

DOES ROMANS 5 TEACH "ORIGINAL SIN"?

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Romans chapter five is often considered to be one of the major "proof texts" for the Calvinistic doctrine of "original sin". This peculiar doctrine is one-fifth of Calvin's theology which has been summed up by the use of the word TULIP. This overall theory teaches: T - Total (Hereditary) Depravity; U - Unconditional Election; L - Limited Atonement; I - Irresistible Grace and; P - Perseverance of the Saints. The particular part that we want to examine in this article is Total Depravity. It is sometimes referred to as "Adamic Sin, Original Sin, or Total Depravity." The basic thesis of this doctrine is that all men have inherited the sin of Adam and are, therefore, possessive of a "depraved nature". The following quotes, from various sources, will document this: "Whence then comes this depraved nature of man? It comes from the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in Eden, by which our nature became so corrupt that we are all ²conceived and born in sin."¹ "Baptism cleanses people from original sin..."² "Original sin...is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil..."³ But is such a theory taught in Romans chapter five? Let us see.

Albert Barnes, the noted Presbyterian Commentator and Calvinist, stated the following on Romans 5:12, "The apostle here evidently is not discussing the doctrine of original sin, but he is stating a simple fact, intelligible to all; 'The first man ⁴violated the law of God, and in this way sin was introduced among men.'" He goes on to say, "The apostle in this expression ('For that all have sinned, v. 12, R.W.S.) does not say that all have sinned in Adam, or that their nature became corrupt...He speaks evidently of the great universal fact that all men are sinners."⁵ In careful study of the Scriptures, one can easily see that the doctrine of "Original Sin" is not taught in the Bible. Actually, over and over, we see the point that sin and guilt (that which is associated with sin), is non-transferrable. Please carefully consider the following passages: Deuteronomy 24:16; Isaiah 53:6; Ezekiel 18:20; Romans 7:9,13; James 1:13-15; 1 John 3:4.

Paul's whole point, in Romans chapter twelve, is not to set forth some discourse on "Original Sin" but, rather, to show that as transgression was introduced into the world by "one man", likewise was salvation made available "through faith" in "one man." That man, of course, was none other than Jesus Christ - Romans 5:17. Really, when one pays careful attention to the words of Romans 5:12 they are able to see the connection of sin and death. Death passes "upon all men". Why Paul? Because, "all have sinned." In other words we see the universality of death due to sin. Really, this gets to the heart of the matter as why the innocent die, etc. We should be careful on this "all" here. This is where the Calvinist runs into his theory. He claims that "all" is all inclusive and, therefore, this would include even infants as he sees this in relation to a connection to Adam. But does the word "all" mean "all" here? If so, what about Jesus? Did he sin? Of so, then Paul contradicts his ownself in Hebrews 4:15 where he stated that Jesus was "without sin".

It seems to me that the doctrine of Total Depravity is at odds with 2 Timothy 3:13 where Pauls stated, "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse..." If man is "totally depraved" at the point of conception how is it possible for him to "wax worse and worse"? On this phrase Robertson points out that the idea is that these "imposters" "shall cut forward to the worse stage."⁶ He also points out that the Greek word "cheiron", translated "worse"

"is comparative of kakos, "to the worse than now."⁷ The Englishman's Greek New Testament translates the passage as follows, "But wicked men and imposters shall advance to worse..."⁸ Vincent sees this phrase as saying, "shall proceed to the worse."⁹ Therefore, in all of the definitions we see the point being made that such an action is a progressive act and not something that one is conceived with.

Therefore, there can be no doubt that Romans chapter five does not teach the doctrine of John Calvin when it comes to "original sin". Paul's desire is to simply show the universality of sin and the universality of the offering of salvation to those who will turn to the Lord in obedient faith.

ENDNOTES

1. Davidson, W.E., A Catechism of Bible Doctrine, Broadman Press, 1930, p. 3. The introduction of the booklet states, "This Catechism seeks to present the body of thinking commonly held by Baptists."
2. Romain, St. Philip, Catholic Answers to Fundamental Questions, Liguori Publications, 1984, p. 28.
3. Leith, John H., editor, Creeds of the Churches, John Knox Press, 1982, p. 269. The quote is from article IX of The Thrity-Nine Articles of Religion, adopted by the Episcopalian Church. See, also, The Book of Common Prayers, p. 604.
4. Barnes, Albert, Barnes on the New Testament, Romans, Baker, 1977, p. 126, emphasis his.
5. Op cit., p. 128, emphasis his.
6. Robertson, A.T., Word Pictures In The New Testament, Baker, 1931, Vol. IV, p. 626.
7. Ibid.
8. The Englishman's Greek New Testament, Zondervan, 1973, p. 552.
9. Vincent, Marvin, Word Studies In The New Testament, Eerdmans, 1977, Vol. IV, p. 315.