

Ephesians

2:1-10

Introduction

Occasionally I am called upon to deliver a death notification. No matter how I go about it... No matter my choice of words... Nothing can change the bad news that someone you love is dead.

The apostle Paul delivers a death notification in our text. Someone you love is dead, **and it's you!** According to verses one and five, if you are not a Christian, you are "dead in trespasses and sins."

Someone you love is dead; *but Someone Who loves you has died to make you alive!* Jesus died and rose from the dead so that you might have eternal life.

We want to understand what it means to be dead *and* what it means to be made alive. To do so we'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 While You Are Dead You Can Only Expect God's Wrath, and #2 When You Are Alive You Can Always Experience God's Workmanship.

#1 While You Are Dead You Can Only Expect God's Wrath (v1-3)

When I deliver a death notification, almost always one of the initial reactions is unbelief. The person I am notifying is hoping I've made a mistake in identifying their loved one as dead. I wish, for their sake, that I were mistaken... But I'm not, and eventually they accept truth that someone they love is dead.

Paul essentially delivers a death notification to the whole human race. He tells everyone who ever was born of human parents that they either *are* or *were* "dead in trespasses and sins." Just like any death notification, you initially react with unbelief.

In this case, you react with strong unbelief because you are being told you're dead while you are alive. You are walking, talking, breathing, thinking, living... It's hard to accept that you are dead while you seem so much alive.

The Bible describes death three ways: There is *physical* death, *spiritual* death, and *eternal* death. We all immediately understand physical death. We do not all immediately understand spiritual or eternal death.

The best and simplest way to understand these three aspects of biblical death is to remember what God told our parents, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden.

Genesis 2:16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat;

Genesis 2:17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

The moment they ate of it, they died – just as God warned. They died even though they remained alive. Adam and Eve died spiritually; they began to die physically; and without God's intervention, they would have died eternally.

Death is essentially separation. The moment they ate of the tree, they were spiritually separated from God. They eventually died physically and their soul and spirit were separated from their body. Without God's intervention, they would also have died eternally – separated from God for all the long ages to come in outer darkness and torment.

Adam and Eve passed along death to the human race:

Romans 5:12 ...through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned...

You were born "dead in trespasses and sins." The first three verses of our text give as complete a description as you can find of spiritual death that will result in eternal death.

Ephesians 2:1 And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins,

You notice that the words “He made alive” are in italics. Words in italics in your Bible are words that are not in the original manuscripts from which the Bible was translated, but were added to clarify. In this case, we have a hard time understanding the sentence because the verb “made alive” doesn’t occur until verse five. So the translators give you a peek at the verb coming up so you won’t wonder where Paul is headed.

You were “dead in trespasses and sins.” “Trespasses” is a word that means *crossing a known boundary, or deviating from the right path*. “Sins” is a word that means *to miss the mark, or fall short of the standard*. Both actively and passively, both by commission of wrongs and by omission of rights, you are a sinner – both a rebel and a failure.

The phrase “dead in trespasses and sins” is a summary of your spiritually dead condition. Paul introduces the phrase in verse one, then uses it again in verse five. Inbetween, in verses two and three, he describes exactly what it means to be spiritually dead. It means you are *deluded, disobedient, defiled, and depraved*.

To be dead means you are deluded:

Ephesians 2:2 in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air...

The word “walked” describes the path you follow. While you are dead, you follow “the course of this world.” A “course” is an age or period of time during which a certain attitude prevails. We might translate it, “the spirit of the times.” In other words, while you are dead you follow the spirit of the times in which you live.

You follow the spirit of the times because you are deluded by “the prince of the power of the air.” “Prince” means *first in power or authority*. “Power” refers to those in authority. “Air” describes the sphere of authority. Paul will describe this more fully when he discusses spiritual warfare in chapter six. He’s talking about the devil and his demons whose sphere of authority is the earth and who order and direct the course of this present world.

Men and women think they are free, and experiencing new freedoms everyday by throwing-off moral restraints. They are deluded by the devil and his demons who are seeking only to destroy them.

To be dead means you are disobedient:

Ephesians 2:2 ... the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience,

“Sons of disobedience” means you are disobedient by nature. You have inherited your disobedience. Look at your children: They need to be taught to obey, *not to disobey!* Disobedience comes naturally.

To be dead means you are defiled:

Ephesians 2:3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh...

“Flesh” refers to your human nature with its appetites. Your natural appetites – like hunger and thirst – can be good or evil. “Lusts” are the passionate cravings within you that take your natural appetites and exaggerate them until they begin to control you. Instead of controlling your appetites, your appetites control you. We say that human nature is defiled.

To be dead means you are depraved:

Ephesians 2:3 ...fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind...

“Mind” simply means *evil thoughts*. It’s not just the body; your mind is also contaminated. Your very thought process is itself given to being depraved.

As I said, people react with strong unbelief to this death notification. They don’t see themselves being quite as bad as these words indicate, and they are certainly better than others. That’s fine; not everyone is as bad as they could be. There are degrees involved among the dead; not degrees of death, but of decay.

You’re **dead**, and you’re doomed:

Ephesians 2:3 ...and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

“Wrath” is God’s wrath against sin. God cannot compromise with sin and must condemn it. Since you are dead in your trespasses and sins, you are condemned already and headed for doom. “Just as the others” means that this is the universal condition of all those born of human parents.

When you were born, you immediately began to die physically; you were born dead spiritually; you are doomed to die eternally. There is **nothing** you can do to save yourself. **But God has done something!**

#2 When You Are Alive
You Can Always Experience God’s Workmanship
(v4-10)

Two of the greatest words in your Bible, and in all of language, are “but God.”

Ephesians 2:4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, Ephesians 2:5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

God’s nature is “love.” His love is expressed as “mercy” and “grace” to those born dead in trespasses and sins.

Paul is now talking to believers. You were dead; now you are “with Christ.” You have been “made... alive,” “saved... by grace.” He’ll explain what he means in a moment. But first, in verses six and seven, he digresses.

Ephesians 2:6 and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus,

“In Christ Jesus” is a key phrase throughout this letter. Whatever is true of Jesus is also true of you! He was raised and is seated in heaven; *so are you*. This is true of you spiritually in the present, and will be true of you actually in the future.

Ephesians 2:7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

The “ages to come” means eternity. In eternity you will be the living proof that God is love. His love expressed itself through mercy and

grace for you when you were dead and doomed. You were born physically dying, spiritually dead, and headed for eternal death. But you were born-again spiritually and have been given eternal life. God's love will be on display forever.

Paul said "by grace you have been saved," then digressed. Now he returns to finish his thoughts about salvation by grace.

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God,
Ephesians 2:9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.

"Grace" is God's unmerited favor. You *did* not, and *can* not, ever in any way or by any means, merit God's favor. You were born dead in trespasses and sins. You are a sinner by nature, deliberately deviating from the right path and continually falling short of the standards of God's holiness despite your best efforts.

Paul adds "not of works" to establish that no works on your part could ever be sufficient to overcome your being dead in trespasses and sins. No religion... no rituals... no rules... no rites... no righteousness of your own... Could ever hope to earn you spiritual and eternal life. If they could, you would be able to "boast" about your contribution to salvation. Salvation involves no human merit or works; it is all of God's grace, all His free gift.

How do you receive God's free gift? Paul says it is "through faith." The words mean you apprehend God's gracious salvation by faith when you believe God.

I don't need to tell you that scholars and theologians battle one another over the role of faith in your salvation. There are those who teach, for example, that faith itself is "the gift of God." They go on to argue that in order for you to be saved, God first "makes you alive," then gives you the gift of faith to believe Him. They say that you are born-again first; then you are given the faith to believe. They say that any other explanation makes believing a "work."

That's nonsense! First of all, the Bible always teaches that faith precedes being born again. Second, according to the finest Greek scholars, the "gift" of verse eight *cannot refer to faith*. It refers to

salvation. Third, after Paul mentions faith, he says salvation is “not of works,” indicating that apprehending salvation by faith is **not** a work.

“Wait a minute!” they argue. “We’ve just learned that humans are dead, *and dead men can’t do anything.*” They compare the sinner to a corpse who must be given life before it can respond.

Logical, but not biblical. I certainly do not want to minimize the seriousness of being spiritually dead. But I do want to be biblical when discussing it. The Bible never says we are unable to believe. Dead, yes; but still we are able to believe.

The first persons to die spiritually, Adam and Eve, did not become actual corpses with no ability to believe. Better yet, look at the very first people who were born spiritually dead. That would be Cain and Abel. There can be no doubt they were born physically dying, spiritually dead, and headed for eternal death. As spiritually dead men, they were *deluded, disobedient, defiled, and depraved*. God nevertheless revealed Himself to each of them to the extent that they could respond to His gracious offer of salvation by faith. Abel *received* the grace of God through faith; Cain *resisted* the grace of God through unbelief.

Thus we teach that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Romans 10:17). The preaching of the Gospel is a real offer of salvation to everyone who hears it. They have both the *ability* and the *responsibility* to respond. They can *receive* or they can *resist* the grace of God.

While you were dead in trespasses and sins, you could only expect God’s wrath. When you are made alive by grace through faith, you can always experience God’s workmanship:

Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

“Workmanship” is from the Greek word *poiema*. We translate it “poem,” but it can refer to any creative work of art. It is only used twice in the Bible – here and in Romans 1:20 where it refers to God’s work of creating the universe.

When you are saved by grace through faith, you become an entirely new “creat[ion] in Christ Jesus.” You are God’s newly created work of art; His poem, His painting, His song, His sculpture. He begins the work at salvation and continues it, day-by-day, moment-by-moment, until you are completed.

The chapter opened with you walking according to the course of this world. Once saved, you walk a new course – one “prepared beforehand” by God. God has made ready, even before you were saved, a path for you to follow. What is the path?

It is to perform “good works” by depending upon His power. Salvation does not involve any works on your part. It is all from God’s love, expressed by His mercy and grace, apprehended by faith. **After** you are saved, however, “good works” should characterize your daily life.

As you discover the good works God has made ready for you, you will experience God’s workmanship. God’s workmanship is accomplished as you “walk” in “good works.” Each good work, done in His power, is a fresh word or syllable in the poem of your life; a fresh brush stroke on the canvass of your life; a new measure in the song of your life; a carefully considered tap on the sculpting of your life... Until God completes His work and you are just like Jesus.

Conclusion

You can remain dead and be doomed; or you can be made alive and be seated with Jesus in heaven, both now and forever.