

Saved By Grace Lutheran Church
Sermon by Pastor Tim Bartels

Trinity 10, 2014
Romans 5:12-21¹

Part I

You and I sit here because of a father and a mother. We are their offspring. As their offspring, we have inherited our genetic make-up from each of them. We are a mix of the genes passed down to us from our parents. Those genes determine our build and the way our bodies and minds work.²

It's not surprising, then, that we hear people make the comment, "You look like your father" or "You have your mother's eyes." Sometimes you can look at a picture from four generations back. As you do, you are struck by a resemblance. A great great grandchild is look-a-like. One thing about genes, biologists tell us, is that each cell in the body contains two of them. One of those genes is from the mother; the other from the dad. One or both of them can be *defective*. The defective gene passes down an illness in a family. If the gene is recessive, the child merely carries the illness. If the gene is dominant, then the child will become sick with the illness.³

Some examples of genetically linked disease are a form of diabetes, muscular dystrophy, Alzheimers, and some cancers.⁴ That's why doctors ask about the family health history. They want to know if the family has a history of genetic diseases. If it does, it makes you susceptible.

So, family history is important when considering infirmity. When you think about family history, all of us come from *one* father. We are all children of Adam. Adam has passed *his* genes on down to us. The genes we got from Adam are *defective*. Not only are they defective, they are *dominant*. Because they are, we are not only *carriers* of the infirmity, we are also *sick* with the infirmity. The infirmity is inherited sin, also called

original sin. It's what our text speaks of when it says, "through one man sin entered the world."

It all came about when Adam disobeyed God. He reached out with his hand, grabbed the forbidden fruit, and took a bite. When he did, he became infected with sin. Infected with sin, Adam's seed became defective. When he fathered children, all he could do was pass the defect on to his children.

Part II

The defect comes with *symptoms*. Its like what happens with genetics. When a defective gene is dominant, the child becomes infirm with the disease; and the disease has symptoms. Take muscular dystrophy, for example. Symptoms include; drooling, eyelids drooping, frequent falls, loss of muscle strength and size.⁵ They are clues, *indicating* muscular dystrophy.

The same is true of the inherited disease of original sin. It, too, has symptoms. They are the sins of thought, word and deed that we commit. The thing is, if there is no diagnosis of the disease, we might know there is something wrong. We might, but we won't know just *how* wrong. We might think that we can get better, when we can't.

Our text gets at that when it says, "until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law." To put it another way, *without* the law's diagnosis, we can't know how sick we really are with sin.

An example of that is Tyre and Sidon, neighbors to Israel; and Sodom, neighbor to Abraham.⁶ They didn't have God's word. Though they didn't, they had symptoms of original sin. They knew something was wrong. They did and attempted their own man-made fixes – false gods and forbidden pleasure.

It's how it is for many in the world, today. They know something is wrong. They see the brutality man does to man as was done to an American journalist by his captors this week; they see the ravaging effect of disease as the Ebola outbreak claims more lives; they see the tensions between police and populace as it goes on in Ferguson, Missouri. They see

these symptoms and think the answer lies *within* man. They, like Tyre, Sidon and Sodom turn to man to find the cure for sin; to self styled religion to improve man, and to forbidden pleasure to get relief.

That is where man ends up without the diagnosis of the law; and that's the trouble. If you don't have the diagnosis of the law, you *can't* know what is wrong. You can't know the horrible infection passed down from Adam. So you try and fix it, but you can't. You *still* die.

Then there are those to whom the diagnosis *is* given. They are the ones to whom "the law entered that the offense might abound." Capernaum and Bethsaida are examples of that.⁷ They were Israelite communities. They heard the law. They knew the law's diagnosis. Then Jesus came and said, "I am the cure." They heard him, but they wanted a *different* Jesus. That's why Jesus says their condemnation is *greater than* the pagan communities. They knew better.

The same happens today. It happens to us in the church. It does when we want Jesus to be something *more than* the cure for sin; when we want *more* out of Jesus *than* forgiveness and salvation. We want a Jesus to get us ahead in life. That would prove he loves us. We want a Jesus who is popular with the masses. Then we will feel we belong. We want a Jesus who doesn't care how we live. Then we can enjoy forbidden pleasure.

When we want these things out of Jesus, it is because we *do* want something more than a cure for sin. We do, because we think we are not so sick. We don't like the diagnosis of the law. We don't like to hear that our infirmity is terminal.

We don't like to hear it anymore than someone diagnosed with muscular dystrophy likes to hear it. The thing is, there is no known cure for muscular dystrophy. It can be treated to control it, *but* the sick can't be healed. The symptoms slowly get worse. In the end it claims the life of the infirm.

That's the ultimate symptom of sin, death. It is, because we can't cure the disease. Death eventually claims the infected. It robs the infected of life. It begins from the moment of birth. "In sin my mother conceived me,"⁸

David confessed. We are like the walking dead. We are alive, but dead; dead spiritually, though alive bodily.

That was true for our first father, Adam. God told him, "in the day you eat of (the forbidden fruit) you will surely die." Adam didn't breath his last the day he fell. No. He live nine-hundred more years. Yet, he died spiritually. Spiritually dead, he was walking toward the grave. That was true not only for Adam, it is true for all of us; and, Adam's sin does more than just dig a grave for us. It also prepares a place in hell for us.⁹

That's the the point. *All* people are subject to it. *All* are under its grip. *All* inherit Adam's sin. "Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned."

Part III

That's where Adam's sin bring us, down to the grave, down to hell...*but* God would not leave us there. "Adam is a type of him who was to come," that is Christ. To put it another way, the acts of both Adam and Christ apply to all mankind; to all people. "As *one* trespass lead to condemnation for *all* men, so *one* act of righteousness leads to justification 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."¹⁰ "As one...so many; as one...for all men." Each one's act is universal. No one is excluded.

So both acts are universal...but note the *contrast*. Adam's act applies to all *negatively*. Christ's act applies to all *positively*. Adam's act infects all with sin. Christ's act brings the cure for all. Adams act puts all in the grave. Christ's act bring life for all.

That's what Christ Jesu did. It all began with his conception. His conception was not like yours and mine. You are I were conceived and born in sin. Jesuswas not. He wasn't, because he had no human father. *God* was his Father. So, Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb. It means Jesus was born *without* sin. He had *no* defective genes – none whatsoever.

Born without sin, Jesus lived the life we can't. He lived life *without* any symptoms of sin. He *never* sinned in thought, word or deed. He *always* did the right thing, spoke truthfully, had pure thoughts. *Always!* Jesus was perfect *for* us.

Because Jesus was perfect, God gave him all our sin - all the symptoms of our inherited disease; all the inherited sin itself. He did, and Jesus became *sick* with *our* sin. God's word puts it like this, "He has borne *our* infirmity and carried *our* sorrows."¹¹ In that way, Jesus got us the cure; the gene therapy, if you will.

Today, gene therapy is researched and practiced by biophysicists and therapists. In some cases, people with defective genes are given special diets. They are used to prevent build-up in the body of harmful toxins. Blood-type diets are along this line. In other cases, the infirm are given drugs. The drugs block or reroute chemical pathways. They let the body function normally. Still in other cases, they are subject to genetic testing. The testing is used to take preventative options. That might include preventative surgery.¹²

It's amazing what modern science can do. Of course it all *costs*. It costs to develop and research. The cost is passed on down to the patient. The cost is not cheap.

Talk about cost! The cure Jesus got for you cost him the *ultimate* price. It was his blood – the infinite blood of God. Not all the amount spent on gene therapy research; no, not all the money in the world holds a candle to that cost...and the price Jesus paid, the blood he shed, cures from the *deadliest* of infirmities, sin; and its most tangible symptom, death. It does...and it costs you nothing. Jesus gives it to you free of charge. He does in baptism. There, he applied the cure to you. There, he washed you clean in his blood. Washed clean, you are justified; and justified you have *eternal* life.

...and if you think that your sin is too big for the cure, think again. Paul piles up the terms in comparing it to sin's deadly effect - "abundance of grace," "much more the grace of God"; "grace abounded much more."

That is, God's grace, as one of my seminary professors said, “*superabounds.*” Jesus act of forgiveness is *greater than* the sin you inherited from Adam or commit. It is, because God got the cure. *Nothing* is greater than God, not even your sin. It all goes to say, “Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more.” Amen!

1References to the text (NKJ) will not be cited unless another translation is referenced

2Humanillnesses.com/original/Gas-Hep/Genetic-Diseases

3Ibid

4Ibid

5Ibid

6Matthew 11.20-24

7Ibid

8Psalms 51.5

9*Lectioary Preaching Resources*, Rossow, Concordia Publishing House, p. 158

10Romans 5.18,19 ESV

11Matthew 8.17

12Humanillnesses.com/original/Gas-Hep/Genetic-Diseases