

Manual of Christian Doctrine

SECOND EDITION



by L. Berkhof

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Preface

After the publication of my *Systematic Theology*, the publisher requested me to prepare for publication a more compendious work on Christian doctrine, which might be fit for high school and college classes, and might also be used profitably by our older catechumens. Mindful of the great importance of the proper indoctrination of the young people of the Church, I did not have the courage to refuse, but undertook to prepare a brief manual. The work seemed particularly important to me in view of the widespread doctrinal indifference of the present day, of the resulting superficiality and confusion in the minds of many professing Christians, of the insidious errors that are zealously propagated even from the pulpits, and of the alarming increase of all kinds of sects that are springing up like mushrooms on every side. If there ever was a time when the Church ought to guard her precious heritage, the deposit of the truth that was entrusted to her care, that time is now. I have tried to give a rather comprehensive and yet concise statement of our Reformed conception of the truth, and sincerely hope that its clarity may not have suffered through its brevity. At the end of every chapter I have given a list of questions that will help the student to test his knowledge of what it contains. ... [T]his *Manual* is based on the larger work [*Systematic Theology*] throughout and can best be understood in the light of its more detailed discussion of Christian doctrine. May the King of the Church make this *Manual* a blessed influence in the instruction of our covenant youth.

L. Berkhof
Grand Rapids, Michigan
May 10, 1933

The Doctrine of Man in Relation to God

Man in His Original State

The Constitutional Nature of Man

From the discussion of the doctrine of God we pass on to that of man, the crown of God's handiwork. The study of man in theology should not be confused with the science of anthropology, though it bears the same name. It does not merely focus upon the study of man, but very particularly man in relation to God is the object of its consideration and discussion. Under the present heading, the essential constituents of human nature, and the origin of the soul in the individuals of the race will be considered.

A. The Essential Elements of Human Nature

There are especially two views respecting the number of elements that go to make up the essential nature of man.

1. DICHOTOMY, OR THE VIEW THAT MAN CONSISTS OF TWO PARTS, BODY AND SOUL

The usual view of the constitution of man is that he consists of two, and only two, distinct parts, namely, body and soul or spirit. This is in harmony with the self-consciousness of man, which clearly testifies to the fact that man consists of a material and a spiritual element. It is also borne out by the study of Scripture, which speaks of man as consisting of "body and soul" (Matt. 6:25; 10:28), or of "body and spirit" (Eccl. 12:7; I Cor. 5:3, 5). The two words, "soul" and "spirit" do not denote two different elements in man, but serve to designate the one spiritual substance of man. This is proved by the following considerations: (a) There are several passages which clearly proceed on the assumption that man consists of only two parts (Rom. 8:10; I Cor. 5:5; 7:34; II Cor. 7:1; Eph. 2:3; Col. 2:5). (b) Death is

sometimes described as the giving up of the soul (Gen. 35:18; I Kings 17:21, 22); and in other cases as the giving up of the spirit (Ps. 31:5; Luke 23:46; Acts 7:59). (c) The immaterial element of the dead is in some instances termed "soul" (Rev. 6:9; 20:4), and in others "spirit" (Heb. 12:23; I Pet. 3:19). These two terms merely serve to designate the spiritual element of man from two different points of view. The word "spirit" contemplates it as the principle of life and action which controls the body; while the word "soul" refers to it as the personal subject in man, which thinks and feels and wills, and in some cases particularly as the seat of affections (Gen. 2:7; Ps. 62:1; 63:1; Ps. 103:1, 2).

2. TRICHOTOMY, OR THE VIEW THAT MAN CONSISTS OF THREE PARTS, BODY, SOUL, AND SPIRIT

Alongside of the usual view another one arose, which conceives of man as consisting of three parts, body, soul, and spirit. This conception of man did not result from the study of Scripture, but was born of the study of Greek philosophy. It was adopted by several German and English theologians. These do not agree, however, as to the nature of the soul, nor as to the relation in which it stands to the other parts of human nature. Some regard the soul as the principle of the animal life in man, and the spirit as the principle of the higher rational and moral life. Others consider the soul to be a sort of intermediate element, which furnishes the point of contact between the body and the spirit. Biblical support for this view was sought particularly in I Thess. 5:23 and Heb. 4:12, but these do not prove the point. It is true that Paul speaks in the first passage of "spirit and soul and body," but this does not necessarily mean that he regards these as three distinct elements in man rather than as three different aspects of man. When Jesus summarizes the first table of the law by saying, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matt. 22:37), He

does not have in mind three distinct substances. Such expressions simply serve to emphasize the fact that the *whole man* is intended. Moreover, Hebrews 4:12 should not be taken to mean that the Word of God, penetrating to the inner man, makes separation between his soul and his spirit, which would naturally imply that these two are different substances; but simply that it brings about a separation in both of these aspects of man between the thoughts and intents of the heart.

B. The Origin of the Soul in Each Individual

There are three theories respecting the origin of the soul in each individual.

1. PRE-EXISTENTIALISM

Some speculative theologians advocated the theory that the souls of men existed in a previous state, and that certain occurrences in that former state account for the condition in which those souls are now found. It was thought to afford the most natural explanation of the fact that all men are born as sinners. This theory meets with little favor at present.

2. TRADUCIANISM

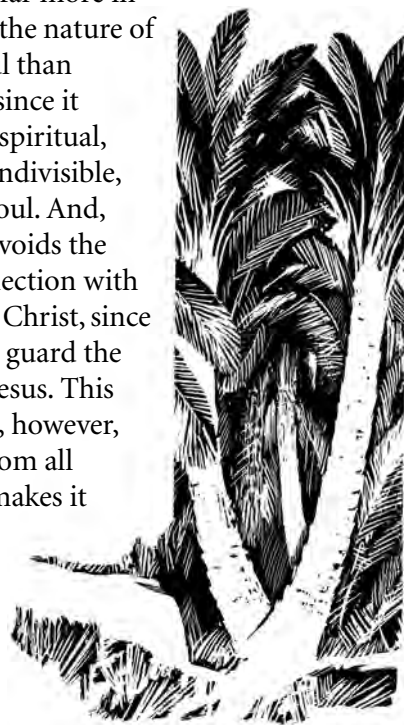
According to Traducianism, souls of men are propagated along with the bodies by generation, and are therefore transmitted to the children by the parents. Scripture support for this is found in the fact that God ceased from the work of creation after He had made man (Gen. 2:2); that the Bible says nothing about the creation of Eve's soul (Gen. 2:23; I Cor. 11:8); and that descendants are said to be in the loins of their fathers (Gen. 4:26; Heb. 7:9, 10). Furthermore, it would seem to be favored (a) by the analogy of the animal world, where both body and soul are passed on from the old to the young; (b) by the inheritance of mental peculiarities and family traits which reside in the soul rather than in the body; and (c) by the inheritance of moral depravity or sin, which is a matter of the soul rather than of the body. This theory is burdened with certain difficulties, however, of which the following are the most important: (a) It either makes the

parents in some sense creators of the soul of the child, or proceeds on the assumption that the soul of the parents can split itself up into several souls, which is contrary to the doctrine that the soul is not capable of being divided. (b) It proceeds on the assumption that God works only in a managerial manner after He has finished the creation of the world. But this is an unproved assumption. God often works immediately in the performance of miracles and in some parts of the work of redemption. (c) It makes it very difficult to guard the sinlessness of Jesus, if He derived both His body and soul from the sinful Mary.

3. CREATIONISM

The creationist view is to the effect that each individual soul is an immediate creation of God, which owes its origin to a direct creative act, of which the time cannot be precisely determined. The soul is supposed to be created pure, but to become sinful even before birth by entering into that complex of sin by which humanity as a whole is burdened. This theory is more in harmony with Scripture than the preceding one, since the Bible throughout represents body and soul as having different origins (Eccl. 12:7; Isa. 42:5; Zech. 12:1; Heb. 12:9; cf. Num. 16:22).

Moreover, it is far more in harmony with the nature of the human soul than traducianism, since it safeguards the spiritual, and therefore indivisible, nature of the soul. And, finally, it also avoids the pitfalls in connection with the doctrine of Christ, since it enables us to guard the sinlessness of Jesus. This does not mean, however, that it is free from all difficulties. It makes it rather hard to account for the reappearance of the mental and moral



traits of the parents in the children. In addition to that, it ascribes to the beast nobler powers of propagation than to man, for the beast multiplies itself after its kind. And, finally, it is in danger of making God at least indirectly responsible for sin, since He puts a pure soul into a complex which will inevitably corrupt it. In spite of these difficulties, however, it deserves the preference.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW:

1. What is the dichotomic view of the essential elements of human nature?
2. How can this view be proved from Scripture?
3. What is the trichotomic view?
4. What Scriptural proof is advanced for it?
5. What objections are there to this view?
6. What theories are there as to the origin of the soul in the individual?
7. What does pre-existentialism teach?
8. What is the traducianist view?
9. What arguments can be advanced in favor of traducianism?
10. What objections are there to it?
11. What is the theory of creationism?
12. What considerations favor this view?
13. What objections are there to it?

WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH

Chapter 6: Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and of Punishment Thereof

1. *Our first parents, being seduced by the subtlety and temptation of Satan, sinned in eating the forbidden fruit. This their sin God was pleased, according to His wise and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to His own glory.*
2. *By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body.*

Man as the Image of God and in the Covenant of Works

In the discussion of the moral and spiritual condition of man, it is of the utmost importance to consider first of all his original state. The two subjects that call for special consideration here are (a) man as the image of God and (b) man in the covenant of works.

A. Man as the Image of God

1. THE SCRIPTURAL TEACHING RESPECTING MAN AS THE IMAGE-BEARER OF GOD

The Bible represents man as the crown of God's handiwork, whose special glory consists in this that he is created in the image of God and after His likeness (Gen. 1:26, 27). Attempts have been made to distinguish sharply between the terms "image" and "likeness." Some were of the opinion that the former referred to the body, and the latter to the soul. Augustine held that they had reference respectively to the intellectual and to the moral qualities of the soul. And Roman Catholics regard "image" as an indication of the natural gifts bestowed on man, and "likeness" as a designation of the gifts with which he was supernaturally endowed, that is, his original righteousness. In all probability, however, the words are used as synonyms and both refer to the same thing, though from a slightly different point of view. Certain Bible passages clearly show that they are used interchangeably (Gen. 1:26, 27; 5:1; 9:6; I Cor. 11:7; Col. 3:10; James 3:9). The words "after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26) apparently serve to stress the fact that the image is most like or similar. The doctrine of man's creation in the image of God is of the greatest importance, for the image is that which is most distinctive in man, that which distinguishes him from the animals and from every other creature. As far as we know even the angels do not share that honor with him. They certainly are not the image-bearers of God in the sense and to the extent that man is.

2. HISTORICAL CONCEPTIONS OF THE IMAGE OF GOD IN MAN

There are especially three important historic conceptions of the image of God in man.

a. *The Roman Catholic View.* Roman Catholics believe that God at creation endowed man with certain natural gifts, such as the spirituality of the soul, the freedom of the will, and the immortality of the body. These natural endowments constitute the image of God. In this purely natural condition of man, however, there was a tendency of the lower appetites and passions to rebel against the higher powers of reason and conscience. This tendency was not in itself sin, but would naturally become sin as soon as the will yielded to it and it passed into voluntary action. In order to enable man to hold his lower nature in check, however, God endowed man with a supernatural gift, called original righteousness. And this is supposed to constitute man's likeness to God.

b. *The Lutheran View.* The Lutherans are not all agreed as to what constitutes the image of God. The prevailing opinion, however, is that it consists only in those spiritual qualities with which man was endowed at creation, and which are generally called original righteousness. These qualities consist in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. In taking this view of the matter, they do not sufficiently recognize the essential nature of man, as distinct from that of the animals on the one hand, and that of the angels on the other hand. If the image of God, consisting in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, constitutes the very essence of man, the question arises, how can man lose this image, as he did by sin, and still remain man. And, again, if the image of God so understood determines the essential nature of man, what essential difference is there between men and the angels, who also possess these spiritual qualities?

c. *The Reformed View.* The Reformed have a far more comprehensive view of the image of God than either the Roman Catholics or the Lutherans. They usually distinguish between the image of God in a restricted sense, and

the image of God in a more comprehensive sense. The former consists in the spiritual qualities with which man was created, namely, true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. That these belong to the image of God follows from Eph. 4:24 and Col. 3:10. The image of God in the more comprehensive sense of the word is found in the fact that man is a spiritual being, rational, moral, and immortal, in the body, not as a material substance, but as the organ of the soul, and in his dominion the lower creation. Notice that Scripture links up this dominion immediately with man's creation in the image of God (Gen. 1:26). It is only in virtue of the image of God in this broader sense that man, even after he has lost the image of God in the restricted sense, consisting in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, can still be called the image-bearer of God (Gen. 9:6; I Cor. 11:7; 15:49; James 3:9).

B. Man in the Covenant of Works

The natural relationship between God and man was supplemented by the covenant relationship, in which God made the future perfection and bliss contingent on the temporary obedience of man. This covenant is known as the covenant of works.

1. SCRIPTURE PROOF FOR THE COVENANT OF WORKS

In view of the fact that some deny the existence of the covenant of works, it is highly desirable to examine its scriptural basis. The Scripture proof for it is found in the following:

a. All the elements of a covenant are indicated in Scripture; and if the elements are present, we have not only the right but also the duty to combine them and to give the doctrine so construed an appropriate name. There are clearly two parties, God and man, entering into an agreement; there is a condition, the condition of obedience, which God imposes on man (Gen. 2:16, 17); and there is also a promise, the promise of eternal life. This is implied in the alternative of death as the result of disobedience (Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:12), and in the symbolical significance of the tree of life (Gen. 3:22).

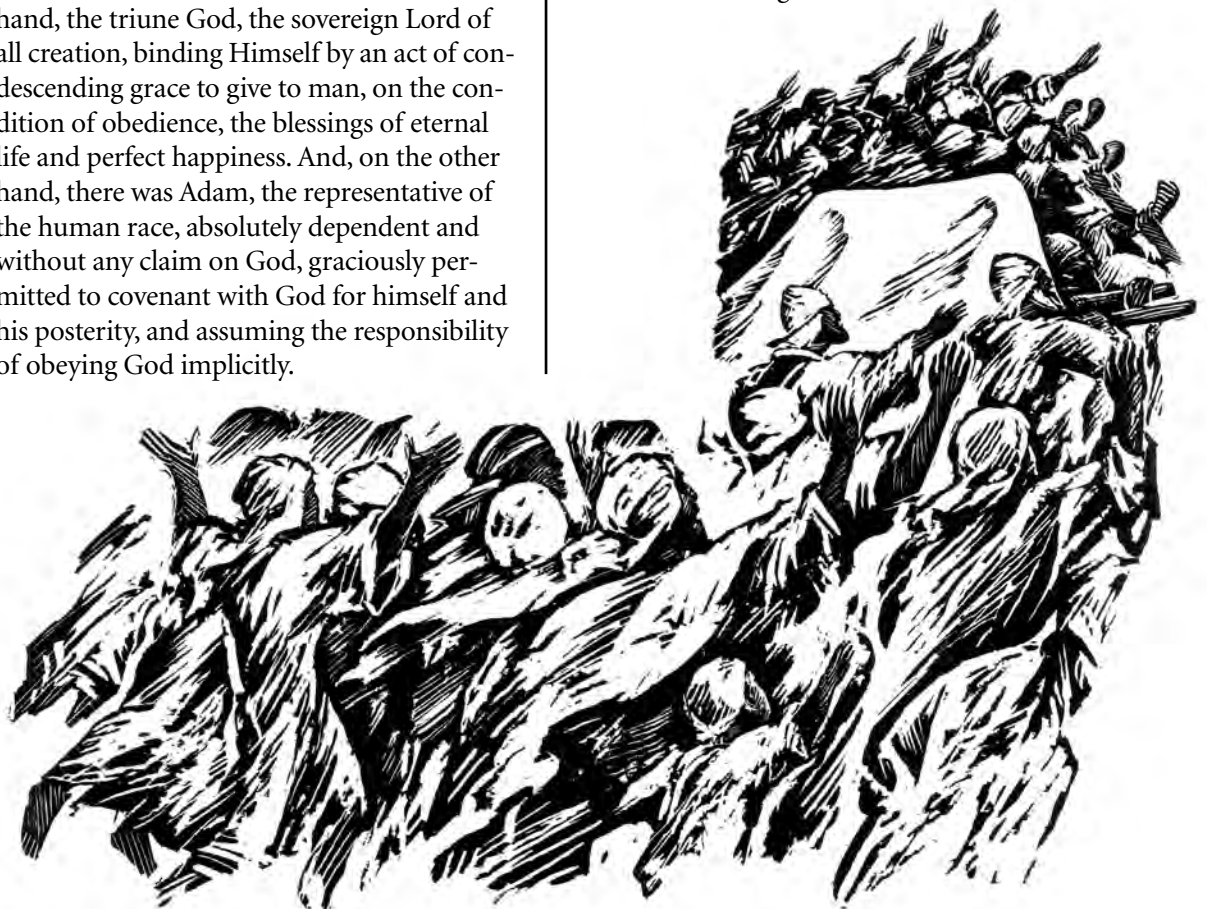
- b. The parallel which Paul draws between Adam and Christ in Rom. 5:12-21—in connection with the imputation of sin on the one hand and the imputation of righteousness on the other hand—can only be explained on the assumption that Adam, like Christ, was the head of a covenant. If we share in the righteousness of Christ, because He is our representative, then it follows that we share in the guilt of Adam for the same reason.
- c. There is one passage in Scripture that speaks of Adam as having transgressed the covenant. In Hosea 6:7 we read: “But they like Adam have transgressed the covenant” (ASV). This rendering of the text corresponds with that in the Dutch Bible. The Authorized Version, however, renders: “But they like men have transgressed the covenant.” The other rendering is clearly to be preferred, and is also favored by the parallel passage in Job 31:33.

2. THE ELEMENTS OF THE COVENANT OF WORKS

The following elements must be distinguished.

- a. *The Covenanting Parties.* A covenant is always a compact between two parties. In the case of the covenant of works there was, on the one hand, the triune God, the sovereign Lord of all creation, binding Himself by an act of condescending grace to give to man, on the condition of obedience, the blessings of eternal life and perfect happiness. And, on the other hand, there was Adam, the representative of the human race, absolutely dependent and without any claim on God, graciously permitted to covenant with God for himself and his posterity, and assuming the responsibility of obeying God implicitly.

- b. *The Promise of the Covenant.* The great promise of the covenant was the promise of life in the fullest sense of the word, that is, not merely a continuance of the natural existence of man, but life raised to the highest development of perennial bliss and glory. Adam was indeed created in a state of positive holiness, and was not subject to the law of death. But he did not yet possess the highest privileges in store for man; he was not yet raised above the possibility of erring, sinning, and dying. He did not yet possess the highest degree of holiness, nor enjoy life in all its fullness.
- c. *The Condition of the Covenant.* The promise in the covenant of works was not unconditional. The condition was that of perfect, unconditional obedience. The divine law can demand no less than perfect obedience, and the positive command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was clearly a test of pure obedience. In it the demands of the law of God converged, so to speak, in a single point. The great question had to be settled, whether man would obey God implicitly, or follow the guidance of his own insight.



- d. *The Penalty of the Covenant.* The penalty that was threatened in case of transgression was death in the most inclusive sense of the word, physical, spiritual, and eternal. The fundamental idea of death is not that of extinction of being, but that of separation from the source of life, and the resulting dissolution of misery and woe. It consists in the separation of body and soul; but also, and this is even more fundamental, in the separation of the soul from God.
- e. *The Sacrament(s) of the Covenant.* Opinions vary a great deal respecting the sacrament(s) of the covenant of works. Though some speak of two, three, or even four sacraments, the most prevalent opinion is that the tree of life was the only sacrament. This would seem to be the only one that finds any warrant in Scripture. In all probability the tree of life was an appointed symbol and pledge or seal of life. The words in Gen. 3:22 should then be understood sacramentally.

3. THE PRESENT VALIDITY OF THE COVENANT OF WORKS

The Arminians of the seventeenth century maintained the position that the covenant of works was wholly abrogated by the fall of Adam, so that his descendants are entirely free from its obligations. In opposition to them, the Reformed took the position that it is partly a thing of the past, and partly still in force.

- a. *The Sense in Which It Is Not Abrogated.* The demand for perfect obedience still holds. The curse and punishment pronounced on the transgressor still apply to all those who continue in sin. And the conditional promise is also still in effect. God might have withdrawn it, but did not (cf. Lev. 18:5; Gal. 3:12). It is evident, however, that after the fall no one can comply with the condition.
- b. *The Sense in Which It Is Abrogated.* The special obligations of this covenant have ceased for those who really live in the covenant of grace. This does not mean that these obligations are simply set aside and disregarded, but that they were met by the Mediator for all His people. Moreover, the covenant of works is abrogated as an appointed way or means to

obtain eternal life, for as such it is powerless after the fall of man.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW:

1. Why is the doctrine of the image of God in man important?
2. Do the words "image" and "likeness" denote different things?
3. What is the Roman Catholic view of the image and likeness of God in man?
4. What is the Lutheran view of the image of God in man?
5. What objection is there to this view?
6. What distinction do the Reformed apply to the image of God in man?
7. What constitutes the image of God in the restricted sense?
8. In the more comprehensive sense?
9. What Bible proof have we for the covenant of works?
10. Which are the parties of the covenant?
11. What is the promise, the condition, the penalty, and the sacrament of the covenant?
12. In what sense does the covenant still hold?
13. In what sense is it abrogated?

WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH

Chapter 7: Of God's Covenant with Man

1. *The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which He hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.*

2. *The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.*

Man in the State of Sin

The Origin and Essential Character of Sin

A. The Origin of Sin in the Fall of Man

The problem of the origin of sin is one that necessarily forces itself upon the attention of thoughtful men, and still continues to baffle those who are not satisfied with the biblical account of it. Some earlier and later theologians simply pushed the problem back a step by saying that the souls of men sinned in some previous existence, and that consequently all men are now born as sinners. The great philosopher, Immanuel Kant, recognized the existence of radical evil in man, but despaired of explaining its origin. Evolutionists find its explanation in the tendencies, impulses, and passions inherited from the brute. The Bible, however, directs our attention to the fall of man. It teaches us that the root of all moral evil in the world lies in the first sin of Adam, the natural and representative head of the human race.

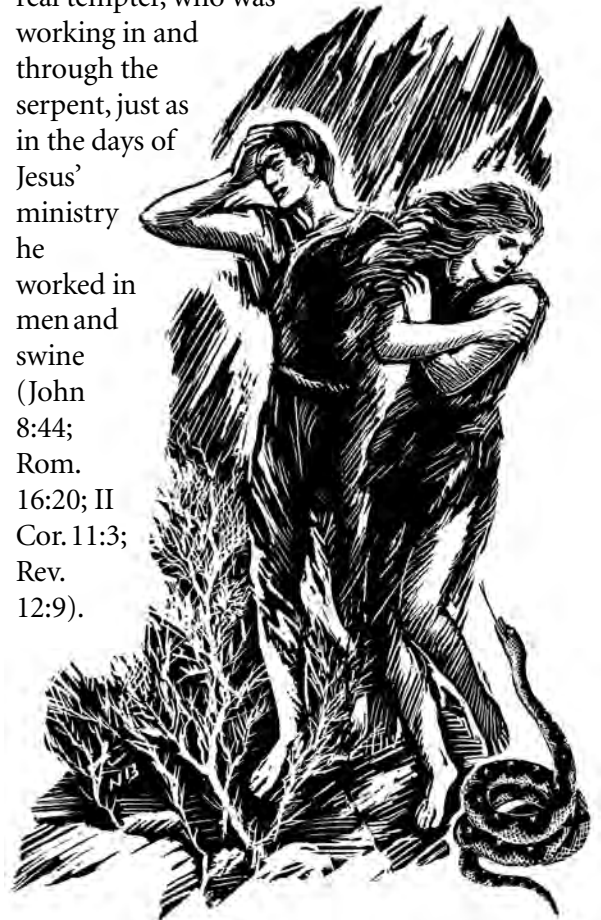
1. THE NATURE OF THE FIRST SIN

The first sin consisted in man's eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This eating was sinful simply because God had forbidden it. We do not know what kind of tree this was. It was called "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil," because it was destined to reveal (a) whether man's future state would be good or evil; and (b) whether man would allow God to determine for him what was good and evil, or would undertake to determine this for himself. The first sin was of a typical character, clearly revealing the essential nature of sin. This lies in the fact that man refused to subject himself to the will of God and to have God determine the course of his life, and decided to settle this for himself. Different elements can be distinguished in this first sin. In the intellect it revealed itself as unbelief and pride, in the will as the desire to

be like God, and in the affections as an unholy satisfaction in eating of the forbidden fruit.

2. THE OCCASION OF THE FIRST SIN

The fall of man was occasioned by the temptation of the serpent, who sowed in man's mind the seeds of distrust and unbelief. Though it was undoubtedly the intention of the tempter to cause Adam, the head of the covenant, to fall, yet he addressed himself to Eve, probably because she (a) was not the covenant head and therefore would not have the same sense of responsibility; (b) had not received the command of God directly but only indirectly, and would consequently be more susceptible to argumentation and doubt; and (c) would undoubtedly prove to be the most effective agent in reaching the heart of Adam. The speaking serpent has been a great stumblingblock for many, and it often led to a figurative or symbolical interpretation of the narrative of the fall. Scripture clearly intimates, however, that the serpent was but the instrument of Satan, and that Satan was the real tempter, who was working in and through the serpent, just as in the days of Jesus' ministry he worked in men and swine (John 8:44; Rom. 16:20; II Cor. 11:3; Rev. 12:9).



3. THE RESULTS OF THE FIRST SIN

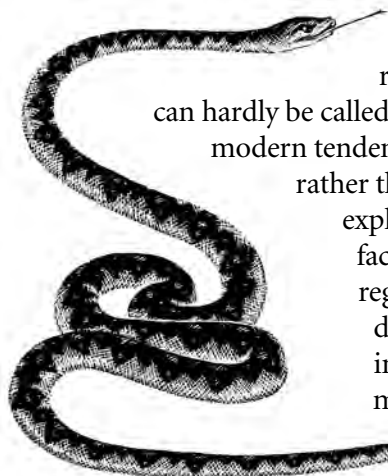
In consequence of the first sin, man lost the image of God in the restricted sense of the word. After the fall, humans no longer possessed a true knowledge of God, righteousness, and holiness; and, moreover, became totally depraved, that is, depraved in every part of his being and utterly incapable of doing any spiritual good. This change in the actual condition of man also reflected itself in his consciousness. There was a sense of pollution, revealing itself in a feeling of shame, and a sense of guilt, which found expression in an accusing conscience and in fear of God. In addition to that, man became subject to the law of death in the fullest sense of the word (Gen. 3:19; Rom. 5:12; 6:23), though the full execution of the sentence was stayed. Finally, man was driven from paradise and barred from the tree of life, which symbolized the life that was promised in the covenant of works.

B. The Essential Character of Sin

There are many erroneous conceptions of the real character of sin. It is only from Scripture that we can learn just what sin is. In connection with the scriptural idea of sin several points should be emphasized.

1. SIN IS A SPECIFIC KIND OF EVIL

In the present day many people show a tendency to substitute the word "evil" for "sin." But this is a poor substitute. While it is perfectly true that all sin is evil, it cannot be said with equal truth that all evil is sin.



Sickness may be regarded as an evil, but can hardly be called a sin. Moreover, the modern tendency to speak of evil rather than of sin finds its explanation largely in the fact that people prefer to regard sin simply as a disease or as an imperfection, for which man can hardly be held

responsible. The Bible teaches us to regard sin as a specific kind of evil, as a moral evil for which man is directly responsible, and which brings him under a sentence of condemnation.

2. SIN HAS AN ABSOLUTE CHARACTER

In the ethical sphere the contrast between good and evil is absolute. There is no neutral condition between the two. This is the clear teaching of Scripture. He who does not love God from the heart, is thereby already characterized as evil. The Bible knows of no position of moral neutrality. It urges the wicked to turn to righteousness, and frequently speaks of the righteous as falling into evil; but it does not contain a single indication that either the one or the other ever lands in a neutral position. Man is either on the right or on the wrong side (Matt. 10:32, 33; 12:30; Luke 11:23; James 2:10).

3. SIN ALWAYS HAS RELATION TO GOD AND HIS WILL

Modern theology insists on interpreting sin in a social way, that is, with reference to one's fellowmen. Sin is wrong done to one's fellow-beings. But this misses the point entirely, for such a wrong can be called sin only in view of the fact that it is contrary to the will of God. Sin is correctly defined as "lack of conformity to the law of God," and this means that it is the opposite of that love to God which is required by the divine law. It is quite evident that Scripture always contemplates sin in relation to God, and the law, either as written on the tablets of man's heart or as given by Moses (Rom. 1:32, 2:12-14, 4:15, 5:13; James 2:9, 10; I John 3:4).

4. SIN INCLUDES BOTH GUILT AND POLLUTION

Sin is first of all guilt; that is, it is a transgression of the law, which makes men liable to the punishment of a righteous God. Many indeed deny that sin includes guilt, but this denial goes contrary to the fact that the sinner is threatened and actually visited with punishment, and to the plain statements of Scripture (Matt. 6:12; Rom. 3:19, 5:18; Eph. 2:3). Sin is also pollution, an inherent corruption to which every sinner is

subject. Guilt always carries pollution with it. Everyone who is guilty in Adam is, as a result, also born with a corrupt nature. The pollution of sin is clearly taught in certain biblical passages (Job 14:4; Jer. 17:9; Matt. 7:15–20; Rom. 8:5–8; Eph. 4:17–19).

5. SIN HAS ITS SEAT IN THE HEART

Sin does not reside in any one faculty of the soul, but in the heart, which in the psychology of Scripture is the central organ of the soul, out of which are the issues of life (Prov. 4:23). And from this center its influence and operations spread to the intellect, the will, the affections, in short, to the whole man, including his body. This view is clearly based on the representations of Scripture in such passages as the following: Prov. 4:23; Jer. 17:9; Matt. 15:19, 20; Luke 6:45; Heb. 3:12.

6. SIN DOES NOT CONSIST IN OUTWARD ACTS ONLY

Over against Pelagians⁹ and semi-Pelagians¹⁰ of every description, the fact should be emphasized that sin consists not only in outward acts, but also in sinful habits and in a sinful condition of the heart. These three are related to one another as follows: the sinful state is the basis of the sinful habits, and these, in turn, lead on to the sinful deeds. That the evil thoughts, affections, and intents of the heart should also be regarded as sinful follows from such passages as the following: Matt. 5:22, 28; Rom 7:7; Gal. 5:17, 24.

C. Divergent Views of Sin

There are several views of sin that are not at all in harmony with the scriptural representation of it. Just a few of these can be briefly indicated here.

9. Pelagians are those who agree with Pelagius in denying original sin and, consequently, in holding that mankind has perfect freedom to do either right or wrong.
10. R. C. Sproul states that semi-Pelagianism is “a somewhat middle ground between full-orbed Augustinianism and full-orbed Pelagianism.” Semi-Pelagians say, “While we are so fallen that we can’t be saved without grace [Augustine], we are not so fallen that we don’t have the ability to accept or reject the grace when it’s offered to us [Pelagius].” See Sproul’s article, “The Pelagian Captivity of the Church,” at <<http://www.modernreformation.org/mr01/mayjun/mr0103pelagian.html>>.

1. THE PELAGIAN VIEW OF SIN

The Pelagian does not believe in original sin, and therefore does not share the conviction that every man is born as a sinner. Adam was created, and every one of his descendants is born, in a state of moral neutrality, neither positively good nor positively bad. Sin is the result of the free choice of every man. No one need sin, if he does not want to. There is no such thing as a sinful nature or a sinful character; neither are there sinful dispositions. Sin consists only in a deliberate choice of evil by a will which is perfectly free, and can just as well choose and follow the good.

2. THE ROMAN CATHOLIC VIEW OF SIN

According to the Roman Catholics, original sin is primarily a negative condition, consisting in the absence of that original righteousness with which man was supernaturally endowed. It is a state of aversion to God, and therefore a state of sin. Actual sin consists only in those actions of man which are the result of a deliberate choice of the will. The unholy disposition, desires, and affections that lie behind these deeds may be of a sinful nature and tend to produce sin, but cannot themselves be considered as sin in the strictest sense of the word.

3. THE EVOLUTIONARY VIEW OF SIN

In modern liberal theology the evolutionary view of sin is very popular, though it is not always presented in exactly the same way. It was developed particularly in the works of Tennant. According to him, there are many impulses and qualities which man has inherited from the brute. These are not in themselves sin, but naturally become sin under certain conditions. There is a gradually awakening moral sense in man, which condemns those impulses and qualities. And these actually become sin, if man continues to yield to them in spite of the condemning voice of conscience. Sin consists in this, therefore, that man, as a moral being, still allows himself to be controlled by the appetites and passions of his sensual nature rather than by the aspirations of his higher nature.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW:

1. What is the biblical view of the origin of sin?
2. Can you name any other views?
3. What was the first sin?
4. Why was the tree concerned called "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil"?
5. What elements can be distinguished in the first sin?
6. Why did the tempter approach Eve?
7. Can you prove that Satan was the real tempter?
8. What were the results of the first sin?
9. Why is it undesirable to substitute the word "evil" for "sin"?
10. Is it possible for man to occupy a neutral position, neither good nor bad?
11. Is it correct to interpret sin with reference to man?
12. How can we prove that sin includes guilt?
13. Where does sin have its seat in man?
14. How can we prove that sin does not consist exclusively in outward acts?
15. What is the Pelagian, the Roman Catholic, and the evolutionary view of sin?

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Chapter 6: Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and of Punishment Thereof

3. *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.*

4. *From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.*

Sin in the Life of the Human Race

A. The Connection Between Adam's Sin and that of His Descendants

The Pelagians deny that there is any necessary connection between the sin of Adam and that of his descendants. The earlier Arminians maintain that man has inherited his natural corruption from Adam, but is in no sense responsible for the sin of the latter, while the later or Wesleyan Arminians admit that man's inborn corruption also involves guilt. There are especially three different ways of explaining the connection between the sin of Adam and that of his descendants.

1. THE REALISTIC THEORY

The earliest of the three is the realistic theory, which is to the effect that God originally created one general human nature, which in course of time is divided into as many parts as there are human individuals. Adam possessed the whole of this general human nature; and as the result of his sin it became guilty and polluted. Consequently, every individual part of it also shares in this guilt and pollution. This theory does not explain why we are responsible only for the first sin of Adam, and not for the rest of his sins, committed by the same human nature, nor for the sins of the rest of our forefathers. Neither does it give an answer to the question, why Christ was not held responsible for the sin of Adam, for He certainly shared the very nature that sinned in Adam.



2. THE THEORY OF IMMEDIATE IMPUTATION (COVENANT OF WORKS)

According to this view, Adam stood in a twofold relation to his descendants. He was the natural head of the human race, the progenitor of all the children of men. To this natural relationship God added the covenant relationship, in virtue of which Adam was also the representative head of all his descendants. When he sinned in this representative capacity, the guilt of his sin was naturally imputed to all those whom he represented, and as the result of this they are all born in a corrupt state. This theory explains why the descendants of Adam are responsible only for the one sin which he committed as head of the covenant, why they are not responsible for the sins of their forbearers, and why Christ, who is not simply a human person, does not share in the guilt of Adam.

3. THE THEORY OF MEDIATE IMPUTATION

The last theory proceeds on the assumption that the guilt of Adam's sin is not directly imputed to his descendants, and advocates the following idea: Adam's descendants derive their innate corruption from him by the process of natural generation; and on the basis of that inherent depravity which they share with him they are also considered guilty of his apostasy. They are not born corrupt because they are guilty in Adam, but they are considered guilty because they are born corrupt. If this theory were consistent, it ought to teach the mediate imputation of the sins of all previous generations to those following, for their joint corruption is passed on by generation. Moreover, by holding that our moral corruption is *imputed* to us as sin, it clearly implies that this corruption would not be guilt, if it were not so imputed; but there is no moral corruption that is not at the same time guilt, and that does not make one liable to punishment.

B. Original and Actual Sin

In a general way sin is divided into original and actual sin.

1. ORIGINAL SIN

In virtue of their connection with Adam all men are, after the fall, born in a sinful state and condition. This state is called original sin and is the inward root of all the actual sins that defile the life of man. It contains two elements:

- a. *Original Guilt.* This means that the guilt of Adam's sin is imputed to us. Since he sinned as our representative, we are guilty in him. This means that the state in which we are born is one of willful violation of the law, and that we are therefore by nature liable to punishment. The Arminians of the seventeenth century and the advocates of modern liberal theology both deny that original sin involves original guilt. Yet this is certainly the case according to the plain teachings of Scripture (Rom. 5:12–19; Eph. 2:3).
- b. *Original Pollution.* The descendants of Adam are not only burdened with his guilt, but also inherit from him their moral pollution. They are not only deprived of original righteousness, but also have an inherent positive disposition toward sin. This pollution may be considered from two different points of view:
 - 1) *As Total Depravity.* This does not mean that every man is as bad as he can be, cannot do good in any sense of the word, and has absolutely no sense of admiration for the true, the good, and the beautiful. It does mean, however, that inherent corruption extends to every part of man's nature, and that there is in him no spiritual good, that is good in relation to God, at all, but only moral perversion. The total depravity of man is denied by Pelagians, Socinians, and the earlier Arminians, but is clearly taught by Scripture (John 5:42; Rom. 7:18, 23; 8:7; II Cor. 7:1; Eph. 4:18; II Tim. 3:2–4; Tit. 1:15; Heb. 3:12).
 - 2) *As Total Inability.* Here, again, it is necessary to distinguish. Reformed theologians generally maintain that the sinner is still able to perform (a) natural good; (b) civil good or civil righteousness; and (c) externally religious good. He may perform acts and manifest sentiments that deserve the sincere approval and gratitude of their fellowmen, and that even meet in a measure

with the approval of God. Yet when these works are considered in relation to God, they are radically defective, since they are not prompted by love to God, nor by any regard for the will of God as requiring them. Moreover, man cannot change his fundamental preference for sin to love for God, nor even make an approach to such a change. There is abundant Scriptural support for this doctrine (John 1:13; 3:5; 6:44; 8:34; 15:4, 5; Rom. 7:18, 24; 8:7, 8; I Cor. 2:14; II Cor. 3:5; Eph. 2:1, 8-10; Heb. 11:6).

2. ACTUAL SIN

a. *The Difference Between Actual and Original Sin.* The term “actual sin” denotes not only sins consisting in outward acts, but also all those conscious thoughts and volitions which proceed from original sin. They are the sins which an individual performs, in distinction from his inherited nature and inclination.

While original sin is one, actual sins are manifold. They may be sins of the inner life, such as pride, envy, hatred, sensual lusts and evil desires; or sins of the outer life, such as deceit, theft, murder, adultery, and so on. While the existence of original sin has met and is still meeting with widespread denial, the presence of actual sin, at least in some sense of the word, is generally admitted. At the present time, however, many deny that it constitutes guilt, and thus close their eyes to the real sinfulness of sin.

b. *The Unpardonable Sin.*

There are passages of Scripture which speak of a sin that cannot be forgiven, after which a change of heart is impos-

sible, and for which it is not necessary to pray (Matt. 12:31, 32; Mark 3:28–30; Luke 12:10; Heb. 4:4–6; 10:26, 27; I John 5:16). It is generally known as the sin or blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. This sin consists in the conscious, malicious, and willful rejection and slandering, against evidence and conviction, of the testimony of the Holy Spirit respecting the grace of God in Jesus Christ, attributing it out of hatred and enmity to the prince of darkness. It presupposes in those who commit it a rather profound knowledge of the truth, an inner illumination of the Holy Spirit, and an intellectual conviction of the truth so strong and powerful as to make an honest denial of it impossible. The sin itself then consists not simply in doubting the truth or in a simple denial of it, but in a contradiction of it that goes contrary to the conviction of the mind and to the illumination of the conscience. It is unpardonable, not because its guilt transcends the merits of Christ, or because the sinner is beyond the renewing power of the Holy Spirit; but because it is a sin that excludes all repentance, sears the conscience, and hardens the sinner. In those who have committed this sin we may therefore expect to find a pronounced hatred of God, a defiant attitude to Him and to all that is divine, delight in ridiculing and slandering that which is holy, and absolute unconcern respecting the welfare of their soul and the future life. In view of the fact that this sin is not followed by repentance, we may be reasonably sure that they who fear that they have committed it, who worry about it, and who desire the prayers of others for them, have not committed it.

C. The Universality of Sin

Scripture and experience both teach us that sin is universal. Even Pelagians do not deny this, though they ascribe it to external conditions, such as a bad environment, evil examples, and a wrong kind of education. According to Scripture, however, the explanation for it lies in the fall of Adam and in the imputation of his sin to all his descendants. It may be proved in various ways:



1. UNIVERSALITY OF SIN

The universality of sin is asserted in several direct statements of Scripture. The following are some of the most important passages that come into consideration here: I Kings 8:46; Ps. 143:2; Prov. 20:9; Eccl. 7:20; Rom. 3:1–12, 19, 20, 23; Gal. 3:22; James 3:2; I John 1:8, 10.

2. THE UNIVERSAL HERITAGE OF SIN

Several passages of Scripture teach that sin is the heritage of man from the time of his birth, and is therefore present in human nature so early that it cannot possibly be considered as the result of imitation (Job 14:4; Ps. 51:5; John 3:6).

3. UNIVERSAL VISITATION OF DEATH

Death as the penalty of sin is visited even upon those who have never exercised a personal and conscious choice (Rom. 5:12–14). This passage implies that sin exists, in the case of infants, prior to moral consciousness. Since infants die, and therefore the effect of sin is present in their case, it is but natural to assume that the cause is also present.

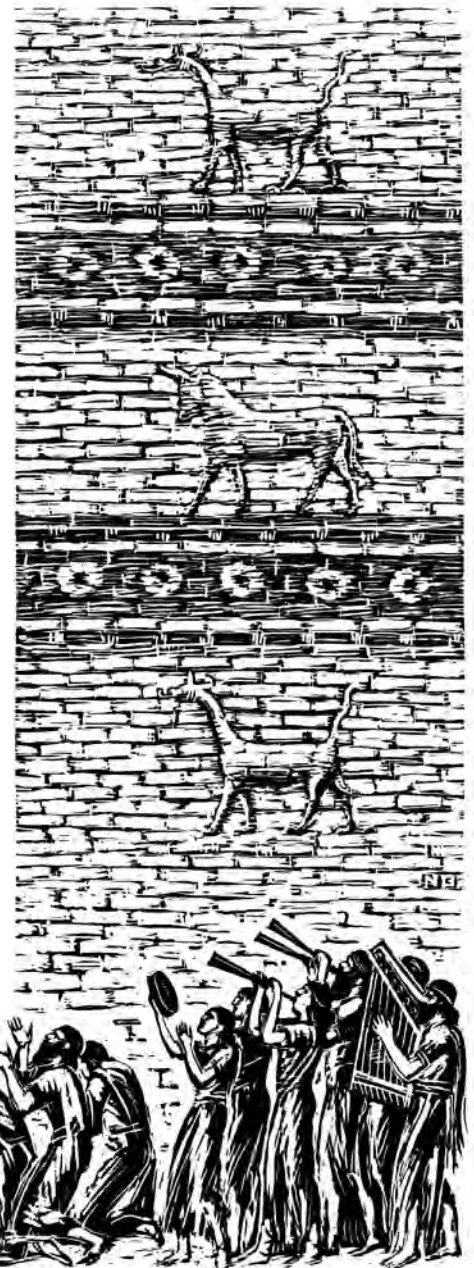
4. UNIVERSAL CONDEMNATION AND NEED OF REDEMPTION

According to Scripture, all men are under condemnation and therefore need the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. Children are never made an exception to this rule. This follows from the passages quoted under (1), and also from John 3:3, 5; Eph. 2:3; I John 5:12. They all need the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit unto salvation.

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW:

1. What different opinions are there respecting the connection between Adam's sin and that of his descendants?
2. What is the realistic theory, and why is it objectionable?
3. How does the doctrine of the covenant of works conceive of the connection between the sin of Adam and our sinful condition?
4. What advantages has this view?
5. What solution of the problem is suggested by the theory of mediate imputation?
6. What objections are there to this solution?
7. What is original sin?
8. What two elements does it include?
9. How should we conceive of man's total depravity?
10. How must his total inability be understood?

*Worship of golden statue—
ninety feet high and nine feet wide.*



11. What is included in actual sin?
12. How does actual sin differ from original sin?
13. What is the nature of the unpardonable sin?
14. Can there be any reasonable doubt as to the universality of sin?
15. What explanation do some offer for this?
16. How does the Bible account for it?

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5. This corruption of nature, during this life, doth remain in those that are regenerated; and although it be, through Christ, pardoned and mortified, yet both itself and all the motions thereof are truly and properly sin.

6. Every sin, both original and actual, being a transgression of the righteous law of God, and contrary thereunto, doth, in its own nature, bring guilt upon the sinner; whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God, and curse of the law, and so made subject to death, with all miseries spiritual, temporal, and eternal.



Man in the Covenant of Grace

The Covenant of Redemption

In the covenant of redemption we have an agreement between the Father, as the representative of the Trinity, and the Son, as the representative of His people, in which the latter undertakes to meet the obligations of those whom the Father has given Him, and the former promises the Son all that is necessary for His redemptive work. This eternal covenant is the firm foundation of the covenant of grace. If there had been no eternal counsel of peace between the Father and the Son, there could have been no agreement between God and the sinner. The covenant of redemption makes the covenant of grace possible.

A. The Scriptural Basis for the Covenant of Redemption

The *covenant of redemption* is frequently called the “counsel of peace,” a name that is derived from Zech. 6:13. The doctrine of this eternal counsel rests on the following Scriptural basis:

1. INCLUDED IN THE ETERNAL DECREE OF GOD

Scripture clearly points to the fact that the plan of redemption was included in the eternal decree or counsel of God (Eph. 1:4 ff.; 3:11; II Thess. 2:13; II Tim. 1:9; James 2:5; I Peter 1:2, etc.).

2. THE NATURE OF A COVENANT

There are passages which point to the fact that the plan of God for the salvation of sinners was of the nature of a covenant. Christ speaks of promises made to Him before His advent, and repeatedly refers to a commission which He received from the Father (John 5:30, 43; 6:38–40; 17:4–12). Moreover, in Rom. 5:12–21 and in I Cor. 15:22 He is clearly represented as a covenant head. The parallel between Adam and Christ leaves no doubt on this point.