that our probation, upon which the infliction of these penalties depends, should have taken place in the weakness of infancy, and under the disadvantages of an already corrupted nature, rather than in the personal and intelligent act of the one perfect man connected with us by natural generation.

8. But while, under the natural headship, every evil would befall which could arise under the representative, or federal headship; under the latter would come blessing, in the event that Adam should maintain his integrity, because, as represented in him, we should have been confirmed with him according to the gracious promises and power of God.

9. It would also appear that only through the representative headship could blessing come in the event of the fall. Had our fall been through merely natural headship we can see no way for recovery. But to the fall under the federal headship of Adam corresponds our salvation under the federal headship of Christ.

10. In support of the Scriptural theory, therefore, we can not only adduce the fact that the federal headship of Adam was just and right, because duly constituted by God, and that too in the fittest person of the whole race, but that it was an act of special mercy and grace, not only in itself, as involving the blessing of participation in the good as well as the evil, but as making a way for restoration in Christ the second Adam.

#### **IV. THE SCRIPTURES TEACH A FEDERAL HEADSHIP.**

The Scriptures recognize both a natural and federal headship of Adam. The natural headship would have sufficed to account for all the effects of Adam's sin. The federal relationship becomes necessary, however, in connection with salvation through Christ. It is on this account that it is more prominently set forth in the New Testament as the common relationship of both the first and second Adam. The establishment of it as to the first Adam is, therefore, to be regarded as a special act of the grace of God, conferring the privileges of success where the evils of failure would not be increased, and preparing the way for future grace in the representation in Christ. The principle, however, upon which it is based, is a general one of nature, and one constantly recognized in the Scriptures.

1. It is natural and common for men to deal with each other on this principle of

representation. Blessings are bestowed and injuries inflicted in accordance with it. Men become heirs to the noble or base characters of their ancestors as really as to their property. The friendship and affection entertained for a father, and no less the dislike and aversion, are renewed as to the son. A similarity is presumed to exist between them, which is deemed a proper basis for such action, until the conduct of the child shows a difference of nature, and, by destroying this presumption, causes him to be differently treated. Nor is this confined to those who are connected, like father and son, in direct succession. The taint of a committed crime soils and stains a whole family, even in its collateral branches. A remote relationship with the guilty one is deemed a disgrace, and the one thus connected realizes himself to be shunned, even if pitied, by those free from such misfortune. On the other hand, the most distant connection with one distinguished for wisdom or virtue, for great deeds or for high position, is thought to be a matter of congratulation, not alone for any supposed substantial benefits that may accrue, but for the simple connection itself.

The same principle extends itself throughout all the circumstances and ramifications of the life of each man. Each takes pride or shame in the place of his birth, in his early or late companions, in the community, or state, or country in which he lives, in its progress or backwardness, in its good or bad character, in its power or weakness, in its knowledge or ignorance,—in short, in any qualities of excellence or of inferiority which are attached to anything to which he belongs. Every man is in some measure represented, though not of his own choice, perhaps by bare accident, perhaps even against his own will, in all the circumstances and persons which surround him.

This principle only gains strength when connected with a duly appointed representative. The President or the King appoints an ambassador to a foreign court, and each citizen, though he had no hand in the appointment, is affected by the action of this, his representative. A representative to Congress is elected, against whom one has voted, and of the whole discharge of whose duties one approves, and yet such a one is bound by these very acts of the one whom he wished not as his representative.

2. The representative relation thus seen in mankind in general is recognized in the same forms in the Scriptures as existing in life with God.

(1.) It is distinctly declared in the aspect of love and hate towards the children of those who love and hate him in Ex. 20:5, and is even more prominently brought to view in Ex. 34:7. See also Deut. 4:40; 7:7-9; Lev. 20:5; 26:39; Num. 14:18 33; Job 21:19; Ps. 89:29, 36; 109:12-16; Isa. 14:19-22; 65:6, 7; Jer. 32:18; Rom. 11:28.

(2) For the fact that different conduct on the part of the children shall counteract the blessing or curse which comes because of the parent, see Lev. 26:40-42;

Neh. 9:2, 3; Ezek. 18:10-23; Dan 9:4-27; 2 Cor. 3:16.

(3.) That all of a nation suffer and are punished for the sins of their rulers and representatives is taught throughout the whole history of God's dealings with Israel. A signal instance of this was the punishment of all Israel because of the sins of Eli and his sons. Compare 1 Sam. 3:11-14 with 1 Sam. 4:10-22. Another was in the pestilence sent because David numbered the people. 2 Sam. 24:2-17. The punishment of all who had killed the prophets is announced by Christ as concentrated on that one generation. Matt. 23:34-39. The death of Christ, which had been brought about by the rulers of the Jews, is charged upon the people themselves. Acts 2:23; 3:13-15. It is also charged elsewhere upon the rulers. Acts 5:30.

(4.) On the other hand, how often was the anger of God turned away or modified by the intercessory prayers of Moses, and for the sake of Moses, as in the battle with the Amalekites, Ex. 17:9-12; and when the golden calf had been made, Ex. 32:9-14; and in his covenant with Moses after the renewal of the tables of the law, Ex. 34:9-28; also after the report of the spies, Num. 14:15-21; and numerous other instances. The case of Elijah and the woman of Zarephath is another illustration. Favour is shown to her because of the prophet's sojourn with her. 1 Kings 17:20-22. It was because of the grace that Noah found with God that he and his family were saved in the ark. Gen. 7:1. Abraham's prayer secured from God the promise to save Sodom, if it contained ten righteous ones, Gen. 18:32. God promised to save Jerusalem, if one just man could be found, Jer. 5:1. These are but a few of the instances which show this to be a prevalent principle in the divine government.

3. The doctrine of representation was especially set forth in a religious aspect under the Old Testament economy in the sacrifices under the ceremonial law.

These sacrifices were anticipated under some more general law of sacrifice which was given to mankind in general. This was exemplified from the earliest times. This is supposed by some to have been the source of the coats of skins with which the Lord God clothed Adam and his wife immediately after the fall. Gen. 3:21. It is more plainly seen in the superiority of the sacrifice offered by Abel over that of Cain. Gen. 4:1-8. Noah also offered burnt offerings. Gen. 8:20, 21. Abraham also built altars to the Lord, calling upon his name. Gen. 12:7, 8; 13:3, 4, 18; 21:33. The idea of the burnt offering was familiar to Isaac, as appears from his question to his father, and the ram was actually there offered as a burnt offering in the place of Isaac. Gen. 22:7-9, 13. Isaac also built an altar at Beersheba and called upon the Lord. Gen. 26:23-25. Jacob did the same at Shechem, Gen. 33:18-20, and at El-bethel, Gen. 35:7, and at Beersheba, Gen. 46:1. Moses also offered sacrifices before the ceremonial law was given. Ex. 17:15, 16. We are told that this was even done by Jethro. Ex. 18:12. In Ex. 20:24-26 God prescribes to Moses that an altar to him must be of earth, or of unhewn stone, and without steps for its ascent.

It is almost certain that these more ancient sacrifices taught at least partially the same truths as those of the ceremonial law. But the ceremonies attached to the latter explicitly set forth the fact of representation, including the ideas of substitution, imputation and sacrifice. These are the constituent elements of any doctrine of representation which releases from sin. They are fully exhibited in the representation of men in Christ. In that in Adam the sacrifice does not appear, because his was a representation which involved guilt, and not atonement. While these sacrifices, therefore, illustrate all that is involved in the representation in Adam, they are properly types of that in Christ, by which guilt was removed and atonement made to God for sin.

(1.) In them we have the sinner and the victim substituted for that sinner. The offered animal becomes his representative. What is due to the man is inflicted upon that substitution. The act of the latter thus becomes that of the former, and, upon the supposition that the victim is authorized and adequate, there is a full discharge of further penalty or obligation.

(2.) There is not only a substitution of one for another, but an actual transfer to this one from that other of his sins, trespasses, uncleanness, or whatever else unfits him for acceptance with God. After this transfer the man is treated as though he had never been thus defiled, and the victim dealt with as though alone the offender. This transfer is what is commonly known as imputation. By it the sin of Adam is transferred to us, or in other words so reckoned to us or put to our account that we are treated as though it were ours. In like manner the sin of man was transferred to Christ, who bore it, though he knew no sin personally, and he was made sin (or a sin offering) for man, and was treated as though he were a sinner. On the same principle the righteousness of Christ is also imputed to man, who, though personally sinful, is treated as though he were righteous.

(3.) The third element is the sacrifice, by which satisfaction is rendered to the broken law, and God can be just and yet justify the ungodly. This was shown by the death of the victim whose life was thus given through its blood in behalf of those whom it represented, as was that of Christ upon the cross.

The whole attainment of salvation through Christ was thus symbolized through these Mosaic sacrifices. The antitype as well as the type depends upon the principle of representation. This forms the connecting link. The Mosaic sacrifices were not offered in general, but for specified persons. It was not sin in the abstract that was confessed, but the sins of special individuals. The fact of representation has thus been distinctly involved in the whole religious life set forth in the Scriptures. It was only through the act of a duly appointed representative that guilt could be removed and salvation obtained.

4. The Scriptures represent this as the method by which guilt was incurred through Adam. This is chiefly done in the well-known passage in the fifth chapter



of Romans. The apostle is here arguing for the possibility of justification through the act of Christ. He does this by drawing a parallel between Christ and Adam, and the effects of Adam's sin and Christ's meritorious work. This parallel could be drawn only on the ground of federal representation. Only thus could it be in connection with Christ as it had been in connection with Adam. Christ could in no sense be a natural head of man. He could only be a constituted or appointed representative head. He is thus everywhere set forth. So the parallel made between him and Adam shows that the headship of the latter was representative and not natural only. The same truth is also taught in 1 Cor. 15:45-49, not only in the names given of the first and second Adam, but by the contrast between their natures and the effects produced by each. In these two chapters from Romans and Corinthians we find ascribed to men, because of the connection with Adam and as punishment of his sin, almost all the penalties which were inflicted upon Adam in the threatened penalty of death. There is the all-comprising word "death," declared to have come by sin, and that, the sin of one man, Rom. 5:12; death, which came upon all, even over those who had not sinned like Adam. In what respect "not sinned after the likeness of Adam's transgression" (v. 14) if reference be not made to the fact that there was no personal sin, as there is none in infants? This seems clearly suggested by the interjected expression "who is a figure of him that was to come;" (v. 14) for Adam was only a figure of Christ by virtue of this representative headship. "Judgement unto condemnation," another penalty of Adam's sin, is also declared to have come through one, V. 16, 18. The death of the soul, as the opposite of its spiritual life, is also asserted to have resulted from one man's offence, V. 17. The controlling power of this sin, which causes the inability to return to God and serve him, is shown by the declaration that "sin reigned in death," (v. 21), which is a result of the one man's disobedience mentioned in v. 19. If natural death is not included in the word "death" in this chapter, and the denial that it is so included is hardly possible, it is yet certainly connected with representation in Adam in 1 Cor. 15:22. These two chapters, therefore, show this representative relation of Adam; and that because of it all men have sinned in him and are justly treated as sinners.

The discussion of this representative relation of Adam has rendered necessary a reference to that of Christ. It will be appropriate, therefore, to present in a tabular form the parallel between the consequences of these relations as a further proof of the representative character of each of these persons:

THOSE REPRESENTED IN ADAM.

THOSE REPRESENTED IN CHRIST.

Sin is imputed. Righteousness is imputed. Treated as though sinners. Treated as though righteous. Not thus personally sinners. Not thus personally righteous. Not regarded as actually guilty of Adam's sin. Not regarded as actually meritoriously possessed of Christ's righteousness. But only sinners representatively. But only righteous representatively. Though not personally sinners in Adam, yet born

sinful, and naturally becoming actual sinners. Though not personally holy in Christ, yet born again unto holiness, and graciously becoming more and more holy until finally sanctified. Condemned to all the penalties of death because of Adam's sin. Released from penalty, and attaining to spiritual life and immortality, because of Christ's active and passive obedience. Voluntarily accepting the relation to Adam, and persevering in the life of sin inaugurated by him. Voluntarily, though by God's help and grace, accepting the relation to Christ, and persevering in the holy life into which he has brought them.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*. If you would like to discuss this article in our online community, please visit our [RPM Forum](#).

#### **Subscribe to RPM**

RPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like RPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [RPM](#), please select this [link](#).