

UNDERSTANDING MAN, Part 6 2-19-17
"Rotten Record, Rotten Heart"

This is something my friend Dave once received in the mail. It was sent to Dave because somebody figured him to be a sucker I guess. Maybe you get these same kinds of things. But this was really special. It is from St. Matthew's Church – *Friends of Jesus for 53 glorious years*. And what they sent Dave was a sheet of paper which they call a prayer rug. And it does have a picture of a weeping Jesus on it. The instructions are to pray on this "rug" with both knees on it, then send it back to the church with a check, and your life can be changed. J.B. testifies that she placed the prayer rug on her bad leg for 2 days and now feels absolutely no pain. Other folks got new jobs, new houses, and new husbands by using the prayer rug. Do you believe this rug can change your life? Say it with me, "NO!" But, this morning, you will hear about what really can produce positive, healthy, happy change. But, first, you need to know why your life is in need of changing.

At a public gathering a liberal (by which I mean "unbelieving") minister was asked to say a prayer and so begins with this: "Oh, Great One, Source of All Being, and Mother of each spirit, immerse us this day in the human condition" A man nearby was overheard to say, "Lord, this is Walt, I don't want any more immersion in the human condition." Walt there seemed to understand something. There is something about humanity that he was getting, and I am wanting us all to get it, before we finish today. We look today at the plight of man. Man is in an awful mess. He has dug himself a pit and jumped in - now finding himself unable to escape. As we found last time, man's problem is sin but there are two facets to this problem; it is a two-edged sword and it is those two facets of our sin problem that we will examine now. Romans 1:**18** *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness*. And if you don't think God's wrath is a problem you don't know God very well. "Oh," you say, "this wrath isn't for me, it's for..." Wait a second! Have you read Romans? Paul proceeds to argue that you and I and all of us are in this camp. In Romans 2 he says it's true of Jew and it's true of Gentile. And then in chapter 3, to make sure you don't wiggle out of the assembly of sinners, it says 3:**10-12** *There is **none** righteous, not even one; 11 there is **none** who understands, there is **none** who seeks for God; 12 **all** have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is **none** who does good, there is not even one*. Then Romans 3:**23** *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*. This is the plight and problem of man. It is a result of Adam's sin and

your sin. Romans 5:**12** (NLT) *Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.*

Now, that may not be a new concept for you. Maybe you admit freely, "Yes, I'm a sinner." But one critical thing that is missing in every unbeliever and almost every Christian is a recognition, or felt awareness, of how serious sin is. The attitude is usually, "Why yes, I've sinned, i.e. I've broken the rules, I've slipped up a few times." But that really doesn't impress you as being a serious problem. One of my seminary profs told of how, as a young boy, his Sunday School teacher asked him if he were a sinner; and he, this preacher's kid, said, "Yes, but everybody's a sinner." Yea but, yea but, yea but. You see, we feel we must add the qualifier, "Everybody's a sinner." The implication is that "I'm not so bad. I'm not unusual." But that would be like someone in the middle ages saying, "Sure I have the plague, but, hey, everyone's got the plague." The extensiveness of this disease of sin makes us think it's no disease at all. We cannot see how awfully wrong it is. As we saw last week, all our problems flow from this spring, yet we casually say, "Oh, to err is human, to forgive divine." God says the result of sin is wrath and that is serious.

Anyone here grow up in the Dutch Reformed tradition? The Heidelberg Catechism of the Dutch Reformed Church begins with the question, "*What's the first thing we must know to live and die happily?*" The surprising answer says, "*The first thing we must know to live and die happily is how great our sins and miseries are.*" Hardly the answer you'd expect. To be happy you must realize your misery? Yes, it's so. It's so. To be sober the alcoholic must face his problem and the sinner must come to grips with his sin. Until you can see you are a sinner and, until you can feel that sin is serious, that it is odious to God, there is no hope for you at all. Jesus came as a physician to the sick, as a Savior for sinners, to call sinners to repentance. He came to seek and save the lost. If you aren't lost you can't be found. You must know how great your sins and miseries are.

I'm convinced that none of us can perceive just how ugly and dreadful sin really is. One day we'll understand. When we behold our God in the beauty of holiness we will see our sin in all of its horror. When Isaiah saw God he said, "*Woe is me, I'm a sinner.*" Job said, "*I repent in dust and ashes.*" Others fell down speechless in God's presence. When you see God as He is you'll see sin as it is - for sin is a personal offense against your Maker. It is against God that you have sinned. The Bible says that sin is a stench in God's nostrils, for He is holy, holy, holy. Habakkuk, the prophet, spoke to God and said 1:**13a** (NIV) *Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrongdoing.* Sinners, like Adam, must be cast from His presence because sin is repugnant to a holy

God. And this is the God we need for life and health and peace. We desperately need God, and yet, Isaiah 59:2 *Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.* Separation from God is the price of sin. And the Biblical name for that separation is *death*. When we think of death we think of termination, but Biblically it means “separation.” Romans 6:23 says the wages, the awful price of sin, is death.

So, you see we are offenders. We are moral debtors. We are guilty before the court of heaven, sentenced to eternal death. Need I say, we are in quite a mess. Need I say, we have a great need, a need for pardon, a need for forgiveness. Until you have this, fellow sinner, you have nothing. All your other possessions both tangible and intangible are so much rubbish if you are not forgiven. When a criminal is scheduled to die tomorrow, hand him a big check and see if it thrills him. Tell him he's won the lottery. Give him a new car and he'll just spit at it. All he wants is a pardon from the judge and until he gets that everything else is rubbish.

Well, how then can a desperate man get such a pardon? Does he get let off the hook for good behavior behind bars? Oh no. So many think if they can do enough nice things they'll make up for the bad. Not so. No way. You are incapable of that and besides Romans 3:20a (NLT) *No one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands.* You cannot work your way to God. Jesus said John 14:6 *I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.* In Acts 4:12 we read of Jesus that *There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.* Jesus came to save us from sin. The whole Jesus story makes no sense apart from an understanding of our sad situation. He came to be a Savior from sin and He did this by living a perfectly righteous life for us and by dying a perfect, substitutionary death in our place and for our sakes. God could not wink at sin; the Judge could not ignore the law. Our sin had to be dealt with, to be punished. And the amazing reality is that Christ came to take our sins and their punishment. I Peter 2:24 *He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness for by His wounds you were healed.* Throughout the New Testament this same truth is taught. Ephesians 1:7 *In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.* I Corinthians 15:3 *I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died **for our sins**.* Romans 5:8-10 *God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. 10 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. And after all this - we Christians have bumper stickers that say "*Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven.*" That speaks a truth but honestly - **just** forgiven? I face eternity in hell but my God comes to die for me. Just forgiven? Oh no. Gloriously, wonderfully, unbelievably, spectacularly, magnificently forgiven.

Here is a question I wish everyone of you might be able to answer: How might it be that sinners can be accepted by a holy God? Can you answer that? Wonder of wonders, mystery of mysteries. We who, through sin, became a stench to our God have been received and made sons and daughters of God? Ephesians says that believers have been "accepted in the beloved" and the beloved one in view is the very Son of God Himself. Ray Stedman tells a story about growing up in Montana where they had a number of sheep farms. He said that spring is the season when the little lambs were born. But Spring in Montana can be brutal; with snowfalls up to four feet deep on the prairies. Of course, when the sheep have to give birth in that kind of weather many of the lambs and the ewes will die. As a result, the farmers end up with many mothers whose newborn lambs have died, and many lambs whose mothers have died. A simple way to solve the problem is to take the lambs without mothers and give them to the mothers without lambs, but with sheep it isn't that simple. If you take a little orphan lamb and put it in with a mother ewe that mother will immediately go and sniff it all over, but then she will shake her head as if to say, "That's not our family odor", and she will butt it away and have nothing to do with it. But the sheep men have devised a way around that problem. They will take the mother's own dead lamb and skin it, and take the skin and tie it onto the orphan lamb. Then they put the little lamb with this ungainly skin flopping around, in with the mother. She pays no attention at all to the way it looks, but she sniffs it all over, nods her head in recognition and allows that baby to nurse. What has happened? The orphan lamb has been accepted in the beloved one. It has been adopted thru the death of the begotten son. And do you follow the parallels? There came a time when the Lamb of God lay dead on our behalf, and God took us and clothed us with His righteousness, His acceptability, His dearness and nearness to the Father and thus we stand accepted in the Beloved One. One of our hymns says "*Jesus, thy blood and righteousness, my beauty are, my glorious dress.*" Accepted for Jesus' sake – we are forgiven and free. Bless the Lord!

Now, as I said at the beginning, this great problem of sin has two aspects to it. One of those involves our guilt before God that we have discussed, but man stands before His Judge in heaven as

a drug addict would before a human judge. Consider the parallels. This addict has two problems: One is that he is guilty before the court of violating the law. He has been proven guilty of trafficking in cocaine and faces a stiff fine and a prison sentence. His problem is his guilt. It is possible though that one could step in as his substitute, pay the fine, and receive his sentence. He then would be pardoned and go free. But would his problems be solved? Only in part. He has another problem doesn't he? He's still an addict. He leaves the courtroom free from guilt but a slave to cocaine. His problem is not merely one of legal position, but of personal condition. So it is with a sinful man. He has the problem of guilt before the heavenly court but he also has the problem of a depraved spiritual nature. He is an addict to sin. So, he has two problems - a rotten record and a rotten heart. A rotten record and a rotten heart.

We have spoken earlier of his rotten record and how Christ deals with that. Consider now man's rotten heart. And the Bible says much about this. Our memory verse for the month is Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV) *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?* Jesus said that we are slaves of sin. Romans 6:16-17a *Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed.* He makes it clear that before Christ entered your life you were a slave of sin. 20a *For when you were slaves of sin.* But this doesn't mean you were an unwilling sinner. You chose to serve sin. St. Augustine in his "Confessions" tells of a time when he was a young man and hanging out with the boys and they decided that, for kicks, they would raid a man's pear tree. He says they weren't even hungry and they threw the pears to some pigs but they did it simply because it was wrong. Augustine writes of this, "*Behold my heart O my God; let my heart tell what it was seeking there that I should be gratuitously wanton, having no inducement to evil but the evil itself. It was foul, and I loved it. I loved to perish. I loved my own error. I was a base soul, seeking nothing through the shame but the shame itself!*" This is the way of a fallen race, a sinful race of rotten hearted people, corrupt and wicked. Romans 5:10 says we were enemies of God. Colossians 1:21 says you were hostile in your mind toward God. And then we read these passages that tell us that spiritually man is D-E-A-D dead. Ephesians 2:1-3 *You were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in 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 3 Among 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. This is the clear and abundant testimony of the word of God. It is further verified by the experience of God's people. C.S. Lewis, upon his conversion to Christianity, noted that when he examined himself, when he looked within, he writes, *There I found what appalled me; a zoo of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a nursery of fears, a harem of fondled hatreds. My name was Legion.* He realized that his sin flowed out of a very basic corruption. He sinned because he was a sinner.

The Scriptures teach that something is radically wrong with man. And why is this? Well, some today would recognize that people are messed up but they look to some societal cause to explain it. They say man is corrupt not because of his nature but because he has been corrupted. His misbehavior is due to society's faults. He is a product of overcrowded public schools or economic oppression or something such as that. The idea is that if society were just not so fouled up, individuals would be fine. Of course they fail to note that our sick society is the creation of supposedly healthy individuals. They just go on talking about how the uninhibited native Indians lived such happy, carefree, naive, but righteous lives. The "noble savage" concept. If you saw the movie "Dances With Wolves" you know what I mean. All of the world's problems are laid at the feet of white, European, Christian civilization. But, the notion of the noble savage is a fairy tale. Africans and Native Americans were enslaving and killing each other long before Europeans joined in. Sin and selfish cruelty is not the invention of the industrial revolution. It is basic to human nature. It is in all men. There is no innocent native in Africa or Allison Park. *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

The real problem is that we are born with rotten hearts. David, in Psalm 51:5 (NIV) *Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.* Psalm 58:3 *The wicked are estranged from the womb; these who speak lies go astray from birth.* The Westminster Confession of Faith says that by their sin our first parents "*became dead in sin and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body*" (WCOF 6:2) This sinful nature they passed on to their offspring so that we are naturally inclined to do what is evil. I really believe you know that is true. You can see it in yourself and you can see it in your children. Beth and I have four children and maybe yours are like ours. We did not have to teach any of them to lie. But, they figured out how - without any instruction. You don't need to teach them that do you - it comes naturally. Do you need to teach selfishness and impatience and cruelty and anger and pride? Of course not - they are born

experts at those things. Proverbs 22:**15a** *Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child.* It's all the good things that have to be drilled into them. Several years ago the state of Minnesota established a commission on crime which was to investigate the root causes of criminal behavior. One would expect them to produce a list of social factors, poverty, overcrowded public schools, etc. But this commission was surprisingly honest in its assessment. Listen to this excerpt from their report:

Every baby starts life as a little savage. He is completely selfish and self-centered. He wants what he wants, when he wants it – his bottle, his mother's attention, his playmate's toy, his uncle's watch. Deny these and he seethes with rage and aggressiveness, which would be murderous were he not so helpless. He is, in fact, dirty. He has no morals, no knowledge, no skills. This means that all children, not just certain children are born delinquent. If permitted to continue in the self-centered world of his infancy, given free reign to his impulsive actions, to satisfy his wants, every child would grow up a criminal, a thief, a killer, a rapist.

William Kilpatrick in his book *Psychological Seduction* writes,

Children are undeniably charming, but they are also an example of how badly we need society if we are not to be ruled by power, whim and selfishness. The business of snatching toys, refusing to share, hitting little sisters, and lying outrageously to cover it all up begins early enough in the child's life to suggest that the fatal flaw lies not in his society, but in his nature. It is society, after all, acting through the parent that teaches him to return the stolen wagon, to share his playthings, to treat his sister nicely, and to tell the truth. To have missed all this does not speak very well of the observational powers of those who preach natural goodness.

Chesterton said that the doctrine of human depravity is the one Christian dogma with clear empirical evidence. Man is sinful this I know for the Bible tells me so. Even if it didn't, experience would. So, this is a problem forgiveness cannot solve. But, it's not a problem Jesus cannot solve. When He came to save His people from their sins He meant both the guilt and the power of sin. He is a complete Savior, bringing a complete salvation. So, He not only secures our forgiveness thru the cross but He obtains our transformation - sending His Spirit to give us life and make us new. Ephesians 2:**1** *You were dead in your trespasses and sins.* **4-5** *But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ.* This is the meaning of the new birth, of being born-again. II Corinthians 5:**17** *If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.* I Peter 1:3 says **God** has caused us to be born again. This is a change, not of my legal status, but a change of me. I had a rotten heart and the Lord Jesus cleanses my heart, transforms my heart! This is why it is a problem when people speak of becoming a Christian as if it's the taking up of new ideas. It is no less than an eternal alteration of the person. This is what the

gospel does for us. Pastor John Ortberg tells of a time when his son was obsessed with a TV show called, *The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*. I vaguely remember when they were really hot. But the teenagers on this show would yell, "It's morphin time" and then they would receive power to do extraordinary things. Ortberg says this: *I liked the idea so much I decided to use it as a liturgy in our church. It wasn't a liturgical congregation, but I tried to teach the people a liturgy where I would say, "Let us morph." The people were supposed to respond, "Let us morph, indeed." They encouraged me to move to Chicago not long after that.* Ortberg is hilarious. We should try that. *Let us morph.* Congregation: *Let us morph indeed.* For Christians, it is time to morph, to become new and better and more like our Lord. And that is what the gospel intends for us. A radio ad for the Unitarian church says, "Come as you are, we don't want to change you." But a gracious Jesus says, "Come as you are and I promise to change you." If you just want to be affirmed then North Park Church really isn't for you. Frankly, Jesus really isn't for you either. You may want to go to a local country-club church. But if you want to be savingly changed, come to Christ in repentance and humility and He will make you whole. This great work of God is described this way in Ezekiel 36:25-27 *I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes.* The slavery to sin becomes a glad slavery to Christ and to righteousness. The addiction to evil is gone, the man is saved from his bad position **and** bad condition, from his rotten record and his rotten heart. Is that what you want? Man, that is exactly what I want. I want forgiveness, but I also want to be better, and the gospel of Christ offers me both. Now, listen, the New Testament warns us that the transforming work is not yet made perfect. We are in a growth process. We will continue to sin, we still have impure desires, but, in Christ, we are emphatically **not** the slaves to sin we were outside of Jesus. We are different! And in our attempts as believers to be humble and honest we must not denigrate the work that has been done in us. The blood of Christ atones, the Spirit of Christ transforms. The believer is saved by God, fully, completely, to the uttermost. Now, besides being the truth - this means that if you have not been changed by Christ you have not been forgiven by Him either. There is a popular notion among us that if someone follows the formula of saying a prayer or walking an aisle that he or she must genuinely believe despite what is reflected in his lifestyle. But such a notion is contrary to New Testament teaching. Romans 8:14 *For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are*

sons of God. Are you being led by the Spirit? The puritans used to ask prospective church members two questions: What has Christ done **for** you? and What has Christ done **in** you? Both of these are critical to understand. And if He has done nothing in you He has done nothing for you. It is time to take care of your problems: rotten record, rotten heart. And there is hope. There is hope on both fronts. Your past, your rotten record can be cleared and forgiven. Your rotten heart, and thus your future, can be reshaped by the power of Christ. You don't have to keep living in the mess and the rut that you have been living in. Jesus says He has come to give us life and to give it abundantly. Jesus is the answer, not a phony photo on a prayer rug, but a Great Savior for a great need. So, turning from your sin, turn unto Him. Sincerely cry out to Him for help. Do this alone. Do it with some fellow believers. Cry out to Jesus. This Jesus can and will not only pardon your sins, He will change your life.