

## Ephesians 2:1-3

### Introduction

This morning, we come to chapter two of Ephesians, and Paul's third "very long" sentence. The first was 202 words (1:3-14), the second was 169 words (1:15-23), and now this sentence is 124 words (2:1-7).

Paul prayed that we might know what is the exceeding greatness of God's power toward us who believe, according to the powerful working of the strength of His might, that He powerfully worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come; and He put all things under his feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

All of this power is "toward us who believe." God's infinite power is always at work for you, and for me. We've seen a little bit of what this *means*, but now Paul wants to show us even more *specifically* exactly *how* this infinite power of God is *always* at work in us (cf. Eph. 3:20). He does this with a sentence that's very "unique" – a sentence that lets us look right into the inner workings of Paul's mind. (For the following, see the sentence diagram on the last page.)

There are three basic ingredients in a sentence – a subject (I), a main verb (hit), and usually an object (the ball). I can say "I hit the ball," or "the ball, I hit," or "the ball was hit by me," but whatever order I pick, there's always a subject, at least one main verb, and usually an object. So here we have a sentence of 124 words, and where do we find these three main ingredients? Paul starts off with the words, "And **YOU**..." But then he breaks off without giving us any main verb. "And you"... what? Are the Ephesians the subject in this sentence (what did the Ephesians do?) or are they the object in the sentence (what happened to the Ephesians?) We have to wait quite a long time before this question is answered.

(Read sentence diagram through "but God...") So now we can guess that the object is "**YOU**" in verse one, and that finally in verse four the subject is "**GOD**." But we still don't have a main verb!

(Finish reading the sentence diagram; note the repetition of "dead in trespasses"). This is a very "messed up" sentence! The basic idea is, "And you... God... made alive." But because these words are spread out over five verses and because of all the stuff that happens in the middle, we end up with this: "And you... but God... made us alive..." So why doesn't Paul clean up his grammar? It would have been so simple. Just do like the King James and the New King James do (cf. ASV):

✓ Ephesians 2:1 (NKJV) — And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins...

They take the subject and verb from verses four and five and just add them here in verse one. It's simple! But then we miss what Paul was really trying to do.

And **YOU**—

*being dead in **your** trespasses and sins...*

(But now Paul thinks to himself, “I need to stop and dwell on this for a little longer. I need to spend more time on this lost condition so the saints can glory in the miracle I’m about to describe...)

And **YOU**—

*being dead in **your** trespasses and sins...*

in which **you** once walked,

according to the age of this world,

according to the ruler of the authority of the air,

of the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience,

among whom **we all** also once lived in the passions of **our** flesh,

carrying out the desires of the flesh and of the mind,

and were by nature children of wrath

even as the rest;

(“Now,” Paul says, “now I’m ready to pick up where I left off in verse one...)

—*but* **GOD**—

(But then Paul still doesn’t want to come right away to the main verb – to what God has done for us. He waits just a little bit longer, and then he let’s loose not just with one main verb, but with three.)

—*but* **GOD**—

being rich in mercy,

because of His great love with which He loved **us**,

*even when **we were dead in **our** trespasses,***

(“Now I’m ready,” Paul says, “now *everyone* should be ready!”)

**But GOD... 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...”

This morning, we’ll focus mostly on the object in this sentence – that’s *us* in the first three verses. Next week, but also this morning, we’ll glory in the subject and the main verbs – that’s God and the exceeding greatness of His power *at work* in us who believe!

### **I. “And you, being dead in your trespasses and sins in which you once walked”**

Our bodies weren’t dead, but our spirits were. We weren’t physically dead, but we were spiritually dead. We weren’t “half dead” or even just exceedingly sick and diseased. We were dead.

What was it for us to be spiritually dead? Paul says that we were dead in our trespasses and sins. He uses *two* words for “sin” and he puts them both in the plural in order to emphasize how pervasive this sin was in our lives (“trespasses *and* sins”). Both words, but especially “trespasses,” emphasize that our sin was not only pervasive throughout our lives, it was also willful. We were dead in our trespasses and sins *in which we once walked*. It was our way of life. It was a way of life that we were daily choosing for ourselves. So you could say that we were truly the “walking dead.”

Because of our sin, we were cut off from God – who is the source of true life. But being cut off from God, it was impossible for us to walk in anything other than our trespasses and sins. We were utterly and completely *dead*. We could not choose the true God as He has revealed Himself in His Word because we *would* not. We could not honor Him as God and give Him thanks because we *would* not. We could not cease to walk in our trespasses and sins because we *would* not. We had no spiritual ability for any of these things. Calvin writes:

“Let this, then, be held as a fixed principle, that the union of our soul with God is the true and only life; and that out of Christ we are altogether dead, because sin, the cause of death, reigns in us.”

Brothers and sisters, at one point every single one of us were *dead* in our trespasses and sins in which we once walked.

## **II. “according to the age of this world”**

In the Bible, the “world” can refer to the world system or order that’s opposed to God and to the values of His kingdom and rule. Jesus said to His disciples:

- ✓ John 15:18, 23 — If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you... Whoever hates me hates my Father also.

And the Apostle John writes:

- ✓ 1 John 2:15–16 — Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—*the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life*—is not from the Father but is from the world.

But the problem is that at one point we were all lovers of this world. We were all living our lives only in light of the here and now. “*This*” was what mattered most of all, and so instead of seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Mat. 6:33), we were completely conformed to this world (cf. Rom. 12:1-2). We were slaves to its power and influence because we were a part of it. Instead of our lives being oriented to the life of the age to come and the heavenly realm (cf. Lincoln), we were in the world *and of* the world (John 17). Instead of being concerned with eternal values or with the judgment to come, we went along with what was fashionable and acceptable and were concerned only with the activities and values of this present age (cf. Hoehner). We were slaves to the power and influence of the age of this world, and so it

was *impossible* for us to set our minds on the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God (Col. 3:1-4). If the world was the ocean, then we were fish swimming in the ocean. We had no thoughts for any life above the surface of the water. We were immersed in the world and carried along by its currents. We could not escape because like fish in the sea, we didn't want to escape. We were dead in our trespasses and sins in which we once walked according to the age of this world.

### **III. “according to the ruler of the authority of the air”**

Later, Paul will speak of the rulers, and authorities, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (6:12). But these spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places are all guided by one evil will – by a single ruler of the authority of the air. The Bible calls this Being the “devil” and “Satan.” According to the Bible, this spirit being is no less real than you and I sitting or standing here in this room.

Paul has just said that God raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places far above all rule and authority... and He has put all things (including Satan) under Christ's feet. And yet there was a time when every single one of us were under the *personal* dominion of Satan Himself. This doesn't mean we were “demon possessed.” This doesn't mean that we were all rapists and serial killers. The schemes of Satan are subtle and cunning, but no less evil and no less opposed to God and to His kingdom. Behind our slavery to the age of this world was our slavery to the ruler of the authority of the air. Jesus said that Satan is the “ruler of this world” (John 12:31). The Apostle John says that:

✓ 1 John 5:19 — The whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

And Paul writes in another place:

✓ 2 Corinthians 4:4 — The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

To say that we “walked according to the ruler of the authority of the air” is to say that we fought under the reign of Satan (cf. Calvin). We were entirely subject to his will, though our minds were blinded so that we couldn't see it. Even if we pleaded ignorance, we were still willing citizens of a world whose only god and ruler is “the great dragon... that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world” (Revelation 12:9). If the whole world lies in the power of the evil one, then there was a day when we, too, were completely and totally under his terrible power and influence. We were deceived by his lies (who is the father of lies; John 8:44), and yet we could not be undeceived because we had no will to believe the truth (2 Thess. 2:9-12). We were under Satan's dominion, and we could not possibly, ever escape. “Our condition, therefore... may well excite our horror” (Calvin). We were dead in our trespasses and sins in which we once walked according to the age of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air.

### **IV. “[the ruler] of the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience among whom we all also once lived”**

Now instead of “you,” Paul says “we all,” including himself. Calvin puts it this way: “Lest it should be supposed that what he had now said was a slanderous reproach against the former character of the Ephesians... [Paul] associates himself... with them in the general accusation.”

We may want to say to Paul after what he’s said so far, “How can you say that I was ever really that bad?” Is Paul just using hyperbole and over exaggerating to prove a point? We measure sin, and evil, and wickedness by standards of our own making, and this itself is one of our most serious sins. God measures sin, and evil, and wickedness by the standard of the heart and motives and of His own holy law. We measure sin, and evil, and wickedness by the standard of outward actions and of our own human sensibilities. And so we call darkness, light, and light, darkness. We call evil, good, and good, evil (cf. Isa. 5:20). Paul says that he was one who once lived among the sons of *disobedience*. And yet this is the one who could say that his former life had been *blameless as to the righteousness under the law* (Phil. 3:6).

That word for disobedience could also be translated “unbelief.” All of our disobedience flows from the ultimate disobedience of refusing to believe and trust in God’s free provision of salvation and the forgiveness of sins. Paul speaks of those who are perishing because they “*refused* to love the truth” and instead *believed* what is “false” (2 Thess. 2:10-11). In another place Paul says that “Israel pursued a law that would lead to righteousness [but] did not succeed in reaching that law... because they did not pursue it *by faith* [in God’s free provision of salvation], but as if it were based on works” (Rom. 9:31-32).

✓ John 6:28–29 — Then they said to him, “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” Jesus answered them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

All works that don’t flow from this belief in God’s infinite provision of salvation *can only be* works of disobedience. And so *all* that we did was disobedience. Our entire life was characterized by disobedience. Even our “good deeds” were simply the evidence of our refusal to believe and love the truth about God’s gracious provision of salvation. As Paul says, we were all sons of *disobedience*. And so there could be absolutely *no hope* that we would ever change. We were dead in our trespasses and sins in which we once walked according to the age of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, of the spirit now at work in the sons of disobedience among whom we all also once lived...

#### **V. “among whom we all also once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and of the mind”**

O what wretched bondage – to be a slave to our own sinful desires, to be unable to escape from them because they’re what we truly *want* most of all, to be unable to escape from ourselves. The passions of our flesh are the desires of our sinful nature. We want to pursue our own pleasure and happiness in this world which lies under the dominion of Satan. We want to pursue our own pleasure and happiness independently of God. How we want to be our own gods – to set our own standards of “right” and “wrong,” to be the center around which all of our thoughts revolve. We walked according to the age of this world, and according to the ruler of the authority of the air not because we were held against our will, but because this was what we wanted. We weren’t

just in slavery to Satan and the world around us, but to the desires within our own hearts. The Bible says that:

- ✓ Romans 8:6–8 — The mind set on the flesh is death... because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

It's our desires that then give birth to actions. Paul says that we were all "carrying out" the desires of the flesh and the mind. Our *minds* rationalize and justify and excuse (cf. Rom. 2:15) – our *flesh* puts into action.

- ✓ Galatians 5:16, 19-21 — Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

We were dead in our trespasses and sins in which we once walked according to the age of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, of the spirit now at work in the sons of disobedience among whom we all also once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and of the mind.

## **VI. "and [we] were by nature children of wrath even as the rest"**

Doesn't this make you shudder? It's the final nail in the coffin. "By nature" means "by birth" (Gal. 2:15). "[We] were [answerable] for [our] sinful cravings, desires, and thoughts, [and yet we all chose] this path inevitably, in agreement with the state into which [we] were all born" (Thielman). There was never any possibility or hope that we would choose any other way.

- ✓ Romans 5:12 — Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to *all men*, because *all sinned*.

And so we were by nature "children of wrath" even as the rest.

Calvin puts it so simply: "God does not condemn the innocent." But if *we* were *all* children of wrath, what must this say about our sin and our guilt? "[God] is a holy God, and therefore he does not stand idly by when people act unrighteously, transgress his law, show disdain to him as their creator, or spurn his kindness and mercy. He acts in a righteous manner, punishing sin in the present and especially on the final day." (O'Brien) And so Paul writes:

- ✓ Romans 2:5-6, 8 — Because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works... for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.
- ✓ Nahum 1:6 — Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken into pieces by him.

- ✓ Revelation 6:15–17 — Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”

Everything about all of this is wholly *opposed* to our *human* reasoning and sensibilities. And yet this only demonstrates the extent of our sinful blindness and our willful *rejection* of God. We were dead in our trespasses and sins in which we once walked according to the age of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, of the spirit now at work in the sons of disobedience among whom we all also once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and we were by nature children of wrath even as the rest. O wretched man that I am (cf. Rom. 7:24)! O wretched people that we were. And now Paul is ready for the subject, and the main verbs.

### Conclusion

**But GOD**, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, **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** He might show in the coming ages the exceeding wealth of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Have you received God’s salvation? Have you trusted in His provision for the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ? Will you, right now?

**Ephesians 2:1-7**

And **YOU**—

being dead in your trespasses and sins  
in which you once walked,  
according to the age of this world,  
according to the ruler of the authority of the air,  
of the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience,  
among whom we all also once lived in the passions of our flesh,  
carrying out 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 trespasses,

—**MADE** us **ALIVE** *together with Christ*  
(by grace you are saved!)

and **RAISED** us **UP** *together with Him*

and **SEATED** us *together with him*  
in the heavenly places  
in Christ Jesus

*so that He might show in the coming ages the exceeding riches of his grace  
in kindness toward us  
in Christ Jesus.*