

Living Faithfully in the Riches of God's Grace

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ...(Ephesians 3:8)

And You Were Dead...

Ephesians 2:1-10

1 And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 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. 3 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.

We came to this text a couple of weeks ago, camping out on verse 1 where Paul gives his readers a most chilling and emphatic statement concerning the condition of every single person on the face of the earth before coming to the knowledge of Christ. Paul simply says, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins."

By way of reminder, we must note that the word "dead" in our text means "a corpse" – and refers to a lifeless being. But as we also noted, the kind of "dead" Paul speaks of here is not a physical thing; but as we will see, it is a spiritual deadness. And here is where we run into problems, for even before coming to Christ as Savior and Lord; most of us "feel" very much alive. So then, how can it be that we "were" dead?

The problem we face is that we have a hard time comprehending things "spiritual". When Paul says that we "were dead," we liken it to physical death. We certainly understand that a person who is physically dead has eyes, but cannot see, has ears but cannot hear, has a nose but cannot smell, a mouth but cannot taste, and hands but cannot touch. And so, we are left to answer the question, "What does it mean to be 'spiritually' dead"? Using our understanding of physical death, we quickly seek to turn the literal into the figurative. We start to speak of spiritual eyes that cannot see; of spiritual ears that cannot hear and the like. And while this is certainly true, it is still perplexing if we leave it like that.

Gratefully, the Lord has seen fit to not simply give us a figurative understanding of what our lives were like before Christ, but here in Ephesians 2:2-3 we are told what being spiritually dead "actually" looks like. Ephesians 2:1 states for us our condition before faith in Christ with verses 2-3 revealing for us exactly how this condition of death played itself out in our lives (and how it plays itself out in the lives of every unbeliever who has yet to place faith in Christ). So then, what does it mean to be "dead in our trespasses and sins"? What does being spiritually dead look like? What "were" we before faith in Christ? This morning we will note four characteristics of what it means to be "dead" before God. Being spiritually dead means that person is...

- **Deluded (2a)** – *"in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air..."*
- **Disobedient (2b)** – *"of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience."*
- **Defiled (3a)** – *"Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind..."*
- **Doomed (3b)** – *"and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."*

Now, let me make two more observations here before we look at verses 2-3 expositively. First, we need to put these verses in the context of Ephesians 1:3-23 and of Ephesians 2:4-10. Remember that in Ephesians 1 we have the clear declaration of all that God Himself has done to

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secure the salvation of His chosen. Up through 1:23, man has done nothing, God has done everything. Beginning in verse 4 of chapter 2, Paul once again points to the exclusivity of God has having brought about man's salvation. Sandwiched in between these two passages is Ephesians 2:1-3, verses that show us what we bring to the subject and work of salvation. We bring our deadness; our inability. After Ephesians 1, we might be tempted to think we are something because of all the blessings we have in Christ. We might be tempted to think we did something to merit this, even in slightest. To quell this, Paul interjects these devastating verses as if to ask, "Do you think you brought something good into this plan of salvation? Let me remind you that you were dead, deluded, disobedient and thus doomed. It is only after reminding us of this that Paul then comes back to the true Master Craftsman of salvation in verse 4 saying, "But God..." This is all a God thing.

A second observation we need to grasp is this; we were not "dying" in our trespasses and sins; rather we were "dead" in them. When we read Romans 6:23 which says, "For the wages of sin is death..." – we can be tempted to think that by this Paul means by every sin we commit, we are earning a bit more; coming a bit closer to death. Many Christians and even more religious people see themselves before God as sick and dying rather than absolutely, positively, irrevocably, unalterably "dead." The wages of sin is death; and we were all born in sin; which means we are born with the curse of death; not that we are earning the curse of death. We already earned our doom in Adam, when we sinned in and with him. This is the condition we find ourselves in. This is what it means to be "dead in your trespasses and sins." This is why Paul cried out in Romans 7:24, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?"

Now then, there is a saying that goes like this, *"It is always darkest before the dawn."* Ephesians 2:1-3 is the darkness of humanity – dead in its sin - before the dawn of salvation in Christ. Paul begins in verse 1 with the words, "And you were dead..." As we have seen, this means that there was a time in our lives when we did not care about God; we had no desire for Him; we did not appreciate anything that had to do with Him. Being dead meant that we could not come to God on our own for salvation. For all intents and purposes, sinners are simply spiritual zombies, who must be made alive in Christ; born again. To be sure, the spiritual dead have bodies which live, breath, love and die, but they are dead even while they live. Beginning in verse two, we see how this deadness reveals itself:

I. We were deluded (2a)

"in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air..."

Before coming to Christ, our utter deadness to spiritual things was made evident in our very behavior. According to our text, we walked according to *"the course of this world."* In other words, the spirit of the age of this world held its grip upon us.

The word translated *"course"* is *aion* translated in other verses as "forever" or as "ages." It speaks of a long or extended period of time in which something takes place. For this reason, we can rightly call it an "age" and Paul is referring to it as *"the age of this world."* And what is the defining characteristic of this age? Looking back up at verse 1, this is the age of *"trespasses and sins."* In other words, we live in a world that is constantly displaying a spirit of hostility, enmity and

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intense disobedience toward God. **Whether the prevailing mentality of this age is one of adventure, persecution, discovery, or tolerance, the general spirit will be worldly, driven by the flesh, and ultimately devilish or demonic.** Why? Because this world is the sworn enemy of God. The Bible warns of this hostility repeatedly: *"If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him"* (1 John 2:15). John summarizes the spirit of the world as *"the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life"* (2:16). The spirit of the age is determined by the spirit of the world.

But when did this "age" of the world begin? It began back in Genesis chapter 3, when Adam partook of the forbidden fruit. There he plunged himself and all his posterity into sins and trespasses. There we were born into this condition of death as we noted from verse 1. And the beginning of verse 2 is clear, this is how we "all" formally (use too) walked. Our behavior and our inclinations were once according to the spirit of this age and even the most noblest of our thoughts, the most generous of our impulses, the loftiest of our ambitions, and even the most religious aspirations we ever had, were utterly devoid of spiritual content. We were "dead."

But there is more; not only did we walk or behave according to the spirit of this age, but we are told next that we walked according to the spirit of the air. The Bible clearly teaches us that there are spirits in an unseen world that dwell in the air – on the invisible realm. These spirits are fallen, malicious, and bitterly hostile not only to God, but also to man. These spirits are known to us as fallen angels or as demons and they are ruled by what Paul refers to as the dread *"prince of the power of the air."* This dark Lord, who roams in the heavenly realms, is said to be like *"a roaring lion seeking someone to devour"* (1 Peter 5:8). We know him as Satan. He, according to our text, is the one who brings evil influences to bear upon this world, this age of trespasses and sins. In other words, as if we needed help to sin, Satan is there to influence humanity towards greater and greater acts and thoughts of hostility towards God. Our state of spiritual death was demonstrated in the fact that we walked according to the spirit of the power of the air. In other words, Satan had such a complete control over us; his influence was so all-encompassing, it engulfed us even as we breathe air. Air is all around us you know. The air exerts constant but often unnoticed pressure on us. Yes, sometimes we sense the presence of air, but in its essence it is invisible to us and intangible. This is how Satan operates. This is how he influences the human race, by subtly encompassing us with his influence. Now he does not do this alone, we will learn later in Ephesians 6 that Satan has a vast company of dark powers, these fallen demonic creatures. But for now, we are told that we were once under the influence of the one referred to here as *"the prince of the power of the air."* This title for Satan is deliberate and definitive. The Holy Spirit, who is Himself likened to "the wind" in John 3:8, uses this title to describe Satan and his sphere of influence.

What does all this mean? We are reminded that before we were found in Christ, in our unregenerate state, in our condition of being dead in our trespasses and sins, we were completely deluded by the world system, and by Satan himself. We walked, we lived, we acted, according to the spirit of this age, to the course of this world, and thus step in step with the spirit of the power of the air. Why do I say we were deluded? We were deluded because we were so devoid of spiritual life that we were actually unaware of our deadness to spiritual things. A dead person does not know that he is dead. A spiritually dead person is deluded into thinking that what this world offers is life.

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And the course of this world is a way of life; it is what we are used to; it is what seems normal to us. We are thus deluded into adopting its ways without a problem. This explains why people so easily adopt the fashions, fads and funs of this world. This explains why we see sins that once repulsed us become more and more accepted and even celebrated by the world. Our authority, the Word of God, is remarkably clear that homosexuality, lesbianism, pre-marital sex, adultery, pornography, drunkenness, drug abuse, and the like are not the ways of God; not the ways of Jesus, but they are more and more the ways or course of this world. Sadly, very few seem to even blush in the presence of sin. Beloved, if what we are reading, listening to, being taught, whatever the source; if it is not grounded in the authority of the word of God, it is a delusion. And before we were found in Christ, we were deluded. But there is more...

II. We were disobedient (2b)

"of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience."

As we read the last half of verse 2 which say, *"of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience..."* let me point out that the force of these words is far stronger than our translation can get across. The Greek word for sons in our text is *"huios"* and has special reference to one's origin, nature, and relationship to his father. In other words, what we are being told is that before we were found in Christ, we were sons and daughters of the disobedient one, Satan himself. This means that we possessed the very nature and character of that evil spirit who prompts people to disobey God. When did Satan first prompt disobedience to God? Again back in Genesis chapter 3. The serpent deceived Eve, but Adam by the influence, and the prompting of the evil one, partook of the forbidden fruit. And, according to Romans 5:12, it was through Adam's disobedience that sin entered into the world and so we became heirs of the disobedient spirit.

I find it interesting, and all of you who have been parents and even many of you who are not yet parents can attest to this fact, that one of the first behaviors that a child displays as soon as he is able to express his developing personality is what? *Disobedience*. You have heard it said before, but I will say it again, that no one ever has to teach a child to disobey. Interestingly, a child must be repeatedly taught to obey; he must repeatedly be given lesson after lesson to reinforce obedience. In other words, and listen to this, disobedience comes to us *naturally*. We need to be reminded that before Christ, and now even in Christ, our natural inclination is to disobey. We don't like authority, we don't want anyone to be our boss, we don't want anyone telling us what to do, we dislike anybody correcting us, and the list goes on. Disobedience is our natural condition. And so, Satan has an incredible advantage over unregenerate people in particular, and even over a Christian if he is not careful because of this desire to disobey.

What is so remarkable about our salvation is that God is able to overcome this disobedience in us. Have you ever wondered why God led some 2 million Israelites out into the middle of the desert to sit at the foot of a mountain called Sinai in order that their leader might make a trek to the top to receive what would become known as the law? God gave Israel the law, His moral expectations. This law was given around 1450 BC and it initiated Israel into an age long course of discipline. For generations the people of Israel sought to live under the law but they constantly would fail to live up to the standards that God had every right to expect of His creatures. This is why God found such delight in His Son Jesus. Why? As Jesus said in John 8:29, *"I always do the things that are pleasing to Him."* Oh that we could say such a thing, but we

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cannot. This is why, according to Acts 17:30, "God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent."

What does this mean? So comprehensive are the effects of the fall of man into sin as recorded in Genesis 3, that we have no natural inclination or even an interest in obeying the gospel. Our first inclination is to disobey God. Even after coming to Christ, is it not true, we find it difficult to stay on the road of obedience; to believe that God's will for us is, as it says in Romans 12:2, what is "good, acceptable, and perfect." Our condition of being dead in our trespasses and sins means not only are we deluded by this world system, and by the prince of this world system, Satan himself, but we are also inclined towards disobedience to God. And Satan has a knack of persuasion, seeking to convince us that our own way is best, and that God's will is irksome, burdensome, unpleasant, and, will even be outright dangerous. In other words, Satan seeks to use his influence, whether through media, or religion, or even through demonic activity, to convince us that slandering God, His word, and even His people, is a good thing. The prince of the power of the air will whisper lie after lie, saying, "If you allow God to have His way in your life, you'll even up serving in a leper colony." Or "God doesn't want you to have any fun." Satan is the supreme slanderer and he uses the age of this world to convince the unregenerate by delusion, and even believers at times through deception, that you can disregard and slander God. And we forget, that our great God of wisdom, and our great God of love never calls us to do something that He has not adequately prepared us for and given us the appropriate measure of His grace so that we might do it for His glory, that we might do it in obedience, and that we might do it in delight.

III. We were defiled (3a)

"Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind..."

Not only were we deluded, and disobedient, but now, according to the first part of verse 3, before being found in Christ, we were defiled, being controlled by "natural" or "earthly" desire. We read at the beginning of verse 3, "among them we too all formerly lived in the lust of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind..." Our natural desire or inclination is what Paul speaks of in this phrase "lusts of our flesh." The word "flesh" refers to our human nature. The Greek word translated "lusts" is *epithumia* literally meaning "desire upon desire." This is an interesting word because it does not necessarily refer to that which is evil. The word can be translated as "lusts" (generally bad) or as "desires" (which could be good). The idea of the word is that which is sought after with intensity. Let me give you an example found in the gospel of Luke 22:15 where we read these words of our Lord Jesus as He is about to partake of the Last Supper. There we read, "I have earnestly desired (sought with intensity) to eat this Passover with you before I suffer..." Here, Jesus was saying in effect, that His greatest desire, inclination, and passion was to partake of this meal with His disciples. This was a good thing. We have another example of this in 1 Timothy 3:1, where Paul says to Timothy, "if any man aspires to the office of overseer it is a fine thing he desires to do." Again this is a good thing. The context will determine whether the desire is a good or bad thing.

As an example of a bad thing, we read in Titus 3:3, a passage similar to our text, "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures,

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spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.” In Ephesians 2:3 we have the dark side of human desire, that which expresses our deadness in trespasses and sins. This is what Paul has in mind in our text saying that we had a strong desire to fulfill our human inclinations, to please the things of our flesh, to walk in step with the age of this world which is under the control of the prince of the power of the air.

Let me say all of this to you in another way. What we are noticing here is that which controlled us prior to conversion to Christ. We were controlled by a delusion; we were controlled by disobedience; and we were controlled by a natural inclination that defiles us in the sight of God. We so longed for and so strongly lusted after the spirit of this age that we were defiled in the sight of God. This dark inclination is such the condition of the spiritually dead that it's all that they can do. And this is why theologians refer to this condition of man as “total depravity.” Let us be clear, total depravity does not mean that people are as bad as they can be; but rather that people are as bad off as they can be. Why? Because in our fallen human nature, the revelation of our being dead in our trespasses and sins, our natural gravitation is to low things, to gross lusts of the body, to the contaminating lusts of our minds. To be sure, people seek to disguise this depravity through culture and refinement, but even then, as being witnessed in the very cultural revolution in which we find ourselves, an age that is increasingly tolerant to those sins that once would have caused a society to blush, but now are being celebrated; here we see the underpinnings of it all the defiled, depraved and fallen human nature of man; all of which cries out for the need of salvation. This brings us to the last point...

IV. We were doomed (3b)

“and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.”

As I commented a couple of weeks back when we began our look at verses 1-3, what we are reading is the most pessimistic description of humanity imaginable. We have noted that because we were dead in our trespasses and sins, we lived under a delusion, we lived in disobedience to God, and our very thoughts and actions were by definition, defiled. But yes, it is even worse than that. As we close out verse 3 we read some of the most horrific words that could be uttered against humanity, *“and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.”*

The word translated *“children”* is not the same word that was used above and translated as *“sons”*. Whereas the word *“sons”* spoke of the nature and relationship of the child to the father, the word here speaks simply of natural descent. In other words, we were born of sinful parents into a sin cursed, post-Genesis 3 world. We were born possessed with a bent an inherently sinful nature, and because of this we were exposed to the wrath, the violent hostility of God against sin. Romans 6:23 reminds us that the wages of sin is death. This makes us think that we earn death because we sin in this life. While it is true that we continue to sin against God in this life and that those sins do deserve death, the picture is far bleaker than that. We were born sinners and thus we were born dead. In other words, we were born doomed. If left in this condition, not only would it be said that we were controlled by a delusion, by disobedience and by defilement; but we would also be controlled by the wrath of God.

And yet, as we will come to see, in order that the pinnacle of God's creation might survive, God, who is rich in mercy (a theme that Paul is about to develop for us), will step in and do something extraordinary to save a remnant of this doomed humanity. But at this point all that we are told is that even we who are now called saints, along with all the rest, deserved but one thing,

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the wrath of God. We sometimes speak positively of the light at the end of the tunnel. But humanity has found itself on the track, deep in the darkness of the tunnel. And the light which it sees is the massive train of the wrath of God ready to plow them down.

Beloved, sin has so clouded our ability to think clearly about the nature of God that unless we are intentional, we will always have low thoughts of Him. We struggle with seeing the utter sinfulness of sin, the depravity of sin, the defilement of sin, the delusional aspect of sin, because we have failed to see the greatness of our God, the righteousness of our God, the very holiness of our God. We read in the Scriptures of the burning Seraphim, who stand before the throne of God; incredible creatures that would strike fear in humanity for all their brilliance and power. And yet, according to Isaiah 6, even these majestic creatures cover their faces in the presence of a holy God. So illuminous is the effulgence of the glory of God, the burning brightness of His being, that these magnificent creatures cannot help but hide their faces in their wings and cry aloud the three fold description of the God in whom they delight, "Holy! Holy! Holy!" God is utterly set apart; completely distinct from His creatures; completely unlike them; without sin; without defilement; without deception. How do we even begin to understand the outrage of God because of our sin? We fail to comprehend how great an insult our sin is to God; how our sin is the greatest act of treason ever conceived and yet we commit such acts daily. And we quickly forget how our sin fans the flames of the wrath of God.

Beloved, what did we bring to the table of our salvation? What is the best that we could offer? According to our text, because we were dead, because we were lost in the delusion of our sin, pursuing the course of this world, a course directed and choreographed by the father of delusions – Satan himself; because we were disobedient, naturally inclined to disrespect and disregard the ways of God; because we were defiled and depraved having as our greatest inclinations the satisfying of our own flesh and of our own minds; because of these things, we, like the rest of humanity, were doomed to suffer the eternal wrath of God against sin. What did we bring to the table? We brought sin and death; we lived in delusion, disobedience and defilement and thus our only expectation was that of deserved doom.

This is the condition of every person before being found in Christ. And as dark and as dismal and as discouraging as these verses may seem even of themselves, even before looking at the glorious hope of the subsequent verses, there is a delight to be found in our text. And what is that delight? It is found in the tenses and descriptions of the verbs. "And you were dead..." and "you formally walked..." and "we to all formally lived..." and "were by nature...". It is all in the past! Beloved, if you are found in Christ then this represents not your current condition but your past condition. We who are found in Christ were without God; we were without Christ; we were without hope; we were sinners by birth, by choice, and by practice. We had cast our lot in with the world being controlled by the evil one and our eternal destiny, if left in this condition, was to live forever under the wrath and curse of God. But, we need not stay in this condition. We can be transformed, renewed and made alive again; something we will see beginning in verse 4. This is not the reality for the saint of God; the chosen and beloved of God. So then beloved, how will you live?

Let me close by asking you, where does this message hit home? Let me give you some possibilities:

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- **Does this message find you lost and trapped in your sins?** Has the Lord revealed your condition to you? Is He calling you to come out of your darkness into His marvelous light? Is He drawing you to Himself so you may be saved? Please, do not you delay. What are you waiting for? Life is but a breath and time is swiftly passing you by. Call upon the name of the Lord now and He will save you!
- **Does this message find you redeemed and headed to Heaven?** Does it fill your heart with praise to know that the Lord came to you in your dead condition; that He breathed life into your spirit, and that He has transformed your life? Would you commit to daily bow before Him in humble thanks and genuine worship?
- **Does this message find you burdened for the unsaved around you?** This would be good time to pray for those whom the Lord has laid on your heart and ask the Lord to not only save them; but to use you to bring them to the knowledge of the truth. Determine to bring them to the Lord once again, to speak of Jesus to them once again, all the time asking the Lord to open the eyes of their hearts and save them.
- **This is a message of warning to the lost.** It says, **"Come to Jesus while there is yet opportunity!"**
- **This is a message of reminder to the redeemed.** It says, **"You are no longer what you used to be. Praise God for changing you!"**
- **This is a message calling you to prayer.** It says, **"Your children, your grandchildren, your family and your friends are perishing. Bring them Christ and ask Him to save them."**

Where does this message find us? I pray it finds us our knees before a just, righteous, holy God who has loved us extraordinarily in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Soli Deo Gloria

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