

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, March 5, 2025 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

T H E B O O K O F

EPHESIANS

How to live the Christian life

EPHESIANS: HOW TO LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE – PART 8
“The Deadly Power of Sin” - Ephesians 2:1-3

“¹And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³ among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.” – Ephesians 2:1-3 (NKJV)

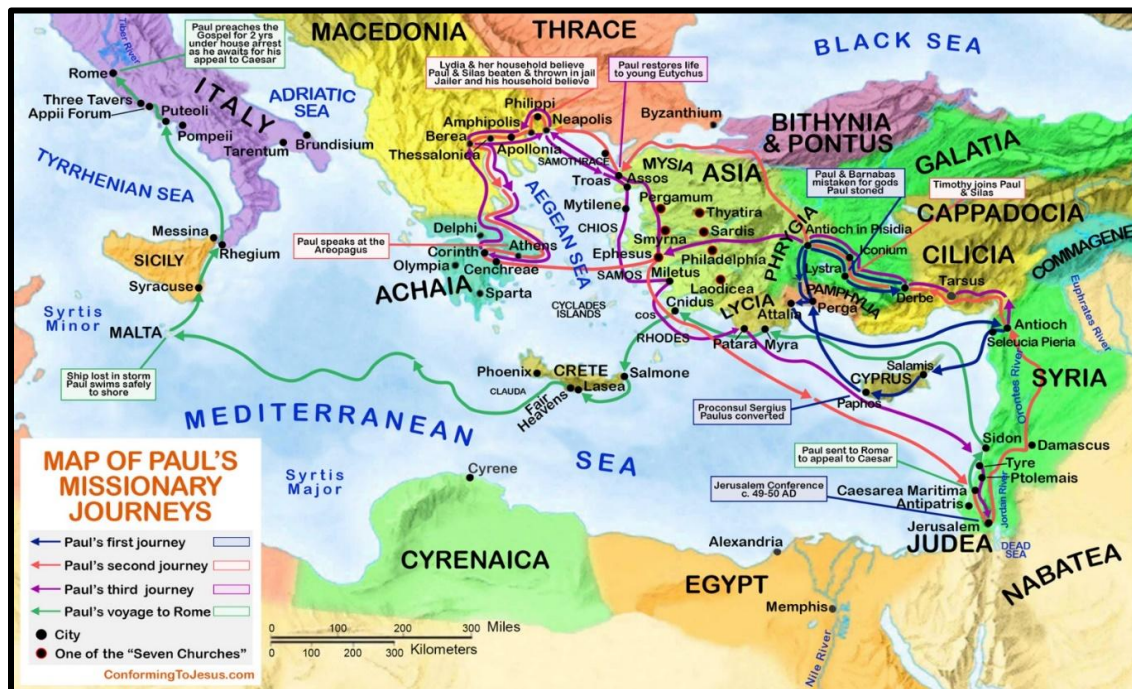
If you could buy a book that contained a concentration of a lifetime of thinking and experience on spiritual matters by one of the greatest Christian leaders of all time, would you do it? Would you read it and study it and try to plumb the depths of its wisdom? What about if you could read aloud all six chapters of the book in only 19 minutes? I’m speaking about Paul’s letter to the Ephesians.

- Even though Ephesians is so short, **Martyn Lloyd-Jones**’ exposition of it takes eight volumes! He has 37 messages on chapter 1 alone!
- **John Calvin**’s 48 sermons on Ephesians take up 705 pages.
- The **Puritan William Gurnall** in *The Christian in Complete Armor* takes almost 1,200 pages to expound on Ephesians 6:10-20!

So there is far more depth in this short epistle than I can begin to understand or apply to my own life, much less to expound on. So as we come to it, we must pray with the apostle Paul (Ephesians 1:17-19), ... *“¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, ¹⁸ the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the exceeding*

greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power.”

- The English poet, Samuel Coleridge, said that “Ephesians is the divinest composition of man.”
- Another writer refers to it as, “Ephesians is the Grand Canyon of Scripture, because it is breathtakingly beautiful and apparently inexhaustible to the one who wants to take it in” (cited by, James Boice, *Ephesians* [Baker], p. 1).
- Martyn Lloyd-Jones calls Ephesians “Ephesians is the sublimest and the most majestic expression of the gospel.” (*God’s Ultimate Purpose* [Baker], p. 12).



KEY BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR EPHESIANS

To gain a better understanding of the Book of Ephesians, consider the following background information:

1. **Authorship: The Apostle Paul** - Traditionally attributed to the Apostle Paul.
2. **Date of Writing: A.D. 60-63** - Likely written around A.D. 60-63 during Paul's Roman imprisonment.
3. **Place of writing: Rome** – Paul wrote the book/letter of Ephesians from a Roman prison
4. **Audience: Ephesian Christians at Ephesus and surrounding area** Addressed to the Christian community in Ephesus, a major city in Asia Minor. Ephesians is considered a “circular letter” meant to be circulated to church in the area of Ephesus... possibly the same 7 churches
5. **Purpose: How to live the Christian life** To strengthen the faith of believers and address issues of unity and spiritual maturity.

6. **Themes: Grace, the church, and holy living** - Key themes include grace, the church as the body of Christ, and the importance of living a holy life.
7. **Structure: Ephesus is divided into two main sections** - Divided into two main sections: doctrinal teachings (chapters 1-3) and practical applications (chapters 4-6).
8. **Cultural Context: Ephesus was center of commerce and religion** - Ephesus was a center of commerce and religion, known for the Temple of Artemis.
9. **Significance: Mystery of the gospel and inclusion of Gentiles** - Emphasizes the mystery of the Gospel and the inclusion of Gentiles in God's plan.
10. **Spiritual Warfare: Ephesians' emphasis on the spiritual battle** Concludes with a call to spiritual readiness and the armor of God (chapter 6).

“¹And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ²in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others..” – Ephesians 2:1-3 (NKJV)

Application Questions

1. **Why is it important to affirm that unbelievers are totally unable to believe in Christ unless God imparts new life to them?**
2. **What is the essence of “worldliness”? How do these three enemies, the world, the devil, and the flesh, assert themselves in the lives of believers?**
3. **Some argue that believers no longer possess “an old nature,” and thus should not view themselves as sinners. Do you agree?**
4. **Why must we hold firmly to the concept of God’s wrath? What do we lose if we minimize or deny it?**

➡ The late Anglican bishop, **H.C.G. Moule**, wrote (*Ephesian Studies* [Christian Literature Crusade], p. 70), **“Never was there a heresy, but it had something to do with an insufficient estimate of sin.”** He was right...

What does an insufficient estimate of sin mean?

- (1) **An insufficient estimate of sin means Jesus died in vain** -
- (2) **An insufficient estimate of sin means that we do not need the radical solution of the cross** - Satan does all that he can to undermine the necessity of the cross. He works overtime to get us to ignore what the Puritans called, “the exceeding sinfulness of sin.”
- (3) **An insufficient estimate of sin means we fail to see ourselves and are self-deceived** -
- (4) **An insufficient estimate of sin means we remain in our sin, unforgiven** -
- (5) **An insufficient estimate of sin means we remain lost and separated from a Holy God**

Sadly, many modern churches that claim to be evangelical minimize sin. Some of them simply avoid the word, preferring to focus on more positive aspects of what they call “the gospel.”

- But there is no need for the gospel if people are not desperately, hopelessly alienated from God because of sin.
- Some of these churches swap the label on sin, referring to it with all sorts of psychobabble.

Some things to think about:

- (1) **The Father did not send Jesus Christ into this world to help us cope with our problems** – Now, certainly God enters our problems with us. He cares for us and is available to help us, but Jesus didn’t come into this world to just help us cope with our problems
- (2) **He did not put His Son on the cross to make us feel better about ourselves or to boost our self-esteem -**
- (3) **Christ came and offered Himself on the cross to deal with our most fundamental, pervasive, and eternally devastating problem, that our sins have made us objects of the wrath of the holy God -**

Some say that they don’t want to focus on the negatives, such as sin, but rather on the positives, such as God’s love and grace. But if we don’t understand the depths of sin from which God rescued us, we will not appreciate the riches of His grace and the magnitude of His love. As J. C. Ryle wrote (*Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* [Baker], on Luke 20:9-19, p. 326), “Christ is never fully valued until sin is clearly seen.”

And if we underestimate the deadly power of sin, we will surely fall prey to it. One of the greatest mistakes a general can make before going into battle is to underestimate the power of the enemy. If he thinks that the enemy is weak when they really are strong, his troops will not be prepared and will be routed. And so we must have an accurate, biblical view of our own sinfulness if we would have victory over sin.

Recap of Ephesians 1:

- In chapter 1, the apostle Paul begins with an extended exclamation of praise to God who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (1:3).
- He unfolds those blessings by showing that the Father chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (1:4-6).
- The Son redeemed us through His blood and made known to us the mystery of His will for the ages, the summing up of all things in Christ (1:7-12).
- And God sealed us with the Holy Spirit of promise (1:13-14).
- God graciously lavished these blessings upon us, all to the praise of the glory of His grace (1:6, 12, 14).

- Then (1:15-23) Paul shares his constant prayer for the Ephesians, that God might grant them a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.
- Especially, he prays that they might understand (1:18-19) *“what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.”* This mighty power of God is the same power that raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all authority and power. And He gave Christ as head over all things to the church, which is His body.

But Paul knew that we will never praise and glorify God as we should if we lose sight of the depths of sin from which He saved us. We will not be filled with gratitude for our salvation if we forget where we were and still would be if God had not reached down to us with His abundant grace. So in chapter 2 Paul shows what God has done for us individually (2:1-10) and corporately (2:11-22) in saving us from our sins. He follows the same pattern in both sections: our past (2:1-3, 11-12); our present (2:4-9, 13-18); and, our future (2:10, 19-22). In 2:1-3, Paul wants us to remember our past before the Lord rescued us from judgment, so that we will appreciate the riches of His grace. He shows that...

KEY TRUTH: All who are outside of Christ are spiritually dead, living under the power of the world, the devil, and the flesh, by nature under God’s wrath against sin.

Before we examine these verses, I want to say a word to those of you who like me grew up in the church. You may not have an outwardly sordid past. Perhaps like me, you’ve never been drunk. You’ve never used illegal drugs. You’ve not had multiple sex partners. You’ve lived an outwardly moral life. You may not have come to Christ because you saw that you were a wretch who needed saving, as John Newton put it (“Amazing Grace”).

In my spiritual experience, the dawning awareness of the wretched sinfulness of my heart did not come before salvation, but rather afterwards. As the light of God’s Word has shone more fully into the depths of my heart, I have grown to understand that it was only my outward circumstances of growing up in a Christian home that kept me from all manner of evil. If I had grown up in a pagan home with no moral training, I would have committed horrible sins, because my heart by nature is corrupt.

“¹And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³ among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.” – Ephesians 2:1-3 (NKJV)

In our text, Paul begins by describing the past sinfulness of the Gentile believers (“you,” 2:1). But lest the Jewish believers smugly think, “I’m glad that I’m a religious Jew who has

never done those terrible sins,” Paul includes himself and all Jews (“we too,” 2:3). His argument is much the same as in Romans 1-3, where he first indicts the Gentiles, but then shows that the religious Jews are equally guilty before God, concluding (Rom. 3:23), “*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*” So even if you have a relatively clean past, God wants you to see yourself in the mirror of **Ephesians 2:1-3**, so that you will be on guard against the deadly power of indwelling sin and so that you will thank God every day for saving you from the eternal consequences of sin. In the first three verses of chapter 2 of Ephesians gives at least 3 truths concerning the deadly power of sin and those who are outside of Christ...

3 Truths Concerning All Who Are Outside of Christ and the Deadly Power of Sin:

- (1) All who are outside of Christ are spiritually dead, walking in their trespasses and sins**
- (2) All who are outside of Christ live under the power of the world, the devil, and the flesh**
- (3) All who are outside of Christ are by nature under God’s wrath against sin**

Let’s look at these...

ALL WHO ARE OUTSIDE OF CHRIST ARE SPIRITUALLY DEAD, WALKING IN THEIR TRESPASSES AND SINS (Ephesians 2:1-2)

“¹And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.” – Ephesians 2:1-2 (NKJV)

“¹As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.” – Ephesians 2:1-2 (NIV)

“¹Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. ² You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God.” - Ephesians 2:1-2 (NLT)

“¹And 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—.” -Ephesians 2:1-2 (ESV)

“¹And you were dead in your offenses and sins, ² in which you previously walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.” -Ephesians 2:1-2 (NASB)

For some reason, the translators of the King James and New King James Version added the words (in 2:1), “*He made alive.*” Paul will state that wonderful truth in 2:5, but his point in these opening verses is to emphasize our woeful spiritual condition before God made us alive. He wants us to feel the desperate situation that we were in (2:1-2a), “*And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked....*”

The truth that we are spiritually dead before God saved us is a watershed in one’s theology of salvation. Those who deny God’s sovereignty in our salvation have to redefine what it means to be spiritually dead. Above all else, they want to avoid the conclusion that it implies inability, because if sinners are spiritually unable to believe the gospel, then salvation must be totally of God and not at all due to man’s free choice to believe. So they argue that spiritual death only means being separated from God. It does not imply the inability to respond in faith and repentance to the gospel (Norman Geisler, *Chosen But Free* [Bethany House], second edition, p. 57-67, argues for this; for an excellent refutation of Geisler, see James R. White, *The Potter’s Freedom* [Calvary Press], especially pp. 91-120).

What does it mean to be spiritually dead?

(1) To be spiritually dead means to be separated or alienated from God - It is true that spiritual death includes being separated or alienated from God. But the very picture of being dead and the need for God to impart new life strongly implies a lack of ability on the part of the dead sinner to do anything to effect his own resurrection. When Jesus cried out (John 11:43), “Lazarus, come forth,” Lazarus didn’t exercise his free will to come back from the dead! He arose because Jesus imparted life to him. That miracle was a picture of what Jesus had said earlier of spiritual life (John 5:21), “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes.” The only “free will” that Jesus mentions there is *His own will* to give life to whom *He* wishes.

Jesus also stated the inability of sinners to come to Him. In John 6:44, Jesus said, “*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.*” In case we missed it, Jesus repeats (John 6:65), “*For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.*” The words, “*no one can,*” in those two verses means that they are *unable* to come apart from God’s powerful intervention. They are spiritually dead until God imparts new life.

In John 8:43, while contending with the obstinate Jews, Jesus said, “Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word.” Obviously, they could hear Jesus’ voice. They weren’t physically deaf. But their spiritual deafness meant that they were *incapable* of hearing Jesus’ words in the sense of responding favorably to them.

Of course the apostle Paul lined up with the Lord Jesus on this same point. After stating that the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing (1 Cor. 1:18), he went on to explain (1 Cor. 2:14), *“But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”* He did not say that the natural man chooses not to understand spiritual truth, but rather that he *cannot* do so. He lacks the capacity because his foolish heart is darkened by sin (Rom. 1:21; Eph. 4:18).

Using the analogy of blindness rather than death, Paul states of those who are perishing (2 Cor. 4:4), *“in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”* Blind people do not have free will to see. Rather, they are incapable of seeing.

So spiritual death includes being separated from the holy God because of our sin, but there is more...

- (2) **To be spiritually dead means to be spiritually incapable of responding favorably to the truth of the gospel unless God raises us from spiritual death to the spiritual life** - Paul adds that the sphere in which these Gentile believers were dead was *“your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked.”* *Trespasses* and *sins* are essentially synonymous when used as plurals (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* [Eerdmans], p. 280). Paul seems to use both words and to add that we *walked* in them to emphasize that our entire way of life before God saved us was one of repeated, perpetual disobedience to God.

This is further underscored by the description of unbelievers as “sons of disobedience” (2:2). “Sons of” is a Hebrew expression that means, “characterized by.” To pick one word to describe those who are spiritually dead, they are *disobedient* toward God. They may be moral, law-abiding, decent people, humanly speaking. But in their hearts, they are not in submission to God. As Paul sums up the depravity of the human race (Rom. 3:18), “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Note also that Paul says that the Ephesians *formerly* walked in their trespasses and sins. While believers do sin, it cannot be said of them that they walk in sin and are characterized by a life of sin. As 1 John 3:9 states, “No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.” If you profess to be born again but continue to live in sin, you need to examine whether you are truly born of God. Walking in sin characterizes the person who is spiritually dead.

- ➡ Puritan, John Owen famously warns Christians, *“Be killing sin or it will be killing you.”* His book *The Mortification of Sin* is an exposition of Romans 8:13, *“For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will*

live.” Though Christians cannot eliminate sin in this life, Owen encourages us to diligently fight sinful desires and put them to death. What is the shovel we use to attack our sin? Owen gives us nine practical directives...

John Owen’s 9 Instructions for Killing Sin:

- (1) **Diagnose sin’s severity** - When a person has struggled with a sin for a long time, it’ll be more difficult to kill. This is especially the case if there have been long seasons when that person has indulged the sin rather than actively trying to kill it. Making excuses, justifying sinful behavior, or too quickly applying grace and mercy to a sin also contribute to the sin’s severity and lead to a hardened heart and conscience. Consider such factors when diagnosing a sin’s severity, because a more severe struggle calls for more focused effort in mortification.
- (2) **Grasp sin’s serious consequences** - Even for the Christian, who has been declared righteous positionally, sin remains dangerous. Owen outlines **four dangers sin poses for the believer:**

4 Dangers Sin Poses for the Believer:

- (1) **Being hardened by sin’s deceitfulness**
- (2) **God’s temporal discipline**
- (3) **Losing peace and strength**
- (4) **The danger of eternal destruction** - that by continuing in sin, one may prove he was never truly converted.

A Christian’s sin grieves the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:25–30), wounds the Lord Jesus (Heb. 6:6), and can cause a Christian to lose his or her usefulness for ministry.

- (3) **Be convinced of your guilt** - We understand guilt through the law and the gospel. **“Bring the holy law of God into thy conscience,”** Owen writes, **“lay thy corruption to it, pray that thou mayst be affected with it.”** Meditate on biblical commands that speak to sin’s sinfulness then also consider your sin in light of the cross. Ask yourself, “Why have I gone on sinning when I’ve been shown such grace and mercy? How can I show such contempt?”
- (4) **Earnestly desire deliverance** - Knowing your great guilt, you can long for deliverance from sin. Why is this important? Because “longing, breathing, and panting after deliverance is a grace in itself, that hath a mighty power to conform the soul into the likeness of the thing longed after.” Indeed, according to Owen, **“unless thou longest for deliverance thou shalt not have it.”**
- (5) **Consider the relationship between your sins and your natural temperament** - Each person has a unique temperament and nature that makes certain sins harder to kill. Owen reminds us, **“A proneness to some sins may doubtless lie in the natural temper and disposition of men.”** We are not less guilty for committing the sins to which we’re prone, but when we know ourselves, we know the areas of our lives where greater self-discipline is necessary (1 Cor. 9:27).

- (6) **Avoid occasions that incite sin** - Consider the circumstances that attend your falling into sin, and guard yourself from them. “Know that he that dares to dally with occasions of sin will dare to sin,” says Owen. If we want to stop sinning, we must avoid the slippery places that occasion our falls.
- (7) **Address sin’s first signs** – Owens writes, “We’ll be most effective in putting sin to death when we rise mightily against the first actings” of our sinful desires. It’s hard to stop water once it bursts into a flood. So too it’s hard to stop sin if we allow our desire for it to grow.
- (8) **Meditate on God’s glory** - We must not let it gain ground. Instead, we must turn from our sin to “the excellency of the majesty of God.” When we see God’s glory, we’ll see our sin’s ugliness in contrast. Owen says it’s especially helpful to consider how much of God’s greatness we don’t know: “It is but a little portion we know of him.” It’s hard for sin to flourish in a heart filled with a sense of God’s majesty.
- (9) **Don’t rush to comfort yourself** - Owen’s final instruction comes in the form of a caution. Though we may experience guilt and conviction over sin, we shouldn’t assume the sin is defeated. Sin is deceitful, and it can trick us into thinking we’ve dealt with it decisively when we have not. Owen warns us not to speak peace to ourselves before God speaks it (Jer. 6:14), but rather to “examine [ourselves], to see whether [we] are in the faith” (2 Cor. 13:5). He warns we may console ourselves falsely if we treat the process of repentance lightly, don’t show concern for other sins, or if our consolation “is not attended with the greatest detestation imaginable of that sin in reference.”

Sin is like an aggressive snake. If we don’t proactively attack sin, it will prove deadly. Thankfully, we aren’t alone in the fight. The power to kill sin comes from Christ through the Holy Spirit. As we focus on snuffing out sin, we must also draw near to the throne of grace. It’s there we’ll find grace to help in our time of need (Heb. 4:16). Effort is necessary, but as Owen says, “Mortification of any sin must be by a supply of grace. Of our selves we cannot do it.”

ALL WHO ARE OUTSIDE OF CHRIST LIVE UNDER THE POWER OF THE WORLD, THE DEVIL, AND THE FLESH.

“¹And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³ among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.” – Ephesians 2:1-3 (NKJV)

Who and what controls those outside of Christ?

- (1) **All who are outside of Christ live under the power of the world** - Paul says that these Gentiles “*formerly walked according to the course [lit., “age”] of this world.*” This is a unique phrase that seems to call attention to the transitory nature of this present evil

world, in contrast to the eternal, heavenly future of the believer. **"The world"** is the organized system under the control of Satan that is opposed to God. The main operating principle of the world system is two fold...

2 fold operating principle of the current world system:

1. **Self-seeking** – It's all about me, me, me! My wants, my wishes, my desires.
2. **Independence from God** – A denial of God, a rejection of God. The world creates their own gods that suit their own whims.

If we can use God to achieve our selfish goals, so be it. But man is on the throne. The apostle John strongly warns (1 John 2:15-17), **"Do not love the world nor 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 lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever."**

Sometimes in the attempt to escape from the corrupting influence of the world, believers have withdrawn into monasteries or cloistered communities.

What is wrong with this and why doesn't this work?

But Jesus prayed for His disciples (John 17:15-18), **"I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world."**

- The Lord wants us to live in the world, but to be distinct from it because we live in light of His Word of truth.
- Those outside of Christ live for this present evil world, because it is all they have.
- They may believe in heaven, but not enough to live in light of it.
- They may believe in hell, but they figure that only the worst of the worst will go there.
- But their focus is on how to get ahead in this world.
- They have no thought of laying up treasures in heaven nor of seeking first God's kingdom.

- (2) **All who are outside of Christ live under the power of the devil** - Paul says that they formerly lived **"according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience."** He is referring to Satan, who is over all of the fallen angels (demons) who followed him in his rebellion against God. Paul refers to him as the prince of the power of the air to show that these spiritual powers are both invisible and powerful. He later calls them (6:12) **"the world forces of this darkness ..., the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."**

It's one thing to fight an enemy that you can see. But it's a whole different battle to fight a powerful, unseen enemy! "Sophisticated" modern man scoffs at the notion that such

unseen spiritual powers exist. Yet everyone accepts the existence of unseen radio waves, microwaves, and X-rays that travel through the air.

We cannot see them, but we can see their effects. It is the same with demonic power. We cannot usually see demons, but we can see the results of their evil power.

Paul is not saying that all unbelievers are demon-possessed. But he is saying that Satan and his evil forces actively work in this world through unbelievers. In most cases they are oblivious to it. They go about their lives without much thought about it, except perhaps at Halloween. But worldly people are actually in Satan's domain of darkness (Col. 1:13). By living independently of God, with no fear of God in their hearts, they are inadvertently furthering Satan's evil plans to usurp God's sovereignty.

(3) All who are outside of Christ live under the power of the flesh - Lest religious people exclude themselves from this indictment of the sinfulness of the human race, Paul adds (2:3), "Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, ..." *We too* refers to religious Jews, including Paul. "The flesh" refers to "human nature as conditioned by the fall" (Moule, p. 72). In Galatians 5, Paul sets the desires and deeds of the flesh against power and fruit of the indwelling Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16-23). This shows that although believers have been delivered from the dominating power of the flesh, we still must do battle against it by walking in the power of the Holy Spirit. But unbelievers are totally dominated by the desires of the flesh. In Romans 8:6-8, Paul states, "For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 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." Note, again, the emphasis on inability. Unbelievers, who do not have the indwelling Holy Spirit, have only one option: they live to gratify the flesh. This includes, of course, sensual desires and living according to what feels good at the moment. But it also includes what Paul here calls the desires of the mind. This includes such sins as pride and selfish ambition. His point is that before God saved us, even those of us who were religious lived to gratify selfish desires, whether physical or intellectual. Thus, all who are outside of Christ are spiritually dead, walking in trespasses and sins. They also live under the power of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

ALL WHO ARE OUTSIDE OF CHRIST ARE BY NATURE UNDER GOD'S WRATH AGAINST SIN

"¹And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³ among whom also we all once conducted

ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.” – Ephesians 2:1-3 (NKJV)

Paul goes even deeper in analyzing the condition of man apart from God. The problem is not just behavior or even thoughts, but our basic nature. Of the religious Jews, Paul states that they were *“by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.”* When Adam sinned, the entire human race was plunged into sin (Rom. 5:12-21). This means that we are not sinners because we sin; rather, we sin because we are by nature sinners. We are born alienated from God, in rebellion against Him.

- This is why unbelievers cannot exercise their “free will” to believe the gospel
- They do not have a nature that is inclined toward God.
- They may dress up their old nature with good works, but it’s like dressing a pig in a tuxedo.
- He may look nice for a short while, but his nature will drive him back to wallowing in the mud. To change the pig, you’ve got to change his basic nature!

Paul says that those apart from Christ are *“by nature children of wrath.”* This Hebrew expression means that they are characterized by being under God’s holy wrath against sin. While modern man scoffs at the notion of God’s wrath, it is a concept that occurs hundreds of times in both the Old and New Testaments, especially in the final book of the Bible, Revelation. It refers to God’s holy, settled hatred against all sin that will result in His final, eternal judgment against all sinners, casting them into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11-15). John 3:36 states, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

CONCLUSION

I realize that this is a rather negative, depressing message, but I believe that Paul wants us to gather around the edge of the cesspool of what we once were so that we won’t forget it. He wants us to remember our former condition so that we will appreciate what he goes on to proclaim (Eph. 2:4-5), *“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)...”*

I leave you with this question... In answer to Paul’s grim statement about the deadly power of sin there is a “but God!”

5 Elements of the Good News of the “But Gods” to Your Sin:

- (1) But God is rich in mercy**
- (2) But God has great love for us**
- (3) But God in spite of our being dead in trespasses and sins**
- (4) But God made us alive with Christ**
- (5) But God saved us by grace**

Is there a “*but God*” in your life?

As you look at this gruesome portrait of the deadly power of sin, can you say, “Yes, that describes what I once was! But God by His grace broke into my life and made me alive together with Christ!” If so, let it flood you with thankfulness for His abundant grace!