

Romans 5:19 Commentary

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Excerpts from Moses Stuart's Commentary on Romans - ROMANS 5:19

In ver. 12, when the apostle had said, that 'by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men,' he meant by these last words (as we have seen above), that his readers should understand him to hint, that the passing of death upon all men had some connection with Adam's offence. But still he subjoins immediately, as the specific and immediate reason or ground of this death, *eph o pantes hamarton*. Why not recognize the same connection and the same sentiment here? Adam's sin was a cause or ground why all men are constituted sinners; yet Adam's sin is not affirmed to be their sin; they are not said to be *en auto hamartoloi*, nor *te hamartia autou hamartoloi*, nor yet to *katakpimati autou katadedikasmenoi*; but they are *hamartoloi in, by, and for themselves*. A ground or cause of this, was Adam's offence. But natural evil, and disadvantage, and degeneracy of nature is one thing, and sin, is another. A man's sin is and must be his own act, either internal or external, or both; and for men to be *hamartoloi*, they must be actively and voluntarily so. Another man's sin can no more be mine, than his soul can be mine; no more than his consciousness, will, affections, or disposition, can be mine. To impute them to me, then, must be to impute to me what in fact does not belong to me, what never did, and what never can. The candid advocates of imputation in its highest sense, concede this. But how much progress do we make in the knowledge of things, and in the explanation of important principles in theology, when we affirm that God counts that as existing which does not in reality exist, and which is in itself an impossibility?

To avoid the difficulty of such imputation (which indeed such men as Calvin, and Edwards, and Stapfer pointedly rejected) some, e.g., Edwards and others, have assumed an absolute unity or oneness of Adam and all his posterity. But this method of explanation is fraught with difficulties both physiological and moral. It is physiologically untrue. A separate consciousness, will, affections, desires, etc., make separate beings; or else there is but one being material or immaterial, in the universe. Consciousness contradicts this theory. Individual accountability renders it incredible. If Adam and his posterity are indeed all one, then all their sins are just as much his, as his is theirs, and his penitence is as much theirs, as his offences. Or is it true, that God, a being of boundless benevolence and love of holiness, has made such a world that nothing but sin can be propagated in it?

The simple statement of fact seems to be, after all, that God has such an utter aversion to sin, that he has testified his displeasure by an appalling exhibition of the woeful consequences to which it leads. Sin is a violation of the order and harmony of the universe, and consequently productive of evil, because it disturbs those laws and tendencies all of which are in themselves productive of good. The greatest mischief of all is, that sin, in this way, brings suffering and sorrow upon the innocent as well as the guilty. But in this very way, too, the odious and abominable nature of sin is most fully

and completely exhibited. The earth cursed for man's sake; the brute creation subjected to innumerable evils on his account; the posterity of Adam born heirs of suffering, and despoiled of the disposition to obedience which our primitive ancestors possessed; are all striking and melancholy evidences of the evil of sin. But for the evils to which Adam's posterity are subjected and exposed, God has provided a remedy; or rather, he has prepared the way for redemption from them. The two things, therefore, now go together, viz., the exhibition of the dreadful effects of sin on the one hand, and of abounding mercy and benevolence on the other. The constitution of the universe, by which sin was made to appear so dreadful in its bitter fruits, is doubtless ordained to serve great and wise purposes, sooner or later, in the scheme of the divine moral government and discipline. Nor is the case of Adam's sin the only one, and altogether singular in its kind. The same principle in the constitution of the world everywhere develops itself. Parents by their vices ruin their children; wicked men corrupt their neighborhood; bad rulers affect whole nations with evil, the innocent as well as the guilty. Nothing can be more untrue, than that the mischiefs occasioned by sin light only upon the guilty. The horrible evil of sin is, that according to the constitution of the universe, it often involves the innocent as well as the guilty in its consequences. Nor could "the exceeding sinfulness of sin" be fully displayed and held forth in its odious light to the abhorrence of all benevolent beings, unless such were the case. Still, after all is attributed to the first sin which belongs to it, it would be difficult to see how Adam's first offence differed from other sins, as to the consequences which it superinduced, excepting that his condition and his relations to the whole human race differed greatly from those of any of his posterity. The consequences of his sin, therefore, were peculiar and awfully deleterious.

It is then one thing to be made a sufferer on account of the sin of others, and another thing to be constituted a sinner by something that he has done. So far as it respects the manner in which Adam's sin has affected us, both of these consequences have flowed from it.

ROMANS 9:11

Neither having done anything good or evil, mede...kakon; a very important declaration in respect to its bearing on some of the controverted questions about hereditary depravity or original sin. It appears that when the words related in the next verse were spoken to Rebecca, the children in her womb had arrived to such a state or growth as that life and motion in them were perceived by the mother, Gen. xxv. 22, 23, i.e., to the age of some five months, comp. Luke i. 24. At this period, then, the apostle declares that they had done neither good nor evil, i.e., they had as yet no positive moral character or (in other words) that there was as yet no development of their moral powers. And with the principle here developed, the tenor of other texts, as well as every man's consciousness, agrees; e.g., Is. vii. 15, 16, comp. viii. 4. Deut. i. 39. Jonah iv. 11. That some knowledge of law and its obligations should exist in order that positive sin can be committed, seems to be clearly decided by Rom. iv. 15, and to be plainly implied by James iv. 17. John ix. 41. 1 John iii. 4. But when children do arrive at such a growth of moral nature that they begin positively to sin, the Scripture does not seem to have decided. The poetic and intensive expressions in Ps. li 5, when compared with Ps. lviii. 3, will hardly establish the

doctrine which many have supposed it to establish. Gen. viii. 21 decides no more, than that men begin very early to commit sin; and John iii. 6. Eph. ii. 3, and other texts of a like nature, decide only that men in a natural state, i.e., in an unregenerate or unsanctified state, are children of wrath and carnal; which must be true, since they actually need regeneration.

The apostle, however, has here told us when sinning had NOT begun, in respect to Jacob and Esau. That they possessed powers or faculties, even in the womb, which were afterwards employed in committing sin when they were more fully developed, is undoubtedly true. But the power or faculty of sinning is one thing; the commission of sin another. Adam in paradise, before his fall, certainly possessed a susceptibility of excitement to sin, and the power or faculty of sinning, (else how could he have been tempted and sinned as he did?) yet he was not guilty of sin because he possessed them, but for the abuse of them. It is not therefore the power or susceptibility which the Creator has given us, which makes us sinners; it is the abuse of them. But the fallen posterity of Adam possess a susceptibility of sin in a much greater degree, so that before regeneration, all their moral acts are sinful. Yet the apostle has decided in our text, that such acts do not take place before birth. Excitability in respect to forbidden objects must be yielded to before it becomes actual sin; or rather, the sin itself is in the yielding, and not in the original disposition which God himself has given us. Disposition to sin, so far as it is created by our indulgence in it, may fairly be put to our account and reckoned as sin. But to count that as sin, which the Maker of heaven and earth himself gave us, before all voluntary moral action, involves consequences that are of fearful aspect.

EXCURSUS VI

On Rom. v. 19, *dia tes parakoes tou henos anthropou hamartoloi katestathesan hoi polloi*(pp. 198, 199).

Those who are familiar with the idiom of the original Scriptures must know, that causation of every degree and kind was usually expressed by the Hebrews in one and the same way. We are accustomed, when we wish for nice distinctions, to speak of efficient or principal cause, and of secondary or instrumental or occasional cause, etc. But it is not so generally in the Scriptures. 'God moves David to go and number Israel, and Satan moves David to go and number Israel.' The very same verb is applied to both agents in this case. So 'the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, and Pharaoh hardened his own heart;' see Exod. vii. 13, ix 12, x. 1, 20, 27, xi. 10, xiv. 8; Rom. ix. 18; Deut. ii. 30; Isai. lxiii. 17; John xii. 40. So evil is ascribed to God, both moral and natural; 2 Sam. xii. 11, xvi. 10; 1 Kings xxii. 22; Josh. xi. 20; Ps. cv. 25; 1 Kings xi. 23, xxiv. 1. In like manner God is said to give men a new heart, and they are commanded to 'make to themselves a new heart;' the Spirit of God is said to convince and convert, and regenerate the sinner; and the same thing is often ascribed, for the most part in the like words, to the gospel and to the power of divine truth. Now he who has not carefully noted and weighed these obvious and highly important facts, is in great danger of making out in some way a very partial system of theology, and of contradicting in his exegesis of one part of the Bible, what the sacred writers have affirmed in another.

To apply this to the case before us. Were constituted sinners means, that Adam was, in some sense or other, the cause or occasion of his posterity becoming sinners. But whether this was through a degradation of their nature physically propagated down from father to son; or whether it was (as Chrysostom, cumenius, Pelagius, Erasmus, and others have with little probability maintained), only by virtue of the example which he set, or whether it was in some other way, is not determined by the language of the text. Such expressions as we have seen above, do not determine of themselves either the degree or the kind of causality. Principal or subordinate causation in this case may either of them be expressed by the phrase *dia tes--katestathesan*. The strenuous advocate for imputation avers, however, that the posterity of Adam were constituted sinners, by his offence being imputed to them, and their being treated as though they had committed it.

But when I look at the nature of this case, and ask what language the apostle would most probably have employed, had he designed to convey such a meaning, I am constrained to say, that the case can hardly be supposed with probability, that he would have employed merely such language as that before us, when other modes of expression more explicit and obvious were within his reach. *hoti en auto hamartoloi elogisthesan--hoti autois elogisthe he hamartia autou--or else hoti esan hupodikoi dia tes hamartias aotou*, or something equivalent to these expressions, might, not to say must, have been added after *hoi polloi*, so as to prevent all mistake. But as the matter now is, with the necessarily active sense of *hamartoloi*, the language itself cannot lead us philologically to the supposition of an imputation scheme of sin. See comm. on this verse and the preceding Excursus.

That men should be constituted or made sinners by the disobedience of Adam, most naturally means, I had almost said, must necessarily mean, that in some way his offence so affected them as that they become actual sinners in propria persona. Now is anything more common than this mode of expression? 'A man of vicious character,' we say, 'corrupts his whole family. A profligate of winning exterior corrupts the whole neighborhood of youth around him. One sceptic makes many doubters in revelation. Voltaire made half of literary Europe sceptical.' Now in these and a thousand other like expressions, we do mean to assert an active influence, a real causality in some proper sense, of the evil done or spoken. Yet we never once think, for example, of Voltaire's scepticism being imputed to half of literacy Europe; nor do we once imagine, that any of the classes above named as being corrupted are corrupted without any voluntary agency of their own. The sin of corrupt feelings and affections is entirely their own: it matters not what the causes were which operated on them, so long as they were after all left to their own choice whether they would yield to the excitement or resist it.

In what way, then, does Adam's sin operate, in order to produce the effect which the apostle attributes to it? The degree, the extent, and nature of this influence, seem all to be laid open in the text. It amounts to such a degree as to involve us in a ruinous state or condition; it extends to all the posterity of Adam; it is a cause or ground of moral depravation, for it is the cause or occasion of all men's coming into condemnation, and therefore it must be a cause of their becoming sinners. But after all, the *modus operandi* is

not declared by the apostle. He does not say, whether the operation of Adam's sin is on our physical or mental constitution; or whether it has influence merely on the condition in which we are placed, as being expelled from paradise and surrounded by peculiar temptations; nor whether it is example merely of Adam which we copy; and therefore a man may believe all that Paul has here taught, who refrains from speculations on any of these points, or on any others of the like nature. Better indeed would it have been for the quiet of the churches; if many had entirely refrained from all the particular modes of explanation which they have urged; for the danger is great that we may not only substitute our own individual belief and speculations for essential doctrines of the Scriptures here, but also for a commentary upon the text, and then elevate what we have thus superadded to an eminence far above the text itself.