

Dead Men Walking – *Ephesians 2:1-3*

Introduction – Some people think it is damaging to talk about ourselves with this kind of language - “*dead*” in our sins, enslaved to the “*prince of the power of the air*” making us “*sons of disobedience*” and “*children of wrath*.” But Paul’s point isn’t to denigrate the human race (we’ve already done that to ourselves). His point is a continuation of his prayer in 1:15-23. While we are only looking at these three verses, the overall point is on how gracious, merciful, and powerful the glory of God is. The heights of God’s grace are more fully revealed when we see the depths of our depravity from which we have come.

The State of Man – There are three views of the nature of man. Either man is in his nature very good, or man is marred and sick but able to change and get better, or man is dead. The Bible is clear, and the teaching goes all the way back to the warning in Gen 2:17, and the curse of Gen 3:14ff. That is not to say that there are not some fine non-Christians out there. Our depravity is not absolute, but it is total. Man, under the headship of the first Adam, is wholly unable to love God or do anything meriting his salvation.

Dead in Trespasses and Sins (v1) – Man is spiritually, although really, dead. He does not become spiritually dead because he sins. He is spiritually dead because he is sinful. He has no capacity to respond properly to God, nor does he have any desire to do so on God’s terms (Rom 3:9-20). Paul wants the Ephesian Gentiles to remember that, before they were saved, they were like every other person who is apart from God. Our *transgressions* (falling from the way) and our *sins* (falling short of the mark), are not the reason we are dead; they are the sphere in which we live because we are dead.

Dead Men Walking (v2) – Our race fell into slavery to the serpent in the Garden and we were all imprisoned under the “*spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience*.” We are like our father, the devil (John 8:44). Connected to this, we walked according to the “*course of this world*,” a world system bent on disobedience and rebellion to God. Presently, you could think of this world characterized by humanism (man above all else), materialism (salvation through, for, and to the glory of stuff), and sexual perversion (destroying the image of Christ and His bride along with the means by which God builds a Trinitarian society).

Children of Wrath (v3) – Including all mankind (“*we all*”), we are given over to the lusts and desires of our fallen flesh and mind. We make these choices because of who we are by nature (Gen 6:5, Jer 17:9). This is what it means that we are *children* (offspring) of wrath. The wrath we are under is not God’s temper flying out of control. God’s wrath is His personal, eternal, specific, just and holy character. It is His righteous, settled refusal to compromise with evil and resolve to fully condemn it. Before ever experiencing the mercy of God (another aspect of His character), we find ourselves objects of His terrible but holy wrath.

The World, the Flesh, and the Devil – The conclusion of these three verses is that our condition apart from the efficacious grace of God is absolutely hopeless. In that state, we are under a triple curse, three enemies whom, by our nature, have become our allies. We are dead in our sins, buried under by six feet of the world, with the devil sitting on top. Lying there, our carcass cannot hope that a few resolutions to “do better” will change anything. We don’t need to turn over a new leaf. We need a new life. And how many carcasses do you know that have any desire to be anywhere else anyway? The main reason an unbeliever does not come to Christ is that he does not want to come to Christ (John 3:19, Rom 8:7).

Implications – Paul’s primary purpose is not to show how unsaved people live, but to remind believers of the state in which they formerly walked, lived, and thought. We are stopping at v3, but remember the sentence in the original is far from over. Nevertheless, some important implications should now be considered.

Is Paul Overstating the Case? – Paul is not making the point that all men are equally corrupt and wicked. If you go to a graveyard you will find various stages of decay, but you will also find that all are uniformly dead. The “good” neighbor, the honest, hard-worker and the civic activist all need salvation through Christ as much as the heartless terrorist or the wicked abortionist. Even the righteous law-keeper found he needed Christ (Phil 3:6).

Don’t We Do Something to Get Saved? – Consider the story of Lazarus (John 11). Who would have approached Lazarus and told him that Jesus was here to help him? “Come on Lazarus, if you just take the first step, then Jesus will do the rest.” Lazarus was dead. There is no response on his part until God does something. Jesus alone raised Lazarus to life; Lazarus was totally unable and unwilling to do anything.

Preaching to Dry Bones – Eph 2:1-3 does not exist in a vacuum. It comes on the heels of all that Eph 1 declared and will be followed with the first two words of Eph 2:4, “*But God...*” You were hopeless. “*But God...*” You were helpless. “*But God....*” You did not want life, you did not want God, you did not want repentance. “*But God...*” The story of Ezekiel preaching to dry bones reveals the power of God (Ezek 37). But it does not reveal the power of God to help those who have some problems and need help. It reveals the power of God to bring life to the dead.