

“Our Former Life – Part 2”
Ephesians 2:1-3
(Preached at Trinity, March 16, 2014)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Chapter 1** Paul described the greatness of God's power toward those who believe. The same power that raised Christ from the dead has raised His people from death unto life.
2. After describing the glorious work of God in our salvation in **Chapter 1** Paul now describes what we were formerly. Sin has affected every part of our being. It has affected our body, our mind, our will and our conscience. We were dead in our trespasses and sins. Nothing but the almighty power that raised Christ from the dead can bring us out of this terrible condition.
3. By describing where we came from we are able to fully comprehend the fullness of God's power and grace in our redemption. God has brought about an amazing transformation. In the first three verses Paul describes our former condition in four ways:
 - I. We were spiritually dead – **Verse 1**
 - II. We walked according to the course of this world – **Verse 2**
 - III. We were governed by the desires of our flesh – **Verse 3a**
 - IV. We were under the wrath of God – **Verse 3b**
4. Last week we limited our focus to the first two—
 - A. We were spiritually dead – **Verse 1**
 1. We became alienated from God, the source of true life. We lost the ability to know God. We no longer recognized the goodness of God or His glory.
 2. We were in love with our sin. Our entire will was now predisposed towards sin and predisposed away from God. We lacked the ability to turn from our sin.
 3. We had no desire for the spiritual things that point to God. Our proud heart stopped us from humbling ourselves and confessing our sins before God. We lacked the ability to humble ourselves.
 4. We need a new life. Paul is said in **Chapter 1:20** regarding Christ that God "raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places*"
Chapter 2:1 begins literally, "And you being dead. . ." Paul's point is that we too have been raised from the dead.
 - B. We walked according to the course of this world – **Verse 2**
 1. The "course of this world" describes the fullness of this fallen world
 2. Human beings are born into this world - this present age, and it consumes them. The lost man truly adores this world.
 3. The people of this world become a part of the collective voice of a world without God.

4. Satan, the god of this world, has the people of this world captive to his lies and deceptions.
Satan has influence over this world's opinions, aims, goals, values. He influences this world's ethics, education, politics, philosophy, sociology and economics.
 5. Satan held us captive, and we had no ability to escape.
5. Paul is saying this is what we were. Deliverance demands God's transforming grace. But our problem lies even deeper. This morning I want us to look at the other two characteristics of our former condition.
- I. We were governed by the desires of our flesh – **Verse 3a**
- A. We love to satisfy the lusts of our own flesh and hate anything that stands in the way.
 1. The word for lust refers to a strong desire whether bad or good.
 - a. Paul uses it (ἐπιθυμέω) to refer to the pastoral calling:
1 Timothy 3:1 NAU - "It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do."
 - b. Most of the time in the NT it has a negative sense as here
We lust after those things that God forbids.
 2. The word for flesh is a common word – used 147 times in the NT
In a general sense it can refer to our flesh and blood. It is often used to reflect the contrast between the physical and the spiritual. In a negative sense it refers to sinful behavior.
Galatians 5:19-21 NAU - "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."
 3. What Paul is speaking of here in **Chapter 3** is this insatiable desire to satisfy our worldly passions and pleasures. There is a great contrast between fleshly desires and spiritual desires—between the desire to satisfy our carnal pleasures and the desire for God. The lost man does not seek God.
Galatians 5:17 NAS - "For ^athe flesh ¹sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, ^bso that you may not do the things that you ²please."
 4. Sin has brought us to seek the fleshly pleasures of this life above all else.
 - a. God created us to find joy in Him; that we would be satisfied in Him.
 - b. The lost man does not find joy in God because he is spiritually dead. He does not seek God because he sees no value in God.
Romans 3:11 NAS - "There is none who understands, There is none who seeks for God"

- d. This is why men will not have Christ. Jesus came in glory but lost humanity sees no beauty in Him. They see no beauty in Christ because they are estranged from God. Isaiah wrote of Him:
Isaiah 53:2 ESV - "he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him."
 He had no beauty because they saw no beauty. There was no desire for Him.
- c. We always seek that which is valuable to us
 People will do what they WANT to do
 And what the carnal man wants to do is feed the desires of his flesh. One of the great sorrows I hear from some pastors is church members who do not have a spiritual appetite.
- B. Paul adds that human depravity affects the mind. We our fleshly desires flow forth from a carnal mind
Ephesians 2:3 NAU - "indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind"
1. This word describes the whole process of thinking
 It is often described as a corrupt heart
NAS **Genesis 6:5** – “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”
NAS **Jeremiah 17:9** - "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?"
 2. The mind controls our way of thinking. We truly believe that satisfying our carnal desires will bring us the greatest pleasure.
 3. When we say we are spiritually dead, it takes place at the level of the mind
 Over and over the Bible describes our depravity on the level of the mind
NAS **Romans 1:28** – “And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,”
NAS **Ephesians 4:17** – “This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, ¹⁸ being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;”
Romans 8:6 NAU - "For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,"
 4. It is at the level of the mind that Satan works
NAS **2 Corinthians 4:3** – “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴ in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”
- C. As we saw last time, the lost man has the collective mind of this world. In other words, they all think the same way.
NAS **Psalms 10:4** – “The wicked, in the haughtiness of his countenance, does not seek *Him*. All his thoughts are, "There is no God."

1. It is this mindset that places the satisfaction of the flesh as the highest goal
2. Paul is saying that formerly we did those things that the flesh and mind willed to do. All of mankind is seeking to satisfy self while resisting the way of God. They truly believe that life without God is the best life.

II. Finally, Paul reminds us of our ultimate problem—we were under the wrath of God

A. Paul says we were “by nature children of wrath”

1. Paul is working off his statement in **Verse 2**
The “sons of disobedience” are the “children of wrath”
2. The fearful thing is that Paul states that we are under God’s wrath by nature. In other words, as sinful human beings it is now an aspect of our very essence to be under the judgment of God.
 - a. God’s wrath is not just kindled against sin. His fiery anger is kindled against sinners, against every human being—all who refuse to bow before Him.
 - b. It is a universal problem. We were born into this condition. It is our natural state. God has given all of His creatures certain characteristics. Dogs look and behave like dog and are distinguished from cats. There are certain characteristics that define human beings. Paul is saying one of these traits is that we are under the wrath of God.

B. The wrath of God is one of God’s divine attributes

1. The wrath of God is His fiery anger against sin. God’s wrath is His holy hatred and indignation towards sin.
2. God’s holy character does not allow indifference towards sin
 - a. If God is pleased over all things holy then He must be displeased over all things defiled.
 - b. If God is infinitely holy then His displeasure over sin must also be an infinite displeasure.
4. The Bible describes this displeasure as a holy hatred
Psalms 5:5 NAU - "The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; You hate all who do iniquity. ⁶ You destroy those who speak falsehood; The LORD abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit."

C. God’s holy hatred of sin has kindled His righteous anger

1. God’s anger is an infinite fury, a terrible rage – yet it is not like the anger of men.
 - a. Human beings usually sin in anger because our anger flows forth from our sinful nature --- pride, impatience, jealousy, envy
 - b. God’s anger isn’t reactionary; it isn’t an emotion.
God is not affected by anything outside Himself. His wrath is simply an expression of His holy character towards that which is not holy.
This is why Isaiah was so affected at the vision of God in all His holiness.
Isaiah 6:5 NAU - "Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."

- c. Because God's wrath is one of His attributes; because it is the full expression of His holiness and justice it doesn't go away. It can only be satisfied.
2. God's holy wrath is fearful to consider
Hebrews 10:31 – "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*"
3. Few today tremble at the thought of God being angry with them
 - a. Few believe that the most powerful being in the universe is angry and poised to crush them
 - b. Most believe that hell is simply inconsistent with the character of a God who is only capable of love. Hell would be much too cruel and violent.
 - c. God's wrath just seems too inconceivable. Last year the Presbyterian Church USA Committee on Congregational song refused to print the song "In Christ Alone" when the composers refused to change the phrase about the wrath of God. Instead of *'Til on that Cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied'* they wanted to substitute, "the love of God was magnified." This bears testimony to the elevation of God's love today above all of His other attributes.
 - d. People today don't really believe in sin. They don't believe in personal accountability. There is a recent case where a 16 year old young man got drunk, crashed his car and killed and injured several people. His defense: "Affluenza" – because of his parents great wealth and because they spoiled him it really isn't his fault. And the judge bought it. No one today believes they are accountable for their sins.
 - e. In addition, our society preaches tolerance of every kind of behavior. The mantra shouted today is, "Thou shalt not judge," and they actually believe that God will not judge them.
 - f. They are blind to the reality that each passing day will only heap up more wrath when we stand before God. The picture is of a great storage vessel that is being steadily filled.
Romans 2:5 NAU - "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,"

Conclusion:

1. So here we find our condition.
 - We were spiritually dead, unable to know God; unable to reach out to Him, unable to turn from our sin.
 - We were engulfed by this present world, walking according to its ways which are under the power and deceptions of Satan, and unable to free ourselves from his captivity.
 - We were bound by the lusts of our flesh always doing those things that the flesh and mind willed to do.
 - We were under God's wrath and condemnation.
2. Is there anything possible that could rescue us from such a condition? The answer is nothing in the power of man could save us.
3. **Verse 4** however rings in unspeakable good news . . . "But God . . ."