

Lecture XXIV.

Of Sin By Imputation And Propagation.

Rom. v. 12.—“Wherefore, 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.”

This is a sad subject to speak upon, yet it is not more sad than useful. Though it be unpleasant to hold out a glass to men, to see their own vile faces into, yet is it profitable, yea, and so necessary, that till once a soul apprehend its broken and desolate condition in the first Adam, it can never heartily embrace and come to the second Adam. You have here the woful and dreadful effects and consequents of the first transgression upon all mankind. The effect is twofold,—sin and misery, or sin and death. The subject is universal in both,—“all men,” the whole world. Behold what a flood of calamity hath entered at a small cranny—by one man's transgression! May it not be said of sin in general, what the wise man speaks of strife,—“the beginning of” sin “is as when one letteth out water?” Therefore it had been good leaving it oft before it had been meddled with, it entered at a small hole, but it hath overflowed a whole world since.

That which first occurs, is, that all mankind, proceeding from Adam by ordinary birth are involved in sin by Adam's transgression. But that may seem a hard saying, that sin and death should flow unto the whole posterity who had no accession to Adam's transgression. It would seem, that every man should die for his own iniquity, and that it should reach no further injustice. But consider, I pray you, the relation that Adam stood into, and in which he is here holden out as a figure of Christ. Adam, the first man, was a common person, representing all mankind, in whose

happiness or misery all should share. God contracts with him on these terms that his posterity's estate should depend on his behaviour. Now, if all mankind would have reaped the benefit and advantage of Adam's perseverance,—if such an undeserved reward of eternal life would have redounded by the free promise unto them all,—what iniquity is it that they also be sharers in his misery? Our stock and treasure was ventured in this vessel, and if we were to partake of its gain, why not of its loss? You see among men, children have one common lot with their parents. If the father be forfeited, the heirs suffer in it, and are cast out of the inheritance. It might appear a surer way to have the fortunes of all—so to speak—depend upon one, and their happiness assured unto them upon the standing of one, than to have every one left to himself, and his own well-being depending upon his own standing, as it is more likely one, and that the first one, shall not sin, than many; and especially when that one knew that the weight of all his posterity hung upon him, it might have made him very circumspect, knowing of how great moment his carriage was. But certainly we must look a little higher than such reasons, there was a glorious purpose of God's predominant in this, else there [112] was no natural necessity of imputing Adam's sin to the children not yet born, or propagating it to the children. He that brought a holy One and undefiled out of a virgin who was defiled, could have brought all others clean out of unclean parents. But there is a higher counsel about it. The Lord would have all men subject to his judgment,—all men once guilty, once in an equal state of misery, to illustrate that special grace showed in Christ the more, and demonstrate his power and wrath upon others. That which concerns us most is to believe this, that sin hath overspread all, and to have the lively impressions of this were of more moment to true religion than many discourses upon it. I had rather you went home not cursing Adam, or murmuring against the Most High, but bemoaning yourselves for your wretched estate than be able to give reasons for the general imputation and propagation

of sin. You all see it is, and therefore you should rather mourn for it than ask why it is.

There is “sin entered into the world” by imputation, and also by propagation. Adam's first sin and heinous transgression is charged upon all his posterity, and imputed unto them, even unto them who have not sinned according to “the similitude of Adam's transgression,” that is, actually as he did. Infants, whom you call innocents,—and indeed so they are in respect of you, who are come to age,—yet they are guilty before God of that sin that ruined all. Now, that ye may know what you are, and what little reason you have to be pleased with yourselves, and absolve yourselves as ye do, I shall unbowel that iniquity unto you. First, There was in it an open banner displayed against God. When the sovereign Lord had enjoined his creature such a testimony of his homage and loyalty, and that so easy to be performed, and such as not a whit could abate from his happiness, what open rebellion was it to refuse it! It was a casting off the sovereign dominion of God, than which nothing can be more heinous, as if the clay should refuse to serve the potter's pleasure, and therefore it is eminently and signally styled disobedience, as having nothing in it but the pure naked nature of disobedience, no difficulty to excuse it, for it was most easy, no pleasure to plead for it, for there were as good fruit beside, and a world of them, no necessity to extenuate it, so that you can see nothing in it but the ugly face of disobedience and rebellion, (ver. 19.) whereby man draweth himself from his allegiance due to his Maker, and shaketh off the yoke in reproach of the Most High. Next, you may behold the vile and abominable face of ingratitude and unthankfulness in it, and truly heathens have so abhorred unthankfulness towards men, that they could not digest the reproach of it,—*Ingratum si dixeris, omnia dixeris*, if you call me unthankful, you may call me any thing or all things.¹⁵³ It is a compend of all vices. It

¹⁵³ [Lycurgus, the Spartan lawgiver, made no law against ingratitude, it is said, because he conceived that no one could be so irrational as to be unthankful for

is even iniquity grown to maturity and ripeness. But that such a fruit should grow out of such a holy and good soil, so well dressed and manured by the Lord was a wonder! Lord, what was man that thou didst so magnify him, and make him a little lower than the angels,—that thou didst put all things sublunary under his feet, and exalt him above them! For that creature chosen and selected from among all, to be his minion, to stand in his presence, adorned and beautified with such gifts and graces, magnified with such glorious privileges, made according to the most excellent pattern, his own image, to forget all, and forget so soon, and when he had such a spacious garden to make use of as is supposed to make up the third part of the earth, to eat of no fruit but that which was forbidden,—there is no such monstrous ingratitude can be imagined as here was acted! But then consider the two fountains from which this flowed, unbelief and pride, and you shall find it the heaviest sin in the world,—unbelief of his word and threatening. First, he was brought to question it, and to doubt of it, and then to deny it. A word so solemnly and particularly told him by the truth itself, that ever a question of it could arise in his mind or get entry, what else was it than to impute iniquity to the holy One, and that iniquity, falsehood and lying, which his nature most abhors? What was it but to blaspheme the most high and faithful God, by hearkening to the suggestions of his enemy, and to credit them more than the threatenings of God,—to give the very flat contradiction to God,—we shall not die, and to assent so heartily to Satan's slanders and reproaches of God? And this unbelief opened a door to ambition and pride, the most sacrilegious ingredient of all, which is most opposite to God, and unto which he most opposed himself from the beginning: “Ye shall be as gods.” Was he not happy enough already, and according to God's image? Nay, but this evil principle would arise up to the throne of God, and sit down in his stead. Pride hath atheism in it; to deny the true God,

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and yet would be a god itself! For the footstool to lift up itself thus, what an indignity was it! And indeed this wretched aim at so high an estate hath thrown us down as low as hell. You see then how injurious this transgression was to God. There was disobedience and rebellion in it, which denies his dominion and supremacy; there was unthankfulness in it, denying his goodness and bounty; there was unbelief in it, contradicting his truth and faithfulness; and finally, pride, opposing itself to all that is in God, reaching up to his very crown of Majesty to take it off. You see then what you are guilty of, in being guilty of Adam's transgression. Many of you flatter yourselves in your own eyes that you have not done much evil, and you will justify yourselves in your comparisons with others; but I beseech you, consider this, though you had never done personally good or evil here, that which drowned the world in misery is your sin, and charged upon you. You are guilty of that which ruined all mankind, and makes the creation "subject to vanity" and corruption. O if ye believe this, you would find more need of the second Adam than you do! O how precious would his righteousness and obedience be to you, if you had rightly apprehended your interest in the first man's disobedience!

But besides this imputation, there is much more propagated unto all, and that is a total corruption and depravation of nature in soul and body, whereby man is utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite unto all that is truly and spiritually good, and wholly inclined to all evil, and that continually, which is commonly called original sin,—a total averseness from God and from all goodness, an antipathy against the ways of holiness,—and a propension and strong impulse towards evil, even as a stone moves downwards. This poison and contagion of sin entering into the world hath infected all, and gone through all the members. Neither is it any wonder that it is so, when this leprosy hath defiled the walls and roof of the house,—I mean, hath made the creation "subject to vanity" and corruption; it is no wonder that

it spread abroad in his issue, and makes all unclean like himself. And truly this is it which most abases man's nature, and, being seen, would most humble men. Yea, till this be discerned, no man can be indeed humbled. He will never apprehend himself so bad as he is, but still imagine some excellency in himself, till he see himself in this glass. You talk of good natures, and good dispositions, but in our flesh, saith the apostle, "dwelleth no good thing." The seeds of all wickedness are in every one of us; and it is the goodness of God for preserving of human society, that they are restrained and kept down in any from the grossest outbreakings. They know not themselves, who know any good of themselves; and they know not themselves, who either are in admiration at, or in bitterness or contempt against, other sinners, whose sins are manifest to all. This were the only way to profit by looking on their evils, if we could straightway retire within and behold the root of that in ourselves, the fountain of it within us, and so grow in loathing, not of those persons, but of human nature, and in suitable thoughts of ourselves and others, and might wonder at the goodness and undeserved bounty of the Lord, that passes an act of restraint upon our corruption, and dams it up. O that we could learn to loathe ourselves in other men's evils! Thus we might reap good out of the evil, and prevent more in ourselves. But the looking upon gross provocations as singularities, makes them more general, because every man does not charge himself with the corruption that is in all these, but prefers himself to another. Therefore are reins loosed to corruption, and a sluice opened that it may come out—that he who would not see his own image in another's face, may behold it in the glass of his own abominations. There is no point less believed than this though generally confessed, that man is dead in sins and trespasses, and impotent to help himself. You will hardly take with wickedness when you confess weakness, as if nature were only sick, but not dead,—hurt, but not killed. Therefore it is that so many do abide in themselves, and trusting to their own good

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purposes and resolutions and endeavours, do think to pacify God and help themselves out of their misery. But O look again, and look in upon yourselves in the glass of the word, and there is no doubt but you will straightway be filled with confusion of face, and be altogether spoiled of good confidence and hope, as you call it! You will find yourself plunged in a pit of misery, and all strength gone, and none on the right hand, or the left to help you; and then, and not till then, will the second Adam's hand, stretched out for help, be seasonable.

That which next follows is that which is the companion of sin inseparably,—“Death hath passed upon all,” and that by sin. Adam's one disobedience opened a port for all sin to enter upon mankind, and sin cannot enter without this companion, death. Sin goes before, and death follows on the back of it; and these suit one another, as the work and the wages, as the tree and the fruit. They have a fitness one to another. Sowing to corruption reaps an answerable harvest, to wit, corruption. Sowing to the wind, and reaping the whirlwind, how suitable are they! That men may know how evil and bitter a thing sin is, he makes this the fruit of it in his first law and sanction given out to men,—he joins them inseparably,—sin and death, sin and wrath, sin and a curse. By death is not only meant bodily death, which is the separation of the soul from the body, but first the spiritual death of the soul, consisting in a separation of the soul from God's blessed, enlightening, enlivening, and comforting countenance. Man's true life, wherein he differs from beasts, consists in the right aspect of God upon his soul,—in his walking with God, and keeping communion with him. All things besides this are but common and base, and this was cut off. His comfort, his joy and peace in God extinct, God became terrible to his conscience; and therefore man did flee and was afraid, when he heard his voice in the garden. Sin being interposed between God and the soul, cut off all the influence of heaven. Hence arises darkness of mind, hardness of heart, delusions, vile affections, horrors of

conscience. Look what difference is between a living creature and a dead carcase, so much is between Adam's soul, upright, living in God, and Adam's soul separated from God by sin. Then upon the outward man the curse redounds. The body becomes mortal which had been incorruptible. It is now like a besieged city. Now some outer forts are gained by diseases, now by pains and torments; the outward walls of the body are at length overcome; and when life hath fled into a castle within the city, the heart, that is, last of all, besieged so straitly, and stormed so violently, that it must render unto death upon any terms. The body of man is even a seminary of a world of diseases and grievances, that if men could look upon it aright, they might see the sentence of death every day performed. Then how many evils in estate, in friends and relations, in employments, which being considered by heathens, hath made them praise the dead more than the living, but him not yet born most of all, because the present life is nothing else but a valley of misery and tears, a sea of troubles, where one wave continually prevents another, and comes on like Job's messengers; before one speaks out his woful tidings, another comes with such like, or worse. But that which is the sum and accomplishment of God's curse and man's misery is that death to come,—eternal death,—not death simply, but an “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power;”—an infinite loss, because the loss of such a glorious life in the enjoyment of God's presence; and an infinite hurt and torment beside, and both eternal.

Now this is what we would lay before you. You are under such a heavy sentence from the womb, a sentence of the Almighty, adjudging you for Adam's guilt and your own, to all the misery in this world and in the next,—to all the treasures of wrath that are heaped up against the day of wrath. And strange it is, how we can live in peace, and not be troubled in mind, who have so great and formidable a party! Be persuaded, O be persuaded, that there shall not one jot of this be removed,—it must be fulfilled

in you or your cautioner! And why then is a Saviour offered, a city of refuge opened, and secure sinners will not flee into it? But as for as many as have the inward dreadful apprehension of this wrath to come, and know not what to do, know that to you is Jesus Christ preached, the second Adam, a quickening spirit, and in that consideration, better than the first,—not only a living soul himself, but a spirit to quicken you who are dead in sins,—one who hath undertaken for you, and will hold you fast. Adam, who should have kept us, lost himself; Christ in a manner lost himself to save us. And as by Adam's disobedience all this sin and misery hath abounded on man, know, that the second Adam's obedience and righteousness are of greater virtue and efficacy to save and instead of sin to restore righteousness, and instead of death to give life. Therefore you may come to him, and you shall be more surely kept than before.

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