

"Guilt – Ours and 'Theirs'"

Text: John 9:1-7,13-16,39-41

Grace and peace be yours in the name of our Savior God. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

There is always a temptation during a crisis (or perceived crisis) both to allow the obvious problem to suck all of the oxygen out of every room (every discussion, every devotion, every sermon) and to over-react. You've all, I'm sure, experienced more than a little of both this past week. To that end, I would be surprised if the vast majority of sermons in churches around the world this morning didn't deal almost exclusively with the Corona Virus. We're not going to do that here this morning, and by way of explanation, I'll offer three words: "Roundup ready corn."

"Roundup" is the most popular brand of a chemical called glyphosate. Glyphosate blocks the production of a necessary enzyme in growing plants, which therefore kills them. Almost all plants need this enzyme, so glyphosate kills almost all plants. Enter Roundup ready plants, like corn, which were developed to use a different enzyme, and are therefore impervious to glyphosate. So what's the point?

If you were a farmer and you wanted to grow corn, would you plant regular seeds, and then have to find some way to destroy the millions of weeds that would also grow (by tilling them under or by pulling them up one by one) or would you find it more efficient to plant resistant seed and to just spray everything with a product that kills only the weeds?

Now apply that to the Word of God. Which is more efficient, to learn basic Bible truths that deal with an incalculable number of life's problems, or to try to deal with every problem one at a time? Here we choose the basics, not because we don't want to deal with individual problems, but because God equips us to deal with all of the problems of life when he teaches us the basic truths he revealed to us in His Word.

We'll see evidence of the wisdom of God's approach this morning as we explore something as basic as guilt, and how a basic understanding of guilt can help us in ways we never would have imagined. The text that will guide us in this study is found in John's Gospel, the Ninth Chapter:

^{ESV} **John 9:1-7,13-16,39-41** *As he passed by, he (Jesus) saw a man blind from birth. ² And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of*

God might be displayed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ Having said these things, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud ⁷ and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing. ¹³ ¶ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ So the Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and I see." ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them... ³⁹ Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains.

So far the revealed Word and will of our God. With complete confidence that these are in fact the verbally inspired words of our God, and confident that he will bless us with added comfort and understanding through the study of these words this morning, so we pray: **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

It would be interesting to hear what popped into everyone's head when you heard the word "guilt." While I would like to hear that no one was burdened with the wrong kind of guilt, I'm guessing that's not the case. There are, of course, right and wrong kinds of guilt. Unfortunately many Christians continue to be burdened by one of the wrong kinds – lingering shame concerning a past sin, together with a certain level of anxiety or uncertainty over the status of that sin. It's easy to accept God's pronouncement that *some* sins are forgiven, especially those sins that seem rather insignificant to us. Not so easy to have such confidence concerning the big, nasty sins – or those sins that we seem to commit over and over again. In our heads we know that Jesus paid for all sins, even while in our hearts we refuse to feel fully cleansed.

The first thing that we need to understand about sin, therefore, is that our categorization of sin is entirely of our own manufacture. It is artificial – 100% man-made. There is nothing in Scripture that leads us to believe that God considers some sins to be more forgivable or less terrible than others. As to their power to condemn, all sins are equal. In

other words, each individual sin carries the power to send us to hell – apart from Jesus Christ. That means that if a man lived a perfect life (assuming, for the sake of argument, that he had no original sin) and just before he died he had one fleeting, covetous thought, he could not enter heaven. Nothing *almost* perfect gets into heaven.

Yet even knowing this as we do, even knowing that Christ paid the full penalty for every single sin, certain sins still tend to trouble us. The residual effect of some of the bad things we've done lingers. They gnaw at us. They leave us with a certain level of uncertainty, and if that uncertainty remains for any length of time, it invariably turns to doubt, and doubt has no place in the Christian faith.

Clearly then guilt is something we must conquer, and the first step in conquering it is to understand it.

Know, first of all, that not all guilt is bad. For the unrepentant sinner, guilt is actually a most precious gift from God. God does not want sinners to go quietly into the night of eternal torment. In fact his desire is that human being would suffer whatever is necessary *during their time of grace on earth* to awaken them to the terrible danger of their spiritual condition. The good kind of guilt comes as a result of the human conscience, which is itself the remnant of the law that God wrote on our hearts at creation. That law written on our hearts provides us with a natural understanding that certain thoughts and actions are just wrong.

In fact much of what the godless do today is a direct result of trying to deal with the guilt that God mercifully brings into their world. Their solution, unfortunately, is not to repent and turn to Jesus Christ for forgiveness. Natural man opts instead for one of two solutions: either they seek to "make up for" their sin, or they deny it. Our society is, tragically, getting very good at both – but particularly good of late at denying that sin is sin. Society used to acknowledge the shame of marital relations outside of marriage. Now they give themselves over to it and brag about it. There used to be no question that same sex relations were an abomination to God. Now our society seems almost to *promote* it as the cutting edge of social evolution. Lying, cheating, laziness, drunkenness – who even considers such things as anything worse than "just the way things are"? This brazen acceptance of sin is something new, but here is evidence that new doesn't always mean "improved."

Churches are not only not immune from the problem, many churches have historically been part of the problem itself. Human beings will always have a natural inclination to help those who are hurting. Where so many go

wrong today is in offering "help" that God doesn't allow. They have substituted compassion for a clear statement of God's Word and will. They have so mangled and distorted Biblical concepts of repentance, love and forgiveness that what they are now dispensing to those that are hurting looks nothing whatsoever like what God prescribes in his Word.

Our text for this morning offers us some much needed help and guidance in all of this. The first thing it teaches us is an example of the wrong kind of guilt. Not surprisingly, this wrong kind of guilt was introduced and perpetuated by the church leaders of Jesus' day. You heard an example of this wrong kind of guilt in the opening verses of our text: ***As he passed by, he (Jesus) saw a man blind from birth. ² And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"***

This was "assigned guilt." In other words, the society of Jesus' day had been trained to believe that everyone suffering some sort of physical or economic hardship was being punished by God for past sin. We call this "assigned guilt" because it is not a natural product of the conscience but an artificial guilt created and imposed by man. In fact Jesus' own disciples were so sure of this untruth that they begged the real question when they asked the Savior about it. They didn't ask, *"Is this man's blindness a result of some sin?"* they asked, ***"Who sinned, this man or his parents?"*** – so certain were they of the error they had been taught.

Jesus' answer was profoundly insightful: ***"It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him."*** Don't miss Jesus' point here, nor its application to your own life. Not only did Jesus here teach us that the difficulties and disabilities that plague our existence shouldn't be viewed as any sort of reliable indicator of sin, he also taught us the profound truth that God allows hardships to afflict human beings for reasons that aren't always readily understandable. In the case of our text, think of how long the blind man and his parents suffered without any idea whatsoever of just why things were the way they were. In fact it wasn't until the man was a grown adult that he came to understand that his congenital blindness was the very thing that the Savior of all mankind used to prove beyond a shadow of any reasonable doubt that he was exactly who he said he was. When Jesus cured the man's blindness, he offered to the world of his day a miraculous sign that they just could not explain away. You heard in our text the "problem" that this miracle presented to them: ***Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he***

does not keep the Sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" And there was a division among them."

The man born blind was suddenly able to see, but to see so much more than the physical sights of God's creation. He was allowed to see the reason for his blindness. More than that, he was able to see – really see – his Savior. The man was thereby given a blessing that most often evades you and me. Most often we never perceive the reason for suffering. Most often we are never privileged to know God's plan, or just what good God works through our suffering – for ourselves or for others. The point here is that God knows, and with that we need to learn both contentment and patience.

This man had been burdened his entire life not only by his blindness, but by society's faulty assignment of guilt. This was obviously the wrong kind of guilt. Jesus concludes our text by teaching the right kind of guilt. You heard the exchange at the end of our text: **Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind."** ⁴⁰ **Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?"** ⁴¹ **Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains.**

Jesus here uses the word "blind" in two different ways. He also thereby defines two categories of sin and guilt. While the unbelieving Pharisees were in the one category, know that you are in the other.

The two kinds of "blindness" are physical and spiritual. The Pharisees in our text asked Jesus if they too were blind. Jesus' replay was that physical blindness carries no guilt. Their problem was that they refused to acknowledge their far more serious spiritual blindness – their unbelief. Because they claimed to be righteous apart from faith in Jesus Christ, their guilt, their spiritual blindness, remained.

Sound familiar? That's exactly the sort of thing our society advocates, which is the reason mankind today never really deals with guilt. Try as they might it's no simple thing to pretend away a guilty conscience – which is also why the reaction to sin and its condemnation is always so explosive. Guilt is always festering, always building, always tormenting. Make-believe just makes it worse. Pretending that sin isn't sin just makes the sinner all the more guilt-ridden, no matter how much they protest.

But by the grace of God that isn't you and me – not because we are better, but because we've been shown that better way. The key to ridding

ourselves of our guilt is to focus not on our own sinfulness but on Christ's goodness. Concentrate not on how imperfect you are but on how perfect our Savior was. Focus on the fact that he was good enough to pay for *every single sin*. More than that, he came to earth not just to pay for our sins, but to carry also our guilt – to the cross. As he took the one (our sin) so he also removed the other (our guilt). Through faith we truly are clean, perfect, holy in his sight. No residue of sin clings to us, therefore no lingering feelings of guilt are ever appropriate. What is now appropriate is a renewed appreciation for just what your Lord has done for you. From the absolution in our liturgy: *"God, our heavenly Father, has forgiven all your sins. By the perfect life and innocent death of our Lord Jesus Christ, He has removed your guilt forever."* Let it be so in your own heart. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Isaiah 42:14-21** For a long time I have held my peace; I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labor; I will gasp and pant. ¹⁵ I will lay waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their vegetation; I will turn the rivers into islands, and dry up the pools. ¹⁶ And I will lead the blind in a way that they do not know, in paths that they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I do, and I do not forsake them. ¹⁷ They are turned back and utterly put to shame, who trust in carved idols, who say to metal images, "You are our gods." ¹⁸ Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind, that you may see! ¹⁹ Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as my messenger whom I send? Who is blind as my dedicated one, or blind as the servant of the LORD? ²⁰ He sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear. ²¹ The LORD was pleased, for his righteousness' sake, to magnify his law and make it glorious.

^{ESV} **Ephesians 5:8-14** For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰ and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³ But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, ¹⁴ for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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The Fourth Sunday in Lent – March 22, 2020

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 7 (Red Hymnal)

"As We Begin Another Week"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Isaiah 42:14-21) This reading is a lament for the fallen people of Israel. It is best read as the Lord himself is speaking in verses 14-18 and Isaiah speaking in verses 18-21. We are here taught that although the message and the promise that were given to the Jews were good and right, they themselves rejected that message, and Isaiah describes the result as utter tragedy.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 51 (Page 31) (Brown Hymnal)

The New Testament Lesson: (Ephesians 5:8-14) We are here once again reminded of just what it was from which we were rescued by our merciful God, which was slavery to sin and Satan. By God's grace, through faith in Jesus Christ, we have now been freed from that tyranny, washed clean, and declared to be heirs of eternal life. We must still, for a time, remain in the world, but now we are to be *in* the world, but not *of* the world.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 721 (Brown Hymnal)

"Cross of Jesus, Cross of Sorrow"

The Sermon – Text: John 9:1-7, 13-16, 39-41 (Printed on the back page)

"Guilt – Ours and Theirs"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 389 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Not What These Hands have Done"

The Prayers of the Day

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 48 (Red Hymnal)

"How Blest Are They Who Hear God's Word"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (37) Average (40) Wednesday (-)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	Suspended
	-10:00 a.m.	Suspended
	-11:00 a.m.	Suspended
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	Suspended
	-7:00 p.m.	Suspended
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	Suspended
	-10:00 a.m.	Suspended
	-11:00 a.m.	Suspended

CLC News – Pastor Sam Rodebaugh is considering the call to Living Savior of Eden Prairie. Teacher Claire Abbas is considering the call as teacher and principal of St. Stephen Lutheran School of San Francisco. The CLC Call Committee on Institutions has called Pastor Mark Weis of St. Luke's of Lemmon.

Corona Virus Update – The Church Council of St Paul has made no long-range plans concerning public meetings. For now (and until we know more) assume that all public gatherings at church are suspended. Members will be notified when services will resume. A reminder that our bills still need to be paid. Offerings can be mailed to the church address, or brought to the church and placed in the offering box. We also continue to offer secure online giving through Vanco Payment Solutions. Contact Gary Miller for more information.

Church Council Notes – The full Church Council met on March 15. Offerings for February fell short of budgeted needs by \$2,210, and are now short of budgeted needs YTD by \$1,678. The final cost of the screen project is expected to be about \$1,200 (those bills will be paid in March). Work continues on providing podcasts of our services, and our LED conversion project is now complete. The next meetings is scheduled for April 5th.

Holy Communion – Due to the suspension of our public services, Holy Communion will be provided to any who request it. Please contact Pastor Roehl so that a time and place can be scheduled.