

The Walk of Man and the Work of God

Ephesians 2:1-10

The movie *Saving Private Ryan* tells the story of a group of 8 soldiers who are sent out to find Private James Ryan and bring him home to his grieving mother who had already lost 3 sons.

The last scene of the movie shows an aged Private Ryan, now a grandfather, standing in front of the grave of his captain who had died for him. He says "Every day I think about what you said to me on the bridge...I've tried to live my life the best I could...I hope that at least in your eyes I've earned what all of you have done for me."

Here's a man who's entire life was shaped around being rescued. Just as his rescue in *Saving Private Ryan* was a life-shaping event, every Christian has in his past a life-shaping rescue event. For Private Ryan, knowing his past shaped his walk; for us Christians, the worthy walk begins with knowing our past.

The Walk of Man: Our Walk Before Christ.

Crucial to understanding your walk is understanding your spiritual biography. In fact, in the chapters in *Ephesians* that lay down the doctrine that is the foundation for our walk, there is only one imperative, only one command. And that command is found in *Ephesians 2:11-12*. It says, "Therefore, remember that at one time you were Gentiles in the flesh... Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise."

So as we look at *Ephesians 2:1-3*, we are getting a bit of our spiritual biography. This is our past--all of ours. Here, we will encounter the depths and the darkness of our sin, and it is helpful to remember, as we remind ourselves of our previous life, that the higher our view of sin, the higher our view of Christ. The darker is sin, the more stunning is Christ. Dark nights make brilliant stars-- and this morning we are going to go back there, to our past, to our dark beginnings, before we knew Christ. Why? Because we want to be reminded of our glorious Savior.

He begins with these words, "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked."

The first word on the tip of Paul's tongue to describe the life of the person outside of salvation, outside of a relationship with Jesus Christ is this: dead. Sure, they'll physically alive—the heart is beating and the lungs are working—but spiritually speaking, this person is dead.

Spiritual death is the separation from the life of God. Spiritual death is the alienation of the soul from God. It is a metaphor that describes people who are physically alive but unable, like a corpse, to respond to stimuli. You can talk to a corpse, you can shout at a corpse, you can attempt to persuade a corpse but a corpses aren't privy to cooperate. They're rather stubborn. A spiritual dead person is a living zombie, walking and talking and acting throughout daily life but separate from true life, unable to apprehend true glory, unable to see actual reality.

Think of all the metaphors he could have used. He could have said, "And you were blind" and he would have been right. He could have said, "And you were deaf" and that would have been true too. He could have said "And you were lame" and again he would have been right on. He could have said, And you were sick, or lost, or broken and in all of these words he would have been right. But none of those words carried the kind of weight he wanted to portray. You were *dead*—and if you were dead that means you were blind and deaf and lame and empty and sick and lost.

The spiritually dead are utterly incapable of responding to spiritual realities. The beauties of God's holiness do not attract him, the miseries of hell do not deter him, the wonders of heaven do not uplift him, the love of God is empty to him, the wounds of Christ do not move him. He does not weep over sin or rejoice over grace or respond to the Word of God. The words that seem to describe this person are "unable" and "unwilling." A dead soul responds to the glory of God the same way an ant responds to a sunset on the pacific ocean. A dead soul can appreciate the gospel the same way a blind man can appreciate the Sistine Chapel.

And he goes on to describe the sphere in which our deadness exists—in our trespasses and sins. These two words: "trespass" and "sin" mean basically the same thing, and Paul uses both of them to convey the completeness of our sinful walk. They have at their root the idea of "missing the mark." It's a hunter's word, an archer's word. It's like missing the target. Missing what you're aiming for.

This is what sin is, and this is the walk of the spiritually dead man. He walks in his mark-missing. He lives and breathes missing God's mark. I want you to notice that these words define sin not in terms of what is done, but in terms of what is *not* done. In other words, the idea of sin that these words carry is the idea that your biggest sins are not what you do, but what you don't do.

Romans 5:8 says that "All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God." But it does mean that the standard placed upon every man is to live in accordance, and in humble response to his glory. You were made to live in response to the glory of God, to be worshipers of him, you bathe in and enjoy his glory. But you have fallen short—that's what Paul's saying. See how he frames the idea of sin? Sin is not that you did that one thing you shouldn't have done. Sin is that you've totally missed what you were created to do. You fell short of God's glory. And you fall short of his glory every single day.

It's like if we all headed out to Zuma Beach to have a jump off. We're going to see who can jump to Catalina. Some of you run hard and jump into the surf. Some of you do a little hop and stumble on in. Some of you get smart and find that pier and run to the end of that and jump off. And nobody comes close. Nobody makes it. Nobody fulfills the call. Nobody comes close.

A spiritually dead person, in a sort of walking death, lives in continual sin and trespass, unable to respond to the beauties of the gospel, unable to respond to the glories of God. And though he was made to see the glory, and enjoy the glory, and love the God of glory, he is dead—unable. God's standard is too high.

He continues on now, describing the walk of the spiritually dead. And what he says makes perfect sense, in the same way dead fish don't swim upstream, dead souls are "following the course of this world." The course of this world, the spirit of the age, or the German word: *zeitgeist*. This is a phrase that indicates the ideologies, the intellectual trends, the fashions and fads of the world. The dead soul has no resistance to every new ideology, every new intellectual fad. Whichever direction the world goes, so goes the dead soul, like driftwood in a rushing stream.

Paul doesn't stop there. Instead he pulls back the curtain to reveal the operator behind the scenes: "following the prince of the power of the air." Here is a descriptive name for Satan. The course of the world is set by the prince of the power of the air. The trends and the fads and the ideologies are not morally neutral, behind the realm of ideas is a great wicked conductor, directing his dead orchestra. He doesn't need to haunt houses to get his job done, all he needs to do is keep his pawns in university classrooms and on the TV screens. Satan is a prince—which indicates a measure of authority and power he has over the realm of thoughts and ideas.

This, says Paul, was our condition. Isn't this severe? And to say that every unbeliever has been duped into following Satan! I don't think Paul could draw out a more forceful condemnation upon mankind. Here we are, says Paul. Dead in sins, missing the mark, following the course, following Satan. In other words, it is not only

that we have taken a shot and missed our target; we have taken our rifle, and turned the barrel to point directly at God himself. We have taken aim at God. We defy him! And that is what sin is! Defiance of the highest degree! "I will not allow you to rule over me!" that is the essence of sin.

That's Paul's message—we are not victims of Satan, we are enemies of God. We have not only failed to glorify God, we have joined the enemy to attempt an overthrow of God.

And we cannot say, "The devil made me do it." Look at verse 3: "among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and mind."

In other words, we weren't coerced into following Satan's schemes. We weren't forced to follow the course of the world. We were *passionate* about it. This was the passion that drove us--the passions of our flesh. We wanted this.

The spiritually dead are passionately committed to their flesh, to the desires of their bodies and minds. Some of them follow their cravings by rushing headlong into carnality—sex, drugs, drinking, eating. Others follow their cravings by rushing headlong into religion! Paul was meticulously keeping the law, fastidiously following the rules, and he was a dead man, alienated from the life of God and walking in the passions of the flesh.

What a sad condition unredeemed humanity is in! Captive 3Xs over! Enamored with the world! Following after Satan! Addicted to the desires of the flesh! There is no escape.

And this was me. I was a spiritual dead, unresponsive man. And being dead I was enthralled with the world and its ideas, and I followed it, unable to see it as a parade laughing its way to hell. I was on board, passionate about these things, passionate about the desires of the flesh and the mind.

Look at the end of verse 3: "and were by nature children of wrath." Wrath is a word that isn't used very often outside of Scripture that refers to the settled anger of God against sin, and his settled determination to judge it. You and I were children of wrath. Judgment loomed upon us like a shadow.

God's response to our deadness, our rebellion was not smiling approval.

One old liberal German scholar wrote a book called "*What is Christianity?*" and in it he tried to reduce Christianity to its most basic common ideas. He surmised that a central tenet of the Christian faith is the universal fatherhood of God. The only problem with his conclusion is that it is totally unbiblical. God is not the father of the unbeliever. "We were by nature children of wrath!"

Jesus said it himself, to the Pharisees, "Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires." John 8:43-44.

It is no wonder that Jonathan Edwards, in his famous sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God"

Your wickedness makes you as it were heavy as lead, and to tend downwards with great weight and pressure towards hell; and if God should let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf..

The wrath of God is like great waters that are dammed for the present; they increase more and more, and rise higher and higher, till an outlet is given; and the longer the stream is stopped, the more rapid and mighty is its course, when once it is let loose.

Children of wrath! Right now, unbelievers are being kept from judgment by the slender thread of divine mercy. This is who I was—my walk was toward eternal death, my father was the devil, my deeds were evil, my life was an offense to a holy God.

Recently on the news there was a story of a man whose daughter was killed by a violent and unremorseful criminal. The father was giving his victim impact statement—a written statement about how the loss of his daughter had affected him. As the grieving father shed tears as he remembered his daughter, the criminal smiled maliciously and chuckled at this pain. The father, unable to control his rage, leapt across the table at the murderer.

Inside us all, we can identify with that father. A criminal laughing at how he murder his daughter--how disgusting! How unjust! And yet that criminal is a picture of who we were before Christ. Before Christ saved us, there we were, sitting in court hearing about our sin and we didn't care. We were committing crimes so abjectly rank and filthy and we liked it, and we wanted more. And just as the father of the murdered daughter felt a rage against such evil, God the Father is angry with sinners. He will have justice.

This is where we were! If I had perished before Christ saved me, I would have awoken that very instant in hell, forever bound, forever regretting, forever lost, forever empty.

You see, I had not only sinned against God's law but against God's love. If you're not a believer here this morning, you must understand something: God loves you, sinner. God wants to save you, sinner. And if you continue in your rebellion you will not only be guilty of sinning against God's law but of sinning against God's love.

You say, "what's the difference?" Here it is. Imagine I'm driving in a residential area way too fast, not paying attention and I accidentally hit and kill a child. Now, I've sinned against the law. And I'll have to face the law. I'd probably be arrested, probably be tried, fined, and imprisoned for involuntary manslaughter. But after I'd done the payment for my crime, I'd be set free and no longer guilty according to the law. I've sinned against the law.

But imagine that after paying my fine and doing my time I go over to that poor mother's house. You see, sinning against the law is one thing. But as I look into the tear-stained face of that mother there's something more than simply sinning against the law. I've sinned against a person; I sinned against love. You see, I can satisfy the law, but I can't do anything to bring back the child or alleviate the mother's grief. I can't work for it. I can't pay her. I can't do anything. She is a heart-broken woman, who had something she loved immeasurably violently taken from her.

There is only one way my relationship with that woman could ever be fixed. Only only way our relationship could be restored. Only only way the chasm between us could be breached--and that is if she voluntarily chose to forgive me. I can do nothing. I cannot earn it. I can beg and plead and work and pay and if she doesn't extend forgiveness, I cannot be reconciled with her.

And so it is with God. We have sinned against his law—we're legally guilty—and we have sinned against his love—we're relationally estranged. We have sinned in ways that are so morally repugnant to God, so horribly disgusting in his sight, so absolutely abhorrent, so criminally evil, so unquestionably wicked—we were guilty of trampling over the Son of God, we were guilty of driving the nails through his hands and we were guilty of hurling the insults back at him—and we have done so willingly, with a smirk on our face. And there is no recourse for us, no way to fix our relationship with God, no way to reclaimed our standing with him, no way to earn our way back. Our only hope is that God reach down to us and forgive us.

The Work of God: God's Work in Christ

Look at this. "But God"—

Our hero intervenes. Divine hope breaks forth.

Two words that shine into the darkness of verses 1-3. In this next part, starting in verse 4, Paul begins to describe the work of God to save these hell-bound, death-walking, Satan-following, God-hating, wrath-deserving rebels.

They couldn't save themselves. But God. They were caught into the death current of the world, but God. They were following Satan toward the eternal lake of fire, but God. They were enslaved and addicted to their bodily desires, but God. Salvation must be entirely an act of God, or else there's no way it could be done.

You ask, "What would motivate God to intervene with these enemies?" Great question, and Paul gives the answer in the next lines: "being rich in mercy"—well, why's he rich in mercy? "because of the great love with which he loved us."

Great love. Abounding love. Overflowing love. This is our God! And when such a love runs into such a sinner like me, it explodes into mercy and compassion. He is rich in mercy. He doesn't, like a poor father with his starving children, portion out small helpings that never actually satisfy. He is rich, and has mercy busting through the lid, overflowing, and it's available in full to his children.

In verse 5-6, he reiterates, "Even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved--and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

You need to notice something crucial about Paul's description here, and it's all the words that describe our union with Christ. "Made us alive together with Christ," vs. 6 "raised us up with him" "seated us with him" "in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

Here's the mystical, beautiful, amazing grace of God. It is not only that he forgives our sins. He does that. It is not only that he gives us life. He does that. It is not only that he washing us clean, he does that too. But the reason why Paul says, "in him, in him, in Christ, with Christ, in Christ Jesus" is because God saves sinners by putting them *in Christ*.

Look at chapter 1:

- vs. 3 "who has blessed us in Christ"
- vs. 4 "even as he chose us in him"
- vs. 7 "In him we have redemption"
- vs. 11 "In him we have obtained an inheritance"
- vs. 13 "In him you also, when you heard the word of truth...were sealed"

Salvation is an act of God where he takes the dead man and unites him to the living, resurrected Christ, and in that union that man shares in all the fullness of Jesus Christ's life in him. Our condition was so hopeless, our sin so dark, our lives so lost that God's only recourse was to unite us to himself, glue us unto the Godhead. Now, being in Christ, we

- share in his perfect life, his saving death, his powerful resurrection, his kingly ascension.

Watch what happens in chapter 2: (Vs. 5) First, God made us alive with Christ.. That means we're a new person. That means we're a new creation. That means the deadness is gone. That means the blindness is gone. That means the inability is gone. We are in Christ, and we are a new creation.

Second,(vs. 6) God raised us up with him. That's a new power. In the resurrection of Christ We share in the resurrection life of the living Christ

Third, (vs. 6) God seated us with Christ in the heavenly places. You say, "What's that mean, I'm still right here." Paul is speaking about your spirit. That's what in Colossians he says, "You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God." Your spirit has already sat down with Christ--you are in Christ, Christ is in you, and you're already beginning to enjoy the blessings of heaven with Christ. You have a new position. In Philippians Paul says it this way: "your citizenship is in heaven!"

God's super-abounding, marvelous, stunning, matchless grace to sinners--he makes them alive, that's a new person. He raises them up, that's a new power. He seats them at his right hand, that's a new position.

There are some Christians who are like homeless beggars who never realized they had billions in their bank accounts. They walk around moping, sad, dabbling in sin, never enjoying the salvation of God. Paul reminds them: you have been endowed with the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead!

Charles Wesley: "No condemnation now I dread, Jesus and all in him is mine! Alive in him, my living head and clothed with righteousness Divine!" What a glorious thought! All of Christ—is mine!

Why? Have you ever paused to ask why? God didn't have to do this. But in verse 7, there's a "so that"-- I love "so that" statements, they give us windows to peek into the heart of God. Verse 7: "so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

Why would God be so kind to rebels? Why would God be so loving toward sinners?

It was God's design, from eternity past, to glorify himself by redeeming, blessing, loving and saving his people. In the coming ages, for all time, God holds up his trophies of grace—sinners made saints, lost made found, the dead made alive, the broken made complete, the weeping now rejoicing, so that all throughout eternity the watching universe will marvel at his wondrous kindness toward us.

You say, "What have I done to deserve this?" Nothing. In fact, you've only ever deserved the opposite. All your righteous deeds, outside of Christ, are filthy rags. I have done nothing, I have earned nothing, I was poor, pitiable, blind, lost. Like Hester Prynne, I wore a Scarlet Letter, not on my clothing but on my heart. I have been marked by sin; my works reek of it. Why me?

Verse 8 "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one may boast."

This is not by works, not by the efforts of man. There is nothing anyone did to earn this. It was by grace. Of course, if it's grace, it can't be works. Grace is freely given, not according to works.

Do you understand the implications of salvation being of grace, and not works?

- If salvation is by grace, then the worst sinner in this room has quite a good shot at getting to heaven!
- If salvation is by grace, then your checkered past has no power to hold you back from experiencing the love of God.

- If salvation is by grace, then God forbid we trust our status or nice-ness, or religiousness to get us right with God.

It is said that the brutal, cannibalistic serial murder Jeffrey Dahmer confessed his sins, repented and was converted a few months before an inmate killed him. A pastor met with him regularly, shared the gospel regularly, and when Dahmer converted to Jesus Christ, eventually baptized him. I watched one of his final interviews, and the man seemed broken over his sin, and continually mentioned his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Let me ask you something, how do you feel about that? Do you sense the scandal? Isn't there a part of you that goes, "Ah, God shouldn't save *him*. Of course he should save me. But him? No."

How big is your gospel? How big is God's grace?

The world doesn't understand the concept of grace! *That* guy is going to heaven, but Ghandi the Hindu won't? But if salvation is by grace, then we better believe that the freaks and the cripples and the lame and the lost who have been humbled before God and have clung to Christ will be leaping and clapping their way into heaven before the upstanding citizens who saw themselves are more worthy.

Grace, by definition, cannot be earned! It is a gift. The work has already been done. Jesus has already earned salvation by his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. He is alive, having paid for sin and having sat down at the right hand of the father. He freely dispenses salvation to sinners.

Verse 8 says salvation comes through faith. Faith is what you must do--you must believe. Faith itself is a gift, it says right here, and yet it is something we do in response to being made alive. You must believe! You must come to grab hold of Christ, to trust him for salvation, to hold onto him. He will save you.

There's no boasting in our salvation, only boasting in Christ. We don't get the credit for this. Well then, who does? God gets the glory, our salvation is of God, and he gets the glory. "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."

Can you see the panorama of grace that is demonstrated in these verses? We were dead, made alive by Christ. We were following the course of the world, now we're flat raised up out of the world, we were following Satan, now we're seated in heaven with Christ, safe in the power of Christ. We were by nature, children of wrath, but now, through Christ, children of God, beloved of God, blessed of God, graced of God. We are rich, we are infinitely wealthy, we are abundantly provided for, we are overflowingly blessed! We are new people, with new power, with new positions. We are the new humanity, birthed into existence by the gospel, fueled by divine power, motivated by eternal blessings.

Now this is the foundation of our walk. To even begin to think about walking worthy, we have to consider our amazing salvation.

Verse 10: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, that we should walk in them."

We come back to "the Worthy Walk." The Worthy Walk can only be lived when we remember where our walks began and remember the work of Christ.

In Saving Private Ryan, a man was saved from out of the violence and destruction of World War II. Many had died to save him, many had risked all to bring him to safety, and the captain's message to him, at the very end, his last words, were "Earn this." In other words, live a life that is so good that you've earned this amazing rescue. The man's whole life was marked by a overriding concern to "earn" what the men sacrificed for him.

This is not the gospel's call. Jesus, the perfect, pure Son of God—who died for us, who brought us home, who cleaned us up, who gave us power, who secured our heaven, who made us rich! And his call to us, is not, I repeat, is NOT "Earn this." Jesus' message to you is not, "Now pay me back for what I've done!" The walk of Christian is not continually wondering "I hope at Christ's eyes I've earned what you have done for me!"

You see, Old Private Ryan said as an old man, "Every day I think about what you said to me on the bridge...I hope that at least in your eyes I've earned what all of you have done for me." But we Christians don't say that. We say, "Jesus, every day I think about you said to me on the cross—you said 'It is finished.' Lord, in light of your finished work, your total salvation, your abundant and everlasting mercies: Help me to walk in a manner worthy of my calling."