

The Prodigal People

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

Romans 3:12

Introduction

In our last discussion, we had arrived at the apostle Paul's fourteen indictments upon the human race.

In Romans, chapter 3, verse 10, we learned that mankind is totally depraved, totally sinful, totally wretched, totally enslaved to sin.

We also read that mankind is spiritually dense. Paul wrote, in verse 11a, that,

there is none who understands, . . .

In other words, no one understands spiritual things. Even though our world talks about spiritual experiences, spiritual things, and spiritual existence – according to the Word of God, apart from the saving, regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, the spirit of man is dead – not semi-conscious, but dead; not in a spiritual coma, but dead.

Then we learned that mankind is not only totally depraved and spiritually dense, but naturally disconnected from God. Paul writes in the latter part of verse 11,

. . . there is none who seeks for God

But surely, everyone seems to be seeking for God, right?!

The truth is, sinful man, like Adam and Eve in the garden, run *from* God, not *to* God. *They* do not seek after the Him, *He* seeks after them.

Jesus Christ said, in Luke, chapter 19, verse 10,

[I have] come to seek and to save that which was lost.

But, doesn't everyone believe in God – just different ways?!

Fifty years ago, there was a fundamental belief, in America, that there was one God and that He was the God derived from the Scriptures. You either believed in this God or you did not believe in God at all. Today, the God of the Bible is only one god among many gods, each equally valid in their claims.

In fact, by the mid 1990's, according to one religious survey, conducted by a group called the Barna Research Group,

Nearly two out of every three adults believed that the choice of one religious faith over another one was now irrelevant because all religions taught the same basic things.

In other words, everyone believes in God, we just call Him by different names. That is why you will hear people at school, at work, in your neighborhood, or in your dormitory say things such as:

- “I respect Jesus Christ just as much as anybody, but I don't think He is the only way to God . . . God would never limit the way to heaven to one person.”
- Or, “I think that all the religions of the world are essentially the same . . . why should we argue about minor points of disagreements.”
- Or, “There are a lot of things I like about Christianity . . . except for the fact that it seems so dogmatic and intolerant of other religions.”

The religion of today is simply one happy buffet of possibilities. Your path to spirituality is a

supermarket where you can choose the ingredients that you like the most in life.

But does the Bible teach that? The Bible says, in Proverbs, chapter 14, verse 12,

There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is [literally] the way of death.

Isn't everyone going to make it to heaven?

The Bible says, in Matthew, chapter 7, verses 13 and 14,

. . . for . . . the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. . . the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Thus, the gospel is, first of all, the news that man is lost. It tells that man is on the broad path to destruction; that mankind is in deep trouble and all his amalgamations of religions, all of his combinations of spiritual ingredients have concocted nothing more than guilt, shame, confusion, and, ultimate, death and separation from the one true and living Yahweh.

There is hope and salvation in Yahweh – there is only deception and despair in any other god, any other faith, and any other way, all of which lead to death.

I stood, this past year, outside a Hindu temple in Chennai, India. It was an incredibly massive temple, with a tiered roof that rose four or five stories high. On each tier were brightly painted figurines of their chief gods and goddesses. There were two headed gods, half-animal, half-human gods, many-breasted female gods, gods with fierce expressions, and gods with kind expressions. There, on the ground below, I stood among a throng of people in the hot sun. They were beggars, pulling at my shirt sleeves and putting their hands to their mouths, dying from hunger. One beggar, in particular, followed me all the way to our jeep. She carried a baby on her hip and kept begging, in a pitiful voice, for food.

What a picture of humanity. It has created its gods, but its gods cannot help them – physically or spiritually.

Indictments on the Human Race

The apostle Paul now continues to deliver indictments on the human race. We will begin where we left off in our last discussion.

Mankind is purposefully defiant

1. Paul's fourth indictment is that mankind is purposefully defiant.

Romans, chapter 3, verse 12 begins with the scathing announcement,

all have turned aside . . .

All have turned aside! What does he mean?

It means, literally, "to lean in the wrong direction". In a military context it means, "to run away from battle".

Alva J. McClain writes that the phrase was intended to provide the picture of a caravan crossing the desert, which has gotten off the route.ⁱ

It is another way of saying that man is lost – man has lost his way!

Isaiah said the same thing, in chapter 53, verse 6a, in this way,

All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way . . .

John MacArthur reminds the reader, in his commentary,

In the early church the gospel was sometimes called "the Way" (Acts 9:2), and Christians were often referred to as followers of the Way. Even the demon who had given a certain slave girl the power of divination acknowledged through her that Paul and his companions were "bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation" (Acts 16:17). Luke referred to some Jewish opponents of Paul's ministry in Ephesus as men who were "speaking evil of the Way" (Acts 19:9), and because of that opposition, "there arose no small disturbance concerning the Way" (Acts 19:23). . . .the writer of Hebrews spoke of Christ's atoning work as "a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh" (Hebrews 10:20). Peter spoke of false teachers who had infiltrated the church as those who had forsaken "the right way" of the true gospel, which is "the way of righteousness" (II Peter 2:15, 21).ⁱⁱ

Thomas, the disciple, once asked Jesus Christ a very honest question. Jesus had been reassuring the disciples that they would, one day, be reunited in heaven. He promised them, in John, chapter 14, verses 3 through 5,

"If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. And you

know the way where I am going.” Thomas [asked] Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?”

I love that. Thomas blurts out, “Wait a second, Lord, I don’t know the directions to heaven . . . we don’t have a map!”

Jesus responded by giving that classic statement, in verse 6,

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”

What I find interesting is that Jesus did not tell Thomas He would give a map to him to show him the way to get to heaven. Jesus told Thomas that He, Himself, was the map. What an incredible answer!

Think of it this way. Imagine you have moved here from another town. Many of you have probably done that in the past five years or so. Now, suppose that, when you moved here, you asked a person to give you directions to the nearest grocery store. You probably did that too, right? What did they say? “Yea, go to the first intersection there and turn right, go about one block and then turn right again, and then go to the blinking light and turn left, and go about a half a mile . . .”

By the way, ask someone from the north how to get somewhere – like someone from Minnesota. Have you moved here from Minnesota? You traded in Jesse Ventura for Jesse Helms! I’ll say no more! If you ask someone from Minnesota how to get somewhere, they will say, “Go to the first intersection and turn north, go one block and turn southeast, go three blocks and head north again . . .”

I do not have a compass on my dashboard! It is not a boat!

I love one story, told by Billy Graham on himself. One day, when he was a young preacher, he arrived in a small town for the first time. He wanted to mail a letter, so he stopped a young boy on the street and asked for directions to the post office. After the boy told him, Dr. Graham thanked him and said, “Now listen, son, if you come to church this evening, I’ll be telling people how to get to heaven.”

The boy thought a minute, and then said, “No thanks, mister, you don’t even know how to get to the post office.”

Has it occurred to you that God has never given directions to heaven? He has never said, “Go past Pluto and turn west, then go past Alpha Centauri and turn northeast . . .”

Was Jesus Christ giving the disciples directions to heaven? No! That is the amazing thing about His answer!

Suppose the person, of whom you asked directions, said to you, “Listen, I have time this afternoon . . . I’ll tell you what, I’ll just take you to the store.”

In that case the person does not show you the way – he becomes *the way*; he does not show you a map – he is the map.

That is what Jesus is saying. He is not saying, “Look I’ll give you really good directions so you can find your way to heaven,” He is saying, “I am the way; that is, I will take you and lead you and guide you, so you will never lose your way.”

Jesus Christ declared, in John, chapter 14, verse 6,

I am the way . . . no one comes to the Father but through Me.

And what does Paul say mankind does? They choose another way!

Paul is not addressing mankind as something that has tried its best to find the path. No. He writes that they have all what?

all have turned aside . . .

That is, they have chosen to take another path.

Man is totally depraved, spiritually dense, naturally disconnected, and, in verse 12, purposefully defiant.

If you talk about God with people, they will be glad to give you their version. But, if you talk to them of a holy God, who will, one day, according to Scripture, judge all of mankind, then the world will mock you and trivialize the future, and say, “That’s not the God I believe in . . . and I’m not worried about being judged, much less being sent to hell.”

They have purposefully turned aside!

I was in the store, the other day, looking for a birthday card for my wife. After reading a dozen cards or so, I was sidetracked by this one card. It is meant to be funny, I suppose, although it made my heart stop for just a moment – I was stunned. It is a friendship card and it has a cartoon woman, who looks to be in her forties, on the front of the card, holding a cup of coffee. Writing to her friend, she says, “We’ll be friends until the day we die . . . and our friendship will not stop there. We’ll probably still be friends even in death. Yes, we’ll be friends after death because we’ll be in heaven together, or

maybe hell! Goodness, I wonder where we'll go? Probably hell because you know how vain and materialistic we are! Yes, I think we'll probably end up going to hell! I wonder if there's a mall in hell?"

What an attitude of defiant, unapologetic turning away from the horrifying truth of final judgment.

Then, Paul goes on to give another indictment against sinful humanity.

Mankind is increasingly decadent

2. The next indictment that Paul gives against mankind is that they are also increasingly decadent.

Romans, chapter 3, verse 12, goes on to say,

all have turned aside, together they have become useless . . .

The Greek word, "useless," is the translation of a Hebrew word that is used specifically to refer to milk that has gone sour. I can well remember the days of finding one of our children's milk cups under the car seat. When you opened the lid, you were knocked out by the smell. There is nothing like the smell of sour milk! That is the word used in this verse.

He also intends it to refer to the wasted nature of the milk. It can no longer fulfill its function. It cannot be drunk; it cannot provide nourishment – it is useless!

This is like the prodigal son who left the father's home with his inheritance. He spent all of his money on sinful pleasure. He bought for friends who came along for the party – he was really living – until his money ran out. He, eventually, found himself in a putrid barnyard filled with pigs.

He had chosen the path that led away from the father – and now, his life was useless. It was a life that was soured, unfulfilled, wasted, bitter.

The further away from the truth of God's Word a person, or a society, goes, the more soured, rancid, putrid, and evil they become.

A recent issue of *World Magazine* provided an illustration of our decaying society. It announced that the American Academy of Pediatrics, with its 55,000 members, endorsed homosexual adoption. They are claiming that children raised by homosexuals can be as well adjusted as those raised by moms and dads. The statement, published in *Pediatrics*, claims that evidence suggests no vital difference exists between homosexual and heterosexual parents. The report even claimed that

"children seem to [actually] benefit from arrangements in which lesbian parents divide household tasks in an egalitarian manner." There is a picture of two men sitting at the breakfast table with a little girl, around the age of four, that they have adopted.ⁱⁱⁱ

Apart from God, the prodigal human race runs further and further from true fulfillment, true pleasure, true guiltless living, true security, true hope, joy, and peace.

Mankind is totally depraved, spiritually dense, naturally disconnected, purposefully defiant, and increasingly decadent.

Mankind is entirely disobedient

3. Finally, as Paul concludes the first section of these indictments, he gives the sixth indictment that mankind is entirely disobedient.

Look at the end of verse 12,

. . . there is none who does good, there is not even one.

Paul began this section of Romans, chapter 3, in verse 10, by saying that there is no one who is good. Now, at the end of verse 12, he says that there is no one who does good. None who is good . . . none who does good.

You might say, "But I know unbelievers who do good things."

Remember, Paul is speaking about the condition of man. He is speaking not so much about single acts, as about a way of life compared to God's holy standard.

Some people behave better than other people. That is not Paul's point. No human being has the desire or capacity for holy, righteous living, unless the Spirit of God has invaded that life, brought him to his senses, and caused him to leave the pig pen for the Father's house.

Left to himself, man will wrap himself up with the hogs, and say, "There's nothing wrong with me . . . Stop making me feel guilty . . . The god I've concocted accepts me the way I am . . . None of this sin and guilt!"

But the one who is being rescued is the one who recognizes sin for what it is.

The great evangelist of a hundred years ago, Dwight Moody, once told of being asked, by the warden of a large prison in New York City, to speak

to the inmates. Because there was no chapel, or other suitable or safe place to speak to the group, Moody preached from a ramp at one end of a large tier of cells. From there, he was unable to see the face of a single prisoner.

After the message, he asked permission to talk face-to-face with some of the men through the bars of their cells. He soon discovered that most of the men had not even been listening to his message. When Moody would ask an inmate why he was in prison, the man almost invariably declared his innocence. He would insist that a false witness had testified against him, or that he had been mistaken for the person who really committed the crime, or that the judge or jury had been prejudiced against him.

“I began to get discouraged,” Moody said, “but when I had gone almost through, I found one man with his elbows on his knees and two streams of tears running down his cheeks. I looked in the little window and said, ‘My friend, what is your trouble?’”

He looked up with despair on his face, and said, “My sins are more than I can bear.”

I said to him, “Thank God for that.”

The evangelist knew that God was opening this man’s heart to admit his need for a Savior, having finally realized that he was, indeed, a sinner.^{iv}

“My sins are more than I can bear.”

Have you come to see yourself in that way? Have you found your name, in Romans, chapter 3? Have you discovered that Paul is speaking of you, in verses 10b through 12, when he writes,

... 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; there is none who does good, there is not even one.”

The person who writes his name here, will find his name written in the Lamb’s book of life. For to admit your sin and your need of a Savior is to be forgiven, redeemed, rescued . . . freed. For you have come to know the One who is “. . . the way . . . the truth and the life . . .”, and you, He promised, according to John, chapter 8, verse 32, “. . . will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

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ⁱ Alva J. McClain, Romans; The Gospel of God’s Grace (Winona Lake, IN, BMH Books, 1973), p. 94.

ⁱⁱ John MacArthur Jr., Romans (Chicago, IL, Moody Press, 1991), p. 185.

ⁱⁱⁱ World Magazine, (Feb. 17, 2002), p. 7.

^{iv} MacArthur, p. 186.