

Lord, at Thy Feet We Sinners Lie*Simon Browne (1680–1732)*

Lord, at Thy feet we sinners lie,
 And knock at mercy's door:
 With heavy heart and downcast eye,
 Thy favor we implore.

On us, the vast extent display
 Of Thy forgiving love;
 Take all our heinous guilt away;
 This heavy load remove.

'Tis mercy—mercy we implore;
 We would Thy pity move;
 Thy grace is an exhaustless store,
 And Thou Thyself art Love.

Oh! for Thine own, for Jesus' sake,
 Our numerous sins forgive;
 Thy grace our rocky hearts can break,
 Our breaking hearts relieve.

Thus melt us down, thus make us bend,
 And Thy dominion own;
 Nor let a rival dare pretend
 To repossess Thy throne.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***Tried with Fire: Why Us?***Kevin T. Bauder*

The early chapters of Genesis trace death to Adam's sin. Along with death came an entire brood of calamities. Alienation from God, suspicion of and hostility toward other people, grinding labor, sorrow, and physical pain all began with the sentence of death. At that time the created order was altered so that things no longer functioned according to their original design and purpose. For example, the ground was cursed and certain plants were changed so that they became hindrances to human wellbeing.

The New Testament teaches much the same: Adam's sin brought death and its brood. In 1 Corinthians 15:21 Paul states that death came through a human being. In the next verse he identifies this person as Adam. Paul adds that all die in Adam, linking every human death to Adam's original transgression.

The apostle further develops this theme in Romans 5:12-21. Verse 12 may teach more about the human condition than any other single verse in the Bible: "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...." Here Paul links Adam, sin, and death. Death came into the world only through sin. Sin entered the world only through Adam.

In Romans 8, which continues Paul's argument from Romans 5, he further explains disorder and suffering in the world. He begins by noting that believers are sons of God and joint-heirs with Christ, joined with Him both in suffering and in expecting glorification (16-17). The sufferings, he explains, are far less significant than the eventual glory (18). Paul then uses a conjunction that links human suffering to the futility of the created order (19), observing that creation is presently in slavery to decay (20-21). This slavery is not something that creation chose for itself; rather, decay was imposed upon it (20). The result is that the whole created order has been groaning and suffering in labor-like pains ever since (22). As part of this general decay, human beings, including believers, also experience groaning (23). Both human suffering and the suffering of creation in general will continue until believers are manifested as God's children and adopted sons, an event that will occur at the redemption of their bodies—a clear reference to their bodily resurrection (21, 23).



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Romans 8 and Romans 5 have to be taken together. First, Romans 5:12 links human suffering and death to Adam’s original sin. Then Romans 8 teaches that human suffering and “natural” suffering (i.e., the suffering of the created order) are tied together. These notions form a single, biblical idea that matches the picture in Genesis 3, namely, that Adam’s sin brought death and its brood upon both humankind and the created order.

Furthermore, Romans 5 specifies the reason that all humans (even those who are apparently innocent) suffer for Adam’s sin. Paul’s purpose in these verses is to discover the extent of human sinfulness. He reasons that, since death is the consequence of sin, the presence of death marks people as sinners. Given that all people die (an observable fact) he infers that all sinned (Rom. 5:12). Paul confirms this inference later in his discussion: the “many” (i.e., the entire human race) were constituted sinners by the disobedience of one human being (Rom. 5:19).

In other words, the reason that all people die is not simply because Adam sinned, but because they somehow participated in his sin. Theologians explain this participation in different ways. According to those who hold the theory of federal headship, Adam stood as the representative of the entire human race. While I do not object to this explanation as far as it goes, I believe a more complete one is available.

According to those who hold the theory of natural headship, Adam actually stood as the race itself. Natural headship takes a bit of explaining. At the present moment (mid-2019), the human race comprises nearly eight billion individuals. When I was born (1955) it included fewer than three billion. In 1800 the human race was still numbered in millions rather than billions. If we could trace the numbers we would find a time when the race was numbered in the thousands, and before that in the hundreds, and before that in the dozens. If we go far enough back, the entire human race consisted of only one individual. At that point, Adam was not only an individual person: he actually constituted the human race. Accordingly, when Adam sinned, the human race sinned, not as individual persons (except for Eve) but as a race.

Consequently, all who derive their life from Adam are already guilty of Adam’s sin, because they participated in the sin of the race. That is why Paul does not say that “all sin,” in the present tense (Rom. 5:12). He says that “all sinned,” with the past tense pointing back to Adam’s original transgression. In some sense Adam’s transgression was also ours. We sinned when he sinned. We all share the guilt of the human race. Because all humans participate in Adam’s guilt, they also suffer the consequences—even if they have never committed any act of personal transgression.

The inescapable teaching of Scripture is that even babies are sinners who participate in Adam’s guilt. Even though they are not yet capable of per-

sonal, moral choices, they are already sinners. They do not become sinners when they commit sins; on the contrary, they commit sins (if and when they reach a point of moral agency) because they are already sinners. We know this because babies die, and death only entered the world through sin. Whoever dies bears the guilt of sin.

Natural headship best accounts for the language of Romans 5:12, 18-19. It also makes the best sense, given that God’s breath of life was breathed only into Adam, and not into Eve or any of their descendants. The human race is not simply a collection of individuals. It is the continuation of the life given to Adam, which is shared with all who derive their life from him. Everyone whose life comes from Adam must necessarily be a sinner and thus inherits death and its brood.

The death penalty that came upon us in Adam involved more than physical death and suffering. It also involved alienation from and eventual condemnation by God—penalties that we often refer to as “spiritual death” and “eternal death.” The race-wide distribution of death creates a problem, however. If infants die because they are guilty of Adamic sin, then we must ask whether that guilt also condemns them to eternal separation from God. I’m not going to leave that question unanswered—but it will take a separate essay to address it.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
