

Doctrinal Studies

The Imputation of Adam's Original Sin – or, "Why is it My Fault?"

Back in the days when I was a new believer, one of the doctrines that I struggled with was the imputation of Adam's original sin to the entire human race. I had no problem with the concept of the old sin nature inherited from my parent, and certainly not with the idea of personal sin, since that was how the Lord drew me to Him in the first place. But somehow the idea that the guilt of original sin was judicially imputed from Adam to me didn't seem fair. After all, Adam was the one who fouled things up, not me! I didn't get us in this mess—he did!

I resented Adam. He only had one way in which he could screw up! Nowadays, we can't turn around without sinning. Worse, he let Eve talk him into it. What a wimp!

I used to imagine myself in Adam's place. There I am, in perfect environment. I have literally everything a man could want. Perfect food, perfect weather, a great job—I spend my day looking at different animals and coming up with such taxonomic gems as "dog," "cat," "cow," and "pig" for their names. I have a female companion who makes today's super-models look like some of the animals I'm naming. She's there at my beck and call, ready to—well, you get the idea. And all I have to do to stay there literally forever, is not eat the fruit from one little tree. As tests go, this is really a no-brainer!

Now, I could see how Eve got into trouble. I keep myself occupied naming the animals. She doesn't have anything more stimulating to do other than figure out how to fix flowers in her hair! It probably went right over her head when I told her about the forbidden fruit (did I mention she was a blonde?).

And so I could see myself, on that fateful day, when she eats the fruit and offers some to me. I weigh my options and being the high-minded, moral person I am, I refuse the fruit, esteeming my loyalty to God greater than my loyalty to her. Simple, right?

My fantasy usually ended there. I never considered the sorrow and pain I would have felt from watching Eve endure alone the consequences of her sin, or the terrible barrier that would have undoubtedly existed between us from that day on. The possible consequences of that scenario are probably endless. Suffice it to say that, in those days, I simply could not appreciate the difficulty of Adam's test. Oh, I accepted the doctrine because that's what the Bible taught, but I didn't really appreciate it.

Then, one day, I heard a story related by a radio preacher—I forget which one. After I heard it I had a little better understanding of the doctrine of the universal imputation of Adam's sin to the human race. I think the story is an old one, dating back to the old South of the mid- 19th century, before the Civil War. At the risk of being politically incorrect, I'll relate it as I remember hearing it.

A plantation owner was riding through his fields one day, when he came upon an old, black slave. The old man was working in the cotton fields, and with each stroke of the hoe he was muttering something, over and over. Curious the owner moved closer.

"Oh, Adam," the old man was saying. "Oh, Adam!"

"Willie," the plantation owner asked, "why are you saying 'Oh, Adam?'"

The old man stopped, wiped his brow, and leaned on his hoe.

"Well suh, las' Sunday de parson down at our church wuz preachin' 'bout 'riginal sin. He tol' us dat when Adam ate dat apple, he done brought a curse on de whole worl', an' dat all our troubles wuz on account o' Adam messin' up in dat garden. So's I figgers dat 'cus he done messed it up fo' de res' of us, I gots t' hoe dis here cotton patch. So dat's why I keeps on sayin', 'Oh Adam!'"

The plantation owner thought about that for a moment, then bade the old slave good day and went his way. The next day the owner came back and there was Willie, hoeing away and repeating his lament: "Oh, Adam. Oh, Adam!"

Doctrinal Studies (Continued)

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The owner dismounted his horse and said: "Willie, I have a proposition for you. I would like for you to come live in the big house with me. You won't have to work in the fields anymore. I'll see that you get some presentable clothes so you won't feel out of place. You'll take your meals with me, you'll have the full run of the house, the servants will wait on you and get you whatever you want, and in the evenings we will sit around the fireplace with brandy and cigars, and we'll talk. In short, you'll have the same privileges that my own son would have. Would you like that, Willie?"

The old man was delighted. "Yassuh, I thinks I'd like dat mighty fine!"

"There is a condition, Willie," cautioned the owner. "In my study there is a wooden box on a table. Under no circumstances are you ever to look under that box. The day you do, it's back to the fields with you. Can you abide by that one rule?"

"Oh, yassuh, I sho' can!" the old man replied confidently. "I won't even look at it!"

That very day Willie went to live with the owner. He had his servants take Willie to town and buy him a fine new wardrobe. He ate his meals with the owner and quickly developed a taste for fine cuisine. He especially reveled in pulling the silk rope in his room and having the servants respond to his every whim. Although he couldn't read much, he loved going to the study and looking at the pictures in the books in the owner's well-stocked library. The owner even began teaching Willie how to read better.

While Willie was in the library he couldn't help noticing the box which sat upside-down on a low table. At first he would look quickly away, but then he remembered that the owner never said anything about not looking at it, and so one day he examined it. It was beautifully made, hunting scenes carved in bas-relief on its sides, and mother-of-pearl inlays around its edges. It was truly a fine box, the most beautiful Willie had ever seen!

He gradually worked up the courage to touch the box, since all the owner had said was that he couldn't look under the box. He caressed the box, savoring the rich feel of the fine, oiled wood. But he couldn't help wondering what was under the box.

Finally one day, Willie could no longer stand it. The owner was off inspecting his fields. Willie made sure none of the servants were around. Then he went to the study and looked at the box. He ached to see what was under it. After all, he rationalized, how could anyone possibly know if he simply peeked under the box? His mind made up, he gingerly lifted one edge of the box. Before he could drop the box, a small mouse ran out, scampered across the room, and disappeared into a small hole in the wall.

When the owner returned, he called Willie into his study. Willie entered, trembling with fearful anticipation.

"Willie, did you look under the box that I forbade you to look under?"

Knowing he couldn't hide the truth, Willie hung his head in shame and nodded.

"Well, you know the terms of our agreement. I'm afraid it's back to the fields with you, Willie," said the owner, sadly.

The next day the owner visited Willie to see how he was getting on. There he was, hoeing away in the fields, muttering something under his breath. The owner couldn't quite make out what he was saying, so he urged his horse a little closer so he could hear. "Oh, Willie," the old man was saying. "Oh Willie!"