

# THE BELIEVER'S LIFE BEFORE CONVERSION: LIFE WITHOUT CHRIST EPHESIANS 02:01–03

## ***DIVISION OVERVIEW: Life of Believers (Ephesians 02:1–22)***

This chapter is one of the most important chapters in the Bible. It focuses upon the life of the Christian believer. It discusses his past, present and future. It shows what life was like before Christ came and what it is like since He has come. It discusses what God has done for man in the *work of His mercy* and the *gift of His grace*. It also paints six pictures of the church. It is a chapter that should be lived in; it should be studied and taught time and again.

- A. The Believer's Life Before Conversion: Life Without Christ (2:1-3).
- B. The Believer's Conversion (Part 1): The Work of God's Mercy (2:4-7).
- C. The Believer's Conversion (Part 2): The Work of God's Grace — Salvation (2:8-10).
- D. Remember What Life Is Like Since Christ Came: Reconciliation and Peace (2:11-18).
- E. Remember Who You Are: Six Pictures of the Church (2:19-22).

## ***Introduction (Ephesians 02: 01–03)***

The believer's life — what was it like before conversion? What was the believer's life like before he came to know Christ? When God looks down upon a man who is unconverted, how does God see him? What is the picture in God's mind of a man who is unsaved? William Barclay descriptively titles this passage, "Life without Christ." Well, what is it like — this life without Christ? What kind of life did the believer live before conversion?

- I. A life of death (v. 1).
- II. A life of transgressions and sins (vv. 1-2).
- III. A life spent with the disobedient of the world (v. 3).
- IV. A life under God's wrath (v. 3).

### ***I. Ephesians 02:01 Death***

Before conversion man lives a life of death. Note the words "you were dead." How can a man be living and yet be dead? To answer this question, we must understand what death means. The basic meaning of death (nekros) is *separation*. Death never means extinction, annihilation, non-existence or inactivity. Death simply means that a person is separated, either separated from his body or from God or from both. H.S. Miller says, "Death is the separation of a person from the purpose or use for which he was intended" (quoted by Lehman Strauss, *Devotional Studies in Galatians and Ephesians*, p. 137). Man was created to know, fellowship, worship and serve God; but man does not do it. If he worships at all, he worships his *own ideas and concepts of God*, creating a god to suit his own notions — a god that will allow him to go ahead and live as he wishes.

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The point is this: man does not fulfil his purpose on earth, not the purpose for which he was created. He has little if anything to do with God. He is *separated from and dead* to God. The Bible speaks of three deaths.

1. Physical death: the *separation* of a man's spirit from his body. This is what men commonly call death. It is when a person ceases to exist on this earth and is buried.

**1 Cor 15:21-22** *For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.*

**Heb 9:27** *Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.*

2. Spiritual death: the separation of a man from God while he is still living and walking upon earth. This is the *natural state* of a man on earth without Jesus Christ. Man is seen as still in his sins and dead to God.

=> A person may walk in life *without God and Christ*, rejecting, rebelling and cursing God. The man is spiritually *separated* from God; he is *dead* to God.

=> A person may walk in life as a religious person, worshipping a god of his own thoughts and notions, rejecting the only living and true God who was revealed by Jesus Christ. The religious person is spiritually separated from God; he is dead to God.

Spiritual death speaks of a person who is dead while he still lives (1 Tim. 5:6). He is a natural man living in this present world, but he is said to be dead to the Lord Jesus Christ and to God and to spiritual matters.

- a. A person who wastes his life in wild living is spiritually dead.

**Luke 15:32** *“But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”*

- b. A person who has not partaken of Christ is spiritually dead.

**John 6:53** *Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.”*

- c. A person who does not have the spirit of Christ is said to be spiritually dead.

**Rom 8:9** *You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.*

- d. A person who lives in sin is said to be spiritually dead.

**Eph 2:1** *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.*

**Col 2:13** *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins.*

- e. A person who is separated from God is said to be spiritually dead.

**Eph 4:18-19** *They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.*

- f. A person who sleeps in sin is spiritually dead.

**Eph 5:14** *For it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."*

- g. A person who lives in sinful pleasure is dead even while she lives.

**1 Tim 5:6** *But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives.*

- h. A person who does not have the Son of God is dead.

**1 John 5:12** *He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.*

- i. A person who does great religious deeds but does the wrong deeds is dead.

**Rev 3:1** *"To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds: you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead."*

3. Eternal death: the separation of man from God's presence forever. This is the second death, an eternal state of being *dead to God*. It is spiritual death, separation from God that is prolonged beyond the death of the body. It is called the "second death" or eternal death.

**Rom 6:23** *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

**Rom 8:6** *The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.*

**2 Th 1:9** *They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power*

**James 5:20** *Remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.*

**Rev 2:11** *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.*

**Rev 21:8** *But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death.*

**Ezek 18:20** *The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him.*

**Thought 1.** Everyone who has not trusted Christ is spiritually dead — dead to God, dead even while he lives upon this earth. This was the life of the believer before he was converted.

## II. *Ephesians 02:01–02 Transgressions and Sins*

Before conversion, man lives a life of “transgressions” and sins. Note that it is transgressions and sins that separate men from God, that place him in a *state or process of death*. It is while men are living in transgressions and sins that they are dead (separated from God).

The word *transgressions* (paraptoma) means to fall, slip, blunder, deviate, turn aside or wander away. It is a person who...

- falls from the right way
- blunders and fails
- turns aside from what is right
- slips from doing what he should
- deviates off the right road
- wanders away from God and righteousness

**Rom 4:25** *[Christ] He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.*

**2 Cor 5:19** *That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.*

**Eph 1:7** *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.*

**Eph 2:1** *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.*

**Col 2:13** *When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins.*

The word *sins* (hamartia) means to miss the mark. W.E. Vine points out that sin is the term most often used to describe man's fallen condition. It is what is meant by falling *short of the glory of God*. Man should live in a state of God's glory, but it is evident that he does not. There is no glory — no glow, splendour, brilliance or light shining out from his body. And there is certainly no glory or light emanating from his behaviour. Listening to any newscast on any given day is clear evidence of man's *inglorious behaviour*.

The point is this: God is perfect but man is imperfect. And imperfection is as different from perfection as day is from night. Imperfection is short — totally and absolutely short — of perfection. Man is ever so short of God's perfect glory:

=> man does not measure up to God.

=> man is not on the same level as God.

=> man does not reach up to God.

Man sins; he misses the mark of life. He does not live a perfect life. He may be respectable, but he is imperfect. He is never all he could be.

=> No husband or wife is free from selfishness and disturbance all the time — not perfectly.

=> No father or mother treats his child like they should all the time — not perfectly.

=> No child obeys his or her parent all the time — not perfectly.

=> No workman is diligent in his labour every minute of every day — not perfectly.

=> No neighbour is as good and kind and helpful as he should be all the time — not perfectly.

=> No person disciplines his body in eating, exercising and sleeping all the time — not perfectly.

=> No person controls his mind from impure and selfish thoughts all the time — not perfectly.

=> No person uses his mind fully, to the maximum all the time — not perfectly.

Man is not perfect; he is short of perfection — short of God's glory — short of the purpose for which God created him. This is what is meant by sin. Sin separates man from God. Man is dead (separated) in transgressions and sins. He is dead because he blunders and falls short of God.

**Rom 3:23** *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

**Rom 5:12** *Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.*

**Rom 6:12** *Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.*

Now, note a significant fact; the man who sins is said to be following after three things.

1. The sinner follows after the “ways of this world [or age, aion, Greek].” This simply means he follows the world in its...

- opinions
- speculations
- selfishness
- popularity
- purposes
- possessions
- standards
- values
- life
- pleasures
- positions
- honour
- technology
- science
- religion

**Mat 16:26** *“What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”*

**Luke 21:34** *“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.”*

**James 4:4** *You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.*

**1 John 2:15** *Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

2. The sinner follows under the power of Satan. Note that Satan is called the “ruler of the kingdom of the air.” Man was never created to be evil or to do evil. Evil originated with an alien force, an alien force that exists in another world, the spiritual world or dimension of being. The Bible calls that evil force a person and he is named Satan or the devil. The spiritual world has access to this world and can influence the spirit of man. What has happened is that man, who has free will, has chosen to follow the evil way of Satan. When Satan tries to influence the spirit of man to sin, man often listens and sins. This is exactly what Scripture declares:

**John 8:44** *“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”*

**John 13:2** *The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus.*

**2 Cor 4:3-4** *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

**Eph 6:12** *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

**Heb 2:14** *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil.*

**1 Pet 5:8** *Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*

**1 John 3:8** *He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.*

**1 John 3:10** *This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God: nor is anyone who does not love his brother.*

3. The sinner follows in disobedience. Very simply, he refuses to obey God, refuses to do what God says. He chooses to do what he wants instead of what he should do. And note: he is classified by God as one of those “who are disobedient.” He is a follower of disobedience; that is, he is in the family of disobedience, not in the family of God.

*Mat 7:26-27* “But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

*1 Pet 2:25* For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

*2 Pet 2:15* [The disobedient] They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness.

*Prov 21:16* A man who strays from the path of understanding comes to rest in the company of the dead.

### III. *Ephesians 02:03 Cravings and Lusts*

Before conversion man lives a life with the disobedient of the world. Note the words, “among them.” They refer to those who are disobedient mentioned in the previous verse. Note that the major stress of the disobedient is the desires and thoughts of the sinful nature. When most persons think of desire or craving, they think of the acts of the flesh or of the sinful nature such as:

=> illicit sex            => laziness            => overeating

=> pornography        => intoxication

But note: the mind also desires and craves. Some sinful lusts of the mind would be:

=> immoral thoughts    => idolatry            => anger

=> envy                    => unbelief            => false beliefs

The point is this: the unconverted man lives to fulfil the desires of his sinful nature, of his flesh and thoughts. In reality, he has nothing else for which to live. He knows nothing but this world and its appeals; therefore, he seeks as much of the world as he can possess and enjoy. His life is self-centred, not God-centred; world-centred, not heaven-centred; selfish, not giving; banking and hoarding, not sacrificial — not meeting the needs of a world reeling in desperate need and death. The unconverted man spends his life with the disobedient of the world living after the desires of the flesh, of the sinful nature and thoughts.

*Mat 5:28* “But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

**Mark 4:19** “But the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.”

**Rom 1:26-27** Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

**Rom 7:5** For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death.

**Gal 5:16-17** So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.

**Col 3:5** Put to death, therefore, whatever [fleshly desires] belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

**1 Th 4:4-5** That each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lust [immorality] like the heathen, who do not know God.

**James 1:15** Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

**James 4:1-4** What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

**1 Pet 2:11** Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.

**1 John 2:16** For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world.

#### **IV. Ephesians 02:03 The Wrath of God**

Before conversion, man lives under the wrath of God. Note the wording of this statement: “Were by nature objects of wrath.”

- => The unconverted man acts against God; he does not act for God.
- => The unconverted man rejects God; he does not receive God.
- => The unconverted man ignores God; he does not confess God.
- => The unconverted man denies God; he does not acknowledge God.
- => The unconverted man curses God; he does not praise God.
- => The unconverted man serves religion: he does not serve God.
- => The unconverted man honours a personal idea; he does not honour Christ, the very Son of God.

Man acts in wrath against God: he is an object of wrath, not a child of God. Therefore, he will reap what he has sown. What he has measured to God will be measured to him. The wrath of God will fall upon him.

**John 3:36** *“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.”*

**Rom 1:8** *First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world.*

**Eph 5:6** *Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient.*

**Rom 2:8** *But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.*

**2 Th 1:7-8** *And give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.*

**Heb 2:2-3** *For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. ■*