

Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 247

RADICAL DEPRAVITY

*You...who were dead in
trespasses and sins.*

Ephesians 2:1

Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

Free Grace Broadcaster

RADICAL DEPRAVITY

247

Contents

A Vital Question for Today	2
<i>Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)</i>	
In Adam All Die.....	8
<i>Thomas Reade (1776-1841)</i>	
Human Depravity.....	12
<i>Joel Beeke</i>	
Depravity of Heart.....	19
<i>Thomas Reade (1776-1841)</i>	
A Depraved, Corrupted Mind	22
<i>John Owen (1616-1683)</i>	
Human Inability	28
<i>Loraine Boettner (1901-1990)</i>	
Legally, Spiritually, Eternally Dead	35
<i>Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)</i>	
God's Effectual Drawing.....	42
<i>John Flavel (c. 1630-1691)</i>	
Are You Dead or Alive?.....	45
<i>J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)</i>	

Published by Chapel Library • 2603 West Wright St. • Pensacola, Florida 32505 USA

Sending Christ-centered materials from prior centuries worldwide

Worldwide: please use the online downloads worldwide without charge, www.chapellibrary.org.
In North America: please write for your free subscription in print. The FGB is sent quarterly without charge. Chapel Library is a faith ministry that relies upon God's faithfulness. We seek His glory in all things, depending upon Him to supply our needs through those who freely desire to give and pray. We therefore do not solicit donations; you will only hear from us when you request materials or receive your subscription. We also do not share our mailing list, so your contact information will remain secure with us. Chapel Library does not necessarily agree with all the doctrinal views of the authors it publishes.

© Copyright 2019 Chapel Library: compilation, abridgment, annotations

A VITAL QUESTION FOR TODAY

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952)

IT is our deep conviction that the vital question most requiring to be raised today is this: Is man a totally and thoroughly depraved¹ creature by nature? Does he enter the world completely ruined and helpless, spiritually blind and dead in trespasses and sins? According as is our answer to that question, so will be our views on many others. It is on the basis of this dark background that the whole Bible proceeds. Any attempt to modify or abate, repudiate or tone down the teaching of Scripture on the matter is fatal. Put the question in another form: Is man now in such a condition that he cannot be saved without the special and direct intervention of the triune God on his behalf? In other words, is there any hope for him apart from his personal election by the Father, his particular redemption² by the Son, and the supernatural operations of the Spirit within him?³ Or, putting it in still another way: If man is a totally depraved being, can he possibly take the first step in the matter of his return to God?

The scriptural answer to that question makes evident the utter futility of the schemes of social reformers for “the moral elevation of the masses,” the plans of politicians for the peace of the nations, and the ideologies of dreamers to usher in a golden age for this world. It is both pathetic and tragic to see many of our greatest men putting their faith in such chimeras.⁴ Divisions and discords, hatred and bloodshed, cannot be banished while human nature is what it is. But during the past century the steady trend of a deteriorating Christendom has been to underrate the evil of sin and overrate the moral capabilities of men. Instead of proclaiming the heinousness of sin, there has been a dwelling more upon its inconveniences, and the abasing portrayal of the lost condition of man as set forth in Holy Writ has been obscured if not obliterated by flattering disquisitions⁵ on human advancement. If the popular religion of “the churches”—including nine-tenths of what is termed *Evangelical Christianity*—be tested at this point, it will be found that it clashes directly with man’s fallen,

¹ **depraved** – morally corrupt; wicked.

² See FGB 227, *Atonement*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

³ See FGB 202, *The New Birth*.

⁴ **chimeras** – wild notions of the imagination; things hoped for but impossible to achieve.

⁵ **disquisitions** – long, elaborate explanatory essays.

ruined, and spiritually dead condition.

There is, therefore, a crying need today for sin to be viewed in the light of God's Law and gospel, so that its exceeding sinfulness⁶ may be demonstrated and the dark depths of human depravity exposed by the teaching of Holy Writ that we may learn what is connoted by those fearful words "dead in trespasses and sins." The grand object of the Bible is to make God known to us, to portray man as he appears in the eyes of his Maker, and to show the relation of one to the other. It is, therefore, the business of His servants not only to declare the divine character and perfections, but also to delineate the original condition and apostasy of man, as well as the divine remedy for his ruin. Until we really behold the horror of the pit in which by nature we lie, we can never properly appreciate Christ's so-great salvation. In man's fallen condition, we have the awful disease for which divine redemption is the only cure, and our estimation and valuation of the provisions of divine grace will necessarily be modified in proportion as we modify the need it was meant to meet.

David Clarkson, one of the Puritans, pointed out this fact in his sermon on Psalm 51:5: "The end of the ministry of the gospel is to bring sinners unto Christ. Their way to this end lies through the sense of their misery without Christ. The ingredients of this misery are our sinfulness, original and actual; the wrath of God, whereto sin has exposed us; and our impotency to free ourselves either from sin or wrath. That we may therefore promote this great end, we shall endeavor, as the Lord will assist, to lead you in this way, by the sense of misery, to Him Who alone can deliver from it. Now the original of our misery being the corruption of our natures, or original sin, we thought fit to begin here, and therefore have pitched upon these words as very proper for our purpose"⁷ ...*Behold, I was shapen⁸ in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

This subject is indeed a most solemn one, and none can fitly write or preach on it unless his own heart is deeply awed by it. It is not something from which any man can detach himself and expatiate⁹ on it as though he were not directly involved in it; still less as from a higher level looking down on those whom he denounces. Nothing is more [unsuitable] and unbecoming than for a young preacher glibly to rat-

⁶ See FGB 240, *The Sinfulness of Sin*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

⁷ David Clarkson, *The Works of David Clarkson*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1864), 3; Clarkson (1622-1686) was an Independent Puritan preacher and author.

⁸ **shapen in iniquity** – brought forth or born sinful at birth; born a sinner.

⁹ **expatiate** – speak or write at great length.

tle off passages of Scripture that portray his own vileness by nature. Rather should they be read or quoted with the utmost gravity. J. C. Philpot stated, “As no heart can sufficiently conceive, so no tongue can adequately express, the state of wretchedness and ruin into which sin has cast guilty, miserable man. In separating him from God, it has severed him from the only source and fountain of all happiness and all holiness. It has ruined him, body and soul. The one it has filled with sickness and disease; in the other, it has defaced and destroyed the image of God in which it was created. It has shattered all his mental faculties; it has broken his judgment, polluted his imagination, and alienated his affections. It has made him love sin and hate God.”¹⁰

The doctrine of total depravity is a very humbling one. It is not that man leans to one side and needs propping up, nor that he is merely ignorant and requires instructing, nor that he is run down and calls for a tonic; but rather that he is undone, lost, spiritually dead. Consequently, he is “without strength,” thoroughly incapable of bettering himself. He is exposed to the wrath of God and unable to perform a single work that can find acceptance with Him. Almost every page of the Bible bears witness to this truth. The whole scheme of redemption takes it for granted. The plan of salvation taught in the Scriptures could have no place on any other supposition. The impossibility of any man’s gaining the approbation¹¹ of God by works of his own appears plainly in the case of the rich young ruler who came to Christ. Judged by human standards, he was a model of virtue and religious attainments. Yet, like all others who trust in self-efforts, he was ignorant of the spirituality and strictness of God’s Law; when Christ put him to the test, his fair expectations were blown to the winds and “he went away sorrowful” (Mat 19:22).

It is therefore a most unpalatable¹² doctrine. It cannot be otherwise, for the unregenerate love to hear of the greatness, the dignity, the nobility of man. The natural man thinks highly of himself and appreciates only that which is flattering. Nothing pleases him more than to listen to that which extols human nature and lauds the state of mankind, even though it be in terms that not only repudiate the teaching of God’s Word but are flatly contradicted by common observation and universal experience. And there are many who [gratify] him

¹⁰ From Philpot’s *The Gospel Standard*, March 12, 1858, p. 92, “Review: Communion with God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost” by John Owen; Philpot (1802-1869) was an English Strict Baptist pastor and author.

¹¹ **approbation** – approval.

¹² **unpalatable** – distasteful and therefore rejected.

by their lavish praises of the excellency of civilization and the steady progress of the race. Hence, to have the lie given to the popular theory of evolution is highly displeasing to its deluded votaries. Nevertheless, the duty of God's servants is to stain the pride of all that man glories in, to strip him of his stolen plumes, to lay him low in the dust before God. However repugnant such teaching is, God's emissary must faithfully discharge his duty "whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear"¹³ (Eze 3:11).

This is no dismal dogma¹⁴ invented by the church in "the dark ages," but a truth of Holy Writ. George Whitefield said, "I look upon it, not merely as a doctrine of the Scriptures, the great fountain of truth, but a very fundamental one, from which I hope God will suffer none of you to be enticed."¹⁵ It is a subject to which great prominence is given in the Bible. Every part of the Scriptures has much to say on the awful state of degradation and slavery into which the Fall has brought man. The corruption, the blindness, the hostility of all Adam's descendants to everything of a spiritual nature are constantly insisted upon. Not only is man's utter ruin fully described, but also his powerlessness to save himself from the same. In the declarations and denunciations of the prophets, of Christ and His apostles, the bondage of all men to Satan and their complete impotence to turn to God for deliverance are repeatedly set forth—not indirectly and vaguely, but emphatically and in great detail. This is one of a hundred proofs that the Bible is not a human invention but a communication from the thrice holy One.

It is a *sadly* neglected subject. Notwithstanding the clear and uniform teaching of Scripture, man's ruined condition and alienation from God are but feebly apprehended and seldom heard in the modern pulpit and are given little place even in what are regarded as the centers of orthodoxy. Rather the whole trend of present-day thought and teaching is in the opposite direction, and even where the Darwinian hypothesis has not been accepted, its pernicious influences are often seen. In consequence of the guilty silence of the modern pulpit, a generation of churchgoers has arisen that is deplorably ignorant of the basic truths of the Bible, so that perhaps not more than one in a thousand has even a mental knowledge of the chains of hardness and unbelief that bind the natural heart or of the dungeon of darkness in which they lie. Thousands of preachers, instead of faithfully telling

¹³ **forbear** – refuse (to hear).

¹⁴ **dismal dogma** – gloomy or dreadful doctrine.

¹⁵ John Gillies, *The Memoirs of Rev. George Whitefield* (Middletown: Hunt & Noyes, 1838), 248.

their hearers of their woeful state by nature, are wasting their time by relating the latest news of the Kremlin or of the development of nuclear weapons.

It is therefore a testing doctrine, especially of the preacher's soundness in the faith. A man's orthodoxy on this subject determines his viewpoint of many other doctrines of great importance. If his belief here is a scriptural one, then he will clearly perceive how impossible it is for men to improve themselves—that Christ is their only hope. He will know that unless the sinner is born again there can be no entrance for him into the kingdom of God. Nor will he entertain the idea of the fallen creature's free will to attain goodness. He will be preserved from many errors. Andrew Fuller stated, "I never knew a person verge toward the Arminian,¹⁶ the Arian,¹⁷ the Socinian,¹⁸ or the Antinomian¹⁹ schemes, without first entertaining diminutive notions of human depravity or blameworthiness"²⁰...

It is a doctrine of *great practical value* as well as spiritual importance. The foundation of all true piety lies in a correct view of ourselves and our vileness, and a scriptural belief in God and His grace. There can be no genuine self-abhorrence or repentance, no real appreciation of the saving mercy of God, no faith in Christ, without it. There is nothing like a knowledge of this doctrine so well calculated to undeceive vain man and convict him of the worthlessness and rottenness of his own righteousness. Yet the preacher who is aware of the plague of his own heart knows full well that he cannot present this truth in such a way as to make his hearers actually realize and feel the same, to help them stop being in love with themselves, and to cause them to forever renounce all hope in themselves. Therefore, instead of relying upon his faithfulness in presenting the truth, he will be cast upon God to apply it graciously in power to those who hear him and bless his feeble efforts.

It is an exceedingly *illuminating* doctrine. It may be a melancholy and humiliating one; nevertheless, it throws a flood of light upon mys-

¹⁶ **Arminian** – referring to the doctrines of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), who rejected the Reformers' view of predestination, teaching instead that God's predestination was based on His foreknowing of who would or would not receive Christ by their free will.

¹⁷ **Arian** – referring to the doctrines of Arius, a bishop of Alexandria (A.D. 250/56-336), who taught that the heavenly Son was a created being and not deity.

¹⁸ **Socinian** – referring to the doctrines of Laelius (1525-1562) and Faustus (1539-1604) Socinus, who rejected original sin, the deity of Christ, and, therefore, the Trinity.

¹⁹ **Antinomian** – from the Greek *anti*, against, and *nomos*, law, which generally applies to those who hold the doctrine that God's Law has no place in a believer's life.

²⁰ Andrew Fuller, *The Complete Works of Andrew Fuller: Controversial Publications*, ed. Joseph Belcher, Vol. 2 (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 662; Fuller (1754-1815) was an English Particular Baptist pastor and theologian.

teries that are otherwise insoluble.²¹ It supplies the key to the course of human history and shows why so much of it has been written in blood and tears. It supplies an explanation of many problems that sorely perplex and puzzle the thoughtful. It reveals why the child is prone to evil and has to be taught and disciplined to anything that is good. It explains why every improvement in man's environment, every attempt to educate him, all the efforts of social reformers, are unavailing to effect any radical betterment in his nature and character. It accounts for the horrible treatment which Christ met with when He worked so graciously in this world, and why He is still despised and rejected by men. It enables the Christian himself to better understand the painful conflict which is ever at work within him, and which causes him so often to cry, "Oh, wretched man that I am!" (Rom 7:24).

It is therefore a most *necessary* doctrine, for the vast majority of our fellowmen are ignorant of it. God's servants are sometimes thought to speak too strongly and dolefully of the dreadful state of man through his apostasy from God. The fact is that it is impossible to exaggerate in human language the darkness and pollution of man's heart or to describe the misery and utter helplessness of a condition such as the Word of truth describes in these solemn passages: "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2Co 4:3a). "Therefore they could not believe, because he hath [judicially] blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them" (Joh 12:39-40). This is yet more evident when we contrast the state of soul of those in whom a miracle of grace is wrought (Luk 1:78-79).

It is a [*beneficial*] doctrine—one that God often uses to bring men to their senses...Nothing but a real sense of our lost condition lays us in the dust before God.

From *Studies in the Scriptures*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952): Pastor, itinerate Bible teacher, author; born in Nottingham, England, UK.



Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one.—*Job 14:4*

²¹ **insoluble** – impossible to solve.

IN ADAM ALL DIE

Thomas Reade (1776-1841)

THE doctrine of the Fall, with all its direful¹ consequences, shines with awful clearness in the book of God: “As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (Rom 5:12).

The doctrine of the Fall lies at the foundation of atonement: for “They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick” (Luk 5:31). Jesus came not “to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luk 5:32). He came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luk 19:10). “This,” therefore, “is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1Ti 1:15). His glorious work was announced to Joseph by the angel, when he said, “Thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins” (Mat 1:21).

Whilst viewing the once happy pair² after their awful fall, we are constrained to use the language of the weeping prophet: “How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!” (Lam 4:1).

The sin of Adam was a compound of unbelief, pride, sensuality, ingratitude, and rebellion. *Unbelief*, in giving credence³ to the tempter, rather than to God. *Pride*, in the fond desire of being wise as gods, knowing good and evil. *Sensuality*, in lusting after the forbidden fruit. *Ingratitude*, in leaguings with the fallen angels. *Rebellion*, in trampling the authority of Jehovah.

The apostle says, “Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression” (1Ti 2:14). The serpent first beguiled Eve through his subtlety, and then Eve gained an easy conquest over her husband, for it is recorded, “She took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat” (Gen 3:6). By this act, Adam [gave in to] sinful compliance with the temptation and became a full sharer in her guilt and misery. In this guilt, their whole posterity was likewise involved, for it is written: “By the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation” (Rom 5:18). “In Adam all die” (1Co 15:22).

¹ **direful** – dreadful; terrible.

² Adam and Eve

³ **giving credence** – believing or accepting a statement as true.

The effect of the Fall was shame, the never-failing companion of sin. “They knew that they were naked” (Gen 3:7). The image of God was gone. Their native robe of innocence was gone. Their peace and purity were gone. Awful condition! They were indeed naked and exposed to all the terrors of incensed⁴ justice without a covering from its wrath.

Another effect of the Fall was the darkness of the mind. “Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of LORD God amongst the trees of the garden” (Gen 3:8). Amazing blindness—to hide themselves from that Being, Whose eyes are brighter than ten thousand suns, Who fills heaven and earth with His presence, and from Whom no secrets are hid!

Slavish fear was another fruit of the Fall. When God asked Adam why he hid himself, he replied, “I was afraid” (Gen 3:10). Ah, what inward torment did sin produce in the soul of our first parents! How changed their condition! They are now afraid to look upon Him Whose presence was their heaven and their joy.

Impiety⁵ and impenitence⁶ were also the baneful⁷ offspring of the Fall. When God charged Adam with eating of the tree whereof He commanded that he should not eat, Adam replied: “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat” (Gen 3:12). Mark the impiety: “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me”—thus charging the guilt upon the Almighty, as if he had said, “If Thou hadst never given me this woman, I would have never sinned against Thee.” O! The impious insult upon divine benevolence, goodness, and love! Mark also then the impenitence of Adam: “She gave me of the tree, and I did eat,” thus throwing the blame of his eating upon Eve, as if he were compelled to eat because she presented the fruit to him, and as if his own will had no part in it.

We see here no conviction of sin, no confession of guilt, no [remorse] on account of it. The Garden of Eden exhibited no signs of penitence, no brokenness of heart...Eve was just as bad as her husband. She, in like manner, endeavored to [clear] herself by saying, “The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat” (Gen 3:13).

Now observe, O my soul; yes, observe with wonder, gratitude, and love the boundless grace and mercy of Jehovah. He, Who spared not

⁴ **incensed** – greatly enraged.

⁵ **impiety** – lack of reverence for God; ungodliness.

⁶ **impenitence** – hardness of heart; unrepentant.

⁷ **baneful** – life-destroying.

the angels that sinned, proclaimed a rich and free salvation to rebellious man. The Lord promised a deliverer, even the seed of the woman, who should bruise the serpent's head. In the fullness of time, Jesus, the Savior, was born of a pure virgin, born to save His people from their sins and to vanquish the powers of death and hell. This precious Jesus is now preached through the everlasting gospel to all the guilty sons and daughters of Adam, with the blessed assurance that all who believe in Him shall be saved.

From this short view of man's apostasy and recovery, it is evident that man is the sole author of his destruction and that his salvation is altogether of free, unsought-for, unmerited grace. Through the Fall, man lost all spiritual power and will to love and serve God. But through the covenant of grace, he regains both, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phi 2:13).

An attentive perusal of the third and fourth chapters of Genesis will convince every humble inquirer after truth, through the teaching of the divine Spirit, that every man born into this world deserves nothing but everlasting damnation, since "that which is born of the flesh is flesh" (Joh 3:6), and "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1Co 15:50). "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again" (Joh 3:7), was the reply of the Savior to the inquiring Nicodemus. The sinner may cavil⁸ and dispute, but his own heart will condemn him. His own life will condemn him. The Law of God will condemn him. The sin of his nature, as a child of fallen Adam, will condemn him. He will find nothing but condemnation here and judgment in the world to come. But let him look outside of himself to the second Adam, the Lord from heaven—to Jesus Christ, the promised deliverer. There he will find everything needful to repair the ruins of the Fall—yes, to raise him to a more glorious state than if Adam had never sinned...

Amazing mystery! O! Wonderful wisdom of God, in thus educating⁹ such good out of such evil and in making that to redound to His glory and to manifest the bright display of His perfections, which Satan intended as an awful blight on His new and fair creation!

Thus, Satan is foiled, and grace reigns "through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 5:21). "Sing, O ye heavens; for the LORD hath done it: shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree there-

⁸ **cavil** – raise trivial objections.

⁹ **educing** – bringing out.

in: for the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel” (Isa 44:23).

Surely none but fools can make a mock at sin...Pride, malice, envy, murmuring, uncleanness, and every abomination hateful to a holy God and destructive to our wretched race spring from this poisonous root. Every particle of sin contains an infinity of evil and deserves everlasting damnation.

But, O my soul, if you would view sin in darkest colors and most terrible effects, go to Bethlehem and ask, “Why did the King of heaven become an infant of days? Why was He Who fills all space, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger?” Go to Gethsemane and ask, “Why did the incarnate God agonize and sweat great drops of blood?” Go to the judgment hall and ask, “Why did the sovereign Judge of men and angels submit to be judged? Why did the innocent suffer such indignities? Why was the guiltless condemned to die?” Go to Calvary and ask, “Why did the Lord of glory hang on the accursed tree? Why did the Lord of life condescend to pour out His soul unto death?”

It was to save you from your sin, to redeem you from the curse of the law by being made a curse for you, to deliver you from going down into hell by becoming your ransom. It was to merit heaven for you by His precious atonement and obedience unto death. It was to purchase for you the eternal Spirit, by Whose powerful aid you might believe and love and delight in this precious Savior, this adorable Redeemer, this almighty Deliverer, through Whom your sins are pardoned and by Whom you have access unto God as your reconciled Father. O my soul! Praise the Lord for His mercy, and never cease to speak good of His name!

Sin—even your sin—nailed, pierced, and agonized the Lord of glory! O! Then hate sin and avoid it as you would tremble to plunge a spear into your Savior’s bosom, as you would shudder to trample under foot His sacred blood. “The wages of sin is death.” But, O!—rejoice in this gracious declaration: “The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:23).

From *Spiritual Exercises of the Heart*, Reformation Heritage Books,
www.heritagebooks.org. Used by permission.

Thomas Reade (1776-1841): English layman and author; born in Manchester, England, UK.



HUMAN DEPRAVITY

Joel Beeke

THE Bible tells us that although fallen man is capable of doing some externally good acts, he cannot do anything truly good or pleasing in God's sight (Rom 8:8) unless he is regenerated by the Holy Spirit (Joh 3:1-8). From God's standpoint, which is the only true standpoint, natural man is incapable of goodness in thought, word, or deed, and thus cannot contribute anything to his salvation. He is in total rebellion against God.

When [we] speak of total depravity, [we] are confessing our hell-deserving demerit and corruption before God because of our original and actual sins. We can neither erase our demerit nor do anything to merit the saving favor of God. To grasp the full implications of this truth, we must understand five things that lie at the heart of what Scripture presents total depravity to mean.

First, total depravity is *inseparable from iniquity*. Total depravity is the inevitable result of our sin, and sin is the inevitable result of our total depravity. You can't understand what total depravity is if you don't understand what sin is. The Bible tells us, "Sin is the transgression of the law" of God (1Jo 3:4). Thus, sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in our actions, attitudes, or nature—either by doing or being what we should not do or be (sins of *commission*) or by not doing or not being what we should do or be (sins of omission). Sin is unrighteousness, and all unrighteousness is anti-God. In essence, sin is all that is in opposition to God. Sin defies God; it violates His character, His Law, and His covenant. It fails, as Martin Luther¹ put it, to "let God be God." Sin aims to dethrone God and strives to place someone or something else upon His rightful throne.

The Bible uses a variety of words for sin. Taken individually, they mean (1) to miss the mark God has established as our aim—that is, not to live to His glory; (2) to be irreligious and irreverent, which is to show the absence of righteousness; (3) to transgress the boundaries of God's Law—that is, to violate His established limits; (4) to engage in iniquity—that is, to deviate from a right course, to show a lack of integrity, or to fail to do what He has commanded; (5) to disobey and rebel against God through a breach of trust or a conscious act of

¹ **Martin Luther** (1483-1546) – German leader during the Protestant Reformation.

treachery; (6) to commit perversion by twisting one's mind against God; and (7) to commit abomination against God by performing acts particularly reprehensible² to God.

Every life—including yours and mine—has missed its target and is irreverent by nature. Every life has transgressed the lines of God's prohibitions and engages in iniquity. Every life has disobeyed the voice of God, has rebelled against Him, and is prone to commit perversion and abomination. Isaiah 53:6a says “all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way,” and Romans 3:23 says that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

Thus, total depravity means that we are lawbreakers at every turn. By nature, we never love God above all or our neighbors as ourselves. We are at “enmity against God” (Rom 8:7), living in active, frenetic³ hostility toward Him, and we are “hateful, and hating one another” (Ti 3:3). We are always sinning, for our motives are never altogether pure.

Second, total depravity is *primarily inward*—an inwardness that stems from our profound and tragic fall in Adam. When we think of sin, we are prone to limit ourselves to outward actions such as murder, theft, assassination, cruelty, and anything else that is external and observable in human behavior. But the Bible is much more rigorous and far more radical. It looks not simply at what is outward, touched, and heard; it goes into the depths of human life and says that sin and depravity exist there, too—in our thoughts, our ambitions, our decisions, our motives, and our aspirations.

Jesus said that it is not what a man eats or touches that defiles him, but that which comes out from him that defiles him and affects all he thinks and does (Mat 15:17-20). It is not so much that human actions or speech have missed the target; it is that the *heart of man* has missed the target. The very heart of man is unbelieving, selfish, covetous, sensuous, and always desiring to displace God Himself. Hence, the very desire to sin is sin. John Calvin put it this way: “According to the constitution of our nature, oil might be extracted from a stone sooner than we could perform a good work.”⁴

Why is this? Why are we all so inwardly depraved? Why is it impossible for the natural man to produce any righteousness? To answer

² **reprehensible** – deserving rebuke or condemnation.

³ **frenetic** – wildly excited.

⁴ John Calvin, trans. John Allen, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 2 (New-Haven; Philadelphia: Hezekiah Howe; Philip H. Nicklin, 1816), 253; Calvin (1509-1664) was a French-born Swiss Protestant pastor, theologian, and reformer.

these questions, we must return to Paradise. There we were affected by Adam's sin in two ways. First, the guilt of his sin was imputed to us, so we are guilty sinners before God, as Paul tells us graphically in Romans 5:18a: "By the offence of one [man,] judgment came upon all men to condemnation." Second, we inherited the pollution of his sin, so we are corrupt sinners before God, conceived and born in iniquity, as David tells us graphically in Psalm 51:5: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." Thus, we are depraved in our inner beings through our fall in Adam, both in our state of guilt and in our condition of pollution. Isaiah said that the best of our righteousness—that is, the best of our best—is as "filthy rags" before the holy God (Isa 64:6). We are worse than we can imagine. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Calvin declares that no one knows even 1 percent of his sin. And a common ancient proverb says, "If the best man's faults were written in his forehead, it would make him pull his hat over his eyes."⁵

We have two problems in God's sight: we have a bad record and we have a bad heart—and the second problem is by far the greater of the two. When we understand our inner depravity in scriptural terms (read Rom 3:9-20), we see that this condition—known by the theological term *original sin*—is a far greater burden than our actual sins, for all our actual sins flow from the fountainhead of our original sin and our bad heart. We sin because we are internally depraved, not because we are externally deprived. That's why Calvin writes, "Every sin should convince us of the general truth of the corruption of our nature."⁶

When Paul got a glimpse of the depths of his depravity, he confessed that he was the "chief" sinner among mankind (1Ti 1:15). When John Bunyan saw just a bit of his inner depravity, he said that he would trade his heart with anyone in all of England.⁷ Luther summarizes our problem well: "Original sin is in us like our beard. We are shaved today and look clean; tomorrow our beard has grown again, nor does it cease growing while we remain on earth. In like manner original sin cannot be extirpated⁸ from us; it springs up in us

⁵ *Select Proverbs, Italian, Spanish, French, English, British, etc., Chiefly Moral* (London, 1707), 111.

⁶ John Calvin and James Anderson, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 290.

⁷ Cf. John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (Choteau, MT: Old Paths Gospel Press, n.d.), 88-95.

⁸ **extirpated** – completely destroyed, as if down to the roots.

as long as we live.”⁹

Third, total depravity means that sin is *tragically inclusive*, i.e., it dreadfully impacts every part of us. There is something terribly wrong not only with who we are inwardly, but with every aspect of our being. No element of our personality is less affected by sin than any other. Our intellects, our consciences, our emotions, our ambitions, and our wills, which are the citadels of our souls, are all enslaved to sin by nature. That’s why Jesus complained, “I would have gathered thy children...and ye would not” (Mat 23:37).

Total depravity is not absolute depravity...[it] does not mean men are animals or devils, or that they are as depraved as they could be or will be. This world is not hell. Total depravity does not mean that an unbeliever is wholly evil in everything he does, but rather that nothing he does is ever wholly good. Man is not so far fallen that he has lost all awareness of God or conscience; by God’s common goodness, he is still capable of showing domestic affection, doing civic good, and performing his duties as a citizen. He is capable of great heroism, of great physical courage, and of great acts of self-denial. Yet he is a corrupt sinner in every aspect of his nature, and as such, he is utterly incapable of performing any spiritual good in the eyes of God.

Total depravity means that when God scrutinizes the human heart, affections, conscience, will, or any part of the body, He finds every part damaged and polluted by sin. Apart from saving grace, every part is alienated from God and actively pursuing sin. If the Spirit teaches us this experientially, we will understand Jonathan Edwards’ confession: “When I look into my heart, and take a view of my wickedness, it looks like an abyss, infinitely deeper than hell.”¹⁰ As D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes, “When a man truly sees himself, he knows that nobody can say anything about him that is too bad.”¹¹

Fourth, total depravity spells *inability*. It means we are active “sinaholics” by nature. There is no thought, no word, no act, and no area of human life that is not affected by sin. Romans 6:16 says that we are by nature slaves of sin: “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants [or slaves] ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” Consider this literally for a moment. A slave was his master’s proper-

⁹ Quoted in John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006), 144.

¹⁰ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 1 (Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), xc.

¹¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 58.

ty. A slave had no time, property, or wealth of his own. He had no single moment of which he could say, “This moment is mine; my master has no rights over this moment.” He was always his master’s property; his every movement, his every talent, his every possession was entirely his master’s. So, Paul says, you were by nature the slaves of sin (Rom 6:16). Sin was your master. Sin lorded itself over you. Sin was in control. And yet, sin gave the impression all the while that you were free and in charge of your own destiny.

Total depravity thus entails moral inability. In ourselves, we are unable to do anything about our condition. We are spiritually impotent by nature, unable and unwilling to save ourselves. We cannot appreciate the Christian faith and we are powerless to work toward our conversion. “We can do nothing but sin,” Calvin says, “until He [the Holy Spirit] forms a new will within us.”¹² No matter how much the natural man is urged by the law or the gospel to believe in Christ and turn from sin, he is “not able, by his own strength to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto” (Westminster Confession, 9.3). Charles Hodge puts it poignantly: “The rejection of the gospel is as clear a proof of moral depravity, as inability to see the light of the sun at noon is a proof of blindness.”¹³ The natural man may want to be free of some sin and of the consequences of sin; he may even expend some effort in that direction. But he is too much a slave to it. He is not simply “going lost” or “dying,” he *is* lost and *is* dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1).

Every person in the world is by nature a slave of sin. The world, by nature, is held in sin’s grip. What a shock to our complacency—that everything of us by nature belongs to sin. Our silences belong to sin, our omissions belong to sin, our talents belong to sin, our actions belong to sin. Every facet of our personalities belongs to sin; it owns us and dominates us. We are its servants.

Total depravity is active in us. It is not simply the absence of righteousness, but the presence of corruption. Our depravity is enormously creative and inventive, ever devising new ways of violating God’s will. It is a growing cancer within us—a rampant, productive, energetic, and self-propagating¹⁴ entity. It is fire out of control—a living, fierce, powerful force. In the horrors of the Holocaust, the monstrosi-

¹² John Calvin, *Hebrews and the Epistles of Peter*, trans. W. B. Johnston, eds. David W. and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1963), 223-224.

¹³ Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of Second Corinthians* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1862), 84.

¹⁴ **self-propagating** – able to reproduce itself.

ty of modern-day terrorism, and the dreadful headlines of our daily newspapers, we are shown what our corrupt, active human nature is capable of, given the requisite conditions, if God leaves us to ourselves.

My dear unsaved friend, you are a “sin-aholic.” You are a slave this very hour, a slave in your bed tonight—even when you pray. And you will be a slave until God’s almighty power raises you from spiritual death, opens your blind eyes, unstops your deaf ears, and breaks the chains of depravity that enwrap you. And even then, until your last breath, you will battle against your addiction to sin, for we remain recovering sin-aholics to the end (Rom 7:24).

Finally, total depravity is a stark reminder of the final issue of sin: *the wages of sin is death* (Rom 6:23). If you serve sin, you will receive the wages of sin. This is a moral universe. We live and move and have our being in God. Every breath of our lives is in His hands. Sow a seed of sin and you will reap the harvest of judgment. Sow the wind of unbelief and you will reap the whirlwind of destruction. “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb 9:27). Judgment is always imminent.¹⁵ There is a moment when God sends in the bill, and we must render account.

The fact of physical death is utterly unavoidable. You and I have a unilateral¹⁶ appointment with death in God’s eternal record book. The one absolute certainty about every one of us is the rending apart of our bodies and our souls. But beyond that is spiritual death—the rending apart of our soul from God, so that we lose the image of God and communion with Him and abide under His curse. Above all, there is eternal death—the rending of soul and body from God forever without any alleviation¹⁷ from common grace. Eternal death is hell—the solemn, awesome reality that the book of Revelation calls “the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone...the second death” (21:8). Hell is the cesspool of the universe. It is that appalling cosmic incinerator into which one day God Almighty will gather the refuse of the world, that place that is ever under His undiluted wrath, where the worm of memory dies not, where the false prophet is, where the Dragon and the Beast are (*see* Rev 12-13), and where everyone will be unless they deal with their sin. Hell is the logic behind sin. It is the divine response to persistent impenitence and final disobedience. Pollution is the forerunner of perdition. And hell is what God ulti-

¹⁵ **imminent** – approaching.

¹⁶ **unilateral** – performed by only one side.

¹⁷ **alleviation** – reducing something unpleasant.

mately thinks of impenitent sin and total depravity.

[Scripture] teaches the sinfulness of sin and depravity. But it declares that sin and depravity are anomalies.¹⁸ In the final analysis, they are beyond all reason. They cannot be depicted as too heinous and dastardly. They represent the height of spiritual stupidity and insanity. The magnitude of our sin and depravity exhibits the magnitude of our need for God's gospel way of salvation.

From *Living for God's Glory* (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2008), 51-58; used by permission.

Joel R. Beeke: American author, theologian, and pastor; President of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, where he is Professor of Systematic Theology and Homiletics.



Now what is the *heart* in Scripture language? *Heart* in the language of biblical psychology means “the focus of the personal and moral life.” In biblical usage, it includes the *intellectual* as well as all other movements of the soul. No doubt, however, while regarded as the home of every inward phenomenon—mental, emotional, moral—it more particularly denotes what constitutes *character*. It is what determines the whole moral being: “Out of it are the issues of life” (Pro 4:23). Plainly, therefore, when the heart is spoken of as the seat of sin, this indicates the radical nature of human corruption. It consists not in words, acts, appearances. These merely show it, for it reigns within. It has tainted the roots of life, the formative sources of character. Thus is explained its influence on all the powers and faculties, its blinding effect upon self-consciousness. The sin, from which God is risen up to redeem us, sits where God alone ought to dwell—at the source of our moral and spiritual being. *Mind* and *heart*, as these terms are used through the Bible generally, never do imply the distinction between the *intellectual* and the *emotional* nature that we denote by them in popular language. The Scripture doctrine of corruption, therefore, in accordance with its own simple psychology, is this: the heart, i.e., the fountain of man's being, is corrupt. Therefore, all its actings, or, as we should say, the whole soul in all its powers and faculties, [are] perverted.—*John Laidlaw*

The heart in the Scripture is variously used, sometimes for the mind and understanding, sometimes for the will, sometimes for the affections, sometimes for the conscience, sometimes for the whole soul. Generally, it denotes the whole soul of man and all the faculties of it, not absolutely, but as they are all one principle of moral operations, as they all concur in our doing good or evil...And in this sense it is that we say the seat and subject of this law of sin is the heart of man.

—*John Owen*

¹⁸ **anomalies** – departures from the general rule; abnormalities.

DEPRAVITY OF HEART

Thomas Reade (1776-1841)

THE corruption of the human race after the Fall was radical and universal: “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” (Gen 6:5). It would seem surprising that anyone should read this passage in the Bible and yet deny the doctrine of human depravity, did we not know the natural blindness of the understanding by reason of sin.

A painful truth is, however, plainly stated: the heart of man is evil. And that this solemn truth may be placed in the strongest light, it is further added that not only the thoughts, but the imaginations of the thoughts of his heart are evil. By this declaration, we learn how the Fall has corrupted all the secret workings of the human mind, since the very outline or rude sketch of the thoughts is polluted.

If the fountain be thus poisoned, can we wonder at those deadly streams that issue from it? All who know themselves through the teaching of the divine Spirit can testify to the truth of this Scripture from their own experience. “The heart knoweth his own bitterness” (Pro 14:10). O that sovereign grace may cast down every proud and sinful imagination that is contrary to the holy Law of God and bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ!

Some, contending for a portion of natural goodness, may perhaps say, “True, the imagination is often defiled; but must we acknowledge no remainders of virtue?” What says the Scripture? “Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5). Allow that this is true, yet may there not be some mixture of good with the evil? What says the Scripture? “Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Admitting this, yet may there not be some intervals of goodness? What says the Scripture? “Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” If this be indeed the state of man’s heart, yet may not the innocent season of youth be an exemption from this awful charge? What says the Scripture? “The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen 8:21). “The wicked are estranged¹ from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies” (Psa

¹ **estranged** – gone astray.

58:3). “Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child” (Pro 22:15). “Childhood and youth are vanity” (Ecc 11:10). And, as if determined to abase the pride of fallen man and to place the doctrine of original sin beyond dispute, David, speaking under the influence of the Spirit of truth, declares: “I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psa 51:5).

Very many pertinent and important passages might be adduced, all of which attest this solemn truth of original sin. “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one” (Job 14:4). “What is man, that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?” (Job 15:14). “How can he be clean that is born of a woman?” (Job 25:4). Hence, we conclude, with divine inspiration, that we are “by nature the children of wrath” (Eph 2:3); that “there is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom 3:10).

O my soul! Dispute not with your justly offended Creator, but confess your guilt, both original and actual. Seek for grace to lie low at His feet and to accept with joyful heart those gracious offers of pardon and peace, which are so freely made to you through the great propitiatory² sacrifice of His well-beloved Son.

The grace of God when viewed, as it always ought to be, in connection with the wretched state of sinful man, shines like the beautiful rainbow on the darkened cloud. Its lovely hues cheer and delight the mind in the midst of surrounding gloom.

How consoling to a soul bowed down under a sense of guilt the following promises: “When I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee...Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live” (Eze 16:6). Then comes the source of mercy: “I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” (Jer 31:3).

But how can a polluted creature be pleasing to a pure and holy God? Behold the effects of sovereign grace: “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them” (Eze 36:25-27).

The safety and perseverance of the redeemed is sweetly declared in

² **propitiatory** – having power to atone for.

the following delightful promise: “And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me” (Jer 32:39-40).

Support and final success are also promised to the believer under the various trials and difficulties that he may be called upon to endure in the cause of his covenant God and Savior: “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness” (Isa 41:10). “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour” (Isa 43:2-3).

For the present and everlasting consolation of the believer, a full free forgiveness of all sin is graciously declared: “I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins” (Isa 43:25). “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee” (Isa 44:22)...

Well may the ransomed sinner exclaim: “O LORD, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me. Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and not be afraid: for the LORD JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation” (Isa 12:1-2). “I will extol thee, my God, O king; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever” (Psa 145:1-2). “Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies” (Psa 103:1-4). “Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen” (Psa 72:18-19).

From *Spiritual Exercises of the Heart*, Reformation Heritage Books,
www.heritagebooks.org. Used by permission.



A DEPRAVED, CORRUPTED MIND

John Owen (1616-1683)

SCRIPTURE teaches that man's will and heart's desires are corrupt and depraved. This is seen as weakness or impotence and leads to stubbornness and obstinacy. The whole soul lies in a state of spiritual death.

Spiritual darkness is in all men and lies on all men until God, by an almighty work of the Spirit, shines into men's hearts or creates light in them (Mat 4:16; Joh 1:5; Act 26:18; Eph 5:8; Col 1:13; 1 Pet. 2:9)...The nature of this spiritual darkness must be understood. When men have no light to see by, then they are in darkness (Exo 10:23). Blind men are in darkness, either by birth or by illness or accident (Psa 69:23; Gen 19:11; Act 13:11). A spiritually blind man is in spiritual darkness and is ignorant of spiritual things.

There is an outward darkness *on* men and an inward darkness *in* men. Outward darkness is when men do not have that light by which they are enabled to see. So outward spiritual darkness is upon men when there is nothing to enlighten them about God and spiritual things (Mat 4:16; Psa 119:105; Psa 19:1-4, 8; 2Pe 1:19; Rom 10:15, 18). It is the work of the Holy Spirit to remove this darkness by sending the light of the gospel (Act 13:2, 4; 16:6-10; Psa 147:19, 20).

On the other hand, *inward* darkness arises from the natural depravity and corruption of the minds of men concerning spiritual things. Man's mind is depraved and corrupted in things that are natural, civil, political, and moral, as well as in things that are spiritual, heavenly, and evangelical. This depravity is often held back from having its full effects by the common grace of the Holy Spirit. So, man's mind being darkened, he is unable to see, receive, understand, or believe to the saving of his soul. Spiritual things, or the mysteries of the gospel, cannot bring salvation without the Holy Spirit first creating within the soul a new light by which they can see and receive those things.

However brilliant the mind may be and however brilliant the preaching and presentation of the gospel might be, yet without the Holy Spirit creating this light in them, they cannot receive, understand, and agree with the truths preached and so will not be led to salvation (Eph 4:17-18). So, the unregenerate "walk in the vanity [fu-

tility] of their mind” (Eph 4:17). The natural inclination of the unregenerate mind is to seek those things that cannot satisfy (Gen 6:5).

It is an unstable mind (Pro 7:11-12). The unregenerate understanding is darkened and cannot judge things properly (Joh 1:5). The unregenerate heart is blind. In Scripture, the heart includes the will also. Light is received by the mind, applied by the understanding and used by the heart. “If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness,” said Jesus, “how great is that darkness” (Mat 6:23).

There are three things that arise from the natural futility of the mind in its depraved condition found among believers. Firstly, it makes the believer waver and to be unstable and fickle in the holy duties of meditation, prayer, and hearing the Word. The mind wanders and is distracted by many worldly thoughts. Secondly, this instability is the cause of backsliding in believers, leading them to conform to the world and its habits and customs, which are vain and foolish. And thirdly, this futility of the mind deceives believers into providing for the flesh and the lusts of the flesh. It can and often does lead to self-indulgence.

To win the victory over this corrupt and futile mind, we must fix our minds and desires on spiritual things shown us by the Holy Spirit. But in fixing our minds on spiritual things, we must watch that the mind does not slip back into vain, foolish, and unprofitable thoughts and ideas. We must get into the habit of meditating on holy, spiritual things (Col 3:2). We must be humbled as we realize how foolish and futile our minds are left to themselves.

The unregenerate mind is perverse and depraved, so men are “alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them” (Eph 4:18). This alienation from the life of God is because their minds are sinful and depraved (Col 1:21) .

The life of God from which men are alienated is the life that God requires of us so that we may please Him here and enjoy Him hereafter (Rom 1:17; Gal 2:20; Rom 6 & 7). It is the life that God works in us...spiritually by His grace (Eph 2:1, 5; Phi 2:13). It is the life by which we live to God (Rom 6 & 7). God is the supreme goal of that life, as He is also the creator of that life.

Through this life, we seek to do all things to the glory of God (Rom 14:7-8). By this life, we come to the eternal enjoyment of God as our eternal blessedness and eternal reward (Gen 15:1). The life of God is that life by which God lives in us by His Spirit through Jesus Christ (Gal 2:20; Col 3:3). It is that life whose fruits are holiness and spiritu-

al, evangelical obedience (Rom 6:22; Phi 1:11). And this life of God never dies because it is eternal (Joh 17:3).

Now the unregenerate mind is alienated from this life of God, and this alienation reveals itself in two ways. It reveals itself by an unwillingness and inability of the unconverted mind to receive those things concerning this life of God (Luk 24:25; Heb 5:11-12; Jer 4:22). It also reveals itself by the unconverted mind choosing any other life than the life of God (1Ti 5:6; Jam 5:5; Rom 7:9; 9:32; 10:3). Even though the unconverted mind is highly educated and talented, yet it is utterly unable to receive and understand spiritually those things needful for its eternal salvation. It will not respond to the preaching of the gospel until it is renewed, enlightened, and enabled to do so by the Holy Spirit: “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” (1Co 2:14). The subject of this verse is the natural man (*the unregenerate man*). The natural man is quite opposite to the spiritual man (1Co 15:44; Jude 19)...

In verse fourteen, we see things put to the natural man. These things are “the things of the Spirit of God.” Now what are these things of the Spirit of God that are put to the natural man? Here are some of them, all from 1 Corinthians chapter 2: “Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (2:2); “the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory” (2:7); “the things that are freely given to us of God” (2:12); “the mind of Christ” (22:16).

These are the things of the Spirit of God. These are things that cannot be received except by sovereign, supernatural illumination. These are the things that “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (2:9). They are things from God’s eternal counsel. These are the things that the mind of man at his first creation had no idea existed (Eph 3:8-11).

Two things can be said of the natural man and the things of the Spirit of God. Firstly, he does not *receive* them: secondly, he cannot *know* them.

In this double assertion, we learn firstly that the power to receive spiritual things is denied [to] the natural man (Rom 8:7). He cannot receive them because they are spiritually discerned. We learn secondly that the natural man willingly rejects them. This is implied in the words “does not receive the things of the Spirit of God.” And he rejects them because they appear to him to be foolish. The natural man

cannot, will not, and does not receive the things of the Spirit of God! He can know the literal sense of the doctrines presented to him. He can know that Jesus Christ was crucified. But there is a wide difference between receiving doctrines as mere statements presented to him and knowing the reality that those statements present.

The natural man can know the way of righteousness as a mere statement (2Pe 2:21). He can know other things also, merely as ideas presented to him (Ti 1:16; Rom 2:23-24). But these truths have no transforming effect on his life. The spiritual man, on the other hand, knows them in reality and they have a transforming effect on his life (Rom 12:2; Eph 4:22-24).

Now before spiritual things can be received two things are necessary. It is necessary that we understand them, agree with them, and receive them because they agree with the wisdom, holiness, and righteousness of God (1Co 1:23-24). It is also necessary that we see how well adapted they are to glorifying God, the salvation of sinners and bringing the church to grace and glory.

The natural man cannot do this. He can, however, receive exhortations, promises, commands and threatenings in the gospel (1Jo 5:20). But to him the wisdom of God is foolishness. Paul says that the “foolishness of God is wiser than men” (1Co 1:25). But to the natural man they are foolishness.

The natural man cannot know spiritual things because it is the Spirit of God Who endows the minds of men with that ability, and the light itself by which alone spiritual things can be spiritually discerned is created in us by an almighty act of the power of God (2Co 4:6)...The natural man cannot discern spiritual things so as to lead to the salvation of his soul because his mind is darkened by its own depravity. This is the misery of our persons and the sin of our natures. But it cannot be used as an excuse in the judgment day for not receiving spiritual things.

There is also in the minds of unregenerate men a moral inability by which the mind will never receive spiritual things because it is governed and ruled by various lusts, corruptions, and prejudices. These are so fixed in the unregenerate mind as to make it think that spiritual things are foolish (Joh 6:44; 5:40; 3:19).

Paul teaches us that Christ “hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col 1:13). In this verse, we are said to be delivered from “the power of darkness” (Eph 5:11; Act 26:18; Isa 60:2; Eph 2:2; 2Co 4:4). Peter

speaks of “chains of darkness” (2Pe 2:4). From these there is no escape.

This darkness fills the mind with enmity against God and all the things of God (Col 1:21; Rom 8:7). If God is great in goodness and beauty, why do men hate Him? This hatred arises from this darkness, which is the corruption and depravity of our nature. This darkness fills the mind with perverse lusts that resist the will of God (Eph 2:3; Phi 3:19; Col 2:18; Rom 8:5). This darkness fills the mind with prejudices against all spiritual things, and the mind is utterly unable to free itself from these prejudices. The darkened mind sees first the things it lusts after. Then, later, it recognizes those lusts in itself. But when men are called to seek God above all other desires, then this is considered to be foolish because the unconverted mind thinks that spiritual things will never bring contentment, happiness, and satisfaction. In particular, the unregenerate mind has a special bias against the gospel.

Now in the gospel there are two things preached: Firstly, there are those things that belong only to the gospel and have nothing of the Law or of the light of nature. They come to us only by revelation, and they are unique to the gospel. They are what makes the gospel to be the gospel. And they are all those things concerning the love and will of God in Christ Jesus (1Co 2:2; Eph 3:7-11).

Secondly, there are those things declared in the gospel that have their foundation in the Law and the light of nature. These are all the moral duties. These moral duties are in some measure known apart from the gospel (Rom 1:19; 2:14-15). There is on all men an obligation to obey these moral laws according to the light they have been given.

Now it is in this state that the gospel adds two things to the minds of men. Firstly, it shows the right way to obey. It shows that obedience can arise only from a regenerate heart that is no longer at enmity with God. It also shows that the whole purpose of obedience is to bring glory to God. It shows that we cannot obey *until* we have been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. All these things put moral duties in a new framework—the framework of the gospel.

Secondly, by giving us His Spirit, God strengthens and enables us to obey according to the gospel framework. The gospel declares to us things that make gospel obedience to be gospel obedience and not legal obedience (1Co 15:3; Rom 6:17; Gal 4:19; Ti 2:11, 12; 1Co 13:11; 2Co 3:18): First, the gospel teaches the mysteries of the faith and lays them down as the foundation of faith and obedience. Second, the gospel then grafts all duties of moral obedience onto this tree of faith

in Jesus Christ. This is what Paul does in his epistles. He begins by teaching the mysteries of the Christian faith. Then, on the basis of these mysteries and wonders of the gospel that has brought to us the grace and mercy of God, he teaches that, out of gratitude, we should seek to please Him Who so loved us by obeying him...

So, while the mind of man remains unregenerate, there is no hope for the soul coming out of darkness into the light of the glorious gospel of Christ.

Conclusion: The mind in the state of nature is so depraved and corrupted that it is not able to understand, receive and embrace spiritual things. Therefore, while the mind remains unregenerate, the soul cannot and will not receive Christ for salvation, nor can it be made holy and fit for heaven. The heart and will cannot act independently of the mind. The will is not free to act on its own. The eye is the natural light of the body. By means of the eye, the body is led safely round dangerous obstacles, and so is kept from hurting itself. But if the eye is blind, or it is surrounded by darkness and so cannot see, then the body has no idea where it is going and will inevitably bump into objects or trip over obstacles.

What the eye is to the body, the mind is to the soul. If the mind sees the glory and beauty of Christ and His salvation presented in the gospel, it will excite the heart to desire them as truly good and the will to receive and embrace them. But if the mind is ignorant of the gospel, or is blinded by prejudice, then the heart will not be roused to desire Christ nor the will be urged to embrace Him. If the mind is deceived, both will and heart will be deceived also. Where the mind is depraved, so will the heart be (Rom 1:28-32; 1Ti 2:14; Heb 3:12, 13; 2Co 11:3).

We see, therefore, how important are the words of Jesus when He said, "Ye must be born again" (Joh 3:7).

From *The Holy Spirit*, abridgement R. J. K. Law (Edinburgh; Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 56-66, available in print and eBook editions from www.banneroftruth.org, used by permission.

John Owen (1616-1683): English Congregational pastor, author, and theologian; born in Stadhampton, Oxfordshire, UK.



HUMAN INABILITY

Loraine Boettner (1901-1990)

STATEMENT of the doctrine: In the Westminster Confession the doctrine of total inability is stated as follows: “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 good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.”

Paul, Augustine,¹ and Calvin have as their starting point the fact that all mankind sinned in Adam and that all men are without excuse (Rom 2:1). Time and again Paul tells us that we are dead in trespasses and sins, estranged from God, and helpless. In writing to the Ephesian Christians, he reminded them that before they received the gospel they were “without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). There we notice the five-fold emphasis as he piles phrase on top of phrase to stress this truth.

The extent and effects of original sin: This doctrine of total inability, which declares that men are dead in sin, does not mean that all men are equally bad, nor that any man is as bad as he could be, nor that anyone is entirely destitute of virtue, nor that human nature is evil in itself, nor that man’s spirit is inactive, and much less does it mean that the body is dead. What it *does* mean is that since the Fall, man rests under the curse of sin, that he is actuated² by wrong principles, and that he is wholly unable to love God or to do anything meriting salvation...

It is in this sense that man since the Fall “is utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil.”³ He possesses a fixed bias of the will against God, and instinctively and willingly turns to evil. He is an alien by birth, and a sinner by choice. The inability under which he labors is not an inability to exercise volitions,⁴ but an inability to be willing to exercise holy voli-

¹ **Aurelius Augustine** (A.D. 354-430) – Bishop of Hippo, early church theologian known by many as the father of orthodox theology; born in Tagaste, North Africa.

² **actuated** – motivated.

³ Westminster Confession of Faith, Savoy Declaration, and 1677/89 Second London Baptist Confession 6.4.

⁴ **volitions** – acts of will or choice.

tions. And it is this phase of it that led Luther to declare that “free choice is an empty phrase, of which the reality has been lost. Lost liberty, according to my grammar, is no liberty at all.”⁵ In matters pertaining to his salvation, the unregenerate man is not at liberty to choose between good and evil, but only to choose between greater and lesser evil, which is not properly free will. The fact that fallen man still has ability to do certain acts morally good in themselves does not prove that he can do acts meriting salvation, for his motives may be wholly wrong.

Man is a free agent, but he cannot originate the love of God in his heart. His will is free in the sense that it is not controlled by any force outside of himself. As the bird with a broken wing is “free” to fly but not able, so the natural man is free to come to God but not able. How can he repent of his sin when he loves it? How can he come to God when he hates Him? This is the inability of the will under which man labors. Jesus said, “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (Joh 3:19); and again, “And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life” (Joh 5:40). Man’s ruin lies mainly in his own perverse will. He *cannot* come because he *will* not. Help enough is provided if he were only willing to accept it. Paul tells us, “The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7).

To assume that because man has ability to love he therefore has ability to love God is about as wise as to assume that since water has the ability to flow, it therefore has the ability to flow up hill; or to reason that because a man has power to cast himself from the top of a precipice⁶ to the bottom, he therefore has equal power to transport himself from the bottom to the top.

Fallen man sees nothing desirable in the One Who is “altogether lovely...the chiefest among ten thousand” (Song 5:16, 10). He may admire Jesus as a man, but he wants nothing to do with Him as God; and he resists the outward holy influences of the Spirit with all his power. Sin, and not righteousness, has become his natural element so that he has no desire for salvation.

Man’s fallen nature gives rise to a most obdurate⁷ blindness, stu-

⁵ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Volume 33: Career of the Reformer III*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, Vol. 33 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 116.

⁶ **precipice** – steep place.

⁷ **obdurate** – hardened in wrongdoing against moral influence.

pidity, and opposition concerning the things of God. His will is under the control of a darkened understanding, which puts sweet for bitter and bitter for sweet, good for evil and evil for good (Isa 5:20). So far as his relations with God are concerned, he wills only that which is evil, although he wills it freely. Spontaneity and enslavement actually exist together.

In other words, fallen man is so morally blind that he uniformly prefers and chooses evil instead of good, as do the fallen angels or demons. When the Christian is completely sanctified,⁸ he reaches a state in which he uniformly prefers and chooses good, as do the holy angels. Both of these states are consistent with freedom and responsibility of moral agents.

Yet while fallen man acts thus uniformly, he is never compelled to sin, but does it freely and delights in it. His dispositions and desires are so inclined, and he acts knowingly and willingly from the spontaneous motion of the heart. This natural bias or appetite for that which is evil is characteristic of man's fallen and corrupt nature, so that, as Job says, he "drinketh iniquity like water" (Job 15:16).

We read that "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" (1Co 2:14). We are at a loss to understand how anyone can take a plain, common sense view of this passage of Scripture and yet contend for the doctrine of human ability. Man in his natural state cannot even *see* the kingdom of God, much less can he get into it. An uncultured person may see a beautiful work of art as an object of vision, but he has no appreciation of its excellence. He may see the figures of a complex mathematical equation, but they have no meaning for him. Horses and cattle may see the same beautiful sunset or other phenomenon in nature that men see, but they are blind to all of the artistic beauty. So it is when the gospel of the cross is presented to the unregenerate man. He may have an intellectual knowledge of the facts and doctrines of the Bible, but he lacks all spiritual discernment of their excellence and finds no delight in them. The same Christ is to one man without form or comeliness that he should desire Him; to another He is the Prince of life and the Savior of the world, God manifest in the flesh, Whom it is impossible not to adore, love, and obey.

This total inability, however, arises not merely from a perverted moral nature, but also from ignorance. Paul wrote that the Gentiles

⁸ is completely sanctified – when he reaches heaven.

“walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph 4:17-18). And again: “The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (1Co 1:18). When he wrote of things that “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1Co 2:9), he had reference, not to the glories of the heavenly state as is commonly supposed, but to the spiritual realities in this life that cannot be seen by the unregenerate mind, as is made plain by the words of the following verse: “But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit” (1Co 2:10). On one occasion Jesus said, “No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him” (Mat 11:27). Here we are plainly told that man in his unregenerate, unenlightened nature does not know God in any sense worthy [of] the name, and that the Son is sovereign in choosing who shall come into this saving knowledge of God.

Fallen man, then, lacks the power of spiritual discernment. His reason or understanding is blinded, and the taste and feelings are perverted. And since this state of mind is innate,⁹ as a condition of man’s nature, it is beyond the power of the will to change it. Rather, it controls both the affections and volitions. The effect of regeneration¹⁰ is clearly taught in the divine commission that Paul received at his conversion when he was told that he was to be sent to the Gentiles “to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God” (Act 26:18).

Jesus taught the same truth under a different figure when He said to the Pharisees, “Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do” (Joh 8:43-44). They could not understand nor even hear His words in any intelligible way. To them His words were only foolishness, madness; and they accused Him of being demon possessed (8:48, 52). Only His disciples could know the truth (8:31-32); the Pharisees were children of the devil (8:42, 44), and bond-servants of sin (8:34), although they thought themselves free (8:33).

At another time, Jesus taught that a good tree could not bring forth

⁹ **innate** – existing in a person from birth.

¹⁰ **regeneration** – God’s gracious act of creating spiritual life in a sinner by the Holy Spirit’s power, resulting in repentance and faith; see FGB 202, *The New Birth*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

evil fruit, nor an evil tree good fruit. And since in this similitude the good and evil trees represent good and evil men, what does it mean but that one class of men is governed by one set of basic principles, while the other class is governed by another set of basic principles? The fruits of these two trees are acts, words, thoughts, which, if good, proceed from a good nature and, if evil, proceed from an evil nature. It is impossible, then, for the same root to bring forth fruit of different kinds. Hence, we deny the existence in man of a power that may act either way on the logical ground that both virtue and vice cannot come out of the same moral condition of the agent. And we affirm that human actions that relate to God proceed either out of a moral condition that necessarily produces good actions or out of a moral condition that necessarily produces evil actions.

“In the Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul declares that prior to the quickening of the Spirit of God, each individual soul lies dead in trespasses and sins. Now, it will surely be admitted that to be dead, and to be dead in sin, is clear and positive evidence that there is neither aptitude nor power remaining for the performance of any spiritual action. If a man were dead, in a natural and physical sense, it would at once be readily granted that there is no further possibility of that man being able to perform any physical actions. A corpse cannot act in any way whatever, and that man would be reckoned to have taken leave of his senses who asserted that it could. If a man is dead spiritually, therefore, it is surely equally as evident that he is unable to perform any spiritual actions, and thus the doctrine of man’s moral inability rests upon strong scriptural evidence.”¹¹

“On the principle that no clean thing can come out of what is unclean (Job 14:4), all that are born of woman are declared ‘abominable and filthy,’ to whose nature iniquity alone is attractive (Job 15:14-16). Accordingly, to become sinful, men do not wait until the age of accountable action arrives. Rather, they are apostate from the womb, and as soon as they are born go astray, speaking lies (Psa 58:3); they are even shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin (Psa 51:5). The propensity (יֵצֶר) of their heart is evil from their youth (Gen 8:21), and it is out of the heart that all the issues of life proceed (Pro 4:23; 20:11). Acts of sin are, therefore, but the expression of the natural heart, which is deceitful above all things and desperately sick (Jer 17:9).”¹²

¹¹ Ben A. Warburton, *Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 48.

¹² Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield: Biblical Doctrines*, Vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 440.

Ezekiel presents this same truth in graphic language and gives us the picture of the helpless infant that was cast out in its blood and left to die, but which the Lord graciously found and cared for (Eze 16).

This doctrine of original sin supposes that fallen men have the same kind and degree of liberty in sinning under the influence of a corrupt nature as have the devil and the demons, or that the saints in glory and the holy angels have in acting rightly under the influence of a holy nature. That is, men and angels act *according to their natures*. As the saints and angels are confirmed in holiness, that is, possessed of a nature that is wholly inclined to righteousness and adverse to sin, so the nature of fallen men and of demons is such that they cannot perform a single act with right motives toward God. Hence the necessity that God shall sovereignly change the person's character in regeneration.

The Old Testament ceremonies of circumcision of the newborn child and of purification of the mother were designed to teach that man comes into the world sinful, that since the fall, human nature is corrupt in its very origin.

Paul stated this truth in another and, if possible, even stronger way in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4: "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world [by which he means the devil] hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." In a word, then, fallen men without the operations of the Spirit of God are under the rule of Satan. They are led captive by him at his will (2Ti 2:26). So long as this fully armed strong man is not molested by the "stronger than he," he keeps his kingdom in peace and his captives willingly do his bidding. But the "stronger than he" has overcome him, has taken his armor from him, and has liberated part of his captives (Luk 11:21-22; Mat 12:29-30; Mar 3:27-28). God now exercises the right of releasing whom He will; and all born again Christians are ransomed sinners from that kingdom.

The Scriptures declare that fallen man is a captive, a willing slave to sin, and entirely unable to deliver himself from its bondage and corruption. He is incapable of understanding and much less of doing the things of God. There is what we might term "the freedom of slavery"—a state in which the subject is free only to do the will of his master, which in this case is *sin*. It was this to which Jesus referred when He said, "Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (Joh 8:34).

And such being the depth of man's corruption, it is wholly beyond his own power to cleanse himself. His only hope of an amendment of

life lies accordingly in a change of heart, which change is brought about by the sovereign re-creative power of the Holy Spirit, Who works when and where and how He pleases (Joh 3:8). One might as well attempt to pump a leaking ship while the leak is still unattended, as to reform the unregenerate without this inward change. Or as well might the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots, as he who is accustomed to do evil correct his ways (Jer 13:23). This transfer from spiritual death to spiritual life we call *regeneration*.¹³ It is referred to in Scripture by various terms: “regeneration,” a making alive, a calling out of darkness into light, a quickening, a “renewing,” a taking away of the heart of stone and giving the heart of flesh, etc., which work is exclusively that of the Holy Spirit (Ti 3:5; Eph 2:5; 1Pe 2:9; Eze 36:26). As a result of this change, a man comes to see the truth and gladly accepts it. His very instincts and intimate impulses are transferred to the side of Law, obedience to which becomes but the spontaneous expression of his nature. Regeneration is said to be wrought by that same supernatural power that God wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead (Eph 1:18-20). Man does not possess the power of self-regeneration; and until this inward change takes place, he cannot be convinced of the truth of the gospel by any amount of external testimony. “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead” (Luk 16:31).

From *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 61-80; used by permission from P&R Publishing Co, P. O. Box 817, Phillipsburg, NJ 08865, www.prpbooks.com.

Loraine Boettner (1901-1990): American Presbyterian theologian; born in Linden, MO, USA.



It is the glory of Christ’s salvation that it is perfectly adapted to every condition of our fallen and helpless humanity. Christianity is the only religion that fully recognizes the natural and utter depravity of our nature and our consequent impotence to save ourselves. Jesus, therefore, is the Savior of sinners. He has undertaken to save us just as we are. He finds us a ruin and recreates us; He finds us fallen and raises us up; He finds us guilty and cleanses us; He finds us condemned and justifies us—all our salvation is in Him.

—*Octavius Winslow*

¹³ **regeneration** – God’s gracious act of creating spiritual life in a sinner by the Holy Spirit’s power, resulting in repentance and faith; see FGB 202, *The New Birth*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

LEGALLY, SPIRITUALLY, ETERNALLY DEAD

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.—John 5:40

FIRST, we are all of us, by nature, *legally* dead: “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen 2:17), said God to Adam. And though Adam did not die in that moment naturally, he died *legally*; that is to say, death was recorded against him. As soon as, at the Old Bailey,¹ the judge puts on the black cap and pronounces the sentence, the man is reckoned to be dead at law. Though perhaps a month may intervene before he is brought on the scaffold to endure the sentence of the law, yet the law looks upon him as a dead man. It is impossible for him to transact anything. He cannot inherit, he cannot bequeath; he is nothing—he is a dead man. The country considers him not as being alive in it at all. There is an election—he is not asked for his vote because he is considered as dead. He is shut up in his condemned cell, and he is dead.

Ah! And ye ungodly sinners who have never had life in Christ, ye are alive this morning by reprieve. But do ye know that ye are legally dead; that God considers you as such; that in the day when your father Adam touched the fruit and when you yourselves did sin, God, the eternal Judge, put on the black cap and condemned you? You talk mightily of your own standing, goodness, and morality: where is it? Scripture saith, ye are “condemned already” (Joh 3:18). Ye are not to wait to be condemned at the Judgment Day—that will be the execution of the sentence: ye are “condemned already.” In the moment ye sinned, your names were all written in the black book of justice. God then sentenced everyone to death [except those who have] found a substitute—in the person of Christ—for [their] sins. What would you think if you were to go into the Old Bailey and see the condemned culprit sitting in his cell, laughing and merry? You would say, “The man is a fool, for he is condemned and is to be executed; yet how merry he is!” Ah! And how foolish is the worldly man, who, while sentence is recorded against him, lives in merriment and mirth! Do you

¹ Old Bailey – central criminal court of England.

think the sentence of God is of no effect? Thinkest thou that thy sin that is written with an iron pen on the rocks forever hath no horrors in it? God hath said thou art condemned already! If thou wouldst but feel this, it would mingle bitters² in thy sweet cups of joy; thy dances would be stopped, thy laughter quenched in sighing, if thou wouldst recollect that thou art condemned already. We ought all to weep if we lay this to our souls: by nature, we have no life in God's sight. We are actually, positively condemned. Death is recorded against us, and we are considered in ourselves now, in God's sight, as much dead as if we were actually cast into hell! We are condemned here by sin. We do not yet suffer the penalty of it; but it is written against us: we are legally dead. [We cannot] find life unless we find legal life in the person of Christ.

But, besides being legally dead, we are also *spiritually dead*. For not only did the sentence pass in the book, but it passed in the heart. It entered the conscience. It operated on the soul, on the judgment, on the imagination, and on everything. "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," was not only fulfilled by the sentence recorded, but by something that took place in Adam. Just as in a certain moment when this body shall die—the blood stops, the pulse ceases, the breath no longer comes from the lungs—so in the day that Adam did eat that fruit his soul died. His imagination lost its mighty power to climb into celestial things and see heaven. His will lost its power always to choose that which is good. His judgment lost all ability to judge between right and wrong decidedly and infallibly, though something was retained in conscience. His memory became tainted, liable to hold evil things and to let righteous things glide away. Every power of him ceased as to its moral vitality. Goodness was the vitality of his powers—that departed. Virtue, holiness, integrity—these were the life of man; but when these departed, man became dead. And now, every man, so far as spiritual things are concerned, is "dead in trespasses and sins" spiritually (Eph 2:1). Nor is the soul less dead in a carnal man than the body is when committed to the grave. It is actually and positively dead—not by a metaphor, for Paul speaketh not in metaphor when he affirms, "You hath he quickened who *were dead* in trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1).

But, my hearers, again, I would³ I could preach to your hearts concerning this subject. It was bad enough when I described death as

² **bitters** – a liquor in which bitter herbs or roots are steeped; bitter-tasting medicine.

³ **would** – wish.

having been recorded; but now I speak of it as having actually taken place in your hearts. Ye are not what ye once were. Ye are not what ye were in Adam, not what ye were created. Man was made pure and holy. Ye are not the perfect creatures of which some boast. Ye are altogether fallen, ye have gone out of the way, ye have become corrupt and filthy. Oh! Listen not to the siren song of those who tell you of your moral dignity, and your mighty elevation in matters of salvation. You are not perfect; that great word *ruin* is written on your heart, and death is stamped upon your spirit. Do not conceive, O moral man, that thou wilt be able to stand before God in thy morality; for thou art nothing but a carcass embalmed in legality, a corpse arrayed in some fine robes, but still corrupt in God's sight. And think not, O thou possessor of natural religion, that thou mayest by thine own might and power make thyself acceptable to God. Why, man, thou art dead! And thou mayest array the dead as gloriously as thou pleasest, but still it would be a solemn mockery. There lieth Queen Cleopatra—put the crown upon her head, deck her in royal robes, let her sit in state; but what a cold chill runs through you when you pass by her. She is fair now, even in her death—but how horrible it is to stand by the side even of a dead queen, celebrated for her majestic beauty! So you may be glorious in your beauty—fair, amiable,⁴ and lovely; you put the crown of honesty upon your head and wear about you all the garments of uprightness; but unless God has quickened⁵ thee, O man, unless the Spirit has had dealings with thy soul, thou art in God's sight as obnoxious⁶ as the chilly corpse is to thyself. Thou wouldst not choose to live with a corpse sitting at thy table; nor doth God love that thou shouldest be in His sight. He is angry with thee every day, for thou art in sin—thou art in death. Oh! Believe this, take it to thy soul, appropriate it; for it is most true that thou art dead, spiritually as well as legally.

The third kind of death is the consummation of the other two. It is *eternal death*. It is the execution of the legal sentence; it is the consummation of the spiritual death. Eternal death is the death of the soul; it takes place after the body has been laid in the grave, after the soul has departed from it. If legal death be terrible, it is because of its consequences; and if spiritual death be dreadful, it is because of that which shall succeed it. The two deaths of which we have spoken are the roots, and the death that is to come is the flower thereof. Oh, had

⁴ **amiable** – displaying a friendly and pleasant manner.

⁵ **quickened** – regenerated; birthed by the Holy Spirit.

⁶ **obnoxious** – offensive; highly disagreeable.

I words that I might this morning attempt to depict to you what eternal death is. The soul has come before its Maker; the book has been opened; the sentence has been uttered. “Depart...ye cursed” (Mat 25:41) has shaken the universe and made the very spheres dim with the frown of the Creator. The soul has departed to the depths where it is to dwell with others in eternal death. Oh, how horrible is its position now. Its bed is a bed of flame! The sights it sees are murdering ones that affright its spirit; the sounds it hears are shrieks, wails, moans, and groans! All that its body knows is the infliction of miserable pain! It has the possession of unutterable woe, of unmitigated⁷ misery. The soul looks up. Hope is extinct—it is gone. It looks downward in dread and fear; remorse hath possessed its soul. It looks on the right hand—and the adamantine walls of fate keep it within its limits of torture. It looks on the left—and there the rampart of blazing fire forbids the scaling ladder of even a dreamy speculation of escape. It looks within and seeks for consolation there, but a gnawing worm hath entered into the soul. It looks about it—it has no friends to aid, no comforters, but tormentors in abundance. It knoweth naught of hope of deliverance; it hath heard the everlasting key of destiny turning in its awful wards, and it hath seen God take that key and hurl it down into the depth of eternity never to be found again. It hopeth not; it knoweth no escape; it guesseth not of deliverance. It pants for death, but death is too much its foe to be there; it longs that non-existence would swallow it up, but this eternal death is worse than annihilation. It pants for extermination as the laborer for his Sabbath; it longs that it might be swallowed up in nothingness just as would the galley slave long for freedom, but it cometh not—it is eternally dead. When eternity shall have rolled round multitudes of its everlasting cycles, it shall still be dead. Forever knoweth no end; eternity cannot be spelled except in eternity. Still the soul seeth written over its head, “Thou art damned forever.” It heareth howlings that are to be perpetual. It seeth flames that are unquenchable. It knoweth pains that are unmitigated. It hears a sentence that rolls not like the thunder of earth that soon is hushed—but onward, onward, onward, shaking the echoes of eternity—making thousands of years shake again with the horrid thunder of its dreadful sound—“Depart! depart! Depart, ye cursed!” This is the eternal death.

Secondly, in Christ Jesus there is life, for He says, “ye will not come to me, that *ye might have life*.” There is no life in God the Father

⁷ **unmitigated** – not softened, not lessened in severity or intensity

for a sinner; there is no life in God the Spirit for a sinner apart from Jesus. The life of a sinner is in Christ. If you take the Father apart, though He loves His elect and decrees that they shall live, yet life is only in His Son. If you take God the Spirit apart from Jesus Christ, though it is the Spirit that gives us spiritual life, yet it is life in Christ, life in the Son. We dare not and cannot apply in the first place, either to God the Father or to God the Holy Ghost for spiritual life. The first thing we are led to do when God brings us out of Egypt is to eat the Passover—the very first thing. The first means whereby we get life is by feeding upon the flesh and blood of the Son of God: living in Him, trusting on Him, believing in His grace and power. Our second thought [is this]: *there is life in Christ*. We will show you there are three kinds of life in Christ, as there are three kinds of death.

First, there is *legal life* in Christ. Just as every man by nature considered in Adam had a sentence of condemnation passed on him in the moment of Adam's sin, and more especially in the moment of his own first transgression, so I, if I be a believer, and you, if you trust in Christ, have had a legal sentence of acquittal passed on us through what Jesus Christ has done. O condemned sinner, thou mayest be sitting this morning condemned like the prisoner in Newgate; but ere this day has passed away thou mayest be as clear from guilt as the angels above. There is such a thing as legal life in Christ, and, blessed be God, some of us enjoy it. We know our sins are pardoned because Christ suffered punishment for them; we know that we never can be punished ourselves, for Christ suffered in our stead. The Passover is slain for us; the lintel and doorposts have been sprinkled, and the destroying angel can never touch us. For us there is no hell, although it blazes with terrible flame. Let Tophet be prepared of old, let its pile be wood and much smoke, we never can come there—Christ died for us, in our stead. What if there be racks of horrid torture? What if there be a sentence producing most horrible reverberations of thundering sounds? Yet neither rack, nor dungeon, nor thunder are for us! In Christ Jesus we are now delivered. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom 8:1).

Sinner, art thou legally condemned this morning? Dost thou feel that? Then, let me tell thee that faith in Christ will give thee a knowledge of thy legal acquittal. Beloved, it is no fancy⁸ that we are

⁸ **fancy** – fantasy; delusion of the mind.

condemned for our sins: it is a reality. So, it is no fancy we are acquitted: it is a reality. A man about to be hanged, if he received a full pardon would feel it a great reality. He would say, "I have a full pardon; I cannot be touched now." That is just how I feel...

Brethren, we have gained legal life in Christ, and such legal life that we cannot lose it. The sentence has gone against us once—now it has gone out for us. It is written, "There is...now no condemnation," and that *now* will do as well for me in fifty years as it does now. Whatever time we live it will still be written, "There is, therefore, *now* no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."

Then, secondly, there is *spiritual life* in Christ Jesus. As the man is spiritually dead, God has spiritual life for him: for there is not a lack that is not supplied by Jesus; there is not an emptiness in the heart that Christ cannot fill. There is not a desolation that He cannot people; There is not a desert that He cannot make to blossom as the rose. O ye dead sinners, spiritually dead, there is life in Christ Jesus; for we have seen—yes, these eyes have seen—the dead live again! We have known the man whose soul was utterly corrupt, by the power of God seek after righteousness. We have known the man whose views were carnal, whose lusts were mighty, whose passions were strong, suddenly, by irresistible might from heaven, consecrate himself to Christ, and become a child of Jesus. We know that there is life in Christ Jesus of a spiritual order; yea, more, we ourselves, in our own persons, have felt that there is spiritual life. Well can we remember when we sat in the house of prayer, as dead as the very seat on which we sat. We had listened for a long, long while to the sound of the gospel, but no effect followed, when suddenly, as if our ears had been opened by the fingers of some mighty angel, a sound entered into our heart. We thought we heard Jesus saying, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Mat 11:15). An irresistible hand put itself on our heart and crushed a prayer out of it. We never had a prayer before like that. We cried, "O God, have mercy upon me a sinner." Some of us for months felt a hand pressing us as if we had been grasped in a vice, and our souls bled drops of anguish. That misery was a sign of coming life. When person are being drowned, they do not feel the pain so much as while they are being restored. Oh, we recollect those pains, those groans, the living strife that our soul had when it came to Christ. Ah, we can recollect the giving of our spiritual life as easily as could a man his restoration from the grave. We can suppose Lazarus to have remembered his resurrection, though not all the circumstances of it. So we, although we have forgotten a great deal, do recollect our giving

ourselves to Christ. We can say to every sinner, however dead, there is life in Christ Jesus, though you may be rotten and corrupt in your grave. He Who hath raised Lazarus hath raised us; and He can say, even to you, “Lazarus, come forth” (Joh 11:43).

In the third place, there is *eternal life* in Christ Jesus. And, oh, if eternal death be terrible, eternal life is blessed; for He has said, “Where I am there shall...my servant be” (Joh 12:26). “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory” (Joh 17:24). “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish” (Joh 10:28). Now, any Arminian that would preach from that text must buy a pair of India rubber lips, for I am sure he would need to stretch his mouth amazingly; he would never be able to speak the whole truth without winding about in a most mysterious manner. Eternal life—not a life that they are to lose, but eternal life. If I lost life in Adam, I gained it in Christ; if I lost myself forever, I find myself forever in Jesus Christ. Eternal life! Oh, blessed thought! Our eyes will sparkle with joy and our souls burn with ecstasy in the thought that we have eternal life. Be quenched, ye stars! Let God put His finger on you—but my soul will live in bliss and joy. Put out thine eye, O sun!—but mine eye shall “see the king in his beauty” (Isa 33:17), when thine eye shall no more make the green earth laugh. And moon, be thou turned into blood!—but my blood shall ne’er be turned to nothingness; this spirit shall exist when thou hast ceased to be. And thou great world, thou mayest all subside, just as a moment’s foam subsides upon the wave that bears it—but I shall have eternal life. O time, thou mayest see giant mountains dead and hidden in their graves; thou mayest see the stars like figs too ripe, falling from the tree; but thou shalt never, never see my spirit dead.

From *Free Will a Slave*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892): Influential English Baptist preacher; born at Kelvedon, Essex, England, UK.



Will a sinner in his unrenewed state ever go to the Savior not under the pressure of necessity? Will a soul ever betake itself to Christ without the conviction of its deep, spiritual need of Christ? Never! With all the sweet, powerful attraction of the Lord Jesus Christ—His love, loveliness, and grace—so completely depraved and dead is our nature, it is utterly insensible to the power of this great magnet and will never repair to Christ until the Holy Spirit, awakening a conviction of sin, creates in it the pressure of need.—*Octavius Winslow*

GOD'S EFFECTUAL DRAWING

John Flavel (c. 1630-1691)

*No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him:
and I will raise him up at the last day.—John 6:44*

LET us consider the marvelous way and manner in which the Lord draws the souls of poor sinners to Jesus Christ, and you will find He doth it (1) gradually, (2) congruously,¹ (3) powerfully, (4) effectually, and (5) finally.

First, this blessed work is carried on by the Spirit gradually. [It brings] the soul step by step in the due method and order of the gospel to Christ: illumination, conviction, compunction² prepare the way to Christ. Then faith unites the soul to Him. Without humiliation there can be no faith: “Ye...repented not afterward, that ye might believe him” (Mat 21:32). It is the burdensome sense of sin that brings the soul to Christ for rest: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden” (Mat 11:28). But without conviction, there can be no compunction, no humiliation. He that is not convinced of his sin and misery never bewails it nor mourns for it. Never was there one tear of true repentance seen to drop from the eye of an unconvinced sinner. And without illumination, there can be no conviction; for what is conviction, but the application of the light that is in the understanding or mind of a man to his heart and conscience? (Act 2:37). In this order, therefore, the Spirit (ordinarily) draws souls to Christ: He shines into their minds by illumination, applies that light to their consciences by effectual conviction, breaks and wounds their hearts for sin in remorse, and then moves the will to embrace and close with Christ in the way of faith for life and salvation...

Secondly, He draws sinners to Christ congruously and very agreeably to the nature and way of man. So He speaks, “I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love” (Hos 11:4). Not as beasts are drawn, but as men are inclined and wrought to compliance by rational conviction of their judgments and powerful persuasion of their wills. The minds of sinners are naturally blinded by ignorance (2Co 4:3-4) and their affections bewitched to their lusts (Gal 3:4). Whilst it

¹ **congruously** – in a manner that fits the circumstances; suitable.

² **compunction** – pricking or stinging of the conscience after wrongdoing; remorse.

is thus, no arguments or entreaties can possibly prevail to bring them off from the ways of sin to Christ.

The way, therefore, that the Lord takes to win and draw them to Christ is by rectifying their false apprehensions and shewing them infinitely more good in Christ than in the creature and in their lusts, yes, by satisfying their understandings that there is goodness enough in Jesus Christ to Whom He is drawing them...

Thirdly, the drawings of the Father are very powerful. “The arm of the LORD” is revealed in this work (Isa 53:1). It was a powerful word indeed that made the light at first shine out of darkness, and no less power is required to make it shine into our hearts (2Co 5:14). That day in which the soul is made willing to come to Christ is called, “the day of his power” (Psa 110:3). The Scripture expresseth the work of conversion by a threefold metaphor: that of a *resurrection* from the dead (Rom 4:4), that of *creation* (Eph 2:10), and that of *victory* or *conquest* (2Co 10:4-5). All these set forth the infinite power of God in this work, for no less than almighty power is required to each of them; and if you strictly examine the distinct notions, you shall find the power of God more and more illustriously displayed in each of them...Let the soul whom the Father draws, struggle and resist as much as it can, it shall come, yea, and come willingly too, when the drawing power of God is upon it. O the self-conflicts, the contrary resolves with which the soul finds itself distracted and rent asunder—the hopes and fears, the encouragements and discouragements, they will and they will not! But victorious grace conquers all opposition at last...and certainly, if we consider how deep the soul is rooted by natural inclination and long continued custom in sin, how extremely [hostile] it is to the ways of strict godliness and mortification! How Satan—that [hateful] enemy, that strong man armed—fortifies the soul to defend his possession against Christ and entrenches himself in the understanding, will, and affections by deep-rooted prejudices against Christ and holiness, it is a wonder of wonders to see a soul quitting all its beloved lusts and fleshly interests and endearments and coming willingly under Christ’s yoke!

Fourthly, the drawings of God are very effectual. There is indeed a common and *ineffectual* work upon hypocrites and apostates, called in Scripture a “morning cloud” and “early dew” (Hos 6:4). These may believe for a time and fall away at last (Luk 8:13). Their wills may be half won, they may be drawn half way to Christ and return again. So it was with Agrippa: “Almost (within a very little) thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Act 26:28). But in God’s elected ones, it is effect-

al: their wills are not only *almost*, but *altogether* persuaded to embrace Christ and quit the ways of sin, [no matter] how pleasant, gainful, and dear soever they have been to them. The Lord not only draws but draws home those souls to Christ: “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me” (Joh 6:37).

It is confessed that in drawing home the very elect to Christ, there may be and frequently are many pauses, stands, and [delays]. They have convictions, affections, and resolutions stirring in them, which, like early blossoms, seem to be nipped and die away again. There is frequently (in young ones especially) a hopeful appearance of grace. They make conscience of avoiding sins and performing duties. They have sometimes great awakenings under the Word. They are observed to retire for meditation and prayer. [They] delight to be in the company of Christians. [But] after all this, youthful lusts and vanities are found to stifle and choke these hopeful beginnings, and the work seems to stand—it may be some years—at a pause. However, at last, the Lord makes it victorious over all opposition and sets it home with power upon their hearts.

Fifthly, to conclude, those whom the Father draws to Christ, He draws them finally and forever. “The gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (Rom 11:29). They are so, as to God the giver; He never repents that He hath called His people into the fellowship of His Son Christ Jesus. And they are so on the believer’s part: he is never sorry, whatever he afterwards meets with, that he has come to Christ.

There is a time when Christians are drawn *to* Christ, but there shall never be a time in which they shall be drawn *away* from Christ (Joh 10:29). There is no plucking them out of the Father’s hand. It was common to a proverb in the primitive times, when they would express an impossibility, to say, “You may as soon draw a Christian from Christ, as do it.” When Christ asked that question of the disciples, “Will ye also go away?” said Peter in the name of them all, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life” (Joh 6:67-68). They who are thus drawn do with full purpose of heart cleave unto the Lord.

From *The Whole Works of the Reverend John Flavel*, Vol. 2 (London; Edinburgh; Dublin: W. Baynes and Son; Waugh and Innes; M. Keene, 1820), 74-75.

John Flavel (c. 1630-1691): English Presbyterian minister; born at Bromagrove, Worcester, England, UK.



ARE YOU DEAD OR ALIVE?

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

You...hath he quickened, who were dead.—Ephesians 2:1

READER, look at the words before your eyes, and ponder them well. Search your own heart, and do not lay down this paper without solemn self-inquiry. I meet you this day with one simple question: Are you among the living or among the dead?...Give me your attention while I unfold this matter and show you what God has said about it in the Scriptures. If I say hard things, it is not because I do not love you. I write as I do because I desire your salvation. He is your best friend who tells you the most truth.

First, then, *let me tell you what we all are by nature—we are DEAD!* *Dead* is a strong word, but it is not my own coining and invention. I did not choose it. The Holy Ghost told Paul to write it down about the Ephesians: “You hath he quickened who were dead” (Eph 2:1). The Lord Jesus Christ made use of it in the parable of the prodigal son: “This my son was dead, and is alive again” (Luk 15:24, 32). You will read it also in the Epistle to the Corinthians: “One died for all, then were all dead” (2Co 5:14). Shall a mortal man be wise above that which is written? Must I not take heed to speak that which I find in the Bible, and neither less nor more?

Dead is an awful idea, and one that man is most unwilling to receive. He does not like to allow the whole extent of his soul’s disease. He shuts his eyes to the real amount of his danger. Many a one will allow me to say that naturally most people “are not quite what they ought to be—they are thoughtless, they are unsteady, they are [care-free], they are wild, they are not serious enough.” But dead? Oh, no! I must not mention it. It is going too far to say that. The idea is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.

My dear Reader, what we like in religion is of very little consequence. The only question is, “What is written?” What saith the Lord? God’s thoughts are not man’s thoughts, and God’s words are not man’s words (Isa 55:8). God says of every living person who is not a decided Christian—be he high or low, rich or poor, old or young—*he is dead.*

In this, as in everything else, God's words are right. Nothing could be said more correct, nothing more accurate, nothing more faithful, nothing more true. Stay a little and let me reason this out with you. Come and see.

What should you have said if you had seen Joseph weeping over his father Jacob? "He fell upon his face, and wept upon him, and kissed him" (Gen 50:1). But there was no reply to his affection. All about that aged countenance was unmoved, silent, and still. Doubtless you would have guessed the reason. *Jacob was dead...*

What would you have thought, if you had seen the Amalekite stripping Saul of his royal ornaments in Mount Gilboa? He "took from him the crown that was upon his head, and the bracelet that was on his arm" (2Sa 1:10). There was no resistance. Not a muscle moved in that proud face. Not a finger was raised to prevent him. And why? *Saul was dead.*

What should you have thought if you had met the widow's son in the gate of Nain, lying on a bier,¹ wrapped about with grave-clothes, followed by his weeping mother, carried slowly towards the tomb? (Luk 7:12). Doubtless it would have been all clear to you. It would have needed no explanation. *The young man was dead.*

Now, I say this is just the condition of every man by nature in the matter of his soul. I say this is just the state of the vast majority of people around us in spiritual things. God calls to them continually by mercies, by afflictions, by ministers, by His Word; but they do not hear His voice...The crown and glory of their being—that precious jewel, their immortal soul—is being seized, plundered, and taken away; and they are utterly unconcerned. The devil is carrying them away, day after day, along the broad road that leads to destruction; and they allow him to make them his captives without a struggle. And this is going on everywhere—all around you, among all classes, through the length and breadth of the land. You know it in your own conscience, while you read this paper. You must be aware of it. You cannot deny it. And what then, I ask you, can be said more perfectly true than that which God says: we are all by nature spiritually *dead*?

Yes! When a man's heart is cold and unconcerned about religion, when his hands are never employed in doing God's work, when his feet are not familiar with God's ways, when his tongue is seldom or never used in prayer and praise, when his ears are deaf to the voice of

¹ **bier** – stretcher or plank used for carrying a corpse to a place of burial.

Christ in the gospel, when his eyes are blind to the beauty of the kingdom of heaven, when his mind is full of the world and has no room for spiritual things—when these marks are to be found in a man, the word of the Bible is the right word to use about him, and that word is *dead*.

Perhaps we may not like this. We may shut our eyes both to facts in the world and texts in the Word. But God's truth must be spoken, and to keep it back does positive harm. Truth must be spoken, however condemning it may be. So long as man does not serve God with body, soul, and spirit, he is not really alive. So long as he puts the first things last and the last first, buries his talent like an unprofitable servant, and brings the Lord no revenue of honor, so long in God's sight he is *dead*. He is not filling the place in creation for which he was intended. He is not using his powers and faculties as God meant them to be used...

This is the true explanation of sin not felt, sermons not believed, good advice not followed, the gospel not embraced, the world not forsaken, the cross not taken up, self-will not mortified, evil habits not laid aside, the Bible seldom read, and the knee never bent in prayer. Why is all this on every side? The answer is simple. *Men are dead*.

This is the true account of that host of excuses for neglect of religion, which so many make with one consent. Some have no learning, and some have no time. Some are oppressed with business, and some with poverty. Some have difficulties in their own families, and some in their own health. Some have peculiar obstacles in their calling, which others, we are told, cannot understand; and others have peculiar drawbacks at home, and they wait to have them removed. But God has a shorter word in the Bible, which describes all these people at once. He says *they are dead*.

This is the true explanation of many things that wring a faithful minister's heart. Many around him never attend a place of worship at all. Many attend so irregularly that it is clear they think it of no importance. Many attend once on a Sunday, who might just as easily attend twice. Many never come to the Lord's Table—never appear at a weekday means of grace of any kind. And why is all this? Often, far too often, there can only be one reply about these people. *They are dead*.

See now, dear Reader, how all professing Christians should examine themselves and try their own state. It is not in churchyards alone where the dead are to be found. There are only too many inside our churches and close to our pulpits, too many on the benches, and too

many in the pews. The land is like the valley in Ezekiel's vision—full of bones, and those very dry. There are dead souls in all our parishes, and dead souls in all our streets. There is hardly a family in which all live to God. There is hardly a house in which there is not someone dead. O search and look at home! Prove your own self.

See too how sad the condition is of all who have gone through no spiritual change, whose hearts are still the same as in the day they were born. There is a mountain of division between them and heaven. They have yet to pass from death to life. O that they did but see and know their danger! Alas! It is one fearful mark of spiritual death that, like natural death, it is not felt. We lay our beloved ones tenderly and gently in their narrow beds, but they feel nothing of what we do. "The dead," says the wise man, "know not anything" (Ecc 9:5). And this is just the case with dead souls.

See too what reason ministers have to be anxious about their congregations. We feel that time is short, and life is uncertain. We know that spiritual death is the highroad that leads to eternal death. We fear lest any of those we preach to should die in their sins, unprepared, unrenewed, impenitent, unchanged. O marvel not if we often speak strongly and plead with you warmly! We dare not give you flattering titles, amuse you with trifles, say smooth things, and cry peace, peace, when life and death are at stake and nothing less. The plague is among you. We feel that we stand between the living and the dead. We must and will use great plainness of speech. "If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?" (1Co 14:8).

Let me tell you...*in what way alone this quickening can be brought about, by what means a dead soul can be made alive.* Surely, if I did not tell you this, it would be cruelty to write what I have written. Surely, it would be leading you into a dreary wilderness, and then leaving you without bread and water. It would be like marching you down to the Red Sea and then bidding you walk over. It would be commanding you to make brick, like Pharaoh, and yet refusing to provide you with straw. It would be like tying your hands and feet and then desiring you to war a good warfare, and so run as to obtain the prize! I will not do so...By God's help, I will set before you the full provision there is made for dead souls. Listen to me a little longer, and I will once more show you what is written in the Scripture of truth.

One thing is very clear: we cannot work this mighty change ourselves. It is not in us. We have no strength or power to do it. We may change our sins, but we cannot change our hearts. We may take up a new way, but not a new nature. We may make considerable reforms

and alterations. We may lay aside many outward bad habits and begin many outward duties. But we cannot create a new principle within us. We cannot bring something out of nothing. The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots; no more can we put life into our own souls (Jer 13:23).

Another thing is equally clear: no man can do it for us. Ministers may preach to you and pray with you, receive you...in baptism, admit you at the Lord's Table and give you the bread and wine; but they cannot bestow spiritual life. They may bring in regularity in the place of disorder and outward decency in the place of open sin. But they cannot go below the surface. They cannot reach your hearts. Paul may plant and Apollos water, but God alone can give the increase (1Co 3:6).

Who, then, can make a dead soul alive? No one can do it but God. He only Who breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life can ever make a dead sinner a living Christian. He only Who formed the world out of nothing in the day of creation can make man a new creature. He only Who said, "Let there be light: and there was light" (Gen 1:3) can cause spiritual light to shine into man's heart. He only Who formed man out of the dust and gave life to his body can ever give life to his soul. His is the special office to do it by His Spirit, and His also is the power.

Reader, the glorious gospel contains provision for your spiritual as well as your eternal life. The dead must come to Christ, and He will give them life as well as peace. He is able to do everything that sinners need. He cleanses them by His blood. He makes them alive by His Spirit. The Lord Jesus is a complete Savior. That mighty living Head has no dead members. His people are not only justified and pardoned but quickened together with Him and made partakers of His resurrection. To Him, the Spirit joins the sinner and raises him by that union from death to life. In Him, the sinner lives after he has believed. The spring of all his vitality is the union between Christ and his soul, which the Spirit begins and keeps up. Christ is the appointed fountain of all spiritual life, and the Holy Ghost the appointed agent Who conveys that life to our souls.

From *Alive or Dead?* available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900): Bishop of the Anglican Church; born at Macclesfield, Cheshire County, England, UK.

