

## How Dark The Heart

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Over the past eight months, I have been fairly frequently reminding myself and you of the carnality that is in our hearts. Now, we do not like to think of ourselves as particularly vicious or mean, despite the fact that the Bible shows that the unconverted heart will never make peace with God on its own. In fact, we like to think of ourselves as normal, nice American people who wouldn't hurt a fly—that is, under normal circumstances.

But what if the circumstances get abnormal, and the atmosphere becomes charged with forces that we've never had to face before, and we seemingly stand exposed and alone? How long do you think you could hold out from sinning in a situation in which the temptation to join with others in sinning was presented to you day after day, and you were merely asked to sin, but no specific charge was made against you in particular if you did not do so? That happens, actually fairly often.

I just read a book report of a work titled, "Ordinary Men." It was subtitled, "Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland." It was authored by Christopher Browning.

The average age of members of Police Battalion 101 was 39 years. They were all males who were evaluated as unfit for front line warfare duties. Even so, they were skilled laborers, salesman, factory workers, truck drivers, etc. In other words, though they were not highly educated, they were educated people capable of holding jobs in normal circumstances. However, they got caught in the German war effort at a peculiar time, even for modern warfare.

The Germans needed manpower in order to solve the German leadership's "problem" with Jews, and their solution was to systematically kill every Jewish man, woman, and child. Reserve Police Battalion 101 was one group of these assigned to carry out the gruesome responsibility in their area of operations. They did so in Poland.

Interestingly, the German personnel kept clear records of their operations. In one year spanning parts of 1942 and 1943, Reserve Police Battalion 101 killed and/or loaded on trains (bound for the ovens in prison camps especially built for such an operation) 83,000 Jews. None of the people in this and other reserve police battalions like it was an out-and-out murderer. Virtually everything they learned, they learned by doing as their murderous responsibilities were carried out. None of them confessed later that they

had any professional hatred for the Jews. The specific battalion killed at least 38,000 in that one year and loaded 45,200 others on trains to be killed there. That is how accurately and efficiently the Germans kept record—names, dates, numbers. It was almost as though the leadership was proud of what they were accomplishing.

The executioners worked fast and efficiently, and, in almost every case, drunkenly. That last statement is telling. It is telling us that in the majority of cases, the killing was extremely stressful on these amateur executioners. They were not trained soldiers, brethren. The killers knew they were doing wrong, and it was psychologically, as David said in the sermonette, damaging. In order to soften the impact of the killing, the leaders in the camp never referred to it as "killing." They called what they were doing an "action." When they were involved in an "action," by the end of it, there were often 2,000 dead piled on the ground.

The executioners executed with a single shot in the back of the neck from a rifle. The Germans quickly stopped shooting a bullet into the head, unless there was no other alternative due to conditions, because a bullet to the head, though efficient, was messy. A bullet at the base of the neck and into the spine was more efficient because no cleanup was required.

The German leadership within this group did not resolutely *force* the German men—this is important—to execute the Jewish people. But almost all the German men rationalized the killing because "it was war" and "everybody was doing it." So, they convinced themselves to do what others were doing—after all, they were just following orders. There were some in the camp who managed to not kill any Jews for a fairly long time since they weren't being forced. They nonetheless complained to their fellow Germans that they were too weak to do the killing.

But this is interesting because it was testified by these very men that they would nonetheless encourage the ones who were killing to continue doing it. Were they involved in spirit? They were more fearful of presenting themselves to their fellow Germans as being morally superior to the executioners, and therefore looked down upon as being a coward who refused to carry his part of the load. And thus, to look good, they attempted to build the resolve of those doing the killing.

That is how they rationalized their part in the German war effort. What is so interesting in this entire affair is that the German command did not force these German men to do the killing. They were not professional soldiers. They did not force these German men to do the killing. There was no threat of death for the executioners for failing to carry out the executions. Interestingly, despite all of the harrowing details revealed after this was

all over and the trial testimonies carefully examined, they revealed that no member of Battalion 101 was ever put to death for resisting a command to kill a Jew.

They were doing this because of other forces, but they were still doing it. If the one assigned to kill a Jew refused, the leader simply got someone else to do it. The precise German records show hardly any German refused the responsibility. Hardly any of them. The forces on their consciences were so great, they just went ahead and did it. The position of executioner during these "actions" was always voluntary. The German recruit viewed it simply as a burden of warfare that almost all eventually took turns carrying out, even if unwillingly. They were just doing a job.

The author, Christopher Browning, believes the German recruits of Battalion 101 were themselves victims of their world view. They were raised to not question the authority of their nation and its leadership, and this includes what the churches taught because most German church pastors believed this is what the Bible says: "You obey regardless."

The Bible does not teach that. Remember, these executions took place 1900 years after Jesus founded, formed, and set the example for His followers within the church. Brethren, the church is not of this world, and though in the world, it is a separate entity from the world. Church members follow the lead of Jesus Christ. Jesus clearly told Pilate that His Kingdom is not of this world. If it were, His servants would fight.

What the Bible does teach is that governmental leaders are indeed to be highly respected because they are appointed by God. The general rule is that every person stands before God to be judged *individually*. It's a wonderful thing that we have a *merciful* God who judges. *My* responsibility is to teach you to follow what God shows in His word. In the history of Israel, in almost every case, it was the king and his retinue of fellow leaders that were the ones leading Israel right into sin and Satan's employment, not God's.