

Series on the Book of Ephesians
Ephesians 2:1-3
Sermon #17
September 25, 1988

THE NATURAL MAN
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I am sure that all of us are familiar with this passage in Ephesians chapter two which has been read for us, especially the latter part. When we get down to verses 8 and 9 we come to two verses that are very familiar, don't we? "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." As you look at those ten verses you see that there is a marked contrast between verses 1, 2, and 3 as compared with verses 4 through 10 because in verses 1, 2, and 3, Paul was basically describing what we all were before we came to the knowledge of Christ as Saviour. Then the words "but God" in verse 4 show introduce that passage which tells us the place, position and blessings that we have now because we are in Christ and because God in His mercy has seen fit to intervene in our lives.

We have just completed chapter 1 and I am sure that you would agree with me if I say that in chapter 1 Paul was inviting us by his teaching and by his praying to enter into heavenly places with him as he contemplated what the Lord has done for all of us in salvation. That is especially true of verses three through 14. He introduced that section by saying that "He has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." He has blessed all of us the same way, with the same blessings. One is not more redeemed than another is and one is not more forgiven than another is. The blessings are ours. They are all ours. They belong to all of us because of our relationship to Christ. When he begins his prayer from verse 15 to the end of the chapter, then he is talking about some of the things that God still needs to do in our lives, and basically some things that we need to know about these blessings that we have in Christ. That is one of the wonderful things about these spiritual blessings. You do not have to know in detail what they are in order to possess them and in order to benefit from them; but if you really want to enjoy them and know the depth and fullness of what God has done for us through the Lord Jesus Christ, then we need to know what is the hope of our calling and what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, and all of the things that were so much upon the heart of the Apostle Paul as he prayed for the Ephesian church. You and I need those things just as much as the believers in the Ephesian church needed them.

Now, as I pointed out to you many times, in the original copies of the Book of Ephesians, and this would apply to any book in the Bible, the books were not divided into chapters and verses. It would just flow from one to another so that as Paul wrote he did not come to verse 23 and say, "Well now, I am through with that and I will go to something else." But chapter two is a continuation of chapter one. I think sometimes we fail to see the connection because we come to that chapter two and we realize that we are starting over with verse one and verse two and verse three; so in our minds we are inclined just to set aside, perhaps, what we have read in chapter one and not tie it in with chapter two. That is one of the beauties of reading a book over and over again and going through it as we are seeking to go through it on Sunday morning so that we can see the whole thing together.

If you have a copy of the King James Version which uses italics, I want to say just a word about that in connection with the first verse because, if you do, and I do not happen to have one with italics this morning (but I do at home), you will see that the three words "hath he quickened" are in italics. In the present day printing, when you put something in italics, you do it for the sake of emphasis. When you are typing why if you want to indicate that something is in italics you underline it, because it is emphasized; but that is not the case as far as the King James Version of the Bible is concerned. They put words in italics which were not there in the original manuscript, but they add them in order to complete the thought and to give the idea which they feel the Apostle Paul in this instance was

trying to get across to them. So if you were to see this in the original Greek manuscripts which we have, you would see that it reads like this: "And you who were dead in trespasses and sins: Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world..." You see, verse one would really be lacking a verb so that is the reason they say "You he has quickened who formerly were dead in trespasses and sins." That expression "quickened" is found in verse 5 where he says, "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ..." I am not questioning the thought and I am certainly not questioning the truth. We were dead in trespasses and sins, and, as a result of what Christ has done in our hearts we have been quickened. We have been made alive. But I want you to see, this morning, a possible way in which we could leave out those three words "hath he quickened" and tie this in with chapter 1 so that the force of this statement could really be impressed upon our hearts, because, just as there is a real contrast between verses 3 and 4, there is a real contrast between the end of chapter 1 and the beginning of chapter 2. I do not think that Paul was turning to another subject. I think that Paul wants us to see even more the marvel of God's mercy and the marvel of God's grace in redeeming us. So I am going to leave out those three words "hath he quickened." I want you to know that I am not leaving out something that Paul originally wrote in there.

I want to suggest another change.

Those of you who have studied the original language know that there are times when the little conjunction "and" can be translated very legitimately "even". It seems to me that this may have been in the mind of the Apostle Paul as he was writing this second chapter so that, being very connected with what Paul wrote and not taking any liberties at all, I am going to suggest that we could translate it this way: "even you who were dead in trespasses and sins: Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world..." Now, if I connect this with the end of chapter 2, and let me do that, you will see that at the end of chapter 2 he has been mentioning the fact that Christ is "the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all. Even you who were dead in trespasses and sins." You see, what he is saying about us as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ: We are part of the church. We are the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. You might think that if we are so related to Christ that we are members of His body, we are that intimately related to the Lord Jesus Christ, that we are members of His body--and being members of His body we are the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. That is, we are the manifestation on earth of the fullness that dwells in our Lord Jesus Christ. People are not able to see the full display, of course, of that glory and He is not saying that we have become deity; but God manifests Himself through His people. Paul was writing about the same time to the Colossian church, you remember that he said, "In him (Christ) dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And you are complete (made full) in him" (Col. 2:9), which is identically what he is saying here. We are the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. As I indicated to you last Sunday morning, I have an idea what that means, but I do not know that anybody can do justice to what the Apostle Paul was saying because it goes so far beyond what you and I are really able to comprehend that we just have to be satisfied as the Lord leads us a little bit more and a little bit more to an understanding of that truth.

This is the connection I want you to see. You would think that since we are the church, we are intimately related to Jesus Christ, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all, that we certainly must be a brand of people that are above everybody else. That is a tremendous position to have, isn't it? You and I would not dare make a claim like that unless we could see a basis for it in Scripture. I am a member of the body of Christ. You are a member of the body of Christ. As members of His body we will never be separated from Him. We have that intimate relationship to Him. But, if I am inclined to think or if you are inclined to think that I am in the body and you are in the body because we are a little bit better than other people who today are not in the body of Christ, we are sadly mistaken about ourselves, aren't we? Here, you see, he has been taking us to the heavenlies. He has been telling us about some of these spiritual blessings that we have in Christ. He does not include all of them. He has been showing how he was praying for these Ephesian believers that they would come to know and understand their destiny. They would understand the wonderful resources that

they have in Christ. He comes to speak of the fact that we are members of His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all; but, in order that we might be prepared for what he is going to say in verse 4, "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)" (vv. 4, 5). In order to prepare us for that he wants us to see that we who are members of the body of Christ in our natural condition were no different from the people who today are not in the body of Christ. He has made us, even we who were dead in trespasses and sins: Who walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now energizes the children of disobedience, Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past (that is, we were one of them) in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as everybody else. That is what "even as others" means. You see, he is saying here that you do not owe your salvation to anything good that God has seen in you. You may have been working hard to prove that you are worthy of God's blessing, but that does not amount to anything. All of your righteousnesses, all of my righteousnesses outside of Christ, the righteous things that I do are as filthy rags in the sight of God. The only reason that God could save me and the only reason that He could save you is because He is a God of mercy and He is a God of grace and because He sent His Son to die for our sins. We needed cleansing just as much as anybody in the world and maybe there are some of us here today who needed it a lot more than the average person in the world. But God has put us in the body of Christ. We are the fullness of Him that filleth all in all.

This is not a very good picture that we have here. This is the Apostle Paul's portrait of the natural man. The natural man is Paul's statement in Corinthians for a person who is without Christ. We would say that it is a person who is not a Christian, a person who is not a child of God. Here he is painting this picture with words to show us what we used to be and what marvelous changes God has made in our lives and had to make in our lives before we could become a part of the body of Christ.

We are looking here at a passage of Scripture in which Paul mentions four particular things. I want to point those out. I just really have time to say only a few words about each one of them.

First of all, he says that we "were dead in trespasses and sins." I like the statement. I have a set in my library, and perhaps some of you do to, called The Expositors Greek Testament, and different men have written on different books in the New Testament. A man by the name of Dr. Salmond, and I do not know who he was but he has done some excellent work--he is the one who wrote on the Book of Ephesians. He says this very important thing about that word "dead". He says, "the word dead means neither dying nor mortal, which means subject to death, nor yet again condemned to death. It means death." You are not going to die. You are not condemned to die. You are not in the process of dying. You are dead. That is what the Word of God has to say about every person outside of Christ. Dead means without life--lifeless. Paul, of course, was not talking about physical death, because we know that people who are not Christians are very much alive. He was talking about people who were alive physically, but dead spiritually. Dead as far as any relationship to God was concerned. Death always means separation, doesn't it? When a human body is dead we know that the soul has departed from the body. There is a separation. The soul is gone. The body is dead. A person is spiritually dead because he is separated from God. God is not in all his thoughts. He does not have the capacity for fellowship with God, nor does he have the desire for fellowship with God. He not only does not love God, he is incapable of loving God. He is a rebel against God because he will always prefer his will against the will of God. His rebellion may be very respectable because there are many respectable and fine people from a human standpoint who are not Christians, but it is rebellion nevertheless. Spiritual death is not only the result of our sins, we are dead in trespasses and sins, but it shows itself in trespasses and sins. Our trespasses and sins are really the outward manifestation of the spiritual death which is within us. We sin in practice because we are sinners by nature and our sins have separated us from God and from the life that is in God. That is the reason that the Bible says that if we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ we have everlasting life.

We are made alive. We are quickened through our relationship to Jesus Christ.

Now, if we are going to distinguish between trespasses and sins, and there are times when these words are used interchangeably and Paul could have used these just to speak of all kinds of sins under every condition, but I am going to suggest that since a trespass means a stepping over and violating something that you know is right, whereas the words sins that he uses here is, as you doubtless have heard, a missing of the mark; on the one hand you have a sin that you commit; and on the other hand you are guilty of sin because you failed to do something. You omit something that you ought to do. We call them sins of omission and sins of commission. So, here the Apostle Paul is saying that we were dead in our sins because there were many things that we have done that God did not want us to do and there were other things that we have not done that we ought to have done. These have separated us from God.

Now, the picture is not complete. Let's look at the second thing that he has to say. He talks about our former way of life. He uses the word "walk". You need to be acquainted with this word "walk" if you are going to understand the Book of Ephesians because this is a word which the Apostle Paul is referring to both with those who do not know the Lord and those who do know the Lord. Those who do not know the Lord walk in a certain way; they live in a certain way; they have certain habits of life. But those who know the Lord have another way of life. Here he is talking about the way we used to live. We used to walk according to the course of this world. The word "course" is the word "age or ages". So that if we were to translate it literally, we would say that we walked according to the age of this world. That does not mean a great deal to us, does it, until we recognize that the word "age" is often used of a period of time. The age of this world would perhaps be a synonym for the times in which we live. The person who is not a Christian adapts himself to the things that are going on in the world and the things that the world is doing.

There was a Christian organization working with young people, I think it is still in existence but not quite as active as it used to be, that used to have the slogan "geared to the times; anchored to the rock." Paul would say, "it is impossible to do that." If you are geared to the times, you are not anchored to the Rock; and if you are anchored to the Rock which is Christ Jesus, you are not going to be geared to the times. You are walking according to a different pattern. Paul says, "there was a day in my life when I was geared to the times, when I was doing what the world was. I was living to have the world's approval. That is what I chose to do. But, when I came to Jesus Christ my walk was different. But I walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air." This is a title that the Word of God gives to the devil. He is the prince of the power of the air because he was, you know, we have been talking about those principalities and powers in heavenly places, and I have said that there are good principalities and powers and there are evil principalities and powers. Here is this prince who exercises authority over these heavenly beings and he is the spirit, the person who is now at work in all of the sons of disobedience. When he speaks of the sons of disobedience he is characterizing the people who are without God and he is showing us that behind what every unbeliever does you have three forces, and they are all mentioned here in verses 1 and 2. In verse 1 you have the flesh, this old nature that makes me do things that are displeasing to God and omit things that are pleasing to Him. I am walking according to this world, geared to the times. The prince of the power of the air is the one who energized me and encouraged me and saw to it that I did things that were displeasing to God and I had no time for the things that were pleasing to Him. So, as he builds this picture of the natural man you become aware of the fact that though the natural man is doing what he wants to do and he is following the pattern that is set by the world, yet at the same time he is in bondage to these powers that are greater than he is and he cannot set himself free. Paul was giving us a picture here of the total depravity of the human heart. When you understand these words you can see that there is not the slightest possibility that any man, any woman, any boy, any girl, could ever contribute in any way to his own salvation. Our condition is absolutely hopeless because we are helpless, caught in the grips of these powers within us and without us that are far too great for us.

The third thing that he says, and here he is talking about our allies, our companions. "Among whom also we all had our conversation." The word "conversation" here means the same as a walk, your manner of life. We all, among these children of disobedience, our way of living in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind. You see, Paul is just eliminating any thinking in people's mind that God has chosen me or God has chosen that other person because he is just a little bit better than anybody else. Paul puts us all in that same category: not as to the sins that we have committed, but as to the condition that we are in. The capability is there in every one of our hearts to commit any sin that anybody else is capable of committing. If you have not committed a lot of sins that other people have committed, you thank God that He has kept you from doing them, because you have the capacity and all you need are the right circumstances and you would be just as bad in your behavior as anybody else. But, you see, we feel perfectly at home in our unregenerate state among those who are living in disobedience to God. In our natural state we do not have any place for God and they do not have any place for God. So he does not enjoy being with the people of God. He likes to be with these sons of disobedience who live according to the desires of their flesh.

Lusts of the flesh can mean sins of immorality of all kinds, but lust of the flesh means that the natural man lives the way he wants to live. He is satisfying his own desires. He is not concerned about what God wants, he is concerned about what he wants. So his interest often is in things and accumulating things because he mistakenly feels that his life consists in the abundance of things which he possesses. The more he has why the happier he is going to be. So he is constantly fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind. This word "mind" is a very interesting word because it means the way you think. He has a certain way of thinking. You remember our verse that you have heard from me so often? God says that His ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts. You see, the natural man is not concerned about God's thoughts. He is not concerned about the Word of God. He is not going to make His way to the assembling of God's people so that He can hear the Scriptures taught. He has his own way of thinking and it is diametrically opposed to the way God think. So he is going to take his own way rather than God's way.

Twice in the Book of Proverbs Solomon says that there is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. The most disastrous thing that a person can do is to go the way that he thinks he ought to go, unless his mind and heart has been enlightened by the Word of God and he sees that he needs to go God's way.

So, he is fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and the Apostle Paul says, "and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

Paul spent all of the first chapter showing us how we because we are in Christ and because we have been made alive to God, love Him and want to please Him and we are under His favor, under His blessing. He has blessed us with all these spiritual blessings. But, you know, it has not always been true with us. Before we were the children of wrath. He uses a word here for children to indicate that we were born this way. We are the techna of God's wrath, born under judgment just like everyone else--"even as others" as this third verse concludes. We did not become sinners when we committed our first sin; we were born sinners. That is what he is saying here. A sinful nature is ours because it has come to us by natural descent. My parents were sinners. My grandparents were sinners. My great-grandparents were sinners. And, by personal inheritance, that is one thing that we pass on to our children. I am sorry I could not do any better for our family. We are under the wrath of God. We are condemned to eternal death. We are on our way to hell and we deserve to be in hell. The natural man has an impossible task in trying to believe this, doesn't he? He does not like to hear about hell. He does not like to hear about judgment of God. He does not like to be told that there is not anything that he can do that is pleasing to God. He may even deny that there is such a place as hell. This is when he will even say, if he does believe in God, that God is too good to send anybody to hell. You see, it is just because they do not think God's thoughts. They do not understand the issues. They have never seen the utter holiness and righteousness and majesty and

glory of God. Nor have they seen the awful depravity and sinfulness and corruption of the human heart. Remember that man without Christ does not think rightly about God and he does not think rightly about the ways of God. He thinks that he is right when he is dead wrong, and to be wrong here is to be wrong forever. So, my friend, if you are here this morning and Jesus Christ is not your Saviour, I would not be telling you the truth if I did not tell you that you where you sit are dead in your trespasses and sins, separated from God and under divine wrath, destined for eternal judgment.

Paul wrote to the Thessalonian church that someday the Lord is going to come "in flaming fire taking vengeance upon them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power" (2 Thess. 1:8).

We are living in a day, as you all know, perhaps some of you know this even better than I, when we are hearing a great deal about self-esteem. People who are having emotional troubles and perhaps a guilty conscience about things they have done may go to some kind of a counsellor who will tell them that they are suffering from low self-esteem. What is the meaning of the word "esteem"? Well, I have given you some grammar lessons this morning, as far as the Bible is concerned. You can see that the word "esteem" is related to the word estimate or estimation. So when people say that we have low self-esteem they mean that we are not rating ourselves high enough. You are better than you think you are. When the truth is that you are worse than you are. The person who supposedly has low-esteem is the person whose pride has suffered because he has seen some things in his heart, in his life, that he does not like to recognize belong to him. Perhaps he did not believe that he could really do some of the things that he has done, bad things that he has done, and he would like to get away from it. So, a human counsellor who is thinking about things the way man thinks will try to eliminate that by saying, "you just need to rate yourself a little bit higher than you do because you are not that bad, you have tremendous potential, and if you will only realize your potential why you will get rid of all these guilt feelings." It is nonsense, isn't it? When we get through with Paul's description we are going to see that unless our ideas about ourselves have been determined by the Word of God we are not low enough. Maybe I should say about those of us who are Christians that our estimation of ourselves is perhaps a little bit too high. Consequently, we do not like what we see. The person who has started to see his own badness is a person who is on the right way if he takes God's answer for his sins. It is always a healthy thing, and, you know, more than once when people have come to me and have poured out all their difficulties and are beginning to realize that they are sinners and that they are not as good as they thought they were, you know, I just kind of take a little enjoyment in saying, "well, you know, you really have not seen the bottom of it yet." I doubt if any of us has. If we could really see what our hearts are like, the potential for wickedness that is still in us though we belong to Jesus Christ and we have a new life and a new nature, yet we all know that it is still possible for us to sin: either doing things that are displeasing to God or failing to do things that we ought to do.

I do not want to leave you there this morning. I am through with my text, at least for this time, and I hope you understand a little bit more about it because Paul has really given us a concise picture of your heart and my heart before we were saved and the hearts of all the people of the world regardless of whatever generation or whatever nation people might come from. This is God's portrait of the natural man, the human heart; but, you know, Paul went on to say, "but God..." "But God..."

I have told some of you that one day I received a letter from my mother when I was in college and I have always regretted that I did not hang on to that letter. But, the Lord had been speaking to her through those two words: But God. She had gone through her Bible and had picked out all the times that the writers of Scripture said, "but God." But God. You see, verses 1, 2, and 3 is your picture. Verses 1, 2, and 3 are my picture--what we are without Christ and what we would still be but for God Who is rich in mercy. Why, if He gave us what we deserved, He would never give us this wonderful salvation, He would never have given us His Son. It is because we are the subject of His mercy, in need of His grace. There is nothing that would commend us to Him. He in His marvelous grace has

moved upon our hearts and has opened our eyes to see something of our need and to realize that we are worse than we thought we were and our condition is incurable as far as we are concerned. If He does not have mercy upon us we are just going to go on our way to hell and to eternal judgment. But God. But God. Jesus Christ said Himself, "Verily, Verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation (judgment); but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). Paul, writing to Timothy, said this, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"; (Paul said) "of whom I am chief" (1 Tim. 1:15). Of whom I am chief. I suggest to you this morning that if God saved the chief of sinners, and He did, He can save you. He is the only One Who can save you. So cast aside your attempt to forget that you are a sinner and that you have offended God and that you are under divine judgment and that you are a child of wrath, born under the judgment of God. Cast yourself upon the mercy of God. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Jesus said, "I am the way...no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). If Jesus Christ is not your Saviour, you do not have a Saviour. Come to Him today. As you have seen the Word of God, if you have never trusted Jesus Christ as your Saviour, come to Him, believe in Christ, and God in His wonderful mercy and grace will be faithful to the gracious promises of salvation that He has given to us.

Shall we bow together in prayer.

Father, we thank you for your Word. Open our eyes, dear Lord, the eyes of our hearts to see and understand more of our great need that we, as your people, might praise you as we ought to knowing what we were and the awful potential for becoming worse if Jesus Christ had not saved us. Father, if there are those here, this morning, who have not trusted Christ, that are without Thee, that are without hope, O Lord, in your wonderful mercy we pray that their eyes might be opened that they would understand that these things are true and that their need is so great. No one but Jesus Christ can possibly meet that need. May they flee to Him and trust Him, believing in Him and enjoy the marvelous deliverance which we call our salvation, which Christ died on the Cross to provide for all who would believe in Him. In His precious name we pray, Amen.