



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Are You a Cancer Survivor?

WHO AM I?

Ephesians 2:1-3

Tim Badal | January 29, 2023



Please turn to the book of Ephesians, where we'll be in chapter two this morning. It's a great opportunity to open God's Word together. We're looking at this book under the heading of this elementary and foundational question that people have been asking for millennia: "Who am I?"

In this postmodern, post-truth culture, this question has never been more important than it is today. Where do I find my identity? What are the things that define who I am? In this culture today that defines people by the status of where they find themselves in their lives, by the stuff they have, by the color of their skin, by their sexuality or the struggles they face, we recognize that now more than ever we need to know how God, our Creator, identifies who we are.

A cursory look at the Scriptures will tell us that the Bible defines and identifies us in one of two ways. We are either in Adam—that is, we are still in sinful rebellion against God and His revealed commands regarding how we ought to live—or we are in Christ, having bowed the knee in submission to His Lordship, receiving His forgiveness for our sins and now living in accordance with His words. We're one or the other.

The book of Ephesians is written to a group of believers who are in Christ. Twenty-five different times Paul writes that they are "in Christ" or "in Him." This letter is written to people who have been saved by the grace of God, but who are also living in a world that is searching for its identity. It can be hard at times for those who are in Christ to keep living in Christ when people all around them are living for themselves in their sin. We too can learn from this letter what it means to live holy and blameless lives to the praise of God's glorious grace amidst the ways our world lives. Paul will continue to remind us who we are in Christ and how we ought to live in light of our position.

If we imagine the book of Ephesians as a song, chapter one would be filled with positive and uplifting melodies. The music would be performed by flutes and clarinets, maybe an alto saxophone and the strings of violins and harps. It would be encouraging. In this chapter, Paul gushes about the magnificence of God's grace, mercy and love.

As we turn the page to chapter two, especially in these opening verses, Paul adds the low brass instruments, trombones and tubas. We hear the low percussion, the bass drum and timpani. For those Star Wars fans, the sounds of the Imperial Death March begin to resound in our ears. In chapter two, we turn our attention from Christ, Who God is and what He has done in our lives, to focusing on us and our sin. Paul has already alluded to our trespasses in Ephesians 1:7 as a little taste of what's coming and now he's going to dig deep into that, reminding us of what we were before we were in Christ.

Paul has a reason for this which is that it's entirely possible for those who are in Christ—especially those of us who have been in Him for a long time—to forget what we were before we came to Christ. The more we forget this, the more we can start to have an arrogant posture toward those who are not in Christ. We see those who are still in their sin and say, "How could you?" We wonder how they can be so dirty and rebellious, forgetting that if it weren't for the grace of Almighty God, we would be there ourselves. Paul is saying, "Yes, you are in Christ, but I want to remind you of what you were before you were in Christ, so you will realize the immeasurable grace you and I have been shown by Him."

What were we before we were in Christ? We were sinners, dead in our trespasses and sin. Let that sink in for a moment. You and I were dead in our trespasses and sin. I want us to think about a couple truths. First, that's what we were. In verse one you'll see the past tense, "You were dead in your trespasses and sin." We're no longer there. We're in Christ. The old is gone and the new has come, Paul says in a letter to another church (2 Corinthians 5:17). If anyone ever says, "You still have sin to deal with," the answer from our status as justified is, "No. Jesus has taken care of that."

Second, we need to realize that's where the world is now. There's no past tense "were" for those who are not in Christ. They "are" dead in their trespasses and sin. That's a sobering place. Our lost friends, family members and neighbors, those who aren't in a relationship with Jesus Christ and who are still in Adam, are still under the wrath of God. That should cause us to become passionate, not only about our walk with Christ, but also about pursuing evangelism.

Maybe there are those here today who have even been in church for a while, but who have never bowed the knee to Jesus Christ. I implore you this morning to realize that you are dead in your trespasses and sin. As we'll see in our passage today, you are by nature a child of wrath. Maybe you've been told God is love—and yes, He is love—but with the same measure that He is love, He is also righteous and just. That's why His wrath will come upon sin.

Third, I want to point out that geography and architecture will bring us a very sobering message this morning. The idea that I'm up here and you're down there can be misleading. You might be thinking, "Who does he think he is?" Actually, I'm one of you. Just because I'm up here doesn't mean I'm not associated with you. Don't let the architecture lead you to think I'm separated from you in this matter. I was dead in my trespasses and sin, but God has made me alive in Christ. I am in Christ, just as you are. I want to make sure you understand that, so you don't leave thinking, "Man, who does that guy think he is?" I'm a sinner who is in need of God's grace; just like you, I was once lost, but now have been found. All I am is a mouthpiece and I want to make sure you're aware of this. This is a sobering passage for me as much as it is for anyone else.

With that in mind, here's what God has to say to us all:

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.

Aren't you glad you came to church this morning? But before we go further, I do want you to notice verses four and five.

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.

We're going to get to these verses next week, so mark your calendar and be at church next week. If you're not here, you're going to prematurely judge the church and me, thinking the church is filled with hate and intolerance, that church is all about bad news and judgment.

Today, yes—the church is all about judgment, because that's what this Scripture lays before us. But that's not the whole story. We'll consider this for a few moments, but at the end of the message I will be giving you some glimpses of the good news. It's altogether good for us to sit in this suspense for a little while, realizing at the same time that good news is on the horizon.

Eight years ago, I remember sitting in a sterile doctor's office with my wife, Amanda. She had been not feeling herself for some time. We had been going to a series of doctors and she had gone through a series of tests. This was the moment of truth, when we were going to get some answers. I remember feeling cautiously optimistic that it really was nothing. It was around this time of year, late January, that Amanda started feeling bad, then about six weeks later, sometime in March eight years ago, that we were sitting there waiting for the report. The doctor came in and quickly dispensed with any pleasantries. There was no, "Hi, tell me about yourself" or any other effort to get to know us. She introduced herself, sat at her desk and pulled up some imaging on the monitor. Then she said, "I need you to follow what I'm about to say and we need to get you to a place very quickly. I need you to understand what I'm going to show you. You have breast cancer, it's pervasive and we have to deal with it right away. We need to be aggressive, because if we aren't, it will wreak havoc in your body."

I know many of you here have dealt with similar things, so I don't want to sound like some kind of martyr or victim. But if you've been in that same spot—especially as a young husband and wife who are raising a young family—that's pretty scary stuff. That

stopped us in our tracks. I remember how our son Luke, who was a little kid at that time, had a hard time wrapping his mind around what cancer even was. Why was it hurting Mom? She looked pretty healthy at the time.

But we knew in time, that because of the decisions we were having to make, she would soon look very frail. She would undergo surgeries and be in the hospital for about a week, during which the boys would only be able to see her a few times.

In fact, she went through a battery of surgeries over the course of the next year, then was on medication for about five years, all in order to address this thing called cancer. It was hard at the time to wrap our minds around what we were facing. One particular statement struck me eight years ago when we received this news. We asked the doctor, "How did this all begin?" As we were reeling under this diagnosis, I remember her saying, "Cancer is pretty crazy." She went on to explain that at some point in Amanda's life, unbeknownst to her or anyone else, one singular microscopic cell got the idea that it wanted to seek out and destroy everything in her body. One little cell. This cell then proclaimed, "Anyone who wants to join me in this party, let's do this."

I remember thinking about that and realizing it was a pretty incredible description of cancer. It wasn't too long after that, when I was talking with someone about sin, that I found myself parroting that description of cancer and applying it to sin. A little part of us wants to seek and destroy us, so it calls on the other parts of us to join it in this process. That's why the apostle Paul can say that we are dead in our trespasses and sin. In other words, before we were in Christ, we were cancer sufferers. There was something in us that was there when we were conceived in sin that ended up ruining the rest of us.

So from the beginning, there's this aspect of who we are in sin and it is pervasive in all of who we are. This has resulted in the diagnosis that we are dead. That's what Paul tells us. And because of this, the final word is that we are under God's wrath. This is a big deal. The antidote, which we'll get to in a moment, was that the Son of God, Jesus Christ, was forced to go to the cross. This cancer is such a big deal that it needs to be eradicated from our lives. So how do we go from being a cancer sufferer to a cancer survivor?

By the way, I need to tell you that Amanda is doing fine now. Those of you who don't know her, she is an eight-year cancer survivor and is healthy now. She was singing up here this morning—praise be to God! One time I told a story in a sermon, but I never gave the outcome. Someone came up to me afterward and said, "I couldn't hear another word you said; did the person live or die?" I said, "They're doing fine. They were at church this morning." So yes, Amanda is doing great. Praise be to God.

So how do we become a cancer survivor when it comes to sin? How do we get to the place where we are "in Christ"? Paul is telling us, "You were this, but now you're this." How we got there is God's work of grace.

Surviving the cancer of sin means we need to receive the correct diagnosis.

The first thing we need to do is receive the correct diagnosis. I'll keep using this metaphor, this illustration, of Amada's journey with cancer and hope it will be helpful in understanding our own journey with this cancer of sin.

When Amanda and I were sitting in the doctor's office, she brought all the imaging and test results in. She then said, "The bloodwork says this. The biopsy says this. The imaging says this. You've got cancer." At which Amanda stood up and said, "I don't believe you. I don't agree. I feel fine. I don't think I've got cancer. I talked to a couple of my girlfriends; they don't think I've got cancer. Tim doesn't think I've got cancer. I looked on WebMD. It says I don't have cancer. It says I have a brain tumor, but not cancer. I don't have that. So I don't believe you. I don't care what the certificates on the wall say. I don't care where you went to college. I don't care how many years you've done this. I don't believe it."

Here's what Doctor God just said in Ephesians 2. Doctor God walked into the room and said to the world, "You are dead in your trespasses and sin, world. Every man, woman and child. He just diagnosed every one of us, saying, "You're dead in your trespasses and sin." The world says, "I don't believe You. I hear You, God, but I'll go ask somebody else." So they walk away from Doctor God's office. They go to the bar and say, "Hey, Charlie. I was at Doctor God's office today." "Oh, really? What did God have to say?" "Well, you know, Charlie, God says I'm dead in my trespasses and sin." "Oh, really?" "Yeah, Charlie. Can you believe it? Do I look dead?" "Nah, you look pretty alive." "Thanks, Charlie. But what's God talking about?" "I don't know. You know God; He comes up with some pretty crazy things. He's probably just trying to make some money, trying to take you for all you're worth. Forget God. You're doing just fine."

The world, in hearing this diagnosis about their sin and trespasses, says to God, "We're not buying this." But listen, God has been diagnosing the world for a long time. It goes way back. Look at Genesis 2:17. God said to our ancestors, Adam and Eve, "*For on the day that you eat of the fruit, you shall surely die.*" Herein lies the problem. When Adam and Eve ate of the fruit—we think of apples, but we're never told what it actually was—did they keel over? No. They didn't die—physically, that is. So we ask the question: what happened? Paul says in Romans 3:23, "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" Then three chapters later he wrote, "*For the wages of sin is death*" (Romans 6:23). They ate the fruit they weren't supposed to eat, they rebelled against God, and something died. But what was it?

Their relationship with God died.

They no longer had the intimate relationship they once had. They, and we, were destined to have an amazing and unhindered relationship with God. Untainted by sin, we would have been able to walk and talk with God, communing with Him. But when Adam and Eve sinned, they were kicked out of the garden and out of that incredible relationship with God. Now the world God had created for them would fight against them. Human beings, including Adam and Eve, would fight against each other. Their children would fight against each other. But most importantly, there was now a change in their relationship with God. New obstacles and issues got in the way.

There was a physical ramification.

The Bible says it's appointed for man once to die (Hebrews 9:27). That death didn't just impact our relationship with God. As we see everywhere in the Bible and in life, man lives, then he dies. So man dies, but then he also faces judgment. The natural consequence of sin is this progressive dying that starts the moment we're born. We talk about how we're living, but really what we're doing right now is dying. You and I are right now experiencing the consequences of our sin. We're growing older and dying. We have lost our relationship with God, so we're in the process of dying and one day we'll die a natural death. God tells us, "This is the result of your trespasses and sin."

When Doctor God comes into the office and tells us, "You're dead in your trespasses and sin," we can do one of two things. If you're in Adam and in rebellion against God, you can say to Him, "You don't know what You're talking about." You can walk out of the room, saying, "I don't buy this." But if you're in Christ, you can say, "I believe this. You're right. Now, what do I need to do to fix this? What's the remedy?" For those who are in Christ, at some point someone told you, "You're dead in Adam. You're dead in sin. You can't fix this on your own." You then looked into the eyes of the Great Physician and said, "Whatever You tell me to do, I will do it. Whatever You tell me the remedy is, I will take it because I am lost and dead without You."

Listen to me, church. This is why every gospel presentation must begin with the place men and women are at in their sin. Without sin, there's no need for a Savior. That's why I love what Nancy Leigh DeMoss says: "True brokenness is a lifestyle. It's a moment-by-moment lifestyle, agreeing with God about the true condition of my heart and life—not as everyone else thinks it is, but as He knows it to be."

My identity is found in what God says it is. The first identity I must have as a human being is that God says I'm a sinner. I'm either going to agree with that fact or not. Listen carefully. You will agree with that statement at some point in your existence. Either you will agree with it in this life, or you will agree with it on the day of judgment. Philippians 2:10-11 says, "*At the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.*" In that moment, every person will bow the knee to the fact that they are sinners and Jesus is Savior.

The problem is at that moment, it will be too late. Now is the time. When you hear that you are sick, that you are dead in sin, you are to bow the knee and agree with the diagnosis of the Doctor Who is sitting across from you. Paul says, "The truth is that you're dead in your sin." But the Hebrew believers have some questions. I remember sitting in the doctor's office with Amanda after getting that information and we had lots of questions. What about this? What about that? It was a lot to digest. Among the questions I had were, "How did this begin? What could have caused it? What can we do to rectify it?"

Surviving the cancer of sin means we need to recognize the different ways it shows up.

Paul knew there would be lots of questions, so we need to recognize the different ways sin shows up. Anyone who has had a cancer diagnosis asks these questions: where, when and how? What is Paul saying when he says we're dead in our trespasses and sin? We talked about this a couple weeks ago. It means we are in rebellion. We must be careful not to redefine sin. Sin is the blatant and rebellious disregard for the commands and directions of God. It's not like we're innocent. We understood what God said, what He wanted, yet we did the opposite. We defied Him and rebelled against Him.

Paul says in verse two that this is how we used to walk. The word "walk" refers to how we lived. It's who we were, what we were all about. In essence, this is what defined and identified us. We were sinners. It's all of who we were. But some of you are probably thinking, "I don't agree with that. I'm not guilty of all those sins." So we pick up the catalog of sins. Starting with A, we think, "Well, I guess I've done that one. But I haven't done that one or that one. I've not even heard of that one; how can I have sinned that if I've never even heard of it? I don't even know how to pronounce that one." Then we read in Hebrews 4:15 that Jesus was tempted in every way as we are, but He didn't sin. Then we pick the catalog up again and we're thinking, "Jesus was tempted with that? Oooh. He was tempted with that? Come on, Jesus. You couldn't have been tempted with that." That's not what it means.

Paul is not saying we've fought every sin possible or even that we were tempted in every sin. What it means is we lived in a lifestyle of sin. The idea here is that we are sinners through and through. We are sinners emotionally, physically, mentally, relationally, spiritually and intellectually. There isn't a part of our being that isn't touched by our sinfulness. There are no faculties in us that aren't impacted by our sinfulness.

The reason why Paul is bringing this up is that in the church of Ephesus, there was a heretical teaching going around called Gnosticism. This was the belief that part of you is good and part of you is bad. The good part is your spirit; the bad part is the flesh. Let's face it. Usually it's your body that gets you in trouble. This was their thinking. It's the body that does the sinning. When you say something bad, that's the fault of your mouth and tongue. In the area of sexuality, there's a part of your body that gets you in trouble. If you steal, it's your hand that's to blame. That's what they meant by the flesh doing the sinning. But the spirit? That's the part that thinks about God. That's the pure part. Paul disagrees. Every part of your being is sinful, apart from being in Christ. There's not a pure part and an evil part; all of us are in sin. This is how we walk and live. We follow in the footsteps of our role models, who are people in the world.

Verse two says we are also "*following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.*" Jesus even called the devil our father. Satan was the first to rebel. Because he thought more highly of himself than he should, he wanted God's position of authority. And like him, we do the same thing. Instead of obeying our Father, we obey Satan. Instead of allowing God to be our model, we allow the devil to be our model.

Before you think the devil is making you do these things, notice he is only encouraging you to do what is already in you to do as a "son of disobedience." You don't need any help; he's just there cheering you on. As we follow him as our role model, we become members of a fraternity of people who like to sin.

Just like football fans, we find other people who share our desire to sin. That's because these are people who won't judge us for what we do. In fact, they're more than okay with it; they applaud us for our sins. There is a brotherhood and sisterhood that makes us feel welcome. That's why the Bible warns us to be careful when choosing people to hang out with: "*Bad company ruins good morals*" (1 Corinthians 15:33). In other words, the "course of this world" becomes an environmental hazard to us. It's the environment that causes this cancer of sin to grow.

I remember when I was growing up seeing a certain commercial in which a baritone voice asked, "Have you or a loved one been exposed to asbestos? You may have mesothelioma." Anybody younger than me has no idea what that is. I didn't either when I was young. Then I did a little research and discovered that it was a pretty heartbreaking situation. Construction guys who were tearing down old buildings would pull out material containing asbestos, which was later found to cause cancer. They didn't have any protective equipment, so they were put in harm's way. Without knowing it, they were taking carcinogens into their bodies

that were very harmful. The commercials were advertising law firms that offered to get them money for the harm they had suffered.

Paul is warning those who are in Christ to not walk in “the course of this world.” They are not to walk in darkness, but in light. Even those who are in Christ can wreak havoc in their spirits because they can unknowingly take in the carcinogens of the world. What are these things? What is the course, the pattern, of this world?

Look again at verse three. Paul writes, *“Among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.”* I thought a long time about how to explain this, then I read in another place where someone used the word “appetites” instead of “passions.” That helped. Now I realize that appetites in themselves are not bad. We all have them. Both those who are in Adam and those who are in Christ have appetites. The question is what are we going to do with these appetites?

Then I thought of a buffet line. There we find things that will fill our appetites. Both God and the world tell us it’s okay to get in line for the buffet. Both worldviews agree that the buffet is open. But the world tells us, “Get as much as you can. Fill your plate with as much as you can because you’re a god.” The only rule according to the world is this: “As long as you don’t judge what’s on my plate, I won’t judge what’s on your plate.” We call that buffet etiquette “tolerance,” meaning we’ve changed the societal norms that have been around for millennia. We are living in the most significant moments in history. We’ve changed the meaning of things like marriage. Why? Because we’re convinced of this: “Who am I to judge what’s on your plate? As long as you don’t judge what’s on my plate, I won’t judge what’s on your plate. Take whatever you like from the buffet line.”

But God’s Word sees things differently. He says, “The world belongs to Me. I’ve given you dominion over it; everything I’ve created is for your enjoyment and your good.” But there is one condition—we must live in submission to His Lordship. We take our plates through the line, but we listen as God tells us, “You can have these things, but in the quantity I permit and in the timeframe and the way I allow. I give you these rules, not because I hate you, but because I love you.”

So we take a little of this and a little of that. But the world says, “What’s your problem, dude? It’s ‘all you can eat.’ Get more ribs. Get more steak. Get more of this. Get more of that. Come on, man. You’re missing out. If you leave it there, you might not be able to get back to it. Heap it on!” People are asking us, “Why aren’t you doing these things?” And you can tell them, “It’s because my God says this is what I’m supposed to do, what I should take and how much I should take. This is how I should enjoy my meal.”

Remember too that the devil isn’t stupid. What God has created, the devil has counterfeited. We’re in the same buffet line, but with two different rules. This is important. The problem with being in Christ, not being in the world and in rebellion to God, is we’re sitting here with sparse plates. We look at our friends and families with their full plates, thinking, “Am I getting a raw deal here? God, it sure looks like they’re living their best life now.”

Surviving the cancer of sin means we need a remedy before the disease is terminal.

Let’s go back to verse three. It says, *“Among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind...”* And here’s the kicker: *“...and by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”* We need a remedy before this disease becomes terminal.

The remedy for Amanda’s cancer was nothing less than barbaric. I remember when the doctor told us what the surgery was going to be like. She said, “I don’t want you to go and look up anything about what’s going to happen.” So what does Tim do? He goes home and does exactly that. I think it was the fifth Google heading that said, “The top 50 most painful surgeries a person can undergo.” Amanda’s was number seven. I clicked on it, read the description and thought about my childhood. My dad was a butcher in a grocery store. It sounded like what I saw my dad do to meat carcasses. I’m not a crier, but that was the one time I cried. I thought, “They’re going to do this to my wife. The doctor seemed like a nice lady, why would she do this?” Then it dawned on me: cancer is an ugly thing. If you don’t deal with cancer, it will kill you.

Friends, the reason why Jesus died a horrific death on the cross is because sin is a terrible thing. It’s a horrific thing. It’s a shameful thing. Jesus willingly said to the Father, “Instead of all of them experiencing Your wrath and indignation, I will go and make a way. I will take Tim Badal’s sin off him and put it on Myself. And not just Tim’s, but I’ll do this for anyone who will call upon My name to be saved.” On that Good Friday, with His arms and legs extended on the cross of Calvary, the Son received all God’s wrath and

indignation in our place. If you believe this by faith, God's wrath will pass over you and go on to Jesus, Who is the perfect Passover Lamb. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that *"for the joy that was set before him [Jesus] endured the cross."*

So you have a decision. Will you believe what the Doctor says? You have a cancer eating away at your body. Will you receive the remedy of Christ's shed blood, or will you one day stand before an all-consuming fire—God Himself—and experience His wrath and indignation in an eternity separated from His presence, a place called hell? If you receive Him, you can in that moment experience His immense supernatural grace and know that your sins have been forgiven and your trespasses have been covered, once and for all.

Brothers and sisters, never forget what you were saved from. Never forget how your sin was covered. Never forget the depths of God's amazing love. Remember what we read in the next verse, Ephesians 2:4-5: *"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ."* Amen?

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