

The Way We Were  
*Building a Christian Mind*  
By Don Green

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Verse:** Ephesians 2:1-3  
**Preached on:** Sunday, November 19, 2023

**Truth Community Church**  
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road  
Cincinnati, OH 45255

**Website:** [truthcommunitychurch.org](http://truthcommunitychurch.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm](http://www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm)

We turn in our Bibles to Ephesians 2 this morning, and I invite you to turn there with me. I'll be reading the first three verses of Ephesians 2, and then we will go through it verse by verse here this morning. Ephesians 2:1.

1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 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-- 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.

We're in a series that I've titled, "How to Know True Salvation," and there's no point in living life if you don't know what true salvation is because it all gets squandered in the end without Christ, without a true knowledge of salvation, and knowing true salvation is utterly essential to having a Christian mind, to having a worldview through which you understand everything else, to having a view of life through which you process everything else. And to have a Christian mind today, you need to know the way you once were. You need to be clear on what it is that you have been saved from if you are a Christian and there is a backward look in the passage that we have just read in Ephesians 2:1 through 3. Notice the past tense references in verse 1, "and you were dead in the trespasses and sins." Verse 2, "in which you once walked," past tense. Verse 3, "among whom we all once lived." Verse 3, toward the end, "we were by nature children of wrath." Paul in this passage as he speaks to Christians, as he writes to Christians, is explaining to them the condition from which they have been saved, what they were saved from.

Now there's a familiar phrase that at least in the older generation they used to use when people were remembering the good times, Scripture warns us about dwelling too much on that, but we would say that they're taking a stroll down memory lane, and they're walking down memory lane remembering the way that things used to be. And in a sense, those times, I suppose, can be innocent as we just look back and give thanks to God for what he's done in our lives and the joys that we've had, perhaps with family, perhaps with the people of God, the way that he's blessed in times of service in the church, service to

Christ, and those things, you know, are good. The psalmist would remember the past in order to strengthen faith today and to inform praise today, but you do have to be careful that lest you develop a sense of nostalgia that causes you to think that things used to be better and it leaves you dissatisfied in the present. So we just have to use our memory for sanctified purposes, I suppose. Here in Ephesians 2, the point of that is to simply set this up, Paul is taking his Christian readers down a stroll on memory lane, but it's a spiritual trip that he is making, and it is for the opposite effect. Rather than creating a longing for days past, he's creating a recognition of the danger and the guilt and shame that marked the past to help us appreciate what we have now in Christ and what it is that we have been delivered from. My friend, if you're going to have a Christian mind, you need to realize how much the gift of salvation in Christ delivered you from, to understand that you have been delivered from a dreadful past that was leading to an even more dreadful future because only then will you have the proper estimation of the value of salvation, that pearl of great price, and be refreshed and renewed in your commitment to live for Christ and to live for his glory.

So we look back today to the way that we were, that's the title of today's message, "The Way We Were," so that we would have a proper sense of Christian salvation. And let me just say this by way of an early tangent, the failure of Christians to be joyful in the present and to be dissatisfied with circumstances and to grumble against God for this or that didn't go the way that you wanted to, the root of that discontent, the root of that dissatisfaction can easily be traced, in large if not exclusive part, to a failure to appreciate what it is that you have been delivered from. When you see and understand what the Bible says about your condition apart from Christ, then you realize that you have abundant grounds day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment, to be grateful to the Lord for his kindness to you in Christ, having delivered you from what you once used to be. What Paul shows us in these first three verses is that you were born, my Christian friend, and my unsaved friend as well, you were born into a condition, into a particular kind of state, you were born into a particular kind of realm, an environment, a spiritual reality, and that realm, that state, that reality was one of utter alienation from God. It was a state of utter total depravity, which we'll explain another time, but every faculty of your life, every faculty of your mind and your being was fallen and marred and broken by sin, and in that state you could not know God because your sin separates you from him, in that state no one can go to heaven because without holiness no one will see the Lord. And beloved, what you need to see if you're going to have a Christian mind about salvation, if you're going to have a right appreciation of who Christ is and what salvation is, you need to understand that being lost, being separated from God, being a non-Christian is far more than simply occasionally doing bad things and being naughty from time to time. When you are not in Christ, when you were not in Christ, you belong to and you love a realm of evil which God himself condemns. You were part of a wicked world, part of a wicked world system. You were a contributing member of it. You were a fan club. You were a member of the fan club of a fallen world before Christ and that's what you are apart from Christ if you are not in him today. And when you begin to realize that and understand it, as I've often compared it to, it's like the feeling you have after you've just missed being in a really bad car accident. So you just stop just in time as somebody runs a red light in front of you, or you're spinning out of control and you end up just on the edge of a

precipice where you would have fallen and being seriously injured or fatally injured and you have that sense of, "That was close," and your heart beats faster at what might have been had not the hand of providence spared you from it. Well, in that way, looking back at the way that we were shows us a sense and gives us a sense of, "This was really, really bad, very, very dangerous. I was in a dangerous position and I was vile and wicked and a rebel against God," and to recognize that is to enter into the realm of being able to appreciate what Christ has actually done for you in salvation. And so we should never, Christian, you should never look back with longing for the days before your conversion. There should never be that sense. There should be such a clean break in your mind and in your being, such a clean break that you realize the thought of going back to that is unthinkable and so utterly distasteful and abhorrent to you that you turn against it all over again and renew your resolve to move forward in Christ and to pursue holiness, because the way things were was so desperately bad.

So what is it precisely that God has saved us from as Christians? Well, first point for this morning, you were captive to evil powers. You were captive to evil powers. Paul says that we were dead in trespasses and sins, and we looked at this some last week, and so I won't spend too much time here. Look again at verse 1, Ephesians 2:1. He says, "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins," dead without any spiritual life, dead in condemnation, and dead in the violations of God's law and the rebellion against him. That's the realm in which you physically lived, but you were a walking spiritual corpse. There was nothing, beloved, appealing to God about your prior way of life. There was nothing about your prior way of life that in any way commended you to God. If you are not a Christian, there is nothing about you to attract God to you at all. There should be nothing in any human mind that has any sense of self-congratulation about our goodness, our righteousness, "You know, I'm a pretty good bloke." None of that can stand. It all melts before the fiery heat of the revelation of the word of God and how God perceives unsaved men and what their reality actually is, and it's precisely at this point where the self-esteem movement over the past several decades and telling people how good they are and you need to love yourself and all of these things, all of that is exposed for the rot that it is and it flatters people who should instead be looking at themselves with a sense of regret and repentance before a holy God.

You were dead in trespasses and sins. There is nothing, beloved, there is nothing appealing about being in the presence of a rotting corpse. There's nothing about that that should appeal to us. There's nothing. We wouldn't congratulate a corpse on how vibrant it is. Well Paul, starting there, expands the thought to describe a three-fold captivity to evil that you were in there. And again, this is so important to understand, that being a sinner is not simply a matter of occasionally having done bad things, having occasionally externally violated the commandments of God. It's so much more than that. The reason that you sinned, you were not a sinner because you sinned from time to time, beloved, you sinned a lot because you were a sinner by nature. You were bringing forth what you were actually like, even if you covered it up from time to time. And so men sin because they're sinners. It's not simply external acts of sin that make us by nature sinful men. And so we just have to think about this. If we're going to think rightly about true salvation, we have to view it from the way that God views it. Put aside the flattery of a broken

education system, put aside the flattery and conceit of your own heart and come humbly before the word of God and let him tell you the way that you once were, if you are in Christ.

And what was this threefold slavery that we were in before God saved us? And by the way, the word slave means that you were under its power and authority. You were not free to leave. You were captive to it. A slave had no independent will of his own to exercise apart from his master. You were the son of your father, the devil. You were the son of the father of lies, and that's why you lied and why you were deceptive in all of these things. We must understand this. And so we see a three-fold slavery laid out for us in verse 2. Let's look at verse 2 and read it and then I'll break it down for you. Ephesians 2:2, "in the trespasses and sins in which," okay, so there's a key word. Paul has generally laid out the realm of trespasses and sins as a realm, and he says in that realm, you once walked. It was in that realm, that realm of transgression and sin and guilt before God that you once walked. That was your pattern of life. It was your course of life, that's the sense of the biblical metaphor of the walk. This was the course and pattern of your life that you walked in those trespasses and sins in which you were dead.

And so, going on in verse 2 with that little explanation, "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." How were you captive to evil powers? Well, number one, the world enslaved you. The world enslaved you. So this is a sub-point. The main point is you were captive to evil powers and now we're going to break the evil powers down into three different components so that you can see fully what God has to say about the way that you once were. And it's not a pretty picture. And I can understand in one sense, it doesn't excuse it, but I can understand why a lot of so-called pastors avoid preaching on this. They prefer to appeal to the pride of their audience, to flatter their audience, to make them feel good about themselves because they think, whether they are consciously reasoning all of this out or not, but if I tell you that you're pretty good and all of that, then you'll like me in return and we can be superficially happy together. Well, I can understand at a human level why men would do that because the biblical teaching on the reality of humanity is not something that's naturally attractive, and it's not what you would say if you're trying to win friends and influence people on a human level but that has nothing to do with being in a Christian pulpit. That has nothing to do with being a pastor. It has nothing to do with teaching the word of God. Our responsibility as pastors, as elders, is to show you what the word of God says, help you understand what it means, regardless of how it makes you feel in the moment, so that you can know the truth of God and respond to it accordingly. God will bless you if you embrace his truth. God will embrace you if you think according to the way that he has made himself known. He will not bless you as God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble. We don't appeal to your pride. We don't flatter your pride here at all. We're not looking to do that. If you choose to resist and reject the word of God, that's on you. The responsibility that belongs to the man in the pulpit is to say, "This is what the word of God says about you," and call you to repent, call you to believe him, call you to respond to his truth regardless of how it makes you feel, regardless of whether some resist and walk out in the process of it.

And so what was our threefold slavery before God saved us in Christ? Well, first of all, the world enslaved you. The world enslaved you. Look at verse 2 again. He said you were following the course of this world. You were following the course of this world. This was the pattern of your life. People reject truth and they follow the thinking and the fashions of their time. Whatever the media puts before them, that's what they believe. They adapt themselves to the shifting course of the world. Why do you think so many people make so much money running public opinion polls and talk about what the majority of Americans think? Who cares what the majority of Americans think, I want to know what's true. I want to know what's real. But the fact that we're so concerned to be in the majority, we don't want to be left aside, we want to belong, we want to be a part of the club, and so we follow the thinking and the fashions of the time without regard to any consideration of God's estimation of it all. And so, non-Christians, perhaps some of you today, perhaps some of you naming the name of Christ, I know that was true of me before the Lord truly saved me. You can mark somebody who's following the course of the world, you can mark them in a negative way. They have no interest in the Bible, really. They have no interest in prayer except as a means to try to leverage God to give them what they want, no interest in his glory. They have no interest in repentance from sin, no desire to examine themselves, and as David said, "Test me and see if there's any hurtful way in me." There's no concern about how their lives are viewed by a holy God. And even worse, there's no genuine love for Christ himself. There's no love for the person of Jesus Christ. No appreciation for his humiliation in his first advent. No humbling and love for his death on the cross where he gave himself a sacrifice for sinners and blood poured out in death. No love, no thrill at his resurrection, no thrill at his ascension, no gratitude for his continuing intercession at the right hand of God for sinners. There's nothing of that. There's no affection for that. There's no inclination to that. It's boring, it's dead, it's something that has no consequence to their daily life and therefore they dismiss it. Why? "I'm too busy. I've got better things to do." Other things are, you know, it's Sunday afternoon, are you ready for some football? Well, you know, at what point do we say, "I'm ready to dive into Scripture. I'm ready for the word of God. I'm ready for Christ. I want that."

And so the course of the world is marked by this lack of interest in heaven, this lack of interest in the people of God, this lack of interest in his word, and all of these things that we've spoken about here today because their minds are just focused on the here and now, the visible as opposed to the invisible, what they see as opposed to that which has been revealed. They prefer their opinions to knowing what the Bible says. And beloved, even in politics, and with the year ahead, an election year ahead of us, it's important for us to remember things like this, even those candidates which verbalize things that seem a little bit more consistent with biblical morality than the other side, they avoid Scripture. What they say, they don't root the things that they say in Scripture because that would offend voters and so they even borrow from the law of God in order to appeal to voters without actually giving honor to the God who's established what's true and right based on his own character. This is bad, beloved. It's bad. It's wrong that we were like that. It's wrong that non-Christians are like that. It is wrong not to give glory to your Creator. It is wrong to look at the skies and not see him. It is wrong to not live for the glory of the one who gave

you life and sustains your life and will one day judge your life. It is wrong to be indifferent to the Lord Jesus Christ who loved sinners and gave himself up for them, who suffered for them, the weight of an eternal judgment. It's wrong to be like that in exchange for whatever the passing fads of today are. It's wrong to be so wrapped up in work and employment and careers or education or friends that there's no room in your heart for Christ, just following after the course of the world. And why do you do that? It's because you're a slave of the world system. You're not even free to get up and go. You're in chains and you don't know it, and if you saw the chains, you would kiss them and say, "But I like it this way." How often have you heard coarse, profane men say, "Yeah, I'm going to hell, but at least I'll be there with my friends." Paul says we were all like that, dead to the things of God, alive to the things of the world and, beloved, whether you were outwardly religious as you were like that, or you were defiantly immoral, or you were coldly indifferent, the world system drove you away from God and shaped the way that you lived. And remembering the motivations of my own early life, desiring power, desiring a sense of pride, wanting to show off and show people that I was better than someone else, I spit on the way that I used to be like that, because as Paul said, all of those things, whether it's things of self-righteousness or things of the pride of the world, he says it's all rubbish. And that's the things that enslaved us.

What else can we say about your former captivity as a believer? If you're now a believer in Christ, what else can we say that God has delivered you from? Well, Paul goes on to show that Satan enslaved you. Satan enslaved you. The world enslaved you, the world system enslaved you, you followed the opinions of the world, Paul goes further and says that Satan enslaved you. Beloved, before you were a Christian, you were subject to supernatural powers that were hostile to you and hostile to God. It's so critical to realize this, to let Scripture show us the unseen realm so that we can see the way things really are rather than just judging by our material senses. Look at verse 2. He says you were following the course of this world, that's what we just looked at, and then there was another thing that you were following, you were following the prince of the power of the air. You were following the prince of the power of the air. Your former way of life, beloved, there are parallel statements that he makes about this, as you were following the course this world, you were also following the course of the ruler of the power of the air. This is so appalling, frightening, revealing to think about. The non-Christian has a life that is in line with the world and is in line with Satan. The interests are aligned, the thinking is aligned, it's all in accord with these evil supernatural beings capstoned by their leadership of Satan. The book of Ephesians emphasizes this evil realm and warns us against it. It tells Christians to be mindful of it and to seek the protection and the righteousness of Christ in the midst of it.

Paul doesn't only mention it here in verse 2, look at chapter 4, verse 26. Chapter 4, verse 26, and since we've mentioned the idea of walking and having a pattern of life, go to chapter 4, verse 1, actually as you're turning there so we can just see the context of what Paul is setting forth in what he says in the passage that I'm going to point you to in just a moment. Paul says in chapter 4, "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called." You used to walk according to the course of the world, according to the the prince of the power of the air.

That's how you used to walk but Christ has saved you. He's broken those powers. You've been caused to be born again. God has made you alive in Christ, my Christian brother, my Christian sister. God has made you alive in Christ, therefore, walk in a manner that accords with your new life, not your old life, is the idea.

As part of that new life, he points us in verse 25, chapter 4, verse 25, to this. Actually, I can't help but going back even further to this in verse 17 because you see the idea of walking yet again. We have to consider not just what we're doing day by day but what is the course of my life. Chapter 4, verse 17, "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." Don't walk like unsaved people. Don't walk like you used to. "They are darkened," verse 18, "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. But that is not the way you learned Christ!" You see, it's the difference between darkness and light, between sin and holiness, between judgment and heaven, between hell and heaven. That's how sharp the distinction is.

And so he goes on in verse 20, he says, "But that is not the way you learned Christ!-- assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires." You see, over and over again, look at the way you were and reject it, turn away from it, consciously disown it, embrace Christ and walk in the pattern of holiness. Verse 23, "be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

Now he goes on and he gets more specific beginning in verse 25, "Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil." There's a supernatural foe who enslaved you as a non-Christian who is still very much alive and active working to undermine your Christian life today. The idea taught by amillennialists that Satan is bound cannot survive biblical scrutiny, that Satan is bound today cannot survive biblical scrutiny. He prowls about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. He blinds the minds of the unbelieving. In what sense is he bound if he's doing all of that? But we see Paul here in Ephesians 4 warning us against that evil realm.

Look at chapter 6, verse 10. "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil." Christian, Paul says, you have to put on the armor of God because the devil has schemes against you. The devil has schemes against the people of God. He has schemes against the truth and if you are blithely ignorant and indifferent to that, if you're not on guard, you're very vulnerable to the attacks of the devil. So he goes on and he says in verse 12, he says, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." The battle is real. For the non-

Christian, the battle is not only real, see, Christians war against that realm, non-Christians are part of that evil realm. They are soldiers in the army of Satan and if you are a Christian, you once were like that. You were under his command. Satan was your General. You were under the father of lies.

And so your former life was one where you were enslaved by Satan, by the prince of the power of the air, which somehow indicates the sphere in which he operates. It's a sphere that we can't see. It's a sphere that we cannot touch or hear and yet it is very real in defining the reality in which we live. We have to have the revelation of God in order to know and to understand these things. And so what Satan does is a lot bigger than making it difficult for you to find a parking space at Walmart. The realm in which Satan works, is he influences the world for evil. He establishes false religions. He establishes false philosophies. He blinds men to the truth and he actively questions and undermines the word of God and insinuates doubtful thoughts in the mind against the word of God so that you'll listen to him rather than listen to what God has said. Go all the way back to the garden of Eden, "Did God really say? Did God really say that?" And the very question. the very question insinuates doubt about the fidelity and integrity of God, and the very question, as soon as you entertain it at all, makes you the judge of truth rather than God himself. Rather than being subject to truth, now you're evaluating what God said or did not say.

And so, as we think about the devil, we should not be thinking in the foolish blow-up things that people put in their yards at Halloween, not be thinking of a red suit, a pointy tail, and a pitchfork, a cartoonish figure. We're dealing with one of supernatural intelligence who knows the ways of men and knows how to influence them through false teaching. He's a false angel of light who generates ungodly philosophies and false religion which not only oppose God's truth but deceive men into thinking that they are Christians when actually they are not. There are 1.25 billion Catholics in that category, beloved. This is serious and the conveyor belt that Satan has his minions on is a long conveyor belt of life that drops off into the abyss, eternal judgment, damnation, and condemnation, and all the while assuring them, "No, everything's fine. Yeah, the conveyor belt's moving, but it's good. You're fine. You're fine. Everything's going to be okay." And then they close their eyes in death, they opened them into a realm of suffering as the rich man did in Luke 16. He said, "What am I doing in a place of torment? Father Abraham, send Lazarus, give me just a dip of water on my tongue to ease the pain of this flame." You see, beloved, the philosophies and false religions of the world, which you once believed in one way or another in your dead ungodly mind, that's the outcome of it all and you were enslaved by Satan and blinded by him as we'll see.

Look at 2 Corinthians with me. It so happens that in the natural course of our weekly readings that we looked at this passage earlier, was not planned that way by me, planned in the eternal decree of God as he outworks it in providence. Look at the contrast, 2 Corinthians 4:3, "even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 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 of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." That's how you were once enslaved, beloved. If you're a Christian, as I speak to brothers



and sisters, I hope predominantly in this room, understand and remember that the things that you cherish now about the word of God, the things that you cherish now about Christ, about your hope in heaven, they did not always belong to you. You were not born into that realm. You were not born a Christian. I remember someone telling me that long ago, "I was born a Christian." Nobody's born a Christian. You have to be born again if you're going to be a Christian. But if you're a Christian now and you cherish these things, look back at the way you were and realize how you were enslaved to the devil who had blinded you to the glory of Christ, who fed the deadness of your heart toward the word of God, and everything that is precious to us now in the Lord Jesus Christ was something that we had no regard for beforehand. Oh, we might have loved our little bit of false religion in the social club of liberal churches maybe that we once belonged to, but don't confuse that with a genuine love for Christ, a flaming heart that longs for his glory and longs to see him more than anything else, a heart to whom Christ is more dear than life itself, which is why the past two millennia is washed in the blood of martyrs who preferred death to denying Christ. You see, Satan blinded you to all of that, all of those glories of Christ. You didn't even see it. You didn't even know and yet God came to you by grace and the gospel, somewhere in your heart, it echoed, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." Jesus said, "Come to me, drink freely of the waters of salvation. I'll forgive all of your sins if you repent and believe in me," paraphrasing, summarizing biblical teaching of the call of Christ. And Satan hid you from all of that. He blinded you to all of that and you've been delivered from that.

Look over at 2 Corinthians 11. I would be sympathetic and could understand somebody wandered in off the street today, hearing some of these things for the first time or having it strike them for the first time, saying, "I'm not sure it was really all that bad. I think that you're exaggerating for the sake of pulpit effect." I'm not exaggerating. I'm uttering words of sober truth about the realm from which you have been delivered, from the way that you once were.

Look at 2 Corinthians 11:3 and 4 as we think about this realm of evil spirits that blind men to the truth and lead them astray with false religion. Actually, let's start in verse 1 because I want to say something here as well. "I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me!" Paul says, "For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ." He's writing to this church which he founded, to believers that once had believed his teaching, loved him, but were now turning away from both, both from the message and the messenger, and Paul's heart is filled with concern over this flock to which he is writing so much so that he says, "I'm afraid." Boy, we won't go there. Paul says, "But I am afraid that as the serpent," who is the devil and Satan, "as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough." What Paul is saying here is, "I gave you the truth. You started grounded in the gospel, but now you are showing an openness to false religion. You are consciously straying away from the truth that was once and for all

delivered to you. You're showing an openness to men who abuse you and mislead you and lie to you." And he says, "That fills my heart with fear. I'm afraid that your openness to false teaching shows that perhaps the truth of the gospel never actually took root in your souls."

I won't claim to know in fullness what Paul's describing about that pastoral concern, but I know a little bit about it. I know a little bit about it, beloved, of seeing people who seem to have an interest in the truth and then just turn and walk away from it, flame for a while. Kind of like, you know, you used to have those charcoal fires and you'd pour on the lighter fluid and light it and it'd flame up really big, then it'd go out five or ten minutes later. The fire never kept true. It didn't continue to burn. It was never really a fire at all. It was just an outward display of something else. Elders, pastors, beloved, this is the realm of fear that we often live in, "What is happening with that person? Look at their life. They once were interested. Now I can't even get a hold of them. They once proclaimed how much they loved truth. Now there's no sign of it. I'm afraid that what I thought once was true, when I receive someone"—I'm just speaking generally, not making this personal—"when we receive someone into membership, when we baptized them in the waters of baptism, and what we thought was real, subsequent life shows wasn't really the case." Because if you start truly in Christ, you continue in Christ because God completes the work that he begins and to walk away is a sign that false conversion's real. They went out from us, but they were not really of us, the Apostle John said about those false teachers in the first century, 1 John 2:19.

You see, and these realms, and these things, worry a true pastor. They worry a true elder. You lose sleep over these things at night and that's what Paul is saying. Paul says, "I'm afraid for you that Satan has a foothold in you that maybe shows that the work was in vain." He spoke that way to the Galatians also and he says, he goes on, in verse 13, actually start in verse 12. He says, "what I am doing I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do." He says, "These men say that they're pastors, these men say that they're apostles," looking at the first century, "that they're doing the same thing that I'm doing," Paul says. He says, "I'm going to work to undermine their claim because it's not the same. They're from completely different realms." He goes on to say, verse 13, "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." And so these new men come in and they're presenting a new message and people think, "Oh, that's the truth," and they follow after it not recognizing that behind the mask, behind the light, is an angel. Not an angel of God, but an angel of Satan. An angel of deception. And whether it's atheism or false religion or devil worship, Satan blinds men to biblical truth so that they will not receive the gospel. He's behind entire systems of thought, entire philosophies to obscure Christ, to sound plausible enough that people, by the deception, set aside the truth and thereby show that they were never redeemed to begin with.

Go back to Ephesians 2 with me. You see, this is where we all once were and if you've been saved out of that realm, you've been given a precious gift, haven't you? You've been

given something greatly valuable. Paul, at the end of verse 2 of Ephesians 2, says he speaks to the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. They would kill God if they could. All of Paul's point here in these three verses in Ephesians 2, Paul's whole point is that you shared in that manner of life. If you're a Christian, that's what you once were. Even raised in a Christian home, you were born into the world with a sinful heart. You little children, you young people, understand that you have to be born again, that I'm describing you. Even if you're outwardly obedient to your good Christian parents, if you have not repented of your own sin and recognized your own sinfulness and come to Christ, you're part of this evil realm yourself, even as you go through looking like such a cute little kid. But it's more than that, beloved. It's not just that you were captive to evil powers, it's not just that the world enslaved you, Satan enslaved you, because that's all external, right? The world and Satan, this is outside of you, influencing you. There's a third aspect of your captivity to evil powers, and it's this: your evil desires enslaved you. Your own desires enslaved you. Yes, absolutely, you were subject to external forces beyond your control, the world, the devil, but you were also subject to internal forces beyond your control. Sin was in you. Evil was in you and it controlled you and directed you like one of the marionette puppets and just juggled you along its lines as it saw fit to do. Look at verse 3. Paul says, "among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh." There it is. The passions of our flesh. And understand, beloved, when Paul here talks about the passions of the flesh, he's talking about much more than illicit sexual behavior and sexual lusts and desires. It certainly includes that, but it's much, much broader than that so that we have to understand the fullness of what he says here.

Look at Galatians. Turn back just a couple of pages in your Bible to Galatians 5. What are these matters of the flesh, the passions of our flesh, of which he speaks? Well, let Scripture interpret Scripture. Galatians 5:17, "For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do." Verse 19, "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry," think about, you know, false religion, "sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies," and he says, that's not a comprehensive list, there are things like these, other "things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

Look, look, a love and a devotion to alcohol, an angry combative spirit, a complete inability to have any kind of harmonious relationships with others, divisions, these things and a thousand others like them, jealousy, coveting, "I want what he has, I hate the fact that he has what I don't have," all of these things bubbling like a cauldron in the human heart, occasionally bubbling forth for others to see, but being the reality of your heart inside. You know, I look back to my life before Christ and what an angry carnal man I was. It wasn't that a lot of people saw that. You know, we can put on a good show but the reality of what's percolating in your heart shows the realm to which you belong. So why are there wars? Why do prisons overflow? Why are there broken families? Why does divorce proliferate? Why is there abortion? Why do pastors preach by the day and commit adultery by night? I had correspondence just this week with someone overseas saying, "Help me understand this. Why do authorities abuse their power? Why do rich

people never have enough? Why do adults gratify their lusts on defenseless children? Why do people die from meth and from fentanyl? Why do men and women persist in unproductive or destructive habits? Why do they attack the people that love them the most?" Evil desires inside the heart showing the realm to which they belong, a realm captivated by the world, captivated by Satan, with a heart that is in full alignment with all of those evil forces. And so with evil minds, unsaved men hate Christ. They hate his righteousness. They don't care about those things. And beloved, the whole point of everything that Paul is saying here as he writes to Christians is that your life was flowing from that same fountain. That's what you once were like. It's an ugly picture, isn't it?

And here's the question, if we're going to have a Christian mind, if we're going to think rightly about true salvation, here's the question that people don't want to go to because the answer to this question has consequences. In light of the fact that you were captive to evil forces, the world, Satan, your own desires, not just as a victim of these things, but as an active, willing participant in it all. That's the thing. That's the thing, beloved. You were on the receiving end of these things, yes, but you embraced it. You welcomed it. And here's the question, you don't expect a holy God to overlook all that, do you? Do you think that a holy God is going to look on that and not express his judgment and displeasure against it? You see, this brings us to our second point this morning, it's not just that you were captive to evil powers, but you were condemned by God. You were condemned by God. God is righteous. As the choir sang earlier this morning, he is holy, holy, holy. The eye of sinful man, his glory cannot see. God is righteous and he is opposed to all of these things that we've been speaking this morning.

Look at Ephesians 2:3 with me again. Paul says, you are "carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and you were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind." Oh, it causes shivers in me just to read it and to think about it in light of everything that we've said. This is your nature. You're an object of wrath. This is your nature. You belong to the rest of mankind, at least you did as a non-Christian. This is what God sees and this is what God condemns. Children of wrath means that our very nature was under the wrath of God. Children of wrath means that before Christ saved you, you deserved judgment. And as I like to say, we have to go all the way with what Scripture means when we read these things. Scripture is not simply saying that you did not deserve to go to heaven. "Nah, I'm not perfect," that despicable lukewarm false modesty. What Scripture is saying is more than you didn't deserve to go to heaven, just that negative statement. Scripture is making the positive statement, you deserved to go to hell forever and ever and ever. Before Christ saved you, beloved, you deserved judgment and God's wrath is not an angry tantrum. It's not a sudden flash of anger like we have sometimes in our sinful natures and you lash out. God's wrath is a settled opposition that is the outflowing of his holy character, a settled opposition to sin that will one day express itself in judgment. Beloved, God is holy. He is not passive and indifferent when people live according to the course of the world, the course of Satan, and the course of their own evil desires. He's not indifferent to that. He doesn't wink at it. He's not an indulgent grandfather who looks on naughtiness and says, "That's okay. It's not a big deal to me." He's not passive why people transgress his law and deny him as Creator and Lord. It incites the outgoing of his holiness against all that is imposed to him and that's the realm

in which you once lived. That's the way that you were. God punishes sin now and he will punish it eternally on the final day.

Now, beloved, this truth is severe. I acknowledge that. But does it not, my Christian friend, does it not make you appreciate the fact that God saved you from all of that? Now the key question for us as we get ready to depart here, this realm, this captivity to evil powers of the world, Satan and your own evil desires, of being a child of wrath under the opposition of God, here's the question I would have each one of you walk out with contemplating: have we described today the way you were or have we described the way you are? My Christian friend, let's take a peek ahead to next Sunday, just briefly, verse 4. Remember Paul's writing to Christians. He says, this is the way you were, "But God." But God. You having no power to change your own nature, you having no power to deliver yourself, you being hostile to God and a child of wrath, you being like that, but God. If we're going to understand true salvation, we must know that the whole issue pivots on this phrase, "But God." You did not save yourself. You were not righteous. You could not have saved yourself. The reality is, "But God. 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 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Christian friend, we end on that hopeful note of the reality of what God has worked in your heart. You were like this, that is the way you were, but now you're no longer dead in sin but alive in Christ. Now you're no longer enslaved to this world and Satan, you're free in Christ, a slave of a different Master. Now you're not a child of wrath but a child of God.

Do you want to know true salvation? Embrace everything that Scripture says about the way you were, look up to the mercy of God, the cross of Christ, and realize that in the wrath that he inflicted on Christ, God was acting to deliver you from your sin in a way you did not deserve and that you could never have accomplished on your own. Do you want to know true salvation? Think about yourself biblically in the way that you were, and then contemplate that Christ died to cleanse you from that guilt, to free you from that captivity, to overcome the world, to defeat Satan, and to realize that in Christ, if you are a Christian, all of that guilt and condemnation has been washed away. You've been delivered from that realm and placed and transferred into the kingdom of God's beloved Son. True Christians can rejoice. True Christians do rejoice at that. My friend, what about you? Have we described the way you were or the way you are? Have you turned from sin and given your life to Christ?

Let's pray.

*Lord, as we look back, we shiver at the way we were. As Christians, we look at the way things are now and we praise your majestic name and give you all of the glory for our salvation in Christ. Sift and search by your Spirit each individual heart, each one before us, that they might truly answer that question, "Is this the way I was, or is this the way that I am?" Guide them in the truth to that answer and then, Father, lead them*

*accordingly by your Holy Spirit to the consequences that that answer deserves. In Jesus' name, amen.*

Thanks for listening to Pastor Don Green from Truth Community Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. You can find more church information, Don's complete sermon library and other helpful materials at [thetruthpulpit.com](http://thetruthpulpit.com) teaching God's people God's word. This message is copyrighted by Don Green. All rights reserved.