

## **The Powerlessness of Man**

By Jeremy Cagle

Good morning, everyone, you can go ahead and turn with me in your Bibles, as you can tell from the Scripture reading, we are in the book of Ephesians this morning. So if you want to go ahead and turn there with me. That's the book we're in this morning. Please turn to the book of Ephesians. And we're in chapter two today. Round of applause. All right, chapter two.

Yeah. We're finally in the second chapter of the book. Just to say a few words about that, if you've been with us for a while, you'll know we've been in Ephesians 1 for some time, now. That's why I asked for a round of applause there. We've been in for about four months, which is the longest amount of time we spent in any one chapter. We actually spent less time in the entire book of Romans than we've spent in Ephesians, chapter one. And we did that for a reason. We did it for a purpose.

As a pastor, I get to talk to a lot of people about spiritual things. It's just, it's my job. It's what I do. I get to talk to them about their soul. The Puritans called pastors 'soul doctors' or 'physicians of the soul,' and I try to copy that best I can. And now as I've done that here in Chilliwack, talked to people about their souls, I found a lot of people are confused about salvation here. It's like it is in most places, most Bible-Belt-type places. I grew up in the Bible Belt in the States, Bible Belt here, people are very religious, which means there's a lot of ideas floating around. And one idea that's very common is, a lot of people think salvation is all about them. Right? They think it's something they have to earn.

God does His part, I do mine. God does a little, He gets the ball rolling, and I do the rest. But the Bible doesn't say that. The Bible says something different. It says salvation is all of God. It says that He is the only one with a part to play, and no passage explains that better than Ephesians one. That's why we spend so much time in this chapter of the Bible. And no chapter explains salvation better than this one, which is why we spend so much time in this portion of God's Word.

Just so you know, I don't plan on going too slowly through the rest of the book, so we won't finish it in 2026. We will speed things up here. But that's why we did it here because I think there's nothing more miserable than soul trouble. Would you agree with that? There's nothing more miserable than being confused about salvation, and going to bed every night wondering, *did I do enough today? Did I do enough today? Was I good enough for God?*

That is a miserable way to go through life. And I've talked to a number of people here and I can relate to this because I grew up in this kind of environment, that thinks that way. And to help with that, we spent a lot of time in Ephesians chapter one. That's the reason we were in this portion of God's Word for so long.

And this morning, we find ourselves in chapter two. And I'd like to introduce it this way. By the way, the worship team did a wonderful job with songs this morning. It all came right out of this particular chapter. They did a great job.

But I would like to start us out this morning by actually giving you my personal testimony, by telling you how this passage, Ephesians 2, impacted me as a young believer.

Like many of you, I grew up in a church like what I just described. It was a little confusing on the subject of salvation, because we were taught it was something you had to earn. I remember thinking-- They were not-- It was a very light version of that, it was not mean spirited. But there was a flavour of God does His part and then you do yours. You know, God, Jesus died on the cross, but in order to receive that you have to be a good person. You have to like Tennessee football, you have to wear camouflage three days a week, and you have to be a good American. That was sort of the flavor of it.

Which was confusing for me. It was unsettling because I never knew if I did enough. I never knew if I was good enough for God, if I did my part. So, I went to church, I read my Bible, I prayed, but for most

of my life I was unsure about my salvation. I didn't know where I stood with God. If I had a good day, I thought I was okay. If I had a bad day, it was a mess.

And it wasn't until my twenties that things began to change. I was converted at sixteen, almost seventeen-years-old, but I grew up in church my entire life, and it wasn't until twenty, my twenties that I was sitting in a philosophy, class and university, something happened when I read the writings of a man named Augustine.

I don't know if you've ever heard the name Augustine before, but he was a church leader from the fourth century. He was an ancient Christian who was respected by philosophers and theologians alike. Christians and non-Christians read him, which is why we studied him. And we read a book by him called *The Confessions*, in which he talked about his conversion. Augustine talked about his struggles with sin and how he was saved from that. And he said that God did it all. That's what he kept repeating over and over again in this book. The one thing he kept saying is that God did everything to save him, all he did was sin. And he sinned a lot. I mean, I remember reading it and thinking if God can save a guy like that, He could save anybody.

He said it in his own words. He said this, he said, talking to the Lord and a prayer. Augustine said, "You called and cried and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, and you took away my blindness. You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath, and now I pant for you. I tasted you and now I hunger for more. You touch me and I am set on fire to attain the peace, which is yours."

It's a beautiful book and the book reads like that. But I remember reading that in my philosophy class, my secular philosophy class, my godless philosophy class, and thinking, *I don't believe that.*

First time I read that I thought as a Christian, I don't see God that way, I don't think I'm that bad. I'm a pretty good person. God doesn't have to do it all. I can help him out. So I thought Augustine was out to lunch.

But I remember thinking, well, I've got to make sure about this. I, this is a big deal. So I've got to look into it. And so I looked it up in my Bible, and I came to Ephesians chapter two. And I remember someone showed this to me, or if I just found it on my own, but I read these words in the Bible, if you want to read along with me, it says,

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, **2** 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. **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. **4** But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, **5** even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ, for by grace you have been saved.

I read that as a pretty new believer, in my twenties, and I said, "Wow, Augustine was right." There it is in plain English. You can't deny what this says. I was dead when God saved me. All I did was sin. It says I was a child of wrath and supposed to be a child of God. I was a child of wrath. Which means I had no part to play. I had no hand in my salvation. I didn't help God out. God did it all. Because in order for God to save me, he had to raise the dead.

I don't have to tell you but you can't get any spiritually worse than being dead. That's the strongest word you can think of. In order for God to make me a believer, he had to perform a resurrection inside my soul. He had to reach me because I couldn't reach him.

And when I understood that, things began to click for me. Some things began to make sense for the first time. For one thing, it helped me sleep at night, because I finally stopped wondering if I was good enough for God. The answer is I'm not.

God saved me. Even when I was bad. It's all God. I can sleep at night because my salvation is all in His hands. And I can be humble. I mean, truly humbled for the first time in my life because I realized how sinful I was. In fact, this passage, more than any other, showed me the depths of my sin, the depths of my depravity. And it showed me that God could save me at my lowest point.

And show me why the world is so bad. I don't have to tell you guys the world is a bad place.

I was in college reading this when 9/11 happened. You guys remember 9/11? Planes flew into the World Trade Center. I've been in the World Trade Center, I went down the below it during rush hour one day and the first thing I thought of was, *Lord, please tell me there weren't that many people in the building when they fell.*

This world's a bad place. People do bad things. And Ephesians 2 tells you why. All that's explained in this chapter; it's all spelled out for you right here. And not only is that spelled out for you, but you also see the hope you have as a Christian.

And one commentator said it this way, he said, 'there's probably no chapter in the Bible that is more practical than Ephesians chapter two. There's probably no passage that more clearly explains the nature of man. If I had no other reason to believe the Bible, this would be it. If I had no other reason to trust it, I would trust it simply for what it says right here.'

And just to give you a review of where we're at so far in the book of Ephesians, chapter two comes at the end of a long discussion about God's power. That's how Ephesians chapter one ends. It ends with a

discussion about the power of God. If you want to look in chapter one, verse eighteen, Paul makes a prayer request, and to show you that God can answer it, to show you that He is strong enough to answer prayer, Paul says in verse nineteen, that God is powerful. Goes on to say, because He raised Christ from the dead, and He put all rule and authority and power and dominion and all things under His feet. And to show you that in chapter two, to explain all of that further, Paul says that God raised you.

That's the connection between Ephesians 1 and Ephesians 2. Chapter one says God can raise the dead. Chapter two says God raised you. You were dead. And God brought you back to life. Not only did He raise His Son, but He raised His Son's followers from the dead. Not only did He give life to Christ, but He gives life to those who trust in Christ. You know this from personal experience, Paul says. This is yours.

You know, I read somewhere this week doing some research on this, and it said, a little quote that said, "Jesus saw the best in me, and then He had to die for it on the cross."

I mean, even my best is sinful in God's eyes. Even my best is like filthy rags, Isaiah says. The idea of filthy there, is the idea of ceremoniously unclean rags. But God still saved me.

In theological terms, salvation monogistic, which means that God does it alone. He's the only one who takes credit for it. It's not synergistic, God and man working together. Our growth in Christ is synergistic, but not salvation. It is, another way to say this is, it's theocentric. It's centered around God. It's not anthropocentric, centered around man.

And going back to what we said earlier, if you're looking for a practical application of this here, this is the way this applies to us. It should give you hope. This should give you hope, because it means you can't mess this up. You guys get this? You can't lose this, because it's not based on you.

So many Christians think they're going to lose their salvation today. Paul says it can't happen because our salvation is solely of God.

And let's talk about this this morning in Ephesians 2. Well, one more thing before we do; in his book *In the Heavenlies*, H.A. Ironside tells a story of a time he met a fortune teller on a train, who said that she could read his palm and tell his future. To which he replied, he said, "That's okay. I already know my future. In fact, I have a book that gives me my past, present and future." The woman said, "Well, I'd like to see that book." And so he opened up his Bible, to Ephesians 2, and he read this: "--and you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world." And he said, "That's my past. That's the man I used to be." And then he read, "--but God being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions made us alive together with Christ." He said, "That is my present. That's who I am now." And then he read, "--and He raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ so in the ages to come, He might show the surpassing riches of His grace." And he said, "That is my future. That's who I will be one day." At which point the woman said, "No more, no more! I don't want to hear anymore!" And she ran off down the hall. And that was the end of the conversation.

But friends, he's right: this tells you your past, present and future. It's all laid out here, in this chapter. And this morning, we're going to look at the first part together. We're going to look at your past.

So if you're taking notes, in Ephesians 2, in the first few verses here, verses one through three, we're going to look at three descriptions of your former sinful state.

That's our outline for today, that's what this is about. But if you're a believer here this morning, we're going to look at three descriptions of your former sinful state. To say this is who you used to be, as a Christian. This is who you once were. If you are an unbeliever here this morning, this is who you still are. And we'll talk about that in a moment. But if you're in Christ, this is who you used to be.

And I wonder, do we ever do this as Christians? Do we ever look at who we used to be and marvel that God saved us? You ever do that? Do you ever look at what you were before Christ, and does that make you say, 'If God did that for me, he could do this for anybody.' You know, 'If God could save a wretch like me...' That's why Paul puts this in here. And let's look at this with three descriptions of our former sinful state. The first one is this: you were dead.

I already said a few words about this, but I do want to explain a little more. First, Paul starts off by saying that you were dead. Because there's nothing more powerless than a dead man. There's nothing more helpless than that. And so to show you the power of God, Paul says, 'This is what you were when he saved you.' If you read chapter two, verse one again. He writes, and he says this, he says, "...and you were dead in your trespasses and sins."

Just to give you some context for that, if you remember from previous weeks, the book of Ephesians is about God's blessing. That's the theme of the book. If you look in chapter one, verse three, this is the kind of the crux, of the key verse of the book. It says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." That's how the book starts out. Paul's telling you how God has blessed you.

But the interesting thing is that so far in the book you haven't been mentioned yet. So far as you're reading the book of Ephesians. It's all about God and what God has done and how God has saved you and blessed you. And this is the first time you appear in a major way. It's the first time you pop up, and it says that, verse one, "You were dead." Which is not a very flattering thing to say. It doesn't really build up your self esteem. But it means that you did nothing to earn these blessings. You did nothing to receive all this in chapter one. It's all of God.

And if you think about it, this is a shocking thing to say. It's pretty startling. You know, the New Testament uses a lot of words for sin, it uses a lot of words you could pick from. For instance, the New Testament calls our sin, 'blindness' and 'deafness.'

If you read the New Testament, you'll see it says that 'sinners are blind and deaf, they can't see they can't hear the things of God.' That's pretty bad.

It's also, sin is called 'hardness' and a 'callousness.' The idea there is, when someone's in sin, the truth just bounces off of them like a brick wall. Sin is referred to as that. It's called a 'sickness' or a 'disease.' It's called 'leprosy,' things like that. But the worst description is this one. The most shocking one is what you read right here. Paul says sinners are dead.

They're dead, which means they have no life in them. They're not able to respond to anything. That's the point of the analogy a sinner can't respond on his own.

I told you before, we have several doctors in our congregation and they tell me that they practice their medicine on corpses. Well, they do that because the corpse doesn't respond. If you make a mistake on a corpse, it's okay, he's already gone. You don't poke his foot and he, you know, slaps you. He's dead.

That's the idea here. Spiritually, we were like that before Christ. And it's even more than this, because a dead body was considered to be defiled by the Jews. A dead body was ceremonially unclean so that if you touched one, if you came in contact with a dead body in the Old Testament, you had to be isolated for several days. They would keep you outside the camp until you purified yourself. Paul says here that not only did you touch a dead body, but you were dead. Not only did you touch something unclean, but you were unclean in your soul.

And if you notice, to add to this, the passage doesn't say that you were in danger of dying, it says you were dead. It doesn't say that you were about to die when God saved you, you were already there. The decomposition, the decay had already set in.

Verse one says, this occurred, if you notice in your Bibles there, "in your trespasses and sins." The word 'trespasses' here comes from a Greek word that means 'false steps.' And 'sins' means, 'to miss the mark.' And the meaning here is, that this is where you die. This is where the death occurred in your failure to keep the law. In your failure to do what God says.

These words are also in the plural to show you this was habitual for you, it was an ongoing thing. But all this to say is, we were in a bad state when God saved us. All of us. Every person on the planet.

One more theological term, this is known as the doctrine of total depravity. And that doesn't mean that you were as bad as you could be. It means that you were covered in badness it touched every part of you. Your sin had a total impact on your life. You may not have been as bad as the guy next door, but compared to God, you'd failed.

Which is significant because, I think if there's something people ignore today, if there's something we don't understand, it's this, you know? We often read a passage like this and say, "Well, come on, Paul. I'm not that bad. I mean, come on, Paul. I may be sinful but I'm not dead in this. I'm not covered in this. I've done some good things."

Well, to kind of help you see what he's saying here, let me just ask a few questions. Kind of flesh this out a little bit, ask you a few things. Here's one.

Have you ever tried to stop sinning? And I mean, stop. Cold turkey. Completely stop. Now, how did that go? Not very well, right? Maybe make it a few, few hours a few, few, maybe a day.

Why was that? Well, because you were dead in your trespasses and sins without Christ. We live in a body of death.

Let me ask you another question and other things from another angle. Have you ever tried, well, have you ever tried to keep a record of your thoughts for a day? Of your fantasies and your images? Have you ever been wondered what it would be like if the person sitting next to you in church were to crawl into your mind for a day. Do you think they'd still be your friend?

That's because, this is what Paul's saying here. Sin comes naturally to you. Death comes naturally to you. It comes naturally to all of us.

You know, we don't tell our children in the nursery to do bad things. They already know how to do that. We tell them to do good things, right?

I read somewhere, it's not just the children, it's the adults too. I read somewhere that in the last four-thousand years of recorded history, there's only been two-hundred-and-sixty-eight years of peace. And on the continent of Europe alone, in the last three centuries, there's been three-hundred wars. On the 'enlightened' continent of Europe, on the 'refined, cultured' continent of Europe: three-hundred wars.

Why? Because we all have the same problem. We're all in the same boat. We're sinners, who are dead in our sins. We fight with each other because we fight with God.

The New Testament scholar Augustus avant ran said, "Sin is the great equalizer." It puts us all on the same playing field, the great and the small, the rich and the poor, the old and the young alike are all infected with sin. They all experience it, and therefore they all die. The only difference is the state of their decay. The only difference is how much our souls have already decomposed on our own.

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And the scary thing, Paul said, we're getting this in a moment., but this is for religious people too. It's not just for atheists and agnostics and sinners-- really bad people. This is for religious people. I remember talking to a Muslim friend of mine in high school, who was a good guy, who was a moral guy. And I asked him about his view of heaven. And he said, 'Heaven is a place where he will sleep with virgins.' That's it. That's what it is. Heaven is a place of sex. And I remember thinking, "Wow. Heaven is just one big brothel to you?" That's the moral people. And he thought that way because he was dead to God. He thought that way because his religion had done nothing for his soul.

It's what Paul is getting at here, and it leads to another point we need to consider this morning. Another description of our former sinful state. The first one is that we were dead. It sets the stage for all we're going to talk about today, sets the tone for it, but as, as Paul is talking about the blessings of the Christian life, it's almost like he says this is a greatest blessing of all: God gave you all of that when you were dead.

You weren't climbing the ladder to heaven. You couldn't even find the ladder to heaven. He gave it all to you when you had no life in you. Which leads to the next description, and that is this: you were disobedient.

The second description of our former sinful state is that we were dead, also we were disobedient. Which means that not only were we dead, but we acted like it. We showed our death and our behavior. And if you look in chapter two, verses one through two. This is one of those verses, I gotta tell you guys, if it wasn't in the Bible, you almost wouldn't believe it.

But he says, "--and you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 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."

This is another shocking passage, but Paul says, in case you don't understand what death means, if you want to know what I'm talking about here, let me spell it out for you. He says, You formerly walked according to the course of this world.

I mean, speaking to the Ephesians they were, normally, a bad people, but it would have been surprising even for them to read this. To show you what he's saying here, the Jews called the law, a **HELOC** or 'a walking.' They believe the law was something to be walked out. It was something to be lived out and practiced every day.

And so Paul uses that expression several times in the book of Ephesians. You see it here, and chapter two, verse ten, uses the phrase, if you look a few verses down, he says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." So Paul says that when you're saved, you should walk in good works. You were created to live them out. But here if you notice, Paul says, You live something else out, you practiced something else before Christ. You walked according to the course of this world.

It doesn't mean the physical world but the spiritual world, the world you can't see. You could call it the world's system or the world of evil spirits. Which is why he goes on to say, "according to the prince of the power of the air, that is now working in the sons of disobedience." The prince of the power of the air is another way of saying the Devil, Satan. It refers to the one who rules the world, the evil world. God rules the world in a sovereign way. But He allows the Devil to rule the evil world. That's what this is referring to here.

Paul says that you followed him. You followed the devil.

We don't think this way today anymore. But the ancients believed very passionately in the existence of demons. That was even until the middle ages. If you ever see pictures from the Middle Ages, you see demons and devils everywhere. They painted them on everything.

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And in the first century, they thought that the air was full of the demons. I thought it was so full them and you couldn't put a pin in between them. So many evil spirits you couldn't put a needle in there.

Pythagorus said, 'The world is full of spirits. You see them everywhere.' Philo, the philosopher, said 'the air is the house of disembodied spirits. It's the home where they live.' And they would go around paranoia that you might contract the evil spirit.

Even the Roman Catholic Church today has a lot of saints to warn off evil spirits. You see that kind of thing going on. And Paul's point is that, in verse two, is that Satan oversees that. He's the prince of the power of the air, and just show you how bad you once were, Paul says you followed him. You did what he did. You chased after the devil.

Which let's be honest, friends, that sounds like a horrible thing to say, doesn't it? Would anybody agree with that? You follow the devil? The devil?

I might have followed some bad ideas but I didn't follow that guy. You know, I might have done some evil things, but I didn't do that. I went to church, I read my Bible. Well, Paul says, you may have done that. But the Devil reads his Bible too, the Devil goes to church. And if your faith is no different from his, you're going to end up in the same place. If you don't believe something different from Satan, your fate will be no different.

James 2:19 says, "You believe God is One. Good. The demons believe that and they shudder." It's kind of shocking. A lot of churches today probably don't even have faith that's as good as the demons' because they don't even shudder at God anymore.

James says the demons believe and they're afraid of God. And if your faith is no different from theirs, you'll be lost. That's what this is referring to. You'll be dead in this life. You'll be dead in the next. You'll be dead in this world and dead in the world to come.

It's a terrifying thought, but there are people in the world who will die, and they will face God on judgment day hear that, you were following the devil. You were following the wrong person.

Paul says unbelievers do that, lost people do that, because they're disobedient.

A seminary professor from Dallas was once trying to explain this to his students. He was trying to explain this idea of disobedience and death to them and he asked them, "What can a dead man do? What can a corpse do?" And, and after a long pause, one student at the back of the room held up his hand and he said, "Stink. The dead man can stink."

So that's what this says. Whether you're religious or not, whether you go to church or not, you still stink in the eyes of God without Christ. You had the same smell on you of death.

The Devil reeks of death, his followers reek of death.

And we could talk about a lot of examples of this. A lot of ways to think about this. I read this week that there's no doctrine in the Bible that's more easily, easier to prove than the doctrine of total depravity. It's so easy to prove this. Some of our brothers went out yesterday, evangelizing, and what did you guys ask people? Could you keep the 10 commandments, right? That is an easy thing: to prove our sin.

So we could talk about a lot of sins, but let's just talk about the sin of lust for a moment. We're going to see that in verse three, the sin of lust.

And I don't mean sexual lust, erotic lust. Because lust is anything that's mastered you. It's anything that has controlled you more than God. And how many of us have been guilty of that? How many of us have let something control us other than God? Before we were saved?

And it could be anything. Anything. Hobbies, sports, movies, relationships, alcohol, drugs, sex, caffeine - all of that could fit into here. We can be controlled by work, family, friends, possessions, our house, our clean house, our very clean house, our house that is cleaner than our neighbor's house. All right, am I getting in trouble now? Am I really stepping on toes here?

It could be even more innocent than that. I talked to a brother in Squamish the other day who told me before he became a Christian, he went skiing a hundred-and-thirty days out of the year. He spent months out of his life every year just skiing, because he couldn't help it. It had taken control of him. It was a passion. It was a desire. That's evil. If it takes the place of God in your life, it's evil.

Nothing wrong with skiing, go ski. Have a great time. But you don't put that above the Lord. That's to walk according to the course of this world. It's to walk according to the prince of the power of the air. And we all did that at one time. All of us.

It's been said that the greatest trick the Devil he ever pulled was convincing the world that he did not exist. And the second greatest trick the devil ever pulled was to convince the world that sin did not exist. There is no sin anymore. We're all okay. We're all fine. It's just a little hobby.

The Bible says it's not, if it takes the place of God in your life. And we've all disobeyed in that.

Which brings us to one more point to consider this morning. Just one more description of our former sinful state. And the first one is Paul says you were dead. When God saved you, you were not a decent person. You were not good. Nothing like that. You were dead. You had no life in you.

And that brings us to the next description and that is that you were disobedient. By the way, on that word ‘death.’ You can’t be sort of dead right? You’re either dead or you’re not dead. You know, you don’t go to the funeral and say, “I hope he’s really dead.” No, he’s dead. She’s dead.

That’s how we were spiritually before God. Bringing us to the next description, you were disobedient as well. You played your death out in real life, whether it was through lust, whether it was through any sin you could put in here. You practiced your evil ways, chased after the Devil.

Bringing us to one more point to talk about this morning, one more description of our former sinful state, and that is that you were depraved. Before God saved you, you were dead, you were disobedient. And finally, one more is that you were depraved, which means sin had dominated your life. It had consumed every part of you.

Piggybacking off of these other verses, Paul says that you became ‘a slave to sin.’ There’s other passages that talk about that. But if you read in verses one through three, the whole passage here, it says, “--and you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 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 and the sons of disobedience. Among them, we all too formerly lived in the lust of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.”

Just to explain this a little bit, as Paul is talking about the power of God and the need for prayer in the Christian life, in chapter one. As he gets into chapter two, he keeps telling you why this is necessary, why you need to pray, why you need the power of God, and he says, “It’s because you were this bad. You couldn’t do anything on your own to save yourself. You were helpless.”

And to explain that further, he said, has one more verse to say that you were depraved, which means your sin had taken over. You see the word 'lived' there in verse three. To emphasize the fact that you didn't just do this every once in a while you lived this way.

He writes in verse three, "Among them, we too all formerly lived in the lust of our flesh." That word 'we' is important there because it means we Jews, we Israelites did this. In verse one, he says, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins." That means you Gentiles, you Ephesians, you non Jews. Now Paul says, 'We Jews live this way.' Now that's a really taking things to a whole new level.

Jews thought the Gentiles were bad. Got that. They were dead. No problem. But the Jews weren't dead.

You remember when John the Baptist was baptizing, the Jews had a real hard time with that? Well, that wasn't because nobody baptized. They would baptize, proselytize, they would baptize non-Jews who were becoming Jewish, but you weren't supposed to baptize Jews.

John the Baptist was baptizing Jews. That's the problem. But he's doing that because he says you have to repent too. You have to believe too.

Paul, as a former Pharisee, as a former keeper of the law, of the tribe of Benjamin, all those qualifications he had. He says here in verse three, 'We had the same problem you did. Try as hard as I might. I couldn't stop sinning,' Paul says. 'Try as hard as I might, I couldn't keep from living in the lust of my flesh. I could defeat a lot of sins. I couldn't defeat this.'

It goes on, he says, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind. Now it's an indulgence for him. Now it's a craving. I liked my sin, Paul said.

We've all craved chocolate before, or indulged in something like that. A fourth cup of coffee when it's really cloudy during the day. Paul says I craved my sinful desires.

Friends, here's how it is: the problem with sin is that you want to do it. If you didn't want to do it, it wouldn't be a problem.

I was counseling a brother one time, he was struggling with something. He says, "I don't want to do this. I don't want to do this. I don't want to do this." And I said, "Then what are we talking about? The problem is you want to do it." That's what this says.

Then he says, "And we were by nature, children of wrath. Even as the rest." Paul says, I should have been a child of Israel. I should have been a child of God. Instead, I was a child of wrath. Anger. God's anger because of my sin. He says 'even as the rest' to say, I was just like you Gentiles.

And the point in all of this, the point he's getting at in this whole passage, is that there is no way for a person to be saved, if it were not for the power of God. There is no way for anyone to be forgiven and go to heaven unless God does it all.

This is for everybody. This is for Jew and Gentile. It's not a racial problem. It's a universal problem. It's not a national problem. It's a human problem. We've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

This is the autobiography of everyone in this room. You should all be able to see yourself in these first three verses. This is a mirror into the lost soul.

You may not feel like you can relate to some verses of the Bible, but if you're honest, you should be able to relate to these verses.

But the turning point comes in verse four, the change comes in the short phrase at the beginning of the next verse, verse four. “But God...” We’re going to talk about this more next week. But that has been called the Gospel in two words. This is how God saves us. This is what he does. “But God...”

You were all of these things, but God intervened. You were all of these things, but God took notice of you.

I heard one deacon at a former church say, “I used to do all these bad things, but God. I used to sin this way in that way, but God.”

The only thing that can save us from all of this is the power of God. Which is what he goes on to say. There’s no plan B, there’s no alternative solution. Good works can’t do it. Good deeds can’t do it. Going to church, reading your Bible, praying. Avoiding culturally bad sins can’t do it.

God alone saves sinners, which is the hope that you have. Because if you see yourself in verses one through three, then the rest of this passage says you can be saved, because God is alive. You can be saved because you have a God who is this powerful. He can raise the dead, he can raise you, any of you.

You see the extremes of human nature in the book of Ephesians. The Ephesians were a rotten stinking group of sinners. They were like anybody else in the first century, they were just a rough town. Name the sin, they did it.

And then you have Paul who was like the equivalent of a seminary professor. PhD, smart guy, godly guy. And Paul says both of us have the same problem, and both of us have the same solution: it is in the power of God.

Warren Wiersbe very powerfully said that when you read Ephesians 2, you notice that God finds you in the graveyard and leaves you in heaven. He finds you in the tomb, in the coffin, nailed shut, and he seats you in the heavenly places. That's how this book goes.

What a wonderful God. Amen? What a powerful God. And you can have this today, if you trust in Him.

Nevermind all this stuff about how this works and the mystery of it. Nevermind how we can explain some of the stuff about how man's will and God's will work. The point Paul makes is that you were dead. But if you believe, you can be saved. This can all be yours, if you trust in Christ.

The story is told of the time William Wilberforce, the man who was responsible for ending slavery in England, brought a lost friend of his to church to hear a preacher speak.

His friend was an intelligent man, highly educated, Oxford trained. And afterwards, Wilberforce was so excited because the gospel was so clear in the sermon, the message was so clear. He thought, boy, my friends gotta believe now. And afterwards, they were talking and his friend said, "You know, Wilberforce, I gotta be honest with you. I don't have the slightest idea what that man was talking about. I have no idea what he said."

And Wilberforce said that he learned something that day he, he realized something. In order for my friend to be saved, God has to do it all. The Lord has to work in his heart.

I can take him to church, I can preach the gospel to him. I can make it clear and I should do that. But the results are entirely up to God. God saves sinners, and God alone. He did that with you. He did that with me.

And if you're a lost person in the room this morning, if you can't see yourself past verse three, I want to tell you, He can do that for you. He can raise the dead. Let me close us in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank You, Lord for this passage and your word. We thank you that it's so clear that the power comes from you and not from us. It's encouraging, Lord, to know that if it were up to us, we would mess it up. We would send it away. If salvation depended on us, we would fail. But it doesn't depend on us. depends on who you are. Thank you for the hope in this passage. Thank you for the truth in this text. Thank you for the power of this.

And Lord, I do pray for those who were here this morning for the Christians that they would be encouraged to know that their salvation is complete. It is finished. You have paid it all. And they can have hope in that. Lord, I pray for the lost people here this morning. If they feel a death in their heart, because they feel the deadness in their soul, if they relate to all of this Lord, they would know there is hope in Christ, there's life in him. And would you awaken the dead this morning among us?

Father, thank You for Your Word. Thank you that it leaves nothing out of human experience. And it leaves no stone unturned and pulls no punches. We go out this morning and rejoice in it, we pray, and may you get all the glory for the souls you save in our church. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.