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THE OLD SIN NATURE EXPOSED

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS
NUMBER 13
EPHESIANS 2:1-3

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EPHESIANS 2:1-3 "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others."

As we wind our way through life we run into circumstances which have a tendency to make us unhappy. Circumstances of life have a great deal to do with our happiness or unhappiness. But let us remember that there are three persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit who have never known one second of unhappiness. In eternity past they had perfect happiness and in the eternity of the future they will share this perfect happiness with every born again believer. It is very important for us to understand this; and even though we all have known circumstances that have made us unhappy, God has never been unhappy and never will be unhappy.

Now God can read your mind and God knows your thoughts and he knows when you are happy or sad. God can read the minds of all the people in the world and he does. Even though this is true, God is still happy. We allow little circumstances to make us happy or unhappy, but let us remember that God did not design it that way in the first place. In chapter one we studied this amazing fact, that God from eternity past had perfect happiness and he designed a plan whereby he could share that happiness with us. We, in order to share this happiness, must enter the plan of God by having faith in Jesus Christ. Now Ephesians 2 is designed to show us how we may enter that plan, and not only how we may possess eternal life, but also how to attain perfect happiness. We discover that all of this comes to us by way of the cross, by way of grace.

We have seen already the condition we were in when grace found us. Illustration--I suppose most everybody, sooner or later, has the experience of falling in love. Once you have this falling in love experience, you look back in your life and remember how inadequate and how empty your life really was before you found real love. Now that's the way it is in the Christian life. Before you came to know God, life was empty, was very much like a desert. In coming to know the love of God we discover that it comes through a grace process. Indeed life was meaningless until grace found us. We were horrible before the grace of God touched us and made us over again. How did grace find us? Well, verse 1 reminded us that grace found us spiritually dead, under the control of the old sin nature, and spiritually bankrupt. Grace found us under the control of Satan and this confused us greatly. In fact, that's about all life was, one disaster after the other. And even after responding to the grace of God, we carried over into the Christian life many wierd and devastating ideas which have to be corrected by the learning of Bible doctrine.

EPHESIANS 2:3 "Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." This verse tells us that grace found us under the control of the old sin nature. This is the reason why man needs salvation. This is the reason why Christ came into the world. The old sin nature is a barrier to our entering into the plan of God. Now you have often heard that God is the Father of all mankind and that all men are brothers. But this Scripture gives the lie to any idea like that. We are not all born equal and we are not all brothers and God is not the Father of all mankind. God is the Father of those members of the human race who come to him through faith in Jesus Christ. So remember, we are not all brothers until we come to this relationship by having faith in Jesus Christ. One of the satanic ideas is that all men are born equal and that all men are brothers. One close look at the accomplishments of any group of individuals will quickly reveal that men are not equal. And man, by man's efforts, cannot make men equal. But God, in one second of time, through the experience we call regeneration, can do what man can never do, and can make men equal in his sight. How did grace find us?

Verse one says we were spiritually dead.

Verse two says we were under the control of Satan.

Verse three says we were under the control of the old sin nature.

In verse three the words "Among whom" should be translated "In the midst of whom." We all were once numbered among the unbelievers. This passage is addressed to believers and tells us what we were like before we believed. This is the Biblical conception of what we were in our former condition. We were spiritually dead, had no fellowship with God, were under the control of Satan. So now, here in this third verse, we meet the real culprit who is responsible for it all.

The word "conversation" doesn't really mean talking to one another, but refers to the state we were in. It refers to the state of being dominated by the old sin nature. Unbelievers have very few ways of controlling the old sin nature. In fact, there is no way an unbeliever can control his old sin nature. But once we enter into the plan of God, we then begin to have some control over it.

This word translated "conversation" comes from "ana strepho."

"Ana" means again and "strepho" means to turn. So this is a retrospective verse. What were we like before? "In times past in the lusts of our flesh." The word for "lusts" is in the dative case and it is the dative of disadvantage. But when we were unbelievers, these lusts just took over and dominated us. Approbation lust, mental attitude sins, and all kinds of overt sins are some of the indications of this lust domination. Approbation lust, power lust, materialism lust are just some of the patterns of this fleshly life. Possibly the best way to understand this fleshly life is to look at the doctrine of the old sin nature.

AN OUTLINE OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE OLD SIN NATURE

1. The old sin nature is the source of spiritual death. Spiritual death means separation from God. You can be physically alive, but spiritually dead and have no relationship with God.
ROMANS 5:12 "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:"

2. The old sin nature is perpetuated in the human race through physical birth.

How did we get the old sin nature? Did we do something to acquire it? No. We were born with the old sin nature. You get many characteristics from the genes of both your father and your mother, but the old sin nature comes to you through the genes of your father only. (This is explained in 1 Timothy 2:14.) When the spark of life hits that soul, you have physical life. So the moment you are born you are physically alive but spiritually dead. So being spiritually dead, we had to be rescued by someone on the outside of the slave market of sin. The only way Christ could do this was to be born without an old sin nature, and Christ achieved this through the virgin birth. This means no virgin birth, no salvation! Christ had to be minus the old sin nature, minus the imputed sin of Adam, and had to live a life free from the acts of sin. This Jesus did. Without the virgin birth Christ would have been born with an old sin nature and could never have been our Saviour. So the old sin nature is the culprit.

PSALM 51:5 "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."

1 TIMOTHY 2:13-14 "For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression."

Therefore in our first birth, we are physically alive but spiritually dead. In our physical birth we have no relationship with God.

3. The believer continued to have an old sin nature after salvation.

You can sin after you are saved.

1 JOHN 1:8 "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

This anticipates Ephesians 5. When one is controlled by the Holy Spirit that one is spiritual. When one is controlled by the old sin nature that one is carnal. Every believer at every moment in life is either spiritual or carnal.

4. The believer under the control of the old sin nature is designated as carnal.

ROMANS 7:14 "For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin."

Carnal means fleshly and this means that there are two kinds of believers--there are spiritual believers and there are carnal believers. At the moment of conversion we are spiritual, but the moment we sin we are carnal and we are out of fellowship with God and we need immediately to confess our sin and get back in fellowship with God. Believers who are carnal will imitate the unbelievers in their conduct.

5. The old sin nature frustrates the bona fide production of the Christian life.

ROMANS 7:15 "For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I."

Three times in that verse we read the words "I do." But each time these words occur, they mean something different. The first "I do" is from "katergazomai" and this means something on the inside working to the outside. The second "I do" is from "Prasso" and means "to practice," to do something repeatedly. The third "I do" is from "Poieo" and it means "to do." So the verse should read "For that which works from the inside of me (the old sin nature) I do not understand. For that which I want to do I do not practice. But what I keep on hating, that I keep on doing." So from this verse we see that the old sin nature is a frustrator. When you are controlled by the old sin nature the only thing you can produce from the area of strength is human good. The old sin nature always frustrated divine good, and the human good you produce doesn't count.

6. The old sin nature is described in the Bible by five names.
 - a. The flesh.
JOHN 3:6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."
GALATIANS 5:16 "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh."
 - b. The old man.
EPHESIANS 4:22 "That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;"
COLOSSIANS 3:9 "With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here."
 - c. Carnal
ROMANS 7:14 "For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin."
 - d. Sin in the singular.
ROMANS 5:12 "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:"
1 JOHN 1:8 "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."
PSALM 51:5 "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me."
 - e. Heart.
JEREMIAH 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"
Heart is also used in the Bible for the thinking part of the mind, it also refers to the soul, and is never used in the New Testament to refer to the pump that pumps the blood through the body.
7. The essence of the old sin nature.
 - a. It has an area of strength. This produces human good.
ISAIAH 64:6 "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."

ROMANS 8:8 "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God."

b. It has an area of weakness.

HEBREWS 12:1 "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,"

c. It has certain trends.

Such as toward asceticism or lasciviousness.

d. It has lust patterns.

Approbation lust, power lust, materialism lust, ego lust, sexual lust.

ROMANS 7:7 "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet."

8. The solution of the old sin nature involves divine judgment.

The old sin nature is totally objectionable to God.

In salvation, Christ was judged for our sins. He took our place on the cross and all our sins were poured out on him and judged at the cross.

Then in the living of the Christian life when one sins, the important thing is confession and the use of 1 John 1:9. This truth is also stated in 1 Cor. 11:31.

Then in eternity all human good is judged. This is described in 1 Cor. 3:11-15. God burns our human good. He will not let us appear in eternity wearing the clothes of our old sin nature.

9. The old sin nature is not found in the resurrection body of the believer.

1 COR. 15:56 "The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law."

PHILIPPIANS 3:21 "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."

1 THESSALONIANS 5:23 "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Let us close by looking at a correct reading of Ephesians 2:3. "In the midst of whom, we also, when we were unbelievers, had our manner of life in time past in the lust of our flesh (The old sin nature) fulfilling the desires of the flesh (and these desires were in the mind) and were by nature the recipients of divine wrath, even as others."