

# Utterly Lost in Sin

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**Bible Verse:** Titus 3:3  
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I want to open our time by reading the first three verses of Titus 3 to just set the context for us here. Titus 3:1-3 says,

1 Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, 2 to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. 3 For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.

On Sunday we looked at verse 2, the call to be a peaceable Christian, and we saw what we are to avoid and what we are to advance in our lives as we deal with the world around us. Verse 2, "to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men." We commented on how comprehensive that verse is that we would be insulting toward no one, that we would be kind and gentle and considerate to all men. It's a comprehensive call and one of the things that I said rather spontaneously in the moment and in the act of preaching, is I was struck by the fact that I am deeply concerned that this aspect of Christian living is being lost in the midst of our politically minded approach to Christianity and, you know, we let what our political opponents, you know, speaking humanistically, our political opponents and the adversarial nature of things, and that's spilling over into the life of the church and spilling over into the way that the church views unsaved people, and I'm greatly burdened by that. If it is, as it seems to me to be, becoming the prevailing pattern in which Christians, so-called, view the world, then we are really losing sight of what it means to be salt and light in the world. You know, Jesus said, "Let your light shine before men that they might glorify your Father who is in heaven." I asked you the question, you know, was it an angry Christian that the Lord used to draw you to Christ or was it someone that was kind and loving and considerate and showed love for your soul? Just by personal experience, let alone by the word of God, you know, our experiences is that it was the loving, gracious people that made Christ attractive to us; in one way or another, the gospel was shared with us. I remember my first pastor back in Bloomington, IN. I've lost track of him, he's probably with the Lord right now, but what a kind, gracious man he was and how he welcomed me into his church in the early, very early days of my conversion. He manifested that peaceable, gentle spirit and his example is encouraging and convicting to me as I look back on my life now that I'm at a similar stage in life and ministry that he was when I first met him.

And so we just need to take these things very, very seriously. Remember that we are living for a world to come not for this life, that the Lord is sovereign over our leaders and over the politics of things and, you know, we hold this world loosely, you know, we're willing to let things come and go, "Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life I'll sow. The body they may kill, God's truth abideth still. His kingdom is forever." You know, we sing those verses, and I'm speaking sympathetically to you, I'm not on a mission against anyone in the room here tonight. We sing those things and, you know, we can sound pretty good when we sing them but, you know, my question is whether that's really the mindset, the attitude that governs the way that we look at the world and the people around us. And, you know, I think it's an open question, I think it's an open question what direction the church of Jesus Christ is going to go going forward. I realize that government has encroached on the function of the church. I realize that the church must guard its prerogatives and its worship. I understand that and I support that, and we've done that here at Truth Community Church, but what we do ecclesiastically is something that is one thing, how we deal personally interacting with the individuals that are in our lives and in our circle of influence, that's another matter altogether and this passage is addressing us in our personal interactions with others and with the unsaved people around us.

Beloved, you and I, we're not called to go about as angry, bitter, contentious people. It couldn't be any clearer. Look at verse 2 with me again. Look at it. This isn't me saying this. This is God's word. It says, "to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men." Now what Paul does here, in the outworking of the text here and in the flow of thought, one of the wonderful things about verse by verse teaching is that you can see the flow of the author's thought, and you can see why he says what he says, and the context lets you know that you're getting it right in your understanding, and that's what's happening here. In verse 1, he talked about submission to government. In verse 2, he talks about this peaceable demeanor toward the unsaved world around us. Now, here in verse 3, he explains to us why that attitude should captivate our heart, what it is that the Spirit of God uses to conform us to what the instruction of Paul's words are to us. The question you could say, why should we be kind to our unsaved circle of influence? Why should we return kindness in the face of insults? Why are we told not to return evil for evil but to give a blessing instead? Beloved, this is all over the pages of the New Testament. This is all over the life of Jesus Christ. It's sad to me, this is the last time I'll say it, it's sad to me that this even needs to be emphasized in the church today. Why should we live that way? Why should we be kind to our unsaved circle of influence? He states it very plainly. We, you and I, we were once as lost as they are now. What they are today is what we, you and I, as Christians, what we once were.

Paul says in verse 3 there, look at it with me, he says, "For we also once were foolish ourselves." The "we" is emphatic. Paul himself was a sinner. In fact, Paul could say in 1 Timothy that he was the chief of sinners. And now he expands the circle and brings it into all of the believing body of Christ, we all once were like this. It's one thing to say as an abstract principle, as a theological construct, it's one thing to say that all men have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, Romans 3:23. That is true, that is right, and it's good

for us to say that and teach it. Beloved, it's another thing to embrace that personally and realize that you and I are sinners who have fallen short of the glory of God. We still do, and it's one thing to say that, it's another thing to explain what it means, that's what we hope to do tonight, but also, beloved, just to remember this, as we gather together, there ought to be enough humility in our hearts to realize that all of us are here tonight with a past. All of us. All of us here are here with a sinful past of one kind or another. Maybe you were saved early in life and you didn't have the opportunity to outwardly manifest that as much as those of us that were saved in our adult years did but, you know, we're all here either in thought, word or deed, we're all here as, you know, in one degree or another, we're all here as past drunkards, we're all here as past fornicators or other kinds of immoral sinners, we're all here as those that have had anger issues in the past, those that have lusted, coveted after things, never content, you know, some having cycled through multiple marriages for various reasons. You know, we're all here with a past, and so there's just not room for us, beloved, to look at the world around us and to speak down, to look down on sinners who are currently living out the depravity that you and I once lived out before. On what grounds would we do that? That makes absolutely no sense whatsoever and the point that Paul is making here is the fact that we understand our prior guilt, we understand something about our prior sin, and as a result of that, as a result of having been there, as a result of being on the receiving end of grace and having been forgiven a multitude of transgressions by the grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ, because we know that we were full of guilt, and we know that God has graciously saved us and forgiven us, then that should, by the work of the Spirit of God applying the truth to our hearts, that should give us a tender disposition toward the sinners around us, make us very slow to take offense when sinners reject us, when they're hostile to us, when loved ones separate from us over the over the sake of the gospel. You know, to respond to that not with an anger, not with bitterness, but with a sense of, of godly sorrow and wishing that it was different and a desire to pray for them and carrying in our hearts an ever-present willingness for reconciliation if they would only have it. And beloved, that kind of theological understanding and honest assessment of our prior lives in Christ is what gives us the spirit to be peaceable, to be gentle, and Paul's point in verse 3 is we once were like what they are now. We all have a past and it's foolish and proud and boastful and arrogant to deny that and to somehow say that that's not me. That's just a contradiction of God's word and that's a place that none of us want to be. And so what we see here is that Paul explains what we once were like.

Now look in verse 3. He's talking in the past tense so we know that he's talking about those that have been born again. This is what marked our prior life. We've been born again. The Spirit now dwells in us. This is no longer true but it's a reminder of, you know, we still carry the aroma around us, you might say, there's still that lingering stench of what we used to be if we just stop and think and look back on it. And what we find Paul saying here, he gives us six characteristics that mark all of humanity, that mark us as what we once were, the way we were in our unsaved lives, and recognizing for those that are not Christians, this is describing the current reality of their spiritual lives, and what we see is the utter depravity of man. We see that humanity is utterly lost in sin.

And let's look again at verse 3, and I want to read it and then just make a parallel passage to your mind, this passage not quite as readily familiar as another one that will quickly ring in your minds. Titus 3:3, "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another." Now if that sounds, if the theme of that echoes in your mind it would bring you back to Ephesians 2:1 and 3 and I'd invite you to turn back in your Bible a little bit to find this text. Ephesians 2:1-3. Ephesians 2:1-3 where Paul says, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 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." Do you see the past and the present? You were like this. You were dead and this spirit is now working in the sons of disobedience who are not in Christ today. You were like this. You were dead. You were guilty. Verse 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." There's something joyful and there's something humbling about realizing this past and present contrast. It's humbling to realize that this is what we were. Before the grace of God captivated us and drew us to Christ, that's what we were like, dead in trespasses and sins, children of the devil, sons of wrath, by nature rebellious against God. That passage in Ephesians being perhaps just a little bit more familiar but expressing the same essential truths that we are seeing in Titus 3:3.

If you look over at chapter 4 of Ephesians, Paul says in verse 17, "So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life," that manner that he had just been describing in the prior five verses, "you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." Past and present being laid out for us with clarity from the word of God.

And so going back now to Titus 3, what we find with that little bit of introduction is we find Paul explaining what your life was prior to Christ. We look back and we see the way that we were. We see that we have a history and as I sometimes like to say, because I read the Bible I know a lot about you. And if you read the Bible, beloved, you know a lot about me as well. And so this is all Scripture just lays this all out and bids us to deal with it honestly and to remember one other thing here, my mind is going in a lot of different directions, and that's all right, is to just remember this, and maybe I'll say this later as well. When you look at sinners outside of Christ, you look at those that are rebels against God and, you know, their, their lifestyle is offensive to you and, you know, and you see, you know, obvious rebels against God in the grocery store and all of that, beloved, I understand the temptation to pride and to look down and to be condemning when that happens but what you need to understand and remember constantly is this: yes, perhaps

you are not guilty of the sins that they are currently committing and you've never been tempted that way, you've never lived that way and, you know, the obvious offense of their lives is, you know, there's a real contrast there. I get that. But what you need to remember and what will anchor you from pride and anchor you away from, you know, turning into a proud, self-righteous, condemning person who is violating Titus 3:2 with every attitude in your heart, you need to remember this, beloved, you may not be committing their sins but the truth of the matter is that they have not committed your sins either. You have your own realm of sin. You have your own struggles that you're dealing with now. We all come with a past. We all come with a past, and it's just so vital for us to remember that and when we remember that it humbles us, it makes us thankful for grace and makes us desirous to see others share in that grace that have not walked in that grace yet themselves.

And so this verse explains a lot to us, it explains a lot about sinners, it explains a lot about our past lives, and let's dive into it now as we look at these six characteristics of sinners, and we'll go through them rather quickly for the sake of time. First of all, we see from this text that sinners are foolish, meaning that sinners are foolish outside of Christ. You were once foolish yourself. Sinners are foolish. That's point 1. Sinners are blind and they are hostile to God and to his law. We read it there in verse 3, "For we also once were foolish ourselves." Foolish in the sense that they do not understand the truth, and they even suppress the truth that they do see. This is the mind of a fool to deny the truth that is right in front of them.

If you go over to Romans 1, you see how foolish they are, Romans 1:18. And even as we're saying these things, we're not diminishing the judgment and the wrath of God. This just soberes us and makes it all the more urgent that we be mindful of these things. 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, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For 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. For 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." Their foolish condition is morally culpable. It comes from a conscious suppression of the truth that is presented to them. They see the truth about them, they see God manifested in creation, and they deny it, they suppress it, they fight against it. They suppress the truth that they see. This is the epitome of a fool.

Psalm 14, Psalm 53, "The fool has said in his heart there is no God." He says it or he lives as though there is no God. Either way, this is insanity. This is culpable ignorance and the question becomes then, how will men that are that foolish, women that are that blind, that are that willful in their rejection, how will they ever see the truth? How will they ever come to Christ? And the answer is in their own power they cannot. They must have grace. They need grace and apart from the grace of God, they will continue down that dark alley that leads to their eternal destruction. You know, if you picture being in a dangerous part of the city where violence is known, and you picture somebody walking at

night into a dark alley where all kinds of bad actors are waiting for them, you just want to call out, "Don't go down there! Come back! You will be harmed there!" And there's that pleading that goes out to turn back from your stubborn ways, turn back from your wickedness. Listen to counsel. Listen to the word of God.

But sinners are foolish. They're in danger and they need grace. The point in the context here is because of that dangerous condition that they are in and that sad future that awaits them, our hearts are not proud and boastful over against them, our hearts yearn for them to turn to Christ and that desire for them leads us to a gentleness as we contemplate things, not seeing them as the world sees, not seeing them through a political prism, even through a moral prism, per se, but rather seeing them through the grace of God that the grace that saved us, "O God, won't You share that grace with them as well because they're foolish, Lord. What will happen to them, Lord, if You don't show grace to them? What will show them if you don't intervene in their lives as You intervened in ours, in mine? Lord, what will happen to them? Destruction awaits them of the most miserable kind." You see, as you contemplate the reality of what the future holds for them, it changes your whole disposition toward them. The idea of an angry, politically minded Christian being cold and indifferent to the spiritual state of those on the other side of the aisle should be unthinkable.

Now secondly. Sinners are foolish. We see as we go on that sinners are disobedient. Sinners are disobedient. Verse 3, "we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient." And what we need to keep in mind is that disobedience manifests itself in different ways. We think about rebellion and we tend to think of the outward kind of rebel, but I'd like you to look over at the gospel of Luke 15, Luke 15, and we don't have time to go through the whole thing here, I just want to remind you of something. This is the passage where we find the prodigal son, that well-known story of the young man who wanted his father's wealth, took his share of the inheritance, went out and squandered it with all kinds of sinful living, found himself eating with pigs, went back home, asked the father to receive him and the father did, Luke 15:22. His outward rebellion was obvious, that's the point that we're making here, "But the father said to his slaves," verse 22, "Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate." Those of you that have had recalcitrant, rebellious children and reconciled to them later, you know something of the joy of that father, don't you? You know something of the joy, you're so willing to put aside all of the past hurt for the sake of the son, the person, the daughter that's back in front of you, and you rejoice over it and gladly forgive it all.

But there's another kind of rebellion that's not just that outward profligate life, there's the seething, quiet rebellion that is found in the older son, and that's my point for here this evening. Verse 25, "Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father

came out and began pleading with him. But he answered and said to his father," and look at the rebellion in his heart, look at the ingratitude, look at the selfishness, look at the lack of love, the lack of relationship, the unwillingness to rejoice with his father over what brings his father joy. Look at that. In verse 29, "he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.'" Oh, the anger, the sense of entitlement, the resentment. Understand, beloved, it's just a different kind of the same spirit, an inner disobedience and rebellion which was, in some ways, even worse than the outward rebellion of the prodigal because he was living and the hypocrisy is just soaking in his life. There was an outward compliance, but there was an internal resentment.

Beloved, what I want you to see tonight is that both are disobedient, they're just in different realms. Outward rebellion, inward rebellion, both being the mark of sin. And one of the things that, you know, as you talk with people about their testimonies and this comes up often in baptism testimonies as well, many children will have a testimony that is like this and they grew up in Christian homes, and they'll testify to this reality after the fact. They'll say something like this. They say, "I looked like a good kid on the outside but inside I was not. I was a liar. I was a deceiver. I was rebellious. I was hateful and things like that, and then the gospel came to me, and it convicted me. There wasn't so much outward sin that people could see, but inside I knew the kind of rebel that I actually was." And sometimes for young people that grow up in Christian homes, they have to come to grips with that and to realize that in the sight of God, that the heart of that rebel is just as sinful as the one who lets it hang out in outward life because God, beloved, let me remind you from 1 Samuel 16:7, the Lord looks on the heart. The Lord looks on the heart and those of you, again, it's just easy to appeal to parents and their understanding of this, that there there's no joy, is there, in a child that is outwardly compliant but you know that their heart is cold and indifferent to the things of the gospel, cold and indifferent to the things of love and relationship even within your home. The outward compliance, you find no joy in that, do you, when you know that there's a reserve and a resentment and, you know, and there's just a coldness that marks the relationship. There's no joy in that. Well, how is it that we think that just an external morality is pleasing to God if there's no genuine heart love for him? How could that ever be pleasing to God if it's not pleasing to a parent to have a child like that?

This disobedience is a mark of the life of the sinner and the question becomes then, how does one who has a heart of that kind of rebellion, how does a rebel ever come to submit to Christ on his own? The answer is he cannot. He needs grace. And apart from grace, he will continue down that dark path into the alley with the confrontation with his foes. Our Arminian friends don't like to talk about this. They like to talk up the sinner's ability to repent on their own as if it's just a simple little switch to flip off. The great fallacy in Arminian thinking is their failure to recognize and to wrestle with the depth of rebellion in the human heart. The Apostle Paul says in Romans 8:7 that "the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God." It takes an outside work

of grace by the Spirit of God on a heart to change the heart of a rebel sinner and unless God does a work in the heart, unless there is a gracious initiative by God, the sinner will continue in his rebel ways defiantly maintaining his rebellion all the way to his deathbed and beyond.

You know, one of the other things about Arminian thinking is this, is that when people are conditioned that way, they think that they can just postpone their repentance and turn it on whenever they want. So because they love their sin they say, "I'll just continue doing, living the way I want, and then I'll deal with Christ when the end comes close." Well, two things about that: the end may be a lot sooner than you think, and so that's foolish to presume that you'll even have time to repent. That's a fool speaking. You talk about being foolish, that's foolish to reject an opportunity now to find salvation in Christ on the presumption that you'll have another day to do it when you may not. But the other aspect of it is this, is that as time goes on and people continue in sin, they get harder in it. You get more stubborn. You get more resistant as you go along in sin. You don't suddenly open up to a tender heart to the things of the gospel on your own. Sin begets sin. Hardness becomes harder the longer the clay sits out under the sun, under the beating sun of rebellion and disobedience, the clay gets harder, not softer.

And yet foolish, disobedient sinners go on in their way and how will they ever be rescued from that? Apart from grace they can't. They won't. And that leads us naturally into the third point that Paul makes here as we go back to Titus 3, is that sinners are deceived. Sinners are deceived. Titus 3:3. I'll get there eventually. Titus 3:3, "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived." Sinners are the dupes of their own foolish hearts. They're the dupes of false teachers, false philosophies, a false view of the world. And we can simplify it for tonight for just down to this simple statement: the sad reality for people who are not in Christ is that they think that the truth is one thing when in fact it is something different. They think, they say anyway that there is no God, but they're wrong there is. They think that they are pretty good people when the reality is that they're not, they're guilty, rebels against God. They think that God will just ignore their sin when he won't, Scripture says he's angry with the wicked every day. They think that there is no reality of hell but there is, Scripture speaks about it repeatedly. And when we taught on Jesus and hell, we saw that Jesus said hell is real, hell is painful, and hell is eternal. By the words of our Lord himself, he warned sinners about the reality of eternal judgment in hell and sinners are so deceived and so confident in their opinions and so resistant to instruction from the word of God that they ignore it all, they brush it all aside and assure themselves and persuade themselves that everything is fine when actually it's not. And they'll find out one second after their last breath and there will be this devastating understanding that, "I just entered into eternal woe and there will be no escape."

Now look, there must be some kind of supernatural deception at work for people to just so readily easily brush that aside and that's what Scripture describes. This is not just a human deception that's at work, there is a supernatural deception. 2 Corinthians 4 says that Satan has blinded the minds of the unbelieving to the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are deceived. They think truth is one way when it's something completely different. Organized religion, Catholicism, has taught them that they could obtain heaven through

their own good conduct, or at least they'll, you know, ultimately they'll end up there if they can just pass through purgatory and, you know, make it through 10,000 years of fire. It comes out well eventually in the end. That's a lie. Public education has taught them self-esteem, to think well of themselves when Scripture says that man needs to humble himself before God. Sinners think God is less holy than he is, and they think that they are more righteous than they are. I mean, the tangled web of deception is just so vast. There's no untangling this apart from grace. There is no untangling this. This is like having a massive ball of yarn that has been deliberately tied together in all kinds of different knots, and you're presented with this 30 pounds ball of knot and told to untangle it. It's impossible. How will a deceived man find truth when his mind is like that, when his mind is so warped and biased against truth and so conditioned in deception? Don't you see, beloved? He can't. There is no hope apart from grace, so deep is the foolishness, the disobedience and the deception that is at work in the human heart.

Now in keeping with the spirit of the passage that Paul is making here, can't you look beyond your impatience with the conduct and thinking and words of sinners, look at the reality of what Scripture describes about them and somewhere in what you profess to be your regenerate heart have a sense of compassion that they are in that miserable condition? You see, that's what Paul is getting to. As he unpacks this, I understand why he's unpacking it. He's reinforcing the teaching to verse 2, "malign no one, be peaceable, gentle, show every consideration for all men for. For you were like this and this is what they are now."

One of the other detestable things, speaking kind of strongly here but that's okay, but one of the detestable things, one of the insidious things about Arminian thinking is this sense that God chooses men based on their foreseen faith. The idea being that God chooses us because he looked down the corridors of time and saw that we would exercise faith, we would choose God, and because he saw that he chose us, and election is made contingent upon what the man would do, what the woman would do. And therefore election is based on foreseen faith rather than the free grace of God and the sovereign freedom of God, choosing whom he will for reasons that are known and sufficient to himself. You say, "Well, why is that so insidious?" It is insidious because it teaches people to find something in themselves to boast about. "God chose me because I chose Him first and, therefore, if someone is not a Christian and I am, then it's because there was something in me that made me better than them." Scripture condemns that kind of thinking and thoroughly refutes it. Scripture makes it clear who loved whom first. We love God because he first loved us. He loved us in our sin, not in response to our faith. While we were yet enemies, Christ died for us. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

You see, beloved, the biblical truth extinguishes human pride and why that's so important here in the context of Titus 3, is that we realize that we have no cause for boasting before God or before other men. If we're saved it's by grace and grace alone. grace being totally, completely undeserved favor where judgment instead was deserved. And if you've received that kind of grace then it's easier to speak, and you understand it from that perspective, then it softens the words and the attitudes with which you approach other men who are not in Christ. When you think there's anything about you that distinguished

you and made you worthy, then that is an ugly root of pride in your heart that you need to repent of, repent of the false belief, the unbiblical thinking that leads you to think that way. Those of you that pull weeds, you know what it's like to get those roots that are down deep and you pull it up and it just breaks off. You've got to dig it out and it is hard, hard work. Well, beloved, those ugly weeds of pride in your heart have to be dug out and tossed aside.

Paul's point is for us to understand what we used to be like. Keep in mind, really, he's addressing us. He's addressing the people of God, reminding us of what we were, and the reminder humbles us in order to pull up all of the root of noxious weeds of pride in our heart so that there is this fresh soil in which grace toward others can be exercised. You and I were once foolish. You and I, once disobedient. You and I, once miserably deceived. Well, Paul goes on. You know and I think, beloved, we're looking at six principles here in this one verse and perhaps there's something for us to understand by the fact that Paul goes into such detail. The fact that he goes through so many principles in such a short, condensed amount of time gives us a sense of how vulnerable we are to the pride that says, "I wasn't so bad beforehand." Paul goes at length item after item after item after item to do away with that spiritual pride.

The fourth one he says, sinners are enslaved. Enslaved. Look at it, verse 3, "For we also once were (1) foolish ourselves, (2) disobedient, (3) deceived, (4) enslaved to various lusts and pleasures." We were under the powers of forces that we could not control, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures. How many of you, I won't ask for a show of hands, but how many of you in your life before Christ knew what it was like to be a slave to sin? You called it a bad habit. You called it, maybe you called it alcoholism instead of just being a drunk. You called it, you know, whatever you called your carnal desires and, "You know, I was born this way. You know, it's genetic. What Scripture describes as sin, I know it's genetic and that justifies all of my behavior." You didn't actually say it about yourself, you've certainly heard people excuse their sinful lives on that basis, haven't you? Well, Scripture gives no room for any of that. Scripture says that people live sinfully because they are slaves to sin, they are slaves to their lust and to their pleasures and they can't break out of it because that sin owns them, it dominates them, it is their master. And sinners are controlled by their illicit desires.

Beloved, I realize and I'm okay with this, what I'm about to say, I realize I'm standing alone on an island with what I'm saying compared to what culture and even the church says about these things, but I'd rather stand alone on the word of God if I must, rather than be partners with the world in deception, wouldn't you? Let me ask you a question. Why is it that men and women are so easily drawn into substance abuse? Why is it that they so easily get into drugs and then cannot get out of them? Why is it that people are so easily drawn into pornography and then cannot get out of it and keep going back like a dog returning to lick up its own vomit, going back to the very things that are destroying their lives and destroying their relationships, destroying their jobs? Why don't they just get up and walk away from it? It's obvious that they are destroying themselves. Why not just get up and walk away, make a decision and change? They do not get up and walk

away because they cannot get up and walk away because they are slaves to their sin. Something else owns them and grips them and they can't get out of it.

They are controlled by their illicit desires and their illicit habits, and so their inner desires lead them to sin, even if it destroys their lives. And so much so, Jesus says, that they will reject the truth rather than let go of it. Jesus said in John 3, you don't need to turn there but you can write it down, they are captives to hostile desires and they like it that way. It would be one thing to be a captive to it but they love it so. Jesus said in John 3:19, "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed." They love their sin so much that they will reject the light that would deliver them from it. They are in chains to destruction and they love it so that they kiss the chains and spit at the one who comes with the key to release them.

That's what sinners are like. That's what you and I were like prior to grace. In Romans 6 the Apostle Paul said this, he said, "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?" He goes on and says to those who have been delivered from sin by grace in Christ, he said, "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, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness." We're all slaves. We're either slaves of sin or slaves of righteousness. There is no such thing as a perfectly free man but sinners think that their sinful lifestyle is their freedom. In reality, it is their slavery.

Different lusts enslave different men in different ways but the question comes down to this: how can a slave make himself free? And the answer is he cannot. He must have grace or he will continue in his slavery. And don't even talk to me about the way that sinners will justify it, excuse it. I mean, even in the church it's very difficult to get Christians to take their sins seriously, to get Christians to stop blaming others for the sin that they've committed, to get Christians to listen simply to the word of God instead of going out and finding counselors that will excuse them and tell them you're not so bad. It's so hard. It's so hard to simply get people to listen to the bare word of God and take responsibility for their own conduct. What can set a sinner free? Can't do it on their own. We're so biased in our own favor. We're so quick to blame everyone else, "Lord, it wasn't me. It's that woman that You gave to me and I took the apple from her and I ate it." Christian, no one forced you to sin. If you are in Christ you are responsible for your sin and you cannot blame it on anyone else. You must as the first point of your sanctification, you must take responsibility for your own life and conduct and stop blaming someone else for it. Do you want to know why there's so many baby Christians crawling around, crawling around in their own excrement of life? Because they want to blame someone else. They don't want to take God's holiness seriously. Ultimately, they don't fear God because Scripture says the fear of God keeps man from evil.

So what Paul lays out before us here is, I speak by reverse hyperbole, he sets forth, doesn't he, a charming picture of humanity. He sets forth this most charming picture of sinners. Not. Foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved. Fifthly, sinners live wickedly. Sinners live wickedly. It's so sad. It's so sad and yet, you know, I stand here and I just think quick flashbacks to my own life as a young man before I was in Christ and I read this, I said it's so sad, I say it as a pastor as you're teaching the passage, and then I look back at my life before Christ and I say, "Oh, it's so true. So true. This was me. This is what I was like."

Fifth point, sinners living wickedly, spending our life in malice and envy. A lifestyle of wickedness and envy, malice being that inner wicked desire that wishes evil on other people, envy resents the good that they have, all of it a tangled mess of violation of the 10 Commandment, "You shall not covet." You should not even have wicked desires in your heart and Scripture says that men live in the midst of their wicked desires. Envy. Malice. You see, the truth of the matter about the unsaved person is that their disposition is selfish not loving. Not at its ultimate core. Certainly if there is any kind of human good that comes out, it's not done for the glory of God which is necessary for any action to be virtuous and to be motivated by the glory of God. That's not true of sinners. Listen, it's because of the malice and envy that's in their heart that sinners so easily curse the other driver in traffic, so easily speed up to cut off the guy who tried to cut you off. That's why sinners resent someone else's success and diminish it and talk it down. Malice. Envy. And the question that the Old Testament prophet asked was, "Can a leopard change his spots? Can someone who is dyed in the wool like this, can they change that? Can a Caucasian make his skin black? Can a person of color make his skin white?" The answer is no, we can't, and in like manner a sinner cannot change his nature. He needs grace. He needs grace.

Finally we look at the sixth point and we see that sinners are hateful. Verse 3 again and let's just pass through the verse again. "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another." A reciprocal hostility in human relationships. Beloved, I ask the questions directly, I ask them sympathetically but let's get down to real life in real society and not pretend that it's any different than what it is. Why is the divorce rate so high? Why are mass murders so frequent? It's not because, you can't just blame the gun. Somebody has the gun in their hand. Why is it that people can't get along in their families and split? It's because there's hate, conflict in their heart. Let me ask another question. Why does cage fighting appeal to the masses like it does? Why do people drink in that violence so much so that it's now popular for women to fight that way and for people to drink it in watching the so-called what used to be considered the fairer sex engaging in that kind of brutality? Why is that? Why is violence entertainment? It's because people are hateful and their hearts are full of conflict and animosity and blood lust. Cross their path and they will bite you with their venom. This is how unbelievers relate to one another. This is how unbelievers get their entertainment. I make the assumption, I make the assumption that none of you in the room and under the sound of my voice and that members of Truth Community Church realize how wicked that kind of so-called entertainment is and find no satisfaction in it because the violence and the

hatred of it is so contrary to the peaceable nature of our Lord Jesus Christ, so contrary to the spirit of peace that saved us and reconciled us to a holy God.

Beloved, how does hate find love? How does one consumed by hatred turn into a loving, gracious person of God? He cannot do it. He does not have the power to do it. He needs grace. Now here's the point. You and I that are Christians, we stand on this side of our conversion, we stand on this side of the cross. We've still got our issues. We still are being sanctified from our own remnants of sin and evil that's in our heart, but our desires are different. We love Christ. We desire him. We desire the good even if we don't do it. We reject the evil if sometimes we fall into it. But two things, because we remember as we look at Scripture and we see ourselves instructed by the word of God under the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit, and we read this and we see in Scripture this is true, and then we have at least a modicum of humility to acknowledge that, "Yes, this was true in my life also." Those twin truths, the teaching of Scripture and our experiential understanding of what we used to be like before Christ does something for us as we look at the unsaved people around us, verse 2, as we look at all men around us.

We realize what sinners are like in these six characteristics. We teach it clearly, unapologetically. We tell the world this is what you are like and we call them to repent, and Acts 2:40, to be saved from this perverse generation. Come out of your sin and come to Christ. Be saved before destruction falls on your head. But beloved, the point of the passage here is that as we do that we're not doing it in a spirit of self-righteousness. This teaching does not lead the church, it does not lead the people of God to pride but a sense of compassion, a sense of earnest pleading. Always echoing in the back of my mind, "There but for the grace of God go I." And as we'll see on Sunday, and we can't just leave it there, Paul moves on and after that bleak picture and that bleak reminder of who you once were, Paul reminds us of what God did in your life. You're a Christian now. That's what you were in verse 3. But oh, praise God, praise the name of Jesus Christ, what he did to deliver us, to redeem us, to save us!

Verse 4, "But," you were like that, but by contrast, "But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness." Beloved, in light of verse 3, it could never have been anything that you did that prompted God to save you. Perish the thought. Annihilate the inclination in your thinking. God saved you not on the basis of anything that you have done, "but according to His mercy," kindness, God looking on you in your need and intervening and showing kindness that met you in your need and delivering you, delivering you from your foolishness, your disobedience, your deception, your slavery to sin, your hateful way of living. God delivered you from all of that by his kindness. By his mercy. God seeing your need and meeting it in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 5, "by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit," the Spirit of God came to you through the gospel, faith came through hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. And verse 6, it says that the God "poured the Spirit out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior." In our utter rebellion, God richly poured out grace and mercy in Jesus Christ through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. "So that," verse

7, "being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

Wow. Mercy. Grace. You know, we looked at Ephesians 2. We'll wrap it up here. We looked at Ephesians 2:1 and 3. Understand that Paul follows the same line of thought in Ephesians 2. These are wonderfully parallel passages in the theological flow of thought. Paul had excluded in verse 3 any possibility of a man saving himself, and he attributes salvation all to the glory of God. In verse 4, Ephesians 2:4, you were dead in sin, dominated by the devil, and doomed to suffer the wrath of God. That's what you were by nature and by choice. Verse 4, "But God. 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 (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Beloved, there is nothing of human merit or ability in that passage. It's all the grace, kindness, mercy, love of God, and not just those attributes but those attributes richly, abundantly poured out upon us so that we gladly repudiate any claim to merit, we gladly now in Christ we gladly repudiate any claim that we had anything to do with our salvation, so that nothing would diminish the glory we give to God for saving disobedient foolish slaves to sin like us. You and I, we were formerly lost, we were degenerate, but God showed kindness to us and delivered us in that rebellious state. Humanly speaking, it is incomprehensible. Biblically speaking, all the glory goes to God.

And so beloved, understanding your own history of sin has to change the way you view the world around you. If we have received grace, let us give thanks to the God of grace, and then let us pray and speak to sinners that like grace might save them as well. Beloved, we don't want to go to heaven alone, do we? Can you possibly be satisfied with the thought that you're saved and go without someone else to have your arm around bringing them with you? God forbid and God be gracious to us and God be gracious to them.

Let us pray.

*Father we accept the verdict of Scripture against mankind and against ourselves. We thank You for the grace that saved us, the grace that sanctifies us, the grace that will one day glorify us. And we just ask You, Father, that You would extend that grace further, develop a gracious peaceable demeanor in us that looks beyond the outward reality of sin to see the lost soul that's in front of us. Give us the words, give us the courage, give us the help of your Spirit that we might be instruments of grace in their lives, Father, vessels of grace to them just as somewhere, someplace, Father, You sent someone to be that vessel to us. Thank You for the rich grace, the marvelous kindness, the immeasurable mercy that You have shed abroad in our hearts in the Lord Jesus Christ. Father, may You always get all of the glory from us to the honor of the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.*

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