

Depravity and Repentance

Let us turn to our Bibles to 2 Timothy chapter 2. 2 Timothy chapter 2, verses 25 to 26. The end of the chapter there, Paul is writing to the young pastor Timothy.

Let us listen attentively to the Word of God, 2 Timothy 2.25 and 26. In humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses, and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will. Let us pray.

Father, God, may your spirit be upon us this morning, especially Lord, for those of us who need to hear this in particular, and the importance of repentance and depravity. We certainly need it as Christians, not as though any of us are perfect enough, God Almighty. But sometimes, Lord, we have such weaknesses in our lives that we need to hear this especially.

In that regard, Lord, guide my lips, and guide my words. Be faithful to the text, and that we would be encouraged and strengthened to move forward in our Christian walk. We are called, not simply unbelievers, but all Christians are called as well to live a life of humility, a life of repentance.

But we will sin and struggle therein, but always keep our eyes upon Christ, our Redeemer. Amen. So here in Paul's urging of Timothy to be gentle, yet firm in calling others to Christ, he describes what moral depravity looks like.

This is not uncommon in his writings. Paul has long, complicated sentences often there, and he ends up having all these clauses or descriptions hanging off the main idea. And from that, because we know the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit, and that these words are put here on purpose and not by accident, we can therefore derive teachings and more understandings of and through the Word of God than we could with ordinary human literature.

And from that, we can learn here the doctrine of repentance, the doctrine of depravity of man, moral depravity. That's a native condition for humanity. So it's a good time to relearn these things, I think, especially given some of the details in this strong description of the fallen nature of mankind.

Total Depravity of Mankind

And so the first point is the total depravity of mankind, the total wickedness or sinful condition that they are in, not as an abstraction, but that which they are by nature. To understand depravity helps us better understand repentance. If we don't want superficial repentance, and I know you don't want that, you're dealing with a family member, you're dealing with a co-worker, you're dealing with somebody who steals from you, you don't want them saying, well, you know, it wasn't that bad.

No, you've got to understand how bad the sin is. This is serious stuff, and your repentance ought to reflect that. And so the two go hand-in-hand, therefore, as we see in this text.

But they are called to repentance by the pastor Timothy here because of the condition they find themselves in here under the heel of the devil. So a proper repentance involves a fuller understanding of depravity, of the depth of sin and unbelieving hearts, the breadth of depravity, so that they would avoid a limited and weak repentance. And certainly as one grows in Christ, you've heard my prayer, more sins will be revealed.

When we are born again by the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, we who are adults in particular, because of course sometimes the kids are grown up in their whole life as being believers, which is a wonderful blessing, we recognize, and the kids recognize as well as they get older, right, from 5-year-old to 10-year-old to 18. Wow! Where do these sins come from? That's why we have to know the law of God and examine ourselves by His Word so that we can repent anew and to eschew or flee and reject the sin within us in our mind, in our will, and our emotions. Those are the three major components in our conscience as well, in our soul that need the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

Now let me define here what this depravity looks like, this sinful condition of men, women, and children across the face of the world. We have this in the short of catechism, right? A catechism is a question and response layout to teach doctrine from the Word of God, to teach the Bible, wherein consists the sinfulness of the condition that mankind fell into. I'm giving a paraphrase here.

What's the condition? What does it look like? What is the sinfulness that we speak of? And we read here in this passage, among many other passages of the Word of God, what does it entail? What does it look like? The sinfulness of that estate or condition, that's the word we use today, wherein man fell, it consists in the guilt of Adam's sin, the lack or want of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called original sin. Now, of course, together with all practice of sin, or they call actual sin in our lives, that's a lot of things going through in that short of catechism. Remember the short of catechism was given to children during the Puritan era and from there on out, that they would grow up at age 11 to 12 and 13 to 14 to realize what they're being taught in the church is true, and they should own it themselves and learn these things.

So first of all, let me describe here the guilt of Adam's first sin is our guilt, for he is our leader. And what he does is what we have done through him in a unique way that our president or the judges or the senates are our leaders, and what they do represents us in one sense. But this is different with Adam, for in him, biologically, we come from, and there's this connection, an organic connection.

So when he fell, we fell. We read this in Romans 5.12. Romans 5.12. Therefore, just as through one man's sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, he means by man, mankind, because what? All sinned. It just shifts very easily from Adam's sin to all of us sinning in Adam.

And he continues in verse 19, for as by one man's disobedience, that's Adam, were made sinners, and so also by one man's obedience, that is Christ, many will be made righteous. If we do not teach and believe in our churches in America that we fell on Adam, Adam's fall

we sinned all, was the old way of describing it in the schools of the Puritans in early America as well. The New England Primer, in Adam's fall we sinned all.

If that's not true on the left hand, then Christ can't save us on the right hand. But Romans 5 makes it very clear, in Adam we fell, but in Christ we are raised from the dead. They have to fit together.

One falls apart, you have no salvation, because Christ does what Adam does, but more positively, gloriously, and wonderfully. He saves us, whereas Adam brought us to hell and damnation. This identification, this union by the covenant of works, we call it, in Adam as our representative head.

But it's not just the guilt of Adam's first sin, but the lack of original righteousness, the want is the old language there. We don't have perfection in other words. Romans 3.10, there is none righteous, no not one.

That's the clear teaching of the Word of God and of the churches. All churches will read this verse that I'm aware of historically, even if they have, often we find out different ways of understanding it. We understand it to be thorough.

They have sin, there's none righteous, not one iota of goodness in you to commend you to God to bring you to heaven. You may feel differently, perhaps. Your friends and family may say, well, I'm not that bad.

It doesn't matter. It's objectively true, regardless of how you feel about the case. There's none righteous, none perfect, none morally upright enough to be brought to heaven.

And he's emphatic, no not one, Paul writes. The lack of original righteousness, lack of perfection is only one part of the story. The other part is they are morally corrupt.

It's filled, there's a vacuum. The moral vacuum can't stay that way. It is now filled with unrighteousness and imperfections and wickedness and the like, or what we call original sin.

Psalms 51.5 is the classic passage that many of us may recall where David writes, Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me. There in that psalm, I won't go to it, you can read and understand his plea before God that he is a sinner. And this is what one of the descriptions he has of his sin before God is that his mother was a sinner and therefore I'm born a sinner.

Very clear, I was brought forth in iniquity. People don't want to hear that, especially in the American or the West where we're just taught, well, you're basically good, you just have a few blemishes in your life, you know, you can work your way through that. No, no, a thousand times no.

The Bible's clear, nature's clear, your conscience is clear, you know you sin and you make excuses for it. John 3.6 we read in the Gospel account of Christ, That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit. He's not meaning some kind of mystical description here, he's using this language to highlight that we are born sinners.

That which is born of the flesh, i.e. the sinful flesh, that our desires, of course, of the of the flesh, of the body, run amok. We want praise, we want pride, we want money, we want whatever it is we want. We desire and lust and have not and desire more.

It's never enough. Whatever that is, sleep, eating, it's all exaggerated by sin. That's what he means by being born of the flesh.

On the flip side of this is that which is born of the spirit, born again by the spirit as we know elsewhere. John 3, that famous passage here, Nicodemus. Born again, born from above, born such that the old man, the flesh, the desires are now suppressed and overcome by the spirit more and more day by day.

And we know the struggle in our hearts as believers. The description here I'm going over the total depravity of mankind. It's for those outside of Christ, those who are not believers, those who do not repent of their sin and follow Jesus, who want nothing to do with His Word and His way.

It describes them to a T. However, it describes Christians relatively. Yes, we too sin, but our depravity has been attenuated greatly by the Spirit of God. We are born again, for example.

We have new desires. We wish to be with God's people, wish to read the Word of God, wish to talk to God and praise Him. We didn't have that before.

So there is a change, but the change takes time, like it takes time to grow up, it takes time to learn things in school and get over bad habits. That's the difference. James reminds us of this for the Christians.

James 1.14, but each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when the desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. It's here that we struggle mostly as believers.

It's in our hearts. Still, we fight and wrestle with that which the world does not wrestle. There's no wrestling there.

They'll just keep sinning. They're happy with it. They like it.

They like the lifestyle. And in talking to people, although you're not a pastor like Timothy, you'll have opportunities to talk to co-workers and friends and family members who are not believers, quote these Bibles. This is a good Bible verse to quote, I think, or other ones.

Sometimes you don't have to quote a Bible verse. You just appeal to them, to their own conscience. They know what is right and wrong, but they do it anyways.

Take the Word of God, what it says at face value. People will tell you otherwise, but don't listen to them. Listen to the truth.

What are the effects of sin? So, that's a picture of sin I described of those outside of Christ, in particular, that they're in the guilt of Adam's first sin. They lack of original righteousness. They are not just lacking, but they are full of moral corruptness in their nature.

The effects therein are multitude. What is the misery, we read in our Shorter Catechism, question 19, what is the misery of that condition where all mankind has fallen into? All mankind, by their fall, lost communion with God, are under His wrath and curse, and so made liable to the miseries of this life. We deserve it.

To death itself and the pains of hell forever. Everything out of kilter, out of whack, that's miserable and difficult in this life is because of sin. Period.

Those are the effects of sin. And again, the world knows this. Unbelievers see this intuitively.

They reflect and think about it. Something's wrong with this world. Why can't we just get along, for example? There's songs about that all the time.

It's like, because we're sinners. We're just born this way. We want to do these things.

We're rebellious. But there's lots of effects. A broken fellowship is one of the first effects here described in the Shorter Catechism.

Lost of fellowship or lost communion is the old language there for fellowship. John 8.34, we read, Jesus answered them, His audience, most assuredly I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. Why do neighbors, why do leaders, why do business shakers and movers sin and act corruptly and play wicked games? Because they're slaves to sin.

And again, we don't want to hear that in the West, especially it seems to me in America. We're taught we're free. We have freedom.

We can do what we want. Yeah, you keep wanting the wrong and doing the wrong thing. What's your problem? You're a slave to sin, a willing slave as well, I would argue.

The Bible tells us. Your conscience informs you. Under God's wrath as a judge, this we know, again, to be true.

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven. Romans 1.18 is one of the classic passages there as well. But they know there's a God and they suppress the truth and unrighteousness.

There are no atheists. They talk like they're atheists. They say they're atheists.

Don't listen to them. They don't know what they're talking about. Rather, they do.

They're making excuses and putting on a face and putting on a mask. The judicial curse is described explicitly in Galatians 3.10 that people are under a curse who are not believers. For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse of the law.

That is, there is no grace for them. For it is written, cursed is everyone who does not continue in all the things which are written in the book of the law to do them. You miss one commandment and that's enough.

You're under God's curse. But of course, it's more than just one commandment. It's a whole host of them.

Although sinners and different sinners sin and transgress and act wickedly in different and sundry ways to be sure. And the miseries of this life, a great classic passage that we know of, Genesis 3.16, describing here a twofold picture that sometimes people miss. Not only does God come to Adam and Eve and give them the curse that we all recognize.

She in labor, he in his work, is cursed and they struggle. But there's also a restoration going on there because they're still alive. He can still work and she can still give birth to children.

They've been restored back to their position by grace, although it's under and laboring under the weight of sin. To the woman he said, I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception. In pain you shall bring forth children.

Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you. Then to Adam he said, because you have hated the voice of your wife and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, you shall not eat of it. Cursed is the ground for your sake and toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life.

These are but picturesque snapshots of all the miseries of this world. It's not just him as a farmer. That's not the idea here.

The Old Testament and often the New Testament as well speaks in concrete languages of a part for the whole. We do this today. I wish I kept my old set of wheels.

1971 Cutler Supreme. Two-door, vinyl, apple green top. What was nice was a 350 four-barrel.

Nice powerful engine, gas guzzler. You guys know what I'm talking about. I didn't use the word car.

I said a nice set of wheels, a part for the whole. That's how we talk. The Bible does the same thing here.

This description of the curse upon Eve and Adam is a description of all of life. Everything miserable is from this. It comes from sin.

Not just Adam and Eve's sin. Your sin. You keep doing the sin.

You keep walking in the step of Adam and Eve. That's why we need Christ. The particulars here I want to go over are from Paul.

There's two ways of looking at this. If God perhaps will grant them repentance so that they may know the truth. So that's a positive.

Repentance would mean they're going to know the truth and that they may come to their senses, verse 26. But that implies what? They didn't know the truth. They didn't come to their senses.

That's the depravity side, isn't it? That's what I'm going to describe here. The negative. They're ignorant of the truth.

Unbelievers are ignorant of the truth. That ignorance is two-fold ignorance. One, in some cases, it's a sincere ignorance.

That is, they simply do not know many things about Christianity like the sacraments. You're not going to know about the Lord's Supper and baptism unless you have a Bible or Christianity comes to your shores and says, hey, you've got to be baptized. You've got to have the Lord's Supper.

So there's an ignorance there. I mean, sincere in the sense that they generally didn't know. They just simply don't know.

And you're not going to hold them accountable for that. Why don't you know about baptism? What's your problem? You weren't here 2,000 years ago, you've been alone. But there's also another kind of ignorance, a willful ignorance.

We've done it ourselves. You've experienced it and seen it in other people. Well, they want to stay ignorant.

They make excuses and don't want to know any more than they need to know. They know God exists, but what? Suppress the truth and unrighteousness. Hold it back.

Hold it down. Hide it. Hide the truth.

That's what every non-Christian way of looking at the world, acting in society, political theory, whatever you want to call it, philosophical approach to life is, but them trying to hide the ball of the knowledge of God that's in their hearts and in nature. That's a willful ignorance. That's culpable.

Unbelievers are both, of course. The part that needs to be emphasized is their willful ignorance of God's presence, of His law, of their own sin, of their culpability, of their guilt. They tried to hide that guilty conscience.

Ephesians 4.18, Paul describes it as having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness of their heart. They wish to perpetuate and live this way. They are next senseless of reality.

So we have here, I'm following again the negation of verses 25 and 26, so that they may know the truth, their ignorant of truth, and that they may come to their senses. They didn't come to their senses. They were senseless, we would say.

Perhaps we may describe it as being out of their mind. And I don't mean that in the sense of they're not morally culpable. I mean, what is wrong with you? Why would you do these things and act this way and bring chaos upon people around you? Ephesians 2.1, Paul describes in this other classic passage depravity again of mankind, the moral depravity of wickedness.

But describing the past life of the unbeliever, he says, and you, you fellow believers who have been baptized by the church as well as baptized by the power of the Spirit in your heart, you're born again. And you, he made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the Spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. That's what we were outside of Christ, brothers and sisters.

It's quite a picture, isn't it? But I want to focus here the opening part, and you, he made alive, who were what? Dead in trespasses and sin. And a life of violating God's holy will written on our hearts. Being dead in trespasses and sins, I would argue, is another way of saying senseless.

For the dead are senseless. They're senseless to the desires and the life and the lights of the living. And so in this imagery of being dead, he's pointing to their non-responsiveness.

They know nothing of life and of truth. They are dead and buried in the grave. This is how the unbeliever is to the world and the works and the word of Christ Jesus.

What moves us as believers means nothing to unbelievers. They are dead in trespasses and sin, unresponsive, indifferent, who cares, whatever that is. What are you talking about? Why do you care about his word? Who is this Christ? So don't be surprised if they think you're weird or even unhinged.

For attending worship, honoring the Lord's day, keeping your word, being clean in your life that is morally clean in actions and in words, reading your Bible, talking about God, it means nothing to them. From this imagery, but we know it goes beyond that, they hate it. They're children of disobedience, children of wrath, not just passive, it's active.

They are snared by the devil and captive to Satan's kingdom is the last description, two ideas that clearly go together. Why do we want our brothers and sisters in this world, our friends and family members, to repent? So they may know the truth, they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil. Why? Because they have been taken captive by him to do his will.

Again, Ephesians 2, that I read, that long passage in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, another description of

Satan. The spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience, not the sons of righteousness, that would be the devil, among whom also we conducted our flesh and we were by nature children of wrath. This is our description, this is what we are without Jesus.

Different ways of describing mankind, not only passively, dead in trespasses and sins, but actively being disobedient and doing whatever we wish and desire, but also paints a picture of being ensnared and captive to Satan and his kingdom under his moral influence. Now, the emphasis here, of course, is upon the depth and degree of sinfulness, both in Ephesians 2 and here in 2 Timothy 2, that they are ensnared by the devil and taken captive into his kingdom, is not to suggest that they are under sin, that they are living a life of wickedness against their will. I can't help myself, stop me, someone stop me from cursing, from fornicating.

That's not what's going on, that's not the picture, that's not the idea. The idea is just to highlight how deep into the enemy territory they are living. That's the idea.

Total Repentance of Sinners

Total repentance of sinners is the flip side of the total depravity of man. As a gift of the Spirit, classic text again here proving that the change of heart, because that's part of what repentance is, to change your mind and therefore change your actions, your will and your emotions, that's wrong, this is good. Going away from sin and unto God and Christ and a life of holiness.

There's not a power native to us. We're not born with the ability to please God, we're not born with the ability to repent. You may repent of things in this world, that's true, and unbelievers can often repent of things that Christians struggle with for a long time, in fact.

Say, you're right, I was wrong, I shouldn't have done that. That's not relevant if they don't repent to God, that's the important thing, they've got to repent to God, not to one another. That's a good start.

You have to acknowledge your sin. You sinned against the Holy Lord and Savior, the one who made you, who sustains you, keeps you alive, and blesses you even though you curse Him. That's the object of repentance, should be towards God.

The text here says, if God perhaps will grant them repentance. It's a gift of God, of the Holy Spirit in them. Knowing the powerful hold of sin and Satan has upon human race, and we know this because psychology and the whole field of counseling that we've had since the 60s and even before then, of course, in the secular world is a total failure.

They've done studies over and over again, it just turns out the best way to deal with these problems often is just have a friend to talk to. Another practical advice like, stop it or you're going to be hurting people. They don't do anything, they've done studies.

It doesn't do anything because it's not rooted in real repentance, which is towards God Almighty, but it also expresses how deep sin is in our lives. The hardest hearts, the most

wicked person that we meet or we can think of, can be melted by the power of God. That's the comforting truth in this passage.

Not, oh no, how can anybody be saved if they can't repent? What's going on here? Because they need God. That's the whole point. You pray to God, you don't pray to them to change their heart.

You pray to be sure, please change your heart, but always depending upon God to touch their heart. It may happen. I don't know until I talk.

You don't know until you try what God will do. And so the description here is a description of the effects and what repentance looks like, right? The positive part that he describes here. Grant them repentance, God Almighty, we pray, that they may know the truth.

The truth that Jesus said will set them free. They may know the truth. Repentance without truth, of course, rings hollow.

This is why good instruction of what sin is, is important, that people have a proper repentance. They may come to their senses, not just intellectual senses of knowing the truth. You got to have that to be sure, but their will and emotions as well must follow.

Their conscience is retrained and retaught by the Word of God. It takes time to be sure. Again, people often think of conversion as something dramatic.

Not necessarily. It's great if it is. Hey, I'm not knocking that.

But often it isn't. It's just like, I'm wrong. God help me, have mercy upon my soul, for I'm a wretched sinner.

And escape the snare of the devil. Repentance helps us escape the snare of the devil, of his traps for us, like we were silly little birds. We have lots of birds in our neighborhood because we live at the edge of the mountains.

They're just silly little birds, like, what are you guys doing? You're bumping into windows. We had one come into our room, our house. Kind of scary.

Birds just couldn't settle down, nothing. And that's what we are without Christ, and we get snared very easily and trapped by the devil and the world and sin. Repentance, to turn away from sin and turn to God and Christ.

It is a gift of God, part of which is new birth. You are born again, John 3, and that being born again or regenerated, the technical term we use in theology, means, therefore, you will repent and you will believe. Because your deadness to sin has now been transformed to a liveness to righteousness in Christ Jesus.

Not your own righteousness, but his perfection. His obedience to the law and the like. And thus we cry out for mercy to save poor, wretched sinners here and now.

Repentance looks different, of course, for different people at different times in their lives. You recall here in our church, a number of us may remember the Delaney's. They were baptized in their 90s.

Isn't that amazing? Their whole life they went through. I remember talking to them. We did Bible studies there every week.

And they said, yeah, we knew God existed. This is the older generation. This is before the boomer generation.

This is their fathers, mothers. We knew God existed, but we just lived our own life. We wanted to do our own thing.

And so the repentance was expressed through the baptism. There wasn't lots of crying and tearing. And at that age, you could.

Sometimes your emotions break down more because you're older. But it doesn't matter. He'd been through a lot.

He'd seen a lot. He acknowledged, I was wrong. I was in sin.

I need to follow Christ. Praise be to his name. So it looks different is the point.

We shouldn't cement it down to one stereotypical way of repenting. Often, again, I remind you, the world does repent, and it may even look good to us at times, but it's only ever partial. They're turning away from sin, of selfishness.

That's great, but they end up running into another sin of pride, whatever the case is. But it's never repentance away from sin and toward God and Christ. That's the other part you must have if it's a genuine repentance.

Because it's only Christ that will save you. You have to believe in him and trust in him that he has covered your sin and he, that his Father above, has accepted your repentance because of your trust in Jesus and not because of your own meriting of his deliverance. Repentance, in other words, is not meritorious.

It does not commend us to God as such. Look at God. Look how sincere I am in my repentance.

Please bring me to heaven. Some churches teach that. Some religions teach that.

You can make up for all your past sins of beating on your friends and cheating on your wife or whatever the case is if you're just sincere enough. No, that's not what commends you before God. That's not what brings you to heaven.

What brings you to heaven is Jesus Christ and his merits alone, his sincerity, his perfection. You must simply repent and hate your sin and say, yes, Jesus, I accept and believe and trust

that you will save me for eternity and have covered my sins. So it is indeed a good thing that you repent and you ought to repent, but it's not something you should get accolades for.

That is necessary, but it is not something that would commend us before God. Only Christ does. It's only faith in him, trusting in him alone that saves us.

Continue to pray and work, brothers and sisters, for the saving of those near you. It is hard work, but necessary because of our love for our fellow men and for those especially close to us. It may be somewhat easy because often people don't want to talk to us about religion.

It's certainly not at work. That's understandable. You're busy.

I grant that. When they know you're a Christian, often it's a turnoff, but it's not easy in the other sense that you want to talk to them. You want them to believe.

Sometimes on problems, what's your problem? Don't you see how miserable your life is because of your own bad decisions, sinful decisions over and over again? It's only God Almighty, the Spirit, that we can plead to change their hearts. Even as Christians, we certainly struggle with remaining sins in ourselves and therefore are called to a life of repentance. It's the same call, different context.

Everyone must repent. The unbeliever repenting of a life of unbelief and wanting it should turn, therefore, to Jesus. For us, we turn to Jesus, but we keep struggling with sins.

We have to still plead and cry out for repentance because we are promised by the gospel that we have a Spirit and that He will forgive us all our righteousness day in and day out. As there's a new day and a new morning, there's always new forgiveness found in Christ Jesus. Let us never forget that, brothers and sisters.

Amen. Let us pray. Father God above, move our hearts, move our minds and our souls to live a life such that we are indeed repenting and that we are learning and coming to know more of your truth, that we are continuing to be prayed by your power and your grace upon us to keep to our senses and not become senseless in sin and to stay far away from the snare of the devil.

Guide and protect us, God Almighty, from our own foolishness, we pray, and bring those near to and dear to us to a life of repentance, just like us. By the blood of Christ we pray. Amen.

Let us arrive