

A Treatise on the Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin

by
H. A. Boardman

PART II.

IMPUTATION.

I have attempted, in the former part of this dissertation, to exhibit the scripture doctrine of NATIVE DEPRAVITY. It has been proved, if I mistake not, that all men have inherited a corrupt and sinful nature--that they are born with depraved dispositions, which are the source of all actual transgressions. It is a natural and reasonable inquiry, how comes it to pass that men are brought into the world in this miserable condition? Why is it that they are born under the frown of God, and commence their existence under these strong and affecting marks of his displeasure? To these questions the Bible furnishes the only answer; "By the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation;" that is, condemnation has passed upon all men on account of the sin of one man. The same truth is stated in our standards, thus:--"The covenant being made with Adam as a public person, not for himself only, but for his posterity; all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him in that first transgression." Again, "The sinfulness of that estate whereinto man fell, consisteth in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of that righteousness wherein he was created, and the corruption of his nature, whereby he is utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite unto all that is spiritually good, and wholly inclined to all evil, and that continually; which is commonly called *original sin*, and from which do proceed all actual transgressions." (*Larg. Cat.* Q. 22 and 25.) And, again, "They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation." (*Conf. Faith*, ch. vi.)

It will be my object to prove the doctrine contained in these quotations: viz.--that THE POSTERITY OF ADAM ARE CONDEMNED ON ACCOUNT OF HIS SIN.

Before entering upon the discussion, I wish to make three preliminary remarks.

In the first place, as the Scriptures give us the only correct account of the creation and fall of man, so we are to receive with implicit confidence their statement of the effects produced by the fall, upon the race. We are of course to employ our rational faculties in interpreting the Bible, but we have no right to wrest the Bible from its simple and obvious meaning, in order to make it accord with our pre-conceived opinions.

In the second place, let it be remembered that the fact that the whole race have been

involved in ruin by the sin of the first man, presses with equal weight upon all other theories (excepting that of the Socinians and Pelagians, who deny the fact,) as upon the doctrine of our standards. It may be denied that Adam was the federal head of his posterity, and that a covenant was made with him in which they were included, and for his violation of which they are condemned; but, the fact still remains. Children are born to an inheritance of sorrow. Millions of them die in infancy. And those who live, begin to sin as soon as they become moral agents. This state of things, everyone must admit, has been brought about in some way by the apostasy of Adam. The rejection of the Calvinistic doctrine as to the mode in which his apostasy has produced it, neither sets aside the fact nor explains it.

In the third place, notwithstanding the hostility which many persons feel to the doctrine of our church on this subject, it *may* be the case that this doctrine is really more honourable to the Divine character (as well as more agreeable to Scripture) than any of the theories to which it is opposed. The main reason, it is confidently believed, why it is supposed to involve injustice, is that it is misconceived. Great pains have been taken, of late years, to caricature the doctrine, and hold it up to ridicule; and that by individuals who have solemnly given their assent to it. It is not surprising, therefore, that it should be so much misunderstood, and being misunderstood, that it should be denied. That there are some things about the doctrine which are mysterious, is readily conceded. It is a mystery that God should have permitted our first parents to fall, and by their fall, to bring an endless train of evils upon their descendants. But that He has in his infinite wisdom permitted it, no one but a Socinian or Pelagian will deny. Whether these evils are inflicted upon the race *in mere sovereignty*, or as *the penalty of a broken covenant* formed with our first parents, is a question to be determined by the word of God.

I shall first explain, and then attempt to prove, what I suppose to be the Scripture doctrine on this subject. This doctrine (as already stated in the language of our standards) is in brief as follows:

God was pleased to make a covenant with Adam, as the federal head and representative of his race, in which he promised life to him and his seed on condition of his obedience, and threatened death in case of disobedience. Adam having violated the covenant, incurred its penalty; and in virtue of his representative character, the same condemnation to which he was subjected, passed upon his posterity; they were regarded and treated as sinners on the ground of his offence. Accordingly the gracious influences which were withdrawn from him when he sinned, are withheld from them, so that they come into the world with a depraved nature, and subject to suffering and death. (See note H.) This is the doctrine, stripped of technical terms, and presented in familiar language. When our standards say that the posterity of Adam "sinned in him and fell with him in that first transgression;" they do not mean that all mankind constituted *one moral person* in Adam, so that his sin was actually and personally the sin of each of his descendants. Such a thing involves a metaphysical absurdity. It is contradicted also by every man's consciousness. I am not

more certain of my existence than I am that I did not put forth *my* hand and pluck the forbidden fruit. Furthermore, this construction is inconsistent with the context. The answer in which this statement occurs, runs thus: "The covenant being made with Adam as a public person, not for himself only, but for his posterity; all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him and fell with him in that first transgression." How did they sin in him? Not literally, surely; not as being personally one with him. For on this view, the covenant was made directly with the whole race, and not, as here asserted, "with Adam" "*for* his posterity." The statement is as lucid as language can make it, that Adam entered into a covenant as their representative; and of course it was only on the ground of his *representative relation* to them, that they could be said to "sin in him and fall with him."

Again, as this doctrine implies no personal oneness between Adam and his race, neither does it *involve any transfer of his moral character or acts* to them. The criminality of my act can never become another man's. So the criminality of Adam's act could not pass over to his posterity. "But does not the Confession say, that the guilt of his sin is imputed to his posterity?" It does. But the word "guilt" means in its constant theological usage, not moral turpitude or criminality, *but liability to punishment*. In this sense the old writers frequently speak of the Saviour as "guilty of our sins," meaning merely that he was *liable to the penalty of the law* on account of our sins: not by any means that the pollution or the ill-desert of our sins was transferred to him. When the Bible says that "our sins were laid upon Christ" and that he "was made a curse for us," no one understands these and other kindred expressions as implying that the blame-worthiness of our sins was transferred to the blessed Redeemer; the obvious meaning is, that in virtue of the covenant relation which he sustains to his people, he, as their federal head and representative, bore the *punishment* which was due for their sins; he was regarded and treated as a sinner on their account. So, when our Confession says, that "the obedience and satisfaction of Christ are imputed" to the sinner as the ground of his justification, and the Bible declares that "we are made the righteousness of God in him," and that "by the obedience of one, many shall be made righteous;" this language plainly means, not that the righteousness of Christ is so transferred to us as to become personally or subjectively ours, but that it becomes *legally* ours--God reckons it to our account *and regards and treats us* as though it were personally ours, that is, he regards and treats us as righteous. In the same way precisely, is the guilt of Adam's sin imputed to his posterity; they become liable to punishment on account of it--they are regarded and treated as sinners on the ground of it. God is pleased to lay it to their charge and deal with them accordingly, in the same sense as he was pleased to "bruise" his beloved Son and "put him to grief," on account of our sins.

Imputation, then, in each of the cases here cited, (viz. the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity, of our sins to Christ, and of his righteousness to us,) affects the *legal responsibilities*, not the moral character of the parties concerned. It creates in each case a ground of condemnation or justification, but makes no one personally either sinful or holy. It is true, the believing sinner is not only justified but regenerated, or made personally

holy; and mankind are not only condemned, but depraved, that is, the subjects of corrupt and sinful dispositions, from the birth. But the personal holiness of the believing sinner forms no part of the righteousness of Christ which is imputed to him; neither is the personal depravity with which all are born, any part of the turpitude or ill-desert of Adam's sin, but they inherit this depravity as a consequence of the imputation of his sin.

That the doctrine under consideration has been correctly stated in the remarks just made, might be shown by ample quotations from the writings of standard divines. Two or three extracts will not be deemed inappropriate.

"Imputation (says Turretin) is either of something foreign to us, or of something properly our own. Sometimes that is imputed to us which is personally ours; in which sense, God imputes to sinners their transgressions. Sometimes that is imputed to us which is *without us*, and not performed by ourselves; thus the righteousness of Christ is said to be imputed to us, and our sins are imputed to him, although he has neither sin in himself nor we righteousness. Here we speak of the latter kind of imputation, not the former; because we are talking of a sin committed by Adam, not by us. The foundation, therefore, of imputation is not only the natural connection which exists between us and Adam, since, in that case, all his sins might be imputed to us, but mainly the moral and federal, in virtue of which, God entered into covenant with him as our head." Again, he observes, "We are constituted sinners in Adam, in the same way in which we are constituted righteous in Christ. But in Christ we are constituted righteous by the imputation of righteousness; therefore, we are made sinners in Adam by the imputation of his sin."

To the same effect, Dr. Owen remarks, that "things that are *not our own* originally, personally, inherently, may yet be imputed unto us 'ex justitia' by the rule of righteousness. And this may be done upon a double relation to those whose they are; 1. Federal. 2. Natural. Things done by one, may be imputed unto others, because of a *covenant relation* between them. So the sin of Adam was and is imputed unto all his posterity. And the ground hereof is, that we stood all in the same covenant with him who was our head and representative therein."¹ And again, "Nothing is intended by the imputation of sin unto any, but the rendering them *justly obnoxious unto the penalty* due unto that sin; as the 'not imputing' of sin, is the freeing men from being subject or liable unto punishment."

Dr. Mason argues with his usual strength and conclusiveness, against the idea of a transfer of moral character or acts in imputation. "Instead of establishing our doctrine, (he observes, speaking of the atonement,) such a transfer would destroy it. For if my personal sin could be taken from me and made the personal sin of another, he must then suffer for himself and not for me, as I would be personally innocent. He would not be under the imputation of my sin, because I would have none to impute; and I could not enjoy the

1 Treatise on Justification.

benefit of his righteousness, because on the one hand I would require none, and on the other, he, as suffering for himself, would have none to offer. So that here would be no representation, neither the substance nor the shadow of a vicarious atonement. Therefore, while my personal demerit must forever remain my own, the consequences of it are borne by my glorious Surety. It is this which renders the imputation of sin to the Lord Jesus, a doctrine so acceptable to the conscience and so consolatory to the heart of a convinced sinner." This train of reasoning obviously applies in all its force to the parallel case before us.

I have dwelt the longer on this explanation of the doctrine of our standards respecting the imputation of the guilt of Adam's sin to his posterity, for the reason already mentioned: viz. that the doctrine has been extensively misapprehended. I come now to the proof of it; that is, I am to show that Adam was the federal head of his posterity, and that in virtue of this relation, they are condemned on account of his first transgression.

First. This doctrine is strongly implied *in the inspired account of the creation and fall of man, in the first three chapters of Genesis.*

It is surprising that anyone can read those chapters, keeping in view the actual condition of the race since the fall, without perceiving that Adam was acting for his posterity, as well as himself. Notice this language: "And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it." "Behold I have given you every herb bearing seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat." A child must see that these declarations were intended as much for the descendants of the first pair as for themselves.

Again, it has generally been supposed, that the 16th and 17th verses of the second chapter, contain the terms of a *covenant* between God and our first parents--which is commonly called the "covenant of works." "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 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." Adam no sooner violated this covenant than its penalty was inflicted on him; he lost the image of God, or died spiritually, and he became subject to temporal death. The same penalty is inflicted on his posterity; which shows that they were embraced in the original transaction. The curse which was pronounced upon the ground also, that it should "bring forth thorns and thistles," continues until this day. And the sore punishment denounced against Eve, that "in sorrow she should bring forth children," is receiving its fulfilment in the whole history of her sex.

It being manifest then, that the sentence which was pronounced upon Adam, has been visited upon his posterity, we are driven to the conclusion that they were included with him in the original threatening. But they could have been included in this threatening

only on the ground that Adam was acting as their *representative*.

The only alternative to this view, is this, to wit: that God has inflicted upon the race the countless and awful evils they suffer, (evils, let it be observed, involving, in millions of instances, eternal perdition,) in *mere sovereignty*. If this doctrine were asserted in the Scriptures, it would become us to bow to it in silent acquiescence; but it is certainly more congenial to the best feelings of the heart, to refer these evils to the source to which the Scriptures do really trace them, the broken covenant of works.

In the second place, the doctrine under consideration is proved by the *parallel drawn by the sacred writers between Adam and Christ*.

Rom. v. 14: Adam is called "the figure [or type] of him that was to come." 1 Cor. xv. 45: "The first man Adam was made a living soul, the last Adam was made a quickening spirit." And verse 47: "The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven."

These passages show that there was some strong resemblance between Adam and the Saviour. In what did this resemblance consist? Not certainly in their possessing a common nature; for in this sense any one of Adam's descendants was equally a figure or type of Christ as himself. Nor can the resemblance consist merely in this, viz.: that as Adam was the natural root of his posterity, so Christ is the root or source of life to his spiritual seed; for although this is a truth, it is not broad enough to exhaust the meaning of the text just quoted. They teach that Adam was a type of Christ, in a sense peculiar to himself, and on the ground of which Christ is called "the second man," and "the second Adam." But it is as true of any other parent who lived before the advent, as of Adam, that he was the natural root of his posterity. Nor again, can these passages mean simply this: that Adam conveyed a corrupt nature to his posterity, just as Christ imparts a holy nature to his spiritual children. For although this is true, it is, like the last interpretation, inadequate to the language employed by the apostle. For, (not to dwell on the observation made on the preceding explanation, and which is equally applicable to this, that in this sense Adam was no more like Christ than any other parent, since all parents convey a corrupt nature to their children,) let it be noticed that in the fifth chapter of Romans, the evils in which Adam involved his race, are affirmed to have come upon them on account of *his first sin*, not on account of his sins in general. Thus it is said, "through the *offence* of one many be dead." "By one man's *offence* death reigned by one." "As by the *offence* of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation." Had the apostle intended to say merely that Adam conveys a corrupt nature to his posterity, and was herein a type of Christ, it is inexplicable why he should have restricted the damage we suffer from him, to his first offence; for, considered only as our *natural* head, our depravity is to be ascribed, not to any one of his sins, but to the whole combined, or rather to the general defilement of his nature.

These various suppositions, then, being all unsatisfactory, there remains but one other

interpretation of the passages quoted, and that is that Adam was a type of Christ *in his federal or representative character*. On this view alone, can the Saviour be spoken of as "the second man," and "the second Adam." That Christ is the federal or covenant head of his people, is a doctrine distinctly taught in the Scriptures, and the proofs of which need not be adduced in this place. If, therefore, he is the "second Adam," the first Adam must have been the covenant head of *his* children. This view is required also by the statements in the fifth of Romans, already cited, which speak of the "one offence" of Adam as the source of all our calamities. That offence involved the race in condemnation, just as the righteousness of Christ insures the salvation of all whom he represented. By that offence the covenant was broken, and he ceased from that moment to represent his posterity. Had he continued our representative after that, we should have experienced the penal evils incurred by his subsequent sins as we now do the penalty of the first sin. But since he forfeited his representative character by that act, it is only for that act that his constituents are regarded and treated as sinners.

In the third place, *we have the direct testimony of Scripture, that the posterity of Adam are condemned for his offence.*

If the Bible declares this, the inference is irresistible that Adam was their legal representative, or federal head, and that the guilt of his sin is imputed to them. But the Bible does teach, in passages already quoted, that our whole race have been condemned for his sin.

The object of the apostle, in Rom. v. 12-19, is to illustrate the mode in which men are delivered from sin and death, by the mode in which they were brought into that state. They are justified through Christ, as they were condemned in Adam. Throughout the argument, he assumes it as a doctrine acknowledged by those to whom the epistle was addressed, that men are condemned on the ground of Adam's transgression, and he employs this *familiar and admitted fact*, to illustrate the method of man's recovery by Christ. A minute and critical examination of the passage would furnish the most convincing testimony to the doctrine maintained in this essay. The time, however, will only admit of a reference to two or three of the verses.

Verse 12: "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*." It is here declared that death is the punishment of sin, and that all die because all have sinned. But multitudes die who have never sinned in their own persons, viz.: infants. The sin, therefore, for which they die, must be the sin of Adam, "the one man" by whom "sin entered into the world." Verse 16: "The judgment was by one (*offence*) to condemnation." Verse 18: "As by the offence of one *judgment came upon all men to condemnation*, even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." Verse 19: "For *as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners*, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."

If it is within the compass of language to express the idea that all men are condemned for the offence of one man, that idea is expressed here. It is not stated merely that his sin has *in some way* involved his posterity in ruin, or that his sin has brought about their ruin as a *natural result*, just as a drunkard usually entails vice and misery upon his family; but we are told expressly, that they are judicially "*condemned*" for his offence. Furthermore we are told that we are "made sinners" by Adam's "disobedience," in the same way that we are "made righteous" by the "obedience" of Christ. But the obedience of Christ makes all whom he represented righteous, by being imputed to them; so the disobedience of Adam makes all whom *he* represented, sinners, by being imputed to them. The spiritual seed of Christ are regarded and treated as righteous on the ground of his obedience; and the seed of Adam are regarded and treated as sinners on the ground of his disobedience. There is no transfer of moral character in either case; but one class are justified and the other condemned, on the ground of what has been done by their respective representatives.

The interpretation here given of this important passage is obvious, and consistent; it is supported by the great body of sound critics and commentators; and it cannot be set aside without gross violence to the sacred text. (See note I.) The doctrine it teaches, is repeated Eph. ii. 3, where it is asserted that men are "by nature the children of wrath." The least that can be meant by this language is, that men are under *condemnation* from the womb--they are "by nature" under God's wrath. This can be only on the ground of the sin of some other being, who of course is our first parent.

The fact set forth in both these passages, that Adam's posterity are judicially condemned on account of his sin, shows that he was their federal head, and that, as such, the guilt of his sin is imputed to them.

Fourthly. This doctrine is proved *by the sufferings and death of infants*.

The Scriptures everywhere speak of death, not as a mere providential "consequence" of the fall, but as a *penal evil*--an evil judicially inflicted as the retribution of sin; in a word, as "the wages of sin." That temporal death is a part of this penalty, (though not the whole,) will be assumed as an admitted fact, although some have gone so far in rectifying Scripture as to deny it. (See note K.) Why then do infants suffer and die? Not, surely, "because they are actual transgressors." Nor is it enough to say, that they suffer and die "merely in consequence of a providential arrangement." This only throws the difficulty a step back;--why was such an arrangement made, and where is the equity of it, unless Adam represented his posterity? Is it credible that a just and merciful God would inflict the most tremendous evils upon successive generations of men, prior to any actual sin of their own, if they had no other connection with the pair from whom they sprung, than that which commonly subsists between parents and children? Could he not have caused the sins of our first parents to terminate upon themselves, and either made their children holy, or created another pair to be the root of the race? And are we not compelled by what we know of the Divine character, to believe that he would have done one of these things, or

else cut off the succession of the race altogether, had not Adam sustained a federal relation to his posterity?

The position here taken, that temporal death is a part of the curse of the law, is not at all invalidated by the fact, that *Christians* (who are delivered from the curse of the law,) die. For, in their case, that which was a penal evil, is *converted* into a providential chastisement; it being too evident to require argument, that the same infliction may be either judicial or disciplinary, according to the *design of its Author*. So in regard to infants; if it be alleged that death is a providential chastisement to them; I reply, it can only be so on the ground that they have, (like adult believers,) been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and redeemed from the curse of the law through the blood of Christ. So that even on this view, (the correctness of which I am not disposed to question,) their death furnishes incontestable evidence that they are by nature in a state of condemnation.

If it be thought that the depraved nature which infants possess, is sufficient to account for their liability to suffering; I answer, First, That the apostle declares that "judgment has come upon all men to condemnation," for the offence of one man. And, Secondly, That the depravity of nature spoken of, is one of the very things to be accounted for. This depravity is the source of all our sin and misery; and the question is, how happens it that we are thus defiled from our very birth? Why are we born under this total deprivation of right principles and affections? Why do we begin to live under the visible frown of God; with a corrupt nature, which unless renewed by sovereign grace, will infallibly destroy us eternally? To say that infants die because they are depraved, although true, does not meet this difficulty at all. Nor does any human theory meet it. The fact admits of no other explanation than the one furnished by the testimony already cited, that the first man represented his race, so that when he fell, they fell, and were involved in the same condemnation with himself.

Once more, omitting other arguments, I remark briefly in confirmation of the doctrine of this essay, that *unless the race were tried in Adam, they have been condemned without a trial*.

This argument will be convincing to those who admit that we inherit a corrupt and sinful nature. Such a nature being at variance with the divine law, implies a state of condemnation prior to actual transgression. We are condemned, therefore, unless our doctrine be correct, without a probation either in our own persons, or that of our representative. This sentiment is so incompatible with the scripture representation of the Divine character, that it should not be lightly adopted. It is certainly more honourable to the Deity to infer, from the fact of our condemnation, that Adam was appointed our representative, and put on probation as such in our stead.

There is a theory prevalent in our day, which attempts to evade the force of this reasoning, by first denying the doctrine of native depravity, and then affirming that every individual is put on trial for himself. How fair a trial this is, may be inferred from the language of

these errorists themselves, who maintain that every child is placed in such circumstances that he will infallibly sin, and incur the wrath of God, as soon as he becomes a moral agent. So absolute is this certainty, that of the countless millions of Adam's descendants, (our blessed Saviour alone excepted,) not one has avoided this dreadful catastrophe. Yet we are gravely told that "God gives to each individual a fair trial for himself!" Surely this is insufferable trifling with a most solemn subject.

Such are some of the considerations which go to prove the doctrine of the federal relation of Adam to his posterity, and the universal condemnation of the race on account of his sin. Various objections have been urged against this doctrine, a few of which shall be very briefly noticed.

First. "This doctrine, (it has been alleged,) *contradicts the essential principles of moral consciousness.*"

I answer, it does this only on the assumption that the doctrine involves a personal oneness between Adam and his posterity, or a transfer of his moral character to them; neither of which ideas (as we have seen) belongs to the doctrine.

Secondly. It is contended that "*Adam could not have represented his posterity, because they never appointed him to that office.*"

I answer, (1.) that even among men, representation does not necessarily depend on the consent of the parties represented. Guardians are every day appointed for minors without their consent, and their acts are legally binding on their wards. So, also, nations are bound by the acts of their representatives, though not one half the people have the right of suffrage. But even if the principle were not recognized in human transactions, it could not, without the grossest presumption, be denied, that the Creator has the right to bind his creatures to any arrangement he may see fit to make, without consulting them.

(2.) God has actually exercised this right in repeated instances; that is, he has established covenants with individuals which were binding upon their posterity.

Witness the covenant with Abraham, described Gen. xvii. 1-14. Witness also the language of Moses, Deut. v. 2, 3, respecting the covenant with Israel:--"The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day." A large proportion of those to whom these words were addressed, were not born at the time the covenant was made at Horeb; yet it seems they were included in it. Again, Moses thus addressed Israel on another occasion: "Neither with you only do I make this covenant, and this oath; but with him that standeth here with us this day before the Lord our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day." Deut. xxix. 14, 15. The context shows that the last clause refers to future generations of their children. So irreconcilable with Scripture facts is the doctrine that

even God cannot appoint one individual as the representative of others, without their consent.

(3.) The objection contains an imputation upon the divine character, and therefore destroys itself: for it implies that God *might* have proposed terms to Adam, which his posterity, had they been present, would have felt themselves authorized to reject as inequitable.

Thirdly. This doctrine is declared to be "*irreconcilable with the justice of God.*"

I answer, (1.) the objection overlooks the fact that God *has* suffered the whole race to be involved in ruin, through the apostasy of Adam. If this be a fact, it must be compatible with the divine justice. The only question then is, whether the justice of God may be best vindicated by referring this fact to his absolute sovereignty, or by seeking a solution of it in such a covenant with Adam as has been described. The last view we have found to be agreeable to the Scriptures, and when fairly understood, it must commend itself to the humble and patient inquirer after truth, as the most rational.

(2.) If we relinquish this view, we must adopt one which militates much more against the divine justice, viz.--that our race have been condemned without a trial.

(3.) Although we are not able to enter fully into all the reasons of the Deity in appointing Adam as our covenant head, nor to discern all the bearings of this transaction, there are some considerations which exhibit the equity of the arrangement in a clear light.

One consideration is, that a probation in Adam was more likely to lead to a happy issue for his posterity, than if they had been put on trial each for himself. For Adam was created perfectly holy, and in the full maturity of his powers; whereas they were to commence their existence in helpless infancy, and of course far less capable of resisting temptation (on the dawn of their moral agency) than he was. Besides, his situation was in all respects pre-eminently favourable to a desirable result--much more so than could have been the situation of any of his descendants. And in addition to this, he had stronger motives to watchfulness than any other individual of the race could have had; since the welfare of all his posterity was suspended on his steadfastness.

Another consideration is, that if Adam had maintained his integrity, his posterity would have inherited eternal life as the reward of his obedience. That the covenant included a promise of life, is implied in the threatening, and strongly intimated in several passages in the New Testament. We may ask then, with a distinguished New England divine, (Dr. Bellamy,) whether, "if Adam had kept the covenant of his God, and secured happiness to all his race, we should not forever have blessed God for so good a constitution? Never once should we have questioned God's right and authority to make him our public head and representative, or have thought that it did not become his wisdom and goodness to trust

our all in his hands. And if we should thus have approved this constitution had Adam never sinned, why might we not as justly approve it now, if we would be but disinterestedly impartial! It is the same in itself now that it would have been then; as holy, and just, and good."²

These observations, it is believed, constitute a sufficient reply to the objection, that the doctrine, to which our attention has been directed, implicates the divine justice.

Fourthly. It is urged that this doctrine "*is at variance with the divine declaration, that 'the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father.'*"--Ezek. xviii. 20.

I answer that the declaration here quoted was addressed to the Jews, who complained that they were driven into exile on account of the sins of their fathers. The prophet tells them in reply, that they shall no longer have occasion to make this complaint, since God will deal with them according to their own sins. It must be manifest, that the declaration here made respecting a particular dispensation of Divine Providence, has no direct bearing on the question, whether the race at large are condemned for Adam's sin. The objection founded on this passage will be set aside, however, if it can be shown that God has in some instances actually punished individuals for the sins of others. And this is evident from the very case which has given rise to the objection. In the second verse of this chapter, God asks, "What mean you that you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge?" that is, "why are we punished for our fathers' sins?" To this God replies, "As I live, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold---the soul that sinneth, it shall die." The phrase, "*any more*" shows conclusively that he had not only visited upon them their own sins, but those of their rebellious ancestors--a fact also recognized in the sad confession of the Church, Lam. v. 7: "Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities." The declaration, therefore, on which the objection rests is so far from asserting a universal principle in the divine dispensations, that it does not even apply to his dealings with this very people at the period immediately preceding the occasion on which it was uttered. Again, there are numerous instances mentioned in Scripture, in which *families* and *infants* are expressly declared to be devoted to death for the sins of parents or others. See an instance in the prophecy just quoted, Ezek. ix. 6, and another, Deut. xxxii. 25. So also for the sin of Achan, not only himself but "his sons and daughters were stoned and burnt with fire," Josh. vii. 24, 25, although we do not read that they were confederates with him in his crime.

In the same way the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, was visited upon "their wives and their sons and their little children," who were destroyed with them. Numb. xvi. 27, 32. The infants of the antediluvians, of the Sodomites, and the Canaanites, shared the doom of their parents. When Israel was passing through the desert, they were attacked by the

² Bellamy's Works, vol. i. p. 221.

Amalekites without provocation. God imputed this crime to their descendants, and several centuries afterwards said to Saul, 1 Sam. xv. 2, 3: "I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." To the same purpose, our Saviour says to the Jews, Matt. xxiii. 35: "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar." In fine, the Scriptures abound with illustrations of the principle asserted in the second commandment, in which God proclaims himself "a jealous God, *visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children*, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate" him.

How futile is it, in the face of all this testimony, to bring forward the declaration that "the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father," as evidence that God never punishes one individual for the sin of another, and as an argument to show that the doctrine of Adam's federal character is without foundation.

The less formidable objections which are sometimes urged against the doctrine of Imputation, might be disposed of with the same facility as those that have now been mentioned. But it is needless to go into a specific enumeration of them. Enough, it is believed, has been said, to show that the doctrine is taught in the Scriptures.

Few doctrines have been more ridiculed in our day than this. And so skilfully have the shafts of ridicule been levelled, so grossly has the doctrine been misrepresented, and so vividly have the alleged injustice and absurdity of it been depicted, both from the pulpit and the press, that even Presbyterians themselves have in many instances been half ashamed to avow their belief of it. If we are to judge from the popular representations on the subject, the doctrine of a covenant of works, in which Adam represented his posterity so that in his fall they fell, and were subjected to the penalty he had incurred, belongs to the mysticisms of the dark ages, and is quite intolerable in this golden era of improvements in theology. And there are probably intelligent people to be found who have really been made to believe that it is a doctrine fit only for the nursery. It may turn out, however, that there are not only some men of sense who hold the doctrine now, but that it has been advocated by names which will shine with undecaying lustre, when those who would brand their opinions with folly, shall have passed away into oblivion. In confirmation of this remark, look at the venerable body by which our standards were framed, the Westminster Assembly of Divines. Of this body, Mr. Baxter, who knew most of the members, says: "they were men of eminent learning, godliness, ministerial abilities, and fidelity; and being not worthy to be one of them myself, I may more fully speak the truth which I know, even in the face of malice and envy; that as far as I am able to judge by the information of history and by any other evidences, the Christian world since the days

of the apostles, had never a synod of more excellent divines than this synod."³ This testimony will be readily credited, when it is remembered that among this body were such men as Twisse and Arrowsmith, Calamy and Burgess, Tuckney and Goodwin,⁴ and others of scarcely less celebrity. It would be wearisome to refer by name to the catalogue of illustrious men who have, since the Westminster Assembly, written in defence of the doctrine of Imputation. Let it suffice to quote the testimony of two men, neither of whom will be readily suspected of embracing a doctrine so palpably preposterous and unjust as this is sometimes affirmed to be. One of these is an eminent jurist, well skilled in the nature of laws and penalties, and the grounds of them; I mean the celebrated Lord Chief Justice Hale.

"God made man righteous at first, (he observes,) and gave him a righteous law; and inasmuch as man owed an infinite subjection to the Author of his being, he owed an exact obedience to this law of his Maker. Yet God was pleased to give him this law, not only as the rule of his obedience, but as a *covenant* of life and death, wherein the first man made a stipulation for himself and his posterity. And this was just; for he had in himself the race of all mankind. All succeeding generations are but pieces of Adam, who had, nor could have their being but from him, and so it was but *reasonable and just* for him to *contract for all his posterity*. And as it was just in respect of the person contracting, so it was in respect of the manner of the contract. The law which was his covenant, was a just and righteous law; a law suitable to the endowments and power of his nature. Again, the blessedness which by his obedience he was to hold, was not of his own creating or obtaining; it was the free gift of God; and it is but reasonable that the Lord of this gift might give it in what manner he pleased; and it could not be unjust, that the Lord who gave him this blessedness, should give it him under what conditions he pleased. But he gave it him under most reasonable and just conditions, viz. an obedience to a most just and reasonable law, which suited with the ability and perfection of his nature; and, therefore, when upon the breach of the covenant by man, he withdrew that blessedness from him and his posterity, he did no more than what was most just for him to do. And thus *we stand guilty of that sin* which our first father committed, and are deprived of that blessedness and life which our first father had; and the privation of that blessedness and immortality is death." Thus admirably does this great man clear the justice of God in constituting Adam the covenant-head of his posterity.

The other witness I propose to cite, is the late Rev. Dr. James P. Wilson, of Philadelphia.

"The first intelligent creatures (says Dr. Wilson) were purely spiritual, and each stood or fell for himself. He united in man the spiritual and corporeal natures; he formed his soul innocent and holy, and made ample provision for the comfort of his body; and as it would have been inconvenient to have brought all of the human family, which were to be in every generation, upon the earth at one time, and still more so, that every one *standing or falling*

³ See Belfrage's History of the Shorter Catechism.

⁴ See Neale's History of the Puritans, vol. iii.

for himself, the earth should be the common habitation of beings perfectly holy, happy, and immortal, and also of cursed, perishing beings, he *constituted the first man a representative of his race*. 'Let us make *man*'--the race in one. To be fruitful, multiply, fill, and subdue the earth, were directed to the *race*. In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt die. He did die spiritually; he lost his innocence, became the subject of guilt, shame, and fear; and all his posterity inherit the fallen nature. Being already *cursed*, when afterwards arraigned and sentenced, it was only necessary to curse his enjoyments in this world. *His posterity were included*, for they are subjected to the same afflictions and death. If they had not been included in the sentence, 'dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return,' as they were a part of his dust, not dying, it would not have been accomplished. *That he represented the race*, appears also from this, that the command was given to him *before his wife was formed*; and also because it does not appear that her eyes were opened to see her guilt and miserable condition, until *he* had eaten of the fruit; then the eyes of them *both* were opened."⁵

I shall now close this dissertation with a few practical observations.

First. The doctrine which has been discussed *is a doctrine of great importance*.

As this is a point about which there exists some diversity of opinion, I shall spend a little time upon it.

If all truth is valuable, (as will be generally conceded,) it cannot be a matter of indifference whether we have correct views on any subject which God has deemed it proper to embrace in a revelation of his will. It is not, however, on this ground simply, that the doctrine under consideration deserves to be regarded as important. It is important as exhibiting the relation which the first man sustained to his posterity, and as vindicating the divine perfections in reference to the evils which have come upon the race in consequence of his apostasy. The alternative presented for our adoption is this: Has God established such a constitution of things, that because one man sinned, all his posterity, though related to him only as their natural root, should commence life in circumstances which render it absolutely certain that they will incur his curse with their very first moral act; or are we born under his displeasure in virtue of a benevolent covenant made with our first parent and broken by him, in which, by the just appointment of God, we were included? The latter of these views would seem to commend itself to every impartial mind, as presenting the divine character in a far more attractive light than the other, and as avoiding many of the difficulties with which it is embarrassed. Indeed, on any other view than that which has been defended in this treatise, the dealings of God with our race, in subjecting them to such terrible inflictions by reason of their descent from a fallen head, are shrouded in impenetrable darkness.

5 See Dr. Wilson's edition of Ridgely's Divinity, vol. ii. p. 77. Note by the Editor.

Again, this doctrine is important as being *identified with the true doctrine of justification through the righteousness of Christ*. We are taught in the fifth chapter of Romans, that we are saved through Christ, in the same manner that we were lost in Adam. The doctrine that we are condemned for Adam's sin, was so familiar to the Jews, that the apostle does not stop to prove it, but assuming its truth, employs it to illustrate the method of our recovery. "As by the offence of one all were condemned, so by the righteousness of one all are justified." "As by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." One principle pervades both the Adamic and the Mediatorial dispensations. Adam was the covenant-head of his people, that is, of his race; and Christ is the covenant-head of his people, that is, of his spiritual seed. The disobedience of the first Adam was imputed to his seed, and they were condemned for it: the obedience of the second Adam is imputed to his seed, and they are justified by it. One covenant cannot be denied, and the other *consistently* retained. If the representative character of Adam is not admitted, that of Christ will not ordinarily be recognized, except in a very inadequate form.

And this leads to another observation, viz. that this doctrine is important, *as an essential part of that system of theology* which is taught in the Scriptures, and summarily comprised in our standards.

It has become fashionable to speak in disparaging terms of systems of theology, and of creeds and confessions of faith. (See note L.) That the Bible does not teach theology in a systematic form, is true; but to suppose that it does not contain a system of theology, complete and harmonious in all its parts, is to charge its Divine Author with framing his word without a plan. Besides, errorists, who have in every age declaimed so much against systems, have always had systems of their own, (see note M.,) which they have defended with great zeal, and not seldom, with much ingenuity.

Another fact closely allied with the one just named, is, that one error almost invariably brings others along with it; and so, also, when an important doctrine or principle is abandoned, its affiliated doctrines usually fall with it.

This may be illustrated by the doctrine before us. It is denied in our day that the guilt of Adam's sin is imputed to his posterity. One ground of this denial is, that penal evil cannot, in the nature of the case, be inflicted on one person, for another's sin. The principle here laid down, applies as directly to the atonement as to our connection with Adam. And, accordingly, they who deny the imputation of Adam's sin to us, also deny the imputation of our sins to the Redeemer--that is, they deny that he bore the penalty of the law in our stead. And, what is more, they deny that his righteousness is imputed to us, as the ground of our justification. These two doctrines, it is true, are not always rejected with the first; but consistency requires that they should be, and there are unhappily many in our day too consistent to retain them.

Again, see where the principle leads, that morality can attach only to acts of choice. According to this principle, fairly carried out, Adam was not created a holy being, but made himself holy by the first exercise of his moral powers; neither was the human nature of the infant Saviour holy, until he became a moral agent. It follows, also, that infants have no more moral character than brutes; and that regeneration consists, not in a radical transformation of character by the immediate power of the Holy Ghost, but in the act of the sinner's own mind--an act put forth, it may be, from no higher motive than "*self-love*." All these opinions are the legitimate fruits of the principle, that there can be no moral character apart from moral action. And they are all held and propagated in our own country, at this time. It should be added, however, that they are not all chargeable on everyone who maintains the principle just stated. For many who adopt that principle, believe in native depravity; although their philosophy compels them to take the ground that the depravity of infants consists in actual transgressions. And whatever may be their view of regeneration, they by no means admit that the sinner changes his own heart, under the influence of self-love.

But without enlarging on the consequences of adopting a single false principle in theology, I repeat the observation, that the doctrine of the federal character of Adam, is essential to the system of truth comprised in our standards, and has ever been so regarded by the soundest divines. No one should be willing to see this doctrine trodden under foot, who does not wish to see the whole superstructure prostrated. That this remark is not lightly made, will be evident from the opinions of two distinguished theologians, whose names are held in profound veneration by the Church. One of these is President Edwards, who says, that "the rejection of the doctrine of original sin, *renders redemption unnecessary*." The other is Dr. Owen, who holds this language on the subject:--"By some the imputation of the actual apostasy and transgression of Adam, the head of our natural posterity, whereby one sin became the sin of the world, is utterly denied. Hereby both the ground the apostle proceedeth on in evincing the necessity of our justification, or our being made righteous by the obedience of another, and all the arguments brought in confirmation of the doctrine of it, in the fifth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, are evaded and overthrown. *Socinus* confesseth that place to give great countenance unto the doctrine of justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ; and therefore he sets himself to oppose, with sundry artifices, the imputation of the sin of Adam unto his natural posterity. For he perceived well enough, that upon the admission thereof, the imputation of the righteousness of Christ unto his spiritual seed, would unavoidably follow, according unto the tenor of the apostle's discourse."

To these quotations may be added the testimony of the ablest *opposers* of our doctrine in the present day, who have justly said, that the doctrine of original sin cannot be consistently held, if that of *imputation* is abandoned.⁶

6 Christian Spectator.

If any weight is to be allowed to these authorities, it is not surprising that the friends of the truth should betray so much solicitude, when the doctrine of original sin, (as embracing our covenant-relation to Adam,) is assailed. They see very well that the denial of this doctrine is likely to lead to a subversion of the system to which it belongs. Ecclesiastical history also lifts her warning voice, and teaches them, that error has achieved its most fatal triumphs, by first proposing to *modify the terms* usually employed by the Church in stating her doctrines, or by calling in question points which seemed to be of little practical value. These changes accomplished, and the Church either lulled to sleep, or constrained by the odium of controversy, to hold her peace, heresy has gained courage, and advanced with a boldness and rapidity which have baffled all opposition, and finally rent the body of Christ. (See note N.)

But not to pursue this topic, I remark,

Again, That the doctrine exhibited in these pages, *illustrates, in a striking manner, the divine sovereignty.*

It is true, the covenant of works was a reasonable, and even a benevolent arrangement, and one of which we have no right to complain. Still, every part of it seems to say, "Be still, and know that I am God." Why did Jehovah create our first parents at all, knowing that they would apostatize if "left to the freedom of their own wills." Why, having created them, did he not prevent their fall and secure to their seed a glorious inheritance of holiness and happiness? Why, having permitted them to fall, did he suffer them to involve the countless millions of their posterity in sin and sorrow, degradation and death? To these and similar questions, we can make but one reply, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." One thing we know, that while many of the reasons of this mysterious procedure are concealed from us, there are wise and sufficient reasons for it in the divine mind. And however inexplicable it may appear to our feeble understandings, God will yet overrule it all for his own glory, and the good of the universe.

This subject also presents in an interesting light, *the wisdom and benignity displayed in the work of redemption.*

It has just been intimated that the ultimate design of God in establishing a covenant with Adam, and permitting him to violate it, and thereby entail an inheritance of wo upon his children, was the promotion of the divine glory. We can already see in part, how it will contribute to this end.

It will be granted that the system of redemption contains the brightest of all the manifestations of the divine perfections. His immaculate holiness and strict justice are less gloriously displayed in the eternal perdition of the apostate angels, than in the cross of Christ. Heaven itself, replete as it is with the fruits of his unwasting beneficence, furnishes no exhibition of his love like that which is presented in the Saviour's sufferings. And it

may be doubted whether the mercy of God, one of his most amiable and attractive attributes, is displayed to his intelligent creatures in any other form than as it is manifested in the redemption of man; for the holy angels need no mercy, and to the lost angles, it is not extended.

But if Adam had not fallen, Christ would not have died. If our race had not incurred the divine displeasure, the perfections of the Godhead could not have been manifested in their salvation.

Let it be considered, also, that the spiritual seed of Christ are, by the merit of his blood, in all probability, exalted to a much higher degree of glory than they would have been had Adam remained steadfast. For in the latter case they would simply have been put in possession of that eternal life which was promised him on condition of his obedience; whereas now they receive that "exceeding and eternal weight of glory" which is the just reward of the obedience of their more glorious surety. The human nature is by this wonderful plan allied with the divine, and exalted above all the thrones and principalities of heaven. And the honour which is thus put upon our nature in the person of our adorable representative, is communicated in an eminent degree to each one of his followers. In this sense it may be said,

"In him the tribes of Adam boast
More blessings than their father lost."

To these considerations it may be added, that the happiness of all other orders of holy beings has been greatly enhanced by the plan of redemption. The Scriptures represent the angels as watching with intense solicitude over the church militant, and declare that there is joy in heaven over every repenting sinner. Indeed, by means of this amazing work, "God is seen by all his intelligent creatures in new manifestations of beauty, glory, and loveliness. Throughout never-ending ages, virtuous minds will be enlarged with knowledge, exalted in holiness, and improved in dignity and happiness beyond all which would otherwise have been proper or possible; and their affections, obedience and praise, become more refined and more elevated in a rapid and regular progress."⁷

These suggestions show, that however dreadful may be the consequences of the apostasy to our race, the infinite wisdom and benignity of God will make it the occasion of promoting his glory and increasing the felicity of the intelligent universe.

This subject, again, *throws much light on the character, condition, and prospects of infants.*

No fact in the providence of God is more mysterious, on any other principles than those advanced in this discussion, than the sufferings and death of infants. But the doctrine of a

⁷ Dr. Dwight.

covenant of works in which we were all included, explains this fact. We here see that these evils are inflicted for the offence of our federal head; that by his transgression he forfeited the favour of God as well for his posterity as himself; so that they are born out of covenant with God, and subject to all the calamities inherent in a depraved and sinful nature.

While, however, we are taught to look upon them as lost in the first Adam, we are permitted to cherish the hope that they will be saved through the second Adam. We are encouraged by the general tenor of Scripture, to believe that since they have been condemned without any actual transgression for the sin of another, they will (dying in infancy) be saved through the atonement, without the actual exercise of faith and repentance. Those who deny that they are born in a lost state, and contend that they "have no moral character," must, in consistency, maintain that they cannot be saved through the Redeemer, and indeed that they need no Saviour.

Again, this subject *exhibits the nature and necessity of regeneration.*

"Except a man be born again, (saith the Scripture,) he cannot see the kingdom of God." The doctrine of original sin shows us, that this is not a mere arbitrary requirement, but one which springs from the very nature of the case. It teaches us that we inherit from our first parent a depraved nature, "whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil." It is too evident to admit of argument, that no one, not even an infant possessing such a nature, can, without being renewed, enter that world from which every "unclean thing," and everything that "defileth," is excluded.

It is evident, also, that the change which is needed to prepare man for heaven, is not a mere outward reformation, nor simply the "giving a new direction to his constitutional desires." The remedy must penetrate to the depths of the disease. If the character is radically corrupt--if all the powers and affections of the soul are defiled--then, obviously, nothing short of a complete renovation of the heart, a new creation which shall restore to it the lost image of God, will answer. A change like this no human power or skill can effect. God challenges it as his own prerogative, and declares that it is "not by might nor by power, but by his Spirit" alone that the transformation can be wrought.

This change we *must* experience or we cannot be saved. No external decency of conduct, no integrity or benevolence of heart, no observance of the forms of religion or reverence for its ordinances, no pious education or zeal for orthodoxy, can take the place of it. We must be "created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works," "old things must pass away with us and all things become new," or we cannot be admitted hereafter to the glorious inheritance of the saints in light.

Finally, with what alacrity and joy should we *fly to the New Covenant for pardon and salvation!*

Lost as we were by the violation of the old covenant, and justly subjected to its penalty, God did not abandon us to hopeless misery, but in the plentitude of his grace provided a Saviour for us. In the covenant of grace he has made ample provision for our souls. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Mediator of this covenant, has made a full atonement for sin, and purchased for his people, pardon, and reconciliation, and eternal life. The inestimable blessings of this covenant are offered "without money and without price," to every child of Adam: "whosoever will, may take of the water of life freely."

Let me, in closing, entreat my readers to give heed to this gracious invitation. Let me affectionately urge them to seek a participation in the privileges of that "everlasting covenant which is ordered in all things and sure." Refusing to come to Christ, you must remain "without God and without hope," under the curse of the broken covenant of works. But if in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, you commit yourselves with true penitence and humble faith into his hands, he will deliver you from that curse, cleanse you both from the sin of your nature and your actual transgressions, shed abroad in your hearts a peace which passeth knowledge, and hereafter "present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy."

Part II, "Imputation," in *A Treatise on the Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin* by H. A. Boardman, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1844). **Note:** The text has not been modified.