

## The Need of the Gospel

By Steven Shepard

### I. Introduction

#### A. The Power of the Gospel and the need of the Gospel

This is a message about sin. It is essential to accurately diagnose mankind's basic problem. The Gospel will have power in our lives to the degree that we understand our sin. People need to know why they need a Savior. We must understand the bad news to appreciate the good news. To be transformed by grace, we must understand sin and judgment.

#### B. Sinners or saints?

Some Christians say that since we are now new creatures in Christ, we no longer have an old nature. They ridicule the saying that "we are sinners saved by grace". But the fact is that all of us do sin. We still have what the Bible calls the "flesh". And the nature of the flesh is utterly sinful. It is important to realize that the nature of the flesh and our old nature before we became Christians is the same nature. The Westminster Confession puts it this way, "During life on earth this corrupt nature remains in those who are regenerated, and, although it is pardoned and deadened in Christ, yet it and all its impulses are truly and properly sinful." If that nature were completely gone at salvation, why would we need sanctification? We would already be perfect. So are we sinners saved by grace or are we new creatures in Christ? Both! We are both saints and sinners at the same time. We are saints in that the real person that we are is in Christ. But we are sinners in the sense that we still sin. God wants us to recognize both. We are to have a deep awareness of our sinfulness, yet never receive condemnation. To recognize sin is healthy. Being in denial about our sin causes us to deceive ourselves that we are above sin. How will we overcome sin if we don't recognize the nature of our "flesh"? So we should feel deeply our own sinfulness and at the same time be aware of our position of total freedom and acceptance in Christ. Today we will attempt to address the following questions: first what is the human condition and second what is the value of understanding it?

**Eph 2:1** And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,<sup>2</sup> in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience,<sup>3</sup> among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

## II. Dead in trespasses and sins

### A. What is sin?

Sin: missing the mark, the transgression of God's law, the utter failure to love God and to love others. Trespass: to stumble or fall, to misstep (against known law)

### B. What does it mean to be dead in our sins?

1. When Adam sinned he died spiritually.

**Gen 2:16** And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; <sup>17</sup> but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

**Gen 3:8** And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. <sup>24</sup> So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

He was separated from God's presence and from all that God is, separated from love, from goodness, from purity, from holiness, from righteousness, from life. When that happened, Adam's nature changed. His nature was to live independent of God, to rule over his own life, to live for himself, to exalt himself, and to become his own god. Instead of being God centered, he became centered on himself.

2. This nature was passed on to all of Adam's descendants. All of us are dead spiritually, cut off from God's presence. We have a sin nature which is dead to God.

**Isaiah 53:6** All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

**Rom 5:19** For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners...

**Psalms 51:5** "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity And in sin my mother conceived me."

**Psalms 58:3** "The wicked are estranged from the womb; These who speak lies go astray from birth."

a) Man is spiritually dead. He is a living corpse, dead to God, dead to pleasing God. He is not merely sick. He is dead. He does not and cannot respond spiritually. He cannot respond to God.

- b) The sin nature reaches the core of our being. It is a total corruption that affects every part of us, our will, mind, and heart. Does not mean that man is not as sinful as he could be.

### III. Results of spiritual death

#### A. Spiritual blindness and ignorance

He is in darkness. Being cut off from God's light, truth, and life, he is ignorant of and cannot know spiritual truth. He can know and understand spiritual truth intellectually, but not in such a way that he is attracted to it because he is convinced of it or believes it.

**Eph 5:8** For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

**John 1:5** And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

**Eph 4: 17** This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, <sup>18</sup>having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart;

**1 Cor 2: 14** But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

**2 Cor 4: 3** But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, <sup>4</sup> whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

**Rom 3:11** There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God.

**Ec 9:3** This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing happens to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

The sinful nature is prone to deception. It is easier for carnal man to embrace error, because error is man-centered, than to embrace the truth which is God centered. Man loves darkness more than light; being repelled by and opposed to the truth.

**Proverbs 16:2** All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirits.

**Jer 17:9** The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?

**John 3:19-20** And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed."

## B. Moral Corruption

"In which you once walked according to the course of this world... among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind (Eph 2:2,3)."

1. We walked in the sin nature. We were the walking dead. Every person apart from Christ sins in everything that he does. He never does and cannot do a single work which is pleasing to God. He cannot do anything in keeping with God's law.

**Gen 6:5** Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

**Is 64:6** But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

**Rom 7: 18 a** For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells;

**Rom 3:10** As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup> There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. <sup>12</sup> They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one." <sup>13</sup> "Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit"; "The poison of asps is under their lips" <sup>14</sup> "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." <sup>15</sup> "Their feet are swift to shed blood; <sup>16</sup> Destruction and misery are in their ways; <sup>17</sup> and the way of peace they have not known." <sup>18</sup> "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

He can do good in a relative sense when compared to others, but not compared to God's standard. He can fulfill God's law externally, but not in truth. A good work must conform outwardly to God's law and also done for the right motivation - love for God.

2. We were God's enemies by nature, disobedient to Him, hating the true God.

**Col 1:21** And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works.

**Rom 5:10** For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son...

**Rom 8: 7** Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

3. We were under Satan's power

"according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience (Eph 2:2)."

Everyone was under Satan's control. Satan works in and inspires all sinners with the same Satanic nature. We are willing followers of the devil.

**Isaiah 14:12** "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! <sup>13</sup> For you have said in your heart: ' I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; <sup>14</sup> I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'

**1 John 5:19** We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.

**2 Tim 2:25** in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, <sup>26</sup> and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

### C. Moral inability

Inability is the essence of death. Being a slave to sin, man is inherently weak, having no ability to do good or please God or convert himself. Because man is not righteous and does no good, and is not subject to God's law, and cannot please Him, he therefore has no ability to choose Christ, embrace Christ, or love Christ in his own strength.

**John 15:5** I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

**Rom 8: 7** Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. <sup>8</sup>So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

**John 6: 44** No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

**Matt 7:17** Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

**John 3:6** That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.

**John 6:63** It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh profits nothing.

**Jer 13:23** Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil.

**Rom 5:6** For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

**Acts 5:31** Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

**Heb 12:2** looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith

## D. Guilt

"and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others (Eph. 2:3)."

We are children of wrath by generation or inheritance.

John 3:36b ...he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.

## E. Summary

Human beings are described in Scripture as: deceitful, desperately wicked, corrupt, proud, unthankful, lovers of self, living in lust, unloving, slanderous, despisers of good, ignorant, blind, poor, naked, miserable, living in vanity, unclean, under the power of Satan, dead in trespasses and sins, and enemies of God. This describes both our sinful natures before conversion and the nature of the "flesh" after conversion.

## IV. Illustration of spiritual death - Lazarus

(Some argue that we are not completely dead in our sins because Christ commands us to come to Him, and He would not give us a command if we were not able to obey it. But God asks us to obey many commands that we are not able to do by our own powers. We are to be perfect, love God with all our hearts, and love others as ourselves. Lazarus is called forth from the tomb. He could not obey Christ's command; he was dead. It was only after God made him alive that he could then come.)

John 11:17, 38-44 So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Remove the stone." Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?" So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. <sup>42</sup> "I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me." When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

## V. Benefits of acknowledging our sin nature

### A. Understanding our total depravity is a great gift revealed only by the Holy Spirit.

1. It produces a genuine humility. We have nothing to boast about.

Eph 2:4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace

you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,<sup>7</sup> that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

**Gal 6:3** For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

2. It enables us to have a forbearing spirit. Knowing that we are part of the same fallen human race, and knowing we are saved by grace along, we are more compassionate and more teachable. We are willing to forgive others knowing that God of has forgiven us of even greater evils.

3. It delivers us from being man centered and enables us to be Christ centered. We understand that the process of salvation is wholly of God from beginning to end. Jesus Christ gets all the glory. We are also delivered from the fear and praise of man.

4. It enables us to walk by grace and in the Spirit Because we know that our salvation and our sanctification are entirely through the Holy Spirit's working, we will cease from own works and trust in the Holy Spirit..

**Philippians 3:3** "we...put no confidence in the flesh."

5. It helps us to gain victory over sin. Sanctification.

6. We can preach Gospel with greater power. We will depend on Holy Spirit rather than self to bring about conversion.

## VI. Man needs a Savior

Our conclusion is that every person needs a Savior. Without a Savior we are dead in our sins, separated from God, and under the dominion of Satan. Without a Savior we are under God's judgment. We are by nature children of wrath and deserving of eternal punishment. We are utterly without hope. But, by the pure mercy of God there is such a Savior. The apostle Paul says in 1 Tim 1:15, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." The Gospel is the message of Good News through which by believing man is united to the Savior, Jesus Christ. Through believing in the Gospel we are set free from sin; from the guilt of sin, from the punishment of sin, and from the power of sin. Through believing the Gospel we are also delivered from the dominion of Satan, and set free from death itself. As we understand and embrace the Gospel of Christ, we will be empowered to live a new life. We will say with the apostle Paul, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation."

## Related verses and notes:

**John 8:44** You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.

Are we complacent with the level of sanctification we have reached? If so we have a complacent attitude about sin. Are we living in denial about sin, escaping and not dealing with it? Are we taking small steps of disobedience which lead to bigger ones? Do we compare ourselves with others, saying I'm not so bad? These attitudes displease and dishonor God.

"Man fell into a state of sin by his disobedience and so completely lost his ability to will any spiritual good involving salvation. Consequently fallen man is by nature completely opposed to spiritual good, is dead in sin, and is unable by his own strength either to convert himself or to prepare himself for conversion." Westminster 9:3

Without clearly understanding why we need this Gospel, all our Christian activities can easily be misdirected. Otherwise, why would it matter if Jesus is our Savior – unless we need saving; as our Redeemer – unless we need to be bought back; as our Mediator – unless we need to be represented in a dispute; as our Lord – unless we need to be ruled; or as our Great Physician – unless we need healing?

A clearer understanding of my sin nature has transformed my life by giving me greater victory, peace, and love for Jesus Christ.

We have so fallen that even beasts have become our teachers – God tells us to look to the ant, the birds, and the oxen, to learn wisdom. We do not know our place in this world nor who our Master is, and unlike most creatures, we fight and devour one another. Though social beings, our societies are held together by strict laws strongly enforced because we are unrighteous creatures. Even criminals, who live outside of society's laws, have laws among themselves. The idea of total lawlessness terrifies all of us, because even unbelievers sense that mankind, when unrestrained, is a demonic monster. Because our minds are darkened, we are fools, lacking wisdom, and are insane all our lives.

In the flesh we are all corrupt, rebellious, fools, and without excuse before Our Maker, the Holy and Righteous God. We are all under His wrath, which is His holy judgment against sin. We stand before Him condemned, clothing our nakedness with only the filthy rags of our own righteousness. There is no room for boasting, for we are all totally corrupt and without excuse. The whole earth will be brought to silence before His presence.

Yes, I am a new creature in Christ, but I also have the old nature present within me that must be daily overcome by the power I have in Christ Jesus. I am as dependent on Him for my sanctification as I am for my salvation. Without Christ, I can do nothing. He delivers me from this old nature. It is also a great joy to know that God chose to save me even when I was His enemy, when I would not have chosen to save myself, and when I did nothing to deserve it.

What loving grace! He saved me in all my corruption and has forgiven every sin I have; past, present, and future. He has made me without spot or wrinkle in His sight because I am covered with the righteousness of Christ. I must still live with ever new revelations of sins in my life that must be dealt with (sanctification). But God reveals them to me for my correction, not for my condemnation. By faith I know that my favor with God is dependent on Him, not on me. I am not trying to earn His favor any more because I already have it. My desire now is to know Him more fully, and to comprehend His love for me more deeply. Because I have lost all confidence in my flesh, I am totally dependent on Christ for everything. It is He who rightfully receives any glory from my life.

**Isaiah 59:2** But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God. And your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He does not hear.

**Luke 5:31** Jesus answered and said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. <sup>32</sup> I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

**Col 2:10** And you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.