13. Original Sin (2)

John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam’s Sin*, chs 3-4

John Calvin, *Institutes*, II.i

**Introduction**

In this session we’re continuing our study of the doctrine of original sin, looking at chapters 3 and 4 of John Murray’s book *The Imputation of Adam’s Sin*. This will complete our overview of Reformed (and some other) positions on the subject. Alongside Murray, I’ve also included some questions on Calvin, *Institutes*, II.i. You almost certainly won’t have time to read all this material, so please don’t try to. Instead, read whichever sections you feel most able and most inclined to. We’ll cover all the bases in the tutorial.

Murray’s book has been re-printed as the appendix to *Justified in Christ* (ed. K. Scott Oliphint; Fearn: Christian Focus, 2007). The page numbers are different from the original, but the section markers and chapter headings remain intact, so we’ll use them (rather than the page numbers) to guide us through the questions.

(Just a quick reminder: the term “impute” means “count,” or “reckon”. Therefore to say that sin is “imputed” to someone means that it is “counted” against them, or “reckoned” to stand against them.)

Here’s a reminder of what Murray has said so far.

- In chapter 1 (sections I and II), Murray outlines the crucial text (Romans 5:12-21), and summarises four different views of the phrase “in that all sinned” (Romans 5:12). These views were (1) The Pelagian view (we imitate Adam’s sin); (2) The Roman Catholic view (non-culpable sinful state imputed, but no sinful act imputed); (3) Calvin’s view (*culpable* sinful state imputed, but no sinful act imputed); (4) The classical Protestant view (sinful state and sinful act imputed). Murray takes view (4).

- In chapter 2 (section III), Murray asks what kind of union between Adam and his descendants can account for the imputation of this sin. The two options are (1) Realist; (2) Federalist/representationist. Murray takes option (2).

This sets the stage for the next chapter, in which Murray addresses the following questions:

- In chapter 3 (section IV), Murray asks how the sin of Adam is imputed to his descendants. He considers two options: (1) Mediate imputation; (2) Immediate imputation. These terms are explained by Murray, and also in the text below.

- In chapter 4 (section V), Murray considers the character of our involvement in Adam’s sin. This is a complex chapter, and is not especially relevant for our purposes, so we won’t spend much time on it.
This material is some of the most complex we have yet encountered. It’s very worthwhile, but please don’t worry if you find it a bit baffling – just do what you can, and skip the questions marked with a * if you’re pressed for time.

I’ve also included some questions on the relevant chapter in Calvin’s *Institutes* (II.i). This is considerably easier than the final section of Murray; you might like to spend your time looking at Calvin instead. Whatever you spend your time reading, we’ll have plenty of opportunity in the tutorial to gather together the various loose ends.

Here, building on the partial outline from last week, is a full outline of the contents of Murray’s book:

**Outline of Murray, The Imputation of Adam’s Sin**

**Chapter 1**

Section I: Syntax of Romans 5:12-21

Section II: The meaning of “in that all sinned” (Romans 5:12)

1. The Pelagian interpretation
2. The Roman Catholic interpretation
3. Calvin’s interpretation
4. The Classical Protestant interpretation

**Chapter 2**

Section III: The nature of the solidarity between Adam and his descendants

1. The Realist view
2. The Representative (i.e. Federalist) view.

**Chapter 3**

Section IV: The mode of the imputation of Adam’s sin to his descendants

1. Mediate imputation
2. Immediate imputation

**Chapter 4**

Section V: The character of our involvement in Adam’s sin
Study Questions on Murray, *Imputation*, chs 3-4

Chapter 3 (section IV)

Chapter 3 is divided into two parts: (1) Mediate imputation; (2) Immediate imputation. Here’s a quick definition of these terms:

The doctrine of **mediate imputation** states that the sin of Adam *is not* imputed directly to his posterity; instead, Adam’s corrupt and sinful nature is imputed directly, and Adam’s sin is imputed as a consequence of the imputation of Adam’s corrupt nature. The imputation of Adam’s sin is thus *mediated* through the imputation of his corrupt nature.

The doctrine of **immediate imputation** states that the sin of Adam *is* imputed directly to his posterity, and that we inherit Adam’s corrupt nature as a consequence of the imputation of his first sin. The imputation of Adam’s sin is thus *immediate* – it is *not* mediated through the imputation of his corrupt nature.

More detailed explanations are found early in this chapter of Murray, to which we now turn. Questions 1 to 10 focus on the first part of the chapter; questions 11 and 12 focus on the second.

1. What was Placaeus accused of believing by the 28th Synod of the Reformed Churches in France in 1644-45?

2. Murray helpfully explains what Placaeus actually believed: “In a word his position was...” what? *For reflection: How do you think Placaeus would have felt when he received news of the decrees of the 28th Synod of the Reformed Churches in France?*

After a brief discussion of some of the debates that took place at the 28th Synod of the Reformed Churches in France, Murray proceeds to outline the views of some other theologians whose views in some (though not necessarily all) respects resembled the doctrine of mediate imputation. We’ll look particularly at Samuel Hopkins, Nathanael Emmons, Timothy Dwight and Nathaniel W. Taylor, before turning our attention to the altogether more sophisticated and subtle theology of Jonathan Edwards.

3. What did Samuel Hopkins believe about the imputation of Adam’s sin? *For reflection: Why might Hopkins’s position seem attractive?*

4. What is wrong with Hopkins’s position? Why can Hopkins’s view “scarcely be classified with the other exponents of mediate imputation”?

5. What underlying conviction do Nathanael Emmons and Timothy Dwight share?

*6. What “two explicit denials” were made by Nathaniel W. Taylor? What did Taylor affirm? What problems could you identify with Taylor’s position?*
We turn now to Jonathan Edwards’s doctrine of original sin. Here it gets a little complicated. Try to follow the threads as well as you can, but don’t despair if you feel a dull headache coming on. The tutorial will relieve the pain. In fact, if you’re pressed for time (or feeling slightly cross-eyed) then I suggest you skip straight on to question 11.


*8. What does Edwards’s position have in common with a doctrine of immediate imputation? How did he differ from Hopkins?

*9. What does Edwards mean when he rejects the idea of “double guilt”?

*10. Why does Edwards’s belief that “The evil disposition is first, and the charge of guilt consequent” not imply a doctrine of mediate imputation?

For reflection: How might Edwards rebut the claim that the imputation of Adam’s sin to his descendants is unjust?

We turn now to the second part of section IV, the doctrine of immediate imputation.

11. What arguments does Murray set forth in favour of the doctrine of immediate imputation?

*12. Does the fourth of Murray’s arguments in favour of immediate imputation challenge Jonathan Edwards’s position?

Chapter 4 (section V)

This final chapter is technical, and is not so significant for our purposes as the previous three. Don’t spend too much time on it – any questions, bring them to the tutorial

*13. What is the question under discussion in this section? How does it follow logically from the flow of the argument so far?

*14. What did Charles Hodge believe is imputed to Adam’s descendants? What is the problem with this view?

*16. What do you make of Murray’s attempts to answer the question posed in this section?

Study Questions on Calvin, *Institutes*, II.i

17. Calvin says we may “divide the knowledge that man ought to have of himself” into two parts (II.i.3). What are these two parts? What are the goals of these two aspects of self-knowledge?

Section 4 is a description of the sin of Adam.

18. Why, in Calvin’s view, was Adam “denied the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (II.i.4)? What do you make of Calvin’s description of Adam’s sin in the second half of II.i.4?

19. What does Calvin think is meant by the phrase “original sin” (II.i.5, 6, 8)? How does his view differ from other Reformed position outlined by John Murray in *The Imputation of Adam’s Sin*? Having read Murray, do you think he represents Calvin accurately?

20. What are the “two things” that Calvin is at pains to clarify in the second part of II.i.8?

21. How much does Calvin say about the mode of transmission of sin from one generation to the next (II.i.7)? Do you find his explanation satisfactory?

22. How does Calvin respond to the objection that God has created us sinful (II.i.10-11)? In what sense is our sinful nature “natural” (II.i.11)?