

## **This Is Your Life, Part 2**

**Ephesians 2:1-10**

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For those of you who are visiting with us, I should tell you that you find us in the middle of a study of the book of Ephesians. We began this study probably back in the early summer of last year, and we find ourselves in the first part of chapter 2. So I ask you to take your Bibles and turn with me this morning to Ephesians 2.

A couple of weeks ago I came across a very interesting story. The story of a man named Jeremy Bentham. Jeremy Bentham was an English philosopher. In fact, you may remember from your school days that he was the father of utilitarianism. His famous statement was, "The greatest happiness of the greatest number is the foundation of morals and legislation." It's a bankrupt philosophy, but nonetheless the one he was famous for and that has permeated much of western civilization. When Jeremy Bentham died, he willed his entire estate to the college hospital in London. But he did so with one very strange condition. The condition was, "You can have all of my money, all of my estate, if you will preserve my body and bring it to all of the hospital board meetings in the future." And the college hospital agreed. So Bentham chose a man that he knew, a Dr. Southward Smith. After his death, he was chosen to prepare his corpse. Smith followed Bentham's instructions. He prepared the body. He affixed to the top of the body a wax likeness of Bentham's head. Then he dressed the body in a suit and hat. According to Smith, the man who did all of this, the whole was then enclosed in a mahogany case with folding glass doors. He was seated in his armchair and holding in his hand his favorite walking stick, with his actual skull resting at his feet. For the next 92 years, Jeremy Bentham never missed a board meeting. The board would assemble and there at the end of the table was Jeremy. They treated his remains as if he were alive, but in fact he was long dead.

When I thought about that story, I thought about how God describes every human being. God says that is exactly what every human being without Christ is like. We are physically alive. Our hearts beat. Our brains function. We have families, we have jobs, we have careers. We eat, and we sleep, and we play, and we go to meetings. But without Christ, we are the walking dead. If there's to be any hope for us, God must miraculously intervene and give us life. And that is the message of Ephesians 2:1-10. Let me read this text for you again. Ephesians 2:1. Paul writes,

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And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we should walk in them.

The first three chapters of this wonderful letter of Paul to the church there in Ephesus and the surrounding churches--the first three chapters are teaching or doctrine about what God has already done for us in Christ. And chapter two continues our education in that that began in chapter one. And specifically, here in this first paragraph I've just read for you of chapter 2, Paul explains how we as individuals came to enjoy the incredible blessings of chapter 1 that we studied together. How could we as sinful human beings come to be in such an enviable place of blessing? You have here in the verses I've just read for you what amounts to the spiritual biography of every Christian. And the key point that Paul wants us to get here is that God alone is responsible for our privileged position. We can reduce the powerful life-changing message of this paragraph to one simple sentence, and it's this. Salvation is entirely the work of God from beginning to end. Paul lays out here this dramatic change and he teaches us about this dramatic change in three simple parts or stages. You can see them clearly. You probably saw them even as I read the text. He begins with what we were in verses 1-3. In verses 4-6, he explains what God did. And in verses 7-10, he tells us why God did it. So, what we were, what God did, and why God did it. We find ourselves discussing the first of those--what we were.

In the first three verses, Paul reminds us of what we used to be. You see, you cannot fully appreciate what God has done for you if you don't first understand what you were before He found you. Before He intervened. I'm convinced the reason many Christians aren't as grateful for what God has done is because they don't understand the pit from which they were dug. They don't understand what God has truly done for them. And so Paul sets out to explain to us what we were. And his explanation of the way we were before Christ

includes several elements. He tells us what our true condition was. “And you were dead.” He tells us the root cause. Not only the true condition, but the root cause “in trespasses and sins.” But beginning in chapter 2, or excuse me in verse 2 and through most of verse 3 he tells us the practical results of our condition. And then at the end of verse 3, he tells us God’s perspective about our condition. Last time we examined our true condition, our nature before Christ in those four words that begin verse 1, “And you were dead.” That was our true condition. Paul is describing what theologians call total depravity. We were, in reference to God, completely dead. We saw that scripture lays out a series of categorical negatives that describe that spiritual deadness. We looked at those last time.

Apart from Christ, we have no ability to act contrary to that deadness, contrary to our nature. We have no ability to enter God’s kingdom. We have no ability to embrace the truth. We have no ability to obey God. We have no ability to please God. We have no ability to even come to Christ for salvation. We are dead to God. So the reality of spiritual death demands that salvation be a sovereign act of God. Salvation must be a work of God from beginning to end because if we have anything to do with it we will still be lost, because we are dead. So when we consider what we were before Christ, our true condition was spiritual death.

I want us to start our study this morning by looking at the second part of Paul’s explanation of what we were before Christ. We’ve seen our true condition. Let’s look at the root cause of that condition. Verse 1, “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins.” Now in the Greek text, there is no preposition ‘in’ that the translators have included here. Instead, it simply reads like this: “And you being dead...” and then it’s immediately followed by the words “your trespasses and sins.” The reason for that is, in Greek, there are case endings. Those of you who’ve studied other languages, you know that there are some languages that are inflected. There’s an ending added to words and that ending tells you how the word is used in the sentence. A certain ending tells you that the noun is the subject of the sentence. Another ending would identify the same word in the same place in the sentence as the direct object. So it all depends on the ending. The case ending of the two nouns ‘trespasses’ and ‘sins’ leaves us with two possibilities of what Paul meant to say here. Let me explain them to you. The translators of the New American Standard have chosen one of those possibilities and that is location. We were dead in or in the sphere of or in the realm of trespasses and sins. And that is possibly what Paul means.

But there’s a second possibility and they’ve given us that possibility in the margin. If you have a New American Standard that has marginal references, you’ll notice next to verse 1 it says that it can also be ‘by reason of.’ This is the other possibility, and I believe because of other clear statements of scripture which I’ll show you in a moment,

this is the right explanation. We were dead by reason of or by means of our trespasses and sins. This is the consistent message of scripture. If you go all the way back to the very beginning. Turn to Genesis 2. Genesis 2:17. God is talking to Adam and it says in verse 16, “The Lord God commanded the man, saying ‘From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.’” He says, ‘If you sin, if you violate my word, then as a result of that, because of that, by reason of that, you will die.’ Now in that case, and really throughout the Scripture, when the Scripture speaks of our dying as a result of sin, it’s speaking of three realities. It’s speaking of spiritual death, which in Adam’s case was immediate. The moment he sinned he died spiritually with reference to God. Here’s a man who walked with Jesus Christ in the garden of Eden in the cool of the day, and the moment he sins, he hides himself and wants nothing to do with God. He died with reference to God the moment he ate that fruit.

So it includes spiritual death, but it also includes physical death. The day would come when Adam would die physically. By God’s grace, it was not immediate, but it would come. And if Adam had not repented, and I believe he did repent. I believe we will meet Adam and Eve in heaven. But if he had not repented, then ultimately he would have experienced what the book of Revelation describes as the second death, or eternal death, eternal separation from God in a place called Hell. That is what follows sin. Sin is followed by death in all of its forms. This is consistently true throughout scripture.

I’m not going to take you to every reference even that I have here in my notes, but turn to Ezekiel 18. You see it again here. In Ezekiel’s time, the children of Israel had a proverb that they really liked. The proverb was, “The fathers eat the sour grapes, but the children’s teeth are set on edge.” In other words, the children are paying for and being punished for the sins of the fathers. God said, ‘Don’t say that. It’s not true.’ Verse 4, “Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die.” Sin is followed by death, again, in all of its forms. In Romans 6, a passage you’re very familiar with, perhaps have even memorized. Romans 6:23. “For the wages of sin is death.” What you get paid for sin, what you earn by sinning, is death. Spiritual death, and physical death, and ultimately eternal death. That’s what the Scriptures teach, but perhaps nowhere more clearly than back one chapter in Romans 5. Turn there with me for a moment. Romans 5:12.

Therefore, just as through one man [that’s Adam] sin entered into the world, [so you had sin] and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because [in Adam as our representative] all sinned. [Verse 15.] “But the free gift [that’s the grace of Christ] is

not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one [that's Adam] the many died.

He's using an understatement there. He's using a figure of speech, he means everybody died. We all died. Here's the point. Because of sin, particularly here Adam's sin, we were born spiritually dead. Sin is the root cause of our spiritual death.

Now turn back to Ephesians 2. Because here we learn that we were twice dead. Romans 5 says that we're dead by nature, because of or by reason of Adam's sin as our representative. Here in Ephesians 2:1, we learn that we are dead as well by reason of our own trespasses and sins. Look at verse 1. "And you were dead by reason of your trespasses and sins." "Your" makes it very personal. "Your" means that the sin that makes us dead is our individual sin. Our personal sin. Paul is saying that what lies back of our spiritual death is our own sin and our own trespass. Now what does he mean here by trespass and sin? Well, we ran into this word "trespass" in chapter 1 and we defined it there basically as "a deviation from the path of truth and righteousness." A trespass is a deviation off the path of righteousness. The truth is, we have never been on the path of righteousness. Our whole life is a deviation from the path of righteousness. What is the path of righteousness? You remember how Jesus defined it? "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart." In other words, I am to love God with my entire being every moment of my life. "And the second," He said, "is like unto it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself." You shall love the people around you like you love yourself. Well, I don't know about you, (I do know about you, but I know even better about me) I have never, one time in my life been on that path. There isn't a second of my life I have loved God like I'm supposed to love God. There isn't a second of my life I have loved others as I'm supposed to love them. My whole life is a deviation. That's why Isaiah said, "All we like sheep have gone astray." We have turned every one what? To his own way. I'm not on God's way. I've never even tried to be. I'm on my own. In myself.

Sin means our inclinations, our thoughts, our words and actions that fall short of accomplishing what we were created to be and to do, and that is to bring glory to God. So a trespass is a deviation from the path, a conscious and deliberate false step against a holy and righteous God. And sin is failing to measure up to what we were made to be and to do, and that is, to bring glory to God. Notice that both of these words are plural, trespasses and sins. That means we're talking about a series and succession of individual sinful actions. We are dead not only because of our sin nature inherited from Adam, but we are dead because of our own accumulated individual sins. We are twice dead.

This fall, we had some friends come to visit us from out of state. They came from Florida, and you know how it is. When people come to visit you here in Texas, they want

to experience all things Texas. So we have kind of Tour Plan A and we took them down to the stockyards, and we did the stuff that you know, you're supposed to do, and various other places here in the metroplex. And one of the things they wanted to do was go horseback riding. And so we said, 'Alright, we'll arrange that.' And so we arranged to go to one of the local horse ranches here in the area. And we really had a great time. It was a wonderful experience. And while we were there, we saw an authentic Texas sign. I mean a sign like you would only see in Texas. The sign there on the ranch said "Trespassers will be shot. And survivors will be shot again." When I thought of that sign, I thought you know that's really a good description of how it is spiritually with every one of us. We are twice dead. We are doomed because we are born spiritually dead because of Adam's sin, and we are spiritually dead as well because of our own sins and trespasses. That is the root cause of our condition. So our true condition? Spiritually dead. The root cause? Sin. Adam's sin as our representative, and our own sins.

Now that brings us to the practical results of our condition. We see this in verse 2 and most of verse 3. Look at verse 2.

...in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. [verse 3] Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind.

Our condition, spiritual deadness. The cause, our trespasses and sins, and the practical result is described in these verses I've just read for you. Notice, as I pointed out to you last week the repetition of the word 'formerly.' You see it at the beginning of verse 2. You see it again at the beginning of verse 3. By formerly, Paul means before our conversion. Before our salvation. Before, as verse 5 says, God made us alive. So what you have here is a description of all of those who have not come into a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ, or the past of those who have.

Now, the words "in which," you see there at the beginning of verse 2, those words refer back to the phrase "trespasses and sins" at the end of verse 1. We were dead because of trespasses and sins, and we used to walk in trespasses and sins. We used to walk in them. Now, for those of you who are biblically literate, you know that this is a familiar biblical metaphor, this idea of walking. It's a very familiar, very common biblical metaphor for lifestyle, conduct. In fact, here in Ephesians, Paul uses it eight times to describe our lifestyle, our conduct, our behavior. Look down in verse 10, you see it again. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." Our behavior, our conduct, our lifestyle will

be commensurate with what God decided would be true. Turn over to 4:1. As Paul enters the practical section of this epistle, this is where he hinges. “Therefore [as a result of all I’ve told you about what God has done] I, the prisoner of the Lord, [plead with you, I] implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.” ‘I want your conduct, your lifestyle, your daily patterns and habits to be in keeping with what you have learned yourself to be in Christ.’ And he goes on by the way, in several other places. In verse 17, he uses this same metaphor of walk. Again in 5:2, 5:8, 5:15. In all of those places he’s using this idea. Our lifestyle, our conduct, our habits of life is what he’s talking about. We have a habit as tendency, as human beings, to get to know someone a little bit, and then to pick out the dominant characteristic that’s part of them, and to sort of think of them like that. We have a little bit of interaction with someone and we’ll say something like ‘Well, that’s certainly a cheerful person, or you know, that’s a very gracious person, or humble person, or that’s a very mean-spirited person.’ You know, we sort of characterize what that person is like. Well, according to God’s perspective, the dominant and defining characteristic of our lives was sin. The dominating quality of our lives apart from Christ is the constant repetition of individual sins. Before Christ, our state or condition was spiritual death. The root cause was Adam’s sin and our sins, and the practical result is a lifestyle defined by the constant practice of sin of various kinds.

Verse 2 says we formerly walked in trespasses and sins. But notice what Paul adds, very interesting. He adds, we walked according to. That means in conformity to. In step with. Paul is saying our sinful lifestyle was in complete conformity to or in perfect step with three very powerful forces that deeply influence our lifestyle and thinking. I told you a couple of weeks ago I think about a video series that Sheila bought me for Christmas--a great documentary on World War II. It’s called *The World at War*. A powerful series, but as I watched that, one of the most frightening images I think is that of the goose-stepping Nazis marching down the street in lockstep. And I think the reason that’s so frightening is because it symbolizes the way that the Nazi propaganda machine forced complete conformity. You had to be in complete lockstep with them. The same is true for every unbeliever. They all think they’re free. When we were unbelievers, we thought we were free as well. They all think they’re completely in control of their thinking, that they are completely in control of their choices, that they are completely in control of their lifestyle and the choices they make. But in reality, before Christ, we were all slaves, walking in lockstep with forces that were too powerful for us to resist or to control. What were these forces that drove our sinful lifestyles? There were three of them. Notice verse 2, “the world.” Also in verse 2, the devil, “the prince of the power of the air,” and in verse 3, “the flesh.” The world, the devil, and the flesh. These forces enslaved us. They controlled our thinking. They directed our decisions. They dominated

our lifestyles. We walked in trespasses and sins according to or in step with these three forces.

The first of them is the world. We walked in lockstep with the world. Notice it says, we walked according to the course of this world. The Greek word that's translated 'course' here is often translated and means 'age.' It describes the world as it exists at a particular point in time. For example, if you remember history--history when you were in school, we spoke of the age in enlightenment, or the age of industrialization. We were talking about a period of time in history, and its prevailing mindset and disposition. So, by 'course,' Paul means 'the spirit of the age,' or the worldview of a particular time. Now the word 'world' is the Greek word you're very familiar with, the word *cosmos*. In this context, it's not referring to the world of people. It's not talking about people. It's not talking about God's creation--the created world. It has another sense here. One of the leading Greek dictionaries defines it like this. "That which is hostile to God, lost in sin, wholly at odds with anything divine, ruined and depraved." That's the world. Hoehner defines it as "the Satanically organized system that hates and opposes all that is Godly." When you put it together, you have 'the age of the world.' You have the current prevailing mindset and values of all that's opposed to God. William Hendrickson defines the age or course of this world as 'the spirit of the age that marks mankind, alienated from the life of God.' Kent Hughes, who it was a delight to have with us last Sunday, and who we enjoyed fellowship with, in his commentary describes it like this 'those without Christ are captive to the social and value system of the present evil age which is hostile to Christ. They are willing slaves to the pop culture of the media, the group think of the talk shows, post-Christian mores, and man-centered religious fads.'

The spiritually dead are dominated by the world. Have you ever thought about that? Every non-Christian is controlled by the spirit of the age in which they live. They take their opinions from The New York Times, or The Dallas Morning News. They learn their perspectives from talk show hosts and celebrities. They learn what books to read from Oprah. The spirit of the age tells them what social issues are important, what causes they should support. It tells them what language to use, however vulgar it may be, to get their point across. It tells them how to dress and how to do their hair, what cars to drive, what kind of home to own. The prevailing mood of the age tells them how to spend their time and how to spend their money. There is no area of life left untouched by the tyranny of the spirit of a system opposed to God at any point in time. Frankly, it's sad to see how people are completely controlled by the spirit of their times.

Lloyd-Jones, in his time, wrote this of unbelievers. He says, "They all conform. It must be done. They dare not disobey. They are afraid of the consequences. Most lives are being controlled by it and governed by it. All their opinions, their language, what they



desire, where they go, where they spend their holidays, it's all controlled and governed completely." In lockstep with the spirit of the times. Paul says to the Ephesians, 'You formerly walked in trespasses and sins in conformity to the spirit of this world.' The spirit of the age. But thank God, for us the tyranny of the age has been broken. We now make our decisions not based on what the culture around us tells us to do, but based on what pleases God.

Listen, if you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, God says that you are spiritually dead, that you do not have the life of God, and that you have no capacity to have a relationship with Him. And the reason for it is your acts of sin, your trespasses and sins. And in the sphere of those sins, you live and conduct your life. And you do that in lockstep with the mindset and values of the times in which we live. According to the Bible, your only hope is for God to miraculously intervene and rescue you. A rescue made possible by the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This morning, if you will repent of your sins, if you will put your faith in Christ alone, then God has promised that He will rescue you, that He will give you life.

For the rest of us, primarily, who are Christians here this morning, we have to remember that we are still susceptible to the siren song of the world, of the age in which we live. We are still tempted to walk in what Psalm 1 calls, "the counsel of the ungodly." How can we avoid that? Well, what does Psalm 1:2 say? "The righteous man delights in the law of God and in His law, he meditates day and night." You remember Romans 12:2. Paul says, 'Stop being conformed to the age. Stop being conformed to the spirit of your times. Don't let the thinking of the world push you into its mold.' Rather, be transformed, how? By the renewing of your minds. And how does that renewing take place? For thinking God's thoughts, understanding His word, and putting it into practice in our lives. According to God, listen carefully, don't buy what you're being told. According to God, there are no free thinkers. There are no self-made men. There are no people who truly think and live outside the box. Young people can be especially susceptible to this. Young people, do not believe for a moment that you are unique, that you are the exception, that you are the true non-conformists. You are merely conforming to a different group. There is no such person. Here's the bottom line. You will either be in lockstep with the Bible, or you will be in lockstep with the spirit of the age, some part of the spirit of the age. God says there's the way of the righteous, and that's the way of the Bible, and then there's the way of the wicked and that's everything else, the wisdom of the world. Do you delight in the Bible? Do you meditate in it day and night? If not, then you are walking in the counsel of the wicked.

But the main lesson in Ephesians 1 isn't about what we need to avoid. The main lesson in Ephesians 1 is remembering what we were when God found us. We were dead, living in

an unbroken pattern of sin. We were in perfect step with the mindset of our age. But thank God, by an act of sovereign grace, He made us alive in Jesus Christ. Now we are alive to God, when once we were dead. We used to see sin as our lifestyle and pattern, but now by God's grace we see a decreasing pattern of sin and an increasing pattern of righteousness. We used to have our minds in lockstep with the spirit of the age, but now they're being renewed to think God's thoughts. Instead of the mindset of the age, we have the mind of Christ revealed to us in His Word. That is something worth celebrating and it's all made possible by the perfect life and the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. It's only right this morning, that as we study and are reminded of what we were, that we celebrate what Christ has done in the Lord's table.

Our Father, we thank You for this reminder of Our Lord and His death. Thank You that His life was freely and willingly poured out in death, in the death of a substitute, in the death of a sacrifice for our sin. Father, we thank You that because He died, we go free. That You have taken our sin and You have expunged the record. You have removed them from us as far as the East is from the West. That those sins that had so deeply stained us, You have put behind Your back never to remember them against us again, forever. Lord, we thank You that all of our sin is gone. We thank You Father, for this reminder of how You accomplished it, in our Lord, in His life, and in His death. For it's in His name, we pray. Amen.