

“THE WEIGHTINESS OF SIN” PT. 2
OR, MAN’S REBELLION AGAINST GOD
ROMANS 3:10-12

In 1990, our country was embroiled in a nationwide debate over a decision that had been made in Washington D.C. President George (H. W.) Bush made a decision that not everyone appreciated, but it was one that he had been contemplating for many years. He banned broccoli from being served on Air Force One. And the nation dove into debate. A group of broccoli growers sent 10 tons of the vegetable to Washington for free (as if 10 tons of the stuff would make him like it).

Bush entrenched himself against the stuff: “I do not like broccoli and I haven’t liked it since I was a little kid and my mother made me eat it. And I’m president of the United States and I’m not going to eat any more broccoli. Now look, this is the last statement I’m going to have on broccoli. There are truckloads of broccoli at this very minute descending on Washington. My family is divided. For the broccoli vote out there: Barbara loves broccoli. She has tried to make me eat it. She eats it all the time herself. So she can go out and meet the caravan of broccoli that’s coming in.”

Wouldn’t it be nice to say to everything we dislike, “I don’t like it; I’m done with it; I won’t deal with it ever again?” And that is the very thing that sinners do in their attempt to rid themselves of God and His influence and authority over their lives. Just like Bush and his broccoli, they say, “I am a man and I am sovereign and I am supreme, and I don’t have to concern myself with God any longer.” And they walk away from Him. And that is not just some men, as Paul notes in Romans 3:10-12, that is *all* humankind.

Last week we saw in v. 9 that man is depraved in everything that he does; this week the emphasis of the passage is that man’s depravity and sin is focused first of all against God. He hates God, wants nothing to do with God, and is rebellious against God in every way.

Paul’s theme in these verses is that —

THE FOOLISHNESS OF DEPRAVITY IS THAT IT IS REBELLION AGAINST GOD.

In these verses, Paul makes six observations about man’s rebellion against God:

1. **Man Does Not Have God’s RIGHTEOUSNESS (v. 10)**
2. **Man Does Not KNOW God (v. 11a)**
3. **Man Does Not DESIRE God (v. 11b)**
4. **Man Does Not FOLLOW God (v. 12a)**
5. **Man’s Life is USELESS (v. 12b)**
6. **Man Does Not Do ANYTHING Good (v. 12c)**

- You will notice that verses 10-18 are in small capital letters; that means that they are quotations from the OT; and Paul is quoting in those verses from six different OT passages, demonstrating the consistency of the teaching of depravity in the OT.
- Paul also begins by saying, **as it is written**, an indicator that he's about to quote from the OT.
 - ✓ But the verb tense he uses also means there is a continuity and continuation of what is written — he's not just quoting an archaic idea, but he is quoting something that still has power and authority.
 - ✓ And notice also the repetition of the words **none**, **no one**, and **all** throughout this passage. Paul is intending every reader to feel the weight of the universality of depravity. All men are **under sin**. The Jews and the Gentiles are both condemned in the same way as sinners. There's no difference.
 - ✓ As one writer has suggested, "If you ask, 'who are the enemies of God?' look in the mirror!"
- In Romans, Paul quotes more from the OT than any other NT — he uses more than 60 direct quotations and even more allusions. That is his way of saying to the Roman church (a church he'd never visited and did not know), "This is not *my* truth — this is and always has been the truth of God."
- What is significant to note here is that the doctrine of depravity didn't begin with the Reformation; this wasn't Calvin's idea, and it wasn't even Paul's idea in this one letter. The depravity of man is taught throughout the Scriptures.
- Now, while Paul uses a variety of passages (primarily from the Psalms) in vv. 10-18, vv. 10-12 are taken exclusively from Psalm 14. So as we talk about this passage, it will be good to have a place mark there.
- We really don't know anything about the background of that Psalm. It is attributed to David and it seems likely that he was indeed the writer.
- The lack of a specific background is also significant; it is a way of emphasizing that all men are depraved and haters of God; it was not just those about whom David wrote in that particular situation that were haters of God. This is the condition of all people everywhere at every time.
- What then does Paul say about mankind and its rebellion against God? His first observation is that —

1. Man Does Not Have God's **RIGHTEOUSNESS** (v. 10)

- Paul's first statement is that **there is none righteous**. And to emphasize his assertion, **not even one**.
 - ✓ Paul hasn't spoken much about righteousness in Romans yet (this is only the 6th time he's used the word), but this will become a dominant theme in the book, appearing more than 60x.
 - ✓ When Paul uses the word **righteousness**, he's not speaking primarily of someone's specific acts or deeds or habits; he is talking about his nature and character. Is a man inwardly righteous — pure and in accord with God's commands and the intents of God's commands in every way? Paul's point in this passage is to say, "No. Even when you see people doing 'good' things, they aren't inwardly righteous." (More on that as we reach the end of the passage.)
 - ✓ "A person who is not as good as God is not acceptable to God." [MacArthur]

- ✓ If you look at Psalm 14, you will notice that Paul does change one word — Ps. 14:1 says ***there is not one who does good***; Paul substitutes the word ***righteousness***. This is often the way NT writers quote the OT, they quote the essence of the OT passage and often expand the implications of the passage. And Paul substituting the word ***righteous*** doesn't change the meaning of Ps. 14, but it does provide a foundation for the emphasis of what he will say in the coming chapter (vv. 19-20ff).
- ✓ Paul's point is that there is no one who has his own inherent righteousness. Men can be righteous, but it is only when the work of Christ's righteousness is imputed to them (2 Cor. 5:21).
- Notice also how David characterizes these people who reject God and His righteousness: they are ***fools***.
 - ✓ The Bible does not use the term ***fool*** to refer to someone who is untaught or unwise. This term (the commonly used term for ***fool*** is a synonym for someone who is wicked. The fool is the one who asserts his independence and self-sufficiency and revels in his sin (Ps. 53:1; Is. 32:5-7).
 - ✓ The fool is the one who disregards God (Ps. 14:1a) — he shuts himself off from God and rejects God.
 - ✓ These are not people who fail to achieve God's righteousness and are broken-hearted about their sin and failure. They *love* their sin and they *hate* God and His righteousness.
 - ✓ And this term ***fool*** is obviously in Paul's mind as he quotes Ps. 14 in Romans 3. The natural man, the depraved man is the one who is unrighteousness and loves that unrighteousness and wants nothing from God and does not want to change. He is defiant against God and His righteousness.
 - ✓ This is the natural man and this is what every one of us was before Christ intervened to save us.

2. Man Does Not **KNOW** God (v. 11a)

- Paul says, ***there is none who understands***.
 - ✓ The psalmist actually says, "The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God" (Ps. 14:2). The psalmist states the principle almost as a question — are there any? (the implication is, "no"). Paul states it dogmatically: "there are none."
 - ✓ The word ***understand*** means "to grasp, comprehend."
 - ✓ Paul is referring to the fact that in ideas concerning the nature and character of God and the way God and man can have fellowship, and that nature of true righteousness, there is no one in the flesh who has any understanding of any of those truths. The natural man is fully ignorant in matters relating to God and man's unrighteousness. This, in part, is why the Spirit must come to enlighten men concerning righteousness (Jn. 16:10) — man has no inherent understanding of the nature of God's righteousness, the righteousness God demands of men, and men's utter lack of righteousness apart from Christ. He just "doesn't get it."

- The tragedy is that man has no excuse. God has revealed Himself in nature (1:20). They can see the evidence of God all around them. And they even have the revelation of God within them in their consciences (2:15). But they still do not understand. They cannot grasp God and His righteousness.
 - ✓ This is what theologians call the “noetic effect” (not Noah’s effect!) of sin. The mind doesn’t work.
 - ✓ We’ve talked about this previously; this is Eph. 4:17-19; Col. 2:8. And the reason they don’t think rightly (from the human perspective) is that they have embraced and desired their sin more than anything else. MacArthur says it this way: “Men are not sinful and hardened against God because they are ignorant of Him, but, to the contrary, they are ignorant of Him because of their sinful and hardened disposition.” He is exactly right. Note Eph. 4:19b — they’ve given themselves over...
 - ✓ This is why unbelievers deny 6-day creation and affirm saving whales and killing babies. This is why it is obvious to us why homosexual marriage is not marriage and the world does not. This is why we can understand why a man saying, “I am a woman,” doesn’t make him a woman and the world doesn’t. And this is why education will never change our culture. You can’t educate mental invalids. You can’t expect someone with a 65 IQ to become a cardiologist — “he just needs to take more classes” won’t work. He is incapable of comprehending. And that is exactly the situation in the unbeliever. He is a mental invalid. He may have a doctorate from Harvard or Oxford, she may be the president of a multi-national, multi-billion dollar company, but they both have no ability to comprehend the truth of God without salvation. Cf. **1 Cor. 2:14-16**.
 - ✓ And that means we can’t expect immoral, uncomprehending people to make moral choices and lead us righteously (whether that leadership is in a family, school, business, or political realm) — no matter how “smart” they are. They are utterly incapable of thinking and knowing the truth.
 - ✓ The joy for the believer is that Christ redeems our minds and enables us to understand (Rom. 15:21)
- And man’s inability to think righteously isn’t even the worst of the depraved man’s problems; Paul’s third observation is that he doesn’t even *desire* God.

3. Man Does Not DESIRE God (v. 11b)

- Specifically, *there is none who seeks for God*.
 - ✓ There is no one who habitually or continually looks for God.
 - ✓ One commentator simply said, “Sinners do not look for God; their interest is elsewhere.”
 - ✓ Now it is true that some people do seek God; but the only one who seeks for God is the one whom God has awakened with that desire. Paul’s point is that no man naturally seeks for God; all men are naturally enemies of God (5:8, 10) until God’s Spirit blows in their hearts to compel them to come to God (Jn. 3:1ff; 6:37ff).
 - ✓ Men look for sin and they desire sin. But they do not naturally look for God. That’s why we need a God who looks for us (Mt. 18:12; Jn. 10:4, 16).

- It may be that people are seeking relief from their circumstances or they may be seeking happiness (joy) or they may be seeking comfort or peace or some form of change in their lives (circumstances or sinful practices) and in that sense they are “looking for God.”
 - ✓ Yet the God, as revealed in Scripture, who demands repentance and obedience, they do not want.
 - ✓ They do not want to acknowledge their sinfulness, their need for a Savior, their need for submission to God. And in that sense, none seeks for God. They want help; they do not want God’s help.
 - ✓ They want a kind of help that enables them to keep the façade of self-sufficiency; they do not want the kind of help that makes them acknowledge their total inadequacy and inability.
- What about all the religions in the world? Don’t all the religions demonstrate a “God-hunger?” No, just the opposite. The fact that there are so many religions and that Christianity is still such a minority in the world demonstrates that people will embrace anything rather than embracing God. All other religions are a means to avoiding man’s sinful condition and his need for Christ. They are trying to manufacture a god that is pleasing to them (Jer. 10:6-16; **Is. 44:12-20**; 40:18-20).
- And this has implications for the way churches do ministry, because for the better part of a generation there has been a movement of churches built around a “seeker” model design — church for unbelievers — people are looking for God and they will come and be saved. It’s a model that is based on an unbiblical principle. You don’t make a church for seekers because there are no seekers. No one wants God. They all want self-rule and self-autonomy. “There are no unconverted seekers.” [Sproul]
 - ✓ What about seeker churches that are full of people? What does the text say? ***None seeks for God.***
 - ✓ That means there are two possibilities:
 - God has awakened some so that they have been saved and are now seeking God to please Him.
 - The church has had to compromise the message they are preaching to such a great extent that it becomes palatable to people who don’t want anything to do with God. So the churches become an agent to keeping people *away* from God; they reinforce the sinners’ resistance to God.
 - ✓ Man does not naturally desire God; he is not looking for Him and does not want Him. That should shape the way we do church ministry and share the gospel and think about ourselves.

4. Man Does Not FOLLOW God (v. 12a)

- Because man does not know God or seek God, then it also is logical that ***all have turned aside.***
 - ✓ The word ***turn aside*** refers to a willful departure from God. Like the sinner who intentionally misses the mark of God’s standard, so this person intentionally goes away from God’s truth.
 - ✓ This is the same truth as what Paul said when he introduced this section in 1:18-19.
 - ✓ Unbelievers are not unbelievers by accident. They do not believe because they do not want to follow God. They have deliberately turned away from Him.

- ✓ They have considered God, observed His work in creation, evaluated His work in their consciences, and have decided that He is unworthy to follow. They do not want Him.
- ✓ This is the same principle as Is. 53:6 — “All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way...” Man has chosen to reject God. The sinner wants to go his own way.
- The tragedy of their rejection is that God is the only way to live.
 - ✓ Jesus has said that He alone is the only way to God and life (Jn. 14:6).
 - ✓ Other NT writers have proclaimed that Christ is the only way to salvation (Acts 16:17).
 - ✓ But the natural man still chooses the evil way (Prov. 8:13) and his way seems right, but it leads only to death (Prov. 14:12).
 - ✓ The natural man is not condemned because he didn’t know about Christ; he is condemned because God has revealed Himself to him and the sinner has rejected God, preferring his own pathway.

5. Man’s Life is USELESS (v. 12b)

- These last two phrases are something of an indictment and verdict of man’s rebellion against God; if one continues to rebel against God, what will the end of his life be?
- They have become **useless**. The word refers to something rotten; it was used culturally of sour milk.
 - ✓ In other words, because of their sin nature, everything they do is tainted with that sin. Nothing they do has any value or significance and they themselves are useless, just like a jug of sour milk.
 - ✓ But can’t you make yogurt or sour cream from sour milk? Perhaps. But this isn’t just sour; it’s rancid. It’s thick and sludgy and growing all manner of colored molds and spores. Would you like to make and eat cheese from that? Rancid milk does not make delectable cheese. And likewise, an unredeemed sinner can produce nothing of value that can please the Lord.
 - ✓ All his life and activity are rotten and worthless. Just as nothing worthwhile comes from rancid milk, so nothing worthwhile comes from a depraved life of sin.
- And notice that Paul says **together they have become useless**.
 - ✓ In other words, this is the condition of all men; this is a “group” project. They are in it together. No man is excepted. The whole mass of mankind is together in this useless state.
 - ✓ This isn’t the idea of “vanity” that Ecclesiastes speaks of — the sense that there is nothing worth doing in life — it’s all just empty, vain, and worthless.
 - ✓ No, Paul is speaking of something far more significant; there is nothing of inherent or eternal value that the sinner does. Everything he does is destined to be burned up and destroyed by God; it is similar to what Paul speaks of in Phil. 3:7-8 — they are loss and rubbish. They will not merit anything in God’s court.
 - ✓ This is simply another way of saying that man cannot please God without Christ.

6. Man Does Not Do ANYTHING Good (v. 12c)

- This is the second indictment of man's rebellion against God — ***there is none who does good.***
 - ✓ Let that statement settle on you for a moment. There is ***none*** — not a single person — who does good.
 - ✓ They do nothing beneficial. And they do nothing righteous. Nothing.
 - ✓ And notice that Paul then emphasizes it — ***There is not even one.*** So two times he says, “no one does good.” No one. Look at the world and all the activity of all the believers and nothing they do is good.
- Now that doesn't seem right, does it? There appear to be reasonable people doing good things.
 - ✓ There are judges who uphold the law and make good decisions, and policy officers and firefighters who work with nobility. There are bankers who don't steal and do treat customers fairly. There are plumbers who work with integrity. There are mothers who are gracious and gentle with their children. There are automobile salesmen who speak the truth. There are customers who tip generously in restaurants. So what does Paul mean when he so emphatically says, there is no one who does good?
 - ✓ Paul doesn't mean, “there are no people anywhere who uphold the moral law of God.” Of course there are. There are law-abiding citizens and there are people who live generously and there are even people who uphold most of the standards of God — to our eyes they appear good.
 - ✓ But what Paul means is that in their heart, they are not good. At the level of their motives and desires, they are not good. And at the level of their desire to do what they do to please God they are total failures. A friend asked me in a Bible study years ago, “Do you think that anyone ever does anything fully for the glory of God?” It took me only a brief moment to answer, “No. Virtually everything we do is tainted by our humanity and flesh; we always have mixed motives.”
 - ✓ Now it is clear that the believer can live to please God (2 Cor. 5:9; Eph. 5:8-10). But there is absolutely nothing that an unbeliever can do that ever pleases God because everything he ever does is always done from the flesh and not from the Spirit. So, even his acts of morality and goodness are sin — because they are done from the flesh and for the desire to please the flesh.
 - ✓ Everything the unbeliever does is condemnation to him; he can do never do anything that will please God. Nothing. Ever. It's all sin. And it's all producing condemnation in his life.

CONCLUSION: The natural man is depraved — every aspect of his life is tainted by sin. And in his wicked and foolish rebellion he sins, and the epitome of that sin is his complete rebellion against God.

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| ✓ Man Does Not Have God's Righteousness | ✓ Man Does Not Follow God |
| ✓ Man Does Not Know God | ✓ Man Does Not Have any Worth |
| ✓ Man Does Not Desire God | ✓ Man Does Not Do Anything Good |

So man is in a dreadful place. Is there hope? There is. Look back at Ps. 14 that Paul's been quoting.

In verses 4-6 David laments the wasteful wickedness of these depraved sinners (v. 4). And there is great dread coming to them as God protects his people and prepares to condemn the unrighteous (vv. 5-6).

And then notice verse 7 — David laments with what we can imagine to be a shout, “Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion!” Zion is a reference to Judah (the southern tribe) or even of Jerusalem. So David is saying, “Israel needs saving because of this depravity! If only someone from Jerusalem would come and save these people!”

And He did, didn’t He? Yes, He did. The Savior, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, has come. And He came not only for the nation of Israel, but He has come so that all men might have freedom from their sin and rebellion and be adopted into the family of God. That will also be Paul’s message in chapters 3:21 – 5:21. Salvation has come in Christ and freed the sinner from his rebellion and animosity against God (5:8-10).

Oh friend, if you are ensnared by your sins and you want to stop rebelling against God and you want to be liberated from your sin and you want to live for God and Christ, then come to God. Ask Him for forgiveness. Ask Him for freedom from sin. Ask Him to save you from His wrath. Ask Him to adopt you into His family. Ask Him to empower you to live for Him. And He will wonderfully save and redeem you and give you freedom from all this sin and rebellion.

You do not have to be a rebel all your days. Yes, you were born a rebel, and all you have ever done without Christ is rebellion against God, but He can and will save you from that rebellion.

BENEDICTION: Rom. 11:33-36