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Radical Depravity

Romans 3.9-20

Series: The Pure Gospel

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The Village Church

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I. Introduction

A. Boice imagines the following scenario

B. Vietnam war

1. Platoon of American soldiers is captured
 - a. Taken to a POW camp in North Vietnam
2. The Red Cross becomes aware of the platoon and their internment
 - a. Allowed to visit
 - b. Men are identified; government and families informed
 - c. Red Cross verifies that the men are essentially ok
3. Once family and friends of the men know of their circumstances, they begin to send them things through the Red Cross
 - a. Of course, the North Vietnamese monitor what comes in; they don't allow everything
 - b. But one of the things that does come through is a game of Monopoly
 - c. The thinking was that these men, sitting in a POW camp with time on their hands, might like to occupy their time by playing Monopoly; Monopoly is a time consuming game; seems like it lasts forever
 - d. (OK, I realize this scenario may seem a bit more like Hogan's Heroes than the Vietnam War – but it's an illustration – just go with it!)
4. Anyway, the men are thrilled to receive the game of Monopoly
 - a. But not for the reasons intended
 - b. They pitch the game, but distribute the Monopoly money among the men of the platoon
 - c. The Monopoly money becomes the currency for the underground, black market, camp economy
 - d. So if somebody needed a cigarette, that might cost \$5
 - e. If somebody had an extra piece of bread, they might sell that for \$1
 - f. If somebody wanted somebody else to cover their latrine duty, they might have to pay \$50 in Monopoly money
 - g. The whole camp economy, then, cruised along swimmingly!
5. And of course, in a free market economy like this one, even though all the money is distributed equally at first, market forces take over

- a. Personal likes and dislikes drive sales and purchase decisions
 - b. And eventually, there are a few who are talented capitalists
 - c. They work at buying low and selling high
 - d. And after some time, they accumulate wealth; and in the end, have lots more Monopoly money than the others
 - e. One of the men in the platoon, in particular, has been quite successful
6. But finally, good news comes
 - a. A prisoner exchange has been arranged
 - b. And the entire platoon has been exchanged for a bunch of North Vietnamese prisoners
 - c. And the platoon is released; within days is returned stateside
 - d. And are greeted with a heroes' welcome (keep using your imagination)
 7. The man who had accumulated the lion's share of money in camp came back to his hometown
 - a. One of his first stops was his home town bank
 - b. The banker was delighted to see him
 - c. He greeted him warmly; assured him the he had thought and prayed about him frequently
 - d. They chatted for a while
 - e. And then eventually, they got around to business
 8. Banker: How can I help you?
 - a. Soldier: I'd like to make a deposit.
 - b. Banker: Great! How much would you like to deposit?
 - c. Soldier: About a half a million dollars.
 9. The bankers eyes lit up!
 - a. He hadn't realize the man had those kind of resources
 - b. But local banks would love deposits like that!
 - c. Banker: Well, let me see what you've got.
 - d. And the soldier lays out \$500,382 on the counter – in Monopoly money.
 10. Banker: Security!
- C. This illustrates the human condition marvelously
1. In this life we have developed a moral economy
 - a. In which a kind of righteousness becomes our common currency
 2. Everybody in this life has some level of righteousness
 - a. But not everybody has the same amount
 - b. And variations in the levels of this righteousness helps us navigate much of life's relationships
 - c. We make economic decisions on the basis of this righteousness (who can we trust to do business with)
 - d. We make relationship decisions on the basis of this righteousness
 3. But sooner or later, we all end up going to meet God
 - a. God – the cosmic banker

- b. God – the President of the First (and Only) Bank of the Kingdom
 - 4. And we want to make a deposit
 - a. And we bring to God our righteousness
 - b. But to God, our righteousness is no better than Monopoly money
 - c. And the cosmic banker shakes His head and calls security
- D. Our lack of understanding about what constitutes true righteousness – the kind of righteousness that works in the divine economy – is horrifyingly deficient
 - 1. Our own righteousness – the kind that seems to work in the black market economy of the human enterprise of this world – is of no value in the divine economy
 - 2. And we show up on eternity’s doorstep with nothing more than play money
- E. That’s what Paul has been trying to communicate in these early portions of Romans

II. Romans So Far

A. Truth Suppression

- 1. He indicated that everyone has knowledge about God
 - a. God’s nature and character are on display in the world God has created
 - b. So that no one could possibly miss it
 - c. His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen
- 2. But human beings don’t like the idea of an eternally powerful and divine Being
 - a. So we suppress the truth about God
- 3. But since the truth about God has been revealed to everybody, and is plain to everybody
 - a. Everybody is without excuse

B. Excuses, Excuses

- 1. But that never stopped anybody from making excuses
 - a. So that’s what we humans do
 - b. We make excuses
 - c. *Homo excusationem factorem* – man the excuse maker
- 2. **The Moral Excuse – We’re good!**
 - a. That’s the excuse that many Gentiles would use, as well as many Jews
 - b. Paul pretty easily dispels that notion
 - c. Both the Jew and the Gentile fail in presuming that they are morally good
- 3. **The Religious Excuse – We have a special relationship with God!**
 - a. This is the excuse of the Jew, who claims to have a special covenantal relationship with God
 - b. But not even the Jews measure up to their covenant responsibilities
 - c. Paul dispenses with that excuse as well

C. Religious Privilege and Presumption

1. Then Paul deals with the issue of religious privilege
 - a. What's the point of being religious? What's the point of our Jewishness?
 2. Paul shows that while there is much privilege in being Jewish – especially that the Jews have the Word of God...
 - a. If you were to presume upon that privilege you've missed the point of the religion
- D. And Paul thus demonstrates that both Jew and Gentile alike are under sin
1. And are liable for the judgment of God
 2. Both the moral righteousness of the Gentile and the religious righteousness of the Jew are just Monopoly money

III. Text

- A. **Romans 3:9–20** (ESV) —
1. 9 What then? Are we Jews any better off?
 2. No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin,
 3. 10 as it is written:
 4. “None is righteous, no, not one;
 5. 11 no one understands;
 6. no one seeks for God.
 7. 12 All have turned aside;
 8. together they have become worthless;
 9. no one does good, not even one.”
 10. 13 “Their throat is an open grave;
 11. they use their tongues to deceive.”
 12. “The venom of asps is under their lips.”
 13. 14 “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”
 14. 15 “Their feet are swift to shed blood;
 15. 16 in their paths are ruin and misery,
 16. 17 and the way of peace they have not known.”
 17. 18 “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”
 18. 19 Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law,
 19. so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.
 20. 20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight,
 21. since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

IV. **Human Nature**

- A. We're so used to medical models these days
1. And so in keeping with that tradition, we observe that there are essentially only three views of human nature from a moral perspective
- B. **Human beings are well**
1. We are essentially good, morally healthy people

2. If there are problems, it's because we're corrupted by our environment
- C. **Human beings are sick**
 1. We have good days and bad days
 2. Most of the time we are fine, morally speaking
 - a. But there are occasional chinks in our armor
 - b. Occasional illnesses pop up from time to time
 3. If we could just figure out the right medicine, we would be kept on even keel
- D. **Human beings are dead**
 1. Now not actually physically dead
 - a. Morally and spiritually dead
 2. That there is no moral life left in us
 - a. No moral heartbeat
 - b. No moral brainwaves
- E. Most people believe in the first – humans are well, basically good, only corrupted by our environments
 1. Somewhat more realistic, however, is the second view
 2. Many people believe that human beings are sick
 - a. Certainly in need of moral and medical intervention
 - b. But there is some spiritual life to work with
 3. But nobody believe that human beings are morally dead
- F. Nobody, that is, except the Bible
 1. **Ephesians 2:1** (ESV) — 1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins...

V. **Radical Depravity**

- A. In Christian theology this latter view has come to be known as Total Depravity
 1. Really not the best name for it, however
 2. It implies that human beings are as bad as they can possibly be
 - a. That we are utterly depraved
 - b. Or completely depraved
 3. But those who teach this doctrine don't really believe that human beings are as bad as we can possibly be
 - a. As bad as we are, none of us probably equates to an Adolf Hitler
 4. As one theologian put it who teaches the doctrine of total depravity, "Human beings are still capable of deprovement" (Gerstner)
 - a. In other words, as bad as we are, we can imagine being even worse!
- B. Nevertheless, "dead in trespasses and sins" is awfully definitive
- C. R.C. Sproul had a better term that he liked
 1. He preferred "**Radical Depravity**"
 2. That's really because R.C. loved Latin
 - a. He had a Latin phrase for just about everything!
 3. The reason he like "Radical Depravity" is because the word "radical" comes from a Latin root – "radix"
 - a. **Radix (Latin) = root**

4. He liked it because he recognized that our depravity goes to the very core of our personality
 - a. That no part of the human being is exempt from moral decay
 - b. Our minds are affected
 - c. Our wills are affected
 - d. Our emotions are affected
 5. There is no corner of our hearts, no hidden closet in our being, which is free from corruption
 - a. Every human faculty, morally speaking, is dead
- D. Well, let's see if that true

VI. **Anatomy of Depravity**

- A. Note first, the radical character of the words used in our text
 1. **None righteous**, no, not one
 - a. Moral dimension
 2. **No one understands**
 - a. Mental, cognitive dimension
 3. **No one seeks for God**
 - a. Volitional dimension (will)
 4. **All have turned aside**
 - a. Dimension of desires and inclinations
 5. **They have become worthless**
 - a. Creative dimension; create nothing of lasting value
 6. **No one does good**, not even one
 - a. Behavioral dimension
 7. **No fear of God** before their eyes
 - a. Emotional dimension
- B. Every conceivable faculty of the human person is infected by sin
 1. Moral lives
 2. Mental lives
 3. Our wills
 4. Our desires
 5. Our creativity
 6. Our behavior or conduct
 7. Our emotions
- C. **Universality of Sin**
 1. All human beings are affected – no exceptions
 2. None righteous
 - a. No one understands
 - b. No one seeks God
 - c. All have turned aside
 - d. No one does good, not even one
- D. So when we speak of radical depravity we say that sin is universal – all people are affected

1. And that sin is pervasive – every aspect of the human personality is corrupted
- E. Not a new concept in the NT
1. **Genesis 6:5** (ESV) —
 - a. 5 The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth,
 - b. and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.
 2. Boice: ... Genesis 6.5 teaches that sin is *internal* (rising from the thoughts and intentions of the “heart”), *pervasive* (affecting our “every intention” so that our deeds are “only evil”) and *continuous* (that is, operating “all the time”).
- F. Then Paul gives us an anatomy lesson to illustrate
1. Uses a series of OT quotations
 - a. Their **throat** is an open grave (Psalm 5.9)
 - b. They use their **tongues** to deceive
 - c. The venom of asps is under their **lips** (Psalm 140.3)
 - d. Their **mouth** is full of curses and bitterness (Psalm 10.7)
 - e. Their **feet** are swift to shed blood; in their **paths** are ruin and misery, and the **way** of peace they have not known (Proverbs 1.16, Isaiah 59.7-8)
 - f. There is no fear of God before their **eyes** (Psalm 36.1)
 2. The visual representation is remarkable
 - a. From head to foot
 - b. Depravity encompasses the whole person
- G. The nature of this anatomy is remarkable
1. First four are organs of speech
 - a. Throat
 - b. Tongues
 - c. Lips
 - d. Mouth
 2. **Matthew 12:34** (ESV) — 34 ... For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.
 - a. Speech is the means by which our hearts affect other people
 3. Throat is an “open grave”
 - a. Repository of death
 - b. “Sticks and stones may break your bones but words will never hurt you”
 - c. Words won’t hurt you; words will kill you
 4. Tongues used to deceive
 - a. Instruments of deception
 5. Lips – venom, poison
 - a. Insidious means of destruction
 6. Mouth – full of curses and bitterness
 - a. Means of expressing hatred toward God and others

- H. Don't have to look far to see the evidence of radical depravity
1. Speech reveals it
 - a. Right here – in our community
 2. The speech that I've been hearing – right here in Shell Point – is a case in point
 - a. I've heard a good bit recently – through the grapevine
 - b. Yes, the Shell Point grapevine is fully functional
 - c. I don't usually get it directly, but I get it; I eventually hear it
 3. And a lot of the speech is directed at Shell Point
 - a. No big deal – just a corporation
 - b. We're allowed to speak ill of corporations
 - c. Except that all of the senior leadership at Shell Point is made up of brothers and sisters in Christ
 - d. And the Board of Directors, who ultimately make decisions, are all brothers and sisters in Christ
 4. I've heard accusations against our brothers and sisters
 - a. Accusing them of sinning in decisions they make
 5. I've heard threats
 - a. "If they do this, we'll ..."
 6. I've heard the repeating of rumors
 - a. I've heard of people who have attributed to motives to our brothers and sisters
 - b. I don't know how they know those motives; must have the ability to read minds
 7. I've heard people state opinions as if they were facts
 8. I've heard just general complaining
 9. And from what I've heard, some of it is coming from believers; from other brothers and sisters in Christ
- I. So what does the Scripture say about that?
1. If you truly believe that a brother or sister is sinning, what are you to do?
 - a. Go tell all your friends at the Crystal, right? Or if we go to the Blend, maybe that's better
 - b. Or maybe it's ok just to send a mass email
 2. What are you supposed to do?
 3. Jesus (Matthew 18) – if you believe your brother or sister is sinning, you are to go that person and present your evidence of sinning – just between the two of you
 - a. And if they are convinced and repent – Praise the Lord!
 - b. But if not, and you're still convinced they're sinning, you're to take a witness – someone who can also verify the sin, and present evidence
 - c. And if that doesn't work, then you can take it to the Elders
 - d. We'll investigate; we'll have a trial
 - e. And if they're still unrepentant, we'll throw them out of the church; disfellowship them; excommunicate them

4. You better be serious if you accuse your brothers and sisters of sin; that's the process
- J. Maybe sin is going a little far
1. Maybe you just don't like what your brothers and sisters have decided to do
 - a. You wouldn't have done it that way
 2. Ok; you can still express yourself
 - a. Just between the two of you – which the leadership team is willing to do
 - b. Or in an appropriate forum – of which Shell Point has many
- K. Or you can complain – tell everybody you know how angry you are
1. Ok to complain, right?
 2. How'd that work out for Israel in the wilderness?
 3. I remember when Jean and I first visited the wilderness – our first trip to Israel
 - a. We saw goats eating rocks
 - b. Probably weren't eating rocks; but that's the only thing we could see
 4. When we saw the wilderness Jean's first reaction was, "No wonder Israel complained"
 - a. Made sense!
 - b. What a miserable set of conditions
 5. How did God feel about their complaining?
 - a. He left their bodies in the desert
 - b. No promised land
- L. May I make an observation?
1. You're not in the wilderness
 - a. On Shell Point's worst day – you're not in the wilderness
- M. How about we make sure we're not an object lesson for radical depravity
1. Instead...
 2. **Ephesians 4:29** (ESV) — 29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.
 - a. Give grace to those who hear
- N. No accident that in Paul's exposition of radical depravity, speech is prominent
- O. Next three elements in his anatomy lesson speak of our actions
1. Our feet, our path, our way – that's the course of action we take
 2. Murderous, destructive – ruin and misery
 3. Anything but peaceful
- P. Finally – emotions
1. No fear of God
- Q. Every dimension of our human nature
1. Words
 2. Actions
 3. Emotions

4. Are a cesspool of death

VII. **Objections**

- A. I can already hear the objections
 1. We all know “good” people
 - a. People who generally do good things
 2. But remember – God looks on the heart
 - a. He considers motives
 - b. He’s not impressed with enlightened self-interest – as useful as that is in maintaining a civil society
 3. We also know people who are “seeking”
 - a. But are they seeking God?
 - b. Or are they seeking the benefits that only God can provide
 4. We hide from God
 - a. Even though we want the benefits of God
- B. Our problem in understanding this doctrine is how often we have been operating on an earthly plane, based upon our own supposed human goodness and righteousness
 1. Without having a clue about God’s requirements and God’s righteousness
 2. We’ve been playing with Monopoly money

VIII. **Paul and the Human Condition**

- A. Pretty dismal picture of the human condition, isn’t it
 1. Not the only place Paul speaks of it
- B. **Ephesians 2:1–3** (ESV) —
 1. 1 And you were **dead** in the trespasses and sins
 2. 2 in which you once walked, following **the course of this world**, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—
 3. 3 among whom we all once lived in **the passions of our flesh**, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature **children of wrath**, like the rest of mankind.
- C. What can dead people do?
 1. Absolutely nothing
 2. Taught behavioral psychology in my university days
 - a. Behavior: Anything a dead man can’t do
- D. **Romans 8:5–8** (ESV) —
 1. 5 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.
 2. 6 For to set the mind on the flesh is **death**, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.
 3. 7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is **hostile to God**, for it **does not submit to God’s law**; indeed, **it cannot**.
 4. 8 Those who are in the flesh **cannot please God**.

- E. Fundamental, moral inability in the human person in the spiritual realm
 - 1. Like zombies – the walking dead
- F. That's Paul – what a kill-joy
 - 1. I like Jesus
 - a. Jesus, kind and gentle

IX. **Jesus and the Human Condition**

- A. **Matthew 5:13** (ESV) — 13 “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is **no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled** under people’s feet.
- B. **Matthew 7:17** (ESV) — 17 So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but **the diseased tree bears bad fruit.**
- C. **Luke 11:13** (ESV) — 13 If you then, **who are evil**, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”
- D. **Mark 7:21–23** (ESV) — 21 For from within, out of the heart of man, come **evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.** 23 **All these evil things come from within**, and they defile a person.”
- E. **Mark 10:18** (ESV) — 18 And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? **No one is good except God** alone.
- F. **John 3:6** (ESV) — 6 That which is **born of the flesh is flesh...**
- G. **John 5:40** (ESV) — 40 yet **you refuse to come to me** that you may have life.
- H. **John 5:42** (ESV) — 42 But I know that you **do not have the love of God within you.**
- I. **John 5:43** (ESV) — 43 I have come in my Father’s name, and **you do not receive me....**
- J. **John 5:47** (ESV) — 47 But if **you do not believe his writings**, how will you believe my words?”
- K. **John 7:7** (ESV) — 7 The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that **its works are evil.**
- L. **John 7:19** (ESV) — 19 ... Yet **none of you keeps the law.** Why do you seek to kill me?”
- M. **John 8:21** (ESV) — 21 So he said to them again, “I am going away, and you will seek me, and **you will die in your sin....**
- N. **John 8:23** (ESV) — 23 He said to them, “**You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.**
- O. **John 8:44** (ESV) — 44 You are **of your father the devil**, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.
- P. **John 8:47** (ESV) — 47 Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that **you are not of God.**”
- Q. We could go on and on
 - 1. Just a taste

- X. **Radical Depravity Revealed**
- A. **Romans 3:19–20** (ESV) —
1. 19 Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.
 2. 20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.
- B. When the radical nature of human corruption is revealed before God, every mouth will be silenced
1. **Job 40:4–5** (ESV) —
 - a. 4 “Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth.
 - b. 5 I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further.”
 2. **Isaiah 6:5** (ESV) — 5 And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”
 3. **Habakkuk 3:16** (ESV) — 16 I hear, and my body trembles; my lips quiver at the sound; rottenness enters into my bones; my legs tremble beneath me....
- C. That’s where people need to be before genuinely coming to Christ
1. Need to have their radical depravity revealed
 - a. Need to have their mouths shut
- D. Barnhouse story of man who used to laugh at his messages, and claimed that his work at the lodge was sufficient
1. Man took ill and lay dying in the hospital
 - a. Barnhouse visited
 2. Barnhouse: “You don’t mind my staying here for a few minutes and watching you, do you? I have often wondered what it would be like for a person to die without Jesus Christ. I have known you for quite a few years, and you have always said that you do not need Christ and that your lodge obligations are enough. I would like to observe a person end his life with those beliefs and see what it is like.”
 3. The man on the bed was struck through the heart. He looked at Barnhouse like a wounded animal. “You ... wouldn’t ... mock... a dying man... would you?” he said.
 4. Barnhouse then asked his diagnostic question. “You are going to appear before God in a very short while. Suppose he asks you, ‘What right do you have to come into my heaven?’ What will you say?”
 5. This time the man looked back in agonized silence, and great tears flowed from his frightened eyes and down his pale, wrinkled cheeks.
 6. Then, while he listened attentively, Barnhouse told him how he might approach God through the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ.

7. The man replied that his mother had taught him those truths as a child but that he had abandoned them. He had lived without faith. But now, in his final moments on earth, he came back to God through Jesus Christ, confessed his faith in Christ and then had someone call his family members so he might give his newfound testimony to them. He asked Barnhouse to tell his story at his funeral which took place a few days later.
- E. Every mouth will be silenced
1. Better to be silenced while on this earth than to wait until meeting God in the hereafter