

Seeking to Apply God's Word to Our Lives

The Depravity of Man and Sovereignty of God in Salvation

Every believer in Christ understands he was saved by God's grace. Yet, many believers do not understand their depravity before salvation, and the role that God's sovereignty played in their salvation. This paper seeks to explain these truths and their impact on the believer's life.

The depravity of unsaved man:

The depravity¹ of unsaved man is a result of his sin and spiritual death in Adam (Romans 5:12).² We will look at four passages which summarize the spiritual condition of unsaved man.

1. Unsaved man is spiritually dead, follows Satan, and is a child of wrath (Ephesians 2:1-3)

The passage reads, *"¹And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ²in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."* In this passage, the Apostle Paul reminds us of our spiritual condition prior to salvation:

- We were spiritually dead in our trespasses and sins (v. 1).³
- We walked according to the course of this world and followed Satan (v. 2).
- We lived in the lust of our flesh and mind, continually indulging these desires (v. 3a).
- By nature, we were children of God's wrath (v. 3b).

2. Unsaved man personally knows of God but refuses to acknowledge Him, honor Him, and give thanks to Him (Romans 1:18-21)

The passage reads, *"¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. ²⁰For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. ²¹For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.* In this passage, we can make the following observations:

- Unsaved man suppresses the truth about God in sin⁴ (v. 18).
- He does have a personal knowledge about God⁵ (v. 19). This knowledge is a result of creation showing him God's invisible attributes, eternal power and divine nature (v.20a).
- He is without excuse. He cannot say, "I didn't know God existed or what He is like" (v. 20b).
- Even though he understands these things, he refuses to honor God and give Him thanks (v. 21).

3. Unsaved man is an enemy of God (Romans 5:10)

In Romans 5:10 Paul writes, *"For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life."*⁶

4. Unsaved man's depravity is complete (Romans 3:10-12)

In Romans 3:10-12, the Apostle Paul summarizes the scope of man's depravity. He writes, *"¹⁰as it is written, 'THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; ¹¹THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, ⁷ THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ¹²ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."*

¹ The Greek word "depraved" means "failing to meet the test, disqualified, worthless, corrupted" (Romans 1:28).

² Adam was the representative of all mankind, while in the Garden of Eden. Therefore, when Adam sinned and experienced spiritual death, this sin and death was imputed to all of his descendants after him (Romans 5:12).

³ Death is defined as separation. The verb in the phrase "you were dead in your trespasses in sins" is a present tense, denoting an ongoing spiritual separation from God.

⁴ The Greek word for "suppress" literally means "to hold fast, hold back."

⁵ The Greek word for "known" means "to have a personal knowledge."

⁶ The Greek word for "if" is a first class condition and can be translated "since while we were enemies."

⁷ The Greek word for "understands" literally means, "to set together." Unsaved man understands God's "invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature" (Romans 1:20), but he has not set together other aspects of God's character and redemptive actions, as described in the Word of God (1 Corinthians 2:14).

The sovereignty of God:

In Romans 9:6-24, Paul explains God's sovereign choice and our salvation:

1. God chooses those whom He wishes (Romans 9:10-13)

The passage reads, ¹⁰ *And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; ¹¹ for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, ¹² it was said to her, "THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER." ¹³ Just as it is written, "JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED."*

- God's choice is not based upon a person's works, whether good or bad (v. 11).
- While in Rebecca's womb, God chose Jacob (the second born) not Esau (the first born) (v. 12).

2. God has mercy on whom He has mercy (Romans 9:14-18)

The passage reads, ¹⁴ *What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! ¹⁵ For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION." ¹⁶ So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH." ¹⁸ So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires."*

- God told Moses that, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION" (v. 15).
- It doesn't depend upon the will of man nor his works, but on God who has mercy (v. 16)
- God raised up Pharaoh to demonstrate His power and to cause His name to be proclaimed throughout the earth (v. 17)
- God has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires (v. 18).

3. God rightly judges unsaved man but has mercy on those whom He chooses (Romans 9:19-24)

The passage reads, ¹⁹ *You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" ²⁰ On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? ²¹ Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? ²² What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? ²³ And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, ²⁴ even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles."*

- Some believers might ask, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" (v. 19)
- God has the right to make from the same lump of clay (lost mankind) some vessels for destruction and other vessels for grace and mercy (v. 21).

Conclusion:

Before placing our faith in Christ, we were spiritually dead, followed Satan, were enemies of God, and were children of wrath. We had a personal knowledge of God but refused to acknowledge Him by honoring Him and giving Him thanks. We never sought Him and we never did one good thing in our life.

Yet, instead of receiving God's wrath, He showed us mercy. This mercy was based upon no other reason than God's gracious choice of us and resulted in us placing our faith in Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior.

In Luke 7:47 Jesus says, *"For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little."* As we better understand our depravity before salvation, and God's mercy and grace at salvation, it will cause us to have a greater love for Him. As our love for God grows, so does our desire to keep His commands. In John 14:15, Jesus said, *"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."*

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