

“THE FALLEN NATURE OF HUMANITY”
Jeremiah 17:9-10, Romans 7:14-25, Ephesians 2:1-10
October 21 & 22, 2023

“Three tornadoes ripped through Omaha, Nebraska in 1975, destroying five hundred homes, damaging one thousand others, killing three people, and injuring one-hundred and thirty-two. National Guardsmen were called out, not to help in the calamity, but to patrol a 3,400-square-block area to prevent looting. The Nebraska governor surveyed the area and said it was the worst case of property damage in the history of Nebraska. It is a sad commentary on our modern society that men with guns had to prevent scavengers from helping themselves to things in devastated sections of the city.”¹

Not too long ago we witnessed the riots taking place in various cities because people were unhappy with what was going on in the political spectrum. Businesses were broken into and stripped clean of their merchandise. Car dealers were devastated as many were set on fire or pounded upon by the protestors. Individual homes were attacked and ransacked, often with the residents being harmed in the process.

College campuses are seeing more and more civil unrest as students demonstrate against particular speakers, putting the lives of those who disagree with the popular perspective in peril. Fellow students are attacked and beaten if they dare speak up against the whims of the crowd. And that’s just here in the United States. There is so much more going on in countries like China, or Afghanistan, or Pakistan, or Russia, or Mexico. Heinous crimes are being done against people. It’s awful!

And last week we witnessed another extreme example of our human condition as the news media spread the accounts of the horrific and brutal attack on Israel. Hamas militia shot, murdered, raped and abducted people merely because they were living in Israel at the time. Whole families were murdered in their cars. Adults, youth and children were killed just because they were living in Israel. The senseless attack has left us reeling, some to the praise of the attackers, and most to the unbelief that people could treat each other with such disdain and utter contempt.

¹ (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Illustrations*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998] pg. 157)

With these and many other examples, it doesn't take us too long to see the fallen nature of humanity. Mark Twain said it well when he said, "We are all like the moon. We have a dark side we don't want anybody to see." That dark side within us was created when humans turned away from following God's ways and decided to attempt to live life without God's guidelines. When the first sin separated us from our holy and loving God, it was the very beginning of a downward spiral away from God's ways taking us toward an ever darkening world of lawlessness and greed and manipulation and brutality. We are seeing the dark side of humanity, the side in us that is depraved and evil.

"Webster's Dictionary defines the word *depraved* as, 'marked by corruption or evil; perverted; crooked.' It's important that you understand this is an **internal** disease; you can't detect it from the outside. Most folks don't *look* depraved. Most of us do a masterful job of covering it up. But never doubt that underneath, deep down inside [each and every one of us], there is this disease that eats away at us and pollutes our thoughts and our words (affecting our intellect); it distorts our relationships (because it touches our emotions); and it drives our actions (because it deviates our will)"² from following God's ways, to demanding to follow our own ways. Because we are all a part of the human condition, we all have a depraved nature within us.

And that is clearly stated in God's words to Jeremiah (17:9-10) that we heard this morning, "*The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward each person according to their conduct, according to what their deeds deserve.*"

OUCH! If God is going to hold us all accountable to our conduct and our deeds, none of us stand a chance on our own for anything but condemnation. There is not one of us who can stand before God and say to Him, "Search my heart, O God, and see if there is any wicked ways in me," (Ps. 139:23-24) and expect Him to say back to us, "You're good to go! All good! No problems!" None of us is pure and holy in the eyes of God. On our own, there is no hope for us! All we can do is to echo David's

² (Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll's Ultimate Book of Illustrations*, pg. 156)

words, *“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin”* (Ps. 51:1-2).

You see, we belong to a world that is covered with sin, driven through sin, and is dominated by sin. That sin veils our eyes from being able to see God’s will and God’s way, so we are left only with the world’s will and the world’s way to follow. And the world tells us to fend for ourselves, regardless of what another needs, or how they feel, or what they think. It’s an “all for me” society that only looks out for their own #1. And look out when you get in the way of a person striving to get what they desire! You put your life on the line when you try to prevent a person from doing wrong to get what they want. It’s that individual mentality that no longer seeks advice or direction from anyone else. It’s the mindset that we will not tolerate anyone else telling us what to do or how to live. It’s a free-for-all with everyone looking out for their own personal interests.

The apostle Paul addresses this depraved nature of humanity in his letter to the Romans (7:14-20). Having turned away from God’s commandments, we abandon what is good and right, and end up doing the very things we detest. Paul puts it like this, *“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.”*

Now Paul is not giving us permission to excuse our sinful behavior because sin is in us. That would be much like the way that comedian, Flip Wilson, joked and made fun of our breaking the laws of God. He’d come back with the statement, “The Devil made me do it!” There’s some truth to that, but it is our depraved human nature that gives into that disobedience and then flippantly disregards any accountability to our actions.

Yes, we are lost and depraved people, but we don't have to stay that way. We have a war going on within us to either follow the ways of the Lord, or reject them and follow the ways of the world. However, we are "*a prisoner of the law of sin at work within*" us (Romans 7:23). Rightfully Paul declares, "*What a wretched man I am*" (7:24)! When God expects perfection from anyone who dares stand in front of Him, there is no way any one of us can ever attain that on our own.

Now Paul just got done telling the Roman Christians, "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Rom. 3:23), and "*the wages of [those] sins is death*" (Rom. 6:23), eternal death - forever in the absence of God's presence, void of any of His grace, without any hope but eternal damnation. That's our lot when we try to earn a place in God's kingdom all on our own. We Just Can't Do It By Ourselves! The fallen nature of our humanity causes us to rebel against God's goodness and strive to live life all on our own terms. And history has shown that any society living outside of God's guidelines is sure to destroy itself. On our own, we are totally incapable of doing good works pleasing and acceptable to God. Though we may desire to do it, the sin within us always brings it to destruction.

Dwight Pentecost explains it like this in his book, *Things Which Become Sound Doctrine*. He says: "The doctrine of depravity has to do, not with man's estimation of man, but rather with God's estimation of man. We are the heirs of generations of the teaching of evolution which sees man in an ever-ascending spiral, rising higher and higher from the depth from which he has sprung, until finally he will reach the stars. So widely accepted is that concept that we have come somehow to feel that there is so much good in the worst of us that man is not so bad off after all. When we measure men by man, we can always find someone who is lower than we are on the moral or ethical scale, and the comparison gives us a feeling of self-satisfaction. But the Scriptures do not measure men by man; they measure men by God who has created them. The creature is measured by the Creator and is found to be wanting."³

Is there any wonder then, why society today, all around the world, wants to get rid of those who follow the Scriptures? Without the moral standard of the Scriptures being lifted up as just and right,

³ (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll's Ultimate Book of Illustrations*, pg. 157)

then anything goes, and people are not to blame for their actions, because inside, they are all basically good people. And then people can get away with all kinds of evil because we judge their actions according to the depravity of the rest of us.

But the Scriptures tell us plainly that no one is good, not even one - well, only One, and that was Jesus Christ. Jesus is the One who came to us as God in the flesh to teach us of God and to help us find out how much we need God in our lives, because without Him, there is no hope for us.

So where is there hope for us? If our wisdom and our knowledge and our justice and our governance fails us, where else can we turn to for any kind of hope? I'm so glad you asked. Let me share with you some good news that is the remedy for eliminating the depraved nature within us. Listen to these great words found in Ephesians 2:1-10. (READ Ephesians 2:1-10)

You see, we first have to recognize our fallen nature as people, descendants of Adam and Eve, people suffering in the result of sin. If Adam and Eve were condemned because of only one sin, then we are heirs of that condemnation. Our only hope is to put our trust and faith in the only One who can change our nature to give us a new nature. Jesus is the only One who can change our hearts from being sin dominated, to being redeemed and restored people free from sin.

And that is the value of the church. We are the ones that find our hearts and minds cleaned from sin as we receive Jesus Christ as Savior of our lives, and then make Him the Lord of our lives. As we make Jesus our Savior, we are rescued from the penalty of sin, which is eternal death. As we invite Him to be Lord, Jesus then guides and directs our lives to do God's will and God's way, and helps us to avoid sinfulness within us. When we let Jesus be Lord of our lives, He encourages us to love Him and honor Him in our daily living, He challenges us to grow closer to Him so that we can recognize sin and evil, and He strengthens us so that we can stand strong in our faith in the face of the evil in this world. As Lord of our lives, Jesus illuminates our path in the darkness of this world so that we can see the right way to go, avoiding all of the pitfalls and dead-ends and snares that could entice us away from Him. Living our lives with Jesus as our Lord gives us the freedom to live for Him so that others might find

their way to Him, too.

And why would God do all of this for us? It is “*because of His great love for us*” (Eph. 2:4)! God does not want us to be destroyed as we walk away from Him. He desires that we draw close to Him, follow His commandments, and find the blessings that only He can give to us as we live within His standards. And because God loves us so much, He has given us His grace through Jesus Christ that saves us and gives us another chance so that we might live differently - giving up living according to the world’s ways, but now living according to His will and His way.

So it is not because we are better than anyone else that we are saved. We all deserve His wrath (2:3). But because He loves us so much, even before we were ready to come back to Him, even while we were yet sinners going against His commands, God was working to enable us to know His Way, His Truth and His Life. By His Holy Spirit, God works to convince us of our sinfulness, to open our eyes to how far off His mark we are, and to call us back to Himself. And when we find the truth of how wretched we are, He then guides us to the point of knowing Jesus, His Son, our Savior, and as we claim Jesus as our Redeemer, we are transformed from sinners into saints, from people on death row to people going on to eternal life.

It works like this. “On February 24, 2001, a one-year-old Canadian girl named Erika somehow wandered out of her mother’s bed and house, and spent the entire night in the Edmonton winter.

“When her mother, Leyla Nordby, found her, Erika appeared to be totally frozen. Her legs were stiff, her body frozen and all signs of life appeared to be gone.

“Erika was treated at Edmonton’s Stollery Children’s Health Center, and God helped doctors and rescue workers bring her back to life. To the amazement of all, there appeared to be no sign of brain damage, and doctors gave Erika a clear prognosis - she would soon be able to hop and skip and play like other girls her age.

“Some of us have wandered away from our Father’s house, and it has brought us near the point of death. Our hearts have hardened, and our spiritual bodies look as lifeless as the little girl in the snow.

“But our Father noticed we were missing and is searching for us. He can take our lifeless spirits and restore us to health. Let the Father pick you up and take you back to His house,”⁴ where there is nothing but life and hope and joy and peace and love.

Because God loves us so much, He *gave us His only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life*” (John 3:16). So *“you are not our own, but you have been bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies”* (I Corinthians 6:19-20), stop sinning and turn to Jesus Christ. *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do”* (Ephesians 2:8-10).

Jesus Christ makes all the difference in our lives. He has made us His people so that we can live according to the ways of God. His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead has broken our chains that bind us as slaves to sin. When we accept Him as our Savior, all our sins are washed away and we are made brand new in Him.

Author Arthur Bennet states it this way. “O Lord God, teach me to know grace preceded, accompanies and follows my salvation, that it sustains the redeemed soul, that not one link of its chain can ever break.

“From Calvary’s cross wave upon wave of grace reaches me, deals with my sin, washes me clean, renews my heart, draws out my affection, kindles a flame in my soul, consecrates my every thought, word, [and] work, [and] teaches me thy immeasurable love. How great are my privileges in Christ Jesus!

“Without Him I stand far off, a stranger, an outcast; in Him I draw near and touch His kingly scepter. Without Him I dare not lift my guilty eyes; in Him I gaze upon my Father-God and friend. Without Him I hide my lips in trembling shame; in Him I open my mouth in petition and praise. Without Him all is wrath and consuming fire; in Him all is love, and the repose of my soul. Without

⁴ (PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003] pg. 250)

Him is gaping hell below me, and eternal anguish; in Him its gates are barred to me by His precious blood. Without Him darkness spreads its horrors in front; in Him an eternity of glory is my boundless horizon. Without Him all within me is terror and dismay; in Him every accusation is charmed into joy and peace. Without Him all things external call for my condemnation; in Him they minister to my comfort, and are to be enjoyed with thanksgiving. Praise be to thee for grace, and for the unspeakable gift of Jesus.”⁵

Though we were once people of fallen nature, depraved of mind and heart, adamantly against all of God’s will and ways, when we claim Jesus as our Savior, all of that is changed, redeemed and remade into the likeness of the Garden of Eden.

And since we are remade in His likeness, in the likeness of Jesus Christ, we are freed from the condemnation that comes from sin’s penalty. That’s the best news for the world we live in. It is the Good News of the Gospel that we are invited to take into the world so that everyone might have the chance to hear it, receive it, believe it, and then live by it.

So we then must no longer give ourselves over to the ways of the world. We are called to be living witnesses to the difference that Christ Jesus makes in our lives. Let us live so that Christ may be glorified in all that we do. Let’s pray.

Father, thank You so much for the gift of Salvation through Jesus Christ our Savior. Though we were once enemies to You because of our sin, we have now put our hope in Jesus, and we find our lives strangely changed, transformed from creatures of sinfulness to those who strive to please You. Thank You for Your forgiveness in Christ. We pray today that You would give us the courage to humble ourselves to Your mighty grace, so that we might become the living witnesses of redemption and life given through Jesus. Strengthen us against all the ways of this world, so that we do not fall victim of turning away from You once again. Encourage us to do all we can do to live pure and holy lives, for we are now Your people, not only called by Your Name, but live according to all of Your ways. This we pray in the Name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and our Lord. AMEN.

⁵ (Charles Swindoll, *Swindoll’s Ultimate Book of Illustrations*, pg. 503-504)