

# Dead Men Walking pt 1

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**Bible Text:** Ephesians 2:1-3  
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Let's grab our Bibles and let's go to Ephesians. We've been in Ephesians a lot morning and evening but when you get to Ephesians 5 and 6 which is not where we're going to be tonight, we're in 2, alright? But when you get over to that section of Ephesians, you have application, a real practical exhortation on Christian living that is fully dependent upon us having experience. We teach and believe in experiential religion. We have experienced what the earlier chapters of Ephesians teach and that, of course, is the new birth, the truth of the Gospel and the changing power that the Gospel that comes by the Spirit brings into our hearts and into our lives. So when we sing a song like "Blessed Be Your Name," that can always be a struggle to really live that reality when I'm in the desert place, blessed be your name. But the reason why I can say that from the heart is because the truth of the early chapters of Ephesians are in my life. The reason why I can lead my life and take responsibility in a way that I consider her and love her the way Christ loves the church is because the truth of the earlier chapters of Ephesians are in my life. The reason why my wife in this maniac world of rebellion against all authority can say, "I joyously in love choose to submit to my husband, my head," it's because the truth of the earlier chapters of Ephesians are in my life. The reason I can be a father and a parent that doesn't just lord it over my children and say, "I'm your dad, that's the way it is," but to lead them with authority but yet with a deep consideration out of love for what's best for them and what glorifies God is because the truth of the earlier chapters of Ephesians are real in my heart.

And again, if you don't get the new birth, you don't get anything, and I'm convinced there are some here this evening in this service that needs the new birth. You're still in the old state. You may be a fine person, a respectable person, a good neighbor, you have morals and ethics, people may admire your wisdom on a number of things but none of that suffices for the new birth and without the new birth, we're in a desperate situation and that's what the Apostle Paul talks about.

You know, the dead are not still. The dead are not without action and movement. Indeed, the movement of putrefaction and decay is evident, really it's evident all around us. There was a dead dog on my property a while back. It didn't last long. It was just decomposing. It was moving and active. In the mortuary work or the medical work or in law enforcement, sometimes they have the most unpleasant task of recovering and handling a putrefying human corpse and the stench is greatly offensive. The decomposition of a once

living being is a very active process. Bacteria and fungi and other loathsome organisms in effect devour that rotting flesh, producing a foul odor.

God designed this process. Now, think about that. God designed it and he designed it to be deeply offensive. One of the reasons it's offensive is because of the decay. You see the decay and that's so unpleasant. It's so greatly unattractive. And then there is the absolute inability of coming back. When you see a dead animal of some kind and it's half rotten, there is just no concept that that thing could ever have life again. It's dead. It's completely dead and when death begins, the state of the body is sealed, in like manner, the Apostle Paul uses the image of death to illustrate the spiritual state of man. The Apostle Paul chooses the Greek word nikros for what people are before they are born again of the Spirit of God and he does that very purposefully, of course, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit so we might grasp what it really is. Man is dead but he's active. He's a walking, decaying, putrefying corpse, that is spiritually speaking. His state is sealed. Unless one outside of himself and superior to himself intervenes, that's what he will always be and only be.

Now, throughout history there has been basically three views of man as far as his goodness or his righteousness before a holy God. There has been the view that's embraced by the liberal or so-called progressives, they're really digressives but they call themselves progressives today, and they act like these are new exciting insights. We're evolving to new things with more fairness and more justice, more concern for the less fortunate. It's all a bunch of malarkey. It's not new, it's just old sin in a new package. It's old man-centered, Godless viewpoints in an old package. But anyway, their view is that man is okay. He needs to evolve further because he's not quite there yet and we're seeing these evolutions socially and other ways take place in our world, in our cultures.

Others say, "Well, man is sick but he's not all bad. He's at least alive and so there is hope." That would be more of what you and I might call an Arminian view. Arminius was the theologian who debated with John Calvin about the state of man spiritually and Arminius would argue that man failed but when man failed in the garden of Eden and then all of his posterity inherited his condition, man was fallen and man was bad but not completely. There was a spark of goodness left whereby he can possibly, if you will, lift himself up out of his predicament by his own bootstraps.

Some says, "Well, man's okay but he just needs to evolve further." Some say, "Well, he's sick but there's a little spark of life and there's hope." Then there's the third view which is the biblical view and the sound view and it's the view we see in Ephesians 2:1, that man is dead. He's not sick, he's dead. He's not weak, he's dead. He's not struggling with a little glimmer of hope, he is dead. Don't you understand and don't you teach and don't you accept a view of Christianity as if man is coming along and man's weak, he's halting, he has stumbled, he is sick and in his weakened position Christ picked him up. That is not Bible truth, that is not Gospel preaching, that is not sound because he's not weak, he's not sick, he's not infirm, he's dead.

Now, these aren't new doctrines for you but do you realize there are places I could preach this, I mean, folks have been in church all their life and they think, "Wow, you sure are down on man." I just want to be biblical. If the Bible is that down, then I'm that down. If the Bible is that up, then I'm that up. He is dead, at least completely dead spiritually as far as his relationship to God is concerned. He's dead and he can't see God. He's dead and he can't hear God. He's dead and he cannot walk to God. He's doomed unless God does something.

Look at Ephesians 2 now, verses 1 through 3. Paul writing and what an unfolding of glories and truths come verse by verse as we unpackage this. We get to chapter 2, verse 1 and he says, "And you were dead," and you could actually amplify the translation there and say, "And you being dead." You are dead and you just continue actively in death, "And you being dead in your trespasses and sins," then he kind of describes, if you will, the characteristics of what that's like, "in which you formerly 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. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."

Now, some years ago in studying through this, I saw the five things that jump out here about man's condition, his unregenerate, his unsaved state before a holy God and I outlined it this way from Ephesians 2:1-3: he is dead; he is deviant; he is demonized; he is disobedient; he is deranged and he is damned. That's what Paul says here in verses 1 through 3.

First of all, I. and I'm going to probably cut this in half and maybe we'll get out a tad early because you've had a busy fall and I appreciate your faithfulness to your 5 o'clock meetings and the students have had special events and I know just a lot of work goes into getting the fall program going and so thank you for that. You're not acting like dead people and I appreciate that very much and God gets the glory, amen?

First of all, I. we are dead in, he says in verse 1, trespasses and sins. We're dead in trespasses and sins. Trespasses means a false step or a blunder. It means to transgress across the line God ordained. Sins, again, means missing the mark. God as Creator set a mark and he says, "I want humankind who are made in my image to achieve this mark. I want them to live up to a certain standard, a certain example is what I want mankind to be like and perform like," and every single one of us sin. We fall short of the standard that our Creator has ordained for us.

So transgressing and sinning marks the nature of who and what we are. You see, you don't just transgress, you are, your nature is a transgressor. You do not just sin, you are a sinner. You are not a sinner because you sin, you sin because you're a sinner. That's what you are and that's what Paul is getting at here. As a matter of fact, flip back over to the epistles to the Romans, Romans 3. Would you do that, back to the left several pages? And look at Romans 3, another text that's quite familiar to a lot of us as we have grown in our grasp of the Gospel and of the doctrine, if you will, of human depravity and that's, of

course, what Paul is laying out here, the doctrine of human depravity and it's still true, it's still right and it still needs to be preached no matter what our culture is saying today.

Romans 3:9, "What then? Are we better than they?" Are somehow the Jews better than the Greeks or the Greeks and the Jews? No, "Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin." The Jews had many blessings and privileges and advantages because they were the ones who received the prophecies, got the word from God that their forefathers wrote down in sacred Scripture, had the prophets proclaim God's truth, so they had advantages but nevertheless with the advantages God gave them, at the end of the day every single Jew and every single non-Jew, here he generally categorizes them under the title of Greeks, all are under sin. They all are a people that have fallen short of God's standard.

Verse 10, "as it is written," he goes to describe how broad and thorough this falling short is. "There is none righteous, not even one." Do you hear that? There is not one single person who in and of himself out of his natural capacity has ever done anything whereby a true holy Judge and God would say, "That was a righteous and good thing you did." Do you understand that? You sir, on your own out of your own natural abilities have never done one thing, not one thought, not one deed, not one notion, not one attitude whereby a holy God would look at you and say, "That was good and righteous." No one is righteous, not even one.

"There is none who understands." You did not even possess the capacity to begin even the beginning points of comprehending God and God's truth in your heart and mind.

"There is none who seeks for God." Now, there are a lot of people who seek God's blessings and God's benefits and things God might do for them but none seeks for God to say, "I love you. I want you worshiped and I want you honored and I want you glorified." That doesn't naturally happen in us.

Verse 12, "All," every single Jew, every single non-Jew, that includes all of us, amen? Verse 12, "All have turned aside, together they have become useless." God says, "I look at all of you and I see zero value. Zero value." You say, "Brother Jeff, you really hurt our self-esteem." I don't want to hurt your self-esteem, I want to crush it and obliterate it. I want you to have Christ-esteem not self-esteem. Amen?

"There is none who does good, there is not even one." Then he talks about your tongue and your mouth here because what comes out of the throat, across the tongue, and out of the mouth reflects the condition of the heart. "Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, The poison of asps," or a viper, rattlesnake, "is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness." Now he's not saying every single person is equal in expressing these things but he's saying every single person has this pollution and this vileness inside of them. Some are more disciplined to keep it in and, by the way, if you have to live with unregenerate people, hopefully they have some of those disciplines. It makes life more pleasant but it doesn't mean they're really any different just because they have disciplines to not express some of their depravity.

Verse 15, "Their feet," not only their heart and their words, now their life and their actions, their feet "are swift to shed blood." You say, "I've never murdered anybody." Yeah, but you've hated in your heart.

"Destruction and misery are in their paths." Here's what he's saying: you leave man to himself and leave him to his own devices and you know what you'll come up with? What we're seeing in our country today, every kind of vile, wicked, chaotic, insane perversions. Men's thinking has gone bizarre. It's just unbelievable. That's what happens when man is left to himself. Why? Because man is dead spiritually. He's dead to God naturally speaking. He has no capacity for good and righteousness in God's eyes whatsoever.

Verse 17, Romans 3, "And the path of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes." Is that not the truth? Now, you know, I just cannot fathom, I cannot fathom the President of the United States encouraging and celebrating so many specific things the Bible clearly calls wickedness. Is there no fear of God before his eyes? And you say, "Well, it's not just the President." I know it's not just the President, it's Supreme Court justices and God help us if we get a President that keeps putting that kind of Supreme Court justices on the Supreme Court. Here's my point: is there no fear of God? Do they lay in bed at night and think maybe back when they were small and in Sunday school somebody taught them the Bible and think, "You know, God called that sin." But there's just no fear of God. That's what happens. That's where man gets left to himself long enough. You know, history and antiquity records the truth of God as we see civilization after civilization and culture after culture that became godless, completely fall apart from within like the old Roman Empire, how this just keeps repeating itself.

Verse 19, the last verse here, "Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law," here it is, "so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God." Well, Paul writing to the church at Ephesus in chapter 2 says we're all dead in trespasses and sins and every mouth, there is just not one half syllable you can utter to commend yourself or to remove the contemptible state you have before a holy God. Every mouth is shut. Every mouth is closed. That's just where we are, we're dead.

This is the reason we are spiritually dead. This is the reason why we transgress. This is the reason why we are sinners because we are shut out and shut off from the life and the presence of God. And as for knowing God and fellowshiping with God, we're just a dead corpse, even a putrefying corpse as we see in verse 2 in our text, "in which you formerly 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." Verse 3, "Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."

Now I want you to jump over to Colossians, just a few pages over to Colossians 2 to show you that in Paul's theology, Paul the major writer of our New Testament, the major human author, that is, how thorough this doctrine is in his writing and how very very

weak and absent it is from even so-called conservative evangelical pulpits today which is a travesty. Verse 13 of Colossians 2, writing to the church at Colossae, "When you were dead in transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." He said, "You were so dead," and he pictures that in a figurative way that in God's heaven the holy, just edict of God against you, God's standard and God's truth that cannot change was against you and every line of that law condemned you. There was a certificate of debt against you. It was hostile to you because of your condition, your natural state before a holy God. Listen to me: that beautiful wonderful, precious, brand new baby boy or brand new baby girl that God gives you and he or she is all of those things, beautiful, precious, wonderful, gift of God, is a dead, wretched corpse spiritually before a holy God. "Pastor, I don't know that I like that theology." Then you don't like the truth. It took the death, the bloody, brutal, horrifying torment and suffering of the Son of God on the cross to cure this issue. It's a serious issue. It's not a small thing.

Man's condition is bad, it's very bad. As a matter of fact, it's as bad as it gets. Man is not well with a few imperfections that somehow evolution is now fixing in our world. Man is not sick but still possessing at least a little spark of goodness and has some breath left in him. No, absolutely not true. And by the way, that's the classic liberal theologian. If you go to a lot of our schools, graduate schools of theology today, that's going to be the view embraced by most of them that man is fallen but he has a spark of divinity in him. Well, the Apostle Paul never attended Vanderbilt Divinity School or Harvard or Princeton Divinity School because he doesn't believe that. As a matter of fact, he would be aghast at such a thing. He would just be totally against such a view because man is dead.

I can still remember, by the way, this guy is going to be with us in just a few weeks on a Sunday night and I want to exhort you to let's get a good crowd here when Dr. Jimmy Milliken comes to preach for us on Sunday night in a few weeks. Dr. Jimmy Milliken really helped me formulate my theology at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary. He was a strong Reformed theologian and we would get in our systematic theology or soteriology class and he would challenge the more Arminian leaning brothers. Again, the Arminian leaning brothers would say, "Man failed but he's not completely bad. There is still some good so he's responsible and he can respond to God on his own. He can choose to be saved if he wants to. There is still some good left in there." And Dr. Milliken, we would egg him on in class and we knew that when we egged him on enough during his lectures, his glasses would start falling down as he'd start to preach and that was our goal every week. Let's get him preaching because he's a good preacher. He's a brilliant theologian but he's a good preacher. You don't see those very often, by the way.

The glasses would come down on the nose and he'd challenge the more Arminian brothers with texts like these and the ones I've shown you out of Colossians and out of Romans and he would say this simple statement, "How dead is he? How dead is he? If there's some spark there, he's not absolutely completely dead. If there is some ability there to do good, he's not absolutely completely dead. How dead is he?" I can still hear

Dr. Milliken. I might just call him and say, "I want you to preach a sermon when you come to Grace Life, how dead is he?" And he could do it.

Now, again, when Paul writes to the Ephesians in Ephesians 2:1 and says, "you being dead," in other words, Paul doesn't argue it or debate it or even explain it, he just says, boom, "you being dead." That's what you are spiritually.

Paul could have used a variety of Greek words to describe man's condition before God. There are numerous Greek words for being weak or sickly, the point of death, or needy, but he doesn't use any of those words, he uses the word *nikros* and it's used in James when James says, "For just as the body without the spirit is dead." It's used throughout the New Testament for those who are physically dead. It's used in Matthew 8:22, Colossians 2:13, Luke 15:24, for those who are spiritually dead. And Jesus said in Matthew 8:22, "Let the dead bury the dead." What was Jesus saying? Jesus was saying that, "Your father may be physically dead," remember the man came to Jesus and said, "Let me bury my father and then I'll come follow you." Well, in this particular case, there was no time for that and Jesus' point was, "What really matters is that men have spiritual life and are born again by me and my Gospel truth and so when your father physically dies, there will be enough spiritually dead people to take care of that. If you have spiritual life, for now since I'm the Incarnate Son of God, only on the earth for a limited period of time and I've called you, you must even forsake your mother and father and come and follow me because you can let the dead bury the dead."

Now, that doesn't apply very much in our setting because the Incarnate Son of God is not walking the earth for a few more months and then going to die on a cross and ascend back to heaven so be careful how you take a Gospel narrative and make it mean something for us. Now, it does mean this: our priorities as moms and dads and young people and senior adults and young marrieds or whoever it is, the spiritual truths of God's work and God's church that is the centerpiece of our lives but it's not all we do. We don't abandon everything else because we're not following the Incarnate Son of God as he is finishing his limited earthly ministry. But the point being Jesus said there are the physical dead and there will be enough of the spiritually dead left behind to take care of that.

So Jesus taught this truth very clearly as he used the same word Paul used for their condition without regeneration of the new birth. Being spiritually dead, man has no capacity to hear God, man has no capacity to see God, he has no capacity to reach for God, he has no capacity to walk with God, he has no capacity to even crawl to God. Quite the contrary, he's not even leaning slightly toward God. Being spiritually dead, he ignores God, he deplors God, he runs from God, he blasphemes God, he denies God and he mocks God. There is no force, no power, no being in the created realm that can help man in this because man is dead. All the works of religious rites, holy water, baptisms, sacraments, the priestcraft, some sort of self-initiated moral reformation on your part to clean your life up, everything that man can do to help himself, to fix himself, to right himself, to bring himself to spiritual life are but the Bible calls dead works of a dead man before a living God. Hebrews 9:14 says, "how much more will the blood of Christ, who

through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

Hopeless and helpless and dead but as I conclude this evening, what man cannot do God has done. In the darkness of our death dungeon, God chooses to walk in with brilliant infusions of his very life, life giving power. And it's quite a mystery, is it not? It's quite a mystery. Banish these blasphemous notions that there are systems and strategies and mechanisms and gimmicks and contemporary relevant approaches whereby we can coerce, trick, manipulate, stimulate men into coming to God. It's not possible. It's mysterious how it works. Spurgeon used to say, "If God is not going to save them with the Gospel, he's certainly not going to save them with a lie." We're going to stay with the old Gospel and if God doesn't bring revival and save men with that, then we're sunk. That's the only thing that can bring men life.

I'm in my 36<sup>th</sup> year here. How are we still going? There is only one reason: God in grace beyond what I could deserve or what you could deserve has chosen to take our ministry and infuse true spiritual life into enough people that love and want the truth. That's it. It's not, there's no doubt, it would be false humility if I said I did it. I have gifts of leadership, I have gifts of organization, I have gifts of developing strategy and making goals and achieving those goals. I mean, I'm a task oriented monster sometimes but that's not what does it. That's not what does it. Now, God can use those gifts and if you're OCD like me, then keep it yielded to the Spirit of God. God can use those gifts but that's not what does it. It is God doing what no man can do.

Charles Wesley wrote,

"And can it be that I should gain  
An interest in the Savior's blood?"

Notice he's writing from the perspective of, "Me, a dead man, dead spiritually?"

"And can it be that I should gain  
An interest in the Savior's blood.  
Died He for me, who caused His pain  
For me, who Him to death pursued?"

Here it is vividly laid out,

"Long my imprisoned spirit lay,  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night; [that's death]  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.



"No condemnation now I dread;  
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;  
Alive in Him, my living Head,  
And clothed in righteousness divine,  
Bold I approach th'eternal throne,  
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.  
Amazing love! How can it be,  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?"

Jesus looked down from heaven and saw the wretchedness, the ungodliness, the complete deadness, not one of us in the slightest way even leaned toward God, quite the contrary, in every active way we worked against God, even though so many of us put on a wonderful, faithful, outward Baptist facade or Methodist facade or Presbyterian facade or Catholic facade. You just pick your religious facade. We put on some good stuff but everything about us was anti-God and in that condition, he came in great mercy, grace and power, invaded our lives and brought us to life through the Gospel in the power of the Spirit. God does what no man can do. And what are we? We're at least two things: we're grateful and we're humble. We're grateful and we're humble.

Let's stand together in prayer.