

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Sixth Sunday after Trinity, July 12, 2015

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 3, 392:1-2, 378, 416, 644.

Lessons: Joel 3:12-16, Romans 8:26-27, Matthew 13:24-43.

Sermon Text: Romans 5:15-21.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Paul needs to emphasize further the gift of God versus the sin of mankind. *“Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.”* We have a comparison again. The gift of God redeemed mankind from judgment and death. Paul then elaborates upon that idea in the next verse. *“The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation.”* That is obvious to everyone. People in the world are not getting to be better people. They are getting worse. And God makes it clear: *“the soul that sinneth, it shall die.”* (Ezekiel 18:4 KJV) *“The soul who sins is the one who will die.”* (NIV) Today we are reminded again:

THE GIFT OF JUSTIFICATION BRINGS LIFE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

- 1. This gift followed many sins, and**
- 2. Brought justification.**

We have here again Sin and Grace, Law and Gospel.

“But the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.” The gift came, in God's right time, following all the sinful thoughts, words, and deeds of all who had previously lived, and brought justification.

Let me propose an example of sorts. When a dam holding back a huge amount of water breaks, it usually starts as just one leak. So it is with sin. It was just one sin that engulfed all of mankind until the end of time. It started with just one sin.

But when the water from the broken dam subsides, people sometimes continue to live below the dam, planting crops, living their lives. But the landscape is changed forever. And the river continues to flow. So it is with the grace of God. Sin continues to flow throughout all of mankind. But the love of God in sending Jesus Christ to make things right also changes the hearts and lives of men living in the floodplain of sin. They have hope and confidence that things will be better, not only in eternity, but here on earth when they seek to live lives pleasing to God. So much for a poor human example.

Our sermon text today points out the great contrast, with Christ's gracious gift far overflowing, overshadowing and offsetting the damage father Adam did to the human race.

“But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.”

The “gift” Christ brought is not like the “trespass” Adam committed. Christ's gift is far greater and better than anything Adam could ever do to us. Paul brings that out in the next three sentences. Basically the three sentences all say the same thing and repetition reinforces Paul's point. But there are a few differences in the sentences that we should note. He says, *“For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more*

did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!" Paul is piling up a variety of terms for "gift" and "grace" to emphasize God's generosity. Note also in these sentences the use of the comparative "more" to show the superiority of Christ's gifts.

The apostle continues, *"Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification."* Adam and Christ are similar to each other in that both did something that has an effect on the whole human race. What Christ did, however, is much greater and far superior. The legacy Adam left came from one sin committed in the Garden of Eden. What Christ did reverses the effect of millions, billions, trillions of sins. The Old Testament teaches us that Israel piled up sin upon sin in their disobedience of the Mosaic Law. Add to that the transgressions of the Gentiles sinning against the natural knowledge of God written in their hearts, and one sees tons of transgressions in the history of the world. And sin continues today in our lives. Adam's one sin brought condemnation on all, but Christ's gift, following many trespasses, brought justification for the same group.

Paul adds another sentence: *"For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ."*

The contrast between Adam and Christ moves to its highest level with the discussion of the central issue: the matter of whether life or death will "reign", will rule in people's lives. The wages of sin is death, and by the sin of one man, death became king, as Paul says. But that condition is reversible. Death can be dislodged from its throne by the gift of God. What Adam did is serious because it put death in charge. But by God's grace in Christ, all is not lost. Paul exclaims, *"How much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ."*

When Paul writes that *"the many died"* and that the gift of God overflows *"to the many"* he is telling us about the universal justification earned for all men by Christ's death.

It is important to note Paul's change in scope here. He does not say that all will reign in life. That would be the unscriptural teaching of universalism; that all people will be saved regardless of whether or not they believe. Paul clearly states that eternal life comes *"through the one man, Jesus Christ."* It is believers in him *"who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness."* Salvation is there for all, but only the believers in Christ actually receive it. Christ's deadly earnest warning remains true: *"Whoever does not believe will be condemned"* (Mark 16:16).

With this discussion of the life or death ruling for the sinner, Paul comes back and emphasizes *"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. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous."*

In these two sentences, we see why Paul has put so much emphasis on the effect and results of Adam's sin. What Adam did had its effect on all the world. Paul has pointed out that even without the commandments given on Mount Sinai for people to break and thus incur personal and individual guilt by willful sinning, all died because all had been infected with inherited sin. Adam's guilt was passed on to them. We could say that Adam's guilt was imputed, or charged, to them.

That is important for Paul's comparison here. Just as one trespass on Adam's part brought condemnation to all people, so there is also a blessed counterpart to that. By a similar transfer process, the righteous conduct of one man, Christ, came to be credited or imputed or charged to that same world of sinners who had been infected by the one man, Adam. Because of what Christ has done for the world of sinners, God now looks at them as being holy and sinless.

The world of sinners has done nothing to bring about a change. They have not changed themselves so as actually to become holy. It is rather that through Christ, God looks at them as if they were holy. He declares them to be just; he justifies them. Thus, they have a new and changed status before God.

When Paul says that this is a justification *"that brings life for all men,"* we need to take that at face value. What Christ did for sinners truly brings life, but it is a blessing that needs to be accepted by faith. Life and salvation are there for all, but unbelief rejects what is there and thus loses the benefits a gracious God has provided.

Paul continues, ***“For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”*** This sentence is virtually a repetition of the previous one, with only a few variations. “Many” replaces the “all” of the previous verse, but really emphasizes again that God did this for all mankind, for all have sinned. This group in fact includes all the world.

Referring to everyone, Paul says, ***“the many will be made righteous.”*** Now remember that ***“to make righteous”*** does not mean that they actually become holy and without sin and do not sin at all. Rather, in Christ their sins have been paid for so that God can now look at them as if they were without sin. Being viewed by God as being righteous reflects their new and changed status before him.

When Paul says that the many ***“will be made righteous,”*** he is not referring to a future time but rather to the logical consequence of Christ's work. That consequence, or connection, is made by the comparison Paul gives us. Just as what Adam did had its effect on all people, so it logically follows that a similar effect, or consequence, may be expected from what Christ did. That consequence is that sinners ***“will be made righteous”*** in God's sight.

Did you notice how clear God's grace and generosity are? Our Savior-God has used words like ***“more”*** (5:15, 17), ***“overflow”*** (5:15), and ***“abundant provision”*** (5:17). It is no surprise, then, that Paul one more time sets up a ***“just as . . . so”*** comparison to show that the blessings Christ accomplished by his obedience are greater and more abundant than the damage done by man's disobedience. In this last comparison, Paul moves ahead and includes not just the sin of one man, Adam, but the guilt of everyone who has ever done anything contrary to God's holy will as expressed in his law. Adding these “actual” sins to the damning “inherited” or “original” sins increases the quantity of guilt to a frightening load. But even this poses no insurmountable problem for a gracious God. As man's sin increased, God's grace in Christ simply increased all the more. The apostle describes this amazing phenomenon with these words: ***“The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*** Even human laws are written and added to in order to make crime greater and more deserving of greater punishment. So the Law of God, given on Mount Sinai, made the greatness, the horribleness of sin more obvious to all mankind

But so great is the love of our Savior-God! So rich is his grace to fallen sinners deserving of death! Where sin previously reigned in death, there grace now reigns to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. As believers in Christ and beneficiaries of his grace, we might think of a doxology of praise, as Paul does a few chapters later. May we rejoice in this glory that we have received from the riches and wisdom of God! ***“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! ‘Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?’ ‘Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?’ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.”*** (Romans 11:33-36 NIV)