

Ephesians 2

Ephesians 2:1—And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,

The believers at Ephesus were spiritually “*dead*” (separated from God) before they met Christ because they were born depraved. So were we. Our bodies functioned. We could even think with our minds, feel with our emotions, and choose with our wills, but we were “*dead*” in that we were separated from God. All of Adam’s descendants begin in this state, for when Adam sinned he became spiritually “*dead*”—separated from God Who “*is spirit*” (John 4:24). God had told Adam that the day he ate of the forbidden fruit he would “*die*” (Genesis 2:17)—experience instantaneous spiritual death. Thus, Adam ate and died spiritually but continued to live physically. In fact, sometime after sinning in Genesis 3:6, he had relations with Eve, who bore Cain (Genesis 4:1). Adam was very much alive physically, but for the first time in his existence possessed a nature that enjoyed sin. Suddenly, it was natural for Adam to sin due to his sinful nature. In fact, the most natural thing Adam did after willfully sinning against God was disobey God. We, being descendants of Adam, were born with a “*dead*” spirit (Ephesians 2:1); the condition that existed within Adam after he sinned. Because “*God is spirit*” (John 4:24), and we possessed no spirit life when we were born, we were dead upon arrival. We were born depraved.

Reformed Theology (extreme and hyper-Calvinism) adheres to the idea that man is born a spiritual corpse, totally incapable of believing while depraved. Is this mindset in agreement with the full counsel of God’s Word? Let’s answer that question using Scripture alone.

Romans 1:8-32 portrays the lifestyle of the heathen—those who, through their own choosing, reject the truth that God so graciously supplies.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, (Romans 1:18)

The spiritually depraved can “*suppress the truth,*” proving that they are conscious (aware) of the truth. You can’t “*suppress*” what has not been made accessible.

because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. (Romans 1:19)

Here we observe that God makes what can be “*known*” about Himself “*evident*” to the depraved (lost).

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. (Romans 1:20)

Creation reveals God’s “*attributes,*” “*power,*” and “*divine nature.*” Hence, no man can accuse God of withholding from mankind the certainty of His existence—not even the heathen.

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (Romans 1:21)

Paul teaches that all persons know about God—know of His existence and specifics regarding His Person. The depraved who choose to dishonor Him, however, possess hearts that have been progressively “*darkened.*” The fact that the choice to dishonor God results in an enhanced darkening of the heart proves

that man is not at his worst at physical birth. He can (in the midst of his depravity) become increasingly “darkened” through intensified rebellion.

Professing to be wise, they became fools, (Romans 1:22)

The depraved who profess “to be wise” become “fools” due to their own choices.

and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. (Romans 1:23)

As a result of the depraved rejecting God’s truth (which can be accepted if they so desire), they worship what has been created. In making that choice, they exchange “the glory of...God” (Who He is in His essence) for what will perish.

Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. (Romans 1:24)

As a result of the majority of the depraved rejecting His truth, “God” gives “them over” to “impurity”—but only after they choose to disobey.

For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. (Romans 1:25)

The depraved (as they progress in sin) are given “over...to impurity” (Romans 1:24) because they exchange “the truth of God for a lie” (Romans 1:25), which results in their worshipping “the creature rather than the Creator” (Romans 1:25). To exchange “truth,” you must have access to “the truth.” You can’t exchange something for an alternative if you don’t first possess what you are exchanging.

For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, (Romans 1:26)

After the depraved reject the truth, God gives “them over to degrading passions” (Romans 1:26), which are defined in both Romans 1:26 and Romans 1:27:

and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error. (Romans 1:27)

The “degrading passions” of verse 26 are passions that cause women to desire “unnatural” physical relationships with women (Romans 1:26) and men to desire unnatural and “indecent” physical relationships with men (Romans 1:27)—homosexual and lesbian relationships that God classifies as “error” (Romans 1:27).

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; (Romans 1:28 KJV)

Clearly, the depraved possess a “knowledge” of God, although they many times refuse to “retain” it (Romans 1:28). Therefore, their rejection of the truth results in their minds becoming “reprobate” (Romans 1:28), causing them to involve themselves in “things which are not convenient” (Romans 1:28)—behavior defined in Romans 1:29-31.

being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; (Romans 1:29-31)

The fruit of rebellion in the depraved is an appalling state indeed!

and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them. (Romans 1:32)

The depraved “*know the ordinance of God*” (Romans 1:32—also read verses 25 and 28) prior to their extreme rebelliousness. Thus, a huge difference exists between knowing God’s truth and yearning to apply it. Once a depraved individual repents and believes, however, he is made new—resulting in a passionate desire to know and exercise God’s absolutes to the greatest degree possible.

Romans 1:18-32 validates (beyond doubt) that man, even in his depraved state, has a conscience awareness of God’s existence—proving that man’s depravity does not make him totally unaware of spiritual matters, and thus, a spiritual corpse. No wonder the Psalmist penned:

The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard. (Psalm 19:1-3)

Depravity does not mean that unregenerate man is “incapable” of knowing about God and His truth. Neither does depravity endorse the idea that unregenerate man possesses an “inability” to exercise personal repentance and faith—as verified by passages such as Galatians 3:24:

Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. (Galatians 3:24)

Romans 1:18-32 ties in perfectly with Galatians 3:24. The Law, given to Moses in the Old Testament, serves a very special purpose. Paul describes it as a “*tutor*,” for through the Law a spiritually unregenerated (depraved) man can recognize his need for a Savior. However, if total depravity should mean “total inability” (the Reformed view), what need would there be for the Law? If man, in his lost (depraved) state, cannot recognize sin and exercise personal repentance and faith, why would God give a Law whose purpose is to convict the depraved of their lostness?

Paul, in (1Timothy 1:8-10), confirms that the Law is for “*the ungodly*”—not the “*righteous*”:
But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, (1Timothy 1:8-10)

These verses prove, unequivocally, that the Law was given to convict the hearts of the ungodly (depraved) only. Paul confirms this same truth in Romans 3:19:

Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God; (Romans 3:19)

The Law speaks to one class of people, “to those who are under the Law.” Once again, we observe that the Law convicts the depraved of their sin so they might recognize their need for a Savior. Adding even more strength to the argument, Paul states in Romans 6:14 that the New Testament believer is “not under law, but under grace”:

For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace.
(Romans 6:14)

This verse reinforces the fact that only the ungodly (the depraved) are under the Law. Paul also states (in Romans 7:4-6) that New Testament believers died to the Law through the body of Christ, freeing them to “serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter”:

Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God. For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter. (Romans 7:4-6)

The Law serves to convict only the ungodly (the depraved). It was given, in other words, to lead the ungodly (the depraved) to Christ (Galatians 3:24). Hence, the depraved are capable of having the Law convict them of their ungodliness so they might repent and believe—disproving that depravity means “total inability.”

To perceive the depraved as spiritual corpses, totally incapable of repenting and believing, is in violation of the full counsel of God’s Word. Again we observe the consistency of the Scriptures regardless of the subject under examination.

Note how John 16:8 ties in with our present study:

“And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment;” (John 16:8)

The Scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit convicts every person on God’s earth, although many of these individuals disregard His conviction. Should depravity indicate that man (while depraved) is incapable of responding to God, would God not be unwise if, through the power of the Holy Spirit, He convicted individuals who are unable to respond? Titus 2:11-12 ties in well with our discussion:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, (Titus 2:11-12)

If depravity makes man a spiritually lifeless corpse, why would Paul record that God’s “grace” makes “salvation” available “to all men”? Why would God offer the non-elect of Calvinism what they are incapable of receiving? He would be irrational in doing so! Thus, some Reformed theologians view the “all men” of Titus 2:11 as pointing solely to the “elect.” Such a conclusion is contextually impossible.

Titus 2:11-12 is also misused by the Universalists in an attempt to prove that all mankind will be saved. When taken through the full counsel of the Scriptures, proper context indicates that God offers “salvation to all men,” many of whom reject it to their own demise. 2Thessalonians 1:6-10 refutes the error that all mankind will be saved:

For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed — for our testimony to you was believed. (2Thessalonians 1:6-10)

A wealth of additional passages could have been cited, but we must continue with our present topic of interest by considering Stephen's words of Acts 7:51:

“You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. (Acts 7:51)

Observe that Stephen's accusers resisted the Holy Spirit and its work of conviction. Therefore, their “*resisting*” proves that the Holy Spirit convicts the depraved. It also proves (coupled with what we will study shortly) that Stephen's accusers' choice, not God's choice, determined where they would spend eternity. Again, if God is all-knowing (omniscient), sovereign, and wise, He would be totally unwise (foolish—relinquishing His sovereignty) should He convict a person of sin whom He knew could not possibly believe. Hence, depravity and “total inability” are absolutely not synonymous. Isn't the full counsel of God's Word fascinating!

Because we were born spiritually “*dead*” (born with a nature that enjoyed sin—separated from God), we committed many “*trespasses and sins*” (Ephesians 2:1). We were not spiritually dead (separated from God) because we had committed acts of disobedience, but the habitual disobedience confirmed that we were already spiritually dead. Individuals who use Ephesians 2:1 in an attempt to prove that man is born void of a sin nature (yet receives it when old enough to sin and recognize sin) are in error, for Romans 5:12-19 (and numerous additional passages) teaches that a person possesses the sin nature at birth. Consequently, between Adam and Moses, when no Mosaic Law existed, men died without breaking the Mosaic Law (Romans 5:12-14). They died due to their sin nature inherited from Adam—due to their genes having been in Adam's gene pool when he ate of the forbidden fruit. Of course, all persons who repented and believed during this period were made part of God's family. Thus, at physical death they entered “*Abraham's bosom*” (Luke 16:22) and were later taken to heaven—a topic addressed in more detail as this study progresses.

Paul, in Romans 5:12-21, confirms that the sin nature condemns man to hell—not his acts of sin. Let's take this input and apply it to the virgin birth. Had Jesus been Joseph's son and not the Father's Son, He could not have been Savior. Why? He would have been condemned to hell because of His sin nature (inherited from Adam) even had He lived without sin. If, however, man should be born void of a sin nature, but acquire it when he sins (an error taught in some theological circles), Jesus (based on this improper thinking) could have been Joseph's son, arrived void of a sin nature, lived a sinless life, and still (according to this erroneous view) fulfilled His mission as Savior. The full counsel of God's Word will not allowed such an interpretation. Note: I am not advocating that all who view the sin nature as acquired subsequent to physical birth reject the virgin birth. I am emphasizing, however, that individuals who strive to discredit the virgin birth could use this argument while attempting to build their case.

The words “*trespasses*” and “*sins*” (Ephesians 2:1) are somewhat synonymous. Paul possibly used both these terms to communicate the scope of disobedience experienced by the spiritually dead. “*Trespass*” is from the Greek *parapipto* and means “to fall beside, to make defection from, to deviate from uprightness and truth.” “*Sin*” is from the Greek *hamartia* and means “a missing of the mark, to be in error.” God's

standard is absolute holiness. A person misses the mark when he fails to walk by God's standard of holiness. For this reason Paul states, "*for all have sinned [missed the mark] and fall short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). God possesses glory due to His flawless character. He has never dropped the ball—never committed sin. Man, in his own strength, cannot live righteously because he is dead (spiritually dead—separated from God) upon arrival. Therefore, "*all have sinned and fall short of*" His "*glory*" (Romans 3:23) because man is born void of God's kind of life (spiritual life). The depraved are not spiritually dead because they committed acts of disobedience, but their habitual disobedience confirms that they were born spiritually dead. Read Matthew 12:35 and Matthew 15:18-19 for more insight into this subject matter.

Ephesians 2:2—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.

in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, (2:2a)

Because "*in which you formerly walked*" (Ephesians 2:2a) points back to verse one, Paul is actually saying "in which you formerly walked in trespasses and sins." The "*course*" Paul's readers chose (prior to salvation) was "*according to...this world.*" The phrase, "*the course of this world,*" does not relate simply to the physical creation as we know it, but to the world's system of values and perceptions. This world system is controlled by Satan, "*the god of this world*" (note the small "g"—2Corinthians 4:4), who "*disguises himself as an angel of light*" (2Corinthians 11:14) but possesses no truth (John 8:44). Because we arrived with a dead spirit (a sin nature which was separated from God), and lived in rebellion toward God, we perceived Satan's lies as absolute truth. Hence, sin inundated our landscape! We not only disregarded God, but bought into a system that totally rejects God, a system where self, humanism, rebellion, worldly wisdom, power, pride, arrogance, notoriety, wealth, and immorality reign supreme—none of which bring fulfillment. Why? Truth, righteousness, humility, brokenness, and love (which bring fulfillment) always trump pride, arrogance, humanism, and power. The cross proved it to be so!

according to the prince of the power of the air, (2:2b)

Because "*prince*" means "ruler," or "chief," Satan reigns as "*the prince of the power of the air.*" He gained his authority through tempting Adam and Eve—the individuals originally given dominion over the earth (Genesis 1:27-28). Once Adam and Eve declared their independence from God (through eating of the forbidden fruit), Satan usurped their authority and became "*the god of this world*" (2Corinthians 4:4). He will function in this position until the Lord's return.

Satan is the "*prince,*" or ruler, or chief, "*of the power of the air.*" The phrase, "*power of the air,*" probably refers to demons—fallen angels who have aligned themselves with Satan (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 12:9). One of their main responsibilities is to war against God's holy angels (read Daniel 10:1-21). "*Air*" is used seven times in the New Testament, and in most cases references the atmosphere surrounding the earth. Satan's present abode is in the "*air,*" or atmosphere, the realm where Satan's demons and God's holy angels do battle. These demons also war against believers, for Ephesians 6:12 states:

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

This battle is real and many times extremely intense. Anyone who walks with the Lord is aware of this conflict. We will study more about spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6.

While Satan's present abode is in the "air," or atmosphere, he is still permitted entrance into two additional locales. He can enter heaven (Job 1:6; 2:1) to accuse the brethren (Revelation 12:10) or, as in the case of Zechariah 3:1-2, to accuse the nation of Israel. He can also come to earth in one of two forms: (1) "a roaring lion" (1Peter 5:8) to destroy (2) "an angel of light" (2Corinthians 11:14) to deceive. His goal is to deceive, both believers (2Corinthians 11:3) and unbelievers (Revelation 20:3), by implementing a counterfeit program resembling the real thing. This program of deception is carried out by counterfeit teachers (2Corinthians 11:13-15) who teach a counterfeit Jesus (2Corinthians 11:3-4) and perform counterfeit signs and wonders (Matthew 7:22-23).

Halfway through the Tribulation, Satan and his angels will be cast to the earth and confined there (Revelation 12:7-9). Satan's counterfeit program will, at that time, be displayed vividly through the counterfeit Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Let's examine this counterfeit trinity for a moment.

The "dragon," Satan, will give his "authority" to "the beast," the Antichrist (Revelation 13:1-2), as the Father gave His authority to the Son (John 17:1-2). Once this transition of power occurs, many people will "worship" Satan (Revelation 13:2, 4). The Antichrist will be Satan's offspring as Jesus is the Father's offspring. Thus, Satan is the counterfeit Father.

The Antichrist will die and be brought back to life, causing a large portion of mankind to follow him (Revelation 13:3). John also states that the dragon (Satan) gives "his authority to the beast" (Revelation 13:4). Hence, the counterfeit trinity comes to full fruition when Satan (the counterfeit Father) gives his authority to the resurrected beast (the Antichrist—the counterfeit Christ). When this transfer occurs, those who follow the beast will worship the beast, just as the followers of Christ worship Christ (Revelation 13:4).

The third member of the counterfeit trinity is described in Revelation 13:11-13 as "another beast," but as "the false prophet" in Revelation 16:13. The false prophet will come "up out of the earth" (Revelation 13:11) and have "two horns like a lamb" (he will have the appearance of a true religious system), and will speak "as a dragon" (speak with the authority of the dragon—the counterfeit Father). He will encourage all men to worship the Antichrist (Revelation 13:12), as the Holy Spirit encourages believers to worship Christ (John 16:14). He will also perform great signs, even call fire down from heaven (Revelation 13:13), in an attempt to counterfeit the miracles of the Holy Spirit.

"The prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2) has one goal in mind—to deceive and destroy. Only truth empowered by the Holy Spirit can thwart such deception and destruction. Satan's goal, therefore, is to busy us so we have little or no time for God's Word.

of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. (2:2c)

"The prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2b) is Satan, who is also the prince "of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2c). Thus, "the spirit" (Ephesians 2:2c) is not referencing Satan himself but Satan's disposition, his perspective of life—what makes him tick. For instance, 1John 4:3 states:

and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.
(1John 4:3)

Ephesians 2:2c shows that Satan's "spirit" (his way of thinking) hampers unregenerate man, which explains why unbelievers so enjoy sin and walk as "sons of disobedience." Their spiritual father, Satan, who is void of "truth" (John 8:38-44), does everything possible to prevent them from exercising personal repentance and faith while depraved. Even believers are to "test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1John

4:1).