

**RESCUED FROM DEATH 1: BAD RELIGION**

*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world... (Ephesians 2:1-2, NIV)*

**N**OBODY WANTS TO BE “THAT GUY.” And when it comes to golf, the guy you don’t want to be is Angelo Spagnolo.

In 1986, as the brainchild of an editor at *Golf Digest*, a devious plot was hatched: Choose four of America’s most beleaguered golfers to play TPC Sawgrass, home of The Players, and find out who really is worst of all. They would play from the back tees under USGA rules. On that day, Spagnolo came to the seventeenth tee already 106 shots over par. Neither that nor this is a typo: Spagnolo made 66 at the famed island hole. He was soon to be named World’s Worst Avid Golfer, carding 257.

When ineptitude rides in on the wheels of obvious, we laugh or shake our heads and sort of move on. The circus came to town, and now it has left. *C’est la vie.*

We cannot dismiss gross wickedness so cavalierly. The bloody trail of despots and serial killers, the heinous outcomes of racial and domestic violence, the execution or incarceration of those who believe something different than those in power—all of these speak loudly of sin. Calling these things a tragedy, like we would when someone dies in a car accident, is not at all enough. Rather, this is hatred and murder and evil.

While we may not dismiss gross sin offhandedly, dismiss it we do. We do this each time we justify our own transgressions by comparing them favorably to the greater wickedness of others, be they liars or swindlers or perverts. You see what I did there? I gave *those guys* the fitting labels they deserve. But here’s the full counsel of Scripture: “Everything that does not come from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23). In light of that passage, there is only one word for me: guilty. No religion in the world can save me.

Today we begin a series looking at the life of the murderous apostle Paul. I know, those two modifiers should not be paired together. But there was also denying apostle Peter and doubting apostle Thomas, conniving apostle Andrew and cynical apostle Nathanael. Like you and me, these men were dead in their transgressions and sins. You cannot massage a dead person back to life. Nor can he raise himself by moral excellence or noble thoughts. A dead person must be resurrected. In the life of Paul, we see that Christ did that, just as he would do for us.

**Opening questions** What’s the worst score you can ever remember recording on a hole? Did you walk away angry or amused? • How often do you think of yourself as guilty of sin?

**READING** Ephesians 2:1-5; Psalm 51:1-10; James 5:19-20

**The serious of where we come from (Ephesians 2)**  
How does this passage expose us and the influences around us? If sin brings death, what brings life? What does this new life look like compared to the old life you lived?

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**Sin before God (Psalm 51)**  
How gravely did David speak of his sin? What did he say God could do for him? How close is your own heart to the words of this prayer?

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**Intervening care (James 5)**  
What role can we play in keeping one another from drifting into sin? Do you have people you entrust to play that role in your life?

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Written by Jeff Hopper ©2019 Links Players International. An introductory video for this study is available at <https://youtu.be/dO2o3T0wBgM>.