

# The Scripture View of the Present State of Man

by Thomas Reade

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the true state of the human heart and the need for divine illumination to attain a true knowledge of oneself.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 14:2, Jeremiah 17:9, Matthew 7:24, Matthew 15:8, Mark 7:20, Luke 6:46, Romans 2:6, 1 Corinthians 3:13, Hebrews 4:12, Revelation 2:23

**Topics:** "Human Depravity", "Spiritual Renewal"

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## Description

Thomas Reade preaches about the sinful state of man as depicted in the Scriptures, emphasizing the necessity of divine illumination and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to understand and acknowledge our wretched condition. The sermon highlights the importance of an inward change of heart and the deceitful nature of the human heart, as described by various prophets and Jesus himself. It calls for humility, self-examination, and a deep desire for God's transformative work in our lives, stressing the need to love the Lord wholeheartedly and seek a radical change from within.

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## Transcript

### 43. THE SCRIPTURE VIEW OF THE PRESENT STATE OF MAN

"The Lord looks down from heaven on the entire human race; he looks to see if there is even one with real understanding, one who seeks for God. But no, all have turned away from God; all have become corrupt. No one does good, not even one!" Psalm 14:2-3

Amid conflicting opinions, and contradictory statements, it is only from the word of God that we can attain to a true knowledge of ourselves. And even this holy book would not instruct us to any saving purpose, without the divine illumination and teaching of the Holy Spirit. Hence, we see the necessity of reading the Scriptures, with prayer for the guidance of the Spirit, whose office it is to guide the followers of Christ into all truth, as well as to convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment.

We cannot read our Bible with any suitable degree of attention, without being struck with the great stress which is laid upon the inward state of the heart. In the very beginning of divine revelation, when the dreadful effects of the Fall began to deluge the earth with violence, it is recorded, that "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." And again, "The Lord said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth."

By the prophet Jeremiah, "the Spirit of truth gives this humbling description of the inner man, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" Jesus, who needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man, has declared, "It is the thought-life that defiles you. For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, eagerness for lustful pleasure, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you and make you unacceptable to God."

The heart of man, while in a state of nature, is described throughout the Scriptures in a variety of ways, in order to impress the sinner with a deep Sense of his wretched condition, and to convince him of the absolute necessity of an entire and radical change. Oh! that beholding our native deformity, we may be led to loathe and abhor ourselves, and to seek to that gracious Giver of all good things, who alone can prepare us for his kingdom and glory. As holy men of old spoke and wrote under the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit, so what they have recorded respecting the human heart, must be considered as the divine testimony.

Solomon declares, "Deceit is in the heart of those who imagine evil." "The heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." "The heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live." What can be more decisive than such declarations? Who can look for holy principles and affections, holy motives and purposes, holy conduct and conversation, in, and from, a heart full of evil? Surely, if there were no other testimony, this alone is sufficient to cast down proud imaginations, and every high thing which exalts itself, against the knowledge of God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden.

Lord give me a humble spirit. May I receive your testimony with self-abasement. O cleanse the thoughts of my heart by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that I may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name.

By the prophet Hosea, the Almighty declares of his professing people, that "their heart is divided." This is highly displeasing to God, who has said, "My son, give me your heart." Not a part, but the whole, for the command is, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart." And what can be more reasonable, more delightful, than to love, with supreme affection, the Author of our being, the God of our salvation, the Bestower of all our mercies ? But, foul ingratitude marks the character of our fallen nature. Thus God expostulates with the rebellious house of Israel; an admonition extending to every creature, even to me; for how prone is my deceitful heart to evade the personal application under the wide extensive survey of human corruption- "Even the animals--the donkey and the ox--know their owner and appreciate his care, but not my people Israel. No matter what I do for them, they still do not understand." "The stork in the heaven knows her appointed times; and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow, observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the Lord." "The stork knows the time of her migration, as do the turtledove, the swallow, and the crane. They all return at the proper time each year. But not my people! They do not know what the Lord requires of them."

We sin, and forget the sin, but God remembers all our wickedness! Awful, awakening thought! Every impure imagination, every unhallowed affection, every wicked purpose, though unripened into action; every secret, and to men, unknown and unseen iniquity, is all remembered by that omniscient God, who will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." Yes, who will judge the secrets of men's hearts by Jesus, and render unto every man according to his works; to those who are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath,

tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that does evil.

O! what a tremendous day will that be, which tears the mask of hypocrisy from the face of sin; which rolls away the stone from off the white-washed sepulcher; which discloses the chambers of imagery, and discovers the hidden evils of a heart once admired, but now abhorred, by an assembled world.

In that day the wicked will bewail in bitter reproaches their forgetfulness of God, and their love of sin; but this bitterness of soul being utterly destitute of every gracious feeling, will only enhance the sharpness of their torment, and give additional strength to the sting of that worm which never dies. Thus their self-reproach will be co-exist with eternity. Hating God, and hating themselves, and hating the fiends who torment them, they will be wretched beyond all conception. "From everlasting damnation, Good Lord deliver us."

The rebellion of the human heart is most forcibly described by the prophet Jeremiah; "Do you have no respect for me? Why do you not tremble in my presence? I, the Lord, am the one who defines the ocean's sandy shoreline, an everlasting boundary that the waters cannot cross. The waves may toss and roar, but they can never pass the bounds I set. But my people have stubborn and rebellious hearts. They have turned against me and have chosen to practice idolatry." What language can more forcibly depict the amazing power and force of human depravity, breaking through every restraint, and passing over every barrier? By the prophet Ezekiel, the unrenewed heart is called a heart of stone, hard and insensible. These are a few of those scriptures which, like a mirror, show us to ourselves. Oh! that the sight of such deformity may humble every proud pretension to moral excellence, and cause us to seek to that divine and gracious Savior, who so lovingly gave himself to redeem us from this lost condition.

Lord, unite me to yourself, that I may show forth your praise, by a life of true humility, purity, and love. Be pleased to give me a new heart and a new spirit; a heart of flesh. Renew my soul in righteousness. Create me anew after your image. Dwell in my heart by faith. Crucify every unholy affection. Mortify every unhallowed inclination. Wean my heart, O God, from earth, and bind my soul to you. Be the center of all my desires. May they all settle on you. Give me clearer views of my real condition as a fallen creature; clearer apprehensions of your grace in Christ Jesus; and clearer manifestations of your purposes and love towards my poor sinful soul, that in the full assurance of faith and hope, I may go on from strength to strength, until I appear before you in Zion.

Every humble student of the Holy Scriptures, that pure fountain of truth, must be convinced that mere head knowledge of the gospel will profit him nothing. However orthodox our opinions may be, they will avail nothing if they merely float on the mind, but never descend into, or influence the heart. However punctual our attendance on the ordinances of religion may be, we shall only resemble the lip-serving Pharisees, who drew near unto God with their mouths, while their hearts were far from him. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith." "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham." "You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do." These are severe words, but they were spoken by Him who is Love, and who knew what was in man.

Paul points out the difference between the outward rite, and the inward grace, which applies as much to Christian baptism, as it does to Jewish circumcision. "He is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God." With this

accords the command of Moses; "Circumcise your heart, and be no more stiff-necked." Also the promise of sanctification; "The Lord your God will circumcise your heart, and the heart of your seed, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, that you may live."

This distinction between the outward visible sign, and the inward spiritual grace, is made by Stephen when addressing an assembly of circumcised Jews; "You stiff-necked, and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you do always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you." When all this is brought to the test of facts, we may ask; Was there no difference between the character and spiritual state of John, the beloved disciple, and Judas, the traitor? Yet both were ordained by Christ to the office of the Apostleship. Was there no difference between Barnabas, "a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit," and Ananias and Sapphira, who lied to the Holy Spirit? Yet, they were equally professing members of the Church at Jerusalem? Was there no difference between the inward state of the baptized Cornelius, to whom was granted repentance unto life; and Simon Magus, who, after baptism, was declared, by the inspired Peter, to be in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity?

If this distinction of character be apparent, even in the primitive Church, should it be deemed an unwarrantable assumption, as some zealous maintainers of baptismal regeneration affirm, to divide baptized people, composing the visible Church of Christ, into the godly and the profane?

Bishop Pearson, in his Exposition on the Holy Catholic Church, (the ninth Article in the Apostle's Creed) did not think so. " We must observe." writes this learned prelate, "that the Church, as it embraces all the professors of the true faith of Christ, contains in it not only such as do truly believe, and are obedient to the word, but those also which are hypocrites and profane. Many profess the faith, who have no true belief; many have some kind of faith, which live with no correspondence to the gospel preached. Within, therefore, the notion of the Church, are comprehended good and bad, being both externally called, and both professing the same faith. This is that ark of Noah, in which were preserved beasts clean and unclean. There are many called of all which the Church consists, but there are few chosen of those which are called, and thereby within the Church."

From this statement of the Bishop, in accordance with the parables of our Lord, and to which he himself alludes, it is evident, that if we are mere nominal Christians, our admittance by baptism into the visible Church, will only aggravate our condemnation. The sin of Hophni and Phineas was augmented by the sacred office which they held. The crime of David was enhanced by the favors which a God of love had heaped upon him. The condemnation of the cities, where our Lord preached and wrought his miracles, was increased by the light vouchsafed to them.

Abused mercies, like the blood of Abel, cry out for vengeance. Sin is deepened in its atrocity, when committed against Light and Love. "What horrors await you, Korazin and Bethsaida! For if the miracles I did in you had been done in wicked Tyre and Sidon, their people would have sat in deep repentance long ago, clothed in sackcloth and throwing ashes on their heads to show their remorse. I assure you, Tyre and Sidon will be better off on the judgment day than you! And you people of Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to the place of the dead. For if the miracles I did for you had been done in Sodom, it would still be here today. I assure you, Sodom will be better off on the judgment day than you."

All are equally responsible for the privileges conferred upon them, but are all equally impressed with the importance of their responsibility? Has not our blessed Lord made a distinction between the man who

improved his talent, and the slothful servant who hid it in a napkin? Did he not pronounce an encomium of "Well done" upon the one, and a censure, "You wicked servant" on the other? This distinction was not made from the inward state of the heart only, but from the diligence of the one, and the slothfulness of the other, agreeably to his own revealed rule of judging; "By their fruits you shall know them."

As the Judge of the living and the dead, the Almighty Savior has reserved to himself the work of separation between the sheep and the goats. He knows the secrets of all hearts. He can discern his people in the midst of their frailties; and the hypocrite beneath his specious virtues. This is His prerogative. But, he has even now drawn a line of demarcation between the godly and the profane. Did not the Lord say to Moses, respecting Korah and his company, "Separate yourselves from this congregation?" And did not Moses command the people "Depart, I beg you, from the tents of these wicked men."

What said the Lord to Jeremiah? "If you take forth the precious from the vile, you shall be as my mouth." What was the complaint of the Almighty to Ezekiel, when speaking of Jerusalem? "Her priests have violated my law; they have made no difference between the holy and profane." Thus is the conduct of those priests condemned, who considered all people, if circumcised, as standing on the same level. When the God of Israel revealed to Ezekiel in vision, the new city and temple, which are thought to be emblematical of the millennial times, he declared the altered conduct of the priests; "They shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane." What can more strikingly show the duty of ministers to take forth the precious from the vile.

If Circumcision was to the Jewish Church, what Baptism is to the Christian, an initiatory rite, abounding with New Covenant blessings, precious privileges, and promises to those who rightly received it; and if the Jewish priests were condemned by the Almighty for making no difference between the holy and profane members of their church; must it not be equally blamable if Christian ministers abstain from dividing the mass of baptized people into those who serve God, and those who serve him not?

After delivering his beautiful sermon on the Mount, our Lord divided his hearers into two classes, by the striking parable of the two builders. Those who heard his word and kept it, built upon a rock. Those who heard and disregarded it, built upon the sand. It is therefore of great importance in preaching the gospel, to discriminate between the different characters to whom the message is delivered, and to separate the precious from the vile. If this is neglected, the wicked will hold fast their delusions, and the righteous continue in bondage to their fears; but, if ministers are faithful in the discharge of this part of their duty, those among whom they minister will be led to a knowledge of their own proper character and condition.

The Church of Rome accounts all those to be her faithful children, who are baptized into the Holy Mother Church; who celebrate the mass; make confession to, and obtain absolution from, the priest; who rigidly observe the fasts; and blindly obey her dictates. To such she extends her soothing power, even in their dying moments, by administering the extreme unction, and promising that prayers shall be offered up for their departed souls! The Church is everything. The Priest is all in all. Is this Christianity?

Oh! that our Protestant Churches may ever guard against the fatal error of thus quieting the conscience, by the mere observance of external rites, crying "peace, peace, when there is no peace." Would not this be opening a by-path into the Church of Rome? Would it not be a descent into the darkneses of Papal superstition? Is there no danger of such a descent? Nothing but sovereign grace can keep us from apostatizing from the truth.

As soon as we leave the plain path of Scripture, we get into the labyrinth of error. It is humbling to think how tenaciously some cleave to error, because it is 'silvered with age'. Our Lord condemned the Jewish rulers, because they taught for doctrines the commandments of men; thus making void the commandments of God by their traditions. It is the arrogant pretensions of the Church of Rome, that her unwritten traditions, and the decrees of her councils, are as binding on the consciences of her members as the revealed written word of God, even though some of those decrees contradict that word. This she founds on her Infallibility. The Rev. Dr. Milner, the Roman Catholic Bishop, in his Sixth Letter to James Brown, Esq., says, "The Catholic rule of faith is not merely the written word of God, but the whole word of God, both written and unwritten; in other words, Scripture and Tradition, and these propounded and explained by the Catholic Church. This implies that we have a two-fold rule or law, and that we have an interpreter, or judge to explain it, and to decide upon it in all doubtful points." From the Fifth Letter. "Supposing the divine authority of the sacred books themselves to be established; how do you know that the copies of them translated and printed in your Bible are authentic?" "Manifold is the cause of the obscurity of holy writ." The object of the Bishop is summed up in the words of Vincent of Lirrens; "The children of the Church must carefully observe the rule laid down by the holy men referred to- they are to interpret the divine text according to the Tradition of the Catholic Church."

By some Protestants it is now received, that Catholic tradition is the only true interpreter of Scripture, even though it is well known that many of the ancient fathers, being uninspired, and therefore fallible men, were dark in some of their views of Gospel truth. Councils and Churches have erred. Where then is infallibility to be found? No where, but in the unerring word of the living God, the Scriptures of truth. Where is light to be obtained? Only from the promised Spirit of truth, who will guide us into all truth, if we implore his teaching through the merits of Christ.

To appreciate the labors of good men, and especially of those who lived nearest to the times of the Apostles, is what every right-minded Christian would do. But to make them his STANDARD for doctrine and practice, is what every enlightened Christian could not do. He will follow them, so long as they follow Christ; but when they deviate from the revealed path, he dare not tread in the steps even of the immediate successors of the Apostles. He calls no man, Master, upon earth. He has one Master, even Christ, whose inspired word is his only RULE and LAW.

Truly we live in sifting times. The mere form of godliness will profit nothing. The true believer must not only dare to be singular in his conduct before the world, by the holiness of his walk, but he must dare to be bold in the confession of his faith, before those who are masters in Israel. Much courage will be required to maintain his ground, much humility to keep him dependent on divine teaching, much love to preserve him from bitterness of spirit, or uncharitable judging of others.

Oh! that the glorious doctrines of grace may be living principles in our hearts, humbling our souls before God under deep views of sin; inspiring us with faith, while beholding the precious Savior; kindling our love towards him, who so marvelously loved us; and creating a hungering and thirsting after righteousness, and that renewal of the soul, without which faith is dead, and religion an empty name.

Oh! Almighty and all-quickening Spirit, make me your temple. Take away the love and power of sin. Fill me with gracious and heavenly desires, with holy longings after Christ, my beloved and my friend. I want to feel my soul to be all on fire, the fire of celestial love; my affections to be all in motion, ever on the wing towards Christ; my will to be ever inclined to choose his law, to bear his yoke, and to prefer the most arduous duties, the most self-denying commands, for his sake, rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a

season.

But where can I find strength sufficient for these things? Not in myself, for in my flesh dwells no good thing. Not from the best of men, for they cannot communicate grace to others. I will look unto the hills from where my help comes from. Oh! blessed Savior, all my fresh springs are in you. Without you I can do nothing. In you dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily fullness of wisdom, power, and love. Replenish my longing soul out of your fullness. Pour into my heart those living streams which make glad the city of God. Remembering that "God is a Spirit", may I ever worship you in spirit and in truth. Preserve me from the dangerous error of resting in the form, instead of seeking after the power of godliness. Make me sincere in all my intentions, and fruitful in every good word and work, until my vile body shall be made like unto your glorious body, and my soul be perfected in your presence, according to the working of your mighty power, whereby you are able to subdue even all things unto yourself.

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