Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In this morning’s sermon, we referred to the horrors of the war in Ukraine. And we wonder how can this be? How can people do this to other people? And during the week, the young victim of an assault was on the news. Apparently, it was a random assault. Some thugs just decided to beat this guy up. And he had a fractured skull and a brain bleed. And again, you ask yourself, how can this be? Who would do that to someone else?

Well, Jesus said something about this in **Matthew 5:21-22**. He said, “*You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.*” So, where does war or murder of violent assault begin? It begins in here (heart). So, by God’s grace, perhaps you have never assaulted anyone or murdered anyone or committed war-crimes. But have you ever been angry with someone? Have you ever insulted someone? Have you ever called someone a fool? I have and I am sure you have.

And perhaps you have not committed actual adultery, but Jesus also said, “*everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart*.” So, have you ever lusted? Fantasized? Watched pornography?

And even if we leave aside the more obvious and notorious sins, some of you will have read or studied the book ‘Respectable sins.’ It gets the microscope out and exposes sins like unthankfulness, anxiety, frustration, discontentment, pride, selfishness, impatience, irritability, judgmentalism, gossip, a lack of self-control, envy, jealousy, and worldliness. And they are all in here (heart), in each one of us! And they can cause so much hurt and damage, and, more importantly, they all offend God.

So, the question is: Why? Why are we like this? Where does this come from?

Well, have you ever heard the saying, “She is the **spitting image** of her mother”? or “he is the spitting image of his father”? We can’t be sure of the exact etymology of the phrase, but back in the day, if a child looked exactly like his or her parent, it was said that they could have been spitten out of their parent’s mouth. So, spitten came to mean ‘perfect likeness.’ And so, people would describe someone as the spitt*en* image, which eventually became the spitt*ing* image.

And answer 7 of the Catechism explains that in terms of sin, we are the spitting image of our first parents, Adam and Eve. And this is actually spelled out in **Romans 5**. It says there that through them, death and sin spread to all human beings. Just as we receive our physical characteristics from Adam and Eve, we also receive a sinful nature from them. As answer 7 says, “We are born sinners, corrupt from conception on.”

And it is important that we understand what having a sinful nature means. You see, I did not *become* a **Holtslag** because I sounded like my father or looked like him or had the same mannerisms as him. No, I sound like him and look like him and have the same mannerisms as him because I am a Holtslag. It is my Holtslag nature that produces my Holtslag looks and behaviour. And similarly, you are either **right-handed or lefthanded**. Is that because at a certain age you chose which hand to use, and that then became your nature? No, you were born with a right or left handed nature, which resulted in you writing with your left or right hand.

And in the same way, we do not become sinners because we commit sins, we commit sins because we are sinners. It is our sinful nature that produces sinful acts. The Bible says that we are born with, even conceived with, a sinful nature. Psalm 51:5 says, “*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me*.” And from this nature comes the actual sins that we commit.

Now, I want to take that as a given today. There is lot’s more we could say about all this and there are many more Scriptures that make this case. But what I would like us to focus on today is **how bad is this problem**? You see, answer 5 said that “I have a natural tendency to hate God and my neighbour.” And answer 7 says that we “have a poisoned nature; that we are born sinners – corrupt from conception on.” And that is strong language. Hate God and neighbour? Poisoned? Corrupt? Are we really that bad? We all make mistakes, many would say, but corrupt? Surely not!

Well, when it comes to our spiritual condition, outside of Christ, it really is that bad! We are poisoned, corrupt, and wicked; we are God and neighbour haters. And it is extremely important that we understand this. For Christ to be lovely, we must understand how much we need Him. And that is why we turn to Ephesians 2 where **The Spiritual Condition of Those Outside of Christ is Laid Bare**. And what we see is that those outside of Christ are **dead *IN*** sin, **enslaved *to*** sin, and **condemned *by*** sin.

1. In the first place then, we see that the spiritual condition of those outside of Christ is **dead in sin.** Verse 1 says,“*As for you, you were dead in the trespasses and sins*.”
   1. Paul originally wrote these words to the **Gentile** or Non-Jewish Christians of Ephesus. And because he said to them, “you WERE dead…” it is clear that they were no longer dead; that at some point they have been brought from death to life. And he explains how that took place in verses 4-10. But for now though, he wanted to remind them that they *were* once “dead.”
   2. And what this deadness is is explained with the words “*in the trespasses and sins*.”
      1. The word “**trespasses**” literally refers to ‘moving away from the right path.’
         1. Boys and girls, if your parents say to you, “I want you to clean up your room,” and you initially head to your room but end up in the lounge reading a book, you have committed a trespass; you have moved away from the path of obedience.
      2. The word “**sins**” refers to ‘missing the mark.’
         1. Again, if your parents tell you tidy up the pile of clothes on the floor in your room by folding them up and putting them neatly in the drawers and you grab them up into one pile and stuff them into the corner of the wardrobe, that is a sin; you have failed to achieve the standard that your parents required.
      3. And these are the two ways that we disobey God; we either break His commands or we fail to keep them, perfectly. And apart from Christ, meaning before a person has been born again, this is what they do, always.
   3. So, the deadness is a **spiritual** deadness. And we all know how deadness works. I am sure you boys and girls have had a pet that died. And it wasn’t just sick or partly dead, it was utterly lifeless! Not even Dad could fix this.
      1. And spiritual deadness means that all that is done and every aspect of a person’s being is infected and tainted and poisoned with sin. It means being *utterly* corrupted.
      2. Now, **this does not mean** that unbelievers are as wicked as they could be all the time. By God’s grace, unbelievers are capable of acts of great kindness and generosity. But you see, none of what they do arises out of faith or a desire to glorify God. And that is what makes something truly good and pleasing in God’s eyes.
      3. So, catechism students, thinking of the TULIP acronym, what do we call this condition? Total Depravity.
2. And we see more about Total Depravity in the next verses. For that is where we see that not only are those in unbelief **dead** **in** sin, they are also **enslaved to** sin. And this is our second point.
   1. To be enslaved to something means that you are completely under its power. It owns you. It controls you. It dominates you, every moment, of every day. So, what does this enslavement to sin look like?
      1. Well, to begin with, verse 2 says that those enslaved to sin **follow “*the course of this world***.”
         1. And following the course of anything is like using Google Maps – you go where the map tells you to go. If it says turn right in 200m, you turn right in 200m. That is the course you follow.
         2. And the course that unbelievers follow is “*the world*.” The Greek word translated as “world” is found approximately 180 times in the New Testament. And almost every time it has a negative connotation to it.
            1. For example, in **1 John 4**, the apostle speaks about false prophets, and he says, “*They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them*.” And **James 4:4** says, “*Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God*.”
         3. So, the course of this world means the philosophies and behaviours of the world, rather than the way of the Bible.
      2. But this enslavement is not just about human thought and behaviour. And we see this is as Paul continues: for they are also **following “*the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience***.”
         1. The Bible calls Satan “*the father of lies*” and the “*deceiver*.” He is a general who has an army of many demons. and he is determined to promote unbelief and disobedience.
         2. And the fruit of his work is seen in unbelievers. Jesus said, “*Whoever is not with me is against me*.” So, there is no neutrality. Sometimes it may not be so obvious, but Satan is always at work in those who follow Him to oppose Christ and the church.
         3. In **1 Chronicles 12:32**, we read this about the men of the tribe of Issachar; they were “*men who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do*.” And we must be like them. And brothers and sisters, this is why being under biblical and full-orbed preaching, and being part of a regular Bible study, and reading and listening to sound theology is so important.
      3. And the result of this enslavement to the world and the devil is life lived “***in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind***.”
         1. And Romans 1 spells out what this looks like in all its gory detail. It says that sinful man in his unbelief knows the truth about God but suppresses it in unrighteousness. And then the creation is worshipped instead of the Creator. And then their thinking becomes futile and foolish. And then sinful sexual passions take hold of them, which eventually ends with dishonourable and unnatural same-sex activity. And then they become filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice, envy, murder, strife, deceit, slander, hatred, heartlessness and ruthlessness. And this is exactly what we are witnessing in the world today.
         2. And people of God, it is all so sad and utterly foolish. In my prayer this morning, I mentioned the **Supreme Court Justice** who was nominated by President Biden because she is a woman. He said, my nomination will be a woman because he wants a gender balance on the Supreme Court. But when she was asked in her Senate hearing to define what a woman is, she said, I don’t feel qualified to answer because I am not a biologist. In other words, she didn’t want to give an answer that might upset the trans community. So, if President Biden had nominated a trans woman, someone born male who now identifies as female, according to the world, that person would count as a woman in the Supreme Court gender balance. And more and more ‘average people,’ including even professing Christians, today, think this makes sense; that this is right and good. Well, God’s word calls it foolishness and wickedness.
         3. And if you get Bob McKoskrie’s Family First newsletter, you may have heard about the **new sex education curriculum** that is being implemented. It is wicked! Its authors state that for too long sex education has focused on education and health and marriage. But those things are sexist and patriarchal and racist. What we must now do is focus on sex. Children need to be liberated from those old ways of thinking to learn about experimenting and enjoying and pleasure. That should be the new emphasis. Coming soon to a state school near you!
   2. Congregation, to be outside of Christ is to be enslaved to sin. And we see evidence of this all around us. But before me move to our last point, there are some very important words at the beginning of **verse 3**. For there, Paul says, “***Among whom we all once lived***.” So, Paul was including himself and all believers in this previous spiritual condition. If you follow Christ, today, there once was a time when you were dead in sin and enslaved by sin. And that is because to become a believer is to become converted/changed/to go from spiritual deadness to spiritual life. And the theological name that we give to this condition is total depravity.
3. And the last part of this doctrine, which is our third point, is that it includes being **condemned *by* sin**.
   1. I don’t know if you have heard this before, but there are some who call verses 1-10 of Ephesians 2 **the shorter epistle to the Romans**. And that is because the key doctrines of the first 11 *chapters* of Romans are summarized, very beautifully, in these 10 short verses. And one of those key doctrines is stated at the end of verse 3: We “*were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind*.” And in terms of the Book of Romans, this is what Paul explains in chapters 3-9.
      1. In chapter 3, we read, “*There is no-one righteous, not even one … for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*.”
      2. And in chapter 5, Adam’s sin led to death and condemnation for all men.
      3. In chapter 6, “*the wages of sin is death*.”
      4. And in chapter 9, “*What if God, desiring to show His wrath and to make known His power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction*?”
      5. And what all this reveals is that because of this starting spiritual condition, this sinful nature that we all inherit from Adam and Eve, this being dead in trespasses and sins, we deserve God’s wrath and anger. We deserve being condemned to an eternity in hell. And this is even before we have committed a single, actual sin!
   2. And you must understand that this is true of you. It is true of you who *have not yet* repented and believed in Jesus. Your sinful nature, and the sins you commit each day, make you deserving of hell. But it is also true of you who *have* put their faith in Christ and have received forgiveness and eternal life. Your previous spiritual condition and the sins that you still commit today make you deserving of hell. So, your salvation is a gracious or undeserved gift of God.
   3. And here is why you need to understand this. The other night my wife and I were listening to a sermon from the recent Ligonier Ministries National Conference. And the preacher spoke about the topic that we are talking about tonight. And a really helpful illustration that he used was about **diamonds**. He recalled looking for a diamond for an engagement ring, because he planned to propose to his girlfriend. So, he visited a jeweller, but all the diamonds that he was shown looked dull and pretty much the same. But then the jeweller said, “Oh, wait a minute, I forgot something.” And he went behind the counter and pulled up a black velvet cloth. Well, when the man looked at a diamond that he had already looked at, but this time against the backdrop of that black cloth, it absolutely sparkled! It seemed to pick up every bit of light in the store and reflect it and refract it into all the colours of the rainbow. The difference was extraordinary. And what made the difference was the black background. And brothers and sisters, it is the same with the doctrine of total depravity. To understand the loveliness of Christ as your Saviour, you must understand the poison and corruption and wickedness of your sinful nature and what your sins deserve.
   4. So, to you who have not yet repented and believed, I hope that this sermon, this exposing of your sinful nature, leads you to humble yourself in confession and sorrow, and to repent and believe in Jesus. He is the diamond of salvation that I hold before you today. And the black background I have painted was intended to make Him shine most beautifully. If you will receive Him today, as your Saviour and Lord, you will no longer be a child of wrath but a child of God!
   5. And if you have received Christ as your Saviour and Lord, can that be seen in how you live? Are you striving to please Him in all that you do? Are you so thankful for God’s grace to you in Jesus Christ that you are walking “*in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called*,” as we read in chapter 4?

In a few moments, we will sing these words: *He calls His chosen from afar, they all at Zion’s gates arrive. Those who were dead in sin, before, by sovereign grace are made alive*.

Thank you, Lord Jesus! Amen.