

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS (LESSON NINETEEN)

“DEAD MEN WALKING”

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

1 And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;

2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:

3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,

5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

In **Ephesians 1**, the Apostle Paul outlines to his readers the Christian's spiritual **possessions** "*in Christ.*" In chapter **2** he turns to a complementary truth: He describes the spiritual **position** of the Christian "*in Christ.*" In chapter **2**, we are shown the wonder of the miraculous grace of God. Paul tells us that we were taken out of the great cemetery of sin and seated in heavenly places in Christ.

In verses **1-3**, Paul informs the Christians in Ephesus about who they were before God intervened to save them by His grace. He writes, "*And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.*"

The first two words "*And you,*" indicate that the flow of Paul's presentation continues without any real break from chapter **1**. In verses **19-23** of chapter **1**, Paul wrote the following:

19 And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,

20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places,

21 Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:

22 And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church,

23 Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

In this passage, Paul emphasized the magnitude of God’s power directed toward all believers as demonstrated in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now, at the beginning of chapter 2, he expands upon the same thought.

Paul has in his mind the idea that the same power which was at work in the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ from death and the grave, works in the resurrection of the believers from their state of spiritual death.

The New Living Translation renders **Ephesians 2:1-3** as follows: *“Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else.”*

The Passion Translation furnishes the following rendering: *“And his fullness fills you, even though you were once like corpses, dead in your sins and offenses. It wasn’t that long ago that you lived in the religion, customs, and values of this world, obeying the dark ruler of the earthly realm who fills the atmosphere with his authority, and works diligently in the hearts of those who are disobedient to the truth of God. The corruption that was in us from birth was expressed through the deeds and desires of our self-life. We lived by whatever natural cravings and thoughts our minds dictated, living as rebellious children subject to God’s wrath like everyone else.”*

In these three verses, Paul gives us a graphic picture of the terrible spiritual condition of the unsaved person. We will highlight 4 characteristics of the unsaved individual as described by Paul in these verses.

The first characteristic of the unsaved person is that they are **dead** in trespasses and sins. The unsaved individual is not sick; he or she is not terminally ill; he or she is dead!

It is impossible for a dead person to do anything to help himself or herself. A dead person does not require resuscitation; he or she requires resurrection. When we speak about unsaved persons as being dead, we mean that they are unable to understand and appreciate spiritual things. They possess no spiritual life, and can therefore do nothing of themselves to please God. Just as a person who is physically dead cannot respond to physical stimuli, so a person who is spiritually dead cannot respond to spiritual things. The corpses in a funeral parlor do not hear the conversations going on around them. They have no appetite for food or drink; they feel no pain; they are dead. In the same way, the spiritual faculties of unsaved persons are not functioning, and they cannot function unless and until God gives them life. They are, to all intents and purposes, spiritually corpses.

We say again that all unsaved persons are dead, and the only difference between one sinner and another is the state of decay. The unsaved drug addict or cancer sufferer may be more decayed outwardly than the unsaved Olympic athlete or business leader, but all are dead—and one corpse cannot be more dead than another! This means that our world is one vast spiritual graveyard, filled with people who are dead while they live. They are dead men walking!

It should be kept clearly in mind that death is not extinction of being or inactivity. Spiritual death is the state of separation from God and His life. Death itself is a separation, whether physical, the separation of the person from his body, or spiritual, the separation of the person from God.

The Greek word translated “*dead*” is **nekros**. It is from this Greek word that we derive several English words such as necrosis, necrotic, necrophobia, necrophilia, necromancy, etc., all of which have to do with death, or the dead.

The state of death spoken of here is “*in trespasses and sins.*” Unsaved individuals are dead with reference to trespasses and sins. That is, this

state of death has to do with trespasses and sins. It is not physical death, although, ultimately, physical death is caused by sin. This state of death is linked with trespasses and sins in that it has to do with the moral and ethical part of these individuals, their reason, will, and emotions. They are living in a state of separation from God and God's life in the sense that God's life does not energize and control their reason, will, and emotions. The reason, will and emotions of these persons are very active, but they are energized by the totally depraved nature.

In our examination of the **Doctrines of Grace**, we considered this state of spiritual death under the subject, “*Radical Corruption.*” Radical Corruption is the term that we used to summarize what the Bible teaches about the spiritual condition of fallen human beings. The doctrine of radical corruption is in harmony with what the Word of God declares that as a result of the Fall of Adam, every part of man — his mind, his will, his emotions and his flesh — have been corrupted by sin. In other words, sin affects all areas of our being including who we are and what we do. It penetrates to the very core of our being and affects every area of it. The doctrine of radical corruption acknowledges the biblical truth that we sin because we are sinners by nature.

The Bible clearly teaches that our original parents, Adam and Eve, fell into sin by disobeying God's commandment. Subsequently, every human being has been born with a sinful, corrupt nature. The truth is that, even if the Bible did not plainly teach this, we would have had to conclude that it is so from the obvious universality of sin. The Fall of man and the effects of the Fall, however, are points of divine revelation. They point to what we refer to as Original sin. Paul alludes to this in **Romans 5:17-19**: “*For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.*”

1 Corinthians 15:21-22 is also instructive in this regard: *“For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”*

Original sin does not refer primarily to the first sin committed by Adam and Eve. Original sin refers to the **result** of their sin which was the corruption of the human race. Original sin refers to the fallen condition in which we were born. The doctrine of original sin teaches that human beings commit sin because we are sinners. We are not sinners because we sin, but rather, we sin because we are sinners. Since the fall of man, we have inherited a corrupted condition of sinfulness. We now have a sin nature. We all commit sins because it is our nature to commit sins.

The word “radical” has its root in the Latin word *radix* which means “root or core.” The word refers to something that permeates to the root or core of a thing. It does not refer to something superficial, incidental or minor. The Biblical view is that the effects of the Fall extend and penetrate to the very core of our being.

The radical corruption of man is clearly revealed throughout the Bible. Let us consider the following passages which underscore the total sinfulness of human nature:

Genesis 2:17

“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”

Genesis 6:5

“And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

Psalms 51:5

“Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.”

The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: *“Look, I was guilty of sin from birth, a sinner the moment my mother conceived me.”*

Psalm 58:3

“The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.”

Ecclesiastes 7:20

“For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.”

Ecclesiastes 9:3

“This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.”

Isaiah 1:4-6

“Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.”

The **New English Translation** renders the passage as follows: *“The sinful nation is as good as dead, the people weighed down by evil deeds. They are offspring who do wrong, children who do wicked things. They have abandoned the LORD, and rejected the Holy One of Israel. They are alienated from him. Why do you insist on being battered? Why do you*

continue to rebel? Your head has a massive wound, your whole body is weak. From the soles of your feet to your head, there is no spot that is unharmed. There are only bruises, cuts, and open wounds. They have not been cleansed or bandaged, nor have they been treated with olive oil.

Isaiah 53:6

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

Isaiah 64:6-7

“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities.”

The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows:

“We are all like one who is unclean, all our so-called righteous acts are like a menstrual rag in your sight. We all wither like a leaf; our sins carry us away like the wind. No one invokes your name, or makes an effort to take hold of you. For you have rejected us and handed us over to our own sins.”

Jeremiah 13:23

“Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.”

Jeremiah 17:9

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”

The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: *“The human mind is more deceitful than anything else. It is incurably bad. Who can understand it?”*

John 3:18-19

“He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”

Romans 3:9-19

9 What then? Are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin;

10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:

11 There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.

12 They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

13 Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; 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 ways:

17 And the way of peace have they not known:

18 There is no fear of God before their eyes.

19 Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

Romans 8:6-8

“For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.”

1 Corinthians 2:14

“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: *“The unbeliever does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. And he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”*

Colossians 2:13

“And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.”

The doctrine of radical corruption is not intended to signify that lost, unregenerate human beings are wholly evil in everything they do, but rather that nothing they do is ever entirely good. In so far as the motive for an act determines the moral character and spiritual significance of the act, every deed has something of sinfulness about it because the will of human beings is fatally corrupted by their fallen nature. Not all motives are equally sinful, but no motive is wholly pure. Hence, from a moral and spiritual point of view, human activity is always tainted as to its motive,

to a greater or lesser extent. This fundamental impurity of motive is the reason for saying that man is radically corrupt. This radical corruption is reflected in the entire impotence of unsaved persons towards any **spiritual** good. It for this reason that Paul speaks of unsaved individuals as not being merely sick but dead. They are dead men walking!

It therefore, follows that the salvation of human beings is altogether a work of God, initiated and carried through by Him without any help from them.

When we speak of the radical corruption of human beings, we are not implying that human beings do not perform good deeds. In **Matthew 7:11** our Lord Himself said, *“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?”*

There is nothing incompatible between the doctrine of radical corruption and the ability of human beings to perform deeds which may be characterized as good. The ability of man to do good deeds in no way challenges his basic corruption. What is corrupt in human nature is motivation. Human beings have the ability to **do** good. What we lack is the ability to **be** good! In **Matthew 7:21-23** our Lord said, *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”*

We see here that it is quite possible in the Judgment for persons to claim truthfully, “Lord, Lord, in your name we have done many wonderful works.” Their claim is not unjustified because it has reference only to

deeds themselves and nothing more. The Judge can say with equal truth, *“I never knew you: Depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.”* This is because a deed, no matter how good it is in itself, is really a work of iniquity when the motivation behind it is wrong. It is not the deeds so much that count but the motives, and the unsaved person is **altogether** sinful. A man may therefore, be full of good works and outwardly have the appearance of a beautiful marble building, spotlessly clean. Yet the building itself may be only a tomb painted white on the outside while inside is a rotting spiritual corpse. This is a saddening truth. The spiritual corruption of man is radical. The radical corruption has reference to his motive, not to his works.

The Scriptural evidence is conclusive. Human beings are *“dead in trespasses and sins,”* and they may only be delivered from that state of deadness by a spiritual resurrection.

It is amazing what medical science can do for sick people. Disfigured faces can be remodeled, body organs can be transplanted, lenses can be implanted in eyes, tumors can be removed, arteries can be bypassed and bones and joints can be replaced. But all these procedures depend for their success on the person being alive. Once the person is dead, medical science cannot remedy the situation. All that the doctor can do is to pull a white sheet over the body and transfer the corpse to the morgue.

The unsaved person is in the very same condition spiritually. Our Lord confirmed this in **John 10:10**. He said, *“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”* Of course, He was speaking to persons who were physically alive, but who were at the same time spiritually dead.

The unsaved person is physically alive, but in the spiritual sense they are a corpse in a morgue. They are in reality “dead men walking.”