

# On the Scope of Adam's Universal Condemnation and Its Implications on the Doctrine of "The Age of Accountability" from *Freed Indeed* XIII.4

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Though Romans 7:14-25 does not deal directly with original sin and the imputation of Adam's guilt to his offspring, it does offer clarification as to the scope of Adam's sin and its punishment. Romans 5:12-21, like our present text, is a very difficult passage of Scripture with regard to its subject and its complexity. In it, the Apostle deals with the very difficult subject of original sin and the universal condemnation afforded by that sin. The Apostle complicates the passage exponentially by introducing Jesus Christ as the Second Adam and by comparing and contrasting the two God-ordained heads of the human race. The passage is complicated further by the Apostle's seemingly free use of universal and particular language, making it seem at one point that Christ is the universal head of the human race and at another, the head of a particular race. Thus the passage reads:

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if *the many* died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for *the many*. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man's trespass, *death reigned* through that one man, much more will *those* who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for *all men*, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for *all men*. For as by the one man's disobedience *the many* were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience *the many* will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 5:15-21, emphasis mine).

There are several terms to note when trying to understand this passage. First is the persons over whom Christ is head. At some points in the passage, Christ is said to be the head of "the many" and at other points, "all men." Second is the grace afforded to those over whom Christ is head. For the many is the "abundance of grace" (vv. 5:15, 17, 20), and for all men, the "grace of God" (v. 5:15). Third is the state of those over whom Christ is head. For the many, is the state of "righteousness" (v. 5:17, 19, 21), and for all men, "justification" (v.

5:16, 18). Fourth is the life granted to those over whom Christ is head. For the many is “eternal life” (v. 5:21), and for all men, “life” (v. 5:18).

Through this passage alone, we can deduce that Christ’s headship and the grace that God gives through Christ is universal in one respect and particular in another. What is not so clear however is the scope of the condemnation (whether it be temporal or eternal death) of Adam’s sin imputed to all of his offspring. For this, Romans 7 offers a clearer insight. In v. 7:9, the Apostle writes, “I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died.” In this verse, the Apostle clarifies what can be deduced in Romans 5:12-21, viz. that the death afforded by Adam is strictly temporal in nature, viz. that the punishment afforded to all men through Adam is physical death. For in v. 7:9, the speaker, being a descendent of Adam, is already condemned to physical death and yet is said to die when he encounters the law and transgresses it. Therefore, it can be said that spiritual death comes to the speaker when he first comprehends the law of God and transgresses against that law (cf. v. 1:20). The experience of the speaker of Romans 7 is identical to the experience of Adam, for God said to Adam, “On the day that you eat of the tree, you shall surely die,” and yet Adam remained physically alive after he ate. God’s word did not fail, for Adam, like the speaker of Romans 7, died spiritually the moment that he transgressed the commandment though he did not die physically until much later.

Was not the sin of Adam sufficient for both the physical and spiritual death of his offspring? It was indeed, but we see even from Genesis 3 the promised coming of the second Adam who would crush the head of the serpent and who granted Adam and his offspring, even prior to his coming, the grace of physical life though they deserved immediate, physical death. Paul puts it this way in Romans 3:23-25, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.” This divine forbearance that allowed God to pass over the sins of the human race and not to commit the race immediately to the judgment of physical death did not come without a price, but it came through the very blood of his Son, Jesus Christ. Here we see clearly how Christ is the universal head of all men and is also the particular head of the many. Christ is head of all men insofar as God through his death grants to all men a measure of physical life. Christ was offered up as a propitiation for the human race—a temporal turning aside of the wrath of God so that all men are temporarily justified in the sight of God so that they will not immediately bear the physical condemnation of Adam’s sin or their own transgressions. This is indeed a grace of God afforded by Christ for all men, for apart from this universal grace no man would live.

This grace of physical life that God grants to all men through Christ, the second Adam, has an even greater purpose, of which the Apostle speaks in Romans 9:20-24 when objections are made against the purpose of God:

You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

In this weighty passage of Scripture we see that God not only withholds his wrath from all men so that those who would believe in Christ would come to him in faith but also so that those who would be vessels of the abundance of God's mercy would comprehend the riches of the grace of God granted to them through Christ. Christ's universal headship that withholds the hand of God's judgment exists ultimately to bring glory to his name through the realization of his great and particular mercy that he has shown to those over whom Christ is their particular head in the abundance of grace. Of this abundance of grace, the saints of God will sing forever, witnessing how God has sovereignly called them out of the world of common grace and into the fold of particular and abundant grace.

Going back to the testimony of Romans 7:9, the justification that Christ grants to all men is justification of the original sin of Adam that brings eternal condemnation. Though those who have not sinned after the likeness of the offense of Adam might fall under the physical curse and die without comprehending and volitionally transgressing a law (e.g. infants, mentally handicapped, etc.), their condemnation is not eternal death, for where there is no comprehension of the law there is no imputation of sin (v. 5:13). Thus it can be said that those who are children of Adam who have not comprehended the law of God, be it the Mosaic law or Natural law, are spiritually alive until they reach a point of comprehension of God's law. This fact is clearly seen in v. 7:9 where the speaker says, "I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive, and I died." The sin that came alive in the speaker, viz. covetousness from the command, "You shall not covet," was sufficient enough to kill the speaker spiritually thereby affording him enslavement to sin and eternal damnation. And though Christ is the speaker's universal head, who relieves him from original sin's eternal condemnation, the curse of original sin, that which indwells the speaker and remains dormant until cognition of the law of God, is such that it is certain to kill the speaker the very moment that recognition of the law of God occurs.

All this is to say that Christ's universal headship is such that it justifies eternally those who have died apart from comprehension of the law of God, be it the Mosaic law or Natural law. This doctrine is commonly expressed as the "age of accountability," but until studying Romans 5:12-21 in light of Romans 7:9, I have never encountered Scriptural warrant for the doctrine. Indeed, I was quite on the fence, as it were, with regard to the salvation of those who died apart from volitionally transgressing the law, for I have always heard it argued from texts that were never meant to express that truth. This doctrine,

expressed from Romans 5:12-21 and Romans 7:9, places the salvation of those who have not sinned in the likeness of Adam's offense in its proper light, viz. in the grace of God afforded by the work of Christ. For apart from Christ even those who have never comprehended the law of God are under the condemnation of Adam which is both temporal and eternal death. However, Christ's work as the Second Adam has placed all men under his headship, justifying them from the eternal condemnation of Adam sin. All men are relieved of this judgment of eternal condemnation until they comprehend the law of God, which brings with it certain rebellion and death because of the sin that indwells all men and remains dead until the time of that cognition.

Therefore, the doctrine that is known as the "age of accountability" would be better named the "state of accountability," for it is not a certain age that makes one accountable to God, but it is a state of comprehension. For the very moment that a person, no matter his age, comprehends a command of God and by his sinful nature rebels against it and thereby rebels against God, he dies spiritually, becomes enslaved to sin, and is condemned in the sight of God. This rebellion against the commandments of God can indeed come at a young age, therefore making the declaration of the Gospel to children of great import. No parent should withhold from his child the teaching of the Gospel, especially if he sees in his child the evidences of rebellion. The first thing that a child should learn from his parent is that his rebellion has a much weightier consequence than a rod on the back—condemnation in the sight of a holy God. Every spanking of a child for his rebellion must then be used as an opportunity for the Gospel, so that through that discipline a parent might save his child from eternal damnation (cf. Proverbs 23:14).