

Study in Romans

Doctrine > Good News > Temporal Blessings > Paul Explains Imputation
Romans 5:12-21

This second half of chapter five is somewhat enigmatic at first because we are not used to thinking in terms of imputation. But without this concept of imputation, we will not make sense of how the righteousness of Christ can be applied to so many people from the act of one man (i.e., justification).

Imputation comes from the Greek word *ellogeo*. It is a compound word meaning “in word” or “in writing.” It means to charge something to one’s account. Paul uses this word in Philemon 1:18, “If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account.” Paul was offering to clear up any financial debts still owed by the runaway-slave-turned-believer Onesimus with his master Philemon. In the same way, all mankind has fallen into condemnation because of the actions of our representative, Adam. The basic idea is guilt by association. In the eyes of the law, all those associated with Adam are also charged with his crime even though they did not sin the same way as he did. Those who lived and died from Adam to Moses were imputed with the sin of Adam legally.

To this point in Romans, Paul has been speaking of all of us as natural sinners. Now he reveals that all of us are also legal sinners. Why is this important? He uses this to show how justification works. By comparing Christ the Second Adam to the first Adam, he shows how the actions of a representative Head can charge the legal accounts of all those under the headship. Just as in Adam the old humanity have been condemned, so in Christ the new humanity is made righteous through this same principle of imputation or charging to one’s account.

1. Paul starts to explain imputation (v. 12)
2. Paul injects a parenthetical explanation of how death could be in the world prior to the Law given through Moses (vv. 13-17)
3. Paul continues to explain imputation (vv. 18-19)
4. Paul contrasts sin and grace. Where sin once had its way (“reigned”), grace now reigns to abound not only to the payment of sin’s debt, but to the abounding of eternal life (vv. 20-21)