

The Gift is Not Like the Trespass

Lent 1

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Romans 5:12-19

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

We were enemies of God. That's what Paul wrote just before our Epistle text. This is how he put it: "For if while we were enemies..." "(W)hile we were enemies" implies that we no longer are; and that's what Paul wrote in conclusion of that statement: "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life." Jesus' death has reconciled us to God so that we are no longer His enemies. Now we live our lives in Him, and we "shall be saved by his life."

Keep these ideas in mind: that we were enemies and have been reconciled to God by Jesus' death, and, second, that we now live our lives in Him. These are both gifts of God. We could not—and would not—have been reconciled to God of our own wills. We had been His enemies. Today, we live our lives in Him, which is also not of our own power. We are able to live in Him only because He has sent us His Holy Spirit who lives in us.

Paul wrote about the future. He wrote "shall we be saved." "(S)hall". Future tense. We shall be, but are not yet saved by Jesus' life. That is our future hope. And our hope relies on the fact that Jesus' has been crucified for us, and the fact that He has sent us His Spirit to keep us in the faith and in His life.

Again, those are God's gifts to us. But in order to understand the gifts better, we must first learn more in depth *from what* our Lord Christ has saved us. That is what Paul explains in our text today: all of those things from which Jesus has rescued us.

Verse 1

Paul wrote: "just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come."

Again, Paul has outlined that we were reconciled to God as a gift of God, but in these words he expands on that idea. As you know, we had to be reconciled because we were enemies of God. We were enemies because of sin—but which sin? Here Paul begins his answer to that question. One form of sin which had separated us from God was that of original sin. Original sin is that sin which "came into the world through one man"—namely, Adam.

Now there must have been some in Paul's time—and there may even still be some today—who had questioned what Law humanity had before God gave the Law on Mount Sinai. Paul acknowledged their thought writing "sin is not counted where there is no law"; but he didn't stop there. He went on to write that despite the Law not having been written on Sinai during the history from Adam to Moses, death still reigned, and that that death was the result of sin.

For one thing, there had been a law which Adam broke: the law not to eat of the forbidden fruit. Well, okay, those of Paul's time and even our own might say, but what of the rest of those who died between Adam and Moses? What Law did they have? They had it, but they ignored it, wrote Paul. The fact remains that "death reigned...even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam." It is true that those

who died between Adam and Moses could not have partaken of the forbidden fruit—Adam had been cast out of the Garden of Eden. Yet nevertheless, they died from Adam to Moses. They had Law which they ignored.

So it is, then, that Jesus' death on the cross of Calvary covered not only partaking of the forbidden fruit, but even the original sin passed from Adam to all of his descendants—even up to you and to me.

Verse 2

As Paul put it “the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.”

Here you must pay attention to the grammar Paul used even closer. The gift we have received in Christ is much greater than Adam's one trespass. As Paul wrote “For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have”—have, plural, needing two items to be its subjects—“much more have (number one) the grace of God and (number two) the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ”—much more have those two things “abounded for many.” Do you see? It is truly bad and evil that many have had sin passed down from generation to generation, and that many have committed sins because of that inborn inclination—but as bad as those are, the gifts of God's grace and the free gift of grace from Jesus work more beautifully.

Adam's sin brought condemnation to the entire human race, but Jesus' obedience to God's Law brought justification for all sin—the sin Adam committed, the original sin he passed down, and the sins committed from our natural inclination to sin. Indeed, all of sin has been paid for by Jesus' death on the cross of Calvary. And what is more, and what is more beautiful, is that Jesus has given you that forgiveness freely.

By that forgiveness, Jesus has justified you before God; and now through that same forgiveness, Jesus has made it so that you may reign in life by His grace. This is how Paul stated it: “For if, because of one man's (that is Adam's) trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.”

To better understand this idea, the ESV Study Bible Commentary notes have us turn to Romans chapter six, verse twenty-three.

Verse 3

This is what Paul wrote in Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

An early Church Father, Chrysostom explained this text well, putting that “After speaking of the wages of sin...he does not say, the wages of good deeds, ‘but the gift of God;’ to show, that it was not of themselves that they were freed, nor was it a due they received, neither yet a return, nor a recompense of labors, but by grace (ESV Study Bible, p.1921).” In this way, it is not by our works, either in coming to God or in remaining in Him, but it was and is all by the work of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Neither does God owe us forgiveness. No, He simply gives it for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ, and that by grace.

In this way, Lutherans are correct when they say that we have been saved by grace alone through faith alone as Scripture alone tells us. And again, all of Scripture is about our Lord Christ Jesus alone. So it all fits together: we were enemies of God, but have been reconciled to Him by the work of Jesus on the cross. What is

more, we now live our lives in Christ. So, how do our lives look now? This is how Paul put it just a few verses earlier from six verse twenty-three:

“For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.” Again, we have that current and future hope of eternal life, the end of the sanctification the Holy Spirit is working in us now that we have been baptized into Jesus.

So how Paul concluded our text for this morning works to conclude this sermon: “Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.” And that one man is none other than Jesus Christ. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.