

The Road Most Traveled

The Depravity of Man . . . The Deliverance of God – Part VII

Romans 3:15-18

Introduction – The Depravity of Mankind

Paul has been describing the depravity of mankind. Depravity is a word that simply means, wretched, ruined, sinful, depraved, degenerate. Webster defines it as “wicked perversion.”¹

When we say that mankind is totally depraved, we do not mean that man is incapable of doing good things. We simply mean that mankind is sinful and selfish in the very core of his being.

Mankind’s Evil Condition – Romans 3:10-12

The evil condition of the heart of fallen, sinful mankind is exposed, as Paul writes, in Romans, chapter 3, verses 10 through 12a,

There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless . . .

The Greek word for “useless” is the word for “spoiled milk”.

Mankind’s Evil Communication – Romans 3:13-14

Then, in the next couple of verses, Paul shifts from describing mankind’s evil condition to describing mankind’s evil communication. Look at Romans, chapter 3, verses 13 and 14.

Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of

asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness

Mankind’s Evil Chaos – Romans 3:15-18

Now, finally, Paul concludes his inspired, unflattering, truthful description of mankind by focusing on the evil chaos brought about by sinful humanity.

The purpose of this awful, yet true description of the wretchedness and sinfulness of mankind is to reveal the absolute inability of mankind to save himself; the inability of mankind to somehow do enough good things to outweigh the bad things. Paul is revealing the need for total and entire redemption.

It is not so much that we have done a number of sinful things, but that we are sinful creatures. It is not so much that we have had a few evil thoughts, but that we are evil in our hearts – which is why our hands and feet do evil things.

Most importantly, this description was given to us from God to show why a Savior would, in fact, need to come to pay the incredible penalty of our sinfulness. There is no way we could ever pay for the immensity of our sin.

According to the press report that I read, Matthew Boya from Bonei, West Africa, was innocently practicing his golf swing in a pasture adjacent to the Bonei Air Force Base. With one errant shot, he destroyed the country’s entire air force. Here is how it happened.

He was hitting golf balls in an adjacent field, when one of his shots sliced toward the runway. The

ball hit a bird and killed it. The bird then, dropped onto the windshield of a small plane, which was speeding down the runway, preparing to lift off. The pilot was so shocked by the bird hitting his windshield that he momentarily lost control of his plane. He plowed into four shiny mirage jets, and thus destroyed the entire air force of this small country in West Africa.

Officials caught Matthew and jailed him for hooliganism, refusing to give him a trial. In fact, they are demanding that Matthew Boya reimburse his country, since they do not have the money in their treasury. The cost is forty million dollars. Since Matthew makes 275 dollars a year, the report estimated it will take him 145,000 years to pay it back.

There is no way! And, my friend, there is no way you could ever pay the penalty of all your sin before a just and holy God.

That is Paul's point, in verse 19b,

. . .that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God

Paul is driving us to that very point.

Like a prosecuting attorney, the apostle Paul:

- in verses 10 through 12, has described who we are;
- in verses 13 through 14, has described what we say;
- in verses 15 through 18, will deliver the final evidence of mankind's sin, by describing what we do.

Mankind's Evil Chaos

Verses 15 through 18 are four very short, powerful, inspired phrases that pull off the mask and reveal the human heart for what it truly is – totally depraved.

Now again, when we say that we are totally depraved, that does not mean that we are all acting as badly as we could be; it does mean that we are capable of being as bad as we want to be – and that is because we are infected with sin in every area of our being.

An unbelieving psychologist wrote, "All the old primitive sins are not dead – they are just crouching in the dark corners of our modern hearts – still there, and still as ghastly as ever."ⁱⁱ

Well, Paul is about to describe the human race – some openly corrupted, and all inwardly corrupted

with sin that crouches in the corners of hearts and waits for an excuse to act.

Mankind is callously unconcerned

1. First, in his inspired description of the evil chaos of mankind, Paul declares that mankind is callously unconcerned.

He writes in verse 15,

Their feet are swift to shed blood

Whether we want to admit it or not, we live in a world of violence. In 1900, there was only one murder for every 100,000 people in the United States. By 1974, it had risen to one for every 10,000 people.

The FBI has stated that the likelihood of you or I experiencing a violent crime has increased 50% in just the last decade alone.

Violence has become a way of life. By the time the average child reaches twelve years of age, he has watched more than 13,000 hours of television. By the way, that is twice as much time as he has spent in school. And in those hours of television, he has seen 14,000 violent deaths and has watched 100,000 violent crimes – one every eight minutes.

This school year, there will be more than 70,000 assaults against teachers in our public school system.

Our culture of violence has led one college president to describe ours as a "culture of death". He editorialized in *World Magazine*, with the following illustration.

On June 6, 1997, Melissa Drexler killed her baby. The Aberdeen, New Jersey, teenager was at her high school prom when the pains of her contractions became strong enough to force her into the ladies bathroom, where she gave birth to a son. She took her child, wrapped him in a garbage bag, and tossed him aside. Returning to the dance floor, she picked up where she left off. Her case is not unique; the number of murders of children less than one week old has increased by 92% over the past 25 years.ⁱⁱⁱ

And why not? The article went on to say, even the *Washington Post* seemed to prophecy that "the acceptance of abortion would lead to a profound moral shift in our culture, a great devaluing of human life."^{iv}

This profound shift is now in full swing. Today, the value of life has been turned upside down. Now,

it is illegal to crush the egg of an eagle, but legal to kill an unborn child in the womb.

But even abortion is a symptom and not the cause of this devaluing of human life. The devaluation of human life has been taught for several generations, as the biblical view of creation has been replaced with the theory of evolution.

The resulting loss of value to human life was recently articulated by James Rachels, an unbelieving professor of philosophy at the University of Alabama. He claimed that because of the theory of Darwin, “we can no longer think of ourselves as occupying a special place in [the world] – instead, we must realize that we are working blindly and without purpose, products of the same evolutionary forces that shaped the rest of the animal kingdom.”^v

So, that logic flows to its bitter and violent end. Since animals kill their offspring, so can humans. Since animals can mate indiscriminately, so can humans. Since animals kill one another for a variety of reasons, so can humans.

Several generations now have officially and resolutely ignored creation as God’s handiwork. They have ignored that only the human race was created in His image; breathed into by God Himself with immortal soul (Genesis 1:27); that man is more valuable than an animal (Matthew 10:31); that the worth of the human soul is greater than all the physical world (Mark 8:36). Ultimately, because these truths have been abandoned, we now have a culture of violence we could never imagine.

Pick up an advertisement for video games and read. The ad for a video game called *Mortal Kombat* says, “Have you ever killed anyone with a chain saw? Would you like to?”

When high school students in Jonesboro, Ark., were told of the shootings at the nearby middle school, some of them laughed.^{vi}

Pick up the latest newspaper – which tells the story of our growing culture of violence and death.

A recent edition of the *News and Observer* revealed, once again, the depth of the human heart in its murderous capabilities. The headline read, “Nurse’s Aide Faces Murder Charge.”

The story told of a nurse’s aide who hit a homeless man, named Gregory Biggs, aged 37, with her car. She continued driving home with him stuck, headfirst, in her broken windshield, and ignored his cries for help as he bled to death in her garage.

According to the report, Ms. Mallard said she had been taking the drug ecstasy and drinking the night the victim was hit. The impact hurled him headfirst through the windshield, leaving his broken legs protruding onto the hood. With Biggs still lodged in the windshield, Mallard panicked and drove a few miles to her Fort Worth home, parked her car in the garage and lowered the door, as Biggs pleaded for help.

According to the arrest warrant, Mallard waited a couple of days for Biggs to die before two friends removed his body and dumped it. Ms. Mallard said she planned to burn the car and purchase a new one after she received her income tax refund.

Cheri Orr, who lives across the street from Mallard and occasionally visited her, described Mallard as a nice woman who kept her lawn neatly manicured and could often be seen dressed for church on Sundays.

The prosecuting attorney said, “I’m going to have to come up with a new word. Indifferent isn’t enough. Cruel isn’t enough. Heartless? Inhumane? Maybe we’ve just redefined inhumanity here.”

And who could imagine this? The article went on to say that, “Several times, Ms. Mallard went out into the garage and apologized to the man, but did nothing to help.”

Why? Because she would be found out as a drug user? Because she would be found guilty of a hit and run? Because she would face criminal charges? Because it could tarnish her career? Because she might lose her job? Some of that, perhaps all of it, turned a nurse who went to church on Sundays, into a physical murderer.^{vii}

Other forms of hostility and aggression, such as child abuse and spousal abuse, are household terms in today’s violent world. Victims are beaten, robbed, raped and then, murdered for no apparent reason other than sheer brutality.^{viii}

Ladies and gentlemen, the apostle Paul says that the capability of murder resides within the human heart. From the very first crime recorded in scripture – which was the murder of a man by his own brother – to the most recent murder, the capability is within us all. Change the circumstances; alter the conditions; apply enough pressure; add enough selfish motive and pride, and maybe a little fear, and the world will only record one more episode in the murderous ability of the human heart.

And what is the ultimate reason for man’s violence against one another? God has been

abandoned and ignored! Humanity is answerable to no one! So, Dostoyevsky was right, when he wrote, “If God does not exist, everything is permissible.”

It is true. Everything is permissible without a living, holy, righteous God, before whom men believe they are accountable.

Mankind is destructively unharmonious

2. The second thing Paul reveals about mankind, is that mankind is destructively unharmonious.

Verse 16 records,

Destruction and misery are in their paths.

“Destruction” is what you do to others. “Misery” is what you bring on yourself.

Paul is referring to the wreckage of human relationships; the debris of emotion; the despair brought about by sin.

The word “destruction” is the rarely used Greek word “suntrimma,” which means, “to crush or grind up”. It is used in the Greek Old Testament in Leviticus, chapter 21, verse 19, for a fractured foot and a broken hand.^{ix}

In other words, Paul is saying that man is a destroyer; that he crushes things and breaks things. He breaks his word; he breaks his vows; he destroys his relationships; he fractures hearts.

Man grows tired of his toys; he wearies of his responsibilities and his commitments. The thrill of sin needs new adventure, new experimentation. His pride and selfishness needs new avenues to satiate his appetite for sin.

In a recent *Wall Street Journal* article, the news of the past Valentine’s Day in England was that a record number of valentines were sent. The trouble is, that was not a good sign for marriages. The survey was conducted by the British, and they found that 13% of married men and 11% of married women planned on sending what they dubbed, an “unfaithful Valentine,” to someone other than their spouse. For people living in London alone, “unfaithful Valentines” jumped to nearly one card out of every seven cards mailed.^x

Anywhere in the world, if you listen carefully enough, the sound of grinding, crushing, fracturing, breaking lives can be heard – lives broken, fractured, and crushed by sinful mankind.

An individual came to see me recently, who had not attended our church for many years. I listened to

his story. He had been through a series of life changing tragedies; including bankruptcy, divorce, and the inability to enjoy his children. On two occasions, he had suffered a complete emotional breakdown. At one point, after having been on nearly every possible medication, he asked his doctor, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, “Do you have a pill for a broken heart?”

What fractured lives we live. What devastating sorrow is brought about by sin.

An old preacher, named R. G. Lee, once wrote these words,

Sin has ruined men, ruined women, even ruined angels. Sin has occasioned every tear of sorrow, every sigh of grief, every pang of agony. Sin has withered everything that is fair, blasted everything that is good, made bitter everything that is sweet. Sin has dug every grave, built every coffin, woven every shroud and enlarged every cemetery that that the world has ever seen.^{xi}

What sorrow.

Paul also says, in verse 16, that mankind is not only on the well worn path of destruction, but he adds,

... and misery are in their paths.

In other words, they get their way, but it only brings misery. They break their word; they violate that covenant and they are miserable. They not only cause misery to others, but they are personally rewarded with misery.

I love the way James Dobson put it when he wrote, “The grass on the other side of the fence is really not any greener – in fact, it’s often not even edible.”^{xii}

Isn’t that true?

Oh, what destruction and misery lie along the path of humanity.

Mankind is inevitably unfulfilled

3. So, Paul has described mankind as callously unconcerned, destructively unharmonious, and, in the next verse, the description that immediately follows comes as no surprise, that he is inevitably unfulfilled.

Look at verse 17.

And the path of peace have they not known.

In other words, you cannot walk on the path of violence, destruction, and misery and expect to find satisfaction and peace. They are not on this path.

The path the world is taking that leads away from God, is the broad path. It is the road most traveled. Jesus said, in Matthew, chapter 7, verse 13b,

... the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it.

He is saying that many find this broad path and that the broad path leads to destruction. The road of unbelief, the road of sin leads to final judgment.

There are three kinds of peace that will never be found on the path of sin and unbelief:

- Peace with God!
- Peace with others!
- Peace with yourself!

Peace with God is not on that path, because peace with God comes through Jesus Christ. Paul wrote in Romans, chapter 5, verse 1,

Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

He also wrote to the Colossians, as recorded in chapter 1, verse 20, of that book, that peace with God comes by,

... having made peace through the blood of [Christ's] cross ...

Peace with others, including yourself, Paul wrote to the Galatians, in chapter 5, verse 22a, comes from submitting your life to the Holy Spirit, Who then develops in your heart and life,

... the fruit of the Spirit [which] is love, joy and peace ...

Peace comes from a personal relationship with the God of this Bible. And, that relationship begins with confession, repentance, and faith in Jesus Christ.

It is interesting that God invites troubled mankind with the promise of rest and peace. Isaiah quotes Him, in chapter 57, verses 18 through 21, as He invites.

"I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will lead him and restore comfort to him and to his mourners, creating the praise of the lips. Peace, peace to him who is far and to him who is near," says the Lord, "and I will heal him." But the wicked are like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet, and its

waters toss up refuse and mud. "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."

Isaiah was also the prophet who unmistakably introduced the Messiah, with these words recorded in chapter 9, verse 6,

For a child will be born to us, a Son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

Do you want peace today, my friend? You need the Prince of Peace to take the throne in the castle of your heart. Anything or anyone else on the throne of your heart will bring nothing but heartache and disappointment. Only the Prince of Peace ruling in your heart, brings lasting peace and satisfaction.

Mankind is stubbornly unbelieving

4. So, what does the world do with this invitation? Paul finishes his description of mankind with one more phrase. Mankind is not only unconcerned, unharmonious, and unfulfilled, but he is now described as unbelieving.

Look at verse 18.

There is no fear of God before their eyes.

There is no respect; no trust; no loyalty; no awe; no worship of God from the unbeliever. The unbeliever is afraid of a lot of things, but he is not afraid of God.

Burt Reynolds was recently asked, in an interview that I read of, what he would say to God in the afterlife. He responded in typical bravado, "I would say to God, I've made a lot of mistakes in my life, but You've made more ..."

Man is fearful of:

- other men, but not the sovereign Ruler of the world;
- natural disaster, but he not the Creator of nature;
- the future, but not the Designer of eternal life;
- death, but not the Lord, who conquered death;
- exposure of his sins to others, but not the supreme Judge, before whom he will one day stand;

- eternity, but not the divine Architect of heaven and hell.

Moody Monthly published a heartbreaking story, several years ago, about an event that occurred in the life of a well known surgeon who lived in Chicago. Dr. Leo Winters was awakened one morning around one o'clock. There had been an accident and a young boy was in the hospital. They felt that he alone had the skill that was capable of putting that boy's body together and allowing him to live.

So, Dr. Winters rushed out of bed, climbed into his clothes, grabbed his keys and ran out to his car. He began the drive to downtown Chicago and decided to take a shortcut through a rather dangerous area, known for its rough gangs. He felt the risk would be worthwhile and precious time could be saved.

As he was sitting at a stoplight, a man, wearing an old flannel shirt and a gray hat, suddenly rushed from the shadows. He opened the car door, grabbed the doctor, and literally, threw him out of the car. He was screaming, "I've got to have your car."

Even though the doctor tried to explain, the man would not listen, and he sped off in the doctor's car. It took Dr. Winters at least forty five minutes to find a phone and call a taxi. By the time the taxi dropped him off at the hospital, more than an hour had passed.

When he arrived, the nurses shook their heads and said, "You're too late, Dr. Winters, the boy died

thirty minutes ago. You'll find the father down the hall in the chapel, grieving. He is awfully confused. He can't understand why you never came."

Without taking the time to explain to his staff, Dr. Winters hurried down the hallway and opened the door of the chapel. There, at the front, was the crumpled form of that weeping father, wearing an old flannel shirt and clutching that same gray hat. He had been in a hurry to get to the hospital too, and had taken this doctor's car. In so doing, he had pushed, literally, from his life, the one who could have perhaps, saved the life of his son.^{xiii}

Do you want a picture of humanity? There it is. Rushing after life; racing after satisfaction and fulfillment; hungry for meaningful relationships and lasting commitments; hoping for peace and some relief from guilt and sin, yet, at the same time, pushing from their lives the only One capable of saving their lives.

There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Conclusion – The Deliverance of God

This has been the description of mankind's depravity. The Spirit of God, through the apostle Paul, has intended to lead the Romans, and us, to an understanding of why we desperately, helplessly need to cling to the deliverance of God.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 3/17/2002 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Webster's New Compact Dictionary (Larchmont, N.Y., Book Essentials Publications, 1987), p. 116.

ⁱⁱ George Sweeting, "Talking it Over," *Moody Magazine*, (Sep., 1985), p. 2.

ⁱⁱⁱ *World Magazine*, (Oct. 10, 1998), p. 33.

^{iv} *Ibid.*, p. 33.

^v *Ibid.*, p.33.

^{vi} *Ibid.*, p. 33.

^{vii} Angela K. Brown, quoted in the *News and Observer* (Mar. 8, 2002).

^{viii} *World Magazine*, p. 191.

^{ix} Archibald T. Robertson, *The Epistles of Paul, Volume IV* (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Book House, 1931), p. 345.

^x "Tony & Tacky," *The Wall Street Journal* (Feb. 15, 2002).

^{xi} Robert G. Lee, quoted by Robert J. Morgan in *Nelsons Complete Book of Stories* (Nashville, TN, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), p. 749.

^{xii} James Dobson, quoted by Charles Swindoll in *The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart* (Nashville, TN, Word Publishing, 1998), p. 523.

^{xiii} "Parables, Etc.," *Moody Monthly* (Nov., 1989).