

## “Basic Biblical Beliefs Series: “The Depravity of Humanity”

2017: The Reflection Year Series

**Scripture:** Ephesians 2:1-3 (NIV)

*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,<sup>2</sup> in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.<sup>3</sup> All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh<sup>[a]</sup> and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.*

**Subject Question:** In what ways does the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians, describe those who yet have come to know and experience a new birth in Christ.

**Compliment answer:** People are Dead (Vs.1), People are Duped (Vs.2), and People are Depraved (Vs.3).

**Big Idea:** The three ways the Apostle Paul in His letter to the Ephesians describes those who have yet to come to know and experience a new birth in Christ are: People are Dead (Vs.1), People are Duped (Vs.2), and People are Depraved (Vs.3).

**Homiletical Idea:** “Hurting, Haunted, Humanity”

**Purpose:** I want the congregation to have a renewed understanding of the precious people who have yet to come to know Christ as their personal Savior.

**Introduction:** From our text today we find that in summing up the overall human condition after the Fall from grace in the garden of Eden, that spiritually speaking: People are Dead (Vs.1), People are Duped (Vs.2), and People are thus inevitably and tragically Depraved (Vs.3). All because of the choice our primordial parents made to choose disobedience over obedience, self-indulgence over submission and sin over the choice not to sin. When God pronounced to Adam and Eve that you shall surely die, He not only meant the heartbreak of human death itself, but the cutting off, the death, if you will, from the intimacy of walking freely and comfortably with the God whose image we are created and whose love and companionship we all crave. Sin was not just an act, sin was and is a malignancy of the soul; affecting our entire being as

people. So much so that although every person has a sense that there is a God, and that, that God is Holy and that God is hopefully understanding and loving, every person also struggles with the reality that there really isn't a peace of heart or mind that can be attained, no amount of good deeds that seemingly can suffice, no flawless behavior that one can actually and permanently achieve, that somehow bridges the gap that we feel exists between an infinite Holy and Perfect God and a finite, mistake prone and at times so unbecomingly unholy person... like us. In other words, we're **all** in a pickle. We **all** share the same helplessness to put ourselves completely right. O we try...we justify our actions, we compare ourselves to others...and yet, everyone knows deep in their hearts that they are powerless to actually cure themselves from this disturbing and sad malady that seemingly has a hold of them, a condition they have inherited and more, which they are all still in bondage to. Let me explain. (See R.C. Sproul, Human Depravity)

(I See Dead People...)

**Groundwork:** Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers

(1) **And you hath he quickened.**—*And you also.* St. Paul here begins the particular application to the Ephesians, which is the main subject of this chapter, broken off in Ephesians 2:3-10, and resumed in Ephesians 2:11. The words “hath He quickened” (or, properly, *did He quicken*) are supplied here from Ephesians 2:5—rightly, as expressing the true sense and tending to greater clearness, but perhaps not necessarily.

**Trespases and sins.**—These two words, more often used separately, are here brought together, to form a climax. The word rendered “trespass” signifies a “swerving aside and falling”; the word rendered “sins” is generally used by St. Paul in the singular to denote “sin” in the abstract, and signifies an entire “missing of the mark” of life. Hence, even in the plural, it denotes universal and positive principles of evil doing, while “trespass” rather points to failure in visible and special acts of those not necessarily out of the right way.

**Benson Commentary**

**Ephesians 2:1-2.** *And you, &c.* — In the nineteenth and twentieth verses of the preceding chapter, the apostle had spoken of God's working in the believers at Ephesus, in order to their conversion, and resurrection from spiritual death to

spiritual life, by the same almighty power whereby he raised Christ from the dead. On the mention of this he runs on, in the fullness of his heart, into a flow of thought concerning the glory of Christ's exaltation, in the three following verses. He here resumes the thread of his discourse. *You hath he quickened* — Or, (as these words are not in the original,) if we connect this verse with the last clause of the preceding chapter, we may read, *you hath he filled*, namely, with his gifts and graces, and thereby hath made you alive to himself; *who were dead* — Not only diseased, but dead; absolutely devoid of all spiritual life, and as incapable of quickening yourselves, as persons literally dead are of restoring their bodies to life. In this sense Locke paraphrases the words: "Ye were so entirely under the power of sin, that ye had no more power, nor hope, nor ability, to get out of it, than men dead and buried have to get out of their graves." The truth is, awakened, impenitent, and unbelieving sinners, are dead in three respects; 1st, They are under condemnation, on account of their past depravity and various transgressions, to the second death, or to future wrath and punishment, like criminals under sentence of death for their crimes. 2d, They are destitute of all union with God, and in a state of separation from him, and alienation from his life, chap. Ephesians 4:18; Colossians 1:21. 3d, They are *carnally minded*; that is, their thoughts and affections are set upon visible and temporal things, *which is spiritual death*, (Romans 8:6,) implying deadness or aversion to spiritual and divine things. *In trespasses and sins* — *Sins* seem to be spoken chiefly of the Gentiles who knew not God; *trespasses* of the Jews, who had his law, and yet regarded it not. Or the expressions may be used indiscriminately, without any such distinction being intended; for all *trespasses* are *sins*, and all *sins* are *trespasses*, properly speaking. *Wherein in time past ye walked* — **Περιεπατήσατε**, *ye walked about*, or *walked continually*. For, as Grotius observes, the word *significat consuetudinem*, implies *custom*, or *habit*. *According to the course of this world* — **Κατα τον αιωνα**, *according to the age*, or the common usage of the age in which you lived, and to those corrupt principles and practices which prevailed around you. The word above mentioned, translated *course*, properly means along series of times, wherein one corrupt age follows another. *The prince of the power of the air* — "That wicked spirit, who commands the legions of fallen angels, that by divine permission range in the air, and fly from place to place, in pursuit of their pernicious purpose of corrupting and destroying mankind." So Dr. Doddridge, who observes, "This refers to a Jewish tradition, that the air is inhabited by evil spirits, a notion which the apostle seems to

approve.” Macknight’s interpretation of the passage is nearly the same, as follows: “Power, being here put for those who exercise power, (as it is likewise chap. Ephesians 1:21, and Colossians 2:10,) signifies those powerful evil spirits, whose confinement [mentioned by Jude, Ephesians 2:6] is not of such a nature as to hinder them from going to and fro on the earth. And therefore, being irreconcilable enemies of God and goodness, they use the liberty granted to them in opposing God, and in ruining men by their temptations, 1 Peter 5:8. And that they may do this the more effectually, they have ranged themselves under the direction of one chief, here called their *prince*; but in other passages *Satan*, and *the devil*. Perhaps also he is called their *prince*, because he instigated them to rebel against God, and was their leader in that rebellion. See 1 John 5:19.” To these quotations we may add, with Bengelius, “A power this the effect of which all may perceive, though all do not understand the cause of it; a power unspeakably penetrating and widely diffused, but yet, as to its baleful influences, beneath the orb of believers.” *The spirit that now worketh — Ενεργουντος, worketh inwardly with energy*. So he did, and so he doth work in all ages; *in the children of disobedience — In all that disbelieve and disobey the gospel*.

#### **Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary**

2:1-10 Sin is the death of the soul. A man dead in trespasses and sins has no desire for spiritual pleasures. When we look upon a corpse, it gives an awful feeling. A never-dying spirit is now fled, and has left nothing but the ruins of a man. But if we viewed things aright, we should be far more affected by the thought of a dead soul, a lost, fallen spirit. A state of sin is a state of conformity to this world. Wicked men are slaves to Satan. Satan is the author of that proud, carnal disposition which there is in ungodly men; he rules in the hearts of men. From Scripture it is clear, that whether men have been most prone to sensual or to spiritual wickedness, all men, being naturally children of disobedience, are also by nature children of wrath. What reason have sinners, then, to seek earnestly for that grace which will make them, of children of wrath, children of God and heirs of glory! God's eternal love or good-will toward his creatures, is the fountain whence all his mercies flow to us; and that love of God is great love, and that mercy is rich mercy. And every converted sinner is a saved sinner; delivered from sin and wrath. The grace that saves is the free, undeserved goodness and favor of God; and he saves, not by the works of the law, but through faith in Christ Jesus. Grace in the soul is a new life in the soul. A regenerated sinner becomes a living soul; he lives a life of

holiness, being born of God: he lives, being delivered from the guilt of sin, by pardoning and justifying grace. Sinners roll themselves in the dust; sanctified souls sit in heavenly places, are raised above this world, by Christ's grace. The goodness of God in converting and saving sinners heretofore, encourages others in after-time, to hope in his grace and mercy. Our faith, our conversion, and our eternal salvation, are not of works, lest any man should boast. These things are not brought to pass by anything done by us, therefore all boasting is shut out. All is the free gift of God, and the effect of being quickened by his power. It was his purpose, to which he prepared us, by blessing us with the knowledge of his will, and his Holy Spirit producing such a change in us, that we should glorify God by our good conversation, and perseverance in holiness. None can from Scripture abuse this doctrine, or accuse it of any tendency to evil. All who do so, are without excuse.

#### **Barnes' Notes on the Bible**

And you hath he quickened - The words "hath he quickened," or "made to live," are supplied, but not improperly, by our translators. The object of the apostle is to show the great power which God had evinced toward the people Ephesians 1:19; and to show that this was put forth in connection with the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and his exaltation to the right hand of God in heaven; see the notes at Romans 6:4-11; compare Colossians 2:12-13; Colossians 3:1. The words "hath he quickened" mean, hath he made alive, or made to live; John 5:21; Romans 4:17; 1 Corinthians 15:36.

Who were dead in trespasses and sins - On the meaning of the word "dead," see the notes at Romans 5:12; Romans 6:2, note. It is affirmed here of those to whom Paul wrote at Ephesus, that before they were converted, they were "dead in sins." There is not anywhere a more explicit proof of depravity than this, and no stronger language can be used. They were "dead" in relation to that to which they afterward became alive - i. e., to holiness. Of course, this does not mean that they were in all respects dead. It does not mean that they had no animal life, or that they did not breathe, and walk, and act. Nor can it mean that they had no living intellect or mental powers, which would not have been true. Nor does it settle any question as to their ability or power while in that state. It simply affirms a fact - that in relation to real spiritual life they were, in consequence of sin, like a dead man in regard to the objects which are around him.

A corpse is insensible. It sees not, and hears not, and feels not. The sound of music, and the voice of friendship and of alarm, do not arouse it. The rose and the lily breathe forth their fragrance around it, but the corpse perceives it not. The world is busy and active around it, but it is unconscious of it all. It sees no beauty in the landscape; hears not the voice of a friend; looks not upon the glorious sun and stars; and is unaffected by the running stream and the rolling ocean. So with the sinner in regard to the spiritual and eternal world. He sees no beauty in religion; he hears not the call of God; he is unaffected by the dying love of the Saviour; and he has no interest in eternal realities. In all these he feels no more concern, and sees no more beauty, than a dead man does in the world around him. Such is, in "fact," the condition of a sinful world. There is, indeed, life, and energy, and motion. There are vast plans and projects, and the world is intensely active. But in regard to religion, all is dead. The sinner sees no beauty there; and no human power can arouse him to act for God, anymore than human power can rouse the sleeping dead, or open the sightless eyeballs on the light of day. The same power is needed in the conversion of a sinner which is needed in raising the dead; and one and the other alike demonstrate the omnipotence of him who can do it.

(I See Dead People...)

A. People are Dead (Vs.1), People are Duped (Vs.2), and People are Depraved (Vs.3).

### **Human Depravity**

by R.C. Sproul

As we said in the previous chapter, a common point of debate among theologians focuses on the question, are human beings basically good or basically evil? The hinge upon which the argument turns is the word "basically." It is a virtual universal consensus that nobody is perfect. We accept the maxim: "To err is human."

The Bible says that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Despite this verdict on human shortcomings, the idea persists in our humanistically dominated culture that sin is something peripheral or tangential to our nature. Indeed, we are flawed by sin. Our moral records exhibit blemishes. But somehow we think that our evil deeds reside at the rim or edge of our character and never penetrate to the core. Basically, it is assumed, people are inherently good.

After being rescued from captivity in Iraq and experiencing firsthand the corrupt methods of Saddam Hussein, one American hostage remarked, "Despite all that I endured I never lost my confidence in the basic goodness of people." Perhaps this view rests in part on a sliding scale of the relative goodness or wickedness of people. Obviously some people are far more wicked than others. Next to Saddam Hussein or Adolf Hitler the ordinary run-of-the-mill sinner looks like a saint. But if we lift our gaze to the ultimate standard of goodness - the holy character of God - we realize that what appears to be a basic goodness on an earthly level is corrupt to the core..

The Bible teaches the total depravity of the human race. Total depravity means radical corruption. We must be careful to note the difference between total depravity and "utter" depravity. To be utterly depraved is to be as wicked as one could possibly be. Hitler was extremely depraved, but he could have been worse than he was. I am sinner. Yet I could sin more often and more severely than I actually do. I am not utterly depraved, but I am totally depraved. For total depravity means that I and everyone else are depraved or corrupt in the totality of our being. There is no part of us that is left untouched by sin. Our minds, our wills, and our bodies are affected by evil. We speak sinful words, do sinful deeds, have impure thoughts. Our very bodies suffer from the ravages of sin.

Perhaps "radical corruption" is a better term to describe our fallen condition than "total depravity." I am using the word "radical" not so much to mean "extreme," but to lean more heavily on its original meaning. "Radical" comes from the Latin word for "root" or "core." Our problem with sin is that it is rooted in the core of our being. It permeates our hearts. It is because sin is at our core and not merely at the exterior of our lives that the Bible says: "There is none righteous, no not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one." Romans 3:10-12

It is because of this condition that the verdict of Scripture is heard: we are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1); we are "sold under sin" (Romans 7:14); we are in "captivity to the law of sin" (Romans 7:23); and "by nature children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3). Only by the quickening power of the Holy Spirit may we be brought out of this state of spiritual death. It is God who makes us alive as we become His craftsmanship (Ephesians 2:1-10).

## **Summary:**

1. Humanism sees sin at the edge or periphery of human life. It considers human beings to be basically good.
2. Biblical Christianity teaches that sin permeates the core of our life.
3. Total depravity is not utter depravity. We are not as wicked as we possibly could be.
4. Radical corruption points to the core sinfulness of our hearts.

## **Biblical passages for reflection:**

Jeremiah 17:9

Romans 8:1-11

Ephesians 2:1-3

Ephesians 4:17-19

1 John 1:8-10

Excerpt from Essential Truths Of The Christian Faith by R. C. Sproul © pages 147-149 (Tyndale 1992)

- B. Next week we'll explore God's remedy for our malady and the graciousness and utter goodness of the God who looked at you and me and said, I will make the way that they could not make, I will heal them, and I will restore them to that place where I have always wanted them to be: back to myself... by my side—there on earth and here in heaven.
- C. Today we celebrate the Lord's Supper. Appropriately called communion. The end result of what God did to reconcile you and me to Himself.
- D. The ultimate invitation to venture once again into the Garden... where communion was lost but can be found again.