



The Lack of Grace

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Ephesians 2:1-7

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*<sup>1</sup> And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— <sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. <sup>4</sup> But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

*(Pastor prays)*

For hundreds of years, the United States has been characterized as a Christian nation. But if that's still the case, then we need to redefine the word *Christian*. To think that any group that assembles together and claims to be a church is in fact an absolute mistake. The religious landscape of Charlotte has changed drastically over the years. First, the Presbyterians settled here, then came the other denominations—Lutherans, Baptists, Methodists, and Episcopalians. And for years, the Christian center hailed. But now, the countryside around us is filled with all manners of assemblies that claim some relationship to Christ but

bear none, whether in belief or practice or both. And it can be confusing when so many churches are claiming that their teaching is truth. It can really be hard to know what to believe.

The apostle Paul seems to have known this situation was going to happen one day, so he writes to the church at Ephesus giving them the fundamentals of the faith. He wants them to trust the Bible. He does this so that they might know what it really means to be a Christian—to be in Christ. I mean isn't that the question on the table? Who has it right? What does it mean in my day-to-day life to know Christ? What is the gospel of Christ? To understand that, we must come to grips with who we are without Christ, and in this passage, Paul gives a fairly unflattering and unvarnished picture to the people at Ephesus of who they were before Christ and the great joy they have in Christ.

### Our Condition Without Him Is Hopeless, but Our Life in Christ Is Fearless

Verses one through ten make up one really long sentence. But we can break it out into a pretty simple outline. Let's follow the passage, and make simple points from what the Bible says.

#### **Without Christ, We Are Dead**

As Paul speaks to the Christians, he tells them just what they were without Christ in verse one: you were dead in your trespasses and sins. Do you see the hopelessness and helplessness of our condition? We are dead. We are unable to understand spiritual things, unable to appreciate or connect with God. Paul doesn't say, "You were bad people," or, "You were sick with sin" He said, "Without Christ you are dead." We can't do anything that pleases God. There are no good deeds. Without Christ, we cannot respond to God, we can't hear God, and we don't feel God. We have no appetite for God because we are dead, like a corpse.

At one of the last funerals I went to in Alabama, I watched a middle-aged lady approach the casket. She stood there over the casket talking to the corpse and holding the dead body's hand. She pressed her lips down on the dead body's cold forehead for a kiss and there was no response. Because she was dead. In this passage, Paul says that we were like that without Christ. Paul gives us two reasons we are dead. The first reason is that we trespass and sin. We are sinners by choice. What we do, we choose to do on our own free will. Nobody makes us do the things we do, we choose to do them. Anything less than owning sin is just making excuses. When my boys were small and we would get on one of them, inevitably they would point to the other and say, "He made me do it." We are sinners by choice, but we are also sinners by nature. Notice what it says at the end of verse three: "and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." Without Christ, even on our best days, we are children of wrath. Even if I could go one day without sinning, I still have a nature that is sinful. We are dead without Him. But we are not just dead.

### **Without Christ, We Are Disobedient**

Look at the two ways Paul describes disobedience: " And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience." The first one is according to the course of this world. That is the influence and the direction of our culture. Paul tells us our culture is headed like a swollen rushing river in a destructive direction, and when you are without Christ, you have no anchor. You will drift with the current and the course of the world. In other words, you will do what is natural, trying to find meaning in whatever the culture offers up. It's what happens to our students, it's what happens to young adults. I would call it passive disobedience when we just float along according to the course of this world. We let ourselves be carried away by the times.

There's another phrase in verse two that describes disobedience, and it seems a little more sinister—"according to the prince of the power of the air." Who do you think is behind the stealing of the brightest and the best of our

students? I fear for our students coming up in an overly sexualized culture. The standards of what is acceptable have dropped remarkably and we have done very little to stem the tide allowing our daughters to dress provocatively instead of teaching them that their body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. We have been passive in directing our sons on the path of biblical manhood, how to stand for what's right and behave as a Christian gentleman and treat girls as sisters in Christ with great gospel-driven respect. Instead, they still oftentimes walk according to the prince of the power of the air. Paul tells us that's who you used to be, who we were without Christ. Without Christ we were disobedient. This is a sad place to be, dead and disobedient, but that's not the end of it.

### **Without Christ, We Are Degenerate**

"Among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind." Before Christ, we lived by the basic natural instincts, by the lust of our flesh. The code we lived by was to do what you want, living for instant gratification. I've used the word degenerate because it means going down. There is a natural digression. Our culture will continue to get worse, and each time the culture moves, the church moves in proportion, maintaining a safe distance from the present culture, but standing where the culture used to be. One glaring example of this is homosexuality. It used to be considered taboo, or even a disorder. Then, over the course of time, it's been normalized and accepted. So much so now that if you call it a sin, you're the one with the disorder. That's just one example, ripped from the news, that shows that without Christ we are dead, disobedient, and degenerate. This last one may be the worst.

### **Without Christ, We Are Condemned**

By nature, we are children of wrath. Paul continues with the bad news for those that are without Christ. Without Christ, there is no escaping the judgment of God. The Bible says it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God, to be sent to an eternal Christ-less hell. Paul tells us that without Christ, your condition is hopeless. You are dead, disobedient,

degenerate, and condemned. That's the bad news. However, there is a beautiful little phrase that introduces our real hope and it's in verse four: "But God." It goes like this: we were dead, disobedient, degenerate, and condemned. There was nothing in us that made Him love us. But, verses four and five say, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved." He did this at the cross of Calvary. The cross is the ultimate display of God's hatred of sin and His love for sinners. When we were dead and useless and rebellious children of wrath, He made us alive by faith in Christ. In the Gospels, Jesus raised three people from the dead. In each of those, He spoke to the corpse, and His word gave life. The case of Lazarus is perhaps the most famous. "Lazarus come forth." Do you remember the first thing Jesus said to do to Lazarus? Jesus said, "Unbind him and let him go. Get him out of those grave clothes." The Lord Jesus is God's expression of love, and in Him we have life. You need to take off those great clothes of shame and guilt and yesterday's sin and put on the righteousness of Christ. The divine love of a Holy Father compels Him to bend down over His children, dead and sin, and even though they are dead, because He loves them with a great love, and because He is rich in mercy. You can do all manner of things to separate yourself from God, be selfish, self-willed, rife with lustful ambition, you can do a lot of things. But if you are His child, you can't stop His loving you. Our condition without Him is hopeless, we are dead, disobedient, degenerate, and condemned. In Christ, He has made us alive, and raised us up with Him and seated with us in Him. This is the gospel we have been learning. Think of it like this: God is our righteous Creator, He is holy and loving. Man is the crown of God's creation, but he is separated from God by sin. Christ was sent as fully God and fully man. He lived a perfect life in our place, and died an atoning death as our substitute. God raised Him from the dead, and our response is that we are saved by grace through faith. Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved. Our condition without Him is hopeless, but our life in Christ is fearless.

*(Pastor prays)*