

¹² Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned—¹³ To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come. ¹⁵ 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! ¹⁶ Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. ¹⁷ 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! ¹⁸ Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. ¹⁹ 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.

I KNOW A CHAMPION

"Teacher," he asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Lk 10:25). Another man asked Jesus a slightly different question, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Lk 18:18). Not much different. I wonder how many times Jesus was asked this question. Both men left Jesus unsatisfied. Both men wanted to do something. Do something to inherit eternal life.

We like to be able to do things. Recently, thanks to a helpful YouTube video, I sewed a button back onto a pair of my pants. It felt good to be able to do that. Mind you, I have yet to wear those pants. I see them in the closet, and I see them looking back at me and I reach for another pair. I think I'll wear my newly rebuttoned pants on Wednesday, so come to worship, preferably or at least come back and see if I have to hold up my pants.

It feels good to be able to do things on our own, but every now and again we need a champion. Every now and again, we need a champion or mechanic for our cars. Every now and again, we need a champion or doctor for our bodies. Last Wednesday, Ash Wednesday presented us with a problem. "Ashes you are and to ashes you will return." Death is a problem. And death is a problem because sin is a problem. And sinners need a champion, and champion who can fix our sin problem and by fixing our sin problem, will also fix our death. problem.

The Apostle Paul, at first, presents our sins and death problem in a very simple way. He says, *"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned."* Adam sinned and Adam died. All people sin and all people die. The problem is simple, but the solution becomes more difficult because of the "dash" at the end of verse 12. What does that dash mean? The dash means Paul is going to make a side comment or a parenthetical comment about, *"all sinned"*. We'll get back to the dash and to the difficult side comment shortly, but let's finish the simple comparison that starts in verse 12 first. And to do that we have to go all the way to verse 18. "Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people (this repeats verse 12), so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man (Adam) the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man (Jesus) the many will be made righteous. Jesus is the champion. You have sin. Your sin results in death. Jesus is obedient. Jesus offers his obedience as a gift so you and all sinners can have justification and life and be made righteous through faith. "Easy peasy," as kids say. The Christian faith doesn't have to be rocket science or brain surgery.

But the Christian faith can become and needs to become even harder than rocket science and brain surgery because as we move past the dash of verse 12 we will learn it's not really our sin that condemns us and all people. Adam's sin condemns all people. Adam's sin condemns us. Ready?

Adam's sin condemns us.

Try to stay with Apostle Paul. Verses 13 & 14, *"To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come."*

You know, God has written his law in our hearts. The Apostle Paul knows that too. That law is called the natural law and the natural law works with a person's conscience. A properly working conscience means we will feel bad if we think we are doing something wrong. Paul is not writing about our conscience here. Paul is writing about clearly communicated rules with clearly communicated consequences such as, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good or evil." That rule was made

clear to Adam as was the consequence, “lest you should die.” No one from Adam until Moses received a rule exactly like Adam did, but everyone from Adam to Moses, with the exception of Enoch, died. Death ruled like an undefeated champion, not because everyone has actual sins, but because everyone has been affected or infected by the Adam and by the teaching called original or inherited sin.

We see this truth more clearly in places like Phoenix Childrens’ Hospital. Some of those children who get sick and die are tiny. They haven’t done anything wrong and yet because of the original sin of Adam, they still die. Original sin is seen even more clearly through the children who never see the light of day but die in their mother’s womb. Why does this happen? It’s the consequence of original sin. For some, that consequence comes in childhood or younger, but for us with superior genetics we still see this consequence as adults, and we age to 70 years or 80 years if we have the strength but not to 120 years or 130 years. How foolish to ask, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” “Surely, I was sinful from birth, from the time my mother conceived me.” Yes, we will die because of our sins, but we were already condemned before we had committed any actual sins. Adam’s sin condemns us. And yet even as Paul stresses this teaching of original sin in verse 14 Paul makes a comment about a champion Paul wants the depth of the darkness of sin to resonate in our hearts. And yet even at the tail end of our verse 14 Paul hints at a champion who was in the same position as Adam was, “a pattern of the one who is to come.”

Christ’s obedience acquits us.

Just as Adam’s sin condemns us, so also Christ’s obedience acquits us. “But the gift,” Paul says in verse 15, “is not like the trespass.” The gift is better than 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! ¹⁶ Nor can the gift of God be compared with the result of one man’s sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. ¹⁷ 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!”*

It’s quite gracious to give someone a second chance. And yet how often don’t these second chances come to ruin? The gift of Christ’s obedience is greater than a second chance. In the story Jesus told about the prodigal son, the son thought it would be gracious to be a servant in his Father’s house, but the gift of Christ’s obedience is greater than getting into God’s house as a servant. We can think of many ways the gift of God’s grace is more than our sin, but I like the comparison in our text of how death rules like a king so powerfully over sinners on earth so even more we will rule over dead and all things with Jesus in heaven. But why wait until then. Did you see how Jesus ruled over the devil in the wilderness. We are only told of the three interactions, but there would have been many more bait and switch interaction Jesus would have encountered over the forty days and nights and Jesus ruled the forty days like a king, like a champion. And we need a champion. And Jesus is our Champion, but why wait until heaven to rule like Jesus. Yes, we can rule with Jesus right now even as our Apostle Paul ruled through faith with a sinful nature. And how did Paul rule?

Remember, Paul was like one of those men who asked Jesus, “Teacher, good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life.” And like those men, the Apostle Paul learned from Jesus directly, how trying to earn the inheritance through human effort doesn’t work. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through our champion, Jesus Christ. And yet the Apostle Paul did the most amazing thing. The Apostle Paul took that same effort he wasted on a false belief and put that effort into the service of his faith. The Apostle Paul wanted to understand God’s Word more deeply. The Apostle Paul wanted to speak God’s Word more clearly. And like Jesus in the wilderness, the Apostle Paul wanted to speak God’s Word in a timely way like a champion, like a king.

How often might we become satisfied with a good enough knowledge of God’s Word? Might that be why we find ourselves all too often on the losing end of temptation? Might that be why we see Satan so successfully break the bruised reeds and finally snuff out the smoldering wicks of our family of faith? No, God’s Word is not rocket science or brain surgery. Everyone can understand salvation through faith and yet at the same time far more than any other earthly discipline, yes even rocket science and brain surgery, God’s Word can always be studied more and always with greater results than any other discipline on earth. And to what end? So we can share God’s Word more clearly and save more people like Paul. And so we can rule over Satan and temptation even now like a king as Jesus did for us in the wilderness. Amen.