

A Radical Remedy for a Radical Disease

Ephesians 2:4-10

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Our society is demonstrating an increasing intolerance for the problem of medical misdiagnosis. That is when a medical professional examining a patient fails to diagnose the symptoms of a life-threatening, yet treatable illness. People who monitor this problem estimate that between 48,000 and 100,000 die each year as a direct result of medical misdiagnosis. For example, the initial symptoms of a common flu virus can be confused with something as potentially lethal as bacterial meningitis. When a wrong diagnosis is made, timely treatment with the necessary antibiotics is denied and the patient can suffer serious brain damage or even death. When a tragedy like that happens, it often hits the news, sometimes evokes public outcry, and invariably ends up in a malpractice lawsuit.

Even more disturbing is a serious but little discussed misdiagnosis that occurs daily. Its rate of incidence is not just in the thousands or even tens of thousands—but *millions*. I am talking about the *disease of sin*. That misdiagnosis started when the Serpent redefined good and evil in the Garden of Eden. Before the Fall, good involved pleasing God and evil was any departure from God's will. The Serpent managed to undermine that diagnosis as too negative and restricting. And so "good" became the freedom to make your own choice—and evil was anything that constrained such a choice. Of course, with new standards come creative diagnoses. Cain didn't see himself as a rebel who turned worship into an act of self-righteousness—he saw himself as a *seeker* who failed to get his needs met.

Today there are so many new ways to label erratic or abnormal behavior that the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Illness has to be periodically revised and expanded. The first edition, which came out over a half century ago was about the size of my Bible (9" X 6" X ¾"). But the most recent edition, DSM IV dwarfs it by comparison. Why? Because we have a better handle on the diagnosis for people's problems? Hardly. Consider this. One of the diagnoses mentioned in this manual is called **Oppositional Defiant Disorder** which takes typical rebellion and opposition to authority and tries to explain it in terms of mental illness (see page 91 in the DSM IV). In raising this point, I am not suggesting that there are no legitimate brain problems in people. I am saying that based on man's bias against God's authority, there is a prevailing tendency to do away with the notion of sin altogether. And when you do that—you still have to call it something. But when the something you call it fails to define it at its deepest and most significant level—you have a *misdiagnosis!*

The real tragedy., however, is not when *sinner*s reject God's diagnosis—what else would you *expect* them to do? It is when **God's people** ignore it or fail to take it *seriously!*

Two weeks ago, we looked at a text in Ephesians that reminded us, perhaps like no other text in the Bible, just how serious our sin problem is. Just *how* big is it? So big that it taints *everything* we do—**everything!** From the top of our heads to the bottom of our feet, we are thoroughly corrupted by sin. Before we came to faith in Christ, we used to be *dead* because of our trespasses and sins. We were totally cut off from the power of God

and the ability to do *anything* that pleased God. We were so tainted by the corruption of Adam's sin that even our relatively good deeds are an offense to God. If an unbeliever were to unexpectedly receive a large sum of money through an inheritance—and then turn around and donate virtually all of it to a good cause (such as an orphanage in Romania, or a needy inner city school in downtown Detroit, or the Tsunami Relief fund), that act of generosity would still be so tainted by that person's self-righteousness and craving for glory that belongs to God alone—it would only add to his just condemnation! William Beveridge put it this way: "*I cannot pray, except I sin; I cannot preach, but I sin; I cannot administer nor receive the [Lord's Table], but I sin. My very repentance needs to be repented of; and the tears I shed need washing in the blood of the Lamb.*" ***That is how serious our sin is!***

While we acknowledge this in theory as we sit here on a Sunday night, the reality of our "*total depravity*" all too often fails to impact us the way it is supposed to during the week. It is one thing to listen to a sermon on the doctrine of total depravity in a comfortably air-conditioned building. It's quite another thing to recognize its implications on Monday or any other day of the week. So when sin rears its head in real time situations, it is all too easy to misdiagnose what is going on. For example...

The Bible frequently compares our actions to fruit on a tree. Have you ever found yourself blowing up when something didn't go your way? Or swearing at somebody because of what they said or did to you? What do you say when that happens? "I can't believe I did that or said that. That is just not like me!" **Or** "I wouldn't have done that if you hadn't done such-and-such to me first!" Yet Jesus said in Luke 6:36:
*43 "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. 44 Each tree is recognized by its **own fruit**. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. 45 The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. **For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.***

The other person's sin didn't cause you to sin. It merely *facilitated* the expression of the sin that was *already* in your heart!

The same thing can happen in our parenting. Is your child rebellious? Many would say it's because he is listening to rock music or hanging out with the wrong friends. *Or is it?* Certainly those factors can help *bring out* rebellion, but they don't *cause* it. Rebellion is a course of action that begins and develops in the heart. Or maybe he gets caught doing drugs or breaking in and entering into somebody's house to steal something. How many times do you hear a parent say: "It's those rotten kids he's been hanging out with. Deep down he *really* is a good kid." That is precisely what Ephesians 2:1-3 *doesn't* teach!

Ultimately the world is not the cause of our sin—though it certainly conspires against us. Not even the devil is the cause of our sin—though he actively promotes it through the world's system. You could take the devil and put him in a bottomless pit and you could remove a person from the world and all of its evil influences—and you would still have a major sin problem. Why? We aren't sinners *because we sin*. We *sin* because we are *sinners*. The problem is not so much with our *sins* as much as it is with our inherent

sinfulness. Sin is not a virus we catch, it is more like an incurable malignancy that begins growing inside us the moment we are conceived. That is what Paul is saying in Ephesians 2:1-3.

In light of all this, God would be perfectly just at this point to pull a sheet over the lifeless corpse of humanity and just consign us to a just and eternal destruction. Instead, Paul grabs us with two words that point us to God's radical remedy for this radical disease. Read Ephesians 2:4-10. Point out that you are reading verse 4 the way it is worded in the original Greek text:

4 But [God] because of his great love for us, [being] rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. [PRAY]

I. Recognize *What* God Has Done.

A. He *has saved* you (vs. 5, 8).

I want you to notice the wording here. He doesn't simply state salvation as a past act of God: "You were saved." Rather, "you *have been* saved and the effects of that saving continue." It is a past action with ongoing, continuous results! (See Phil. 1:6 and explain the three tenses of salvation: Justification—penalty of sin; Sanctification—power of sin; Glorification—presence of sin).

Transition: *How* does he do this?

B. He has *linked* you with all that He has done to the God-Man, Jesus Christ. Explain the concept of "*with-ness*" in the Bible.

- God created man so that man could dwell *with* Him in the Garden. But sin radically changed that.
- In the OT, God made a provisional arrangement to once again dwell with His people. He gave instructions for building a Tabernacle and later the Temple so that the Israelites could be with Him. But it was *highly restricted* access.
- In the NT, God sent His Son, Jesus so that once again people could be with Him. (Immanuel—"God with us"). John goes as far to say that what the Tabernacle was in the OT, Jesus is in the NT when he says in John 1:14 that Jesus "tabernacled" among us. Mark points out in his gospel (3:14) that Jesus chose 12 disciples so that they could be *with* Him. Later, He promised His disciples in

John 14: 3 that He would leave the earth, but later come back and take them to *be with* Him in heaven. What a great hope we have!

- But no passage of Scripture develops this “with-ness” concept like these verses do. What Paul is saying in these verses is that we are not only going to be with Christ *one day* in a “spatial” sense—we are already “in Christ” in some sort of “relational” sense. And being “in Christ” means that whatever God did to Him—in some way He has done to *you and me—here and now!*

Transition: Exactly what is Paul talking about?

1. God *made us alive with* Christ (vs. 5) and *raised us up with* Christ (vs. 6a).

What did God do on the third day in the tomb where Christ’s body had been laid to rest? For several hours there had been no heart beat. No respiration. No circulation. No eye movement. Only absolute, uninterrupted stillness. But suddenly, Christ’s body came to a fullness of life like it had never experienced before. For in that miraculous moment, God totally reversed the decaying process that reduces the human body to the dirt that encases it in the grave and transformed His body into a glorious body that will never again experience death or decay.

What did God do to *you* the day you came to faith in Christ? Immediately prior to your awareness of your sin and your expression of faith in Christ—God did for you spiritually what He had done for His Son when He revived Him in the tomb. He resuscitated you from your deadness. He revived a heart that had been long before decayed by sin. Suddenly your deaf ears opened and your blind eyes could see.

Illustration: My New England uncle, who had been a life-long skeptic when it came to Christianity. He had ad rejected the Gospel numerous times when my mother and father had tried to witness to him. In fact, had made some rather malicious accusations about Christianity and preachers simply using it to make money. One day, he found himself in the hospital with a serious illness. A pastor came to visit him (upon my mother’s request). And to put it in my uncle’s own words: “The lights came on.” And he was never the same!

That all happens the split-second a person is saved. In fact, if you want to be theologically precise, it happens the split-second *before*

a person believes. Did you catch that? A split-second *before* a person believes. You ask: Why do you say that? What do you mean by that? Simply this: Dead people don't believe. Dead people *can't* believe. The New Birth didn't happen *because* you believed—though faith in Christ is necessary for salvation and forgiveness. Rather, you believed as a *result* of the New Birth. The reason anyone believes is that God *first* revived their slumbering heart. Charles Wesley once described this miracle of *re-creation* this way in the third stanza of his famous hymn, And Can It Be:

*Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night.
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray:
I woke—the dungeon flamed with light!
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.*

Transition: A radical disease requires a radical remedy. Paul is saying that if you are a genuine follower of Christ—you are that only by virtue of the miracle of the New Birth, a miracle not only as great as the resurrection of Jesus Christ Himself—but a miracle that actually is *connected* to that same event and its mighty power! Which brings us to the second thing God did for us.

2. God *seated* us *with* Christ in the heavenly realms (6b).

What is the significance of Jesus sitting down? Look back at 1:20-22. What is the significance of seating Jesus at His right hand? What is the meaning of all things *under His feet*? You have to interpret Ephesians 2:6 in light of 1:20-22 because the pattern here is that what God did to Christ—He has done *to* and *for* those who are *in* Christ! Just as He has enthroned Jesus and put everything in Creation back under His feet, so *in* Christ He has empowered us to have the power to deal with sin. Not all at once in the sense that we defeat it fully and finally. That is yet to come. But in the sense that we overcome its power and begin to regain the rule that God gave to us as His image bearers in the very beginning of Creation.

Illustration: Fred and Sue's testimony this morning is an encouraging example of running to Christ and His grace and power to deal with sin. Fred and Sue taught us how to put the residual effects of our indwelling sin under our feet in a particularly difficult situation!

We are not talking about a Christianity that takes sin lightly by avoiding dealing with it so we can maintain a pharisaical, external lifestyle that looks good from a distance—but has no power over

the real stuff we face in a sin-cursed world. God's got the power—and so do those who are in Christ!

Paul is saying when you understand depravity, when you understand just how tainted you are by it—regardless of how far you may go in expressing it—you are in a position then (and not until then) to appreciate what God has done for you *in* Christ.

But *why* has God done all this? That brings us to the second major point in this passage....

II. Recognize *Why* He Has Done It.

Because we give money to the church? We work in the nursery once in a while? We take a stand for right moral causes? We don't cuss—too much?! No! All answers are to be found in *Him* alone.

A. Because of **His** *mercy* (vs. 4b).

We were *dead* and thus totally *helpless* to save ourselves. Mercy is that unexpected love for the person who is totally down and out. God loves to take the worst that sin can throw at him and not merely *recycle* it but *redeem* it. Titus 3:3-5a:

“At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.”

Everybody loves the Parable of the Prodigal Son. But most don't even get the main point of it. It is not 3 steps on how to find your way back to God. It is about God's mercy to us even when we are at our worst! And it is a warning to those who (like the pharisaical elder brother) aren't moved by God's mercy but are totally out of sync with it! One of the things that the MCREST program ought to do for us this week is to evoke some recollection of our own past struggles and remind us of God's mercy to us!

B. Because of **His** *love* (vs. 4a).

The preceding verse tells us we were standing on the shore curiously watching but not fully understanding the oncoming tsunami of God's wrath. Only love could triumph over His wrath by diverting it from deserving, unjust sinners like us to the Undeserving, Just One who took our place.

C. Because of **His kindness** (vs. 7b).

Kindness speaks of God's sympathetic concern unmistakably expressed in the work of His Son.

Question: How do you think of God? Is kindness a word you associate with Him? In studying this word, I found out something interesting. Though it is a Greek word (because that is the language of the NT), it was never used in Greek writings to refer to their gods. It was considered "ungodlike," or even trivial to for the gods to dispense kindness to mortals. Is there a suspicion left in the heart of man about the motives of deity—a suspicion placed there in the Garden of Eden when the serpent questioned the goodness and kindness of God? Any doubt of that is blown away by what Jesus did when He came and demonstrated uncommon kindness in His life on earth and especially in His giving up His life for sinners like us. So—are you struggling with a tortured conscience? Are you waiting for the shoe of God's judgment to fall? The you need to meditate on the *kindness* of God in Christ and allow that attribute to draw you out of hiding into the arms of your Savior. It is the *kindness* of God that leads to repentance!!!! (Romans 2:4)

D. Because of **His grace** (**Read** 7a, 8-10a).

This words sort of summarizes all the others. It is the dominant theme of this book. And it is the greatest of all remedies for a sin-sick soul! It speaks of our deliverance from everything that sin can throw at us. Enslavement to addictions. Wrath. Death. All the stuff that describes our hopeless condition outside of Christ. And grace delivers you from all of it. And it does so not as a payback—but as God's gracious gift.

Why? Look at 7a:

“ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace....”

To bear witness to all time concerning His glorious grace (See Revelation).

Or possibly *to* the *Aeons* (i.e. principalities or angels). See Ephesians 3:10.

Transition: So where is all this supposed to go? Grace is not a license to sin. It is a motive for holiness. And so Paul says in verse 10:

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

III. Recognize What This Means For You (vs. 10b).

Some practical implications:

1. Do you take the doctrine of depravity seriously? Personally? Do you see it for what it is and let it drive you to the riches and power of God's grace—or do you spend more time trying to rationalize, minimize, or even justify fallen human behavior? (I'm only human! That by the way is blasphemous and blame-shifting. It suggests that God is responsible for your sin since He *made* you human. It is not your humanity that causes you to sin. It is the invasion of sin into your humanity via Adam's sin that causes you to sin. But if you are saved, you in Christ. You are in the Second Adam—the one human who never sinned. The one human who shows us what it means to be *truly* human!
2. Do you take the riches and power of God's grace seriously and appropriate them by spending time renewing your mind and feeding your soul in God's Word? It is *not* a matter of time management. (**Example of a fire**). It is either ignorance or unbelief! And after you have read Ephesians 2, you can no longer claim ignorance!
3. Do you have a “civil religion” (a form of godliness without much power) or do you have a faith that appropriates God's grace to you in Christ?
4. Will you wait until your depravity hits you or one of your kids in an obvious way before you finally get serious about God's grace?
5. Has your depravity already hit you in a way that makes you feel so hopeless, so ashamed, or so embarrassed that you are dying on the inside but are afraid to deal with it because you fear being rejected or being judged? Then let God's kindness draw you into the arms of His mercy and grace.

We have a cure—a cure that is worthy to be proclaimed. But to proclaim it, you have to be willing to live it. And to live it you have to understand what God has done for you. And accepting the medicine at first tastes bitter because it destroys our dream of self-righteousness where we are the hero of our own dream. That dream is only a nightmare in disguise. This morning we got a taste of the *real* dream as we saw God's grace in a tough situation. May the dream (and cure) of God's amazing grace become more and more *your* present reality.