

God's Plan of Reconciliation

The Way We Were

Ephesians 2:1-3

Rev. Freddy Fritz

April 23, 2017

The Way We Were

Scripture

Today, I am beginning a new series of eight sermons on Ephesians 2 that I am calling, “God’s Plan of Reconciliation.”

Before we begin Ephesians 2, let’s briefly review Ephesians 1. As in all his letters, the Apostle Paul began his letter to the Ephesians with a brief greeting (1:1-2).

Then, in Ephesians 1:3-14, which is one, long, complex, glorious sentence in the original Greek, the Apostle Paul praised God for salvation. Paul praised the Father for planning our salvation, the Son for purchasing our salvation, and the Holy Spirit for applying that salvation to us.

In Ephesians 1:15-23, which is also one, long, complex, glorious sentence in the original Greek, the Apostle Paul prayed for the saints to grow in their understanding of, and appreciation for, the blessings of salvation.

Ephesians 2:1-10 is another single sentence in the original Greek. The theme of this sentence is God’s grace in saving sinners. Paul begins, however, in the first three verses with a devastating description of the way we were before we Christians came to receive the amazing grace of God.

Let’s read about the way we were in Ephesians 2:1-3:

¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of

mankind. (Ephesians 2:1-3)

Introduction

Tony Merida tells the story about Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) who was a philosopher (among other things) and is considered the founder of utilitarianism (“the greatest happiness principle”). He was an interesting figure. In Bentham’s will, he apparently left a fortune to a London hospital. But there was one condition: Bentham was to be present at every board meeting. Reportedly, for more than one hundred years, the remains of Jeremy Bentham were wheeled into the boardroom every month and placed at the head of the table. His skeleton was dressed in seventeenth-century garb and a little hat, which sat on his wax head. In the minutes of every board meeting, a line read, “Mr. Jeremy Bentham, present but not voting.” This was a joke from his philosophy. Of course, he never voted because he had been dead since 1832.¹

In our text for today, Ephesians 2:1-3, the Apostle Paul was teaching essentially the same thing. Spiritually, all people without Christ are “present but not voting.” We Christians were the “walking dead,” as many commentators put it. In fact, John MacArthur says, “Men apart from God are spiritual zombies, the *walking dead* who do not know they are dead. They go through the motions of life, but they do not possess it.”²

Before Paul explained the amazing grace of God towards sinners, he explained the way we were as sinners in the state of sin before we came to receive new life in Jesus Christ.

¹ Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), n.p.

² John MacArthur, *John: Jesus - The Word, the Messiah, the Son of God*, MacArthur Bible Studies (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2000), 26.

Lesson

The analysis of the doctrine of sin in Ephesians 2:1-3 shows us several truths about sin.

Let's use the following outline:

1. People Are in the State of Sin (2:1a)
2. Why People Are in the State of Sin (2:2b, 3a, 3b)
3. What Results in Practice Because People Are in the State of Sin (2:1b)
4. How God Views People in the State of Sin (2:3b)

I. People Are in the State of Sin (2:1a)

First, people are in the state of sin.

Paul began chapter 2 by writing in verse 1a, **“And you....”** To whom was he writing? He was writing to the Christians in Ephesus. In verse 3a Paul mentioned **“we all.”** He wanted his readers to be sure that what he was about to say was true of all Christians. He was not about to describe some people in deepest, darkest Africa or some people we might consider rude, revolting, or repugnant. No. He was talking about Christians, us, all of us who make a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. This is the biblical diagnosis of our state.

Paul said further in verse 1a, **“And you were dead....”** **Dead?** Yes, **dead.** Why? **“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins”** (2:1). The word **“in”** is not in the original Greek, and it may be better to translate it as “because of” or “on account of.” In other words, Paul was saying, **“And you were dead in [that is, “because of” or “on account of”] the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.”**

The key word is **“dead.”** Paul was saying, **“And you**

were dead!” What did he mean? Clearly, Paul was talking about a *spiritual* condition and not a *physical* condition. He was describing the life of a non-Christian. Life for a non-Christian is, as Martyn Lloyd-Jones called it, a “living death.”³

It is important to understand that every person who is not a Christian is spiritually dead. That is what Paul stressed in this passage. There is no spiritual life at all in any person who is not a Christian. All non-Christian people are spiritually dead!

But what does that mean? Death is the opposite of life. Well, then, what is life? In the Bible, life is always described in terms of our relationship to God. Take the words of Jesus, for instance. He said in John 17:3, “And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” That is life! It is knowing God, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. “So,” says Lloyd-Jones, “we can define life like this: life is to know God, to be in relationship to God, to enjoy God, to correspond with God, to be like God, to share the life of God, and to be blessed of God.”⁴

Death, then, is the opposite of that. Paul was saying that non-Christians don’t know God, they are not in a relationship with God, they don’t enjoy God, they have no connection with God, they are not like God, they don’t share the life of God, and, in fact, they are under the curse of God.

This was your state and my state prior to our conversion to Christ. All people who are not Christians are in this state.

II. Why People Are in the State of Sin (2:2b, 3a,3b)

Second, let’s see why people are in the state of sin.

³ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God’s Way of Reconciliation: An Exposition of Ephesians 2* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 18.

⁴ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God’s Way of Reconciliation: An Exposition of Ephesians 2*, 18.

Having explained that all people are spiritually dead, the Apostle Paul now explained why people are in the state of sin. Paul used three terms or words to explain why people are in the state of sin.

The first term is **“sons of disobedience”** at the end of verse 2. Paul said, “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the **sons of disobedience”** (2:2b). All of Adam’s sons and daughters are disobedient. We all disobey the law of God. That is why Paul wrote to the Romans in Romans 3:10-12, “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

The second term Paul used to explain why people are in the state of sin is at the end of verse 3, “and [we] were **by nature** children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” The reason we are all sons of disobedience is because of who we are **“by nature,”** or, if you like, of who we are “by birth.” The teaching of the entire Bible is that we are born into this world with a disobedient nature. No-one is born neutral or good. It is said that people are basically good. That is wrong. People are basically bad. David said in Psalm 51:5 (*NIV*), “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”

This is so opposite to what our culture teaches today. The culture says that education will improve people. Or, the right environment will improve people. Or, getting out of poverty will improve people. Well, all those things may help in material ways, but they do not address the profound spiritual state of every human being. Every person is basically bad because every person sinful from conception.

We need to remember that we sin because we are sinful

and not that we are sinful because we sin. Our fundamental problem is our sinful nature. Our sinful actions flow from our sinful nature. And that is the state of every person in the world.

And the third term Paul used to explain why people are in the state of sin is the most important word **“all”** at the beginning of verse 3, “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – among whom **we all** once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath,” and then Paul adds **“like the rest of mankind.”** The Jews who read this description of Paul had a hard time with it. They believed that God smiled on them. They were his covenant people. It was the Gentiles who were sinners and outside the covenant. But Paul insisted that **“we all...like the rest of mankind”** are in the state of sin. This description includes everyone. There are no exceptions on the planet. All are sinful, sons of disobedience by nature.

The great danger is that we think that we are basically good. Or that we are better than others. We look at others around us and we believe that God will find us acceptable to him because we are better than others. But, we forget that every one of us has a sinful nature that is under the wrath of God. Let us never forget what Paul said in Romans 3:23, “...for *all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

III. What Results in Practice Because People Are in the State of Sin (2:1b)

Third, what results in practice because people are in the state of sin.

All people who are not Christians are in the state of sin. They are sons of disobedience, they are so by nature, and that description is true of all people. And, according to Paul, people's lives are lives of trespasses and sins, as he said in verse 1b, "And you were dead in the **trespasses and sins.**"

What are "**trespasses**"? A trespass is a "fall, fault, offence, or sin."⁵ Lloyd-Jones says that "a trespass is an outward transgression. The actual root meaning of the word is that it is a falling away from the true and from the upright. Man was meant to be upright and true and righteous and holy; he has fallen away from that, he is deflected from it, he is no longer upright. It is like something leaning or falling to the ground, it has gone out of its true position, out of the perpendicular."⁶

What are "**sins**"? A sin is an "offence."⁷ Lloyd-Jones says that it is "a very large and comprehensive term. It is a term which includes all the manifestations of sin considered as an inward principle."⁸

All non-Christians are in a sinful state that results in **trespasses and sins**. Moreover, because non-Christians do not follow God – indeed, they are unable to follow God – they follow three evil forces. And this was true of us who are now Christians.

First, we followed the world. Paul said in verse 2a, "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, **following the course of this world.**" We were under the influence of our culture. We valued the things of our culture. And we imitated the habits, attitudes, and lifestyles of our

⁵ James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Bel-
lingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 55.

⁶ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation: An Exposition of Ephesians 2*, 37.

⁷ James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible*, 10.

⁸ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation: An Exposition of Ephesians 2*, 37.

culture. We were like the people Paul described in 2 Timothy 3:2-5a who were “lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to [our] parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.”

Second, we followed the devil. Paul said in verse 2b, **“...following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work** in the sons of disobedience.” Paul will say a lot more about “the schemes of the devil” in chapter 6. Suffice it to say now that we used to be under the authority of Satan. We may not have done so consciously, but Satan was able to tempt us quite easily to do that which was pleasing to him and disobedient to God.

And third, we followed the flesh. Paul said in verse 3a, **“...among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.”** Because of our sinful nature, that is, our fleshly nature, we live in accordance with **the desires of the body and the mind.** Paul described the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21. He said, “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.” Moreover, Paul said to the Romans in Romans 8:8, “Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

Paul wanted the Ephesians – and us – to recognize that it was because of our sinful natures that we were enslaved to all kinds of sin. And that was a desperate position to be in.

IV. How God Views People in the State of Sin (2:3b)

And finally, let's see how God views people in the state of sin.

The Apostle Paul described how God views us at the end of verse 3. We were **“children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”** Our spiritual state could not be more hopeless. We were justly under the wrath of God.

God's wrath is not a volatile eruption of anger. That is how we act. God's wrath, rather, is his settled, righteous indignation against violators of his law. So, again, God is righteously angry at every one who is not in Christ.

People in our culture do not like to think of the wrath of God. They like to think of God as a God of love. God is certainly a God of love. But he is also a God of wrath against all who are living in rebellion and opposition to him. Martyn Lloyd-Jones expressed it as follows:

Wrath is nothing but a manifestation of indignation based upon justice. Indeed, we can go further and assert that the wrath of God, according to the scriptural teaching, is nothing but the other side of the love of God. It is the inevitable corollary of the rejection of the love of God. God is a God of love, but God is also and equally a God of justice and of righteousness; and if God's love is spurned and rejected there remains nothing but the justice and the righteousness and the wrath of God.⁹

Conclusion

Having analyzed the doctrine of sin in Ephesians 2:1-3,

⁹ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation: An Exposition of Ephesians 2*, 51.

we should thank God for rescuing us by his grace.

My former Senior Pastor, Lee Eclov, tells the story about Dr. Erwin Lutzer who teaches preaching courses at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Every year, Dr. Lutzer takes his students on a field trip to the local cemetery – *so they can preach*. Dr. Lutzer says:

I take them to a little cemetery in Deerfield, Illinois, and I have them all gather around a certain gravesite. I point out the name, and then I tell one of the students, “Preach the gospel to Mr. Smith here.”

They look at me like I’m nuts. So, I preach to Mr. Smith with enthusiasm: “Sir, Jesus died for your sins, and you must put your faith in him.”

Then I look at the students and tell them, “This is no different than preaching the gospel to unsaved people. The Bible says that they are dead in their sins. You can preach your heart out, but nothing will happen unless God does a miracle to give them the life to listen.”¹⁰

Christian, thank God for that miracle. Thank God that he gave you a new heart and grace and faith and repentance so that you are no longer dead “in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.”

If you are not yet a Christian, you are still dead in the trespasses and sins. You are following the course of this world and the prince of the power of the air. However, you may also receive the miracle of a new life in Jesus Christ. Ask God to give you faith in Jesus Christ and repentance of your sins. Do so even now. Amen.

¹⁰ <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2007/may/3052807.html>.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can
be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons.
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributors/freddy-fritz-sermons-11181.asp.
3. www.sermonaudio.com/source_detail.asp?sourceid=Fred-dyFritz.

Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org