

THE FEDERAL HEADSHIP OF ADAM AND JESUS CHRIST (THE LAST ADAM)

A. W. Pink



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“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, in whom all sinned” (verse 12);

“through the offence of one many be dead” (verse 15);

“the judgment was by one to condemnation” (verse 16);

“by one man’s offence death reigned” (verse 17);

“by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation” (verse 18);

“by one man’s offence many were made [legally constituted] sinners” (verse 19).

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22).

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It is of vital importance for a right understanding of much in God's Word to observe the relation which Adam sustained to his posterity. Adam was not only the common parent of mankind, but he was also their federal head and representative. The whole human race was placed on probation or trial in Eden. Adam acted not for himself alone, but he transacted for all who were to spring from him. Unless this basic fact be definitely apprehended, much that ought to be relatively clear to us will be shrouded in impenetrable mystery. Yea, we go further, and affirm that, until the federal headship of Adam and God's covenant with him in that office be actually perceived, we are without the key to God's dealings with the human race, we are unable to discern man's relation to the divine law, and we appreciate not the fundamental principles upon which the atonement of Christ proceeded.

"Federal headship" is a term which has almost entirely disappeared from current religious literature—so much the worse for our moderns. It is true that the expression itself does not verbally occur in Scripture; yet like the words *Trinity* and *the divine incarnation*, it is a necessity in theological parlance and doctrinal exposition. The principle or fact which is embodied in the term "federal headship" is that of *representation*. There have been but two federal heads: Adam and Christ, with each of whom God entered into a covenant. Each of them acted on behalf of others, each legally represented a definite people, so much so that all whom they represented were regarded by God as being *in* them. Adam represented the whole human race; Christ represented all those whom the Father had, in His eternal counsels, given to Him.

When Adam stood in Eden as a responsible being before God, he stood there as a federal head, as the legal representative of all his posterity. Hence, when Adam sinned, all for whom he was standing are accounted as having sinned; when he fell, all whom he represented fell; when he died, they died. So too was it with Christ. When He came to this earth, He, too, stood in a federal relationship to His own people; and when He became obedient unto death, all for whom He was acting were accounted righteous; when He rose again from the dead, all whom He represented rose with Him; when He ascended on high, they were regarded as ascending with Him.

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The relationship of our race to Adam or Christ divides men into two classes, each receiving nature and destiny from its respective head. All the individuals who comprise these two classes are so identified with their heads that it has justly been said, “There have been but two men in the world, and two facts in history.” These two men are Adam and Christ; the two facts are the disobedience of the former, by which many were made sinners, and the obedience of the latter, by which many were made righteous. By the former came *ruin*, by the latter came *redemption*; and neither ruin nor redemption can be Scripturally apprehended except as they are seen to be accomplished by those representatives, and except we understand the relationships expressed by being “in Adam” and “in Christ.”

Let it be expressly and emphatically affirmed that what we are here treating of is purely a matter of divine revelation. Nowhere but in Holy Scripture do we know anything about Adam, or of our relation to him. If it be asked how the federal constitution of the race can be reconciled with the dictates of human reason, the first answer must be, it is not for us to reconcile them. The initial inquiry is not whether federal headship be reasonable or just, but, is it a fact revealed in the Word of God? If it is, then reason must bow to it and faith humbly receive it. To the child of God the question of its justice is easily settled: we know it to be just, because it is a part of the ways of the infinitely holy and righteous God.

Now the fact that Adam *was* the federal head of the human race, that he *did* act and transact in a representative capacity, and that the judicial consequences of his actings *were* imputed to all those for whom he stood, is clearly revealed in God’s Word.

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condemnation” (verse 18);

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The meaning of these declarations is far too plain for any unprejudiced mind to misunderstand. It pleased God to deal with the human race *as represented in and by Adam*.

Let us borrow a simple illustration. God did not deal with mankind as with a field of corn, where each stalk stands upon its own individual root; but He dealt with it as with a tree, all the branches of which have one common root and trunk. If you strike with an axe at the root of a tree, the whole tree falls—not only the trunk, but also the branches: all wither and die. So it was when Adam fell. God permitted Satan to lay the axe at the root of the tree, and when Adam fell, all his posterity fell with him. At one fatal stroke Adam was severed from communion with his maker, and as the result “death passed upon all men.”

Here, then, we learn what is the formal ground of man’s judicial condemnation before God. The popular idea of *what* renders man a sinner in the sight of heaven is altogether inadequate and false. The prevailing conception is that a sinner is one who commits and practices sin. It is true that this is the *character* of a sinner, but it certainly is not that which primarily *constitutes* him a sinner. The truth is that every member of our race enters this world a guilty sinner before he ever commits a single transgression. It is not only that he possesses a sinful nature, but he is directly “under condemnation.” We are legally constituted sinners neither by what we are nor by what we are doing, but by the disobedience of our federal head, Adam. Adam acted not for himself alone, but for all who were to spring from him.

On this point the teaching of the apostle Paul is plain and unambiguous. The terms of Romans 5:12-19, as we have shown above, are too varied and distinct to admit of any misconception: that it is on account of their sin in Adam, men, in the first instance, are accounted guilty and treated as such, as well as partake of a depraved nature. The language of 1 Corinthians 15:22 is equally unintelligible except on the supposition that both Adam and Christ sustained a *representative* character, in virtue of which the one

involved the race in guilt and ruin, and the other, by His obedience unto death, secured the justification and salvation of all who believe in Him. The actual condition of the human race, throughout its history, confirms the same: the apostle's doctrine supplies the only adequate explanation of the universal prevalence of sin.

The human race is suffering now for the sin of Adam, or it is suffering for nothing at all. This earth is the scene of a grim and awful tragedy. In it we see misery and wretchedness, pain and poverty, decay and death, on every side. None escape. That "man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward" is an indisputable fact. But what is the explanation of it? Every effect must have a previous cause. If we are not being punished for Adam's sin, then, coming into this world, we are "children of wrath," alienated from God, corrupt and depraved, and on the broad road which leadeth to destruction, for *nothing at all!* Who would contend that this was better, more satisfactory, than the Scriptural explanation of our ruin?

But it will be said, It was unjust to make Adam our federal head. How so? Is not the principle of representation a fundamental one in human society? The father is the legal head of his children during their minority: what he does, binds the family. A business house is held responsible for the transactions of its agents. The heads of a state are vested with such authority that the treaties they make are binding upon the whole nation. This principle is so basic it cannot be set aside. Every popular election illustrates the fact that a constituency will act through a representative and be bound by his acts. Human affairs could not continue, nor society exist without it. Why, then, be staggered at finding it inaugurated in Eden?

Consider the alternative. "The race must have either stood in a full grown man, with a full-orbed intellect, or stood as babies, each entering his probation in the twilight of self-consciousness, each deciding his destiny before his eyes were half-opened to what it all meant. How much better would that have been? How much more just? But could it not have been some other way? There was no other way. It was either the baby or it was the perfect, well equipped, all-calculating man—the man who saw and comprehended everything. That man was Adam" (G. S. Bishop).

Yes, Adam, fresh from the hands of his creator, with no sinful ancestry behind him, with no depraved nature within. A man made in the image and likeness of God, pronounced by Him “very good,” in fellowship with heaven. Who could have been a more suitable representative for us?

This has been the principle on which and the method by which God has acted all through. The posterity of Canaan were cursed for the single transgression of their parent (Gen. 9). The Egyptians perished at the Red Sea as the result of Pharaoh’s wickedness. When Israel became God’s witness in the earth it was the same. The sins of the fathers were to be visited upon the children: in consequence of Achan’s one sin the whole of his family were stoned to death. The high priest acted on behalf of the whole nation. Later, the king was held accountable for the conduct of his subjects. One acting on behalf of others, the one responsible for the many, is a basic principle both of human and divine government. We cannot get away from it; wherever we look, it stares us in the face.

Finally, let it be pointed out that the sinner’s salvation is made to depend upon the same principle. Beware, my reader, of quarrelling with the justice of this law of representation. This principle wrecked us, and this principle alone can rescue us. The disobedience of the first Adam was the judicial ground of our condemnation; the obedience of the last Adam is the legal ground on which God alone can justify the sinner. The substitution of Christ in the place of His people, the imputation of their sins to Him and of His righteousness to them, is the cardinal fact of the gospel. But the principle of being saved by what another has done is only possible on the ground that we are lost through what another did. The two stand or fall together. If there had been no covenant of works there could have been no death in Adam, there could have been no life in Christ.

“By one man’s disobedience many were made sinners” (Rom. 5:19). Here is cause for humiliation which few think about. We are members of a cursed race, the fallen children of a fallen parent, and as such we enter this world “alienated from the life of God” (Eph. 4:18), with nothing in us to prompt unto holy living. Oh, that God may reveal to you, dear reader, your connection with the first Adam that you may realize your deep need of clinging to the last Adam.

The world may deride this doctrine of representation and imputation, but that only evidences it to be of God. If the gospel (the genuine gospel) were welcomed by all that would prove it was of human manufacture; for only that is acceptable to fallen man which is invented by fallen man. That the wise of this world scoff at the truth of federal headship, when it is faithfully presented, only goes to manifest its divine origin.

“By the offence of one judgment came upon all men *to condemnation*” (Rom. 5:18). In the day that Adam fell, the frown of God came upon all His children. The holy nature of God abhorred the apostate race. The curse of the broken law descended upon all Adam’s posterity. It is only thus we can account for the universality of depravity and suffering. The corruption which we inherit from our parents is a great evil, for it is the source of all our personal sins. For God to allow this transmission of depravity is to inflict a *punishment*. But how could God punish all, unless all were guilty? The fact that all do share in this common punishment proves that all sinned and fell in Adam. Our depravity and misery are not, as such, the appointment of the Creator, but are instead the retribution of the judge.

“By one man’s disobedience many were made sinners” (Rom. 5:19). The word “made” in that verse calls for a definition and explanation. It does not refer directly and primarily to the fact that we inherit from Adam a corrupt and sinful nature—that we learn from other Scriptures. The term “were made sinners” is a forensic one, and refers to our being *constituted guilty* in the sight of God. A parallel case is found in 2 Corinthians 5:21: “He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin.” Clearly those words “made him [Christ] to be sin” cannot refer to any change which our Lord underwent in His nature or character. No, rather the blessed Saviour so took His people’s place before God that He was treated and dealt with as guilty: their sins were not *imparted*, but *imputed* to Him.

Again, in Galatians 3:13—we read that Christ was “*made* a curse for us:” as the substitute of God’s elect, He was judicially regarded as beneath the condemnation of the law. Our guilt was legally transferred to Christ: the sins we committed, He was regarded as responsible for; what *we* deserved, *He* endured. In like manner,

Adam's offspring were "*made* sinners" by their head's disobedience: the legal consequences of their representative's transgression were charged to their account. They were judicially constituted guilty, because the guilt of Adam's sin was charged to them. Hence we enter this world not only with the heritage of a corrupt nature, but "under condemnation." We are by nature "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3), for "the wicked are estranged from the womb" (Psa. 58:3)—separated from God and exposed to His judicial displeasure.

