

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

**But God...**  
**Ephesians 2:1-6**

**Intro:** As we move into the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Ephesians we should notice that Paul makes a change in his approach on the subject of salvation. In **ch1**, Paul looked at our salvation from God's point of view, showing how God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ and how one day all things shall be subjected to Christ. Now in **ch2** he talks about salvation from the perspective of the recipient; the individual Christian. He will discuss what we were before God worked in calling us to Christ, what God did for us in Christ, and what we are now to become and do as the result of His continued working in our life. In a nutshell, **ch1** presents the past, present, and future of God's great plan of salvation while **ch2** reveals the past, present, and future of the persons Christ saves.

So, having explained to us our present possessions in Christ in **ch1**, Paul now turns to discuss our spiritual position in Christ and the description is glorious. But before Paul can look at the glories of our present and future in Christ he must take us back to the miserable state of our past life before we met Jesus Christ and the picture is not pretty.

**1-3** – There have been many TV series and even full-length movies whose entire purpose was to look back with nostalgia at a simpler time: The Andy Griffith Show; The Walton's; Little House on the Prairie; Happy Days and countless movies – almost every baseball movie that's ever been made. Even print media is not immune – the whole emphasis of The Saturday Evening Post was to look back and help it's readers to remember the good ol' days. Well, Paul is taking a look back here in these first few verses and his view is anything but nostalgic! You might think Paul is laying it on kind of thick to make his point but the sad truth is he's being shockingly realistic and painfully accurate. In these 3 verses, Paul gives us a full length picture of the terrible condition of the unsaved person.

In 1968, The First Edition released a song called "Just Dropped In (To See What Condition My Condition Was In)". How should we assess the condition of the human condition? In the entire scope of human history there have only been 3 basic answers to that question. The 1<sup>st</sup> view is that people are

basically okay. Those that hold this idea would admit that human nature isn't as healthy as it could be but we live in an evolving world and things are getting better. At the worst, people are not quite perfect. The 2<sup>nd</sup> view is that man is not well; he's sick, even mortally sick. There is indeed something wrong with human beings. But the situation is not hopeless. People are at least alive, and as long as they are alive . . . well, where there is life, there is hope. No need to call the undertaker just yet.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> view, the biblical view (which Paul articulates here), agrees that man is not well. In fact it's a more serious diagnosis: man is dead—dead so far as his relationship to God is concerned. He is dead in trespasses and sins (1b), just as God warned Adam he would be in Eden before the fall. The idea behind trespasses is that we've crossed a line, challenging God's boundaries. The idea behind sins is that we have missed a mark, the perfect standards of God. Trespasses speaks of man as a rebel, sins speaks of man as a failure. But worse than that, like a spiritual corpse, a sinner is unable to make a single move toward God, think a single thought about God, or even correctly respond to God—unless God is first present to bring the spiritually dead person to life, which is what Paul says He does do (1a).

In Christian doctrine the crux of this matter is in how we regard the human will. Is it free to choose God in its fallen state? Or, is it unable to choose God, being bound by sin? This question has been debated at length over the long history of the Church, and the general consensus leans heavily towards the bondage of the will. This concept states that apart from the undeserved grace of God in quickening the human mind and soul, no one ever willingly turns to God or embraces the offer of salvation. Sin enslaves us. Instead of turning to God, we run from Him. No other view does justice to what the Bible teaches concerning the radical nature of sin and the totality of grace in salvation.

Jonathan Edwards, 18<sup>th</sup> century revivalist and theologian probably had the clearest take on the subject. He said the problem is not with the will itself, since the will is simply the mind choosing what the mind deems best. The problem is with man's moral nature, which is opposed to God, and with the sinful motives that flow from that corrupt nature. Edwards agreed that the will is always free; we always choose what we judge best in a given situation. But as sinners we always judge wrongly. We consider God undesirable. Thus, we always resist Him and reject the gospel.

Now, the kind of death Paul talks about here is a strange one—although dead, the sinner still walks about quite actively in sin. He is dead toward God but still alive to all wickedness. Paul uses strong, active words here. Although spiritually dead, the sinner follows the ways of the world and of the devil and spends his time gratifying the cravings of his sinful nature. That's a lot of activity for a dead man but it's that very activity that reveals and proves the reality and complete futility of our spiritual death.

Here's a question: what plot line involves an entity that is both dead and still moving around? Zombies! A zombie is a person who has died but is still walking around. To make this scenario even more gruesome, the body is not just dead but decaying; putrefying. It's about the most disgusting thing anyone can imagine. But that's what Paul says the human condition is before God. In their opposition to God, men and women are walking corpses. They are the living dead and just like zombies, they're an offense in the nostrils of God. These decaying spiritual corpses stink.

Even worse, sinners are trapped by the very things that are destroying them. In spiritual terms we commonly speak of temptations coming to us from "the world, the flesh, and the devil." These are the categories of sinful activity Paul speaks of. Only it's not just temptation that Paul has in mind, but actual captivity by these forces so that the person involved constantly moves and operates only within their influence. We talked about the world, the flesh, and the devil last time, showing the resurrection power of God over each of them. But Paul speaks of these things here not to show our victory over them or liberation from them but rather our enslavement to them apart from God's power.

We're enslaved to the world, because apart from the renewing of our minds ([Rom 12:2](#)) we're unable to perform in any other way. The lost person is entirely controlled by the world's thought system. They think as the world thinks. They take their opinions ready-made from their favorite media outlet. Their very appearance is controlled by the world and its changing fashions. They all conform; they dare not disobey; they're afraid of the consequences. Paul says that in our transgressions, sins, and disobedience we all followed the ways of this world ([2](#)).

We're enslaved by the devil also, because we followed the prince of the

power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience. Here, the word spirit is not a synonym for “devil,” as in the evil spirit. The phrase is more accurately translated: the prince [ruler] of the power [kingdom] of the air, [who is also the ruler of] the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.” This shows how the devil enslaves people. It’s not that he’s personally present. He’s only one creature and can only be present in one place at one time. It is rather through the evil spirit or outlook present in the world that he rules over the lost.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> area of human slavery is to the flesh, whose sinful cravings we’re always working to gratify (3). Flesh refers, not to our body, but to our fallen sinful nature, including both our fleshly desires and our wicked thoughts. We have fleshly sins of the more obvious sort: laziness, lust, greed. But also inner, intellectual sins: pride, sinful ambition, hostility to the revealed truth of God, malice, and envy. Sadly we’re trapped by these things. In our fallen state, we cannot turn from sin and seek after God; we cannot even stop sinning. We’re on a path of self-destruction. We’re oblivious to the danger as we rush head-long and hell-bent toward our eternal demise.

Paul’s description of the sorry state of the human condition sounds pretty comprehensive. It seems as if nothing more could be added. Yet Paul does add something, something quite horrible; something so overwhelming that the other descriptions truly fade into the background when placed next to it. He says that in our sin we are by nature children of wrath, meaning in our natural state we are the objects of God’s wrath (3b). Of course, God’s wrath isn’t a popular topic in most churches today. They’d rather hear about God’s love, mercy or even His justice but not His wrath! This objection is actually just an example of the very bondage Paul’s been writing about. The worldly mind doesn’t take God’s wrath seriously because it doesn’t take sin seriously. But, if sin is as bad as the Bible says it is, nothing is more just or reasonable than the wrath of a holy God being expressed against it.

The OT has more than 20 words used to express God’s wrath and more than 600 passages that deal with it. The NT uses 2 main terms to express God’s wrath: *thumos* means “to rush along fiercely” or “be in a heat of violence” and *orgē* means “to grow ripe for something” indicating God’s gradually building and intensifying opposition to sin. This is the word most often used for “wrath” in the NT. Taken together these words teach that God’s wrath is consistent, controlled, and judicial. That’s what makes it so

frightening. The doctrine of wrath doesn't mean God just gets angry from time to time, flies off the handle, then forgets about it. Instead, His wrath is an inevitable and growing opposition to all that is opposed to His righteousness.

What a horrible position to be in! What can be done for those who are trapped in sin and, unable to escape from it, are being carried along to the inevitable outpouring of the just wrath of the avenging God? Humanly speaking nothing can be done. The sinner cannot save himself. Even a redeemed person, who has seen the truth of salvation in the gospel, cannot save another sinner. The state of the unsaved individual is humanly hopeless. But what is impossible for men is possible for God. A radical problem requires a radical remedy, and God supplies it!

**4-6** – No sooner has Paul spoken of the way we were then he joyfully breaks in with, But God... Dead in trespasses and sins? Yes we were! But God performs resurrections. He reaches down to where ruined, miserable, trapped sinners are living, and He brings them to spiritual life again. He calls them; and His voice, which quickens the dead, brings them running to that which beforehand they both shunned and feared. One theologian has posited that these 2 words, in and of themselves, in a sense contain the whole of the gospel.” They tell what God has done, how He’s intervened in what was otherwise an utterly hopeless situation. Before God intervened we were as **1-3** describes us. This is a deplorable, desperate, heinous condition. But God - the insertion of those words and what they mean make all the difference in the world.

Who is this God? He’s the God of the Bible. He’s the God Paul gloriously revealed in **ch1**. What do we know about this God? He’s sovereign. The most important thing we can say about God is that He is sovereign. In fact if God isn’t sovereign, God isn’t God. Sovereignty means rule, so saying God is sovereign means God rules His creation. He made it, and He’s in control of it. Nothing occurs without His knowledge and permission. Nothing surprises Him. He’s holy. He’s a moral God who’s not indifferent to issues of right and wrong, justice and injustice, righteousness and sin. On the contrary, it’s because of His opposition to everything sinful that His great plan of salvation was made and is being executed. Sin will be punished and righteousness will be exalted in His universe.



God's also full of wrath against sin. This flows from His holiness. It's the outworking of His holiness against all that's opposed to it. This is why our condition is so frightful. We're dead in trespasses and sins (1). That's bad, sure. But it wouldn't be frightful apart from God's wrath against those transgressions. Apart from this wrath we could say that's just the way things are. God is God; we're just people. He's holy; we're not. Let God go His way; we will go ours. It doesn't work that way. God doesn't just go His own way. He's the holy God. This is His universe and our sin has introduced a foul blemish into it. He's opposed to sin and is determined to stamp it out. This is the God of the Bible and this is the God we need, though we don't know it in our sinful state. Instead of coming to Him to find new life and righteousness, we run from Him to wickedness and spiritual death. What has God done?

It's amazing to discover that although we run from God, preferring wickedness and death to righteousness and life, God hasn't run from us. Instead, He's come to us and has done for us exactly what needed to be done. In short, He's saved us. He's rescued us from the desperate, deplorable condition described in v1-3. We were dead: spiritually hopeless. We were enslaved by sin and were justly the objects of God's wrath. But God! Here's where the wonder of the gospel comes in. We were hopelessly lost in wickedness. But God has intervened to save us, and He's saved us by intervening sovereignly and righteously in each of these areas.

Notice how this works out. We were dead in sins, but God made us alive (5). Just like Lazarus in John 11, we were dead. But God can awaken the dead, and that's what He's done for us. Like Lazarus, we've heard the Lord calling us to come forth (v43); His voice brought forth life in us, and we've responded, emerging from our spiritual tomb. Now life is no longer as it was. Life is new and we have a new Master and a new standard of righteous living to pursue.

Plus, not only were we dead in our sins; we were also enslaved by them. Even though we may have desired to do better, we couldn't. Instead our struggles to escape only drew us down, plunging us deeper and deeper into sin's quicksand. But God! God's not only called us back to life; He's also raised us up...in heavenly places in Christ (6). There are no slaves in heaven. We've been raised up and made to sit in heavenly places as free individuals. Sin's shackles have been broken and we have been freed to act

righteously and serve God effectively in this world. Also, God has dealt with the issue of wrath. In our sins we're objects of His wrath. But since Jesus has suffered in our place for our sin and we've been delivered from it, we're no longer under wrath. Instead we're now objects of the exceeding riches of His grace (7).

But God! These 2 words set against our desperate condition reveal the gracious initiative and sovereign action of our God. God has taken action to reverse our condition in sin. These 2 words should also encourage us to trust God in all things today. Am I ignorant of God? Yes, I am but Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit" (1 Cor 2:9-10). Am I tempted to sin? Yes, I am but no temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able (1 Cor 10:13).

Am I foolish, weak, lowly? Yes, that too. "But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things that are mighty. And the base things of this world and the things which are despised God has chosen and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor 1:27-29). Have I been the victim of other people's sin and ill will? If not I will be sooner or later. Still I'll be able to say like Joseph to his brothers, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good (Gen 50:20).

Put simply, if you understand those 2 words but God they will save your soul. If you think of them daily and live by them, they will transform your life completely.

Why did God do this? Paul expresses God's reasons with 4 different words. 1. Love (4). God's done this because of his great love for us." The God who needs nothing, loved us into existence just so that He may love and perfect us. He created the universe knowing it would lead to His horrendous death on the cross. This is the picture of Love – God: the inventor of all loves. 2. Mercy (4). Mercy is related to love; it flows from it. But it has the sense of favor being shown to those who deserve the exact opposite. If all we got was justice, we would receive God's wrath. That fact that we don't is due to God's mercy. Instead of condemning us, as He had every right to do, God

reached out and saved us through the death of Jesus Christ.

3. Grace (5). While mercy is not getting what you do deserve, grace is getting what you don't deserve. Grace means there's no cause in us why God should have acted as He did. We think the opposite. We think God owes us something. Even after we become Christians we often find ourselves thinking that God owes us a chance, or if God fails to do something we think He should do, we say, It isn't fair. If we think that way then we don't understand **grace**. Grace is God's favor to the utterly undeserving. 4. Kindness (7). God's kindness is critical in our daily lives. We often sin grievously and foolishly. But God doesn't strike us down when we do. He doesn't turn on us. Instead, He's kind. He protects us from the worst of sin's consequences, and He softly draws us back to the path of obedience.

Why has God done this? Paul says because God is love, mercy, grace, and kindness. God acts this way because that's what He is. He is as much love, mercy, grace, and kindness as He is sovereign, holy, and full of wrath against sin. We must praise Him for it.

What must you do? If you're not a believer, let the grace of God and love of Jesus Christ move you to a place of repentance and acceptance. If you're already a believer, let this great love of God move you to a higher level of consecration and activity. In talking about our trespasses and sins, Paul points out that these were things in which believers once walked, meaning life should be different for those who've been made alive in Christ. A dead man should feel comfortable in his coffin; but if he were to be made alive again, he'd instantly be uncomfortable and suffocated with a strong urge to escape the coffin and leave it behind. You once walked in trespasses and sins but if you've been made alive in Christ – you'll walk that way no more. Escape the coffin of spiritual death and leave it behind for good! 😊