

The Divine Warrior

Part II: Threat of the Zombie, Triumph of the King

Ephesians 2:1 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.
4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,
5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ-- by grace you have been saved--
6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,
7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.
8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,
9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.
10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

(Eph 2:1-10)

The Walking Dead

I WANT TO DISGUST AND horrify you for a moment. Nothing less will do our passage justice or, if you will hear, your heart ultimate good. Sound strange?

Bela Lugosi (1882-1956) plays Murder Legendre, the menacingly named zombie master of Haiti. So it's to him that Charles Beaumont (Robert Frazer) goes when he needs help for a twisted plan. Spurned in marriage by Madeline Short (Madge Bellamy), Beaumont has decided on a simple solution: kill Short and bring her back as a zombie. Then she can be his forever. The only problem comes when Legendre keeps the fetching girl for himself -- and her new husband (John Harron) comes to Madeline's rescue.¹

Since the release of *White Zombie*, the first full-length zombie movie (made in 1932), a billion-dollar industry has developed around this horror creature. The causes and nature of zombification have changed to fit the times. As to the **causes**, today it is usually some kind of scientific experiment gone bad. I'll save the older cause for later.

¹ Synopsis of *White Zombie*, from the Tribune Media Service. "White Zombie: Rated NR * 73 minutes * 1932," *Rochester City Newspaper*, <https://www.rochestercitynewspaper.com/rochester/white-zombie/Film?oid=2693823>.

As to the [nature](#), listen to the late Dr. James Boice describe them in his commentary. “A zombie is a person who has died but who is nevertheless up walking around [Hence, they are sometimes called the walking dead]. To make matters even more gruesome, the body is not only dead, but decaying, putrifying. It is the most disgusting thing many people can imagine.”² The “making matters worse” part is the newer depiction of a zombie. In this older movie, Madeline does not become a rotting corpse. She does become a zombie. Before telling you the cause hinted at in the synopsis of the movie, I need to address something more basic.

Hollywood screen writer, Christian, and fellow Calvinist [Brian Godawa](#) likes the horror genre. But as he has travelled the country giving lectures, he has come to realize that many Christians can't understand why. He writes,

Some well-meaning cultural crusaders make claims that horror is an intrinsically evil genre that is not appropriate for Christians to create or enjoy. They believe horror is an unbiblical genre of storytelling. One writer argues, ‘Horror is an example of a genre which was conceived in rebellion. It is

² [James Montgomery Boice](#), *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1988), 47.

based on a fascination with ungodly fear. It should not be imitated, propagated, or encouraged. It cannot be redeemed because it is presuppositionally at war with God.’”³

He then gives an apologetic for why **the Bible itself contains** many stories that if told in a movie would be considered **horror**. I’m not here to change your mind if you don’t like horror. I would like you to hear what he has to say about zombies.

Many people already have a hard time with zombie stories. They think they are just a glorification of blood and gore and should be rejected as dehumanizing. Not true. Some are. But not all. In fact, the very essence of the zombie story is as a cultural critique of social values that dehumanize us. They explore the moral question of what makes us human? What gives us dignity? How are we any different from animals? What keeps civilization from falling apart into anarchy? These are all **VERY** relevant and important issues in our morally relative culture of naturalism and atheistic evolution.⁴

³ Brian Godawa, “An Apologetic of Horror,” *Christian Research Journal* 32:5 (2009): 46.

⁴ Brian Godawa, “The Walking Dead: Zombies, God, and What Makes us Human,” *Thus Spake Godawa* (11-16-2013), <https://godawa.com/walking-dead-zombies-god-makes-us-human/>

The point is, creatures such as these can be used to tell the biblical story and to tell it very effectively. You may think this a bizarre, perhaps even sacrilegious way to begin a sermon. I hope to prove to you how invaluable this particular horror creature can be to a proper understanding of our text today.

Threat: Zombies vs. The Divine Warrior (Eph 2:1-3)

A story is told in the [Gospel of Mark](#) of a powerful demoniac. It takes place on the east side of the Sea of Galilee in the ancient country of Bashan, the virtual desert home of once mighty giant King Og.

They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when Jesus had stepped out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. He lived among the tombs. And no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain, for he had often been bound with shackles and chains, but he wrenched the chains apart, and he broke the shackles in pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and cutting himself with stones. And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and fell down before him.”

Larry Hurtado has some insightful and helpful comments. “The man is so described as to make him both a full captive to the powers of evil and beyond any human help (5:2-4). Further, his dwelling among the tombs, the ‘dwelling’ of the dead, almost makes him like a zombie, a living dead-man. Finally, he is self-destructive (5:5) and obviously in torment ... [all] this suggests that Mark intended his readers to ponder the account and to see what is symbolized in it.⁵ What should we ponder?

Let’s return to the changes that zombies have undergone. Whereas today the idea is usually to make a cultural commentary on mad-scientists’ attempts to create a utopian future that always ends in the apocalypse, the far older idea was that a zombie was created by something like a powerful sorcerer using potions and voodoo. The victim is then forced to become a slave of the sorcerer who zombified it.⁶ Its existence was not from science gone bad, but a satanic

⁵ Larry W. Hurtado, *Mark* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 69.

⁶ See Hans-W. Ackermann and Jeanine Gauthier, “The Ways and Nature of the Zombi,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 104:414 (Autumn, 1991): 466-94.

form of dark magic and slavery. I did a podcast on this recently for *Peeranormal*,⁷ and we discovered that these stories actually have some basis in reality in nations like Haiti, which can only mean that there truly is some serious black magic afoot. Of course, the sorcerer is himself under the control of some very dark spiritual forces, meaning that the entire zombie-thing is very much not good.

Enter **Ephesians 2:1-3**, the first of the **ten verses** we will look at today. Hurtado continues commenting on the demonic, “**All of this looks like a powerful picture of how the NT describes the condition of humans apart from Christ: Spiritually dead and in bondage to evil (e.g., Eph 2:1-3).**” He’s not the only one to see this. Boice writes, “**Some years ago I heard John H. Gerstner compare [Ephesians] to what horror stories call a zombie ... That is what Paul says the human condition is before God. In their opposition to God, men and women are walking corpses. They are the living dead. ‘They are an offense to God’s nostrils. These decaying spiritual corpses stink.’**”⁸

In trying to get a grip on the second chapter of Ephesians—what is being said, why is it being said—we need to

⁷ **Michael Heiser**, Brian Godawa, Natalina, Doug Overmyer, Doug Van Dorn, Trey Stricklin, “Peeranormal 12: Zombies,” *Peeranormal* (10-25-2017), <https://peeranormal.com/podcast/peeranormal-12-zombies/>. See also the accompanying Journal articles on the page.

⁸ **Boice**, *Ephesians*, 47.

return to the idea introduced last time. This concerns [the Divine Warrior epics](#), a very popular biblical (and extra-biblical) way of talking about God. Ephesians is written as the Divine Warrior story *par excellence*, following all of the traditional literary features you need to have in such stories.

We began in [Eph 1:3-14](#) with the greatest [praise-cry](#) in all of literature, with its glorious themes of predestination, redemption, and sealing by the Holy Spirit. This set the only appropriate stage for a [prayer \(15-19\)](#) rooted in the [declaration \(20-23\)](#) that Jesus Christ has won the great battle and has been declared King and Lord of all earthly and heavenly powers and rulers, winning this right as the God-man who has died for sin, been resurrected from the dead, and ascended to the right hand of Power in heaven. Today, we literally celebrate this victory on this Easter Sunday.

But to tell the story the right way, to show the unsurpassable greatness of this Divine Warrior, Paul has to go back in time and set the stage properly with a [terrible threat](#) and a desperate situation. One scholar has us consider the story of David and Goliath as a backdrop. What is it that makes that divine warrior story so memorable?

The narrative goes to great lengths in describing Goliath ... noting his enormous size, his experience in combat, and his impressive equipment (1Sa 17:4-8), building the sense of dread. He embodies the strength and power of the Philistine army, and the overwhelming obstacle that they pose to the army of Israel. Not only does Israel face this huge threat posed by Goliath, but the stakes for the army are high. For forty days Goliath has been taunting them, attempting to shame them into taking up his challenge (v. 16). If any ‘man’ can defeat Goliath, then the Philistines will become the servants of Israel. But if Goliath triumphs, then Israel will become the servants of the Philistines, to “serve’ them (v. 9). Though it appears that Saul would have been the obvious one to answer the challenge [he is a head taller than anyone else], he and his army have responded only with fear. The scene closes with a note of intense desperation and utter hopelessness—the men are ‘dismayed’ and ‘greatly afraid’ (v. 11).⁹

Now add to this that Goliath is described with origins (like Og) that go back to the Nephilim giants of old, and that the only one willing to face him is a very average sized despised

⁹ Timothy Gombis, “The Triumph of God in Christ: Divine Warfare in the Argument of Ephesians,” a Dissertation at the University of St. Andrews, 2005, 63.

shepherd named David, and you've got the makings for a great story!

This is what the passage at the beginning of Ephesians 2 does. **It shows you the threat.** It is a threat a person can barely imagine and once heard and understood can scarcely take in. It is a threat that seems to many of us to be exemplified best by the **zombie**. If you understand that, then what it depicts should disgust and revolt you and show the absolute complete helplessness of the condition being described. But this in turn should also show you just how great a victory over them would be, for virtually every zombie story ends badly. This one won't.

Notice what it says, “**And you were dead in the trespasses and sins¹⁰ in which you once walked...**” (**Eph 2:1-2a**). **Dead but walking.** The walking dead. Just here, let me make a theological point that perhaps the zombie can actually illustrate better than other ideas.¹¹ Many **Arminians** take the

¹⁰ A study of this is **Ernest Best**, “Dead in Trespasses and Sins (Eph 2.1),” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 13 (1981): 9-25.

¹¹ **Richard Phillips** gives a better attempt than most when he tells the story of Jeremy Bentham who died and gave his great wealth to a hospital in London on one condition. His body had to be preserved and every meeting of the board of directors his corpse was to be dressed in a formal suit and seated at the boardroom table. To this day, 180 year later, they still wheel out the body and the chairman says, “Jeremy Bentham, present but not voting.” The main problem with this analogy is that Bentham is still only dead. Richard D. Phillips, *Saved by Grace: The Glory of Salvation in Ephesians 2* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 7-8.

“once-walked” part to the exclusion of the “dead” part, virtually ignoring the dead part in fact. This usually comes up in discussions of freewill, which is certainly not far away from anything we will talk about today. “*Dead doesn’t really mean dead,*” more than one person has said to me. “*It’s just not that serious, and in fact being ‘dead’ makes a mockery of human freedom.*” They think it’s more like a man in a hospital or perhaps the Princess Bride’s “*mostly dead,*” which isn’t actually dead at all. One scholar says it well, “*Being spiritually dead does not mean a person who has no ability to respond to God’s drawing ... [they are not] like inanimate objects ... unable to respond to spiritual things.*”¹² A problem comes with the analogy of inanimate objects. No one believes that they are inanimate objects. They are, however, like zombies which are anything but inanimate. You need to use the right illustration to get the severity of the threat before you.

On the other hand, a typical **Reformed** response is to show something like a meme of a bunch of skeletons with the words, “*Dead in Sin*” plastered across the picture, with little to no regard for the “walking” part. Skeletons don’t walk. These people in Ephesians do.

¹² René A. López, “Is Faith a Gift from God or a Human Exercise?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164 (July-Sept 2007): 261, 62. López is actually summarizing others here, but he ends up agreeing with them at the end.



If not carefully parsed, **both of these have some real problems**. The text actually says is that two seemingly contradictory things exist simultaneously. People are dead. People are walking. What could this possibly mean?

The idea of a zombie gets at this nicely and in more ways than one. **Zombies are not bones** but flesh and blood. Ask anyone in a zombie movie if a zombie has a will and the answer is a universal and resounding, “Yes!” Zombies do exactly what they want! But look out for what they *want*! If you get in their way, it’s game over. You can’t reason with a zombie. There’s no talking sense into a zombie. Don’t try pleading with a zombie or telling her she really shouldn’t want to eat your brains (yes, girls can be zombies too). This is because a zombie is not alive. It is dead. What it wants is nothing human, only inhuman. Zombies are horrible, disgusting cannibals.

Cannibalism is something we don't talk about in fine company, but it's in the Bible too.¹³ **The Law sometimes predicts** that mothers will eat their children because the coming destruction for violating the covenant will be so other-worldly horrific (**Lev 26:29; Deut 28:53-57**). **The Prophets add** that God will make them do this, he is that jealous his Name be worshiped rather than mocked (**Jer 19:9; Ezek 5:10**). **The history books** then tell you that it actually happened (**2Kg 6:26-29**). The thought is meant to absolutely disgust you and to get you to contemplate. I know it did me, the first time I read it. How could anyone do that?

What a zombie does it depict something of human nature in a way that I really know of few other things that can do in quite the same way. Being bones in a grave is one thing. Being sick in a hospital is another (being mostly dead is the same thing). But being a zombie is a different matter entirely. A zombie has a will, but its will was completely changed when it died. And now, it is 100% a slave to that

¹³ This comment presupposes that Paul literally had in mind something like a zombie. Could this have been possible? Certainly, the ancient world knew of many fantastic creatures that he could have drawn upon. While not exactly the Haitian zombie, one creature—the revenant, was certain known to them and feared. It might equally be used as an analogy in Ephesians 2, but since few know of the revenant and zombies are more popular today, I went with the zombie. A couple of good studies are **Jason Robert Combs**, “A Ghost on the Water? Understanding an Absurdity in Mark 6:49-50,” *JBL* 127:2 (2008): 345-358. <http://www.michaelsheiser.com/TheNakedBible/MarkGhost.pdf>; **Carrie L. Sulosky Weaver**, “Walking Dead and Vengeful Spirits,” *Popular Archaeology Magazine* 19 (Summer 2015), <https://popular-archaeology.com/article/walking-dead-and-vengeful-spirits/>.

will and to its master, as it hungers for its never-ending need to eat living flesh.

Dead to What?

Look then through the eyes of this disgusting creature at the condition Paul describes. “You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked” (Eph 2:1-2). **Trespasses and sins** is the key to proper interpretation. We’ve seen these before in this letter. We saw them in the context of another death—Jesus’ death. His death was said to be the thing that redeemed us from them. We saw that a “*Trespass means a falling to the side of ... a deviation from the path of truth and righteousness.*”¹⁴ A **sin** is a missing-the-mark of that which God has established through his law for us to hit. Both are disobedience to the commandments and covenants of God. And they are extremely serious things, so serious that God himself had to come and die for them in human flesh if you were to have any hope for what you have done against him.

Here “trespasses and sins” are described in **three ways**. These three things bring home another feature of the older

¹⁴ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of Ephesians*, vol. 7, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 83.

zombie in a remarkable way. I said that in earlier times, zombies were created by wicked sorcerers and forced to serve them for eternity. This is the same thing of the walking-dead in their trespasses and sins. How so?

The World

These three things follow a very old and traditional way of speaking about this. The first is *the ways of this world*. “Following the course of this world...” (Eph 2:2), Paul says. More literally, it is “following the age (*aion*) of this world.” Some have, for some interesting reasons, tried to personify “age” here as a kind of title or name for Satan. This is done because of what seems like must be a parallel in the next phrase.¹⁵ But the Greek here would be awkward at best and flat-out impossible at worst.¹⁶ Instead, this probably refers to “the present evil age” (Gal 1:4; Eph 1:21), so that “Paul understands the physical creation and humanity as belonging to the present evil age. The social structures and the value systems of corporate humanity have been corrupted

¹⁵ The best discussion of this (no pun intended) is Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark International, 1998), 203-204. Ignatius seems very close to this, perhaps having this very passage in mind when he calls Satan the “ruler of this age” (Eph 17:1; 19:1).

¹⁶ See Gombis, 65 n. 67.

by sin and exert a powerful influence on people.”¹⁷ Think of the world here like you might that frightening post-apocalyptic world wherein walk the living dead, where no place is safe and everywhere you go there is the worst threat imaginable. You are constantly terrified, always looking over your shoulder, prepared to die.

The Devil

Second is *the ways of Satan*. “...following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience” (Eph 2:2). It gives a word that is very similar to one used just few verses ago: *archon* (*arche* or “rule” in 1:21) or “ruler.” Though the word sometimes refers to humans, it clearly does not here. For it is a power “*of the air*” and its parallel is “the spirit that is now at work...” This is a supernatural entity.

In 4:27 and 6:11 Paul specifically mentions “the devil” (*diabolou*). In 6:16 he speaks of “the evil one” (*ponerou*, the same word we find of “The Evil One” in the Lord’s Prayer). It is most likely Satan that is in view here too. In John, Satan

¹⁷ Clinton E. Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon.*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 312.

is the “ruler” (*archon*) of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; cf. Dan 10:13, 20).¹⁸

This is solidified when you go to the Dead Sea Scrolls and understand the parallels going on in Ephesians here with its “sons of disobedience” (2:2) and later the “sons of light” (Eph 5:6) with something like this, “The first attack by the sons of light will be launched against the lot of the sons of darkness, against the army of Belial” (1Q33 Col. i:1).¹⁹ Belial is a name for Satan.²⁰ Paul is clearly working with the same conceptual world here.²¹ “Satan is [understood] to be

¹⁸ An interesting discussion here is Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John: Translated, with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*, vol. 30, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 486-87. A possible explanation for Satan being the ruler of this world is because he was considered to be the Prince of Rome (see my article “Satan, Zeus, Baal, and the Prince of Rome,” <https://www.dougvandorn.com/Satan%20Zeus%20and%20Baal%201-7.pdf>). At that time, Rome was the world empire, and so as on earth, so in heaven.

¹⁹ Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition (translations)* (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1997–1998), 113.

²⁰ **Going Deeper:** Paul asks the Corinthians, “What fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial” (2 Cor 6:14-15)? The parallel is Acts 26:18, “... so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.” It is clear that Belial and Satan are viewed as the same person. Extra-biblical Jewish literature is helpful here, for they had a rich tradition of equating Belial with Satan. Belial is parallel with the serpent in the Dead Sea Scrolls (1 QH^a Col. XI, 17-18; XIII, 26-27). He is the angel/prince of wickedness and ruler of this world (MartIs 2:4, 4:2; 1QM 1:5-6), the head of a legion of angels (T Ash 6:4), and the accuser (Jub 1:20).

²¹ **Going Deeper:** Some may wonder, if they understand “sons of God” or Watcher theology (and assuming that Satan is one of them), about his being called the power of the “air” or a “spirit,” as both “air” and “spirit” are usually terms reserved for evil-spirits or demons. 1 Enoch 15:7-11 puts it this way. “Because of this I did not provide you with wives; O spirits of heaven, in heaven [is] your dwelling. But now the giants, those who are born of spirits and flesh are mighty spirits upon the earth, and in the earth their dwelling will be. Evil spirits went out from their body, since they came from the higher places, and from the holy watchers -- the beginning of their creation and beginning of a foundation -- they will be called evil spirits. Spirits of heaven, their dwelling will be in heaven, but the spirits who are begotten on the earth, their dwelling will be on the earth. And the spirits of the giants, while doing wrong in the clouds,

the ruler of an army of evil spiritual powers who work at promoting disobedience to the purposes of God among humanity.”²² If the world is the extremely unsafe land of the zombies, Satan is the voodoo zombie-master who enslaves them to his will. What a terrifying thought that is.

The Flesh

The third is *the ways of the flesh*. “...in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind...”

were destroying, falling, wrestling, and throwing together on the earth, harsh spirits of giants, carrying out a mission, eating nothing, but fasting and thirsting, spirits causing stumbling.” Augustine, knowing nothing of the actual text of Enoch puts it this way, “Certain philosophers have declared that of all living beings possessed of rational souls there is a threefold division into gods, men, and demons. The gods, who hold the highest place, reside in heaven; men, who hold the lowest, sojourn on earth; demons, in the middle, inhabit the air. As the dignity of their abode is diverse, so, also, is that of their nature. The gods are superior to both men and demons. Men, both in the order of nature and the scale of values, are inferior to both gods and demons. The demons, therefore, are in the middle. As they are lower than the gods in place and dignity, so they are higher than men. They have immortality of the body in common with the gods, but passions of the mind in common with men” (Augustine, *City of God* 8.14). Even a magical papyrus reads, “Protect me from every demon in the air” (Arnold, ZIBBC says this is TBen 3:4. Charlesworth reads very different from that, but the next reference seems to be a parallel to both). See further Brown, 487 and 1QS 3:17-21; TJudah 20:1-2; ShepHerm 6.2.1; etc.).

Demons are a different category of entity from a Watcher or “son of God.” While this is true generally speaking, it is still true that even Watchers are called “spirits” (Ps 104:4; 1En 15:8). And while you could posit that Satan literally entered Judas “from the air” it would probably be more appropriate to say that he is the Lord or “prince” of the spirits of the air and therefore has power over demonic spirits. And one more point might be of interest. The reason why Satan is the figure is because there was some belief that he was the son of God placed over the Roman Empire, and therefore at this time was the ruling prince of the world. See my article “Satan, Zeus, Baal, and the Prince of Rome,” <https://www.dougvandorn.com/Satan%20Zeus%20and%20Baal%201-7.pdf>.

²² Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon*, 313.

(**Eph 2:3**). The rabbis called the flesh “the evil impulse.” Long ago, the Church Father **Ambrosiaster** (fl. 366-84) said,

The pleasure of the flesh means being delighted by the visible, so that it gives the name of gods to the elements that God appointed as his means of ordering the world. But this name [God] belongs rightly to the one and only God, from whom everything derives.... If anyone imagines that the “passions of the flesh” mean anything else, let him reflect on how the apostle led a pure life. He lived without blemish according to the righteousness of the law. But because he had persecuted the church he includes himself in the “we”—“we lived in the passions of our flesh.” For every sin, according to Paul, has something to do with the deception associated with living according to the flesh, which is the mother of all corruption.²³

Unlike the other two, this is not external, but internal. It is what and who we are. What being described is “a comprehensive diagnosis of their previous state—not only their actions, but their plans, thoughts, aims, motives, dispositions, and imaginations were affected by sin and were in opposition to God.”²⁴

²³ **M. J. Edwards**, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture NT 8. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 129.

²⁴ **Gombis**, 67.

The three together are thus that famous triad: the world, the flesh, and the devil. “The devil controls non-believers both externally (the environment or domain of the air) and internally (attitudes or spirit).”²⁵ The point, it is absolutely impossible to extricate yourself from these things. They have total control over you. Apart from Christ, Satan owns you like a slave. These make you sin and trespasses against the Lord in the same way that a zombie is made, by its nature, to seek out and destroy living flesh. Outside. Inside. In the world. In the air. In your heart. Everywhere.

This is precisely why when the threatening veil of the law and its punishment is removed from a society, as it is being lifted today, it always turns inward on itself—as ours is presently doing—and eats itself alive. Paul is depicting humanity as the living dead, and if living in the present culture in 2019 with all of its insanity and irrationality and inhumane behavior towards other human beings doesn’t prove it to you, how much worse are things going to have to get to do it? We are living, for all practical intents and purposes, at least spiritually speaking, in a post-apocalyptic dystopian zombie movie. And that is exactly what Paul says everyone is like apart from Christ.

²⁵ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 104.

Importantly Swindoll adds, “Where does this zombie-like march through the valley of death lead them? Into deeper enslavement to the wicked spirit working among the children characterized by disobedience ... Paul includes even himself in this category: ‘Among [the sons of disobedience] we too all formerly lived’ (2:3). We all lived among the dead, having the exact same nature as they have.”²⁶ This is a very important point, and it is clearly the same one Jesus made when he called the Pharisees, who were in one sense children of Abraham, “Children of the devil” (John 8:44). Even being born an Israelite did not extricate someone automatically from this enslavement to the powers of darkness. This would have been as astonishing a thought to them as it is to many Christians who think that because they go to church or have Christian parents or are baptized that they are Christians.

No, but Paul says that **even he and his companions** once lived in these passions of the flesh. He even says that he and they “**all once lived**” under this and were “**by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind**” (Eph 2:3) This is both startling and troubling. It is **troubling** because it means everyone is born enslaved to the world the flesh and the

²⁶ Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights: Galatians, Ephesians*, New Testament Commentary vol. 8 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2015), 185.

devil and they have to have freedom from it, even if they do not know it. From a Reformed point of view, think about this: Paul is elect, yet he calls himself by nature a child of wrath who once lived enslaved to these things. So, the elect are not born free from this. They must be released, and only God can do that.

This has implications for the death of Christ. His death, even for the elect, does not automatically free us *ipso facto* 2,000 years ago. No! **The elect must look to Christ and believe upon him.** This is something we will, in fact, see in a moment. But it is worth noting, because there is a certain theology out there that insists that the elect were not in fact, by nature, children of wrath. No. They are. We all are. Christ's death does not just forgive simply because he died. Rather, it has to be applied by the Holy Spirit to each individual. Surely it will be, but do not confuse predestination with the need to believe upon Christ—the risen Savior.

So here we have now seen the threat, and I hope you can see what **a true terror** it is. If this discussion made you **uncomfortable**, good. We all need to be much more uncomfortable with this threat than we are, because we do not take it seriously enough. Indeed, I'm not sure it is possible to take it seriously enough. But these three things have in a very real

sense dehumanized us, stripped us of our dignity, made us brutes and slaves who are decaying, rotting, spiritual corpses that stink yet walk. How can anything save you from that? Can a zombie be changed, saved? All zombie movies have hopes that they can. They always fail and usually make things even worse. The best you get is some kind of rotting corpse that remains dead, but somehow is now able to realize it! That may be even more terrifying, to know your condition but have no hope of escaping it. There is no reversing death, unless you have the very power of life itself inside you.

But this is Scripture, reality, not a movie. And seeing the depths of the threat now prepares you for the glories of the triumph, for this is a Divine Warrior story, and he has not forgotten the children of Adam.

Triumph: The Mercy and Grace of God in Christ (Eph 2:4-6)

We come to the hinge. “**But God**” (Eph 2:4a). *We* may be like this, but *not God*. God is above this in every possible sense. His own nature causes him to do something. “**But God, being rich in mercy**” (4b). He decided to have **mercy** upon us. Mercy—not getting what we deserve. Being taken

out of this unchangeable condition and given life. “Because of the great love with which he loved us” (4c). It is the love of God that drives him to have mercy. God is love! Do you believe that?

“Even when we were dead in our trespasses...” (5a). Our condition is restated, reiterated, reinforced. Make no mistake, we were *dead* in our previous way of walking. While not physical death, it is spiritual death. We missed the mark and wandered off the path to our destruction. And now we pay the consequences.

“But God ... made us alive” (5a). His is no life from Dr. Frankenstein who cried out, “It’s alive” when he made the monster live. You are not a monster in Christ, but a child of the living God. This is resurrection to newness of life.

God is not doing this to just one person but “together” we are raised from the dead “with Christ” (5b). Here, the central message of Christianity comes into sharp focus. Christ’s resurrection after three days, today, on Easter Sunday. It is the great game-changer of human history, for he was transformed to a form of indestructible glory in his resurrected body. Yet, it was still the Lord Jesus. He had the marks in his hands and feet and side to prove it. He had died.

He was raised to new life. It is through his resurrection and its power that God made us alive together with Christ.

This is called “**grace**” and “**salvation.**” “**By grace you have been saved**” (5c). It is almost impossible to think of the brute uncontainable power behind this, a power full of mercy and compassion. This is why the threat had to be cast in such dark terms. Only when you see the darkness for its inescapable inexorable ugliness does the light begin to make sense. Only when you see your true previous spiritual condition—or perhaps your current spiritual condition if you are not saved but are hearing these words—does this power begin to shine upon your heart. This is what has caused so many to sing, “**Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.**” Did not Newton get that line from this verse?

The resurrection continues into vs. 6. “**And raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.**” The first chapter opened with this song that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (1:3). It then told you many of these blessings. It said that they come to you because the King has conquered death itself and is now “**seated at his right hand in the heavenly places**” (20). Do you see what is happening now, in this

third of the five key “[heavenly places](#)” passages of Ephesians?²⁷

You are seated with Christ in heavenly places. **Now**. It isn't that you are there physically in heaven. It is that your spiritual condition has been changed. You have been born again. You have the very Spirit of God as your guarantee of future inheritance. But positionally. Lloyd-Jones says,

You notice he puts that quite clearly—“by grace ye are saved”, you “have been” saved. In the same way you “have been” quickened, you “have been” raised, you “are” seated. It is something that has taken place. It is not a prophecy, it is not a prediction, it is not holding out a hope before us of something that is going to happen. The real point the apostle is concerned about is that these Ephesians should realize that this is true of them. He says, I want the eyes of your understanding to be enlightened that you may know that this change has already taken place, it is already something that is actually a fact. It must be, I repeat, because of our union with our Lord.²⁸

²⁷ Thomas G. Allen, “Exaltation and Solidarity with Christ: Ephesians 1.20 and 2.6,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 28 (1986): 103-120.

²⁸ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation: An Exposition of Ephesians 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1972), 94-95.

He is the head, you are the body. The Reformer **Wolfgang Musculus** (1497-1563) said,

What is closer than a head and its members? Our head Jesus Christ, even though he reigns in the heavenly realms and is absent from us in the body that he took up to heaven with him, nevertheless dwells in us by his Spirit making us his members even though we are still living in the world. Therefore, if we are really his members, our hearts commune with him in heaven because he is our head, even though we are still stuck on the earth.

(Commentary on Ephesians)

You are his temple, he is its cornerstone. He is the groom, you are the bride. He is the Divine Warrior, you are his church militant, his army on earth. Everything you need to wage the spiritual war down here has been given to you, because it has been won by Christ and it now his. His authority, his power over his enemies, his weapons and armor ... I can hardly contain taking us to Chapter 6.

God's Purpose in the Triumph (Eph 2:7-10)

But Paul doesn't go there yet. Instead, he wants to give you **the purpose** for all of this. This is what **vv. 7-10** declare. It begins with a "**so that.**" This is the purpose clause. "**So that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus**" (7). God wants you, for all eternity, to see and know his kindness.²⁹ God wants you to understand the immeasurable riches of his grace through this, so that you will ultimately praise him for his power and glory. **Calvin** said the "**astounding work of God's goodness ... ought to be handed down from one generation to the next and never be erased from people's minds. The kindness that we have received springs from God's mercy, which is entirely free and undeserved.**"

It is a kindness he has, again, showed us "**in Christ Jesus.**" It is not bare kindness and grace. It is kindness and grace personified through the God-man and union with him. Look to his kindness and see his grace and you will know the kindness and grace of God. Look at what he has done in dying for your sins, saving you from hell, freeing you from Satan's tyranny, making you his child when you were a child of wrath and a son of destruction and disobedience.

He returns to grace but now adds something more. “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not of your own doing; it is the gift of God” (8). He adds something unexpected: **faith**. Faith is the instrument we are given that receives the grace of God and the salvation that is granted through Christ.

He says something very Pauline, “Not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (9). He **contrasts both grace and faith with works**. Grace and faith are the opposite of works. Whatever a work is, these are the opposite. Meriting the favor of God by being good? This is the opposite. Outweighing the good deeds with the bad? This is the opposite.

This is not your doing. Sadly, there are some who just can't get past that idea of freewill that I talked about earlier. I came across an article this week that rightly argued from the Greek that “**this is not of your own doing**” refers not to faith or even to grace, but salvation. However, he then tried to argue, I believe from some very bad theological presuppositions, that we always had the ability to believe. Faith is not a gift. This completely denies the point of being dead. He just doesn't get the badness of the bad news. It also misses the fact that salvation is by grace through faith and thus the

whole package, including grace and faith are therefore necessarily gifts.

The church has always believed this. Jerome said, “Paul says this in case the secret thought should steal upon us that ‘if we are not saved by our own works, at least we are saved by our own faith, and so in another way our salvation is of ourselves.’ Thus he added the statement that faith too is not in our own will but in God’s gift” (Jerome, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 1.2.8-9). Fulgentius (467-532) says, “The blessed Paul argues that we are saved by faith, which he declares to be not from us but a gift from God. Thus there cannot possibly be true salvation where there is no true faith, and, since this faith is divinely enabled, it is without doubt bestowed by his free generosity. Where there is true belief through true faith, true salvation certainly accompanies it” (Fulgentius, *On the Incarnation* 1). And Chrysostom, “Even faith, he says, is not from us. For if the Lord had not come, if he had not called us, how should we have been able to believe?” (Chrysostom, *Homily on Ephesians* 4.2.8).

People struggle with this idea that if faith is a gift, then it means we did not have the ability to believe (we saw this with Lopez earlier). They then often turn *God* into a monster for things like forcing people to hell against their will.

That's classic projection. The whole point of this is that *we are the monsters*, not God. God is full of kindness and grace and mercy. But when you feel such a need to sacrifice the truth of Scripture in order to support some problem you have with human ability or inability, it can only be because you either 1. Are *deeply confused* and need to be taught better or 2. Are simply acting in that wicked world-flesh-devil mentality and that either because you *aren't yet saved* or because *the flesh has gotten the better of you*.

Going all the way back to Augustine, the church has been very helpful if you will listen to her. Augustine spoke of a natural ability and spiritual inability.³⁰ Physical faculties and spiritual deadness. Dr. Boice uses the illustration of putting straw in front of a lion. An ox will eat the straw all day. The lion could too, if he wanted to. He has a mouth, teeth, a stomach, and so on. He has all the natural ability to eat it. He just doesn't want to. He has no "spiritual" desire to will it so. He would literally starve to death if all he had was straw. The problem is he needs a new nature.³¹ This is what the gift of grace through the gift of faith does for us. It gives us a new nature to now crave and desire the things of God

³⁰ See my paper "On Amyraldianism, Different Sense of Ability, The Death of Christ, and Being Reformed."

³¹ **James Montgomery Boice**, *Romans: Justification by Faith*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991–), 302.

rather than the things of the world and the flesh and the devil.

Thus, he ends this section by saying, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works” (Eph 2:10). Good works are what we were created for. He made us alive in Christ, gave us grace and faith, saved us so that we would do good works. This was his plan from the very beginning for it says, “... which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (10b). In other words, Christians are changed in a dramatic way by the conquering power of Christ subduing their hearts, beating their enemies, and giving them life that they will do these good works.

Brothers and sisters, if you are in Christ, you are not zombies. If you are not in Christ, your condition is truly horrifyingly pitiable. You have no way to extricate yourself from it. You generally have no desire to even do so, even though you hate and also participate in the wickedness you see everywhere around you that you cannot escape from any more than your own skin. The power of Satan over this world is dark and deep.

But **Christ has conquered**, and his resurrection proves it. So I say look to him and come to life. Gaze upon the resurrected Lord of Glory, the Lord of Glory mighty and strong in battle. See what he has done to his enemies. See how he is showing grace to his people. Look to his kindness and power, his grace and mercy and be changed from the walking dead that you are to the person God created you in his image to be. It can happen. For this is the power of God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It has happened millions of times by his work alone. Know that Christ has died for you and that he has been raised to life so that you might be justified when you hear words, “**Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest**” (**Matt 11:28**). You will then know the freedom of walking in light rather than remaining one of the walking dead.

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