

God's Sovereignty and Your Salvation, Part 3

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In 1974, Hungarian sculptor and professor of architecture, Erno Rubik, designed a puzzle called the “Rubik’s Cube.” How many of you have played with one of those? See? Everybody has. It became a worldwide fad, and over 300 million of them have been sold. They had different levels—the two-by-two cube, and the three-by-three, and the four-by-four, and if you were really a brainiac, a five-by-five cube. It was fun to scramble one of [the cubes] and try [to] get all [of] the right colors on each of the four sides. Soon, people were so obsessed with them that they began to develop strategies and procedures to get all [of] the colors in the right places. There were competitions, [and] people who had learned these strategies and secrets [and] could figure out how to put all the puzzle together, and get all the colors on the right sides as quick[ly] as possible [competed to see who could do it the fastest]. But, once the secret is learned, once the steps to re-assemble the colors in their right places [are] learned, then it’s just a matter of going through the motions [and] maybe seeing if you can pick up speed.

We’re working our way through the doctrine of God’s sovereignty and salvation, and it is a puzzle. It is like the Rubik’s Cube. Many people have for many years fiddled, and fiddled, and fiddled with it, and they think to themselves, “I just don’t know. How could that be true? I mean, how can

God save us, and it's not by works, and yet we have to believe [see Galatians 2:16]? How is it that no one seeks God [see Romans 3:11], and every Christian seeks God and is saved? How is it that we are commanded to exercise our wills to believe [see Romans 10:9], and yet salvation is not of us, and no one seeks God [see Romans 3:11]? How can that be? [Why is] the gospel preached to all [see Mark 13:10], and yet only the elect believe? How is it that God commands everybody to repent [see Acts 17:30], but yet not everybody repents [see Matthew 11:20]? But if God is sovereign, and He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked [see Ezekiel 18:32, 33:11], then why doesn't He save everybody?"

This is a problem. This is a puzzle and it has to be solved. In order to solve the puzzle of God's sovereignty and salvation, you have to learn certain things from the Bible. I've never met anyone who understood the puzzle correctly who didn't start at the primary steps. This is what people do: they get these questions like this, and [they] bother them, and so they take several approaches. Here's one approach: "I don't know how it works, [but] I'm just going to believe it." OK? That's one approach. Some of you might be there. Another approach is: "Hey, I just don't want to think about these certain verses because they cause me grief." That's kind of like planned obsolescence, [where] you're just like, "I don't know. Let's just not talk about that." Here's another approach: "I know that's what [the Bible] says, but let's redefine these words so they mean something God didn't mean them to mean, and that way they'll fit in with our little, cozy view of how we want salvation to work." Those are the approaches that people have taken to deal with the puzzle. Those are inadequate. Those do not fix the puzzle. They just make it work [partway]. They might fix one side, [but] then you turn it over, and everything else is still messed up.

What we're doing this morning is we're going to be looking at some of these initial steps in solving this big mystery, with all of its apparent contradictions and paradoxes. If you have your Bible, look at Luke 10, and follow along as I read verses 21–24. Just as a reminder, the seventy have been sent out, they've healed the sick, cast out demons, preached the

gospel, reassembled, [and] they're rejoicing that the demons were subject to them. Jesus says, "Don't rejoice at that, rejoice that your names are written in heaven" [see Luke 10:20]. Now, Jesus is going to do some rejoicing Himself. "At that very time," verse 21 says, Jesus:

rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, "I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." Turning to the disciples, He said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see, for I say to you, that many prophets and kings wished to see the things which you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear them."

Here we see Jesus praising the Father. The first thing He praises the Father for is rather disturbing, when He praises God, [saying], "Father, I am so glad You hide the truth from certain people so they can't be saved." That scrambles the cube. Then, He praises the Father because the Father reveals truth to others. He says, "Everything has been given to Me," and then He turns to the disciples, and says, "By the way, you guys know Me, you guys have heard Me. I have revealed the Father to you, [and] I want you to know that kings and prophets in the past *longed* to be able to hear the things that you have heard, and to see the things that you have seen." This text obviously shows God's sovereignty because no one can know the Father or the Son unless Jesus, by divine act, wills it. It's obviously a sovereignty of God and salvation text.

Now, in order to unravel these mysteries, we have to go back to some initial steps, and those initial steps are man and sin. We have to understand

that. That's what we've been driving at. We've looked at man, we've looked at [the fact that] he was created perfect, he then fell—Eve was deceived, Adam willfully rebelled—and that was the beginning of sin in the human race. Before that, Satan rebelled with the demons in heaven.

Now, this morning, we want to continue on from where we were last week, where we discovered that all men are sinners. That was the whole thrust of last week. Guess what? You're a sinner, in case you didn't know that. Now we want to look at a little bit more about sin—three aspects, specifically, that are going to begin to create in our minds [an] understanding of why God saves men the way that He saves them. See, when we start talking about God's sovereignty and salvation and all those scary, paradoxical things, you ask yourself: "How can that be?" This is the step that gets you to that answer.

The problem is [that] I can't tell you everything [that] I want [to] all at once. I would like to, but I can't. So, you're just going to have to wait for another sermon after this in four weeks, and then one sermon after that we'll get into the solving of the puzzle. OK? Beginning it, anyway. That's what's going to happen.

The first thing we want to understand is total depravity: what it means and what it does not mean. A few years back, there was a Walt Disney animated picture called *The Incredibles*. Some of you, I'm sure, probably saw it. It is [about] two superheroes—a man and a woman—[who] decide to hang up their superhero profession, settle down, and have a nice family. The problem is [that] their children have super powers, too, and it causes a lot of interesting family dynamics. Well, in one part of the movie, the Incredible family is forced to reveal their true identities while fighting against their psychotic enemy, Syndrome. Syndrome kidnaps their baby, and is getting away in his rocket-propelled boots. He's launching off through the house roof, and up to his jet, which is hovering above the Incredible's house.

The parents think the baby doesn't have any powers, but the baby, when frightened, reveals that he has a whole arsenal of powers. [The baby] freaks out Syndrome, Syndrome drops the baby, and then his mother catches him.

Syndrome, then, starts climbing into the [jet], and he vows, "I'll be back to get you!" Mr. Incredible is on the ground, and he's looking around for something to throw at the jet. The only thing that's close by is his Corvette, and so he grabs the Corvette, and, [using it] like a huge projectile, hucks it in the air, it explodes the jet, and destroys Syndrome. When it's all over, the camera pans back, and there in the middle of the street is a boy on a tricycle who has witnessed all of this. His eyes are bulging out, and he says, "That was totally wicked!"

That's what we're going to talk about this morning: the "totally wickedness" of man. That's what depravity is, that's what it means. Men are "totally wicked," but in a different way than the boy [in the movie] meant. The boy meant it was neat, impressive, and fun. But, the kind of "totally wicked" that we're going to look at this morning is neither impressive nor fun, and it carries huge consequences because it is one of the barriers that stands in between men [and their] coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

Some people don't like the term "total depravity." It just [irks] them. It's like, "I don't like that term. All I know is that that term isn't in the Bible." Well, neither is the Trinity, neither are any other English words because the Bible was written in Hebrew and Greek. But the Bible does teach total depravity. Some object, saying, "I'm not *totally* depraved. I'm not as sinful as I can be. I do some good things. I mean, come on, I'm not *that* corrupt." Statements like this reveal a misunderstanding of what total depravity is. We saw last week that all of us "like sheep have gone astray, and each of us has turned to his own way" [see Isaiah 53:6], that "the wages of sin is death" [Romans 6:23], and that all men "sin and fall short of the glory of God" [see Romans 3:23]. We pounded that into dust last week. This morning, I want to show you just how deep human depravity runs so you can understand that everybody is really bad off—probably far worse off than you imagine.

You can [go] up to the average Christian, and say, "Are you a sinner?"

[He will respond], "Oh, yes. I'm a sinner." It's acceptable among Christians to say, "Yeah, yeah, I'm a sinner. Besides, 1 John 1:8 says [that] anyone who says he has no sin is a liar and the truth is not in him. Yeah, yeah,

I'm a sinner." But a lot of times, [that person is] thinking: "Yeah, I'm a sinner, but I'm not as bad as that guy," that other person, that unbeliever, or maybe even another Christian. "You know, I'm pretty good compared to him." This kind of outlook is incorrect because who we need to compare ourselves with is an infinite, holy God. Take your life and compare it to infinite holiness, perfect sinlessness, [and] then you begin to start on the correct path to solving the puzzle, because then you begin to see yourself as way, way below infinite holiness. You probably can't even see [infinite holiness] from where you are.

So we stand before the mirror of God's Word, we look closely into the Word, and what does it teach us? It teaches us that men are totally depraved. The *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* defines "total depravity" as this:

[It] is the scriptural teaching that mankind is totally, thoroughly, and completely corrupted by sin in all parts of his being. Total depravity means that man is unable to please God on his own or earn any saving merit from God. It is also helpful to understand what total depravity does not mean. 1) It does not mean that people cannot do things which are relatively good in the sight of other men. 2) It does not mean that all men are as sinful as they can be or become. 3) It does not mean that men have no concept of good and evil. 4) It does not mean that men, because of their depravity, will indulge in every sin to every degree.

That is an excellent definition because what it does is it lets us know what total depravity means and what it does not mean. [Imagine] you have a large glass of crystal clear spring water, and you take an eighth of a teaspoon of sewage, put it in there, and stir it up. Would you say that that glass of water is now corrupted? [Yes.] Would you drink part of it? No. Does that mean that you can't put more sewage in there? No, you could. You could

increase the concentration of sewage in there, but that wouldn't change the constant fact that the whole glass is corrupted, whether it has an eighth of a teaspoon, a teaspoon, or a tablespoon in there, right? It's totally corrupted. That is, the effects of that sewage have spread out in all of the parts of the glass [of water]. Well, that's how it is with total depravity. Total depravity doesn't mean you can't sin more. What it means is [that] sin has permeated, soaked in to, saturated, every part of your being so that you are totally, in all parts, infected and corrupted by sin.

We have already traced the origin of sin back to Satan. We learned that sin entered in through Adam and Eve, the human race. Now we want to talk about this problem of sin pervading the human race. How can that be? Well, it comes from two different areas. The first [is] a big word. You know, I'm not into using big words on you just to make your eyes go sideways and fall asleep, but the word is "imputation." OK? There it is: imputation. What is that? Well, the word basically means this: "to charge to someone's account." That's what it means.

Let's say that I knew that you had an account at some retailer. You [could go] in there, they knew you, and you [would say], "Just charge it to my account," and they'd send you a bill. Well, I knew that, so I went into that store and I bought a whole bunch of stuff, and said, "Yeah, just charge it to so-and-so's account." You would then receive a bill for what I bought. It would show up in your mailbox, not mine, because I have "imputed" it to your account. That's what imputation is. This is the concept. Our sin and guilt at birth comes from Adam and Eve. It is imputed to us. Because of that, we are sinful from the get-go, and guilty from the get-go.

Listen to how imputation is described in Isaiah 53. I just took the [pertinent] phrases out of [verses 4–12]. The first kind of imputation that we come to is the imputation of our guilt to Christ. Let's talk about that. I think most of us realize that when Jesus died on the cross, our guilt was laid upon Him, right? Our sins were put upon Him. That is imputation. Listen to how Isaiah describes this. He says:

Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried;...He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,... the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him... He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?... But the Lord was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render himself a guilt offering...He will bear their iniquities. He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors. [Isaiah 53:4–12]

Did you see that? How did that happen? If Jesus was sinless, and Jesus never sinned, how did all of our sins get dumped on Him? Imputation: all of our sins were charged to His account.

There is another kind of imputation, and that is the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us. Not only did Jesus have our sin imputed to Him, and He died in our place, so He also, in dying for our sins, reckons to those who believe in Him—imputes, charges to the account of those who believe in Him—His perfect righteousness. Listen to how Paul describes it in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "He made Him," that is, Jesus, "who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Now, how did that happen? How do you and I become "the righteousness of God in" Christ? Through imputation because God reckons Christ's righteousness to us—God credits to our account the very infinite righteousness of Jesus Himself. It's like getting a Starbucks card that has unlimited usage. You could Frappuccino into oblivion [and] never run it dry. When the guy gives you the receipt, it says [the balance is] infinite. You can just keep charging [and] charging. Well, that's what Jesus does to us—He gives us infinite righteousness. He gives us His perfect righteousness. It's always ours, and the account never runs dry. God sees us in Christ as perfect and never-ending righteousness. It's just amazing in light of how sinful we are.

There is another category of imputation: Adam's sin and guilt. This is what relates to us this morning most directly. Adam's sin and guilt is imputed, or charged, to our account. When you get a brand-new credit card, it comes in the mail, [and] it has [a] zero balance. That's how Adam and Eve were before the Fall: zero debt to God. God gives them one law, they break the one law, and now they have a debt that's so huge they could never repay it. They can't even pay the interest. They're buried in debt, never to be able to pay the debt themselves that they owe to an infinitely just God.

Something has to happen. You see, if God's going to forgive somebody, if He's going to save somebody, He doesn't just say, "I forgive you. Come on into heaven and I'll just pretend it didn't happen." No. God always gets His pound of flesh. "He will by no means allow the guilty to go unpunished" [see Exodus 34:7]. Somebody is going to pay and they're going to pay to the full extent. If you have a sinful human, the only way you can redeem, the only way you can atone for, the only way you can forgive that sinner of his sins is to find a perfectly holy and righteous person who, of his own accord, is willing to die in the place of, as a substitute for, the guilty person. I'm telling you, perfect people are hard to come by, especially when you're a sinner, and your wife's a sinner, and the only children you can give birth to are sinners. It's just a miracle that it could ever happen, but it did happen because the sin is passed down through the Father, and so God, in His plan, was Jesus' Father, making Jesus God and without sin. And, being born of a woman, [Jesus] was fully human, so He was then able to be a perfect man, fully man, to die for man, willingly, voluntarily, as a substitute for sinners. That's how it works.

When you read certain texts [in the Bible], like Psalm 51:5, where David says: "In sin my mother conceived me," you [wonder], "How could that be? How could David, at the moment of conception, be a sinner? How could he then go on to say, in Psalm 58:3 that 'the wicked are estranged from the womb; These who speak lies go astray from birth'? How is that? How can somebody be conceived in sin and born in sin when they haven't even done anything yet?" Imputation. In the genetic code, so to speak, of

Adam and Eve, was sin and the curse. [Therefore], the only thing they could give birth to is other sinners who had their same sin curse and guilt. Then everyone who is born is born with Adam's sin and guilt imputed [to], reckoned [to], charged to, their account.

Let's see this in the Scriptures. Turn to Romans 5, and we're going to look at verses 12–14, and then verse 19. I'll just do a quick commentary on this, and you'll be able to see how it works out. Notice what it says here in [Romans 5:]12: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world," and, of course, we know who that man is, that man is Adam, "and death through sin." Why? [It is] because, [as] everybody knows, "the wages of sin is" what? "Death" [Romans 6:23]. Adam died spiritually and later physically. "And so death spread to all men, because all sinned," [which] implies [that] all men die as a consequence of Adam's sin because all sinned, implied, in Adam. You say, "Well, how do you know that?" Keep reading. "For until the Law sin was in the world." You could paraphrase [it] this way: Between the time of Adam and the time of the Law of Moses, sin was in the world. Right? You bet. Lots of it, plenty. That's why God sent the Flood.

"But sin is not imputed," or reckoned, "when there is no law." What does [Paul] mean by that? Here it is: if there's no law, can you break the law? If no one has written any rules, can you break the rules? No. You can't break a rule unless there is a rule to be broken. Notice Paul's argument here. It's pretty brilliant. He's saying [that], "For until the Law" of Moses, "sin was in the world." How could that be? He goes on to say, "But sin is not imputed when there is no law." You don't have a law, you don't break the law, and no one is going to charge to your account the violation because there isn't any violation when there's no law to be violated.

[Romans 5:]14: "Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses." How could that be? Well, obviously it's not because of that original law. There was only one law given in the Garden: Don't eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They both—[Adam and Eve]—blew that one. Then, after that, the cherubim were stationed there [see Genesis 3:24], so no

one could even attempt to break the law anymore. It was just over. That law was done with. So how could there then be sin in the world if there was no law? [Why did] sin and death reign between Adam and Moses, when there was no law to be violated? [Why were] men dying? Look at the middle of verse 14: Death reigned "even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam." What does that mean? What was Adam's offense and sin? God said, "Here's the law: Don't eat of the tree," [Adam] then ate of the tree. There was a law and he broke it.

But here [Paul] is saying [that] even over those who didn't have a law and didn't sin against the law like Adam did, death reigned. How? Look down at [Romans 5:]19: "For as through the one man's disobedience," now get this, "the many were made sinners." There it is: imputation. Through one man's disobedience—Adam—all of his children were made sinners because of his sin. That doesn't mean we don't commit our own sins—we do a lot of that—but I just want you to understand that even apart from what we do, which is plenty, we're conceived in sin, born in sin, and then we sin because we're sinners. It's bad. It's really bad.

Paul summarizes pretty much everything he says in Romans 5 in 1 Corinthians 15:22, where he says: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive." In one man you are guilty. Some [people] don't like the thought that they have Adam's sin and guilt imputed to them, or reckoned to them, or charged to their account. They say, "How could that be? I couldn't help it! I didn't do anything. I was just born this way. How could I be guilty? I mean, come on!" Well, think about it this way. Let's just talk about the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Do you earn Christ's righteousness? Does God give it to you because you deserve it, because you work for it, because you're smart, because you do certain procedures? No. It's all by grace, it's unmerited and unearned. It is given to you freely, not because of *anything you do*.

Follow me here. [The] verses that we've looked at talk about the imputation of Adam's sin and the imputation of Christ's righteousness side by side. [Therefore] you can't have one mean one thing and the other mean

the other thing. If we receive Christ's righteousness because of nothing we do, then we receive Adam's sin and guilt because of nothing we do. That's imputation, and that's bad, and that's why we need [to be] saved.

It gets worse. It gets worse because the doctrine of total depravity says that we have Adam's sin and guilt imputed to us, that it's part of our being because we are descended from Adam and Eve who are sinners. He—[Adam]—being the head, the father of all the descendants—all of us, everybody who has ever been born—because he is that person, and he is a sinner, he passes down like genetic code all of his sin and guilt. And so, even apart from what we do, we're sinners. It's bad. That sin permeates every part of our being. It doesn't mean we're all as sinful as we could be, or [that] we've all sinned as much as we are able to, it just means that sin affects all of us in our physical being, and especially [in] our spiritual, non-physical, being.

Turn to Genesis 6:5. [I] want to look at the second step in solving this puzzle, and that is: Understand the degree to which men are corrupted by sin. Genesis 6:5 gives us the reason why God sent the Flood. There's something wrong going on at [that] time on the earth, and this is why God sends the Flood. "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." That's bad. We learn here that mankind has great evil, that every intent, every thought of his heart—the heart being the control center of his whole life—is only evil all the time. Other than that, you're fine.

[You might be thinking], "But He sent the Flood." Yeah, He sent the Flood, and we read right after the Flood, in Genesis 8:21, that God said: "I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth." It didn't eradicate sin from mankind, it just decreased the number of sinners, that's all. That's all the Flood did.

Turn to Jeremiah 17. In this section [of] Jeremiah 17, there is a discussion of those who don't trust God, those who do trust God, and then he gets down to verse 9, and he says this: "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?" This term "desperately"

means “incurably,” or “beyond all cure.” Man’s heart is incurably wicked, Jeremiah says. I know what some of you are probably thinking right now. You’re probably thinking, “Oh, yeah, but Jack, when we come to Christ, we receive a *new* heart.” That’s true, but do not confuse the term “new heart” with “sinless heart.” Yes, we receive a new heart, but it doesn’t mean that it’s sinless. Every Christian who is honest with himself knows that because he thinks evil thoughts.

[Imagine that] you go to a computer store, and you [want to] buy some CDs. They have all these packages of different kinds [of CDs] there, and you’re looking at CD-Rs and CD-RWs, You’re thinking, “What [does] that [mean]?” You learn that the CD-Rs are the readable compact discs, which means you can write to them one time and then it’s over. You just get it and it’s over. That’s how we are when we’re born. We’ve had Adam’s sin and guilt written to us, and it’s over. When you come to Christ, [however], you get a CD-RW heart. That is, you get a heart that can be erased and rewritten—“be transformed by the renewing of your mind” [Romans 12:2].

Unlike CD-RWs, which can be rewritten in just a minute or two, [however], we spend our whole life trying to get our hearts rewritten, and we never finish the process in this life. There’s still plenty of sin in there, and it’s plenty deep, it’s plenty wicked. What happens is [that] when you look at Scripture, and it talks about a new heart, it is a heart that, unlike before when it couldn’t even understand the Scriptures, couldn’t be rewritten, couldn’t be changed, now it can be changed, now it can be rewritten. If you go to the Scriptures, if you meditate on the Word of God, if you read the Word of God, if you study the Word of God, if you listen to good teaching and preaching, and read good books, if you do that, and go to Bible studies, and you get God’s Word in your life, and you strive to apply it by God’s grace, what will happen is it will rewrite your heart.

The heart is the control center of your whole life. That is why Solomon said, “Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life” [Proverbs 4:23]. Everything in your life boils forth from your heart. You have to guard your heart. That is why it is so critical to guard all of your

senses—what you look at, what you listen to, what you smell, and taste, and touch. Why? [It's] because that's how information gets in. Just like you can rewrite [your heart] by doing what is correct, by studying the Bible, hearing good teaching, and applying [it], so you can also defile your heart if you put trash in there—you can write more trash on there and actually go backwards. You don't want to do that.

Paul describes our transformation, our progression, our rewriting process, in 2 Corinthians 3:18, when he says: “But we all, with unveiled face,” he has just been talking about Moses. You remember, [Moses] went up on the mountain, saw God, and had to put a veil over his face because he was glowing. [Paul goes on, saying], “beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord.” [When] we look in the Scriptures, we see it's like a mirror (James says [this], too [see James 1:23–25]), [and] we see the glory of the Lord. We “are being transformed,” changed, rewritten, “into the same image,” that is, into the image of Christ, “from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.” That's what it is to mature in Christ, that is what sanctification is: you are rewriting your heart, you are growing and changing from glory to glory. It's a whole life process. Then finally, when you die, or when Christ comes back, He does a quick erase, reformats [your heart, and] you're perfect. Every Christian knows in his heart that he is a sinner, and that is why we need to be diligent to use those means God has given us to be transformed by the renewing of our mind, as Paul says in Romans 12:[2].

Our hearts are bad. Jesus, speaking to His disciples about the heart of men, says this in Mark 7:21–23: “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.” Jesus pictures our [heart] like a sin-manufacturing plant, that's just producing sinful thought after sinful thought, [and] sinful deed after sinful deed. It's like a big, black, sooty chimney that's belching out noxious fumes all the time. There's your heart, your new heart. Hmm. Yes, you can rewrite

it, but man, there's still a lot of soot in there, isn't there? Don't you just wish you could get those things out of your head? Yeah!

Paul, in Romans 1:21–23, says of mankind: “For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations,” that is, when they looked at things and tried to assess things, their assessment was futile. He goes on to say: “And their foolish heart was darkened”—the control center of their life was darkened. “Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures”—[they] worshipped beetles, and frogs, and stuff.

You want to know the [answer to the] question “What about the natives in Africa?” They are without excuse. That's the [answer]. Why? [It is] because God has revealed Himself to man, all men, in three distinct areas: in creation—in what has been made—in our consciences, and He has written [His] law in our hearts, [giving] us a general understanding of right and wrong. But all men, universally, without exception, take that truth, that understanding of God, which is available in those three areas—conscience, nature, and the law of God written in their hearts—and they “suppress that truth in unrighteousness” [Romans 1:18], and say, “I will not submit to it or learn anything about God because I don't want to think about God.” That's what [Paul is] saying.

Turn to Ephesians 4. You think it's bad? It's worse. We're not even done. [In] Ephesians 4:17–19, Paul [is] speaking about unbelieving Gentiles, [and] notice how he describes them. Remember—I want you to follow here—we're trying to answer this question: How has sin, and the fall of man, and the imputation of Adam's sin, and our own sins affected how we see God, respond to God, and respond to His truth? We're trying to see how sin has corrupted us. We've seen [that unbelievers are] “futile in their speculations,” [and their] “foolish heart was darkened,” now let's look at this text, Ephesians 4:17–19:

So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

Here Paul describes seven effects of sin on the human race. [Let's] just get them here in bullet points:

- They have futile thinking.
- They have a darkened understanding.
- They are excluded from the life of God, which means they're spiritually dead.
- They have a hard heart.
- They have a callous conscience.
- They are given over to sensuality.
- They "practice every kind of impurity with greediness."

That is bad. That is really bad. Paul, speaking to Titus in Titus 1:15, says: "To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled." That describes everybody you know who doesn't know Jesus as their Savior—that family member, that coworker, the neighbor, everyone. You start thinking about that, and it's like, "Well, no wonder they can't understand. I mean, no kidding. Man, that's bad. People are in bad shape." That's why they need [to be] saved.

Let's talk about the effects of sin a little bit more in relation to God and the truth. You need to realize how the depravity of man actually repels men from the truth. It not only gives them convoluted thoughts, it makes them

run the other way. Yes, all men are sinners, yes, they are defiled, but notice how they respond. Let's look at John 3. This is right after "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" [John 3:16]. Look at John 3:19[-20], and notice here how men respond to the gospel, to Christ. [Jesus] says: "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world," that is, the truth of the gospel, Jesus Christ, "and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."

He's talking about human cockroaches here. You turn on the light, and what do they do? They all run away. [Have] you ever dealt with this? You're sharing the gospel, you're talking about the Bible with somebody at work, and it's like, "Oh, yeah, I don't really want to hear it. What about the natives in Africa?"

And then you say, "Well, let me..."

"Hey, I've got work to do. See you later. What about them Mets? Bye." They don't want to talk about it. They're repelled from the truth. Well, this is a huge thing. As we're going to see—we're getting there—this has huge implications in the way we do evangelism. [If] you wonder why people don't want to listen, there it is: "they *love* darkness rather than Light, for their deeds are evil. And they do not come to the Light lest their deeds should be exposed." They are repelled from the very thing they need to save them, [they are] driven from within.

Turn over to John 5:39[-44]. Jesus is speaking to the unbelieving religious leaders, and notice how sin has affected these unbelieving religious leaders:

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life. I do not receive glory from men; but I know you, that you do not have the love of God in yourselves. I have come in My Father's name,

and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?

Do you see how these verses describe the effects of sin in unbelievers? 1) It makes them unwilling to come to Christ; 2) they do not have the love of God within themselves, which means they have the hate of God within themselves; 3) they do not receive Jesus; 4) they receive false teachers; 5) they do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God. No wonder people respond the way they do when we try to share the gospel with them. That is why: Sin has messed with them big time.

Turn over to Romans 8. If you know Romans 8, [it] is like the most wonderful, encouraging part of the whole book. After [Paul] has said that there's "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" [see Romans 8:1], he now begins to compare the man who he talks about—the man who is the spiritual man, the man who walks in the Spirit—with the person who is in the flesh, or the unbeliever. "In the flesh" is a synonym for the unbeliever, somebody living for the flesh. [Paul] says this, starting in verse 5. Look there. Again, watch for how sin affects man's response to God and truth:

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. [Romans 8:5–8]

I don't care how good it looks to society, what a philanthropist [an unbeliever is], how many times [he] walks the old lady across the street, and

throws [his] coat in the mud so the princess can stand on it, it never pleases God—not even a little bit. Nothing an unbeliever does ever pleases God. They are only and always hostile toward God, and they cannot please Him. That is bad when the whole purpose of your being created is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

You think, “Well, Jack, at least we have the gospel that can lead us to Jesus.” That’s true, but turn over to 1 Corinthians 1. Notice how men on their own will respond to the gospel. [In] 1 Corinthians 1:18, Paul is giving his whole paradigm of how he did evangelism, and he says: “For the word of the cross is foolishness,” literally “moronic,” “to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” Unbelievers, they look at the gospel, and they go, “That is dumb. That is stupid. That’s foolish.”

Turn over to 1 Corinthians 2:14. [Paul] has just explained in the preceding context that Christians have this great thing because we are able to understand the mind of God because we have the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of God—within us. The Holy Spirit within us helps us to interpret the things of God. But, the problem is [that] the “natural man,” another synonym he uses to describe an unbeliever, doesn’t have the Holy Spirit. So let’s see how the natural man—the man who isn’t saved, who doesn’t have the Holy Spirit in [him]—how that person responds to the things of the Spirit, the Word of God. He says this: “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him”—same thing that we saw in [1 Corinthians 1:]18—“and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”

This phrase, “cannot understand them,” means he does not have the “*dunamis*” the power within him, to have a “*gnosco*,” an intimate relationship with the truth. Sure, he can be a Hebrew/Greek scholar, he can know all the stories of the Bible, but he doesn’t know it in an experiential, intimate way like a brand-new believer does. Until he comes to faith in Christ he *cannot* get to the truth, though it is right there in front of him. He has no access. It’s like me giving you an AM radio, and saying, “Hey, dial in to this FM station.” Well, try all you want, you can’t do it. Back, forth, back,

forth, you could wear out the dial, [but] you're never going to get an FM station out of that AM radio. It's just not going to work. The problem is [that] those who don't know God don't have the Spirit of God, so they are trapped because they are unable to access the truth [that] saves them. They don't have the power within themselves to access that truth.

You need to think about the implications of this when you're evangelizing somebody, when you're sharing the gospel with them. Sometimes we feel guilty because, "Oh, I didn't say the right thing."

"I should have used this argument."

"I should have used that verse."

"I should have tried this approach."

"Oh, maybe I should have prayed harder."

"Maybe I said too much."

"Maybe I didn't say enough."

We kind of torment ourselves because we want to see that person come to Christ. But listen, you can't grant anybody the ability to understand the things of the Spirit of God. "No one knows the Father or the Son unless the Son wills to reveal Him" [see Luke 10:22].

Let's look at one more text: Romans 3. We'll close with this one. If you've studied the book of Romans, you know that the theme verse in the book is Romans 1:16, where Paul says: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." He says, "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH'" [1:17]. And then, starting in verse 18, he starts talking about the wrath of God coming upon men because they're sinners.

He then says, "Listen, if you're a Jew, you're a sinner; if you're a moral person, you're a sinner; if you're a Gentile, you're a sinner." It's interesting that Paul, when explaining the gospel, starts out where? [The fact that] men are sinners. Guess where I got the idea? Paul then explains in great detail how all classes of men, all nationalities of men, men with truth, men with-

out truth—at least the written truth, because all men have creation, their conscience, and the law of God written in their hearts—all men are without excuse, they're all sinners, and they're all guilty before God.

He's summing up the total depravity of man, and just to make sure that everybody knows this isn't some kind of weird idea the Apostle Paul has conjured up [on his own], he decides to only quote in this section Scriptures from the Old Testament. He gathers together all of these texts from the inspired Old Testament Scriptures, and he lays it all down so that everybody knows this is the truth. What does he say? "What then," verse 9, "Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin;" he has just explained that in the preceding chapters. Verse 10: "As it is written," now he's going to start quoting the Old Testament Scriptures:

“THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.” “THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,” “THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS”; “WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS”; “THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN.” “THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.” [Romans 3:10–18]

[These are] all quotes from the Old Testament. “Now we know,” he goes on to say, “that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God” [Romans 3:19]. That is, everybody needs salvation. [If] you want to understand predestination, you want to understand election, you want to understand the mysteries of the Rubik's Cube of God's

sovereignty and how He saves men, and why He saves men, you've got to understand this: men are totally corrupt, and totally unable in themselves to even begin to respond to the truth. They don't have the power in themselves. They're just corrupted, their thoughts are corrupted, they're running the other way. It's like being in a dark desert, and somebody holds up a light to help you see, and you just keep running into the darkness. You don't want [the light].

It's going to be so fun to get into this stuff. [There will be] just one more sermon on some other pretty fun things, and then when we get through those fun things, then we're getting into the really fun things. In closing, what I want to do is I want to read a portion of a Puritan prayer. I know many of you have gotten the little book *The Valley of Vision*, [which is] a collection of Puritan prayers. There's also an audio version by Max McLean, which is very wonderful, that you can listen to in your car. One of the prayers [in the book] is called "The Cry of a Convicted Sinner." I'm going to read part of [it], so why don't you bow your heart before the Lord, and I'm going to read this portion and then I'll finish up in prayer.

Save me from myself,
from the artifices and deceits of sin,
from the treachery of my perverse nature,
from denying thy charge against my offences,
from a life of continual rebellion against thee,
from wrong principles, view, and ends;
for I know that all my thoughts, affections,
desires and pursuits are alienated from thee.
I have acted as if I hated thee, although thou art love itself;
have contrived to tempt thee to the uttermost,
to wear out Thy patience;
have lived evilly in word and action.
Had I been a prince,
I would have long ago crushed such a rebel;

Had I been a father,
I would long since have rejected my child.
O, thou Father of my spirit,
thou King of my life,
cast me not into destruction,
drive me not from thy presence,
but wound my heart that it may be healed;
break it that thine own hand may make it whole.

Father, we are so grateful to have Your Word, to have Your truth. We are thankful for what You're doing at Calvary Bible Church. Purify us. May we all confess our sins, and if we've sinned against others, may we confess our sins to them, so that we may walk in Your Spirit, and walk in holiness. Father, if there is anybody here who doesn't know Jesus Christ as his or her Lord and Savior, who has never repented of his or her sins, turned from his or her sins, and received the Lord Jesus Christ, I pray that right now, in his or her pew, he or she would do that, he or she would cry out, confessing, admitting, that he or she is a hopeless, helpless sinner. That, Father, he or she cannot on his or her own rescue him- or herself, that he or she needs Jesus—His life, His death, His resurrection—to save him or her. Father, please rescue him or her as only You can. And, Father, help the rest of us this next week to take some time to think about what great sinners we are, that we might marvel at what a great Savior You are. We pray this in Christ's name, Amen.

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