

Using Romans to Support Original Sin?

Albert Barnes

Excerpts From Albert Barnes' Notes on the Epistle to the Romans – Introduction

I add, (6.) That one principal reason why so much difficulty has been felt here, has been an unwillingness to stop where the apostle does. Men have desired to advance farther, and penetrate the mysteries which the Spirit of inspiration has not disclosed. Where Paul states a simple fact, men often advance a theory. The fact may be clear and plain; their theory is obscure, involved, mysterious, or absurd. By degrees they learn to unite the fact and the theory:--they regard their explanation as the only possible one; and as the fact in question has the authority of divine revelation, so they insensibly come to regard their theory in the same light; and he that calls in question their speculation about the cause, or the mode, is set down as heretical, and as denying the doctrine of the apostle. A melancholy instance of this we have in the account which the apostle gives (ch. v.) about the effect of the sin of Adam. The simple fact is stated that that sin was followed by the sin and ruin of all his posterity. Yet he offers no explanation of the fact. He leaves it as indubitable; and as not demanding an explanation in his argument--perhaps as not admitting it. This is the whole of his doctrine on that subject. Yet men have not been satisfied with that. They have sought for a theory to account for it. And many suppose they have found it in the doctrine that the sin of Adam is imputed, or set over by an arbitrary arrangement to beings otherwise innocent, and that they are held to be responsible for a deed committed by a man thousands of years before they were born. This is the theory; and men insensibly forget that it is mere theory, and they blend that and the fact which the apostle states together; and deem the denial of the one, heresy as much as the denial of the other, i.e. they make it as impious to call in question their philosophy, as to doubt the facts stated on the authority of the apostle Paul. If men desire to understand the epistles of Paul, and avoid difficulties, they should be willing to leave it where he does; and this single rule would have made useless whole years and whole tomes of controversy...

ROMANS 5:12-21

12-21. This passage has been usually regarded as the most difficult part of the New Testament. It is not the design of these Notes to enter into a minute criticism of contested points like this. They who wish to see a full discussion of the passage, may find it in the professedly critical commentaries; and especially in the commentaries of Tholuck and of Professor Stuart on the Romans. The meaning of the passage in its general bearing is not difficult; and probably the whole passage would have been found far less difficult if it had not been attached to a philosophical theory on the subject of man's sin, and if a strenuous and indefatigable effort had not been made to prove that it teaches what it was never designed to teach.

19. For, &c. This verse is not a mere repetition of the former, but it is an explanation. By the former statements it might perhaps be inferred that men were condemned without any guilt or blame of theirs. The apostle in this verse guards against this, and affirms that they

are in fact sinners. He affirms that those who are sinners are condemned, and that the sufferings brought in on account of the sin of Adam, are introduced because many were made sinners. Calvin says, "Lest any one should arrogate to himself innocence, [the apostle] adds, that each one is condemned because he is a sinner."

By one man's disobedience. By means of the sin of Adam. This affirms simply the fact that such a result followed from the sin of Adam. The word by (dia) is used in the Scriptures as it is in all books and in all languages. It may denote the efficient cause; the instrumental cause; the principal cause; the meritorious cause; or the chief occasion by which a thing occurred. (See Schleusner.) It does not express one mode, and one only, in which a thing is done; but that one thing is the result of another. When we say that a young man is ruined in his character by another, we do not express the mode, but the fact. When we say that thousands have been made infidels by the writings of Paine and Voltaire, we make no affirmation about the mode, but about the fact. In each of these, and in all other cases, we should deem it most inconclusive reasoning to attempt to determine the mode by the preposition by; and still more absurd if it were argued from the use of that preposition that the sins of the seducer were imputed to the young man; or the opinions of Paine and Voltaire imputed to infidels.

There is not the slightest intimation that it was by imputation. The whole scope of the argument is, moreover, against this; for the object of the apostle is not to show that they were charged with the sin of another, but that they were in fact sinners themselves. If it means that they were condemned for his act, without any concurrence of their own will, then the correspondent part will be true, that all are constituted righteous in the same way; and thus the doctrine of universal salvation will be inevitable. But as none are constituted righteous who do not voluntarily avail themselves of the provisions of mercy, so it follows that those who are condemned, are not condemned for the sin of another without their own concurrence, nor unless they personally deserve it.

Sinners. Transgressors; those who deserve to be punished. It does not mean those who are condemned for the sin of another; but those who are violators of the law of God. All who are condemned are sinners. They are not innocent persons condemned for the crime of another. Men may be involved in the consequences of the sins of others without being to blame. The consequences of the crimes of a murderer, a drunkard, a pirate, may pass over from them, and affect thousands, and overwhelm them in ruin. But this does not prove that they are blameworthy. In the divine administration none are regarded as guilty who are not guilty; none are condemned who do not deserve to be condemned. All who sink to hell are sinners.