One of the characteristics of Ephesians is the long sentences Paul writes. 
Ephesians 1:3-14, THE HYMN OF GRACE, is one long sentence that celebrates the 
sovereign grace that has richly blessed us in Christ. Ephesians 1:15-23 is another 
long sentence in which Paul prays the saints will fully comprehend the spiritual 
blessings that are ours in Christ. Ephesians 2:1-7 is likewise one sentence in the 
record the before picture. Verses 4-7 record the after picture. You will not find a 
more dramatic transformation than what is described here. We were dead in sin. 
But now we are alive in Christ. We were enslaved in sin. But now we are free in 
Christ. We were condemned in sin. But now we are saved in Christ.

Ephesians 2:1-3 is about the tragedy of life without Christ. There good news 
of salvation is declared in verses 4-10. But our text begins with the bad news. This is 
important news, even though it is not the news we want to here. You cannot 
embrace the good news of salvation until you accept the bad news of sin. Conviction 
of sin must precede the experience of grace. The condemnation of the law must be 
faced before justification by faith can be received. Yet this passage is not 
evangelistic. Paul is not talking to unbelievers here. Paul is preaching here to the 
very saints he just prayed for in chapter 1. Paul prayed the saints would know God 
better. Now he reminds them of the sad condition they were in before they trusted 
in Christ for salvation. To know God better you must know something about 
yourself: You have absolutely no hope of getting right with God without faith in 
Jesus Christ.

Have you ever shopped for jewelry? The jeweler pulls out a diamond ring 
and tells you how beautiful and valuable it is. But you don’t know what he is talking 
about. And you cannot see the intricate details he describes. Then he places the 
diamond on a dark piece of velvet. And against the dark backdrop, the jewelry 
shines and the diamond blows you away with its beauty. Ephesians 2:4-10 is a 
glorious gem filled with beautiful diamonds of amazing grace. But you cannot see 
the incalculable valuable of salvation without the dark backdrop of our sinful 
condition. Ephesians 2:1-3 give three tragic realities of life without Jesus Christ.

I. **You are dead without Christ.**

Human nature is generally viewed three ways. Some view humanity as well 
and good. No one would argue that humanity is perfect or all that it could or ought 
to be. But many believe that humanity is good and getting better. Others view 
humanity as sick. It has diseases that afflict it and may kill it. But with the right 
treatment it can recover and be restored. This is the most common view of the 
human condition. But there is another view of the human condition. It is the view 
that we find in this text. Ephesians 2:1 says: “And you were dead in the trespasses 
and sins.” This pessimistic view of human nature is the biblical perspective.
Scripture does not view mankind as well or sick but dead. This is the condition of every person who is not saved by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: dead in trespasses and sins.

How can this be? There are many negative ways we would describe some non-Christians we know. But we would not call them dead. They are obviously alive. They have homes and families and careers. How can they be dead? Scripture speaks of death two ways. In Genesis 2:17, God warned Adam: “but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” Adam did eat of the forbidden tree, along with his wife. But he did not immediately drop dead. In fact, it would be nine hundred years before Adam died and was buried. Yet, in a real sense, Adam died immediately when he sinned against God. On one occasion, Jesus called a man to be his disciple. But the man asked to go bury his father first. In Luke 9:60, Jesus responded, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Jesus distinguished between physical death and spiritual death.

What is spiritual death? It is the same as physical death. Death is separation. When the spirit is separated from the body, the body dies. And when the spirit is separated from God, the spirit dies. To be separated from God is spiritual death. The moment Adam died the moment he sinned in that he his sin separated him from God. Just as the body dies when it is separated from the spirit, the spirit of a person is dead without God. But spiritual death is about more than separation from God. It is also spiritual inability. Dead people cannot do better, try harder, or change their ways. A dead person cannot do anything to help himself. And an unsaved person cannot do anything to save herself. Romans 3:10-12 says: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” Sin separates us from God and renders us spiritually helpless.

Without Christ we are dead in trespasses and sins. The words trespasses and sins are synonymous. They are both used here to describe the total depravity of our sinful nature. “Trespasses” means a false step or deviation from the right path. A trespasses is when you cross the line. It is used here to refer to sins of commissions. “Sins” means to miss the mark. There are two ways that can happen. You can have poor aim. Or you can lack strength to reach the goal. It is used here to refer to sins of omission. Whether you view our sin problem positively or negatively, the results are the same. Sin renders us dead before God. Romans 5:12 says: “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.” Without Christ, we are dead before God by the guilt of original sin we inherited from Adam and Eve. But we are also guilty of personal sins and trespasses that separate us from God. And there is absolutely nothing we can do to save ourselves. This is a morbid description of human nature without Christ. And unsaved person may not feel the guilt of sin that separates him or her from God. But that only proves the point. What can dead people feel? The fact is that you are dead without Christ.
II. **YOU ARE ENSLAVED WITHOUT CHRIST.**

Verse 1 describes those who are not in Christ as dead in trespasses and sins. This is the worst thing you can say about a person. But it is not all the text has to say about life without Christ. You are dead without Christ. But you are also enslaved without Christ. Spiritual death is separation from God and inability to respond to God. But the inability to respond to God is not inability to respond to anything. The sinner is dead to God but very much alive to the flesh, the world, and the devil. He cannot say yes to God. But he cannot say no to sin. In John 8:34, Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.” Sin enslaves. Scholars call this the bondage of the will. The sinner is free to do as he wishes. But he cannot do as he ought. His thoughts, choices, and actions are in bondage to sin.

A. **THE UNSAVED ARE ENSLAVED TO THE WORLD.**

Ephesians 2:1-2 says: “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked.” Don’t miss the irony here. We were dead. Yet we walked. The unsaved person is a zombie. A zombie is a dead body in the process of decomposition that gets up and walks around. This is a graphic picture of life without Christ. Sinners are spiritual zombies. Sinners are walking corpses. Sinners are the living dead.

Verse 2 says: “in which you once walked, following the course of this world.” Spiritual dead people are not walking about aimlessly. They are not just lost. They are constantly being led further away from God as they follow “the course of this world.” Literally, it is the age of this world. This phrase refers to the godless value system of fallen society. In Romans 12:2, Paul exhorts the saints, “Do not be conformed to this world, 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.” But in Ephesians 2:2, Paul makes it clear that sinners cannot obey the exhortation of Romans 12:2.

Parents warn children about the dangers of peer pressure. But we fail to perpetual reality of life without Christ. Unsaved people are enslaved to perverted peer pressure. Sinners are driven to fit in with the world. They are squeezed into the world’s mold when it comes to sex, money, power, fashion, fame, pleasure, and success. But 1 John 2:15-17 says: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life – is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.” True Christianity is characterized by a love that hates. To love God is to not love the world. You cannot run with the rabbits and hunt with the hounds at the same time. James 4:4 says: “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”
**B. The unsaved are enslaved to the devil.**

Verse 2 says: “in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.” The living dead are not walking about aimlessly. They are following the course of this world. And they are following the prince of the power of the air. This is a reference to Satan that teaches us three things about the devil. Satan is real. Satan is powerful. And Satan is strategic. He is “the prince of the power of the air.” Did you know that Satan is a prince? He is a ruler. And his author extends over the power of the air. Satan rules and reigns over the spirit-powers in the unseen world.

The phrases, “following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air,” are parallel statements. To follow the course of this world is to follow the prince of the power of the air. In other words, worldliness is satanic. God is omnipresent. God is never late, tardy, nor absent. God is fully-present everywhere all the time. The devil, however, is not omnipresent. He is localized to one place at a time. But Satan carries out his work through an army of fallen angels that support his evil cause. And this power of the air shapes the course of this world. Satanic influences shape worldly values. This is how Satan rules the world. 1 John 5:19 says, “We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” There was a time when pastors warned their members not to listen to the radio, because they believed it was “the power of the air” through which Satan ruled. Of course, the power of the air is not the radio. But what is it? The last clause of verse answers: “the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.” The power of the air is the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Unsaved people are enslaved to the spirit of the age that is Satan and the spirit-beings of the heavenly places.

**C. The unsaved are enslaved to the flesh.**

The last clause of verse 2 calls sinners “sons of disobedience.” The idiom “son of” means to be characterized by a thing. It is to share the distinctive characteristics of someone or something. So to call sinners “sons of disobedience” is to indict them of conscious and consistent rebellion against God. Satan and his evil forces influence this spiritual rebellion. But he finds an ally in the flesh of the sinner. A little girl hit her brother and knocked over his glass of milk. Of course, he cried and told on her. Her mother asked the girl why she let the devil make her hit her brother and knock over his milk. “No, mom,” she answer. “The devil only made me hit him. Knocking over his glass of milk was my idea!” Indeed, the sinner is enslaved to Satan and his forces in the world. But the devil cannot be blamed for everything. Without Christ, we are just as enslaved to the flesh as we are to the world and the devil.

The flesh is bound to sinful desires. After mentioning the sons of disobedience, verse 3 adds: “among whom we all once lived in the passions of our
The flesh does not refer to the human body. Christians do not believe the body is sinful. We believe our bodies are both created and redeemed by God. Yet these bodies are inhabited by and enslaved to the flesh – the sinful nature of fallen humanity. And the flesh has passions. The King James Version calls it the “lusts of the flesh.” But we tend to use the term “lusts” narrowly, to refer to inordinate sexual desires. But Paul is talking about more than sexual sin here. He is talking about the desires, passions, or longings that pervert the God's good will for us. It is fleshly passions for money, sex, food, or anything else that fail to keep pleasures in its proper place. Adding himself to the list of sinners, Paul says, “We all once lived in the passions of our flesh.” Both religious Jews and pagan Gentiles live in the passion of the flesh without Christ.

The flesh is bound to sinful deeds. Verse 3 says: “among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.” It is bad to live in the passions of our flesh. It is worse to carry them out. But that is the spiritual bondage of unsaved people. The flesh is bound to sinful desires and deeds. Sinners carry out the desires of the body and the mind. There are sins that are the result of the desires of the body. And there are sins that are the result of the desires of the mind. 2 Corinthians 7:1 says, “Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.” But without Christ there are no promises to claim to cleanse you from the defilements of flesh and spirit in holiness. The flesh is bound to sinful deeds.

III. You are condemned without Christ.

This tragic picture of life without Christ begins by calling sinners dead in trespasses and sins. But it gets worse. Not only are sinners dead in sin, they are also enslaved to sin. They are in bondage to the world, the world, and the devil. Yet it gets even worse. Unsaved people are condemned in sin. Verse 3 says: “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.”

Those who are not children of God through faith in Jesus Christ are “children of wrath.” Sinners are dead in sin – separated from the love of God and unable to get right with God. Yet they do have a relationship with God. They are children of wrath. There are those who deny that wrath is of God. Others claim that the Old Testament presents a God of wrath while the New Testament presents of God of love. But wrath is an attribute of God. It is essential to the nature and character of God. Divine wrath is not like human wrath. God’s anger is not arbitrary. God does not have a bad temper. God is not the Incredible Hulk! God’s wrath is his righteousness reacting to unrighteousness in righteousness. God’s wrath is at work in the world today. It is the wrath of abandonment described in Romans 1:18-32. And there is coming a day of reckoning when the wrath of God will punish sin. Either way, the truth is the same. Sin has consequences. Galatians 6:7 says, “Be not deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.”
This is the destiny of life without Christ. We are children of wrath by nature. The word “nature” does not mean this is what humanity was originally. Mankind was created in innocent perfection. But original sin has corrupted us all. In Psalm 51:5, David confesses, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” This is true of all. We are guilty in original sin and personal sin. We are sinners by nature, birth, inclination, choice, and behavior. The bottom line is that you do not want God to give you what you deserve. We do not deserve any divine favor. We deserve God’s just justice, holy wrath, and eternal punishment. This is the bad news. This is the tragedy of life without Christ. This is why we need salvation. Yet there is good news. It’s found in the first words of Ephesians 2:4: “But God.” We were dead in sin. But God! We were enslaved in sin. But God! We were condemned in sin. But God! Ephesians 2:4-5 says: “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.”