

Am I Really Blamed for Something I Did Not Do?

(A Study of Original Sin)

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Defining Our Terms

When was the last time that you heard a message on the subject of ORIGINAL SIN? Quite frankly, I can't remember. The subject of ORIGINAL SIN seems to be as popular as ants at a picnic! Why is this so? Before I go on it is absolutely necessary that I define exactly what I mean when I say ORIGINAL SIN. What I don't mean is a description of Adam's first sin. I admit that the terminology may be a bit misleading, but our study has nothing to do with the specifics of that first sin. When I say I am studying ORIGINAL SIN I mean that I am examining the consequences of Adam's first sin for the rest of us (i.e. all mankind since Adam).

The Locus Classicus

Where do we begin? The "Locus Classicus" (that portion of the Bible that we go to when we are beginning our study of a particular subject, the primary passage of scripture that speaks to the truth that we are studying) of ORIGINAL SIN is Romans 5:12-21. Here we find the Apostle Paul describing the method by which we are saved. In order to properly describe how it is that we are saved by Jesus Christ Paul finds it necessary to first relate how it is that we come to be condemned.

Stating the Problem

The first point to be noted involves the ending of verse 12. Paul is stating an argument that he is unable to finish until verse 18. No matter what translation you may have it ends verse 12 in a rather peculiar way.

"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned -- " Romans 5:12 (NIV)

It is just as if Paul was interrupted by his listeners. Now we know that this could not literally be the case, for Paul was writing his letter to the church at Rome. But that notwithstanding, Paul writes his letter in such a way as to give the appearance of a speaker being interrupted and forced to stop his message and make a detour in order to answer the complaint. In this passage the interruption takes place at the end of verse 12, and it is not until verse 18 that he picks up his original train of thought.

All Die = All Have Sinned

The argument that Paul uses in verse 12 is that all men die because they have sinned. Now the problem that we are faced with is this, are there individuals who have died that have not sinned? In answer to this question we can put forth two categories of people:

1. The heathen in "Altoona" (those who have not heard the gospel).
2. The "Innocent" (children who die before they are able to distinguish between right and wrong, this includes the unborn child).

In verse 13 we are told that the first time any law was put down in black and white (in "stone") was with the giving of the Mosaic Law on Mt. Sinai (c. {Around} 1400 BC). The argument that is being put forth states that someone cannot be held accountable to obey the law if the law has not yet been revealed to them. Now in saying this, we must understand there must have been some law passed down orally from Adam to

his ancestors, for the Lord punishes Cain in Genesis 4 for murdering his brother Abel. God could not have judged Cain guilty if he had not broken one of God's laws. In addition to this we find in scripture the law of the "conscience."

"Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them." Romans 2:14-15 (NIV)

The law of the "conscience" is that imperfect standard of right and wrong that resides within us as a result of our being made in the "image of God."

So even though there may have existed a heathen in "Altoona" who was never exposed to the written law, we know that he was exposed to the law of "conscience," and very possibly, if he were living in the patriarchal era, he was confronted by the oral law. Yet, as far as the argument of Romans 5:12-14 is concerned the only law that is of any relevance is the written or Mosaic law. The point that is being made is how do we account for the death of everyone who lived before the written law.

"For before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come." Romans 5:13-14

It is at this juncture that we must examine that second category of individuals mentioned above, namely, those dying before they reach the age of "accountability" (unable to distinguish between right and wrong).

Since the scripture is clear that you do not die unless you have sinned, the only explanation for infants dying is that they must have sinned in some way. The only option available is that Adam's sin is applied to their account. Or to put it another way, they are blamed for Adam's sin.

"Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men," Romans 5:18a (NIV)

Realism, a Way Out?

It is a clear biblical fact that we are condemned for Adam's sin. The issue that plagues us is how we can be blamed for something that we did not do. One answer to this dilemma is the "REALISTIC" approach. To state it in simple terms, we were "really" there when Adam sinned. If we were really there then it could be said that "we" sinned in Adam, and the sting of being blamed for something we did not do is removed. A key proof text for this view is found in the book of Hebrews.

"One might even say that Levi, who collects the tenth, paid the tenth through Abraham, because when Melchizedek met Abraham, Levi was still in the body of his ancestor." Hebrews 7:9-10 (NIV)

Here we have the account of Abraham rescuing Lot in Genesis 14. On his return from the battle Abraham is met by Melchizedek the king of Salem, who is also a priest of the Most High God. Abraham is described as being blessed by Melchizedek, and then he, that is Abraham, gives him a tenth of all the spoils. The argument that is put forth is that since Levi was a descendant of Abraham, and the Levites were given the responsibility of collecting the tithes from the Israelites, one could say that when Abraham paid his tithe to Melchizedek it was also Levi paying his tithe to Melchizedek. Now, I may have been physically in Adam in some way, yet the issue at stake is whether "I" as an act of my will participated in Adam's fall. The answer to the above is a straightforward "NO." I don't care how you play with it, the "REALISTIC" approach does not make our being blamed for Adam's sin any easier to accept. The bottom line is that we are blamed for something that we did not do!

The Ethics of the Almighty

Is it ethically right for the Lord God to blame me for what Adam did? Here we are appealing to the American sense of fair play. Surely God owes me a chance to make or break it myself. What do the Scriptures say?

"Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?" Romans 9:21 (NIV)

The answer to our question is quite simple. As our creator, God has the right to do with us whatever he wants to do. We are his clay. I admit that this is not a very settling thought, but it is the biblical answer.

The problem seems to be that we keep getting confused as to what is our true identity. We like to see ourselves as only a "bit" lower than God, and surely on debating terms with Him. But the Bible does not see it this way and we are reminded of it in no uncertain terms. The bottom line is this, is the God of ORIGINAL SIN the God we love? Nothing else than eternal life is at stake.

"Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." John 17:3 (NIV)

To reject the God of ORIGINAL SIN is to reject the God of the Bible. Indeed, your God may not blame us for the sin of Adam, but the God of Scripture has.

It's All or Nothing

Now that the guilt of Adam's sin for all his posterity has been established is ought to be stated that the purpose in Romans 5 for delving into ORIGINAL SIN is to describe the method used for our salvation.

For just as the guilt of Adam's sin was applied to those whom he represented, so also the salvation that Jesus Christ purchased on the cross was applied to those whom he represented. This is the truth of Romans 5:18.

"Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men." Romans 5:18 (NIV)

Let me point out that in both cases you and I are left out of the initial decision-making process. If you hold that the basis of our condemnation to be immoral, then you must also hold that the basis of our salvation is also immoral. The method in both instances is identical.

The answer to the question, who are the "all men" that Jesus represented on the cross? Is found not in Romans 5, for this passage only describes the method of salvation. If you want to answer that question you must go to 1 Corinthians 15:20-23!

A Closing Note

ORIGINAL SIN consists of two parts. We come into this world with both a BAD RECORD (that is we are blamed for Adam's sin) and a BAD HEART (a corrupted heart that causes us to come into the world as a God hater). In this study we have only focused on the BAD RECORD. I will save the study of the BAD HEART for a future Review.

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