



# CANYON HILLS

## COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: Ephesians

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## **The Way We Were**

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We just worshiped our mountain-moving God, and now that same God wants to speak to us in his Word, so I'm going to ask you to open your Bibles to Ephesians, chapter 2. While you're doing that, let me really encourage you to take a few moments in our lobby before you leave.

We are committed to reaching our community, especially those who may be more easily forgotten: those in prisons, the youth who are struggling, the homeless who are desperate, as well as women facing unplanned pregnancies. These are just some of the areas of our community we are wanting to impact with the gospel, and we are.

Some of you have passion for those types of ministries. I want to encourage you to just stop by. There are some displays out there and some people out there in those ministries. You can pick something up and read it later. You could ask questions. We have a lot of people in our church who are involved and volunteering in those ministries. If that sounds like something you might be interested in, please take advantage of that today. We were able to get all of them here on the same day.

I also want to tell you the good news that today is our birthday as a church. This day, 23 years ago, we were born, so we are now 23 years old. We are still here, so that's exciting. How many of you were here on that first Sunday, 23 years ago? Anybody in this room? I see a hand way back there, and some over here. All right! That's really cool! You're a lot older than you were when we started!

The bad news, though, is that we're going to have to ask all of the Oregon Duck fans to now leave our service. We do not love you, at least for today. We'll love you again next week, when we're over it, but right now, we need you to just be quiet. You can relish and revel in your ridiculous win yesterday, but we'll love you again next week. Give us a little time.

We're in Ephesians now, and let's remember that this letter in our New Testament is written by the apostle Paul while he's in a prison cell, and yet he's writing a letter of encouragement to

encourage Christians who are living in a city called Ephesus in which it's really, really hard to be a Christian. It's a city that was super-progressive, an anything-goes type of city.

It was a huge tourist stop because of the Temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the world. This temple employed over 1,000 prostitutes year-round. It was a very spiritual city in the sense that there was a lot of superstition. There were many cults in the city. There was an enormous amount of idol-worship in the city of Ephesus.

At the time of Paul's letter to the Ephesian Christians, there was a growing hostility in the city toward Christianity and the church. Yet when you read through this book of Ephesians, you see that Paul refuses to let them wallow. He refuses to let them moan in the godlessness of their context. Neither does he encourage them to isolate, to just go away and form some Christian commune somewhere. Not at all. Instead, in this letter, he gives them a vision for something far greater than the stuff they're going through and the things with which they're struggling.

He reminded them, in chapter 1, that they were chosen by God before the foundation of the world to be redeemed by the shed blood of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. He reminds them, "Don't forget you are the chosen of God!" He reminded them that by faith in Jesus, God adopted them as his very own sons and daughters, with their salvation sealed and guaranteed forever by the indwelling of God's very own Holy Spirit in the believers' hearts as a deposit until they receive the inheritance of their salvation.

What's really cool about that in chapter 1, as we've been looking at for the last many weeks, is that it's not only true for the Ephesian Christians to whom he's writing. It's true for all of us who have put our faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins through his life, death, and resurrection.

If you were to summarize chapter 1, I would say Paul is trying to remind us that *the one true God of the universe loves you and he promises to keep you strong in your faith in Jesus to the very end so you will be blameless and holy before him until he returns as the Judge of the living and the dead.*

That is the encouragement of Paul. God has chosen you. He loves you. He's going to keep you strong to the end. This is what Paul, I think, is believing forms our hope and our courage to get out of bed every day, to live for Jesus in this crazy world and this crazy time in which we find ourselves living.

Today, we come to chapter 2. He wants to remind us of who we were before God called us to faith in Jesus. I think Paul knows that every once in a while it's good for us to recall the way we were before we were born again. That's what I've called this sermon: *The Way We Were*. I'd like to now break out in a Barbara Streisand version of this song. Only those over 50 are laughing, because you know what song it is. You can't get it out of your head. I'm not going to do that. It'll destroy the whole moment.

Paul is saying here, "Hey, all the blessings of chapter 1 are so true for us, but let's never forget where we've come from." At the very least, this keeps us from thinking there's no hope for this

crazy, mixed-up, sin-broken world in which we're trying to live our lives. It keeps us from thinking that somehow, the people around us have no chance. They're way too lost. Paul is saying, "Don't fall into that trap." That's what I think he wants to do here in chapter 2. Let's go ahead and stand for the reading of God's Word. It's just three verses.

**"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—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."**

Father in heaven, I pray that you would use these words to remind us how desperate we were for your mercy and your grace, for you to choose us and save us. I pray, God, we would never forget, that we would be a church filled with Christians who would humbly remember the way we were before you saved us. God, I also pray that you would make us Christians filled with hope for those around us who still don't know Jesus, your Son. If you could save us, you could save anyone. God, give us that heart today, I pray in Christ's name, amen.

1. *Before God saved us, we were spiritually dead in sin.* This is what I think Paul wants to remind us very clearly in these three verses. We didn't know God. We didn't love God. We didn't worship God, and we certainly didn't want God. One of the things that makes sin so evil is that it makes us believe we can be our own god. If you don't believe that, just read Genesis 3 and ask Adam and Eve, because that's exactly what happened in the fall. Satan convinced them that they didn't need God, that they could be their own god.

You see, after Paul spends all of chapter 1 reminding us how much God loves us and what he has done for us in Jesus, in chapter 2, he wants to say, "Don't think for a minute that somehow you weren't all that bad or sinful to begin with. Don't fall into that trap."

He reminds us that before God saved us, we were dead. He didn't say, "And you were really sick in your trespasses and sins..." No, dead is dead. Before we were saved, we were completely dead toward God and we were completely alive toward all wickedness and sin. That's what Paul is saying about every true Christian. I love the translation of this one verse that says simply, "You were doomed forever because of your many sins."

In fact, I want you to turn to chapter 4 of Ephesians and just see how Paul more graphically describes this deadness that was us before we were saved. Now, he's referring to Gentiles. *Gentiles* is a catch-all for those who weren't Jewish, those who didn't know God, and those who don't believe in Jesus. That's how Paul is talking here. He's speaking to the Ephesian Christians, and he says,

**"Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They**

**have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity."**

Paul is saying, "That's the way we were. That's what we were like before God saved us." In Romans, chapters 1 and 2, Paul is even clearer when he says, "You know what? None of us was righteous. No, not even one of us. None of us sought after God." Then, he says, in chapter 2, "And none of us had any excuse." That's the description of every person before God mercifully saves them.

What he's teaching here in Ephesians, chapters 2 and 4 is what we call the *doctrine of original sin*. He's reminding us that when we were born, we were born separated from God. We were born with our nature already corrupted by sin. We inherited the human nature of our first parents, Adam and Eve. He says that's the condition in which we're born. That's the bad news. That's the true news, that without God's love and grace in the redeeming death and resurrection of Jesus for our sins, we are completely hopeless.

Now, let's be honest. The world hates this doctrine. The world hates this message of Christianity. Many of us hated it as well, because self-justification and denial of our own sinfulness is what comes natural to unregenerate sinners. This is why pride, not unbelief, is the greatest barrier and obstacle to faith in Jesus. Pride is the greatest barrier to believing in Jesus, because we never wanted to believe we are as bad as we really are. We often quickly found comfort in the self-deception of comparing ourselves to other sinners. That's what we did.

Jesus just keeps it simple. His message was clear: "Unless you repent, you too will perish." You see, repentance is no respecter of sin. Repentance hates all of it. Paul is saying, "Hey, I know it's hard to be a Christian, especially in this time and this place in the world, but never forget we were also dead in our sins and trespasses." Then, he says something a little more. He starts to describe what this deadness looks like in real time.

2. *Before God saved us, we let the world tell us how to think and live.* Here in verse 2, Paul says we "**...once walked, following the course of this world...**" The irony at this point is that the world often mocks us Christians, saying we're so narrow-minded that we're enslaved to our Bibles or to our religion. The world would look at us, the church, and say, "You're so closed-minded. You're so narrow-minded." Actually, just the opposite is true. It's people without God who are enslaved, who are completely controlled by what the world thinks.

The world, without God, forms their convictions from the ever-changing opinions of the loudest voices, those screaming from Washington or Hollywood, our cable news channels, the halls of higher education, Madison Avenue, or celebrities relentlessly pushing everything from their worship of alternative sexual lifestyles to the most popular hashtag of the moment.

Even their appearance is controlled by the world and its ever-changing approval ratings. There is a reason why the most lucrative plastic surgeons are all in Hollywood, right? It's because they are enslaved to allowing the world to tell them what to think and how to live.

Paul is saying that's exactly where we were before we were saved. In fact, the world really is enslaved to conforming. They think as the world thinks. They dare not disobey the majority because they are truly terrified of the consequences. The world without God really has become slaves to things like votes, likes on their Instagram, friends on their Facebook, awards they have won, or approval of their peers.

You see, the thing about this sin-broken world that is so deceiving is that sin has many options that actually lead us to think we can be in control of our own destiny. See, sin has a way in this world of convincing us that we're in control of our own destiny. Sin gives us many options to keep thinking that.

For instance, behind door number one of sin, you might find all things *pleasurable*. The world is constantly screaming at us to pursue whatever makes you feel good. So, pursue all the food, leisure, fashion, partying, sex, or approval you can if it makes you feel good. The world's message is, "Do whatever you want whenever you want with whoever you want." That's the slavery of the world.

Once you try that for a while and you realize, "Well, that wears off," there's always door number two, and it's not all things pleasurable. It would be all things *powerful*. You see, the world wants to scream at us to pursue the things that give you a sense of control, so, "Pursue with all your might things like money, prestige, success, status, or achievement. This will make you feel like you are in control of your destiny."

You relentlessly go after everything you can that will lift you up and above the rest. Then, you will finally get there, where you are longing to be, in control of your destiny. You find out that's not as easy as the world makes it sound. Then, when some of you actually get there, you realize nobody cares, so there's always option number three.

Door number three is not all things pleasurable or powerful, but the world is saying, "No, pursue all things *self-preservation*. Pursue your health and fitness with everything you have. Pursue your own safety or your own financial security."

Here's the best one in our generation. "Pursue a social conscience. Figure out how you can save the whales, dolphins, salmon, slugs, and whatever else you want to save. Just save something so you get a sense in your own soul that somehow you are preserving yourself and prolonging your life and you are going to make a difference. Just save something."

However you look at all this, you can't avoid the fact that it's all extremely self-centered and self-glorifying. What I love about the Christian life is that it is a life saved from the futility of trying to always keep ourselves on the throne at the center of the universe. Christianity saves us from the futility of thinking, "Somehow, if we make our world all about us and we stay at the center of our little world and on the throne of our little world, we're going to be just fine."

Christianity says, "No, the throne of the universe is not vacant. It's not up for occupation. It's already occupied." Where we Christians tend to get ourselves in some trouble is when we forget

that and we ask God to step off the throne so we can take over now. That's typically when we mess up our lives good.

I think that's why Paul wrote Romans 12, those amazing words of constant encouragement, when he says in verse 2, "**Do not be conformed to this world...**" In other words, "Do not continue to let the world tell you how to think and live like we used to. **...but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.**" Paul says, "Don't ever forget there was a time where we did let the world tell us how to live and think."

3. *Before God saved us, we were actually following Satan.* That seems a little startling, but it's true. Paul says here that we were not only following the world, but we were "**...following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind...**" Paul calls Satan the prince of the power of the air. Satan, the father of all lies, and the ultimate deceiver.

See, in this world of spiritual blindness and darkness, Satan makes sin and all of its temporary promises of fake happiness to look good for us. For many of us, before we were saved, we thought a lot of good things were evil and we thought a lot of evil things were good. That's what Satan does. We actually thought a lot of good things like God, Jesus, the church, the Bible, and morality were horrible, terrible, and evil. Then, we thought the evil things were actually good for us.

You see, Satan is the master of disguise, isn't he? Before we were saved, Satan disguised pornography as adult entertainment. He disguises abortion as the right to choose. He disguises all sexual immorality as a recipe for pleasure and happiness. He disguises greed and materialism as the pathway to success and security. He disguises drugs and drunkenness as a necessity for fun or escape. He disguises worshipping the earth and creation as this cute little thing called environmentalism. He calls and disguises adultery as, "My needs being fulfilled."

He disguises gambling as the hope for a better life. He disguises selfishness as taking control of your own destiny, and he disguises lying and dishonesty as situational ethics. He disguises political correctness as tolerance and acceptance. The result is a world that buys into almost anything, believes almost everything, and can't cope without something. That's the world out of which God saved us.

In 2 Corinthians 4:4, we read, "**In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel...**" This is the way we were before we heard the truth and the truth set us free. We were blinded, following Satan's disguises and deceptions.

Right about here, most of the Christians in this room have the natural inclination to think, "I was never like that. I never got that bad. Not even close!" There would be some truth to that for most of us in this room, because the truth is most of us didn't reach the full potential of the evil that

was in our hearts. We were not totally depraved, but we were capable of total depravity and at all levels of sinfulness, we lived. Even in our state of deadness, we were capable of doing some good.

Because of that, we're tempted to believe our state of spiritual deadness wasn't quite as dead as the other people sitting around us in church. That's what we're inclined to think. "Yeah, okay. I get it. I wasn't saved, but I surely wasn't as not saved as that guy or that lady over there. I mean, they were *really* not saved." That's what we tend to do immediately in our minds.

I think Paul wants to make sure none of us falls into this type of spiritual pride, because that's exactly what it is. The truth is there are only two types of Christians. The first type is those sinners who have been saved out of the world. These Christians usually came to faith in Jesus a little later in life, maybe in their college years or later than that. I would fall into that category. We followed the course of the world and many of Satan's temptations a little farther and a little longer than most. We're Christians, but we were saved out of the pit of the world.

Yet there's a second kind of Christian. There are only two. The first is being saved *out of* the world, and the others are sinners saved *from* the world. Those of you who were saved by grace at an earlier time in life. God graciously spared you from a lot of the world's false lies, promises, and destruction that comes from our own sinful choices. Maybe you grew up in a Christian home or you had the incredible privilege and blessing of coming to Christ at an early age somehow, some way, and so you didn't walk down that road that some of the rest of us did.

Yet here's what we know to be true. Either way, saved out of the world or saved from the world, we were both dead in our sin. We were both guilty of disobeying God. Some were more guilty than others, but guilty nonetheless. Either way, it took just as much of Jesus' blood and God's grace to save us both.

Your salvation didn't take any less of Jesus' shed blood on the cross than the worst of sinners in this room. I think this is what Paul is getting at. He's saying, "Hey, don't forget that." He's not telling us to dwell in our sinful past. He's just saying, "Don't forget about the way we were.

4. *Before we were saved, we were headed for the wrath of God.* Before we were saved by God's grace through faith in God's Son, we were staring into the face of his divine fury and just wrath for our sins. It says, in verse 3, "**...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.**" In God's perfect justice, he does not leave one single sin in the universe unpunished.

Every sin is first rebellion against a holy God, and his punishment will be perfectly fair. It'll be perfectly justified. There will be no favoritism and no mercy in the day of judgment, beginning with Satan and all of his minions, and then the wicked, the rebellious, and all who have rejected, mocked, and ignored Jesus, who died on the cross as God's gift of merciful forgiveness to those who would believe.

Don't think that just because you're a Christian that your sins didn't get punished. They got punished okay. Jesus took the punishment. The Bible tells us in Revelation 14:19 that all of those who reject God's gift of forgiveness in Christ will be thrown into "...**the great winepress of the wrath of God.**" We were headed to stand before the perfect glory and holiness of God in the judgment and we would not have been able to justify one single sin, big or small.

This is the way we were. Yes, in varying degrees of unbelief and guilt, but equally dead in our sins. This is where God rescued us from. This is where God ransomed us from. This is where God redeemed us from. Paul is saying, "I know it's hard to be a Christian, especially where you live and the people you live with or work with."

But then he says, in Ephesians 2:4-5, "**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...**" Two of the greatest words in the New Testament: "**But God...**" In those two words, for those who sit here as God's children, we find our salvation.

In those two words, "**But God...**" we also find hope for the crazy world in which we live. "**But God...**" If he could make us alive in Christ while we were still dead in our trespasses, there is hope for that person at work or that person in your family. There is hope for those crazy neighbors who live nearby. There's hope for this world. We were dead, but God...

I think the best way to make this come closer to home is that we might just bow our heads and pray for those in our lives who are still lost. I'm going to ask you to bow your heads, just quietly. I want to know who comes to your mind. What name immediately comes to your mind? What face comes to your mind where you may have (and maybe even justifiably) felt like there's no hope.

"There's no way this person or these people would ever, ever want to know Jesus, repent, or hear the gospel." Who is that? Then, I want you to let those two words ring in your ears: "**But God...**" Pray for them right now that in his rich mercy and in his great love he would make them come alive in Christ.

Father, we praise your holy name that once, we were lost, and now, we're found. I pray, God, that we would be a church filled with people who are joyful and grateful for how far you brought us to find your grace and mercy. I pray, God, that there would be a natural joy and appreciation for our salvation in which we would just be able to wallow, knowing that at one time, we were dead.

God, I also pray that we would be a church filled with Christians who are humble, knowing that the people in our world do not need more of your grace than we did. They need the same amount. So, God, in your sovereign, wonderful way, use us to tell them about your good love and grace you gave to us, and just maybe give us the joy to see them want the same. We pray this in your Son's name, amen.



When I said to bow your heads and asked what face or name comes to mind, I know in a room like this there are some of you for whom the first name or face that came to your mind was you, because you've never surrendered. You've never repented of your sin and asked Jesus and Jesus alone to forgive you, to be your Savior, and to begin changing you into his likeness.

I would invite you today, if you have not done that, that you would believe in Jesus Christ today and no longer ignore him, mock him, or let the world tell you what to think of him, but you would receive him as your Savior and your Lord. These people standing up here would love to help you take that step of faith.

Last service, somebody got saved because they knew it was them. That may be why you're here today, for God to tell you one more time, "I love you and I have done everything you need for forgiveness and hope." If that's you, just walk up to one of these people before you walk out and say, "That's me. How do I get started?" and they'll help you do that. The rest of us... Let's bring our Bibles back next Sunday. We'll see you there, in Ephesians 2.