

JESUS DID NOT BECOME A SINNER

Albert Barnes

(Taken from his commentaries)

“Jesus was not sinful, or a sinner, in any sense. He did not so take human guilt upon him, that the words sinful and sinner could with any propriety be applied to him. They are not applied to him any way in the Bible; but there the language is undeviating. It is that in all senses he was holy and undefiled. And yet language is often used on this subject which is horrible and only a little short of blasphemy, as if he was guilty, and as if he was even the greatest sinner in the universe. I have heard language used which sent a chill of horror to my heart; and language may be found in the writings of those who hold the doctrine of imputation in the strictest sense, which is only a little short of blasphemy. I have hesitated whether I should copy expressions here on this subject from one of the greatest and best of men (I mean Luther) to show the nature of the views which people sometimes entertain on the subject of the imputation of sin to Christ. But as Luther deliberately published them to the world in his favorite book, which he used to call his “Catharine de Bora,” after the name of his wife; and since similar views are sometimes entertained now; and as it is important that such views should be held up to universal abhorrence, no matter how respectable the source from which they emanate, I will copy a few of his expressions on this subject. “And this, no doubt, all the prophets did foresee in spirit, than Christ should become the greatest transgressor, murderer, adulterer, thief, rebel, and blasphemer, that ever was OR could be in the world. For he being made a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world is not now an innocent person and without sins; is not now the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary; but a sinner which hath and carrieth the sin of Paul, who was a blasphemer, an oppressor, and a persecutor; of Peter, which denied Christ; of David, which was an adulterer, a murderer, and caused the Gentiles to blaspheme the name of the Lord; and, briefly, which hath and beareth all the sins of all people in his body: not that he himself committed them, but for that he received them, being committed or done of us, and laid them upon his own body, that he might make satisfaction for them with his own blood.

“Therefore, this general sentence of Moses comprehendeth him also (albeit in his own person he was innocent), because it found him among sinners and transgressors; like as the magistrate taketh him for a thief, and punisheth him whom he findeth among other thieves and transgressors, though he never committed anything worthy of death. When the Law, therefore, found him among thieves it condemned and killed him as a thief.” “If thou wilt deny him to be a sinner and accursed, deny, also, that he was crucified and dead.” “But if it is not absurd to confess and believe that Christ was crucified between two thieves, then it is not absurd to say that he was accursed, and of all sinners, the greatest.” “God, our most merciful Father, sent His only Son into the world, and laid upon him all the sins of all people, saying, be thou Peter, that denier; Paul, that persecutor, blasphemer, and cruel oppressor; David, that adulterer; that sinner which did eat the fruit in Paradise; that thief who hung upon the cross; and, briefly, be thou the person who has committed the sins of all people; see, therefore, that thou pay and satisfy for them” - Luther on the Galatians, Gal_3:13. (pp. 213-215. London edition, 1838).

“Luther was a great and holy man. He held, as firmly as anyone can, to the

personal holiness of the Redeemer. But this language shows how imperfect and erroneous views may warp the language of holy people; and how those sentiments led him to use language which is little less than blasphemy. Indeed, we cannot doubt that in Luther had heard this very language used by one of the numerous enemies of the gospel in his time, as applicable to the Saviour, he would have poured out the full torrent of his burning wrath, and all the stern denunciations of his most impassioned eloquence, on the head of the scoffer and the blasphemer. It is singular, it is one of the remarkable facts in the history of mind, that a man with the New Testament before him, and accustomed to contemplate daily its language, could ever have allowed himself to use expressions like these of the holy and unspotted Saviour. But what is the meaning of the language of Paul, it will be asked, when he says that he was "made a curse for us?"

"In reply, I answer, that the meaning must be ascertained from the passage which Paul quotes in support of his assertion, that Christ was "made a curse for us." That passage is, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." This passage is found in Deu_21:23. It occurs in a law respecting one who was hanged for a "sin worthy of death," Deu_21:22. The Law was, that he should be buried the same day, and that the body should not remain suspended over the night, and it is added, as a reason for this, that "he that is hanged is accursed of God;" or, as it is in the margin, "the curse of God." The meaning is, that when one was executed for crime in this manner, he was the object of the divine displeasure and malediction. Regarded thus as an object accursed of God, there was a propriety that the man who was executed for crime should be buried as soon as possible, that the offensive object should be hidden from the view. In quoting this passage, Paul leaves out the words "of God," and simply says, that the one who was hanged on a tree was held accursed.

"The sense of the passage before us is, therefore, that Jesus was subjected to what was regarded as an accursed death. He was treated in his death as if he had been a criminal. He was put to death in the same manner as he would have been if he had himself been guilty of the violation of the Law. If he had been a thief or a murderer; if he had committed the grossest and the blackest crimes, this would have been the punishment to which he would have been subjected. This was the mode of punishment adapted to those crimes, and he was treated as if all these had been committed by him. Or, in other words, if he had been guilty of all these, or any of these, he could not have been treated in a more shameful and ignominious manner than he was; nor could he have been subjected to a more cruel death. Since it has already been intimated, it does not mean that Jesus was guilty, nor that he was not the object of the approbation and love of God, but that Jesus' death was the same that it would have been if he had been the vilest of malefactors, and that that death was regarded by the Law as accursed.

"It was by such substituted sorrows that we are saved; and he consented to die the most shameful and painful death, as if he were the vilest criminal, in order that the most guilty and vile of the human race might be saved. With regard to the way in which Jesus' death is connected with our justification, see the note at Gal_2:16. It may be observed, also, that the punishment of the cross was unknown to the Hebrews in the time of Moses, and that the passage in Deu_21:23 did not refer originally to that. Nor is it known that hanging criminals alive was practiced among the Hebrews. Those who were guilty of great crimes were first stoned or otherwise put to death, and then their bodies were suspended for a few hours on a gibbet. In many cases, however, merely the head was

suspended after it had been severed from the body. Gen_40:17-19; Num_25:4-5. Crucifixion was not known in the time of the giving of the Law, but the Jews gave such an extent to the Law in Deu_21:23 as to include this mode of punishment (see Joh_19:31 ff).

“The force of the argument here, as used by the apostle Paul, is, that if to be suspended on a gibbet after having been put to death was regarded as a curse, it should not be regarded as a curse in a less degree to be suspended Alive on a cross, and to be put to death in this manner. If this interpretation of the passage is correct, then it follows that this should never be used as implying, in any sense, that Christ was guilty, or that he was ill-deserving, or that he was an object of the divine displeasure, or that he poured out on him all his wrath. He was, throughout, an object of the divine love and approbation. God never loved Jesus more, or approved what he did more, than when he gave himself to death on the cross. God had no hatred toward him; He had no displeasure to express toward him. And it is this which makes the atonement so wonderful and so glorious. If God had been displeased with Jesus; if the Redeemer had been properly an object of God’s wrath; if Jesus, in any sense, deserved those sorrows, there would have been no merit in Jesus’ sufferings; there would have been no atonement. What merit can there be when one suffers only what he deserves? But what made the atonement so wonderful, so glorious, so benevolent; what made it an atonement at all, was that innocence was treated as if it were guilt; that the most pure, and holy, and benevolent, and lovely being on earth should consent to be treated, and should be treated by God and man, as If Jesus were the most vile and ill-deserving. This is the mystery of the atonement; this shows the wonders of the divine benevolence; this is the nature of substituted sorrow; and this lays the foundation for the offer of pardon, and for the hope of eternal salvation. Albert Barnes (Commentary on Galatians 3:13)