

**Basic Christianity**  
**From An Urban Perspective Unit 1**  
**Week 2: Human Depravity**

Note to instructor: Key points in this lecture:

1. We are all sinners.
2. We have no one to blame but ourselves.
3. We are all truly worthy of God's judgment.
4. We can be forgiven permanently, not by being a good person, but ONLY by relying on what Jesus has done for us.

We want students to have a full awareness of their sin AND appreciation for God's grace.

### **Human depravity**

Last week we learned what it means to be made in the image of God. And it was all good, right? Yet, we know from our own experience that it's not all good now.

For discussion: Why do we see so many broken families? So many divorces? Violence on the streets? War? What drives all this?

There is a dark side to human nature.

**“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick. Who can understand it?” –  
Jeremiah 17:9**

**Human depravity means humans are *sinful*.** We have a sin nature, an inbuilt tendency to sin deep buried deep within our hearts. We still bear the image of God, but his image in us has become distorted and corrupted. On our own, we could never overcome our sin or approach God.

**So what happened? How did we go from Gen 1:31 (“God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good”) to where we are today?**

We didn't always have a sin nature. It came to us as a result of an event called **“the Fall.” Adam and Eve made a mistake and sinned** – like the song, “We Fall Down.”

“We fall down  
But we get up  
We fall down  
But we get up  
We fall down  
But we get up  
For a saint is just a sinner who fell down  
and got up...”

Let's read about this event in **Genesis 3:1-6**.

**For discussion:** Why did God place the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden? If no one bites on this first question, try: What does it look like to give someone the opportunity to exercise their free choice?

God placed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden as a tangible opportunity to exercise freedom to reject God. The tree gave Adam and Eve the opportunity to say no to God. Christians today still have that option.

Why did God warn Adam and Eve not to eat the forbidden fruit? Not because he is a killjoy, but because he knew what was best for them. When we say “no” to God and go our own way, we mess up our lives.

e.g. A parent telling their child to travel at night with a group of friends vs. walking alone. Is it safer to walk around alone at night and go wherever you want, or to agree to travel in a group? Sometimes striking out on your own and doing what you want is dangerous.

e.g. A coach telling a ball-hogger on a basketball team to pass the ball. The ball hogger can do what he wants, but if he won't pass the ball, he hurts himself and the whole team.

**The consequences of the fall** affect every area of our lives. Nothing is left unblemished.

Read **Genesis 3:7. Alienation from *self***. Adam and Eve felt shame. They wanted to hide. They weren't comfortable with themselves or being exposed to others. Many of us today still feel the shame they felt.

Read **Genesis 3:8, 9. Alienation from *God***. When Adam and Eve heard God's footsteps, they were afraid of him. They were worried about what he might do to them. Christians know that God's love can cast out fear. He will declare us “not guilty” when we turned to him and asked him to forgive us. But sin, fear, and guilt made Adam and Eve avoid God's presence.

Even today, people know deep down that they are sinful. That's why most religions exist. They offer various ways (good works, rituals, meditation) to gain relief from our feelings of guilt.

Jesus offers the only real solution to this problem.

“You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins.<sup>14</sup> He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross.” – Colossians 2:13-14

Read **Genesis 3:12. Alienation from *others***. Unity between Adam and Eve was shattered. Rather than seeing his mate as a compliment to himself, Adam blamed her for his own sin! Perhaps this is the most significant outward sign of the fall.

Most people are focused on getting what they need to get by. They say, “I'm just trying to get mine. That's what life is all about.” But what happens when everyone is scrambling to get their slice of the pie?

“What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you? You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it. And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.” – James 4:1-3

All of this fighting destroys relationships. Divorce, the breakdown families and communities, even war between countries—all of this can be traced back to Adam and Eve’s original sin.

Human sexuality has also been distorted by the fall. What was meant to be a celebration of unity is often turned into self-seeking pleasure and exploitation.

Read **Genesis 3:17, 18. Alienation from nature.** When God created the world, he made it easy to grow crops. But now things are hard. We have to fight weeds and disease. Because of sin, the way we care for our environment is messed up as well. Global warming and pollution show how we have mistreated nature.

Read **Genesis 3:19. Death.** After a catastrophe or a tragedy, who do people normally blame? Often people point their finger at God: “God took him.” “It was his time.” etc. This is due to a misunderstanding of the fall. Ultimately, the fall means death to all people.

Death is not natural. We were not created to die. Paul refers to death as "the enemy" in I Corinthians 15. In John 11, Jesus wept at the tomb of his friend Lazarus.

So the greatness of man is corrupted by the fall. We maintain the image of God, but in all of the areas of human dignity, a pervasive element of distortion remains.

## **Under God's Judgment**

**This twisted image is what we have inherited from our ancestor, Adam. The Bible refers to it as a sin nature. And because of that nature, we sin. The bad news is that God will judge us for our sins.**

**“For the wages of sin is death” – Romans 6:23a**

People don’t like the idea of a "judging God." They like to talk about his love, but are uncomfortable thinking about his judgment. He is loving, but he is also righteous, just, and ready to judge sin.

What do you think about what 2Pac says?

“Only God can judge me, is that right?  
(Only God can judge me)  
(Only God baby)  
Nobody else, nobody else  
All you motherf----- get out of my business  
(Only God can judge me now)” – 2Pac, *Only God Can Judge Me*

Many people are rightly afraid of being judged by God, so they look for ways to escape his judgment. Here are **two of the most popular ways** of doing this:

**1. Comparing our sin with everyone else’s:** Some people convince themselves that God only judges really bad people, but not good people.

**Discussion:** Can you think of someone who is basically a good person? Most people know a “good” person – a friend, a parent, a grandparent. But the Bible says no one is truly good. We all have faults.

Most of us think, “I’m not *too* bad.” We tell ourselves, “I try to keep it real with folks.” “I buy my kids what they need.” “I get up and face the day every day.” “I don’t try to hurt other people unless they hurt me first.” “I may have some sins, but, hey, I’m only human.”

But let’s think about what this view really means. If some sinners are worthy of God’s judgment, and others aren’t, where do we draw the line? How much sin is too much sin? **The fact is that we are all *sinful* and in the same situation.**

**“All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” – Romans 3:23**

If we held a swimming race from Los Angeles to Hawaii, some people might swim further than others, but no one would make it.

What are God’s moral standards? Perfection!

**“The person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God’s laws.” – James 2:10**

**It only takes *one* sin to make us worthy of God’s judgment.** We may stack up well in comparison to other people. But that doesn’t matter. “Good” is not good enough. You have to be perfect. So comparing ourselves to other people won’t work.

Here’s another way we try to avoid God’s judgment...

**2. Blaming our sin on our *circumstances.*** We may admit our sins, but not take responsibility for them. We don’t Man-up. It’s like the song, “It’s not my fault, did I do that? It’s not my fault...” We say to ourselves, “If my circumstances were different or if that other person hadn’t said what they said or did what they did, things would be cool and I wouldn’t have acted like that.”

**The Bible is clear that everyone is *responsible* for their own actions, regardless of what has happened to them in the past.**

**“For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and that without partiality.” – Colossians 3:25**

If you accept the idea that God judges people, this raises another question: **How can God judge people who have never heard the Gospel?** How can God judge them for not responding to a message they’ve never heard? Here are some important points to keep in mind:

**1. Some people *lack* the ability to grasp their moral state and will *not* be judged.** See 2 Samuel 12:23.

**2. Others can be saved by responding to what *nature reveals* about God.** Read Romans 1:18-23; 2:14-16. By looking outside at nature and inside their own hearts, people can tell that God is personal, powerful, and moral. They can call out to him for mercy and be forgiven.

**3. God won’t judge us for what we don’t know, but for how we *respond* to what we do *know.*** We are responsible for responding in faith to what God *has* revealed to us (Genesis 15:6). Abraham did not know the full plan of God. He only knew that God was calling him, and that he should act in obedience.

If someone can be saved without hearing the Gospel, why should we evangelize? The truths we instinctively know about God get distorted by false religions.<sup>1</sup> More people come to God where more information about God is provided.

Have you ever considered what God would be like if he didn't judge? Think about it just a minute. If God does not intend to hold anyone responsible for their lives, then God is ultimately responsible. Further, what would eternity with an unrepentant Hitler be like? Could this be heaven? What is the difference between heaven and hell at this point?

**Summary:**

As sinners, human beings are in a very bad situation. As Isaiah explains, "all of us like sheep have gone astray" (Isaiah 53:6). This puts God in a dilemma. He loves us very much, but his moral standards demand that he punish us for our sin. Overlooking our cruelty would be unloving and be unjust.

How can God express love toward us and preserve his justice? We'll study God's solution to this problem next week.

**Memory Verse: Jeremiah 17:9**

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<sup>1</sup> *Have you ever wondered how can God judge someone for eternity who has only sinned for one lifetime? We get a 20-year sentence for 2-hour robbery. But what about getting judged forever for 70 years of sin? Is that fair? Does God's punishment fit our crime?*

1 Tim. 2:3, 4. God's desire is that all be saved.

Heb. 9:27. We are given a finite amount of time to make a decision of permanent consequence.

What would be the appropriate sentence? The point is not a fixed number of years for a particular offense. Rather, the issue is whether or not we will humble ourselves to receive forgiveness. Jesus said, "He who is not for me is against me" (Mt. 12:30). A war time analogy fits in here. The issue is not the number of sins, but where we have our allegiance. We have a limited time to decide.