

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
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Sermon by Pastor Bart Brauer  
***One man makes all the difference***

—Romans 5:12-19

In a book called *The New Strong-Willed Child* (pages 46-47); Dr. James Dobson says the Bible teaches that we are born in sin. We inherit a disobedient nature from Adam, and the tendency to do wrong is transmitted genetically. Children don't have to be taught bad behaviors; they are natural expressions. Dobson provides evidence to support this teaching. "People have tried to rape, plunder, burn, blast, and kill each other century after century," he says. Also mentioning the "depressing incidence of murder, drug abuse, child molestation, prostitution, adultery, homosexuality, and dishonesty," Dobson aims to prove that people are not naturally good. At that point, a question is asked: "What, then, does this biblical understanding mean for parents? Are they to consider their babies guilty before they have done anything wrong?" Dobson's answer: "Of course not. Children are not responsible for their sins until they reach an age of accountability." Do you agree with that? Do you agree we are born not guilty? Or do you disagree with that? Do you think we are born guilty? Either way, where would you point to in the Bible to justify your answer?

The evil in the world is obvious. The evil in you, if you are honest with yourself, is in plain sight of your own conscience. Death—as teacher Francis Pieper said it, "The only reason why we do not fully realize the enormity of death is its daily occurrence among us" (*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. 1, 536). We slip and slide in so much evil and sin and death. How horrible! And that is the right word for it—horrible! Where does it all come from? What is the source of so much horror? One man. One deed. One bite. A bite? Yes, that's right! A bite! One sin. One transgression, one trespass. Call it what you will—one deviation, one error, one failure, one miss, one overstep, however you can describe it—it was one sin against God. That is the single source of the multitude and abundance of all the sin, evil, and death on earth.

God created the man good, in God's own image. God created all the trees in Eden for the man's good, including that good tree called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God wanted the man to learn by experience how good it is to fear, love, and trust in God above all things, and in so doing, the man would also learn by experience that evil is something he would never ever want to become. So God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you shall not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." If the man ever chose to disobey God's good command, the consequence would be horrible: "When you eat of it, you will surely die." But Adam did eat. He took a bite of the tree's fruit. He disobeyed God, crossing a line he should never have crossed, doing what he was never supposed to do. He failed, refusing to fear, love, and trust in God above all things. Adam got condemned for it. He got punished for it, hearing the words straight from God's mouth, "Dust you are and to dust you will return." Horrible. What a horrible thing!

It is the true story of one man's one sin. But you cannot sit back and view it like some detached observer who's got better things to do. The true story of the one man's one sin affects you. That one man, Adam, with his one sin makes all the difference for everybody else in the world. *Through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners. The result of one trespass was condemnation for all men*, for all human beings. Including you. When the one man disobeyed, you got classified as a sinner. When Adam became a sinner, you did too. When the one trespass brought condemnation on the one who did it, you got condemned. When Adam was sentenced to death, you were too. *The many died by the trespass of the one man. The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation. By the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man.* Granted, not everyone did exactly what Adam did. But that's irrelevant. *Through one man sin entered the world, and death came in through sin, and so death came to all people, because all sinned.* So what can you do about all this? Absolutely nothing.

Let's go back to Doctor Dobson. He says we inherit a disobedient nature from Adam. When asked, "What, then, does this biblical understanding mean for parents? Are they to consider their babies guilty before they have done anything wrong?" Dobson answers, "Of course not. Children are not responsible for their sins until they reach an age of accountability." Now my aim here is not to attack Dr. Dobson personally. He's not here to answer for himself. He is a Christian and a trained, experienced psychologist with many fine things to teach parents and families. But I bring up this example to show how foreign and how offensive to our natural way of thinking is this biblical teaching presented to us in Romans chapter 5. Are parents to consider their babies guilty? Yes. Of course. All human beings became sinners through Adam's disobedience. All human beings were condemned when Adam was condemned. The punishment of death came on all human beings when Adam took one bite. Maybe you'd like to say, "But that's not fair! It's not fair that one man should make all that difference for me and the people I love! It's not fair that one man with his one sin should make all that difference for the whole world!" Well, maybe it's not fair, as you define fairness. But that's the way it is. God says that's the way it is. And you have to live and die with it.

Speaking of what's not fair, neither is this... *The result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all...through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.* That's grace. So there's sin and there's grace. Along with sin come condemnation, punishment, and death. Along with grace come justification, righteousness, and life. Sin and grace. They are opposites. But they are not equals, not even close. Let's do some comparing.

*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!* The grace belongs to God. God was the one sinned against when his own first human creation disobeyed him. God is the one sinned against in heaps by all humanity. Yet God he displays this wonderful quality called grace. He looks on you with favor. He does things for you that are the opposite of what you deserve from him. He is a gracious God, and he shows heaps and heaps and heaps of grace to all humanity. That same grace of God is attributed to one man. To Jesus Christ. He is God in human flesh, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. From the fullness of his grace we have all received grace upon grace, one blessing after another.

*The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification.* The gift Jesus graciously brings far outdoes the damage done by Adam's sin. In fact, the gift Jesus graciously brings far outdoes the many sins that everybody else has done ever since, even the many sins that anyone and everyone will ever do. God's gracious gift, Jesus' gracious gift, is righteousness. Everybody is declared righteous. All the world is counted as righteous.

Then there's a third way sin and grace are not equals, not even close. *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.* You can do absolutely nothing to reverse the death penalty that hangs over you. But God can do something about it, and he did. Through one man, through Jesus Christ, God removed your sin, gave you righteousness, gave you eternal life, and puts a crown on your head that nobody can knock off. Yes, death is a formidable thing. But for those who trust in Jesus Christ, death has become temporary, to be replaced by a resurrection from death to life on the last day and an everlasting life with God, his angels, and all fellow believers in Christ.

One man made all the difference in the world when he did one sin and brought condemnation and death to everybody else. But another man did much more. He made all the difference in the world through a lifetime of righteousness and obedience. He brought righteousness and life to everybody else. He brought a life-giving justification for all people. Through his singular obedience the many will become righteous.

Obedience. All of Jesus Christ's life and death was obedience. It even started before his earthly life, when he, the Son of God, was gearing up to enter the world. "Here I am," the Son told his Father in Psalm 40, "I have come. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." The obedience continued when the 12-year-old Jesus obeyed his Father by listening to the Word of God in his Father's house, the temple, and when he listened to Mary and Joseph and returned home to Nazareth to be obedient to them in their home. At 30 years old, since it was proper to do so to fulfill all righteousness, Jesus had himself baptized by John. Right after his baptism, some of the greatest tests to his obedience came when he went into the desert to be tempted by the devil. When tempted by food, Adam failed. Not Jesus. Hungry though he was, Jesus obeyed. "It is written: Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." Whatever temptation the devil threw at Jesus, the devil got the same reply thrown back in his face, with Jesus saying, "It is written." Jesus was always doing what pleased his heavenly Father. He was constantly keeping God's Word in everything he thought, said, and did. He loved God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength. He loved every neighbor as he loved himself. Truth be told, he loved his neighbor even more than he loved himself. The thought of having to drink the cup and suffer and die brought him to tears; he trembled at just the thought of it. He even asked for it all to be taken away, if that was at all possible. But he knew it wasn't. He knew it had to be done for Adam and for all Adam's descendants, for all his fellow human beings, including you and me. And he was the only one who could do it. Could there be a more obedient prayer than the one Jesus prayed in the garden: "Father, not my will, but yours be done"? So Jesus suffered. He suffered all the anger God ever felt, from the first day that Adam publicly crossed him to your latest private act of defiance. Jesus suffered all that sin ever deserved during those hours he was nailed to the cross. And when it was almost over, with just one death to die that would take away all the horror that Adam's sin caused, Jesus offered up a final obedient prayer: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

It was essential for us that God accept Jesus' obedience. And how pleased God was! "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased," God said of him. Then God raised Jesus from the dead, declaring him to be Lord and Christ. Jesus Christ is the one man who makes all the difference for everybody else. The one man who makes all the difference for you, guilty though you were at birth. Adam was a killer for you. Jesus Christ brings you life. Believe that, keep believing that and you will live. Amen.