

## Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 21, [Nu 9](#) March 5, 2006GG

### Man's Depravity: How Dark is Dark?

#### Man's Depravity: How Dark is Dark?

Dear Friends,

"How dead is dead?" The question smacks of absurdity! And well it should. Yet across the centuries an incredible number of professing Christians have struggled with this question and strangely have embraced faulty theological views that required them to decide that sinful, fallen man isn't really altogether dead (a glaring contradiction of [Eph 2:1](#)). In this week's study we will examine Paul's assessment of the state of sinful man in his unsaved state. Once we grasp the doctrine of human depravity, we reasonably and logically must come to the Biblical concepts of salvation all of God and all of His grace—undeserved and unearned by any degree of human effort—be it mental, physical, or metaphysical. As a child, long before I became significantly interested in spiritual matters, I recall hearing preachers who embraced various ideas of salvation by human cooperation with God make such statements as "God the Father did all that He could do for you; Jesus died on the cross—He did all that He could do for you—the Holy Spirit is doing all that He can do for you. There is NOTHING that you can do." Invariably this impossible scenario was followed by a list of instructions telling the sinner what he must do if he had any expectation or hope of salvation. The absurdity of telling the sinner that he could do nothing, followed by a long list of what he MUST do struck me as foolish, even as a child. The two points are glaring contradictions of each other. Which way is it really? Can the unsaved sinner do something, or can he not? If he can, to tell him that there is nothing that he can do is in error. If he cannot do anything, then telling him all that he must do to be saved is an error. The Biblical truth is that man's sin problem leaves him in a helpless, hopeless situation in which he can do nothing to remedy his state. All that must be done—and is done—to save him from that state is performed by God alone without human assistance or agency. We should be incredibly thankful to God that His grace is amazing! God bless, Joe Holder

#### Man's Depravity: How Dark is Dark?

*"In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. ([Joh 1:4-5](#))* Most of us have at some time visited a large cavern in which the guide took us to the deepest part of the cave, huddled us together, and briefly turned out all surrounding lights. The experience of "total" darkness is a bit frightening. Imagine living in this state, the perspective of a person who is wholly blind. Once you experience total darkness you realize that even the darkest night contains some element of light. Now translate this analogy that Scripture often uses of darkness and light as moral sin and righteousness. It is truly frightening to imagine a person who possesses no moral righteousness whatever. Morally this person is wholly darkness—not a shred of light exists in him. While I agree with the definition of "total depravity" in the last study, and do not believe that unsaved people live constantly in the most extreme and intensely sinful practice possible, I believe that Scripture teaches that unsaved people are in fact just as dark from the perspective of ability to perform unselfish and morally pure acts of goodness as the physical darkness in that cave. Unsaved man's moral bent is animosity toward God, not moral neutrality. I believe that unsaved people have some sense of moral right and wrong; they know what moral wrong is; they simply have no appetite for it beyond doing what is in their best interest within their culture. An unsaved man who is president of a

bank has no moral compunction against stealing money from the bank for his own use, but he realizes that if he does so and is caught, he will lose his career and fortunes, so selfish interest, not innate moral conviction, urges his honesty. For this reason, if not for many others, equally obvious and morally correct in their own right, godly people should live their faith and do everything within their ability to influence their culture for moral integrity. Regardless of the political party under which you vote, as a Christian, you should consistently vote for candidates for office who provide evidence of personal integrity, moral integrity, more than political philosophy. Did Jesus have this principle in mind when He reminded the disciples, "Ye are the light of the world..." ([Mt 5:14](#))? If Christians refuse to exercise their moral convictions in a culture, that culture is doomed to dreadful darkness! We need not be political activists or extreme zealots in order to cast the light of our moral convictions into the dark moral culture in which we live. Paul describes the character and conduct of the unsaved sinful person quite specifically. "What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes. Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin." ([Ro 3:9-20](#)) Let's list each of the character traits of the wicked person from this list. Some of the terms appear as basic moral-rather immoral-actions, and some appear as character traits. Whether a character trait or actual conduct, the list reveals fallen, unsaved humanity's sinful bent. Sometimes these people curb their sinful inclination; sometimes they indulge it. Increasingly in our fallen culture we see the signs of this perversity. It seems that the dominant "right or wrong" decision about any action nowadays is not whether it is right or wrong based on the Law of God, but the relativistic question, "Can I do it and not get caught?" Follow the description that Paul gives us in this passage. Make a note as to which description refers to a trait and which refers to actual conduct. Both features reveal the profound sinfulness of unsaved humanity.

1. There is none righteous, not even one person who is truly righteous when weighed in God's uncompromising moral scales.
2. 3. None understands; this does not mean that sinful people are intellectual imbeciles. It rather means that they do not understand the moral issues of God's spiritual character and Law.
4. 5. Not one seeks after God. If Paul is correct in his assessment in this point, how can an unsaved person respond to preachers' invitations and instructions to "seek after" God so as to gain their salvation? Those who advocate human action, performed by an unsaved person, in order to gain salvation preach a truly "hard" gospel. They demand that the unsaved sinner do what Scripture says they do not do and will not do. This philosophy is the spiritual equivalent to dreaming the "impossible dream"!
6. 7. They are all gone out of the way. Not only do they possess a sinful nature; they practice it.
8. 9. They are together become unprofitable. Here the principle of financial gain appears, and Paul asserts that unsaved sinful people represent a moral loss to God, not a profit in any sense of the idea.
10. 11. None does good, not one. Conduct clearly is the issue here. Forget the errant teachings that we examined a few studies back; in actual practice they refuse to practice moral goodness. Paul further affirms that there are no exceptions to this rule of sinful conduct in fallen humans.

12. 13. Their throat is an open sepulcher. Personal appetite is their major objective ([Php 3:19](#); "...god is their belly....").

14. 15. They speak with intentional deceit and serpentine venom. If sinful and hurtful speech characterizes the wicked, how should righteous people use their speech?

16. 17. Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. This trait identifies a pervasive attitude of dislike toward the people around them. If you want to hear a put-down that denigrates someone, these folks will fill your ears full. Self lies at the heart of their interest. If someone succeeds, they bitterly curse the person's success and claim to be far more deserving of success than the person who gained it. Ask them what is wrong with the world; they will tell you all about it, but God help us if their view of the world became reality!

18. 19. Their feet are swift to shed blood. They may not be universally guilty of literal murder, but watch the flavor of their attitudes and words. Far more murders have occurred with the sinful use of the tongue than with sword and gun.

20. 21. Destruction and misery are in their ways. The person who admires these people is in frightening trouble. Imitate their attitudes and conduct, and you may expect destruction and misery, not success and contentment, much less pleasure. Take a look at the quality of life in the people who are close to them.

22. 23. The way of peace they have not known. They may speak of peace, claim to know about it or to follow it, but look at their conduct. Jude will describe them as "...raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame..." ([Jude 13](#)).

24. 25. There is no fear of God in them. Many years ago the son of a minister came home from a college philosophy class concerned and troubled. His father asked why, and the son told how the professor in class that day had defiantly defamed the Bible and ridiculed any student who dared to believe in God. The father thought briefly and quoted [Ps 14:1](#), "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." He then observed, "Son, it matters little what abbreviations your professor has behind his name. You have a fool for a teacher!"

26. From this list Paul will conclude that no human in his personal merit or conduct is capable of gaining his own right standing with God, for all unsaved people, stand guilty before God, not deserving, partially or otherwise. In the theology of Pelagius, Molina, and Arminius God bestows grace on the graceful and deserving, but Paul and Scripture rejects the idea, for none is graceful and deserving. Divine grace, as described and defined in Scripture, is bestowed mercifully on the ungraceful and the undeserving. Praise God for "Amazing Grace!"

Elder Joe Holder