

Sermon Notes: *Dead or Alive?* (Ephesians 2:1-3)

Intro: The Ephesian Christians had experienced a transformation from spiritual death to life and Paul reminds them of it. He wants them to have a deep sense of the wondrous change which divine grace and power had wrought in them. His starting place is “sin.” Human depravity, while not the most attractive Christian doctrine, is utterly fundamental. Unless we understand sin and the abhorrent damage it has done to human existence, we cannot appreciate how glorious is new life by the blood of Christ and power of God’s Spirit. The qualities of spiritual death which God has conquered in Christ our Savior:

#1: The Walk of Death. Once the Ephesians “were dead in trespasses and sins in which they once *walked*.” That’s a strange conjunction of words! Once they had been dead men walking! Biologically they had been alive. All their vital signs were apparent. The problem had not been biologically death but spiritually death. Yes, they had an ability to judge and choose but no ability to choose God because they had no real desire for God. Freely, willfully, and happily they walked in defiance of God. Their walk is the walk all men who live apart from Christ.

Walking in trespasses. A trespass is a transgression. To trespass is to overstep and transgress the moral boundary which God’s law has prescribed for us. The picture is of a road which God has ordained and which we must walk in. But we go off God’s road and travel one of our own construction because we believe it holds our more pleasure and fulfillment to us than God’s.

Walking in sins. To transgress is to defy what God has commanded but to “sin” is to neglect it. Here the picture is of an archer who aims, draws his bow, but has his arrow fall short of the mark. The target is clear enough to our minds: we should live for God’s glory and enjoy him. But apart from God’s mercy and the new life he gives through Jesus Christ we lack the heart for communion with God. And we are quite happy to live that way. When our first parents, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God in the garden they died spiritually. But their representative disobedience, for they were the heads of the race, cast the curse of death upon their natural descendents too (Rom. 5:12). The Bible’s picture of man’s state in sin is fearful! “no one who seeks God” (Rom 3:11). “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him (1Cor 2:14).

#2: The Bondage of Death (2). Not only did we walk in trespasses and sins but we were held in bondage by powers over which we had no control. What powers of spiritual bondage bear the corrupt fruit of walking in death? A three-fold bondage. Bondage to the world. Unless our minds are renewed by the Spirit of God they will be conformed to the unbelief of this world and we will be unable to live any other way (Rom 12:2). We will be conformed to the values of this world. Who can doubt that one of the most powerful instruments of bondage to the world is television? Not that TV and films are inherently evil. But the undiscerning imbibing of worldviews through this medium (not to mention many popular books and magazines) leads many in the way of this world. Bondage to the devil. The devil is the “accuser” and “adversary.” The “destroyer” and “deceiver.” The original liar and father of all subsequent lies (Joh 8:44). He rules in the realm of the spirit and over innumerable fallen angels. Like the air his influence is penetrating and pervasive. He “works” unceasingly through the attitudes and structures of our fallen world. He hates God and man who is created in his image. Bondage to the flesh. Although Paul can use the term “flesh” to refer to the material body here he means all of human nature, all our God-given gifts and abilities, used in defiance of God. The “passions” of the flesh include not only sexual sins but proud ambitions and unholy desires. This is the

doctrine of “total depravity”. Not that men are as bad as they can be. Because of God’s common grace they are not. Rather, we mean that sin has such a hold on us in our natural state, that we have no positive desire for a true knowledge of God. We are either passively indifferent or actively hostile but either way we want nothing to do with God (Joh 6:44). To willingly bow the knee before him and to happily serve him as Lord would be a living hell to us.

#3: The Condemnation of Death (3). Not only were we dead and enslaved, but condemned. Man is condemned for his guilt. Sons of disobedience that we were, by our very nature we had merited God’s condemnation. God’s wrath is not a spiteful emotion but a just sentence—what we have chosen for ourselves, what we deserve. C. S. Lewis: “the door of hell is locked from the inside.” Jesus Christ was condemned for man’s guilt. No sooner has Paul presented this depressing picture of man’s death in sin than he rejoices in God’s mercy and life and power in Christ. Like Lazarus whom Christ raised from the dead (Joh 11), God raises his chosen ones from the dead. His Spirit works faith in them (Eph 2:8). Has he awakened you from death in sin to new life through faith in the blood of your Savior? Hear him! He calls you to trust in Christ’s cleansing blood and walk in obedience.