

What happened to Jesus happens to you when you put your faith in Him. Ephesians 2 is not so much beginning a new section as *continuing* Paul's explanation of *what* it is that he prays for when he prays for the Ephesians, and *why* it is that he prays this way for them. In the last section of chapter 1, Paul prays that the Ephesians would know the hope of their calling, the riches of their inheritance, and the immeasurable greatness of God's power towards those who believe.

As a display of this power, Paul proclaims four truths about Jesus: He was dead, He was raised from the dead, He was seated in the heavenly places, and He rules over all. Chapter 2 then explains how being united to Christ, becoming part of His body, the Church, means that God's power is working these same things in you! Ephesians 2:1 – you were dead. 2:5 – you were made alive! 2:6 – you were seated in the heavenlies! And 2:10 explains that where *Christ's* present calling is to rule over all, *your* present calling in Christ is to walk in good works. The pattern is the same: Jesus and you, dead, raised, seated in heaven, working for the world's good.

The pattern is the same, but the particulars are different, and so we're going to look this week at what it means that we were dead in trespasses and sins. Both transgressions and sins are mentioned to include all sorts of wrongdoing, both law-breaking transgressions and immoral rebellious actions that are an affront to God. They are slightly different in meaning, but the consequence of both is the same: *death*. The death of Ephesians 1 is obviously not the cessation of all life – the sin-dead are *walking* in sin, making their way through the world, following natural human urges and enslaved to fleshly passions, not just *dabbling* in sin or *slipping* into an occasional transgression, but a full-on sins-and-transgressions *lifestyle*. So what is this death?

Whether you've ever seen a movie or tv show about them, our culture has given us quite a picture of what Paul is talking about in the monsters we call zombies. A zombie is a dead human being that has been reanimated so that they walk around seeking to relentlessly gratify their hunger, but something essentially human is missing: they have no heart, no soul; and so even though they are walking and eating, they aren't really alive.

And if you find talking or thinking about zombies gross and horrific, that's Paul's point! When you were dead in sins, you were so repulsive and wicked and gross that God thought of *you* the way *you* react to zombies.

Please understand: I'm not commending or condemning any or all zombie movies; but the central metaphor is exactly what Paul is describing. Maybe you hate pictures of zombies, and want them all wiped from the face of the earth; that's how God feels about the ruined husk of people made in His image: they are children of wrath, soulless subhuman monsters controlled by the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Now, when God made man, He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul, crowned with glory and honor, as Psalm 8 says, given dominion over all other all other earthly creatures. Humans were rulers over creation, leaders imbued with the spirit of life. But sin changed everything, and mankind became slavish followers of the way of the world, not the good world that God made, but the world without reference to God.

Whenever humans live as if God didn't exist or didn't matter, they are *following the course of this world*. All the "isms" that we see today, the lifestyle of those who don't follow God – that's the way the walking dead "live" – in secularism, relativism, materialism, consumerism, exploitation or domination of others, racism, sexism, hedonism, all that we would call *worldliness*. And this makes an important point that the world can't fully understand: it's possible to have all your earthly desires satisfied, but if you aren't living for God, then *you aren't really living*.

Maybe some of you can testify to this: it wasn't needing or lacking anything in this world that drove you to Christ. It was the fact that you had everything this world could offer, but you still felt empty, because when you live the way the godless world lives, you're just another one of the walking dead. Following the way of the world means that the walking dead are godless and worldly.

"Ah!" The dead man says, "I see the problem! If only the world weren't so worldly! If only I had a different environment or better examples, then I could really live!" But this brings us to the next point: those who are dead in sin don't just go the way of the world; they are also *following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience*. You don't just have a corrupt environment; you have a cruel enemy, a deceiver who keep your soul enslaved to disobedience.

The prince of the power of the air refers to Satan, and the power of the air is *not* (as some silly Christians thought) radio waves or the internet, although Satan is active there as well. The air refers to the non-physical realm, the invisible, spiritual side of reality. Not only the tangible reality of the world, but the intangible realm of the spirit is also a sphere where death reigns. This means that you can't follow the swamis and gurus into the spirit world to find life. An exorcism might just open the door for seven worse spirits to come in. Meditation and mindfulness and ascetic rejection of worldliness cannot save you! You are just changing the face of the zombie in the mirror. Even if you thought you were escaping from the world into the spiritual realm, there you would find the Devil leading you into disobedience, and that too is spiritual death.

And so here the dead man wants to explain away his situation with the famous excuse: "The devil made me do it!" But Paul has more bad news: your spiritual deadness is not simply a result of external forces like the world and the devil. You carry death in your own flesh, and so we all once lived as sons of disobedience, because those external pressures were eagerly met with internal compulsions to live the sin-dead life. Your sin reveals that you are enslaved to your passions and desires, not just bodily needs but also mental inclinations towards evil.

Even if you could manage it (which you can't), self-denial of your physical urges can't bring you to life, and neither can self-help, learning new patterns of thinking or gaining new information, because your body and your mind are already full of death! "If only I were a more disciplined person, then I could begin a new life! If only someone had told me; if only I knew better, or knew more, then I could really start living!" These are real things that real people say all the time. But diets, swear jars, mantras, cognitive therapies, porn-blocking software, budgets, screen time fasts – these are mortician's tools; they can make the corpse look prettier, but they cannot give life to dead souls. The walking dead have a triple problem: there is no one to lead them to life; they are stuck following the world, the flesh, and the devil.

And now comes the worst part: this is the condition of every man *by nature*. There is no one who is alive; we are all dead. And this didn't just "happen" to us; this is *who we are*. This is the human condition, and a zombie is a horrifically accurate representation.

Paul is hinting briefly here in Ephesians at what he explains in greater detail in the book of Romans, especially the first five chapters, where he talks about how all men, both Jew and Gentile, are enslaved by sin, and that this is a result of Adam's trespass back in the garden of Eden. We are dead by nature because we are all sons of the Disobedient One. We aren't sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners. It's our fallen nature, ever since we sinned and fell in our covenant head, Adam. It's what comes *naturally* to those who are walking in death.

And as those who are dead in trespasses and sins, sons of disobedience, worldly, satanic, fleshly sinners, our last identity is the worst of all: because of sin, we are children of wrath. Paul is not referring to the Big Sinners, some class of humanity worse than all the rest. We are all children who have incurred God's righteous wrath, beginning with death as the wages of our sin, but in the end, we can't even escape the human condition at death, because after death comes the judgment of God.

Nearly everyone you meet describes their condition differently than Paul does here. "I'm basically a good person." "I do my best, and hope my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds." "God understands; it's just the way I am." But the Word of God says that all of mankind is dead in their sins, deserving of God's wrath. We are not a little bit dead, or even mostly dead. Our death is comprehensive: a change of *time* or *place* or *environment* can't save us, deliverance from Satan's influence can't save us, transcending our bodies can't save us, information and education can't save us, we cannot look forward to a wrathless oblivion, and there is no one among all of mankind who can be of any help, because we are *all* in the same situation.

This is why what we learned about Jesus in ch. 1 is so important. If our condition isn't really as bad as Paul says, then why did Jesus need to come and die? In order for life to break into a dead world, Christ has to overcome all rule and authority and power, every name that is named, not only in this age, but in the one to come. *This condition of death* is the one He took on Himself at the cross, not because He was a sinner by nature or because of His own sin, but because our death is so comprehensive, that only a completely sovereign Savior could help. This status of "dead in trespasses and sins" was imputed to Jesus on the cross as He died in our place. This is the death He died, but that also means that this is the death He was raised from!

The good news about Jesus from chapter 1 is about to be applied to dead sinners in one of the most powerful, wonderful, glorious and majestic passages ever written by a human pen. The catastrophic horror of our undead condition is shaken by the most marvelous conjunction imaginable. You were dead, *but God*. Next week, Lord willing, we will be reminded again of the great good news of how God gives life to the dead.

- In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Let us pray: *Merciful God, in your power and love you raised Jesus from the dead, lifted Him up into your presence, and seated Him on heaven's throne high above all things. We praise you now for the grace that looked upon us when we were dead in sins, enslaved by the world, the flesh, and the devil, and nevertheless chose to redeem such hopeless children of wrath because of your great love for us in Christ. Having been made alive with Him by your Spirit, we ask for grace to withstand the daily temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, so that with pure hearts and minds we may follow you, the Living God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*