The Doctrine of Absolute Inability
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
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We have embarked upon a wonderful study of some very important doctrines on these Sunday nights. And from my viewpoint, it's kind of open ended. I'm just kind of following the flow and seeing where it goes. But I'm having a wonderful time. As you well know through all these years, we predominantly, if not almost always, work through texts of scripture, and that way we are obligated to affirm what the Word of God says because it's what it says. And there is always the, I suppose, potential accusation that when you leave the flow of expositional preaching and you embark upon a topical study or a doctrinal study, you may be caught up in something philosophical, you may be caught up in something rational, or something logical and you may be drawing conclusions that wouldn't stand the test of scripture.

And so I want to affirm to you that everything that I say I trust will be before your very eyes drawn out of scripture. And I would encourage you, like the noble Bereans, to do a little work yourself and search the scripture and see if these things are so. I certainly don't want to bring to you a rational theology, although it's not irrational. I don't want to bring to you a philosophical approach to theology. I don't want to follow the path of human reason to conclude the things we conclude. I want to bring you what the Word of God has to say and the Word of God does speak to these very, very important doctrinal issues.

Just by way of brief review, we started out when we ended the book of Jude, by looking at the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints or the preservation of the saints. That is to say that if you're ever saved, you'll always have the hope of eternal life. You cannot ever be unsaved. You can't lose your salvation, because he is able to keep us from falling and to present us before his presence with great glory. That's how Jude ends.

And so we talked about this doctrine of security or preservation or perseverance. And in the end, we said we are preserved to the end because we are chosen from the beginning for that purpose. And that took us into the doctrine of divine election, the doctrine of predestination, that God determined before the foundation of the world who he would save, who he would bring to glory. Therefore whoever it is that he calls, he justifies, whoever he justifies, he glorifies. And so the great doctrine of preservation is connected to the doctrine of election or predestination.

And for at least three messages we took you through the important passages of scripture that teach the doctrine of election and laid it out for you as it is in the Word of God. And having understood that

doctrine, those of you who have been with us, you're going to find it everywhere and you're either going to accept it wherever you find it, or you're going to spend the rest of your life fighting it when it jumps off the page.

Now, any discussion of the doctrine of predestination or the doctrine of divine sovereign election, or, if you will, sovereign salvation as a work of God is based on another doctrine, on another doctrine. God must save us. He must choose us, call us, regenerate us, justify us by his divine power, because we are neither willing nor able to do it for ourselves. And this takes us to what I'm going to call the "doctrine of absolute inability." I've never heard it called that but that serves my purpose to explain what we mean.

Now to start this discussion, I want you to open your New Testament to John 11 - John 11 - and this will provide for us, I think, a good analogy to kind of launch us into our discussion. John 11 is a notable chapter to all who understand the Bible because it records the resurrection of one of Jesus' most intimate friends, a man by the name of Lazarus, who had a couple of sisters named Mary and Martha, and at whose home Jesus spent time. They were believers in him and friends. As the 11th chapter of John opens, Lazarus - who lived in Bethany about two miles east of Jerusalem just on the back side of the Mount of Olives - Lazarus became ill. In fact, verse 2 says he was sick.

And his sisters, Mary and Martha, sent a message to the Lord saying, "Lord, behold he whom Ye love is sick." That indicates to us that Jesus had a very special affection for his friend Lazarus. Jesus hearing it, verse 4, said, "This sickness is not unto death but for the glory of God that the Son of God may be glorified by it." God has a purpose in this sickness and it is not ultimately to bring about the death of Lazarus. Jesus loved Martha, verse 5, loved her sister, loved Lazarus, but when He heard that He was sick, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. He didn't respond. And finally, as you remember, He went.

And when He arrived late by Mary and Martha's standards, verse 17 says, "He found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. And many of the Jews - " verse 19, " - had come - " to Mary – or " - to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning *their* brother." This was kind of a community deal that happened when there was a death. Everybody surrounded them and mourned, tried to comfort them. In verse 21, Martha indicts Jesus and says to Him, "Lord, if You had been here my brother would not have died." She had great confidence in His healing power and apparently none in His resurrection power.

He said to her, "Your brother shall rise again." "And she said, 'I know that he'll arise again in the resurrection on the last day.' And Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?' She said, "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, *even* He who comes into the world.' "

So they had this little theological discussion and she locked in on the final resurrection as the only hope for her brother. But as the story goes on, and you come down to verse 32. “Mary came where Jesus was, saw Him, fell at His feet saying to Him, ‘Lord if You had been here my brother would not have died.’ ” This is the same comment that her sister had made.

“And when Jesus therefore saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her - ” this whole mourning crowd “ - *also* weeping, He was deeply moved and spirit was troubled and said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ And they said to Him, ‘Lord, come and see.’ Jesus wept. So the Jews were saying, ‘Behold how He loved him.’ Some of them said, ‘Could not this man who opened the eyes of him who was blind have kept this man also from dying?’ ” So, you know, just about everybody thought He could heal the sick.

“Jesus - ” in verse 38 “ - being deeply moved within, came to the tomb, which was a cave and stone was lying against it. Jesus said, ‘Remove the stone.’ Martha, the sister of the diseased said to Him, ‘Lord, by this time there will be a stench for he’s been *dead* for days.’ And then Jesus said to her, ‘Didn’t I say to you that if you believe you’ll see the glory of God?’ So they removed the stone. And then Jesus raised His eyes and prayed, ‘Father, I thank Thee that Thou heardest Me and I knew that Thou hearest Me always but because of the people standing around I said it that they may believe that Thou didst send Me.’ ”

And then verse 43, most interesting. “And when He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come forth.’ ” Now what interests me here is that Jesus gave a command to a dead man. I’ve done a lot of funerals. I’ve seen a lot of dead people. I’ve never asked any of them to do anything, nor has anybody else. Especially would I never say to a dead man, “Bill, come forth.” I mean, you wouldn’t waste words. You’d look foolish. Dead men can’t hear. Dead men can’t think. Dead men can’t respond cause they’re dead and dead means the absolute inability to do anything in response to any stimulus. There’s no will. There’s no power to think or act. But, look at verse 44. “He who had died came forth.” Lazarus did exactly what Jesus asked him to do. Amazing. He must have sort of stumbled out of there because “he was bound hand and foot with wrappings. And his face was wrapped around with a cloth and Jesus said to then, ‘Unbind him and let him go.’ ” Dead men can’t respond. Dead men can’t obey commands. He couldn’t, but he did. He did what was impossible.

How? How is it possible for a dead man to do what Jesus told him to do? We all know the answer. Because Christ gave him the ability to do it. If Christ hadn’t given him the life, he couldn’t have obeyed. And that’s what’s bound up in the earlier words of Jesus in verses 25 and 26, “I am the resurrection and the life.” And the amazing miracle of commanding a man who can’t respond, and then giving him the power to respond is analogous to salvation. The gospel commands dead men to rise, dead men to believe, dead men to understand, dead men to repent. The gospel commands dead people to do what, frankly, they can’t do.

Now, from there I want you to go to Ephesians chapter 2 and here we see the depth of this problem. Ephesians chapter 2. This is not a description of Lazarus. This is a description of everybody. Ephesians 2:1. “And you were dead.” “You were dead in your trespasses and sins. In that condition you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air - ” Satan “ - the spirit now working in the sons of disobedience.”

You all, all of us, Paul included, we “formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as everybody else.” We were all dead. Dead to what? Dead to God, dead to spiritual reality, dead to the truth.

Man’s basic problem is not a lack of self esteem. It’s not that he’s out of harmony with his environment. It’s not that he’s sort of out of sync with his Creator. It’s not that he needs to make a few adjustments to sort of get God on his wavelength. Man’s problem is he is absolutely dead, and he is incapable of relating to God at all - God’s person, God’s truth, or God’s commands.

Sin kills. “The wages of sin is - ” what? “ - death.” Now, this is reiterated in many places in the Bible that we are not only ignorant, that we are not only blind, that we are not only weak and impotent, we are just plain dead. One of the would-be disciples in Matthew 8 was approached by Jesus, who asked him to follow Him. And he said in Matthew 8:21, “Lord, permit me first to go bury my father.” You know what Jesus said? “Follow Me and let the dead bury the dead.” Let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead. So there Jesus calls those outside His Kingdom “dead.”

Paul in 1 Timothy 5:6 says, “The one who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives.” The one who is dead has no capacity whatsoever to respond to God. He is a servant of Satan, driven by the lust of his flesh. The things that come out of his heart are evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders, as Matthew chapter 15 indicates and other places in Scripture.

Now, I’m not saying that sinners can’t do some human good. They can be philanthropic. They can be charitable. They can help people. They can be kind. They can be merciful. But they cannot do any spiritual good. They cannot do anything that pleases God, because no one can do anything that pleases God unless it’s done for His glory, and it can’t be done for His glory unless it’s done in the name of His Son. So while there is human good, it is dead good. It has absolutely nothing to do with God.

In Luke 6:33 it says, “If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is *that* to you? Even sinners do the same.” So even Jesus’ words there admit that people do good. But it’s human good, and in a sense it’s bad good. Good in the sense of human, bad in the sense that it has no pure motive and no bearing on one’s relationship to God. Nothing about it pleases Him.

I think that idea is brought out in Luke 11:13 in the words, “you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children.” Even though you are evil, you do good things to your children. That’s instinctive in parenting. But it’s not a good that in any sense satisfies God. Even the natives on the island of Malta in Acts 28 showed exceeding kindness to Paul. There is a kind of pagan kindness and pagan goodness, and we would never deny that, but it has no relationship to God. It counts for absolutely nothing.

Now, back to Ephesians 2 again. The sinner is so dead that all that he is involved in can be summed up as being of the world, of the devil, and of the flesh. He can do absolutely nothing outside of that. So when you come to verse 4, if you’re going to start to talk about salvation, it doesn’t start out in verse 4 and say, “However, one day you came to your senses.” It says, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us - ” what? “ - alive - ” he did it, he made us alive “ - together with Christ (by grace you have been saved). He raised us up with Him.”

You say, “Yeah, but we had to believe.” Of course, verse 8. “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that - ” that faith “ - not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God;” You see, even faith has to be given to the dead.

Look at 2 Peter 1:1. We made a brief comment about this this morning. Second Peter 1:1. “Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ,” listen to this. “Simon Peter, a bond-servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received faith of the same kind as ours.” We all have faith because we received it. It is a divine gift.

Philippians 1:29. Philippians 1:29. Very clear. “For to you it has been granted - ” by God, obviously “ - for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” So, it has been granted to you by God for the sake of Christ to believe and to suffer. If God didn’t grant you the power to believe, you couldn’t believe. You’re dead. It has to be granted by God. Dead people can’t respond. That’s why the analogy of death is used.

Look at Acts 3:16. Here you have Peter and John healing this lame man. And verse 16 says, “And on the basis of faith on His name - ” Acts 3:16 “ - On the basis of faith in His name, *it is* the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which *comes* through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all.” The man had - the faith to believe in Christ had to come through Christ. Think of it in these words. Philippians 1:6. I am “confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you - ” that’s very important. Who began the good work? God. Who initiated it? God. “ - will perfect it till the day of Christ Jesus.” He began it. He’ll fulfill it.

First Corinthians 1:30. It says in verse 29, no man should boast before God. Why? Verse 30. “By His doing you are in Christ Jesus.” By His doing you are in Christ Jesus. That’s why verse 31 says, “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.” Dead men don’t obey. Dead men don’t respond. Dead men don’t rise. Dead men don’t do anything. They can’t. And we are, because of sin, spiritually dead.

Back to Paul’s letter to the Ephesians and 4:18 describes this with these words. “The Gentiles - ” verse 17 “ - walk in the futility of their mind, darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God.” That’s another way to say it. Physically alive, spiritually dead. “Excluded from the life of God.” Colossians 2:13 weighs in on this. “And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive.” Dead in transgressions. Greek students would call that a locative of sphere. You live in the sphere of death. You live in the realm of death, void of all spiritual sense, dominated by your flesh which is uncircumcised, or uncleansed. And in that condition, He made you alive. That’s exactly what Ephesians 2 says.

Now, this condition of being spiritually dead was not the way humans came from God. When God made Adam and made Eve, they were spiritually alive. They communed with God. They walked and talked with Him in the cool of the day. They naturally obeyed God. They naturally loved God. They naturally did God’s will. But God gave them one prohibition, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and said, “In the day you eat, you die.” And in the day they ate, they died spiritually.

And all of a sudden they were alienated from God. They were lost in the garden. They covered themselves. They hid from God, spiritually dead. And, of course, that caused the whole human race to be born dead. That’s Paul’s point in Romans 5. Romans 5:12, Paul says, “Just as through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin, so death spread to all men.” Later he says, “As in Adam all die.” The whole human race is born dead because of the sin of Adam.

Paul is trying to explain to his readers how the death of one man, Christ, could effect so many savingly. And the way he explains how the death of one person could have such a great effect is to show how the sin of one person had such massive effect on the whole human race. And so, Paul says, “sin entered the world by one man. Death came by sin. Death spread to all men.” And history records the record of that death. First Corinthians 15:22. “As in Adam all die.”

God made man upright, but God made man alive, but the whole of humanity is dead in trespasses and sins. God comes along and He commands sinners to repent. He commands them to believe in His Son, to love His Son, to confess His Son, to submit to His Son. And you ask the question, can a whole race of Lazaruses respond?

This is the compelling question that lies behind the doctrine of election. If sinners are left to themselves to believe, by what power do they do it? If you’re going to say, “I don’t believe in divine

election. I believe everybody's on his own out there. Everybody makes their own choice. God just looks down the way and sees what you're going to do, but it's up to you to do it." Then the question is by what power does the dead man rise? By what power?

If God does not make them willing and God does not make them able, where does the power come, and where does the will come from? Those who deny the doctrine of divine election, those who deny the doctrine of divine salvation as an act of God have to believe that there's something in man left to himself that enables him to become willing and to come to life. Is that what the Bible teaches? The Bible doesn't describe our condition as a disability. It describes it as death. And everybody knows that death means an inability to respond.

Maybe a little further review will help us to understand this point. Back to John 1 for a minute, John chapter 1. Just to clarify, this is everywhere in Scripture consistently. But, of course, John 1:12, wonderful verse, "As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name." We love that verse. A lot of people memorize that verse. "As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name."

Oh by the way, verse 13. "Who were not born of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." You can't be born from the dead by your own power. Whoever received Him, whoever believed and became a child of God was enabled by God. It wasn't their own will, the will of the flesh, the will of man. It was God.

Look at chapter 3 in the Gospel of John. We'll just look at some very familiar passages that everybody knows. John chapter 3, probably one of the most familiar chapters in all the Bible.

Verse 5. You know, Jesus is talking to Nicodemus about he needs to be born, which means he's dead. He needs life. He needs to come to life. And so in verse 5, Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit - " and he's referring there to the water of purification and the work of the Holy Spirit, which was described in Ezekiel in the great prophecy that talks about the New Covenant. Unless you're born with a cleansing and the Holy Spirit, " - you can't enter the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit." You have to be born by the power of the Holy Spirit. You have to be cleansed from above. Verse 7. "Don't marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' "

And then He says this, "The wind blows where it wills, you hear the sound of it, you don't know where it comes from, you don't know where it's going, so is everyone who is born of the Spirit." Wow, what a statement. People are born of the Spirit because they're born of the Spirit and the Spirit goes wherever the Spirit wants.

Look at John chapter 5. John 5:21. “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.” Boy, that is a painful verse to endure if you deny the sovereignty of salvation, the sovereignty of God and salvation. The Son gives life to whom He wishes. The Spirit gives life to whom He wishes. When somebody believes, it’s not of the will of the flesh or the will of man, it’s the will of God. It’s God who wills it. It’s the Spirit who wills it. It’s the Son who wills it. All the Trinity involved. John 1, John 3, John 5, John 6:44. We’ve considered these passages. Verse 44. “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him;” No one can come unless the Father draws him. And then last week, we looked at verse 64. “There are some of you who do not believe,” verse 64. John 6:65. “For this reason I have said to you no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.”

And the point of all of this is you couldn’t possibly come on your own. You are not willing or able. You’re dead. You’re dead. John 8:36. It’s just a simple statement. “If the Son shall make you free, you’ll be really free.” You’re never going to be free unless the Son makes you free.

You - looking it at another way, from another analogy - are not only dead, you’re a slave. You aren’t going to be alive unless He makes you alive. You aren’t not going to be free unless He makes you free. And back in Matthew chapter 11, and I think it’s verse 27 – well, verse 25 carries on this same great thought. “I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You did hide these things from the wise and intelligent, did reveal them to babes.” Now what in the world is that saying?

What it’s saying is God has decided Himself to whom He will reveal the truth. And He has determined to hide it from the wise, intelligent and reveal it to babes. Why did God do that? Verse 26, “Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Your sight.” He did it because that pleased Him. Then verse 27. “All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.”

It’s very clear. You’re not going to come alive. You’re not going to understand truth. You’re not going to believe unless the Father wills. And yet isn’t it amazing? Look at verse 28. And here’s the constant paradox, apparent paradox. “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.” What an amazing thing.

People always ask me, “How do you resolve that?” I don’t resolve that. I have no idea how to resolve that. The offer to come is made universally. The power to come is limited to those whom the Father raises.

Listen. You’re not going to find a text, not any of those texts, in which Jesus defends the ability of sinners. You’re not going to find those texts anywhere where He defends the freedom of their wills. Jesus is no Arminian. All those Scriptures that I went through and many, many more place all the

work of salvation on God's side. All the will is on His side. All the power is on His side.

To further answer the question, can sinners will and are they able? I want to turn to an even deeper look at what it means to be the living dead. Let me break it down. What does the Bible say about the human heart? Let's go back to Genesis 6. We'll do a couple of verses in the Old Testament just to show you the universal reality of this.

In Genesis 6:5, you're looking at the whole human race here since the fall. "The Lord - " verse 5. Let's just talk about the heart of man. "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Every, only, continually. "And the Lord was sorry He made man on the earth, was grieved in His heart." The biblical diagnosis of the human heart is that it's evil, more evil, and nothing but evil. And that's it.

Jeremiah 17:9, Jeremiah says, "The heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." Psalm 143:2 says, "No man living is righteous." And Proverbs 20:9 asks this question. "Who can say, 'I have cleansed my heart' "? Wow. "Who can say, 'I am pure from sin?' " Answer? Nobody. Nobody can say, "I got my act together. I cleansed my heart. I made the right call."

Jeremiah 13:23 asks this question. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin? Can the leopard change his spots?" The prophet then says, "Then can you also do good who are accustomed to doing evil?"

When you look at the biblical diagnosis of the human heart, there's just nothing there that can respond. Desperately wicked. And what proceeds out of that heart is all the sins and iniquities that characterize it. And if you wanted to look biblically at the heart, you could find a lot of other passages on the heart.

But let's talk about the mind. What about the mind? If the heart is something deep, and the mind is maybe the superficial thinking, if we make any kind of distinction there, what about the mind? I mean, can't we process this stuff and sort of overrule that internal evil? Can't we get our heads together and come up with some sound commitments on our own?

Well, Romans 1:28 said, "God gave them over to a depraved mind," a reprobate mind. The word basically means a mind that doesn't function. So the unregenerate have non-functioning minds insofar as God is concerned. Furthermore, 2 Corinthians 4:4 says, "The God of this world had blinded their minds so that the glorious gospel cannot be comprehended."

Look at Romans 8 for a moment, and again this takes us further into the problem. Romans 8:5. "Those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh. Those who are according to the Spirit, set their minds on the things of the Spirit." That's how it is. If you're according to the flesh, then your mind is devoted to the flesh. Verse 6 says, "The mind set on the flesh is death."

There it is. That's characteristic of spiritual deadness. Your mind is set on the flesh. Verse 7. "The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God - " listen now " - it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so." Verse 8. "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

I mean, that's a pretty airtight description. And I read you a little earlier from Ephesians chapter 4:17-18 that "the Gentiles walk in the futility of their mind - " or the emptiness of their mind, " - darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they are therefore given over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness."

Every description is the same: Ignorant, dark, futile, empty, dead. And there's no relief. No matter where you go in the Bible, it always comes out like this. "To the defiled - " Titus 1:15 " - and unbelieving, nothing is pure, both their mind and their conscience are defiled." The picture of the unregenerate is very bleak.

One more passage, 1 Corinthians 2, 1 Corinthians 2:14. We could talk a lot about this whole passage, but just verse 14. "The natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God. They're foolishness to him. He can't understand them." Why? "Because they're spiritually examined," spiritually discerned, spiritually appraised. And guess what? He is spiritually dead.

Martin Luther said, "A man is like a pillar of salt. He's like Lot's wife." Luther said, "He's like a log. He's like a stone. He's like a lifeless statue which has neither eyes, nor ears, nor mouth, neither senses nor heart, unless he is enlightened, converted and regenerated by the Holy Spirit." So there's no hope for the heart, no hope for the mind.

And somebody might say, "Well, maybe down there somewhere there's a spark in the will." Really? Listen to John 8:44. "You are of your father the devil." Ephesians 2, "You're dead in trespasses and sin, ruled by the prince of the power of the air," same thing. "You're of your father the devil, and you will to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning. He doesn't stand in the truth because there's no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature* for he's a liar and the father of lies. And because I speak the truth, you don't believe Me."

You have a father, the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He's a murderer. He doesn't know the truth. He's a liar. And so when I speak the truth, you don't believe Me because you live in a world of satanic lies. You have no will for the truth. You will to do the desires of your father.

Paul in Romans 6:20 puts it this way. "You are slaves of sin and free in regard to righteousness." You can say to an unredeemed person, "You have a great freedom in life. You are completely free of anything righteous." You are.

Well, out of this kind of dead heart, mind, and will comes, of course, nothing but the things that please the Father of the living dead, Satan. And so again we read in Mark 7, similar to what I read earlier in Matthew 15, “That which proceeds out of the man is from his heart, evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting, wickedness, deceits, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these things proceed from within.”

Now it’s a serious situation and I just have one text that sums it up. Romans 3 - and some of you knew I’d have to go there. But Romans 3 sums it up in case somebody is still saying, “But, but, but there must be something in there, must be something in man that allows him to pursue what is right.” Romans 3:10. “As it is written - ” and this is a string of quotes taken from the Old Testament so it’s a universal diagnosis. “As it is written, ‘There is none righteous,’ ” And somebody would have said, “Comma, except me.” And so the Lord quickly said, “No, not you.” “There is none who understands - ” the natural man understands not the things of God. “There is none who seeks for God.” You say, “Wait, wait, wait, wait. In the Old Testament there are those statements about, ‘If you seek Me with all your heart.’ ”

Folks, you can’t seek Him until He has already found you. We love Him because He first loved us. “There’s none who - ” on his own “ - seeks after God. They’ve all turned aside, they’ve all become useless. There is none who does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave. With their tongues they keep deceiving. The poison of asps is under their lips.” They’re children of their father. “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery in their paths. The path of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

There’s the basic description of the living dead. Evil, selfish. They’re just a whole race of Lazaruses. And we love our darkness and we love our sin. We thrive on selfish lust. We want to do the things that please our father, the devil.

By the way, this diagnosis of man has been the conviction of Christians through the centuries. You can read statements of the Council at Dort, and Westminster Confession, and all kinds of other theological creeds through history, and this is how man is understood biblically.

This doctrine has been called “Total Depravity,” but I feel that the “total depravity” is a misleading term. If you look up “depravity” in the dictionary, it’s a synonym for viciousness. It’s a synonym for being vile. In fact, to be depraved, according to the dictionary, is to be degraded, debased, immoral to a dangerous degree like rapists and serial killers. The word “depraved” sort of connotes a level of evil that’s just not applicable to everybody. To say someone is totally depraved, you know, you think of Jeffrey Dahmers, or Charles Manson, or somebody who has not a vestige of human goodness, and void of all normal affection and restraint. To call someone “totally depraved” would set them outside

normal people as vicious perverts.

That is not what is meant when theologians refer to total depravity because not everybody is as bad as they could be, and not everybody is as bad as everybody else. What we're talking about here is what I've chosen to call "absolute inability." What is true of everybody is we have no ability to respond to the gospel. We are completely unable to raise ourselves out of a state of death. We are completely unable to give our blind hearts sight. We are completely unable to free ourselves from slavery to sin. We are completely unable to turn from ignorance to truth. We are completely unable to stop rebelling against God, stop being hostile to His Word.

We are not only unable but we are unwilling to do that, unwilling to repent, unwilling to believe. And if we are to repent and to believe, then it must be like it was for Lazarus, where God who commands the dead to rise has to also give them the power. And in 2 Timothy 2:25 Paul says that we are to treat people gently "if perhaps God may grant them repentance." Wow. Couldn't be clearer. "Leading to the knowledge of the truth, they may come to their senses, escape from the snare of the devil."

The only way you can escape from the snare of the devil is to come to your senses. The only way you can come to your senses is to have the knowledge of the truth. The only way you can have the knowledge of the truth is if God grants you repentance.

And Ephesians 2:8-9, again, "For by grace are you saved through faith; that not of yourself." God has to grant the repentance. God has to grant the faith. And the core of this great truth is that God must Himself give life to the dead. Regeneration is what theologians would call monergistic. It is a work of God alone.

In regeneration we are basically passive. It is when we have been awakened and granted repentance and faith that it all comes together concurrently to bring about salvation. This is what the Bible teaches, and if you don't believe this, then how can the biblical doctrine of man leave any possibility for his salvation? Is God merely commanding sinners to do what they absolutely can't and won't do?

I mean, to me, denying this doctrine and then evangelizing is sort of like standing on a bridge over the rapids watching somebody bob up and down screaming and saying to them, "I have good news for you. If you can get yourself out of there, we'll dry you off. Come on, get out of there." He can't get out of there. You're not offering him anything that he's capable of doing. The gospel call with no power makes no sense.

Do you mean to tell me that God does no more for the believer than He has done for the multitudes that are now in hell? It's just that we somewhere found something in us to come to life? Do you mean to tell me that God has done the very same thing for all who have ever lived whether they be in heaven or in hell and it was really up to us? So everybody who is in hell just didn't have the will to

swim? No.

One final passage, Titus 3. Well, maybe one more, but close. Titus 3:3, 3:3, Titus 3:3. “When we were once foolish ourselves, - ” notice the condition, foolish. Titus 3:3. “ - disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasure, spending our life in malice - ” that’s evil “ - and envy, hateful, hating one another.” Pretty severe description. “But when the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared - ” here it is “ - He saved - ” what? “ - us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.” He saved us. He saved us. Not by anything we did, by mercy.

Now just a closing comment on that. Some people have tried to make regeneration, this coming to life, a sort of preliminary work to conversion. The idea is that regeneration happens and then somewhere down the road after you’ve been regenerated, you get saved. I don’t buy that. The word “regeneration” used here, verse 5, I just read it, Titus 3:5, *palingenesias*, is only used here and in Matthew 19:28 in an eschatological sense. But here is the only place in the Bible where you have the word “regeneration” connected to salvation. And please notice this, it is “the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit,” or by the Holy Spirit.

Regeneration and washing are the same thing, the same glorious reality. You cannot be regenerated unless you’ve been washed. And therefore, regeneration and conversion occur simultaneously. You know, there are some people who even believe you can be regenerated and not yet saved. No. It is the washing of regeneration. Regeneration is that cleansing. It is that salvation. It is that conversion. It is that redemption. It is that justification. It is that sanctification.

That all occurs in the great miracle at once. And it occurs upon believing the Scripture so that we are born again or regenerated through the living and abiding Word of God. You hear the gospel, you believe the gospel because at that very moment you are being regenerated, being washed, being converted, being redeemed, being ransomed, being justified, being sanctified. It all happens at once, just like it did for Lazarus. And out of the grave we come.

And in the end, all the glory, all the glory goes to God, all of it. And we will spend the rest of our lives here and in eternity giving Him praise. “O the depths,” says Paul, “of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways.”

When you camp on that, folks, if you can’t quite figure this out and how it works in with “whosoever will may call - may come,” just remember, it is unsearchable and unfathomable. And he goes on to say, “Who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?” Don’t think you can fully figure it out, and you certainly can’t give Him your input on it. Just know this, “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to Him *be* the glory forever. Amen.” And that’s enough. Amen.

Let’s pray.

Father, we have covered so much in such a short time. May we all revel in the glory that belongs to You and in the joy of our salvation. We pray for those who have not come to Christ and we plead with them, we beg them to believe, knowing that whoever comes You will receive. It’s not for the sinner to wait and wait and wonder. It’s for the sinner to come and ask. And You work that perfectly with Your glorious, sovereign plan. Do it even in souls tonight, we pray, and those who hear this message in Christ’s name. Amen.

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