

Remember Your Need for Grace, Part 2 – You Were Totally Depraved “But God ...” (Ephesians 2:1-4a)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on March 13, 2011

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The first 3 verses of Ephesians 2 are a portrait of unsaved humanity, the biblical picture of what all humanity is like apart from the sovereign grace of God. Whether your past was rampantly immoral or religiously moral outwardly like the Pharisees, whether you grew up pagan in an utterly un-Christian background or whether you’re growing up in a conservative home-school Christian environment, apart from the regenerating life-giving life-changing grace of God transforming you on the inside, you and I and all would be and remain in Ephesians 2:1-3:

*¹And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ²in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³Among them we too **all** formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even **as the rest**.*

For some in this room, v. 1-3 paints a picture of you spiritually in your *present* state, the great need you still have for great grace to deliver you from sin. This may greatly offend you? I hope it brings you to the great Savior who finds sin more offensive than we find His verdict of it, and who can save you from the wrath you deserve. For others of you, v. 1-3 is your *past* state before Christ, it’s how you used to be but God has saved and changed your life, and these verses don’t anger you, they amaze you that God saved you! You don’t resist this in pride, you rejoice in praise of your Savior. If you are here this morning and you’re saved by grace, and you know that because God has made you alive to spiritual truth and spiritual things with spiritual desires and spiritual changes, this text we’re about to read is God’s reminder to you of *what you were* and *what you still would be* apart from God’s resurrecting grace. We must remember none of us were better or are better than anyone else, we’re all spiritual corpses “*but God...*” (v. 4a). Paul gives 4 reminders of our fourfold need of regenerating grace:

1. You Were Spiritually Dead (v. 1)

“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins ...”

We just sang “sin that promised joy and life had led me to the **grave**. I had no hope ...” – that song All I Have is Christ comes from Ephesians 2. We looked at spiritual death last week and will again in v. 5, so we’ll come back to it in our next message, but in v. 2-3, Paul gives 3 more descriptions of how deep the sin problem is for the unsaved

2. You Were Satanically Driven (v. 2a)

... in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air [Satan] ...

Paul speaks of “*the course of this world*” as a course we all were walking on. 1 Peter 4:3 says the heathen “*pursue a course of sensuality, lusts ...*” James 3:6 speaks of “*the course of our life which is set on fire by hell.*”

This course or age of the world is a highway to hell, and we were all walking on it, if not running. The song “All I have is Christ” says it this way “I ran my hell-bound race...” (C.J. Mahaney says in his testimony, he was on a hell-bound sprint, running his course as fast as he could away from God). We don’t know that Satan is driving the course of this world we’re on. We’re on a course/way that seems right to man but its end leads to death.

Paul was on his course, Damascus road, *but God ...* Paul wasn’t seeking Christ *but God* came to seek Paul (Acts 26). Christ stopped Paul in his course, in his tracks on the broad road to destruction. God didn’t wait for Paul to seek Christ on his own. Christ sought Paul while Paul was on his own course going exact opposite direction with all his might and murderous anti-Christian intention. Paul didn’t initiate salvation, God initiated this, God intervened, God interrupted Paul’s plan, God invincibly called Paul from darkness to light by irresistible grace. God intercepted Paul on his course to kill Christians, and incredibly turned Paul’s life around and put Paul on a new course. Not the course of this world anymore, but the race of faith. Paul writes at the end of his life: *I’ve run the race. I’ve finished the course, I’ve kept the faith.*

If God has rescued you, whether your story seems as dramatic as Paul’s or not, it was just as miraculous. Paul says in v. 2 “*you formerly walked ...*” We may not have realized it, but we were all marching in Satan’s parade with the rest of mankind on a broad path leading to destruction. The world is on this course. 1 John 5:19: “*the whole world lies under the sway of the evil one*” (NKJV). Revelation 12:9 calls him “*Satan, who deceives the whole world.*”

v. 2 “*the prince of the power of the air.*” Air seems to be the spirit realm between heaven and earth. “Power” of the air in Eph. 3:10 and 6:12 refers to fallen angels “in the heavenlies,” i.e., in the spiritual realm. Eph. 6:12 says our struggle is against “*powers [same word as 2:2] the world forces of this present darkness ... the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenlies*” – spiritual realm, not in heaven itself, where God is the ruler, but between there and here, in this world/age. This word “power” is used by Jesus for the “power of darkness” in Luke 22:53. The same word is translated “domain” in Luke 4, the realm of Satan’s kingdom in this world.

Satan is called the ruler of this world, in other places, even a “god” with a little “g” – but we need to remember Satan’s under the true God. The same word for his “power” in 2:2 was also used in Eph. 1:21 for all powers and authorities that are subjected to Christ, as it says Christ is far above all of them. Satan is not competition to the Lord; He’s a creature under the foot of the Lord as Paul said at the end of Ephesians 1, he’s subservient to King Jesus. Luther said the devil is “God’s devil.” He has to check in with God (Job 1-2) and get permission to act. Even demons believe in God ... and tremble.

Satan is not sovereign. God is. Don’t underestimate the devil, but don’t over-emphasize him either. Don’t focus on Satan; focus on the Savior. And don’t think Satan is focused on you; he can only be in one place at a time. He’s not omnipresent (all-present) or omnipotent (all-powerful). But Satan is alive and well on planet earth which is under his sway/influence, the domain of this present darkness with forces under him driving the course of this world.

Fallen man doesn’t believe v. 2 anymore than he believes v. 1. The natural man doesn’t think he’s really spiritually dead or satanically driven.

Your friends or coworkers may say to this: “Yeah, right Satan’s behind the scenes, pulling the strings, directing this world. No way, I have free will and go where I want. I’m doing it my way, doing my thing.” But that’s one of the strings Satan pulls as a prince who has power to make us think we’re free while we’re really in bondage. Martin Luther considered his most important book *The Bondage of the Will*. Our will is in bondage to sin, but thinks it’s free. Jesus said in John 8 *everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin ... but God can set free*. We’re not free, even as believers, we’re bondslaves still, but now of a new merciful Master. We have taken his yoke upon us, but His yoke is lighter than our old yoke. We all have a yoke and Master, it’s just a question of who and what.

Only Christ’s power can liberate from sin’s slavery and from this “prince of the power of the air,” from this world’s course to the way, truth, life, from the domain of Satan to the kingdom of Christ. Colossians 1:13 says “*He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,*¹⁴ *in whom we have redemption ...* [that’s slave-liberating emancipating language]

You were spiritual slaves who were spiritually dead (point #1), satanically dominated (#2) ...

3. You Were Stubbornly Disobedient (v. 2-3)

End of v. 2 calls us “sons of disobedience” i.e., our characteristic. This was a stubborn willful sinful habitual pattern of disobedience, both deeds and desires, both actions and attitudes.

³ *Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind ...*

Without v. 3, some might argue we’re not responsible for our sin, after all we’re just spiritually dead and satanically driven. But it’s equally true we’re stubbornly disobedient by choice, loving sin and hating God. The bad news gets even worse and our problem goes deeper than outward sins and trespasses; we inwardly desire and love sinful things, and we carry out those desires. We gratify our sinful cravings, lusts of the flesh, eyes, and pride of life. We can’t blame the world or the devil, because our flesh is ultimately the driver. There may be others in the car, but the driver is guilty before the judge. We’re influenced by the world, the flesh, the devil in v. 2-3, but the responsibility and culpability lies within us.

The world and the devil don’t implant sin in us; they can just stir up what is already in our heart and mind, what’s in our own flesh. Jas 1:13 “*each one is carried away and enticed by his own lust...*” Don’t blame God (Jas 1:12), don’t say “the devil made me do it.” “*Of the flesh*” in v. 3 is the way Greek writers would refer to source – the source of the desires, what produces them, is the flesh, not anything outside the person (James 1:13, 4:1-2). Our greatest and deepest problem is our own sin within, and the solution, the good news of the gospel, must come from outside us in Jesus giving us a foreign righteousness which He implants in us a gift by grace through faith, which is itself part of His gift (v. 8-9). He takes out our stubborn stony heart and puts in a new heart that is soft and submissive and that sees Christ as sweet and wonderful, from changed hearts now *willing to believe* and obey and love Him because He first loved us. Instead of our old heart that disobeyed the Lord, our new heart can delight itself in the Lord, and He will give us the desires of our heart, by giving us new desires (Ps 37:4).

Instead of that spirit working in the sons of disobedience, the Son of God was obedient where we failed, and gives us His Spirit instead of our disobedient spirit. He takes our punishment on the cross that our disobedience deserved, and gives us His obedience and His righteousness, which we do not deserve. Jesus lived the life we could not live, for us. He didn't just die for us, He lived for us. And He changes us so we can live for Him and want to obey Him from the heart. God alone can transform us inside-out. He can regenerate, replace, and re-orient desires and affections to Him. Thomas Watson said: 'till sin is bitter to us, Christ is not sweet to us.'

Until we realize how bad our sin was and is, we won't see how amazing grace is and how desperately we needed it and still need it, and we won't see Christ as the sweet Savior from our bitter sin. Remember your great need for grace and recognize the greatness of the graciousness of our Savior in meeting our need. You were: 1) spiritually dead, 2) satanically driven, 3) stubbornly disobedient

4. You Were Sinfully Depraved (end of v. 3)

"... you were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."

John 3:36 says whoever disobeys or disbelieves Jesus, the wrath of God abides on him. Paul describes us as objects of God's wrath by our very nature, nothing within us deserving anything but wrath. Sin has infected man's mind, man's thoughts, man's desires, man's wants, man's will. Don't think man's will is free *from sin*. There's no question man freely and willfully *chooses to sin* all the time, the language of v. 3 makes that very clear. We are not coerced into sin, we are doing exactly what we want, and can't claim it's not fair. If we are saved, though, it's not because of a good inclination or an island of goodness within us that didn't have the same sinful nature as the rest of mankind. Verse 4 doesn't begin *But I* (what I like to think I decided or did) the gospel must begin like v. 4 *But God* ...

Turn with me back to Genesis 6 because I want you to see this is the consistent teaching of the Bible from the beginning about the depraved nature of all mankind since his fall into sin in Genesis 3. Genesis 6:5 says:

⁵*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. [or "every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time"]*

There are 13 verses in Scripture that use the term "depraved" or "depravity," depending on which English translation you use:

- Hosea 5:2, 9:9 (NASB) speaks of sinners deep in depravity
- 2 Peter 2:19 says (NIV) "They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity – for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him."
- Phil 2:15 speaks of "a crooked and depraved generation" (NIV)
- others "depraved mind" (Rom. 1:28-29, 1 Tim. 6:5, 2 Tim. 3:8) – it's not that man's *actions* are corrupt always, but the *attitudes* of their mind/heart are depraved, inner intentions and inclinations.

Scripture is not saying that every outward deed of man is depraved, but it repeatedly and consistently declares the totality of *inward* depravity or corruption, using terms like mind or heart or will or thinking (essentially synonymous terms in the Bible).

One version of Genesis 6:5 says: *“The LORD observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil.”*

That’s total depravity. Some theologians prefer radical corruption because radical emphasizes the very root or core of the person. v. 12 makes clear all flesh, all humanity, God sees as corrupt. 8:21 makes clear after the flood, man’s nature is still the same, the imaginations or inclinations of his heart are still evil from youth.

We could look at other examples in the Torah, in the Law, but I want to show you just a few examples from the 3-fold division of the OT as Jesus gave it, the Law, psalms, prophets.

Psalms 14:2 The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men,
To see if there are any who understand, who seek God.
³ They have all turned aside,
They have together become corrupt;
There is none who does good,
No, not one.

Psalms 53:2 God looks down from heaven upon the children of men,
To see if there are any who understand, who seek God.
³ Every one of them has turned aside;
They have together become corrupt;
There is none who does good,
No, not one.

Isaiah 1:5 Where will you be stricken again, As you continue in *your* rebellion? The whole head is sick And the whole heart is faint. 6 From the sole of the foot even to the head There is nothing sound in it ...

“total depravity” = the totality of our being, from head to toe, top to bottom, the “whole head ... and the whole heart” is unsound, unhealthy, unholy, sin-infected and rebellious.

Isaiah 64:6 For all of us have become like one who is unclean,
And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment;
And all of us wither like a leaf,
And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
⁷ There is no one who calls on Your name ...

Jeremiah 13:23 “Can the Ethiopian [Cushite] change his skin Or the leopard his spots? Neither can you do good Who are accustomed to doing evil.

Jeremiah 17:9 “The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick [or “incurably wicked”]; Who can understand it?”

How do we natural sinners with incurably sick hearts just choose to do good or love God or choose to change our nature? We don’t. It’s as impossible for us to change our inner nature by a choice of our will as it is for a man to change his outward nature of his skin by mere will-power, or a leopard to make a decision that makes his spots go away. But note that the impossibility of change is not an intellectual inability, it’s a moral unwillingness and responsible rebellion.

Romans 3:10 “THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; ¹¹ THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ¹² ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.” ¹³ “THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,” “THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS”; ¹⁴ “WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS”; ¹⁵ “THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, ¹⁶ DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, ¹⁷ AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN.” ¹⁸ “THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.”

That's total depravity – the totality of man's being from head to toe. Did you notice the terms? “throat ... tongue ... lips ... [whole] mouth ... feet ... known [mind] ... their eyes.”

- Now Total depravity doesn't mean we're as bad as possible
- It doesn't mean we are as bad as other people
- It doesn't mean we are unable to do any human good

When Romans 3 says there's no one who does good, it's not talking about **man's** definition of human good or charity, but by God's definition fallen men don't do any true spiritual good with proper motive to glorify God. Depravity is from God's perspective who sees our best works as filthy rags and who knows the heart of man is deceitful and incurably sinful.

Total Depravity means that sin radically infects and affects the whole person, including not just his actions, but more importantly his mind, heart, and *will*. It's not that we can't do anything of any earthly good but we can't do anything good by heaven's standard or to get to heaven. We can't do anything to save ourselves or to please God or to change our nature, and left to ourselves, we not only won't but don't want to do any of those things on God's terms

Westminster Confession of Faith: “Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to *any spiritual good accompanying salvation*: so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and *dead in sin*, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.”

Romans 8:7 “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, ⁸and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

- You were spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1)
- You were satanically driven (v. 2)
- You were stubbornly disobedient (v. 2-3)
- You were sinfully depraved (v. 3b)
- **You were sovereignly delivered (v 4a): “But God ...”**

⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

Ephesians 1:4-6 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love ⁵He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, ⁶to the praise of the glory of His grace ...

1 Corinthians 1:26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; ²⁷but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹so that no man may boast before God.

1 Corinthians 6:9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, ¹⁰nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. ¹²All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.

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