

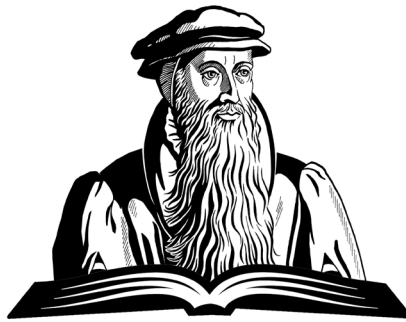
VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

The Application of Redemption

by Rev. William Macleod

Lecture 2

Total Depravity



**The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education**

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

John Knox Institute of Higher Education

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Rev. William Macleod recently retired, after serving as minister of the gospel for 45 years at Knightswood Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), in Glasgow, Scotland. In addition, he was for many years the editor of the denominational magazine, *The Free Church Witness*. He was also Professor of Systematic Theology and Principal of the Free Church (Continuing) Seminary, in Inverness, Scotland. He is married and has three adult children and six grandchildren.

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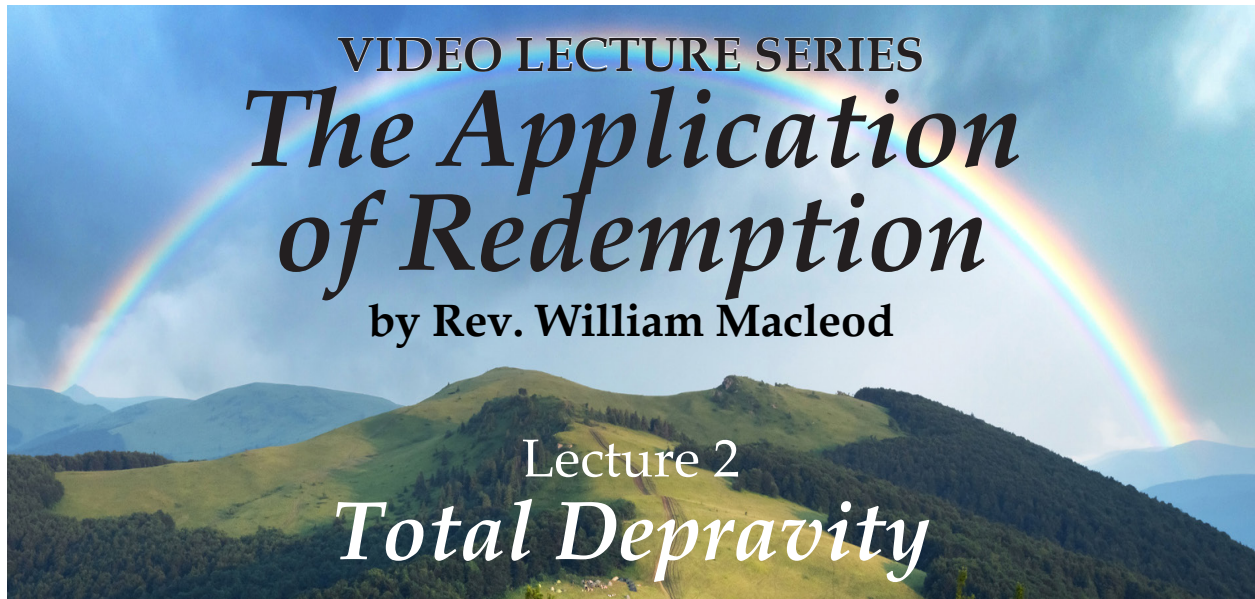
VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

The Application of Redemption

by Rev. William Macleod

12 Lectures

1. The Order of Salvation
2. Total Depravity
3. Effectual Calling
4. Regeneration
5. Repentance
6. Saving Faith
7. Justification
8. Adoption
9. Sanctification
10. Union with Christ
11. Perseverance of the Saints
12. Glorification



Our second lecture is on man's need, that is, "*Total Depravity*." For all of us, it is of great value to consider our past. God said, through Isaiah the prophet, "Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged" (Isaiah 51, verse 1). Paul reminds the Ephesian Christians that they were at one time "children of wrath, even as others" (Ephesians 2, verse 3). Reflecting on our past should benefit us in various ways. For one thing, it encourages humility. We were hell-deserving creatures in a spiritual mess. The best of us were spiritually filthy and polluted. We had no righteousness or merit. And then, too, when we consider what we were, it demonstrates to us that salvation is all of grace. We were dead in our sins, and we could never save ourselves. A third point is, it should stir us up to praise God with a new song (Psalm 40)—our salvation is from an awful pit and miry clay (verses 2 and 3). It's all God's work from the beginning to the end. And fourthly, this ought to give us confidence and expectancy in evangelism. Since God saved us, he can save anyone. Even the most sinful and hostile sinner can be born again. The behavior, beliefs, and educational attainment of the individual essentially makes no difference. It takes the same mighty, sovereign grace of God to convert every individual who is dead in sin. No matter how gifted we are in our evangelism, how persuasive in our arguments, how loving in our personality, we are totally ineffective without God. But even weak creatures like us, if God chooses to use us, will see the greatest sinners and the most hardened atheists converted. We discover that with God's help, all things are possible.

So first of all, consider *The Fall*. Adam was created in the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. Knowing God, he was in a loving relationship with Him. Being righteous and holy, he was in a right standing with God, and pleasing to Him. Adam, however, had a free will, in the sense that he could choose to obey or disobey. When God created Adam, He entered into a covenant with him. We call it the Covenant of Works. In this covenant, He threatened him with death if he ate of the forbidden fruit, and promised him life and blessing if he continued obedient. Adam did not have a tendency towards sin as we do. In fact, there was only one sin he could commit, and he did that. Once he had chosen to eat the forbidden fruit, he lost the core elements of God's image. Instead of being righteous and holy, and in a loving relationship with God, he was now alienated from God, and his will was in bondage to evil. So, sadly, as fallen

mankind, sin is now easy and natural for all of us.

We were all in Adam in this Covenant of Works. We all sinned in him and fell with him in his first transgression. In this way, all men and women are, by natural generation, children of Adam, and are sinners even before they are born. Jesus, the seed of the woman, was protected by his special conception and his virgin birth, so that he did not inherit this sin. The Bible reveals a progression of sin, from Adam to Cain, who murdered his brother. Then we are told of Lamech, who boasted of having committed murder. Eventually, just before the flood, God pronounced His judgment on men and women, because “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6, verse 5).

So then, we are in *A State of Total Inability*. By nature, we are not just dull or spiritually sleepy—we are dead. The Bible says man is dead in his sins (Ephesians 2, verse 1). We have eyes that cannot see the holy God who is everywhere, nor are we aware of our own sinfulness and lostness. Being blind, we are unable to see the hell to which we are headed, or the wonderful gospel provision in Christ, or the way of salvation through him. We cannot see the glory of heaven that Christ has purchased for us. And we are deaf, so that we may sit in church and outwardly hear the preaching and the reading of the Bible, yet fail to hear the gospel call. We have mouths that cannot pray for our needs, or praise God we ought. We have heart, yet we cannot love the altogether lovely One. Our hearts are as hard as stone, and we are as cold as ice. We have a duty to repent and believe the gospel, but cannot because we are dead. Can the leopard change his spots or the Ethiopian the color of his skin? (Jeremiah 13, verse 33). We are, by nature, in a state of total inability to start seeking, or to make one move toward God without divine help. Because of this, when Christians are witnessing, or ministers are preaching, pleading with sinners to flee to Christ, it is like speaking to a corpse. Ministers do sometimes feel as inadequate, as if they were preaching in a cemetery. They say the most moving things, pleading with tears in their eyes. They warn sinners of the hell to which they will certainly go if they do not repent, and indeed that hell may at any moment open its mouth and swallow them, yet there is no response. They tell of a loving Savior willing today to receive them if they will but call upon them, but it makes no impression. Yet, praise God, when it pleases him, he accompanies the Word by his Spirit, and that is what makes all the difference, raising the spiritually dead.

So, we’re in a condition of *Total Depravity*. Our moral condition, by nature, is not just that we have some serious sins and guilty stains, but rather that we are dead in trespasses and sins. This state is described for us in Ephesians chapter 2. “Trespasses” (verse 1) refers especially to outward sins, open transgressing of the commandments. Although we are dead to God, yet we are alive in sin. In our unconverted state, we break God’s commandments in thought, word, and deed, and sadly, love to do so. We have conscience that condemns us, but we suppress it. We wish, in fact, that God was dead, so that we would not have to give account to him. As unconverted people, we want to be free to wallow in sin. We are dead in sins (verse 1). Dead in sins refers to something more inward. The Greek word for sin here means, essentially, “missing the mark.” God set the standard, his law, when he created us, but we miss it. Our hearts, by nature, are “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17, verse 9). We are all under sin, and there is none righteous, no not one (Romans 3, verse 9 and following). And “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isaiah 64, verse 6). We were actually born dead—dead in sins.

The fallen world is opposed to God and is the enemy of God. All men, since the fall, are born in sin, walk along the broad road, following the fashions of majority, and are powerfully subjected to peer group pressure by the ungodly society around them. John Bunyan, in his classic work, *The*

Pilgrim's Progress, described this as “Vanity Fair.” The world is seductive in tempting to sin; it is persecuting and threatening, and oppressing the godly. Each one of us, in the past, was a friend of the world, and therefore an enemy of God (James 4, verse 4). One sin leads to another. Sin matured in Cain from initial self-righteousness, to jealousy, to hatred of his brother, because Abel was more righteous than he was, and finally, to the murder of Abel. In Judas Iscariot, sin developed from unbelief, to coveting, to stealing, to eventually betraying Christ for thirty pieces of silver, and finally to self-murder or suicide.

In our unconverted state, we walk “according to the course of this world” (Ephesians 2, verse 2). This refers to the universal sinful path of mankind. Satan is “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (verse 2). He was created in the image of God as an angel; indeed, he was a prince among the angels, or an archangel. But he was banished from heaven for his sin and his rebellion against God. He entered the garden of Eden, and succeeded in tempting our first parents to join him in rebellion against God. In a sense, he and his fellow fallen angels rule this world, and so, he is called here “the prince of the power of the air.” He is not like God, who is omnipresent and so present in the totality of his being everywhere. Satan is limited to being in one place at one time. But not having a body, he is not subject to the force of gravity. Because of this, he can move quickly through the air. Thus, he is called “the prince of the power of the air” (verse 2). He knows that his days are short, and that he is doomed to spend eternity tormented by God in hell. Therefore, he is very active seeking to hurt God. Because he cannot directly attack God, he attacks the people of God. He hates God, and tries to do maximum damage to His kingdom, busily flying through the air, tempting people. He has many devils under his command who follow and obey him. All those who are unconverted are Satan’s children. He dwells in them, and they are his slaves. Jesus said to the Jews who opposed him, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do” (John 8, verse 44). There was a time when Satan ruled over us, and so, we too were the children of disobedience.

Moving on to verse 3, we read that our lives in the past were dominated by the lusts of our flesh. These are the desires of the flesh, which involve immorality, greed, and drunkenness. We are also deeply affected by the desires of the mind, which include idolatry, pride, covetousness, hypocrisy, and deceit. We all had our conversation, or lifestyle, with these things in the past. Paul, along with the Ephesians, the Jews, and the Gentiles, and also Christians today were, in their unregenerate state, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind. We were children of wrath, like our father the devil. Ours was a lifestyle of constant sinning, and so all of us were under the wrath and curse of God.

This doctrine of total depravity means that every part of man’s being is depraved. His understanding is darkened, and his mind is at enmity with God. His decision-making is twisted. His will is a slave to his darkened understanding and rebellious mind. His heart is corrupt, and his affections naturally gravitate to what is wicked. His conscience is untrustworthy. His emotions are perverted and distorted. Further, his body is subject to mortality. There is, however, a difference between total depravity and absolute depravity. Man is not absolutely depraved, as bad as he could be. Those who will be in hell will be absolutely evil there. In this world, man is restrained by God’s common grace, and by fear of punishment, also by government and public opinion, and by the desire to please and be popular. The barbarians in Malta showed great kindness to shipwrecked Paul and his companions (Acts chapter 28). Some unconverted people do amazing acts of kindness and charity, and indeed should many Christians. Yet, Paul asserts, “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Romans 14, verse 23). In the eyes of God, the unconverted are constantly sinning. “There is

none that doeth good, no, not one” (Romans 3, verse 12).

Thinking then of *Guilt*. Sin is wicked—it involves breaking the commandments which God has given mankind to be kept. God is love, but God is also a consuming fire (Hebrews 12, verse 29). He is holy and just, hates sin, and must punish it. So, we “were by nature the children of wrath, even as others” (Ephesians 2, verse 3). We were holding back and suppressing the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1, verse 18). And we were resisting the Holy Ghost (Acts 7, verse 51). “God is angry with the wicked every day” (Psalm 7, verse 11). But someone might object and ask, “Surely, if I am in the elect, God loved me from all eternity.” Yes, in God’s plan, he has certainly always loved his elect, but they are still guilty before God till they are justified. We are, all of us, under condemnation until we repent. You are reconciled to God and justified when, and only when you believe. “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5, verse 1). Before we believe, we are not justified, and so, we do not have peace with God. We are, by nature, under God’s condemnation. We need to make our peace with God. We do that when we believe in Jesus and claim him as our Savior. Then, and only then, is the redemption which was purchased by Christ for us on Calvary, applied to us.

So then, our *Conclusion*. Having described fully the awful state of those totally depraved, and in a condition of total inability, the Apostle writes these tremendous words, in Ephesians 2, and verse 4: “But God”—“but” is a small word, with great significance. When our case was hopeless, God intervened. God did it all. We were totally undeserving and completely unable to save ourselves, but sovereign grace changed us. The power which raised up Christ from the grave (Ephesians 1, verses 19 and 20) raises up us from being dead in sins. Let us be humbled by considering what we once were. It took sovereign grace to convert us. Let us praise the Lord, realizing that this salvation is all of God’s work and not of man. Yes, we must believe, it is our duty, but even faith itself is the gift of God (verse 8). Glory be to God. Look back, and give thanks to the One who took you from the horrible pit and from the miry clay (Psalm 40, verse 2). Let us sing a new song to our God as we realize afresh the desperate low condition from which he saved us. Even in heaven, we will remember our initial low, lost, depraved state, and our song of praise will be, “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (Revelation 1, verses 5 and 6).

We need God’s help in evangelism. Jesus said to us to go and make disciples, then baptize and teach these converts. This would be an impossible burden, but for the fact that he also said, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth,” and, “Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28, verses 18 and 20). Christ, by his Spirit, builds his church, “and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16, verse 18). He speaks through those who share the gospel with their neighbors. He anoints New Testament preachers with his Holy Spirit. Christ saves those dead in sin. He penetrates stony hearts. Success is guaranteed, glory be to God.