

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

as the universe, as lasting as eternity. For the present there may be much to perplex, much to sadden, much to disappoint you; but wait on, and hope on: for that which is perfect *will* come, though it tarry, and you shall have peace at the last.

ALMONI PELONI.

ST. PAUL ON THE HEATHEN.

ROMANS II. 12-16.

IN the 16th and 17th verses of the First Chapter of this Epistle, we have, though in no technical form, the theological thesis or theme of the most important of all the doctrinal discussions in which the Apostle Paul was ever engaged. The verses run thus:—"I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is God's power for salvation to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and to the Greek; for God's righteousness is revealed in it *ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν*, as it stands written, He who is righteous by faith shall live."

In the remainder of the Chapter, the Apostle shews, in a free and easy manner, befitting epistolary composition, that Greeks or Gentiles stand in most urgent need of the Gospel, their actual ethical condition being extremely corrupt.

Then, in Chapter ii. he proceeds, in a manner of peculiarly effective dialectic, to impeach his countrymen, the Jews, of equal pravity and guilt. "Thou doest," says he, "the same things." And "dost thou think," he inquires, "that thou shalt escape the condemnation of God?" He proceeds to maintain that God is absolutely impartial, and will render to every man, whether Jew or Gentile, according to his deeds, and thus according to his real character. At the bar of the great Judge no one will be accepted because he is a Jew; and no one will be condemned because he is a

Gentile. On the contrary, they who, by patient continuance in good-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, shall, whether Gentiles or Jews, receive retributively "eternal life;" while they who are of a factious spirit in relation to God, and disobey the truth, but are obedient to unrighteousness, shall, whether Jews or Gentiles, be visited with "wrath and indignation;" for, says he, "there is no *προσωποληψία* on the part of God." Then follows the first of the verses we purpose to consider in this article:—"For as many as sinned *ἀνόμως* shall also perish *ἀνόμως*; and as many as sinned *ἐν νόμῳ*, shall be judged *διὰ νόμου*."

It may be noted, in the first place, that the Apostle says *sinned*, putting his verb in the aorist. He has stepped forward, in imagination, to the great judgment day, and is thence looking back upon life's concluded career. Hence the *ἥμαρτον*.

Then, in the second place, we must consider what is the *νόμος* referred to, when the Apostle speaks of those, on the one hand, who sinned *ἀνόμως*, and of those, on the other, who sinned *ἐν νόμῳ*. Manifestly it is not what is, in common theological parlance, called *the moral law*; for there is no such thing as sinning without the moral law. All sin is *ἀνομία*, and hence relative to the moral law. Take away from any man, or from the reach of any man, the grand law of morals, and you abstract from him the possibility of sinfulness. it is true; but likewise, and by the same stroke of abstraction, the possibility of the ethical anti-thesis of sinfulness, that is, the possibility of ethical goodness or righteousness.

Then, again, the expression "the hearers of the law," occurring in the next verse, shews that it is not to *the moral law* that the Apostle is referring. It is to something more extensive in a literary point of view. He manifestly had in his eye the consecutive readings that were statedly con-

ducted in the synagogues with a view to the instruction and edification of the Jewish people at large. He refers, in other words, to the Bible in its entirety, such as the Hebrews had in their Sacred Scriptures. That Bible was their νόμος in the generic and radical acceptation of the term. It was their Torah, because it was, to them, *the Divine Teaching*, which should, in virtue of the imperatives which pervaded it, and the wisdom which pervaded the imperatives, have resulted in the full-orbed spiritual and ethical education of the people. This Hebrew word תּוֹרָה (*torah*) came out of the alembic of the Septuagint Translators as νόμος, because it is God's grand ethical Imperative, whether viewed on the side of its formal *statutes, precepts, and commandments*, or of its *prophecies*, or of its *testimonies and psalms*, or simply on the side of its *words* in the sum total of their connected or concatenated import.

The term νόμος is used in this extensive and generic acceptation when it is said in the Old Testament that "the *law of the Lord* is perfect, converting the soul," and when it is said in the New, "the people answered and said, We have heard *out of the law* that the Christ abideth for ever; and how sayest thou then that the Son of man must be lifted up?" (See also Matt. v. 18, xxiii. 23; John x. 34, xv. 25; 1 Cor. xiv. 21.) No one supposes, or can suppose, that in these statements the reference is to *the moral law*. The Greek νόμος, the Hebrew תּוֹרָה, the English *Law*, and the Latin *Lex*, are by no means absolute synonymes. The lights which they flash on the grand Reality referred to by them all, are varied. The Reality itself remains unique, and cannot be perfectly mirrored in any human vocable or definition. Koppe would translate the νόμος, *Offenbarung*, that is, *Revelation*. Middleton, of *Greek Article Celebrity*, adopted from Macknight the same version. But such a term is too free for a translation, and not sufficiently comprehensive for a logical definition or rhetorical explanation;

for the Revelation referred to in the verse before us is a specific kind of revelation. *It is verbal.* And the Greek term felicitously implies that this verbal Revelation is an *Authoritative Rule of Life.*

What, then, does the Apostle mean when he says, "as many as sinned *ἀνόμως* shall also perish *ἀνόμως*?" Does he mean that all the heathen, who, on the one hand, have no Bible, and who, on the other, have lost their moral innocence, shall be destroyed? *We are not shut up exegetically to such a conception of his meaning.* For the word *sinned* may be used in its emphatic acceptation.

Such an emphatic sense of the term is familiar in our current theological phraseology, and likewise in the Scriptures. We speak discriminatingly of *saints and sinners*, though firmly believing that *saints are sinners*, in the unemphatic acceptation of the term. Our Saviour discriminated in the very same manner,—“If ye do good to them who do good to you, what thank have ye? for *sinners* also do even the same” (Luke vi. 33). “If ye lend to them from whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for *sinners* also lend to sinners to receive as much again” (Luke vi. 34). Evidently those were *sinners* in the intensive acceptation of the term. So when the disciples, on a certain occasion, asked our Lord, saying, “Master, who did *sin*, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither did this man *sin*, nor his parents” (John ix. 3). They were not more abandoned than others. Again, we read, “Behold, a woman in the city, who was a *sinner*” (Luke vii. 37). Again, “This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him; for she is a *sinner*” (Luke vii. 39). We read again, on a kindred line of representation, that the multitudes, who thronged our Lord as He walked to the house of Zaccheus, “murmured, saying, that he was gone to be guest with a man who is a *sinner*” (Luke xix. 7). “Many

publicans *and sinners* came and sat down with him" (Matt. ix. 10). The man who was born blind, but afterwards saw, said in reference to a criticism which the Pharisees made, "We know that God heareth not *sinner*s" (John ix. 31). There is evident emphasis in the signification. "If the righteous scarcely be saved," says St. Peter, "where shall the ungodly and *the sinner* appear?" (1 Pet. iv. 18). "We, who are Jews by nature," says St. Paul, "and not *sinner*s of the *Gentiles* (that is, *sinner*s conspicuous among sinners) believed in Christ Jesus" (Gal. ii, 15). "Go," we read in the Old Testament, "and utterly destroy *the sinner*s, *the Amalekites*" (1 Sam. xv. 18). In the prefatory psalm of the Psalter it is said, "the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor *sinner*s in the congregation of the righteous" (Ps. i. 5). We read again in St. John's General Epistle, "whosoever abideth in Christ *sinneth not*; whosoever *sinneth* hath not seen him, neither known him" (1 John iii. 6); "whosoever is born of God *doth not commit sin*; for his seed remaineth in him; and he *cannot sin*, because he is born of God;"—"In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil."

May it not then be the case that the word *sinned* in the passage before us is used in its emphatic or intensive signification?

This *is* the case, as is evidenced by the immediately preceding context. In that context we find the Apostle referring to the doom of those who "despise the riches of the Divine goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering," not considering, as they should have done, and therefore "not knowing that the goodness of God," as inclusive of his forbearance and long-suffering, "*is the Hand that leads to repentance.*" Hence, instead of repenting, they stored up to themselves, according to their hardness and impenitent heart, "wrath in the day of wrath," as if it had been treasure. Such is the high-handed and defiant sinfulness

of those whose case the Apostle is considering. It is sinfulness *κατ' ἐξοχήν*.

The Apostle depicts their character still farther, when he says of them that they are "factious" (under God's government), and "disobedient to the truth, but obedient to unrighteousness." He had said just a line or two before, that the vilest vices of the heathen were—in essence—reproduced in their conduct. *Such is their aggravated sinfulness.*

We seem to breathe more freely when we get to see that the Apostle does not teach in this paragraph that all who have lost their innocence *ἀνόμως*, are, if they live and die *ἄνευ νόμου*, helplessly and hopelessly handed over to the endurance of that penalty which is the opposite of "eternal life."

The Apostle does speak, as we have seen, of certain *ἁμαρτωλοί* who shall "perish;" but these *ἁμαρτωλοί* are not to be confounded with those who have, it may be, merely fallen from their innocency. They are sinners who are high-handed and defiant. They are "workers of iniquity," who give themselves *con amore* to their work, as if it were their trade and their privilege.

The *ἀνομοί* are referred to by the Apostle chiefly for the sake of furnishing himself with a stepping-stone by which he might get access to the hearts and consciences of those who are *ἐν νόμῳ*, or let us, by a legitimate and convenient accommodation, say *ἐννομοί*. Hence it is that he dictated the second moiety of verse 12, "and as many as sinned *ἐν νόμῳ* shall be condemned *διὰ νόμου*." He impeaches the *ἀνομοί*, in order that he may get the best possible foothold on which to stand, when feeling constrained to impeach the *ἐννομοί*.

The word *sinned* has consequently here the same accentuated signification as it has in the preceding moiety. And, as regards the verb *κριθήσονται*, it may either be

translated *shall be judged*, the idea of condemnation being subsumed; or it may be freely rendered *shall be condemned*. This latter rendering is Luther's; and, in our public English version, it is given twice to the term as it occurs in John iii. 18, "He that believeth on him is *not condemned*; but he that believeth not has been *condemned* already." Taking the accentuated import of the verb *ἤμαρτον* into account, the idea of *condemnation* must, in the statement before us, be either expressed or subsumed. When the Lord Chief Justice of the universe takes his seat on the pure white throne of his glory, to try those who have been defiantly disobedient, there can be no reasonable doubt about the nature of the sentence that will be passed.

While the Apostle employs the generic *ἄσσοι* in both moieties of the verse, and does not specify either Gentiles or Jews, we may accept it as certain that in the second moiety the reference, that subtends the indefinite relative pronoun, is to the unbelieving and impenitent Jews. This reference is demonstrated by the entire texture of the paragraph which immediately succeeds the verses we are considering, and extends to the end of the Chapter.

It is in accordance with this subtended reference that the Apostle says in verse 13: "For not the hearers of the law are righteous," in the judicial finding of God; "but the doers of the law shall be justified."

Regarding this verse, let it be noted that, in both its negative and its affirmative clause, it intentionally accounts for the asseveration in the second moiety of the preceding verse, viz. "That as many as sinned *ἐν νόμῳ*, shall be condemned *διὰ νόμου*." This will certainly be the case, says the Apostle, for not the hearers but the doers of the *νόμος* shall be justified at the Grand Assize. Hearing the *νόμος* read in the Synagogue Service, or reading it by oneself, or carefully and reverentially preserving its voluminous letter in the home,—all this exercise if performed without inter-

weaving the imperatives of the Bible into the texture of the life, is simply treating the Bible as a fetish ; and no wonder that the fetish-worshippers, if unrepentant, should not be justified in the day referred to in verse 16—"The day when God shall judge the secrets of men through Jesus Christ."

But what is it that the Apostle means when he says that "the doers of the law shall be justified at the Grand Assize"? The expression has occasioned almost infinite perplexity to multitudes of expositors, more especially when it is placed side by side with the declaration in the 30th verse of the following chapter of the Epistle, the declaration "that by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in God's sight." Here the Apostle says, "the doers of the law shall be justified." There is an "impossibility," says the late Dean Alford, "of being thus justified." "There are no doers of the law," says Hemming. "He is merely illustrating a principle," says Moses Stuart. "The Apostle," says Dr. Wardlaw, "merely lays down the principle of law on the subject of justification." "Doers," says Bengel ; "yes, if they really approve themselves *doers*." "But no one," says Pareus, "is a doer of the law, as the Apostle will afterwards demonstrate ; and therefore no one shall be justified through the law." "Loquitur Paulus de idea," says Melancthon. "They," says Calvin, "who make use of this passage to establish justification by works, deserve to be laughed at even by children (*puerorum cachinnis sunt dignissimi*)." "It may be legitimately argued from this very passage," he continues, "that no one is justified by works ; for if those only who fulfil the law are justified, it follows that no one is justified, for no one can be found who can boast of having fulfilled the law." Hodge goes hand in hand with Calvin, and says that the Apostle "is not speaking of the method of justification available for sinners, and as revealed in the Gospel, but of the principles of justice, which will be applied to all who look to the law for justification. If men rely on

works they must have works." Meyer takes the same cue and says, "Real, actual justification by the law takes place neither among Jews nor among Gentiles, because in no case is there a complete fulfilment." "Sinlessness in the inward disposition," says Shedd, "and perfection in every outward act, are requisite to constitute a ποιήτης," such as the Apostle speaks of.

But all these expositors, and many others, comprehending in particular those who belong to the same school of *doctrinaires*, have, as we conceive, missed entirely the aim of the Apostle, and have consequently misapprehended and misstated his argument. He is not referring in the word νόμος to the moral law; and consequently, when he speaks of the doers, or the ποιηταί, of the law, he is not referring to those who are characterized by "sinlessness in the inward disposition, and by perfection in the outward act." Nor, when he represents the ποιηταὶ τοῦ νόμου as "justified in the day when God shall bring into judgment the secrets of men by Jesus Christ," does he refer to any peculiar quality or quantity of works of faith and labours of love, as distinguished from the quantity and quality of the righteous deeds done in the body referred to in the 6th verse of this chapter, and in 2 Corinthians v. 10, and other kindred passages, and so emphatically held up to the light in the decisions of the Great Judge, when He shall say, "Come ye blessed of my Father, for I was hungry and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came to me. . . . inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it to me." These were not ποιηταὶ νόμου in the classical import of the phrase, *law-makers* or *legislators*, nor perhaps in the highest pitch of meaning of which the phrase, absolutely considered, is susceptible, and which it might possibly have borne in a world without sin. But

they were such *ποιηταὶ νόμου* as, in harmony with the requirements of the *νόμος*, repented of their transgressions, bemoaned their shortcomings, turned longingly to the long-suffering God, put their trust in his clemency and propitiousness and tender mercy, and sought thenceforward to pursue—though doubtless with many failures—that which is true, that which is ethically beautiful, that which is ethically good. It should ever be borne in mind that the *νόμος* referred to here is not *the law of morals*, distinctively so called. *It is the written revelation in general.* It is, with the utmost possible distinctness, *the Bible*, as distinguished from *the moral law*. And the Bible of course is a book, not for the absolutely sinless and innocent, but for those who have, by their own wilfulness, missed their way, and stumbled and fallen. It is a book that contains glad tidings of great joy concerning God's compassion and mercy towards the erring and the guilty. They who obey its imperatives—though it may be only imperfectly—are *ποιηταὶ τοῦ νόμου*. Faith in Jesus, as well as holiness of character, is a *ποιήσις νόμου*. All works of faith and all labours of love are *ποιήματα νόμου*. The unselfish love which is the product of the inspiration that breathes through faith of God's propitiousness is sublimest poetry. A life of such love is the grandest of all poems. This fulfilling of the law stands in militant antithesis to the hollow, pretentious, resounding, artificial righteousness of Scribes and Pharisees, ancient and modern.

When the Apostle says that the *ποιηταὶ νόμου* will be justified on the day of the Great Assize, it is of moment to bear in mind that, in accordance with the imagery of the Biblical eschatology, the whole proceedings of that great day will consist in judicial processes, and the passing of sentences of justification and condemnation. It is not, therefore, to be wondered at that the inspired writer should use the future tense of the verb, and say *δικαιωθήσονται*.

There is, indeed, a preceding justification that is still more frequently referred to in the writings of the Apostle, and in systems of theology, and that is of surpassing importance in Evangelistic labours. But that justification is private, and is conditioned on faith and the great evangelical object embraced by faith. The justification, again, that takes place on the day of Universal Assize is public. It is a sentence passed in the Court of the Universe. And it is conditioned on such works of faith and labours of love as are patent to universal observation and verification.

It is not uninteresting to note that Roman Catholic expositors and divines have felt much difficulty in giving their peculiar idea of *justification*, or *justifaction*, as Dr. Owen calls it, to the verb which the Apostle employs, *δικαιωθήσονται*. Hence Este admits that here, at least, it must be understood forensically. His opinion is reproduced in modern times by Klee, Adalbert Maier, Reithmayr, and Bisping. Even Augustin of old, while exerting his utmost ingenuity—and that was something extraordinary—to prove that the word, even here, might mean *to make righteous*, felt himself constrained at length to admit its forensic interpretation (*De Spiritu et Lit.*, chap. xxvi.).

The 14th and 15th verses of the Chapter are most strictly a parenthesis, as is evidenced by the consideration that, though we should drop them entirely out of the Apostle's text there would be no break in the continuity of his composition or representation. The parenthetical statements, while enriching the discussion, are by no means essential to the validity of the reasoning. They are to the effect that even heathen, who have no written Revelation, no verbal Bible or νόμος, may, to an appreciable degree, fulfil to themselves the function of the Biblical νόμος in its relation to human duty and human privilege. The ἀνομοί, as well as the ἐννομοί, may comply with the great imperatives, that have regard to men as men and to men as sinners, but

such sinners as, notwithstanding their sinfulness, are under the arch of the Divine propitiousness. They may do, by the light of Nature, says the Apostle, the things of the νόμος; for they may be, in the inward correlations of their being, a νόμος to themselves. The life's work, enjoined in the νόμος, is inscribed on the tablets of their minds. And the Apostle's statement assumes that there are cases in which the great ethical and evangelical requirements of the νόμος are fulfilled. "Whenever (ὅταν)" says he, "Gentiles, who have not a written νόμος, actually do by Nature the things of the νόμος, these, though not having a verbal νόμος, are a νόμος to themselves, shewing the inscription in their minds of the work enjoined in the νόμος." Their inward consciousness, "the man within the breast," bears, with their outward obedience, concurrent testimony to the fact of the actual revelation; while still farther evidence of the same great reality is afforded by the reasonings which they have among themselves when they either inculcate on the one hand, or else vindicate on the other, the actions of those on whom their criticisms are passed. The "Pagan's Debt"—to refer to the remarkable title of John Goodwin's remarkable treatise on this subject—is a reality, because it is indissolubly connected with another reality, the "Pagan's Dowry." There is not a man living who is utterly impenetrable to the rays of the Sun of Righteousness.

Such is the grand idea that underlies the Apostle's representation. It is a little theodice. God's ways are equal and just. They are merciful too,—merciful in relation to all. It is only when mercy is spurned, either by Jews or by Gentiles, that punitive justice steps in to perform its peculiar function.

Bengel proposed to construe the expression *by nature*, not with the statement "do the things of the law," but with the foregoing statement, thus, "when Gentiles who

by nature have no written revelation." Benjamin Wills Newton seizes with eagerness upon the transposition, in order to get quit of the idea that there is anything Divine in "nature." But the Apostle was no advocate of atheism in "nature." Such a notion is exegetical impotence. And certainly the apexesis contained in the concluding clause of the 14th verse, and the first clause of the 15th—"these having not the νόμος are a νόμος to themselves, who shew the work of the νόμος written in their hearts"—is demonstration that the Apostle maintained that there are Gentiles, concerning whom it may be assumed that they do *by nature* the things of the law. They "work righteousness." Only it must never be lost sight of that when the Apostle speaks of "the things of the law," his reference is not to immaculate holiness of character, but to such faith, and such works of faith, as might be reasonably hoped for in the midst of "the true light that lighteth every man coming into the world." In the presence of this light God has not anywhere left Himself "without witness," and evangelical witness; so that men everywhere are "without excuse," if they keep their eyes closed against the Light, and their hearts double-bolted within against the entrance of Him who, though having the right to take full possession, yet patiently stands outside and "knocks."

JAMES MORISON.

A DREAM.

To the Editor of the Expositor.

SOME seven years ago I ventured to send you a slight account of a discourse on "The Rich Young Ruler," which I chanced to hear on a week-evening in one of our Midland towns.¹ I was in the same town a few weeks ago, on the same evening in the week;

¹ See *The Expositor* for 1877: First Series, Vol. vi. pp. 229 ff.