

Saved By Grace IX – What Can a Dead Man Do?

Introduction – There is no doubt about it. There are some fine non-Christians out there. Some make splendid neighbors and citizens. But we must be careful about how we interpret what we see in the world around us. If we do not, it won't be long until we fall into the error of thinking that some people don't need a Savior, or that a man would be able, of his own individual initiative, to choose to seek and follow God. Total Inability is the teaching of scripture that man, apart from a work of God, is wholly unable to love God or to do anything meriting salvation.

Truly Dead (Eph 2:1-3) – Three main views of the nature of man exist. Either man is in his very nature good, or man is marred and sick but able to change and get better, or man is dead.

Dead in Sin (v1) – This is the teaching of Genesis 3. Mankind died in Adam because of Adam's sin (Gen 2:17). While Adam did not die physically for over 900 years after his sin, he died spiritually immediately upon his disobedience.

Dead Men Walking (v2) – This hideous, zombie-like picture describes the natural state of mankind after the fall. A man is alive in his flesh, but dead in his spirit (Col 2:13).

Children of Wrath (v3) – Paul makes clear that we didn't choose our way into this nature. We make these choices because of who we are by nature (Gen 6:9, Jer 17:9). We like our choices.

All Under Sin (Rom 3:9-20) – The point is not that man is 'absolutely' depraved. Rom 2:14 even mentions those who do not know the law but keep it at some points. The point is that at our very core, there is nothing to commend us to God or to prepare us to become commendable. The law has been declared, and in Adam, we all find ourselves guilty. In verses 9-11 particularly we are told there are –

None Righteous – Apart from the imputation of Christ's perfect righteousness, we cannot remove the stain of our sin, the will to rebel, nor the self-centeredness of all our actions (we are our own gods).

None Who Understand – Like a quantum physics problem written out on the board, we may be able to observe all of the various components, but we cannot make any sense of what He is saying (1 Cor 2:14). Our spiritual mind is dead, so a man may analyze the causes of the Reformation, or explain the doctrine of justification, but his nature will declare these things 'spiritual nonsense'.

No God-Seekers – Mankind is incredibly religious. But at the core of the unregenerate heart, everything he does is simply imitating Adam and Eve when they discovered the shame of their nakedness. We are running and hiding from God, and trying to cover ourselves, even if we use religious activities as fig-leaves.

Slaves Are Not Free (Rom 6:20) – Paul uses other word-pictures to describe our situation outside of Christ. Men are slaves to sin, and that hard master is not going to allow them their freedom, except their freedom from righteousness. But like a sly tyrant, it is simply giving them what they want – freedom from righteousness.

What Can A Dead Man Do? – He can lay in his grave and that is all. He cannot respond until Someone gives him life (John 11:25-26 and the story of Lazarus). In addition, the slave, bound by the strongman (Luke 11:21-22, 2 Tim 2:26) cannot be freed until a Stronger One comes and releases him.

But here is the clincher: The dead man does not want life. The slave does not want freedom. The main reason an unbeliever cannot come to Christ is that he *will not* come to Christ (John 3:19, Rom 8:7). Christian, the reason that you believe and love the Savior is exclusively due to the fact that He gave you, a dead man who could not and would not ask for it, spiritual and eternal life.

Worldview and Practical Applications – Those who do not believe that man is dead in his sin will have a profound impact over time as to how we interpret the world around us.

The Preacher – Is he preaching to people who can reason their way into the kingdom? Then salvation is ultimately up to the preacher and the listener. Is he preaching to people who need to initiate their salvation? Then he better make a good show of it – a man's eternity is at stake. Or, is he preaching to dry bones? Then, his confidence will rest squarely on the work of God and nothing else.

The President – Even if it is just for political expediency, to avoid calling a nation to repentance and humility, a leader's flattery will create moral confusion. Either we are good and there are no reasons to connect God to the events of 9-11, or we are under His judgment and we need to be led in seeking His mercy.

The Doctor/Pastor/Therapist – There are fewer and fewer 'sins' these days, and more and more diseases and disorders.

Embezzlement is now a shopping disorder. Drunkenness is alcoholism. Fornication is a sexual disfunction (unless no one gets hurt).

The Parent – Some Christian parents are 'shocked' to find out that their children are, by nature, sinners. But whether they are manifesting their unregenerate state or their battle with remaining sin, children are some of the best teachers of Total Inability.

The Race Reconciler – Feuds between families, tribes, races, and nations, have been with us since Cain and Abel. There is an antithesis, but it is spiritual, not ethnic. The answer is not to teach tolerance, but rather to preach 'one blood', one race in Adam, all fallen and all in need of a Savior.

Dave Hatcher – September 15,