

<b>Series:</b> Ruin to Renovation	<b>Reference:</b> Psalm 14:2-3	<b>Title:</b> Ruined Soul	<b>Date:</b> 02.25.18
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The Christian cannot cut corners. They must deal with the whole self, warts & all. To not begin with the ruined soul, is to bypass repentance & not to understand salvation at all. But this does not usually enter into our polite conversations....although, it is imperative & very necessary for salvation & spiritual formation.			

### Color changes in text indicate slide changes

Thanks to Dallas Willard, this series is born out of his book, *Renovation of the Heart*. Many of his thoughts & words make it into these sermons; read the book as you follow along.

*PSALM 14:2-3*

*The Lord looks down from heaven, on all mankind  
to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God.  
All have turned away, all have become corrupt;  
there is no one who does good, not even one.*

*Romans 3:23,*

*...for all have sinned & fall short of the glory of God,*

We said last week, there's a sense in modern society, there's no such thing as a sinful human nature. That sin's an archaic construct made up by those in the past which simply had not progressed to the point at which humankind finds itself now. We mistakenly think in terms of only intelligence; not taking into account all aspects of self. We think we're smarter now. But...resurrect Plato & stand our greatest modern philosopher, or politician next to him - they'd pale in comparison. Human intelligence isn't just about the amount, or kind of knowledge in a brain, it's the ability to acquire & apply knowledge & skill. The ability to think - to employ logic & reason. And human nature, more comprehensive than just intelligence, isn't progressive without God's saving grace, if anything, it's regressive. Wisdom isn't dictated by how much math or chemistry I know, rather with how I understand human nature & navigate relationships & life.

Humankind has not progressed in becoming better internally, and never will without divine intervention. We may have more gadgets, but that's not progression of nature or the inner self. It's just more stuff & honestly more headache. This is why love songs, great literature & art are timeless, and will always be, because human nature doesn't change. This is why poverty, racism, and all the other plagues of humankind which originate internally from the human heart, won't go away until Jesus comes back. These things may thrive more readily under certain conditions, but they won't fully go away just by societal pressure, education, or better laws.

The mature Christian understands this & embraces their already Ruined Human Soul - our flawed human nature with inherent sin at it's core. They're not afraid to look into that truth, own it & begin from there. Any serious look at Christian spiritual formation must begin from the dark truth that the human condition is at it's core corrupt - it is, in

Christian theological terms, *Fallen*. That is, we're totally fallen away from God from the beginning.

And at the same time, everyone's being formed spiritually, Christian & nonChristian alike - each becoming a certain type of person. What type, is the question. The Florida shooter chose a certain route of spiritual formation, he's responsible for it. His was dark, leading to certain beliefs, values & then on to horrific action. He chose this route.

Spiritual formation's like an education, it's good or bad. And it's as if, at the moment of our salvation, Jesus picks us up & moves us to the best school district with the best teachers, the best resources, and the Bible as our textbook. A district of peace, learning & growth, although for a time, we still look over our shoulder, since the school we came from had metal detectors & gangs running the halls.

CS Lewis said humans were either '*immortal horrors or everlasting splendors*'. Without Jesus we're the former (Ps 14 & Rom 3). With him we're the latter (2 Cor. 5:17). And we're invited to enter into that splendor with him - to become more & more splendid day in & day out.

Here's the weird thing...when God created everything else, he said it was good. But when he got to humankind, he created man & woman in his image, and deemed us very good (Gen 1-3). Human beings are at a level far & above all other creation. Old Christian writers would say that our majesty's been veiled to us in order that we wouldn't live in vanity. Maybe that's true. It's precisely this fact, the illustriousness of humankind, which makes our fallenness such a tragedy!

If we were to illustrate this, we may say it's the difference of our addict cousin who lives on the streets of Philly shooting up heroin. When he's arrested we think nothing of it, it's what we expect of him. He's almost insignificant, since his sin doesn't surprise us.

But when Bill Cosby was first accused of sexual misconduct & at such gross levels, we were appalled! When it first came out, everyone thought, "No way, not Bill!" Dave Chapelle said Bill Cosby's moral failure was like finding out milk, one of the most wholesome things he enjoyed growing up, had been found to be bad for you (he said it in such a way I cannot share in church though!). Cosby was significant for all of us. He was a seemingly strong morally upright successful good black man, to whom we all enjoyed looking up. His fall from grace made a loud thud in our collective consciousness.

Humankind *IS* significant - we're not a drug addict expected to fail, we're Bill Cosby, a prominent wholesome moral leader who's done something atrocious & fallen from grace altogether. If we were on the same level as slugs & chipmunks, our fallenness wouldn't be as tragic! But it is, since we're created in the image of God; very good. And all the garbage which plagues us is a result of our fallen nature - our sin. Every societal ill can be traced to it.

But as tragic as our sinful condition is, these are also the reasons why God would go to such lengths to save us - to sacrifice himself on a cross! We are, in the eyes of God, immensely worth saving! We're deserving of death, and worthy of Grace at the same time. Our sin doesn't make us insignificant, or valueless in his sight, rather it just makes us lost. And here's the difficulty in communication with nonChristians...even in our lostness, our human depravity...the human being's still capable of acts sublime. Of expressing deep love & commitment in relation with others. Of writing, singing, or performing extremely moving profound works of art. Of doing good for others unlike no other being on the face of the planet. Of being heroic. Our baseness is easily masked with our residual godlike-image.

So, for those who *don't* want to acknowledge the true horror which is the human condition, they will simply choose to be distracted, or look away. Because humankind can do resplendent majestic things, so to them, it must be the few, and not the whole which is rotten. They're unwilling to acknowledge there's a very twisted thing at the core of us all - and therefore, run the risk of missing God's call upon their hearts.

All of this is the reason why God says in Is 64:6, "*All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.*" It's not about our perfect record or good deeds, as we said last week. God didn't come to make bad people good, he came to make dead people alive. Sin has shot us dead & only Jesus can remove the arrow. Remember from past sermons...Ephesians & Romans, as well as many other places, tell us that we're spiritually dead, like the true zombie race, until we meet Jesus. **Morality's not the purpose of Jesus coming, it's the byproduct of life with him, given his heart's good & we begin to emulate that - God is good & can be none other than good.**

So, it doesn't matter how nice someone is, or how well-adjusted to life they seem to be! How moral or immoral they are...without Jesus we're lost, spiritually dead. That's the only starting point to true spiritual formation, and from it we grow to emulate God's goodness.

But sin's not in the conversation as a reason for the failures of people in any way these days. As a matter of fact it's only a sin to talk about sin! The only natural logical recourse to human evil in the world when God is cut out of the conversation is to label it as *mental illness*. It's the only excuse we have when faced with evil in a person at all. Be it from the cheating spouse, to a shooting in a schoolyard. We can't fathom such levels of evil coming from humankind which we expect such greatness from, so we take choice & responsibility out of the hands of everyone. Anything aberrant is simply deemed mentally ill. We've taken the concept of personal *choice* out of the equation, and what a satanic lie it is. People aren't held accountable for choices, they're simply regarded as those who can't help themselves, since 'they're made that way', and in our thinking, everyone else is just made differently than that aberrant person.

So, we have a society now which points the finger at only the most horrific & claims, "Mental instability!" Then, we're forced to create laws to control everyone's behavior,

since their hiding among us, there's no way to identify them other than behavior - which is after someone's hurt. And that's our *only* answer - and it's not freedom. It's unable to solve the problem. Enact laws to control racism, but the racist is still a racist internally. The Judge who incarcerates murderers still goes home at night & assassinates his wife slowly with murderous words. Without the killing off of sin, and the rebirth of the soul, sin simply goes underground, only to resurface in other areas of life later. No law can control it.

Dallas Willard wisely says, *"Choice is where sin dwells."* No matter what my unique proclivities are, I choose to sin when I do. It's no one's fault but my own. Remember, we've trusted in Education, Science & Technology, thinking they'll save us, but they can't address the inner human heart in it's depraved needy state! Modern thought's like a farmer who plants crops, but denies the existence of weeds & insects which destroy the work & all he can think to do is pour on more fertilizer...which doesn't help. We have to accept & come to grips with the base problem & need. Sin, our desperate need for God & to be transformed into his likeness.

My sin, even in its more socially acceptable forms, make my heart just as far from God as was Hitler's. Your proclivity to watch degrading pornography is just as hurtful & damaging to women, as is an active rapist's. When Jeremiah 17:9 says, *"The heart is deceitful above all things & beyond cure. Who can understand it?"* I have to admit, he's talking about me! He's not just talking about all those others we don't like or agree with, or we deem mentally unstable - Paul's statement puts us all in the same bucket!

Acknowledging that fact brings about a freedom, humility & understanding of not only ourselves, but of others. It creates not only a desire in me to know God more fully, but also a compassion for my neighbor, even if I don't like them (Luke 10). And if the sinful nature of humankind is so tragic due to our place in creation with God, then sin in the church is that much more horrific than in other places. Do you ever wonder why people get more mad at church folks, than they do others in this issue of moral failure - it's because it is more tragic! Especially when we try to cover it up, revealing a lack of integrity. Sin undermines Christians from living as God's own people out of God's own heart. This is why it's so perplexing for Christians to think they can solve social ills with the voting booth, rather than with Jesus applied to the heart. Evangelism's *always* the answer - of ourselves & others.

This is why we don't come to church to better ourselves, to gain more self-esteem, get some religion, or be more morally upright people - boosting self-esteem only breeds self-deception & eventual frustration since the root of the problem still exists. We come to church because we need Jesus desperately, without him we're tragically lost. And we don't just need him once & done, but every single day of our lives as we work out our salvation with fear & trembling (Philippians 2:12).

Denial of our condition & need of Jesus stands in our way. In fact, without denial, people would be dropping off left & right from suicidal tendencies. Since to look at the darkness of our hearts without Gospel hope is absolutely despairing. Yet still, in their

denial, people may regard this kind of look at ourselves to be masochistic. To admit that we're that far gone, they may think is counterproductive to human growth & betterment; or simply just too negative. *So they must contrive ways to deal with the reality of it all - so their twisted hearts make up untruths to live by (Romans 1:21-23).*

But our argument is, that if you want to reuse the poisoned glass, then you must empty all the contents out & wash the cup. To only pour out 99%, and leave any of the contaminate at the bottom is only to continually poison yourself again & again.

Christians must understand themselves first, then be willing to look the fool throwing our weight behind the words of God, speaking against the groupthink prevalent today that we're just good & only need to be educated to do better. Jesus did it with the Pharisees, we feel he was being harsh at times. But, when the heart has deceived, not only itself, but whole systems of people, a straightforward answer is the only thing which might cut through! "You brood of vipers, you whitewashed tombs!" he said; these words weren't to hurt, but to help (see Luke 11:37-54, Mt 23:26-28, John 5:44). The healing wound. The surgeon cutting out the cancer instead of simply applying salve to the carcinoma.

In Romans 3:10-18 Paul quotes from Psalm 14, in an estimation of human nature...

*"There is no one righteous, not even one;  
there is no one who understands;  
there is no one who seeks God.*

*All have turned away,  
they have together become worthless;  
there is no one who does good,  
not even one."*

*"Their throats are open graves;  
their tongues practice deceit."*

*"The poison of vipers is on their lips."*

*"Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."*

*"Their feet are swift to shed blood;  
ruin and misery mark their ways,  
and the way of peace they do not know."*

*"There is no fear of God before their eyes."*

If you think this doesn't describe you...then you're simply not being honest. And that last line's important since Proverbs 1:7 says, *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.* And 9:10 says, *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

We fear God not because he's mean, but because he's dangerous. He does have the power of life & death in his hands. Electricity & fire aren't mean either, but they are dangerous. When understood & used wisely they're beneficial. God's the same, although in his case we don't manipulate as we do with electricity or fire, rather we simply

submit. To not care what God thinks is incontrovertibly careless & reckless. But we live in a world which has flippantly written him off in such ways.

The Psalmist didn't though...listen to his heartfelt understanding of self, and his open need for divine intervention in his own heart...

*PSALM 51 - "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*

*Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*

*Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you. Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, you who are God my Savior, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise. May it please you to prosper Zion, to build up the walls of Jerusalem. Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous, in burnt offerings offered whole; then bulls will be offered on your altar."*

Notice his acknowledgement of sin, even from birth leads to a need for salvation which leads to a contrite evangelistic heart. Romans 3:20 says, *Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.*

We're still trying to solve our issues by human law instead of allowing God's Law to reveal our deep & desperate need for transformation by God!

Let's not delude ourselves to think that just by implementing laws societal problems will go away. As Christians we want the Shalom of God to reign, and the only thing that will make that happen is Jesus changing hearts (evangelism). We should always vote our conscience on issues, but neither side should delude ourselves that a sound byte on Facebook, or Twitter is going to change the hearts of others. Ever notice that both sides of any issue actually have strong arguments? That's because we're still dancing around the behavioral & artifact circles. As Christians we've not been talking about the central



issue which is the depravity of humankind & it's utter desperate need for Christ - we still get caught in the thicket of artifacts & behavior.

A soundbite doesn't afford the room, or nuance to discuss any issue, and meanwhile we're drawn into arguments which only drive deeper wedges & keep us from talking about the most important things; our need for Jesus, and his ability to change us at the core. More or less outward control isn't the answer for any problem, more or less Jesus is, as **Romans 3:21-24 illustrates...**

*21 But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

For our current context I think it's helpful to replace Jew & Gentile with anything you like, Black & White, Asian & Hispanic, Black Panther & White Supremacist, Male & Female, Republican & Democrat, Liberal & Conservative, etc... Jesus died for all peoples, we're to love & witness to them. No one stays the same after encountering Jesus. In coming to Christ we have our hearts renewed & begin a journey of becoming more like Him. This is why we don't focus all our judgement on outward behavior, instead we share Jesus, then nurture towards true spiritual formation in Christ.