

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

HAMARTIOLOGY

The Doctrine of Sin

The Catastrophe from Which the Gospel Rescues Us

UNIT 7: THE EFFECTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF SIN WHAT SIN HAS COST THE HUMAN RACE, THE CREATION, AND ETERNITY

Lesson 18

Spiritual Death

Separation from God: The Gravest Consequence of the Fall

The Invisible Devastation from Which Every Visible Consequence of Sin Flows

“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins — spiritual death is not a metaphor; it is a real, present, devastating condition”

Key Texts: Ephesians 2:1–5; Isaiah 59:1–2; Romans 8:6–8; Colossians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 2:14; John 5:24

“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience... But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ.”

Ephesians 2:1–2, 4–5, NASB 1995

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Introduction

With Lesson 18, the Hamartiology curriculum enters Unit 7: The Effects and Consequences of Sin. Units 4 through 6 have established what sin is in its nature, how it transmits, how comprehensively it corrupts every human faculty, and how it binds the will in a bondage that only sovereign grace can address. Unit 7 now surveys what sin has actually cost: not the internal condition of the sinner but the objective consequences — the catastrophic losses that sin has inflicted on the human race, on the created order, and on the eternal destiny of the impenitent. Three lessons carry this survey: Lesson 18 addresses spiritual death, the foundational and most devastating consequence; Lesson 19 addresses physical death, suffering, and the curse on creation; and Lesson 20 addresses eternal death, the final judgment, and the biblical doctrine of hell.

Spiritual death is not the first consequence considered in this unit by accident. It is first because it is foundational: every other consequence of sin, physical, relational, social, and eternal, flows from the primary rupture between the creature and the Creator that spiritual death names and describes. Physical death entered the world as the consequence of the spiritual death that Adam's transgression immediately produced. Relational brokenness at every level, between husband and wife, between brother and brother, between the nations, flows from the vertical rupture between the creature and the God who designed all horizontal relationships to reflect and depend on the vertical. Moral corruption (total depravity) is the expression of the spiritually dead soul's constitutive orientation away from God as its proper end. And eternal judgment is the culmination of the trajectory that spiritual death initiates, unless the sovereign grace of God intervenes to transfer the spiritually dead person from death to life.

The pastoral urgency of this lesson exceeds even its doctrinal significance. Spiritual death is, in the precise sense that the outline's opening statement captures, the gravest consequence of the fall, and it is also the most invisible. Physical death is visible; suffering is felt; relational brokenness is experienced; eternal judgment lies ahead. But spiritual death is the condition of the person who appears, from the outside, to be fully alive: active, engaged, morally serious, perhaps even religiously sincere, and entirely unaware that the most important dimension of her existence is the one that is most thoroughly dead. The pastor and evangelist who know this lesson know something about the people around them that those people do not know about themselves, and that knowledge is both the heaviest pastoral burden and the most urgent pastoral calling: to offer the specific gospel that addresses the specific condition of the spiritually dead with the specific provision of the God who makes alive those who were dead in trespasses and sins.

This lesson examines spiritual death in six major sections. Section I defines spiritual death in its precise biblical and theological sense, distinguishing it from the metaphorical and from the other forms of death that the Scriptures name. Section II develops the four constitutional incapacities that spiritual death produces in the unregenerate person. Section III examines spiritual death as the root from which all other consequences of sin flow, establishing the diagnostic primacy of the vertical rupture. Section IV examines the specific dimension of spiritual death that makes it most pastorally challenging: the spiritually dead person's unawareness of her own danger. Section V presents the gospel's specific, comprehensive, and irreversible answer to spiritual death. Section VI develops the pastoral and doxological implications of the entire doctrine.

A note on the relationship between this lesson and earlier content in the series. The doctrines of total depravity, total inability, and the bondage of the will that Units 4–6 established are all expressions of what it means to be spiritually dead. The lessons on the corrupt heart (Lesson 15), the bondage of the will (Lesson 16), and the non posse non peccare of Augustine's State 2 (Lesson 17) have all been describing specific dimensions of the condition of spiritual death from the angle of the person's internal constitution. This lesson approaches the same reality from a different angle: not the internal constitution of the spiritually dead person but the objective consequence of the fall that produces it. The two approaches are complementary: together they establish that spiritual death is both the internal condition of the fallen person (total depravity, total inability, bondage) and the objective covenantal consequence of the fall (separation from God, the rupture of communion, the hidden face of Isaiah 59:2).

I. Spiritual Death Defined

What It Is and What It Is Not

A. *What Spiritual Death Is Not*

The theological precision of the doctrine of spiritual death requires a careful account of what the term does not mean, because the most common misunderstandings of the doctrine are misunderstandings about its scope and character rather than about its reality. Spiritual death is not the annihilation of the soul. The spiritually dead person continues to exist, to think, to feel, to choose, and to act. The soul is not destroyed by spiritual death; it is corrupted and reoriented. The annihilation view, which has affinities with certain forms of conditionalism in the doctrine of hell, is not supported by the biblical data and is explicitly contradicted by the New Testament's consistent teaching that even those who are spiritually dead are accountable to God and will face judgment (Romans 2:5–6; Revelation 20:12–15).

Spiritual death is not merely a metaphor or a figure of speech for moral failure, spiritual lethargy, or religious indifference. When Paul writes in Ephesians 2:1 that his readers “were dead in your trespasses and sins,” he is not employing poetic hyperbole to describe a spiritual sluggishness that could be addressed by greater moral effort or more sincere religious practice. He is describing a real condition: the actual severance of the life-giving relationship between the creature and the Creator, with all the specific constitutional consequences that severance produces. The death metaphor is chosen with precision precisely because it is the most extreme available expression of the absence of the specific vitality in question. As Ephesians 2:5's response makes clear, “God made us alive together with Christ”, what the condition requires is not improvement but resurrection; not more effort but new life; not moral reform but the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

Spiritual death is also not to be confused with the temporary spiritual dullness or the seasons of spiritual dryness that can characterize genuine believers at specific moments of their experience. The Psalms are full of expressions of spiritual desolation, divine absence, and the sense of separation from God that can accompany specific seasons of a genuine believer's life (Psalm 22:1–2; 88:1–18). These are real spiritual experiences, and they can be genuinely agonizing. But they are the experiences of genuine believers, regenerate persons in Augustine's State 3, who are temporarily experiencing the hiddenness of God's face without being in the permanent condition of spiritual death that the unregenerate person inhabits. The distinction matters pastorally: the pastoral response to spiritual dryness in a genuine believer and the pastoral response to spiritual death in an unregenerate person are fundamentally different, and the failure to distinguish them is one of the more consequential pastoral diagnostic errors available.

B. *What Spiritual Death Is*

Positively defined, spiritual death is the severance of the life-giving relationship between the human soul and God, the source of all true life, that Adam's transgression introduced and that every fallen human being has inherited as the foundational condition of existence in Adam's line. It is the condition Paul describes in Ephesians 2:1 as being “dead in your trespasses and sins”, not dead despite having committed specific transgressions but dead in them: the specific transgressions are both the expression of the death-condition and the instrument of its perpetuation. The person who is dead in trespasses and sins is dead through the medium of her own transgressing and sinning, and the transgressions simultaneously express and deepen the death-condition that underlies them.

Colossians 2:13 adds a crucial dimension to the definition: “When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him.” The phrase “uncircumcision of your flesh” points to the covenantal dimension of spiritual death: it is not merely the condition of the individual sinner but the covenantal status of the person who is outside the covenant of grace, who has not received the sign of inclusion in the people of God, and who therefore exists in the condition of covenantal alienation from the God who is the Lord of the covenant. Spiritual death is simultaneously the individual's internal condition (the soul's separation from God) and the person's objective covenantal status (the condition of those who are in Adam rather than in Christ).

The most theologically illuminating parallel to spiritual death in the biblical narrative is the condition of Lazarus in John 11:38–44. Lazarus has been dead for four days: there is no question about the totality of his death, the irreversibility of the condition by any natural means, or the absence of any residual life-function that could provide the basis for a natural recovery. And Jesus’ response to the death of Lazarus is not an effort to stimulate whatever remaining life-functions might be operative; it is the sovereign creative call that produces life from death: “Lazarus, come forth” (verse 43). This is the model of spiritual regeneration: not the stimulation of residual spiritual life-functions that original sin might have left intact, but the sovereign creative act of the God who “gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist” (Romans 4:17, NASB 1995).

“And you were dead in your trespasses and sins... But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ.”

Ephesians 2:1, 4–5, NASB 1995

II. The Four Constitutional Incapacities of Spiritual Death

What the Spiritually Dead Person Cannot Do

The outline identifies four specific constitutional incapacities that characterize the spiritually dead person, and each represents a dimension of the total spiritual helplessness that spiritual death produces. Together they establish the scope of the condition with comprehensive precision: the spiritually dead person cannot perceive spiritual truth, cannot please God, cannot come to Christ, and cannot accurately assess her own spiritual danger. No human remedy addresses any of these incapacities; each requires the specific, sovereign, effectual work of the Spirit.

A. Unable to Perceive Spiritual Truth: 1 Corinthians 2:14

The first incapacity is the cognitive: the spiritually dead person is constitutively unable to receive the gospel as the wisdom it is. Paul states this with the precision of his most careful theological writing in 1 Corinthians 2:14: “A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised” (NASB 1995). The “natural man” (*psuchikos anthrōpos*) is not an especially irreligious or intellectually obtuse person; it is the condition of every person who has not yet received the Spirit’s regenerating and illuminating work. The cannot understand (*ou dunatai gnōnai*) is the language of constitutive incapacity, not of strong disinclination: the spiritually dead person lacks the specific faculty of spiritual perception that genuine understanding of the gospel requires.

The pastoral significance of this incapacity is that it establishes the fundamental futility of the purely rationalistic approach to evangelism, the approach that treats the conversion of the unbeliever as primarily an intellectual problem requiring a better argument. If the spiritually dead person’s resistance to the gospel is not primarily an intellectual failure (a deficiency of evidence or argument) but a constitutional incapacity (the absence of the spiritual faculty required for genuine spiritual understanding), then the decisive instrument in evangelism is not the most sophisticated philosophical argument but the proclaimed Word empowered by the illuminating work of the Spirit. This does not render careful intellectual engagement with the unbeliever’s questions unnecessary, it remains a legitimate and important tool of the Spirit’s illuminating work, but it locates its function correctly: as an instrument in the Spirit’s hands rather than as the autonomous generator of saving conviction.

B. Unable to Please God: Romans 8:8

The second incapacity is the relational: the spiritually dead person is constitutively unable to perform any act that genuinely pleases God in the spiritual sense that the first great commandment requires. Romans 8:8 states this comprehensively: “those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (NASB 1995). The cannot please (*ou dunantai areasai*) is the language of constitutional inability: it is not that the flesh-minded person chooses not to please God

on this occasion but could on another; it is that the constitutional condition of being “in the flesh” makes genuine spiritual pleasing of God impossible.

This incapacity addresses one of the most pastorally challenging questions in the ministry of the church: the question of the unregenerate person’s genuine moral achievements. The lesson on total depravity (Lesson 11) established that the doctrine of common grace affirms the genuine natural goodness of the unregenerate person’s civic virtue, family love, and cultural achievement. Romans 8:8’s “cannot please God” does not contradict this; it specifies the dimension in which the pleasing is impossible: the spiritual dimension of the first great commandment, the whole-hearted love of God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength. The unregenerate person who genuinely loves her family, genuinely serves her community, and genuinely produces works of cultural excellence is doing genuine natural good that the doctrine of common grace affirms. What she cannot do is do any of these things as an expression of the genuine love of God that the law ultimately requires, because the specific orientation toward God that is the precondition of genuinely God-pleasing action is precisely what spiritual death has severed.

C. *Unable to Come to Christ: John 6:44*

The third incapacity is the volitional: the spiritually dead person is constitutively unable to come to Christ in saving faith apart from the sovereign drawing of the Father. Jesus states this with the absolute language of John 6:44: “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (NASB 1995). The inability (*oudeis dunatai*) is absolute in scope (no one, without exception) and constitutional in character (cannot, not the language of strong disinclination but of constitutional impossibility apart from the prior divine act of drawing). The drawing (*helkuō*) is the sovereign, effectual, compelling act of the Father that addresses the constitutional inability by creating in the drawn person the very desire and capacity for coming to Christ that spiritual death had made impossible.

This third incapacity is the one most directly relevant to the doctrine of effectual calling (Lesson 12) and the bondage of the will (Lesson 16). The spiritually dead person’s inability to come to Christ is not circumstantial, not the product of unfavorable external conditions that could in principle be improved to the point of enabling the coming, but constitutional: it is the specific expression of the spiritual death that has severed the soul from the source of the desire and capacity for genuine turning to God. The Father’s drawing is therefore not merely a favorable circumstance that makes coming easier; it is the sovereign creative act that produces the coming as its necessary fruit, just as the Father’s opening of Lydia’s heart (Acts 16:14) produced her responding to the things Paul was saying as its immediate and necessary consequence.

D. *Unaware of the Danger: Proverbs 14:12*

The fourth incapacity is the most pastorally unsettling of all: the spiritually dead person is constitutively unable to accurately assess the danger of her own condition. Proverbs 14:12 states this with the concentrated force of wisdom-literature economy: “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (NASB 1995). The way that “seems right” is the spiritually dead person’s own self-assessment of her moral and spiritual trajectory: it seems, from inside the death-condition, to be a reasonable, defensible, even commendable way of life. But its end, the objective destination toward which the spiritually dead person’s trajectory is moving, is the way of death.

The fourth incapacity is the dimension of spiritual death that makes the evangelist’s and the pastor’s task most urgent and most sobering. The person who knows she is in mortal danger will at least seek a remedy; the person who does not know she is in mortal danger has no motivation to seek the remedy she does not know she needs. The heart’s self-deception (Jeremiah 17:9, Lesson 15) systematically produces in the spiritually dead person the confident assessment that her trajectory is fine, that she has no urgent spiritual need, and that the gospel’s offer of rescue is unnecessary or at most a pleasant religious supplement to an already adequately managed life. The pastor who knows Proverbs 14:12 knows that the apparent comfort of the unregenerate person is not evidence that the trajectory is safe; it is evidence that the fourth incapacity of spiritual death is operating with full efficiency.

“A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”

1 Corinthians 2:14, NASB 1995

III. Spiritual Death as the Root of All Other Consequences

The Invisible Primary from Which the Visible Secondary Flows

A. Physical Death as the Consequence of Spiritual Death

The relationship between spiritual death and physical death is one of the most important and most commonly misunderstood causal sequences in the entire biblical narrative of the fall. The common assumption is that God threatened Adam with physical death (“in the day that you eat from it you will surely die”, Genesis 2:17), Adam ate, and physical death followed as the specific penalty. But Adam did not die physically on the day he ate; he continued to live for hundreds of years (Genesis 5:5: “so all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died”). The death that occurred on the day of the transgression was the spiritual death, the immediate rupture of the life-giving relationship between the creature and the Creator. The physical death that followed was the consequence of the spiritual death: the creature whose soul had been severed from the source of spiritual life was now also a creature whose body had been destined for the dissolution that Genesis 3:19 announces: “For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

This causal sequence, spiritual death preceding and causing physical death, is the specific structure of Paul’s argument in Romans 5:12: “For as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.” The “death” that entered through sin is primarily spiritual death, the condition of separation from God that the fall introduced; the physical death that spreads to all men is the bodily expression of the spiritual death that underlies it. The order is consistent with the Genesis narrative: the spiritual rupture of the garden is the cause; the physical mortality that Paul describes as spreading to all men is the effect. To treat physical death as the primary consequence of the fall and spiritual death as a secondary or metaphorical implication is to invert the biblical order and to misunderstand the specific gravity of the primary catastrophe.

B. Relational and Social Consequences as Expressions of the Vertical Rupture

The relational consequences of the fall, the blaming of Genesis 3:12–13, the murder of Genesis 4, the polygamy and violence of Genesis 4:19–24, the collapse of the Babel project in Genesis 11, all trace directly to the primary vertical rupture between the creature and the Creator. This is not a merely mechanical causal sequence (as though vertical rupture automatically produces horizontal breakdown through a kind of spiritual physics) but a moral and theological one: human beings who have lost their proper orientation toward the God who is the source of all love, truth, and righteousness also lose their capacity for the genuinely God-reflecting love, truth, and righteousness that right horizontal relationships require.

The specific causal mechanism that connects the vertical rupture to the horizontal breakdown is the fallen nature’s constitutive self-centeredness. The person who has lost the genuine love of God as the organizing center of her affections and choices will inevitably organize her affections and choices around a substitute center: herself. And a community of self-centered persons, each organizing her relationships around her own self-interest rather than around the genuine love of neighbor that the law requires and that the love of God makes possible, is a community in which every relationship carries the seed of its own destruction. The blaming of Genesis 3:12–13 is the first expression of this: Adam blames Eve, Eve blames the serpent, and the model of mutual transparency and responsibility that the original human community had embodied is immediately replaced by the model of self-protective accusation that characterizes fallen human relationships at every level and in every culture.

The pastoral implication of this analysis is that the church’s ministry to relational brokenness, marriage counseling, family ministry, community peacemaking, the pursuit of racial and social reconciliation, must always engage the vertical dimension if it is to address the horizontal consequences effectively. The horizontal relationships are

expressions of the vertical orientation of the persons in them; improving the horizontal relationships without addressing the vertical orientation is treating the expression without treating the cause. The gospel's specific provision for relational brokenness, the reconciliation that creates the new humanity in Christ (Ephesians 2:14–16), the community of genuine love that the Spirit's indwelling produces, works precisely by restoring the vertical orientation that makes genuine horizontal love possible. Restored relationship with God through the gospel is the specific foundation on which all genuinely renewed human relationships can be built.

IV. The Pastoral Challenge: Death That Does Not Know It Is Dying

Proverbs 14:12 and the Spiritually Dead Person's Unawareness

The fourth constitutional incapacity of spiritual death, the unawareness of the spiritually dead person's actual danger, deserves a sustained section of its own because it is the specific dimension of the condition that makes the pastor's and evangelist's task most counterintuitive and most urgent. If spiritual death produced obvious symptoms, if the spiritually dead person appeared to outside observers as clearly and visibly in mortal danger, the pastoral and evangelistic task would be relatively straightforward: present the remedy to the person who can see the need. But spiritual death produces none of the visible symptoms that physical death or severe illness produces. The spiritually dead person appears fully alive; she functions effectively in every domain of natural human life; she may be morally admirable, culturally sophisticated, and sincerely religious; and she is entirely convinced, on the basis of the self-assessment her deceitful heart (Jeremiah 17:9) is consistently producing, that her spiritual trajectory is fine.

Proverbs 14:12's observation, "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death", is among the most important sentences in the entire wisdom literature for the pastor's self-understanding. It establishes that the spiritually dead person's confident self-assessment of her spiritual trajectory is not merely unreliable; it is systematically, constitutively unreliable in the specific direction of dangerous self-flattery. The way seems right to the person who is on it. She has no experience of the way as leading to death; she has only the experience of a way that seems, from the inside, to be a reasonable and responsible path. And this specific constitutive unawareness is itself a symptom of the spiritual death that underlies it: the person whose mind is set on the flesh (Romans 8:6) cannot perceive the spiritual reality of her own trajectory because the perception of spiritual realities requires the spiritual faculty that spiritual death has taken away.

The parallel to physical scenarios involving impaired consciousness is illuminating. A person who has taken a drug that produces a sense of well-being while their body is in mortal danger experiences not the alarm that their physical condition warrants but the comfort and contentment that the drug produces. The drug has not removed the danger; it has removed the capacity to perceive it. In the same way, spiritual death does not remove the danger of the unregenerate person's trajectory; it removes the capacity to perceive the danger accurately. The way that leads to death is experienced, from within the death-condition, as a way that seems right. And the specific intervention required is not the improvement of the circumstances that might make the danger more apparent from the outside; it is the Spirit's sovereign work of conviction that penetrates the death-condition from within and produces the awareness that the death-condition's fourth incapacity had made impossible.

The pastoral implication is that the evangelist and the pastor cannot rely on the spiritually dead person's self-assessment as the primary indicator of the urgency of her spiritual need. The person who appears comfortable, satisfied, and untroubled by any sense of spiritual need may be in the most urgent spiritual danger: the comfort, satisfaction, and absence of felt need are precisely the symptoms of Proverbs 14:12's death that does not know it is dying. The appropriate response is not to manufacture artificial spiritual anxiety through psychological manipulation, that is not the Spirit's work and will not produce the Spirit's fruit, but to faithfully, clearly, precisely proclaim the Word of God that the Spirit uses to produce genuine conviction of sin, genuine awareness of the danger, and genuine turning to the Christ who is the only adequate remedy. The Spirit's work of conviction (John 16:8: "He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment") is the specific divine provision that addresses the fourth incapacity of spiritual death, producing the awareness that the death-condition had made impossible.

“There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”

Proverbs 14:12, NASB 1995

V. The Gospel’s Answer to Spiritual Death

Made Alive, Passed from Death to Life, Life and Peace

A. *Made Alive Together with Christ: Ephesians 2:4–5 and Colossians 2:13*

The gospel’s specific answer to the specific condition of spiritual death is captured in Paul’s most theologically concentrated formulation: “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)” (Ephesians 2:4–5, NASB 1995). Every element of this formulation is designed to establish the specific character of the divine provision for the specific condition of spiritual death.

“But God”, the two-word theological pivot of the entire passage. The condition of verses 1–3 (dead, enslaved, children of wrath) is entirely the product of human sin and its consequences; the provision of verses 4–10 is entirely the initiative of the God who intervenes in the death-condition from outside it. The contrast is between the conditions that human sin has produced and the provision that divine grace supplies. “Being rich in mercy”, the inexhaustibility of the resource from which the provision comes. The mercy is not a finite quantity that must be rationed; it is the inexhaustible abundance of the God whose character is the source of it. “Because of His great love with which He loved us”, the motivation is not the condition of those who are dead (there is nothing in the dead that earns the making-alive) but the character of the God who loves before the loved is lovable. “Even when we were dead in our transgressions”, the timing is decisive: the making-alive occurs while the condition is death, not after the first stirrings of spiritual life that might provide a basis for divine assistance. And “Made us alive together with Christ”, the specific act of resurrection, co-participatory with the resurrection of Christ, as the specific divine answer to the specific condition of spiritual death.

Colossians 2:13’s parallel formulation adds the Christological mechanism: “When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions.” The making-alive is accompanied by the forgiveness of all transgressions, the forensic dimension of the spiritual resurrection: the guilt that had created the objective separation of Isaiah 59:2 has been removed, the face that was hidden has been turned toward the forgiven person, and the basis for the restored relationship that the making-alive creates has been established by the removal of the guilt that created the separation.

B. *Passed from Death to Life: John 5:24 and the Irreversibility of the Transition*

Jesus’ declaration in John 5:24 is the New Testament’s most direct statement of the decisive, irreversible, already-accomplished character of the transition from spiritual death to spiritual life: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (NASB 1995). Three grammatical features of this statement carry enormous theological weight.

First, the present tense “has eternal life” (echei zōēn aiōnion): eternal life is not merely the promise of a future experience but the present possession of the person who has believed. The believing person already possesses the life that is eternal, the life of genuine communion with God that will find its fullest expression in State 4’s glorification but is already genuinely present in State 3’s regenerate experience. Second, “does not come into judgment” (ouk erchetai eis krisin): the transition from spiritual death to spiritual life is the specific reversal of the condemnation that spiritual death produces. The person who has passed from death to life stands under no condemnation, Romans 8:1’s “there is therefore now no condemnation” is the Romans formulation of the same reality that John 5:24 expresses. Third, “has passed out of death into life” (metabēbeken ek tou thanatou eis tēn zōēn): the perfect tense metabēbeken describes a completed action with permanent ongoing effects. The passage

from spiritual death to spiritual life is not a tentative, reversible, or conditional transition; it is an accomplished, permanent, irreversible crossing that the perfect tense establishes as definitively behind the believer.

The pastoral significance of John 5:24's irreversibility cannot be overstated in the context of the assurance of salvation. The person who has genuinely believed, who has heard Jesus' word and believed the Father who sent Him, has already passed from death to life. The passage is complete; the destination is secured; the present tense possession of eternal life is real. This does not mean that the genuine believer never sins, never struggles, or never experiences the battle with remaining sin that Augustine's State 3 involves. It means that the passage from death to life, the foundational transition that the new birth produces, is not undone by the specific failures of the ongoing battle. The person in State 3 may sin; she is not thereby returned to State 2. The transition is permanent; the battle is ongoing; and the assurance of the permanent transition is the specific foundation of the ongoing battle's confident engagement.

C. *Life and Peace: Romans 8:6 and the Positive Condition of Spiritual Life*

Romans 8:6's contrast between the two conditions, "the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace" (NASB 1995), provides the New Testament's most compact positive description of the condition of spiritual life as the specific opposite of spiritual death. The "life" (zōē) is the spiritual life that genuine communion with God produces in the regenerate person: the life of the Spirit's indwelling (verse 9–11), the life of the mind set on the Spirit rather than on the flesh, the life that is already possessed (John 5:24's present tense) even while its fullest expression awaits the glorification of State 4. And the "peace" is the specific experiential reality of Romans 5:1's reconciled relationship: "having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The "life and peace" of Romans 8:6 is not a description of spiritual ecstasy or uninterrupted emotional tranquility; it is the description of an objective condition, the condition of the person whose mind is set on the Spirit, whose orientation is toward God rather than toward the flesh, and who therefore possesses the life and peace that the Spirit's work of regeneration, justification, and indwelling has produced. The life and peace are real in the midst of the ongoing battle with remaining sin; they are the objective features of the State 3 condition even when the subjective experience of them is muted by the struggle of the Galatians 5:17 conflict. And they stand as the specific experiential fruits of the transition from spiritual death to spiritual life that John 5:24 describes, the first installment of what State 4's consummation will complete in the permanent, uninterrupted, perfect life and peace of the beatific vision.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life."

John 5:24, NASB 1995

VI. Pastoral and Doxological Implications

The Most Urgent Need, the Most Specific Provision, and the Most Personal Doxology

A. *The Pastoral Urgency of the Invisible Condition*

The specific pastoral urgency that the doctrine of spiritual death generates is unlike any other urgency in the entire pastoral repertoire, because it is the urgency of knowing that the most devastating condition a person can be in is also the condition that is least visible from the outside and least felt from the inside. The person with a terminal physical illness may be visibly deteriorating; the person in financial ruin may be visibly distressed; the person in a broken relationship may be visibly grieving. But the person in spiritual death appears, from every available external indicator, to be fine. She is alive, functional, morally creditable, perhaps even religiously active. The devastation is entirely invisible to the natural eye, and it is the most devastating condition she could be in.

This specific character of spiritual death, its invisibility combined with its absolute severity, creates the pastoral urgency that should characterize every evangelistic encounter and every moment of gospel proclamation. The person who appears comfortable with her current trajectory is not necessarily comfortable with her actual condition; she is comfortable with her perception of her condition, which Proverbs 14:12 and Jeremiah 17:9 together establish is systematically distorted in the direction of self-flattery. The pastor who knows these texts knows that appearance and reality may be radically divergent in the spiritual domain, and that the most urgent spiritual need in any room may belong to the person who appears most comfortable and least in need.

The practical expression of this pastoral urgency is the faithful, consistent, theologically precise proclamation of the gospel, not as a religious supplement for those who feel the need for it, but as the specific remedy for the specific condition of everyone in the room, regardless of whether they feel the need. The Spirit's specific work of conviction (John 16:8) creates the felt need by penetrating the fourth incapacity of spiritual death that Proverbs 14:12 describes; the proclamation of the Word is the specific instrument through which the Spirit ordinarily exercises this convicting work. To withhold the proclamation out of sensitivity to the absence of felt need in the hearers is to withhold the Spirit's primary instrument at precisely the moment when the Spirit needs it most.

B. *The Doxological Recognition: Made Alive When We Were Dead*

The doxological implication of the doctrine of spiritual death is the most personal and the most searching available in the entire doctrinal repertoire of the Christian faith: the recognition that the spiritual life one now possesses was given, by sovereign grace, to one who was dead and therefore could not participate in her own making-alive. The specific character of Ephesians 2:4–5's "even when we were dead" is the specific character of every genuine believer's spiritual autobiography: she was dead, not weakened, not struggling, not seeking, and God made her alive. The initiative was entirely divine; the transformation was entirely sovereign; the credit belongs entirely to the God who is "rich in mercy" and who acted "because of His great love."

This recognition produces the specific doxology that is the appropriate response to the making-alive from spiritual death: not the satisfaction of one who has made a wise choice and received the expected reward, but the wonder of one who was dead and has been given life she could not generate, did not deserve, and would not have sought apart from the specific, prior, sovereign work of the God who sought her first. John 5:24's perfect tense, "has passed out of death into life", is the perfect tense of the specific moment when the Spirit's creative call produced in the spiritually dead person the spiritual life she could not produce on her own. That moment is behind every genuine believer; its fruit is the present possession of eternal life and the present experience of reconciled peace with God; and its ultimate destination is the State 4 confirmation of all that State 3's spiritual life already contains in seed.

Paul's doxological eruption at the end of Romans 11, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!... For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen" (Romans 11:33, 36, NASB 1995), is the only adequate response to the sovereignty and the mercy that Ephesians 2:4–5 describes. The wisdom that is unsearchable is the wisdom of the God who chose to make the dead alive, to pass those who were under condemnation into life, and to give the life and peace of Romans 8:6 to those whose mind had been set on the flesh in the specific, comprehensive, all-encompassing bondage of spiritual death. To Him be the glory forever. Soli Deo Gloria.

"Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!... For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen."

Romans 11:33, 36, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Spiritual Death	The primary, foundational, and most devastating consequence of the fall: the severance of the life-giving relationship between the human soul and God, the source of all true life. Spiritual death is not the cessation of consciousness, biological function, or volitional activity; it is the corruption and reorientation of the soul away from God as its proper end, producing an existence that functions on the horizontal plane of creaturely life while being entirely cut off from the vertical dimension of genuine communion with the Creator. Paul describes this condition in Ephesians 2:1 as being “dead in your trespasses and sins”, a condition present from birth as the inheritance of Adam’s transgression. Spiritual death is the condition that requires the new birth (John 3:3), the making-alive (Ephesians 2:5), and the passing from death to life that John 5:24 describes as the specific gift of saving faith: “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”
Separation from God	The relational dimension of spiritual death: the rupture of the covenant fellowship between the creature and the Creator that sin produces. Isaiah 59:2 provides the Old Testament’s most direct statement: “Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.” The separation is not spatial (God’s omnipresence is not diminished by sin) but relational and covenantal: the holy God cannot be in the relationship of unmediated fellowship with the guilty and corrupted sinner that He originally established with Adam in the garden of covenantal communion. The separation operates in both directions: from God’s side, the divine holiness that cannot coexist with unaddressed sin withholds the face of covenant favor; from the sinner’s side, the corrupted nature hides from the God whose presence would expose and condemn. The gospel’s answer is the reconciliation accomplished through the blood of Christ, which removes the barrier of guilt and reopens the access to God that the separation had closed (Romans 5:10–11; Ephesians 2:18).
The Spiritually Dead Person’s Condition (Four Incapacities)	The unregenerate person who is spiritually dead exhibits four specific constitutional incapacities that together define the scope of the spiritual death condition: (1) unable to perceive spiritual truth, “a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised” (1 Corinthians 2:14, NASB 1995); (2) unable to please God, “those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:8, NASB 1995); (3) unable to come to Christ, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (John 6:44, NASB 1995); and (4) unaware of the danger, “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12, NASB 1995). These four incapacities together establish the specific helplessness of the spiritually dead person and the absolute necessity of the sovereign, effectual work of the Spirit to address each of them.
Walking According to the Course of This World	Paul’s description in Ephesians 2:2 of the behavioral expression of spiritual death: the spiritually dead person lives and moves according to the organizing framework of fallen human culture, “according to the course of this world” (kata ton aiōna tou kosmou, literally, according to the age of this world). The “world” in Pauline and Johannine usage is not the physical creation but the organized system of human life in rebellion against God, the comprehensive framework of values, priorities, assumptions, and ways of life that the fallen human race has constructed to enable itself to live as though God’s authority, character, and claims are not the most significant realities of its existence. The spiritually dead person’s walking according to this framework is not a conscious act of deliberate rebellion (most spiritually dead persons are not aware of living in the way Paul describes) but the natural expression of a nature that has no alternative organizing principle available to it. The world’s organizing framework is the only one the spiritually dead person knows, because the Spirit who provides the alternative framework has not yet been given.

Term	Definition
The Mind Set on the Flesh (Romans 8:6)	Paul's description of the spiritually dead person's default orientation in Romans 8:6: "for the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace." The mind set on the flesh (to phronēma tēs sarkos) is not merely a mind that thinks carnal thoughts but the mind whose fundamental orientation, its basic framework for understanding reality, its primary concerns, its deepest motivational structure, is organized around the flesh (the fallen human nature in its unredeemed dimensions) rather than around the Spirit. The result of this orientation is death: not merely the prospect of future death but the present condition of spiritual death in which the flesh-oriented mind already exists. The contrast with "life and peace" (verse 6b) is the contrast between the condition of spiritual death (the flesh-mind's present state) and the condition of spiritual life (the Spirit-mind's present state), a contrast that corresponds precisely to the difference between Augustine's State 2 (non posse non peccare) and State 3 (posse non peccare).
Made Alive Together with Christ	Paul's description of regeneration in Ephesians 2:5 and Colossians 2:13, "even when we were dead in our transgressions, [God] made us alive together with Christ", is the New Testament's most direct statement of the gospel's specific answer to spiritual death. The making-alive (suzoopoiesen) is a compound verb combining the Greek for "together" (sun) and "make alive" (zoōpoiein), establishing that the spiritual resurrection of the believer is co-extensive and co-participatory with the physical resurrection of Christ: the same divine life that raised Christ from the tomb is the divine life that raises the spiritually dead person from the death of trespasses and sins. The "even when we were dead" establishes the temporal priority of the divine act: the making-alive does not wait for signs of spiritual stirring in the dead person but occurs while the condition is one of death, establishing that regeneration is prior to and the cause of faith rather than subsequent to and the result of it. The connection to Colossians 2:13 ("When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him") adds the circumcision of Christ (verse 11) as the Christological mechanism of the making-alive: union with Christ's death is the specific means by which the old nature's death-producing power is addressed.
Passed from Death to Life (John 5:24)	Jesus' declaration in John 5:24, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (NASB 1995), is the New Testament's most direct statement of the decisive, irreversible, already-accomplished character of the transition from spiritual death to spiritual life that saving faith produces. Three specific elements of the declaration are theologically precise: (1) the present tense "has eternal life" (echei zōēn aiōnion), eternal life is a present possession, not merely a future hope; (2) "does not come into judgment" (ouk erchetai eis krisin), the transition from death to life is the specific reversal of the condemnation that spiritual death produces; and (3) "has passed out of death into life" (metabēbeken ek tou thanatou eis tēn zōēn), the perfect tense metabēbeken describes a completed transition with permanent ongoing effects: the person who has believed has already made the passage from spiritual death to spiritual life, and the passage is not reversible.
Spiritual Death as the Root of All Other Consequences	The theological principle that spiritual death, the rupture of the creature-Creator relationship, is not merely one consequence of sin among others but the foundational consequence from which all other consequences flow. Physical death entered the world as the consequence of the spiritual death that Adam's transgression immediately produced (Genesis 2:17's warning, "in the day that you eat from it you will surely die", refers primarily to spiritual death; the physical death followed as its necessary consequence). Relational brokenness at every level flows from the vertical rupture: the blaming of Genesis 3:12–13, the murder of Genesis 4, and the social dissolution of Genesis 11 all trace to the primary rupture between the creature and the Creator. Moral corruption (total depravity) is the expression of the spiritually dead soul's constitutive orientation away from God. And eternal judgment (lessons 19 and 20) is the culmination of the trajectory that spiritual death initiates. To address any of the secondary

Term	Definition
	consequences without addressing the primary one is to treat the symptoms while ignoring the disease.
Unaware of the Danger (Proverbs 14:12)	One of the most pastorally significant dimensions of spiritual death is the fourth incapacity: the spiritually dead person is constitutively unable to accurately assess the danger of her own condition. Proverbs 14:12 states this with devastating precision: “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (NASB 1995). The way that “seems right” is the spiritually dead person’s own assessment of her moral and spiritual condition, an assessment that the heart’s self-deception (Jeremiah 17:9) systematically distorts in the direction of self-flattery. The danger is real; the trajectory is toward death; but the person whose mind is set on the flesh (Romans 8:6) is constitutively unable to perceive it with the spiritual accuracy that would produce genuine alarm. This specific dimension of spiritual death has enormous pastoral implications: the evangelist who knows Proverbs 14:12 knows that the person who appears comfortable with her current spiritual trajectory is not evidence that the trajectory is safe; it is evidence that the specific incapacity of spiritual death is producing precisely the self-deluding comfort that Proverbs 14:12 predicts.
Life and Peace (Romans 8:6)	Paul’s description of the condition of the regenerate person whose mind is set on the Spirit: “the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace.” The “life” is the spiritual life that is the specific opposite of spiritual death, not merely biological life (both the spiritually dead and the spiritually alive possess that) but the life of genuine communion with God, of the Spirit’s indwelling presence, of the new nature’s genuine desires toward God. The “peace” is the specific experiential reality of reconciled relationship with God (Romans 5:1: “having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ”), the peace of a conscience that has been cleansed by the blood of Christ and the assurance of a person whose condemnation has been removed and whose access to God has been restored. Life and peace together describe the positive condition of the person who has passed from death to life (John 5:24) and who is now living in the already-and-not-yet tension of Augustine’s State 3, already possessing spiritual life and already experiencing the peace of reconciliation while awaiting the complete and permanent experience of both in State 4’s consummation.

Practical Application

A. *For the Mind: What Must We Believe?*

We must believe that spiritual death is not a metaphor but a real, present, devastating condition, the actual severance of the life-giving relationship between the human soul and God, that characterizes the condition of every person outside of Christ, regardless of their moral seriousness, religious activity, or apparent spiritual health. This conviction has enormous practical implications for the way we see the people around us. The neighbor who is morally admirable, the colleague who is genuinely kind, the family member who is sincerely religious but not yet a believer, each is in the condition of Ephesians 2:1: dead in trespasses and sins, subject to all four constitutional incapacities, and on the trajectory that Proverbs 14:12 describes as seeming right but ending in death. Knowing this is the pastoral knowledge that produces the specific, urgent, compassionate love for the lost that the doctrine of spiritual death is designed to generate.

We must also believe the precision of John 5:24's declaration that the person who has heard Jesus' word and believed the Father who sent Him "has passed out of death into life" in the perfect tense, a completed transition with permanent, irreversible ongoing effects. The assurance of salvation that the gospel provides is grounded not in the continued quality of the believer's performance but in the permanent, completed character of the transition from death to life that the Spirit's regenerating work has produced. Remaining sin (State 3's ongoing battle) is not evidence that the transition has been reversed; it is evidence that State 3 is not State 4. And the God who made us alive together with Christ when we were dead in our transgressions (Ephesians 2:5) is the God whose making-alive does not expire.

B. *For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?*

The doctrine of spiritual death should produce in the believing heart the specific wonder and gratitude of one who knows that she was dead and has been given life. Not the satisfaction of one who made a wise choice and received an expected benefit, but the astonished gratitude of one who was constitutively incapable of perceiving the truth, pleasing God, coming to Christ, or even knowing the danger she was in, and who has been given all of these things by the sovereign, merciful, gracious work of the God who acted "even when we were dead." This wonder is not a manufactured emotional experience; it is the specific cognitive and affective response to accurately understanding what spiritual death was and what the making-alive has done.

Desire, above all, that the "life and peace" of Romans 8:6 would be the daily, experiential reality of your spiritual life rather than merely its theological description. The life, the genuine communion with God, the Spirit's indwelling presence, the new nature's genuine desires toward God, is already yours if you have believed. The peace, the reconciled relationship with the God who was formerly your enemy (Colossians 1:21), the settled conscience of the justified person, is already yours if you have been justified by faith. Desire to inhabit these realities with the specific, daily, thankful awareness of one who knows what the alternative was: the death of Ephesians 2:1 from which the grace of Ephesians 2:4–5 has rescued you.

C. *For the Hands: What Must We Do?*

- Read Ephesians 2:1–10 as a personal spiritual autobiography, substituting the second-person plural of the text with a first-person singular that makes the doctrinal statement personal. Begin with the diagnosis: "I was dead in my trespasses and sins, in which I formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air... I was by nature a child of wrath." Allow each phrase to land with its full personal weight: not a general description of humanity but a specific description of your own pre-conversion condition. Then receive the provision: "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved me, even when I was dead in my transgressions, made me alive together with Christ." Then receive the implication: "I am His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that I would walk in them." The good works are the living expression of the life that the making-alive has given, the evidence that the transition from death to life is real.

- Study John 5:19–29 as the full development of John 5:24’s declaration. Note the two resurrections Jesus announces in this passage: the spiritual resurrection of verse 25 (“the hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live”) and the physical resurrection of verse 28–29 (“all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth”). What is the relationship between these two resurrections? How does the spiritual resurrection of verse 25 anticipate and guarantee the physical resurrection of verses 28–29? And what does this two-resurrection structure reveal about the relationship between spiritual death (Lesson 18) and physical death (Lesson 19) in the biblical narrative of sin’s consequences?
- Apply the four constitutional incapacities of spiritual death to your evangelistic practice. For the next person you engage in a substantive gospel conversation, attend carefully to which of the four incapacities is most visibly operative in their specific resistance to or disinterest in the gospel: Is it the inability to perceive spiritual truth (the gospel seems intellectually foolish or implausible)? The inability to please God (they believe they are doing fine without the gospel’s provision)? The inability to come to Christ (they recognize the gospel’s claims but find themselves unable to respond with genuine faith)? Or the unawareness of the danger (they see no urgent need for what the gospel offers)? Each diagnosis points toward a different specific prayer request and a different specific emphasis in your gospel engagement, and the precision of the diagnosis produces the precision of the pastoral provision.
- Reflect on Proverbs 14:12’s observation, “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death”, in relationship to specific persons in your pastoral care or evangelistic sphere. For each person you identify as being in spiritual death, answer the specific question: what is the specific way that seems right to this specific person? Is it the way of moral self-sufficiency (“I am a good person and I do not need the gospel’s rescue”)? The way of religious performance (“I practice the rituals and observe the forms and that is sufficient”)? The way of therapeutic self-actualization (“My life is improving and I am becoming a better version of myself without reference to God’s claims”)? Identifying the specific form that the “seems right” takes for each specific person equips you to address the specific self-assessment with the specific gospel truth that most directly challenges it.
- Pray for specific persons in your pastoral sphere using the structure of Ephesians 2:1–5: naming the specific four-fold bondage that the specific person’s specific form of spiritual death involves (dead in what specific trespasses, walking according to what specific form of worldly conformity, subject to the prince’s direction through what specific patterns of sin, a child of wrath in what specific way), and then asking the God who is “rich in mercy” to do for this specific person what He did for the Ephesian believers: to make them alive together with Christ, even now, while they are dead, by the same sovereign, merciful, prior initiative of the God who does not wait for signs of spiritual life before He gives it.

Key Texts: *Ephesians 2:1–10; Isaiah 59:1–2; Romans 8:6–8; Colossians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 2:14; John 5:24; John 6:44; Proverbs 14:12; Jeremiah 17:9; John 16:8; Romans 4:17; Romans 5:1, 10–11; Romans 11:33–36*

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

1. Before studying this lesson, how would you have described spiritual death to someone who had never heard the term? Would you have described it primarily as a moral failure (the pattern of sin that characterizes the unregenerate life), a relational rupture (the broken relationship between the sinner and God), or an ontological condition (the actual severance of the life-giving relationship between the soul and its proper end)? How has the lesson's definition of spiritual death changed, nuanced, or confirmed your prior understanding? And what is the most practically significant implication of the doctrine's precise definition for your own pastoral and evangelistic ministry?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

2. Read Ephesians 2:1–3 carefully and identify every specific dimension of the spiritual death condition that Paul describes. How many distinct dimensions can you identify? What does “dead in your trespasses and sins” (verse 1) establish about the character of the condition? What does “walk according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air” (verse 2) establish about the external and spiritual forces that operate in the life of the spiritually dead person? And what does “by nature children of wrath” (verse 3) establish about the constitutional, pre-personal character of the condition, is it the consequence of specific sinful acts, or is it the condition into which every member of Adam's race is born?
3. Read Isaiah 59:1–2 in its context. What does verse 1 establish about what the problem is not (the Lord's arm is not shortened, His ear not dull)? What does verse 2 identify as the actual cause of the non-hearing and non-saving (iniquities have made a separation; sins have hidden His face)? What does the specific covenantal language of “face” and “hear” suggest about the nature of the separation, is it spatial (God is not present) or relational (God's covenant favor and responsiveness have been withdrawn)? And how does the divine response in Isaiah 59:16–21 (“His own arm brought salvation to Him”) relate to Paul's “But God” in Ephesians 2:4?
4. Read John 5:19–29 and identify Jesus' two resurrections: the spiritual resurrection of verse 25 and the physical resurrection of verses 28–29. What is the specific agent of the spiritual resurrection in verse 25 (“the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live”)? What does the present tense and the phrase “the hour is coming and now is” establish about the timing of the spiritual resurrection, is it a future eschatological event or a present spiritual reality? And how does John 5:24's declaration (“has passed out of death into life”) describe the completed character of the transition for those who have already believed?
5. Read Romans 8:5–8 and identify the specific contrast Paul draws between the two minds, the mind set on the flesh and the mind set on the Spirit. What does verse 6 say about the result of each orientation: “the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace”? Is the “death” of verse 6 a future consequence or a present condition? And how does the “life and peace” of verse 6 correspond to the specific provisions that the gospel's answer to spiritual death makes available: does the “life” correspond to the making-alive of Ephesians 2:5, and does the “peace” correspond to the reconciliation of Romans 5:1?
6. Read Colossians 2:9–15 and identify the Christological basis of the making-alive that verse 13 announces. What does Paul say happened “in Him” (verse 10–11) and “with Him” (verse 12–13) that forms the basis of the spiritual resurrection? What is the specific connection between the “circumcision of Christ” (verse 11), the burial and resurrection in baptism (verse 12), and the making-alive together with Him (verse 13)? And what does the forgiveness of all transgressions in verse 13 add to the making-alive, what specific dimension of spiritual death (the objective separation created by guilt) does the forgiveness specifically address?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

7. The lesson argues that spiritual death is not a metaphor for moral failure or spiritual lethargy but a real condition: the actual severance of the life-giving relationship between the soul and God. Evaluate this claim.

Is the “death” language of Ephesians 2:1 and Colossians 2:13 clearly more than metaphorical, or is there a legitimate case for reading it as powerful rhetorical exaggeration? What specific features of the Ephesians 2 and Colossians 2 contexts support the real-condition reading rather than the metaphorical reading? And what are the pastoral consequences of treating the death language as merely metaphorical rather than as the precise description of an actual condition?

8. The lesson presents the four constitutional incapacities of spiritual death (unable to perceive spiritual truth, unable to please God, unable to come to Christ, unaware of the danger) as comprehensive expressions of the spiritual death condition. Evaluate whether these four incapacities are genuinely entailed by the condition of spiritual death, or whether they are rather the independent effects of original corruption that happen to coexist with spiritual death. Are there unregenerate persons who partially overcome one or more of these incapacities, for instance, persons who seem genuinely to recognize the danger of their spiritual condition even before regeneration? If so, what does this suggest about the relationship between the incapacities and the death-condition itself?
9. The lesson identifies spiritual death as the root consequence from which all other consequences of sin (physical death, relational brokenness, moral corruption, eternal judgment) flow. Evaluate this claim. Is it clearly supported by the biblical narrative, does Genesis 1–3 explicitly present spiritual death as the cause of physical death, relational brokenness, and moral corruption, or does the text present these as independent but related consequences of the same transgression? And does the claim that spiritual death is the root consequence have any implications for the priority of evangelism over other forms of social ministry, if the vertical rupture is the root of all horizontal consequences, does this mean that evangelism (which addresses the vertical) is more important than social ministry (which addresses the horizontal)?
10. John 5:24’s declaration that the believer “has passed out of death into life” uses the perfect tense to describe a completed transition with permanent ongoing effects. The lesson draws from this the conclusion that the transition from spiritual death to spiritual life is irreversible, that remaining sin in State 3 does not return the believer to State 2’s spiritual death. Evaluate this claim. Is the irreversibility of the passage from death to life an explicit teaching of John 5:24, or is it an inference from the perfect tense that might not be warranted? Are there New Testament texts that seem to leave open the possibility of a return from spiritual life to spiritual death (Hebrews 6:4–6 is the most discussed example)? How does the Reformed tradition address these texts within the framework of the irreversible transition that John 5:24 describes?
11. The lesson argues that the fourth incapacity of spiritual death, unawareness of the danger, is pastorally the most challenging, because it means the evangelist cannot rely on the spiritually dead person’s self-assessment as an accurate indicator of her spiritual need. Evaluate this claim. Is there a sense in which the natural conscience (Romans 2:14–15) provides even the spiritually dead person with some genuine, if suppressed and distorted, awareness of her moral accountability and spiritual need? Does Romans 1:18–20’s description of the suppression of the knowledge of God suggest that the knowledge of God (and by implication the awareness of the danger of violating His claims) is genuinely present in the unregenerate person even in its suppressed form? If so, what role does this residual awareness play in the evangelistic encounter, and how does it relate to the Spirit’s specific work of conviction in John 16:8?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

12. The lesson argues that the doctrine of spiritual death generates a specific pastoral urgency, the urgency of knowing that the most devastating condition a person can be in is also the most invisible and the least felt. Apply this to a specific person in your evangelistic sphere whose apparent comfort and apparent spiritual health might be masking the actual condition of spiritual death. What do you know about this specific person’s spiritual condition from the revelation of Scripture, regardless of how she appears from the outside? How does the knowledge of spiritual death’s four incapacities inform your specific prayer for this specific person and the specific emphasis of your gospel engagement with her?
13. John 5:24’s declaration that the believer has already “passed out of death into life” in the perfect tense provides the most stable possible foundation for the assurance of salvation: the passage is complete,

permanent, and irreversible. Evaluate your own experience of assurance in light of this declaration. Is your assurance primarily grounded in the completed, permanent character of the transition John 5:24 describes, or is it primarily grounded in the current quality of your spiritual experience, the absence of major sin, or the strength of your current faith? How does the doctrine of spiritual death and its gospel answer (the making-alive of Ephesians 2:5, the perfect tense of John 5:24) provide a more stable foundation for assurance than an experience-based or performance-based grounding would provide?

14. The lesson presents spiritual death as the root from which all other consequences of sin flow, and argues that the gospel's address of the vertical rupture is the specific foundation on which all genuinely renewed horizontal relationships must be built. Evaluate this principle in light of your own pastoral ministry. When you are counseling couples in relational difficulty, families in conflict, or communities in social division, are you consistently engaging the vertical dimension (the spiritual condition of each person in the relationship) as the foundational issue, alongside and prior to the horizontal strategies for relational improvement? What specific adjustments to your pastoral counseling approach would bring it into more consistent alignment with the principle that vertical reconciliation is the foundation of horizontal renewal?
15. The lesson identifies John 16:8 ("He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment") as the Spirit's specific work that addresses the fourth incapacity of spiritual death, the unawareness of danger. How does this understanding of the Spirit's convicting work affect your approach to evangelism? If the Spirit's work of conviction is the specific provision for the unawareness-of-danger incapacity, does this mean that the evangelist's primary task is to create the conviction (by manufacturing emotional distress or moral alarm), or to faithfully proclaim the Word through which the Spirit convicts (trusting the Spirit to produce the conviction through His own sovereign work)? What is the difference between these two approaches, and what does the difference reveal about the evangelist's understanding of her own role in the Spirit's work?
16. The lesson concludes with the doxological recognition that the spiritual life the believer now possesses was given by sovereign grace to one who was constitutively unable to perceive the truth, please God, come to Christ, or even know the danger she was in. How fully does this recognition characterize your daily spiritual life? Do you live with the specific, personal, wonder-producing awareness that your current spiritual life, your love for God, your desire to obey, your possession of eternal life, your peace with God, was given to you when you were dead, by the God who is rich in mercy? What specific practices of Scripture meditation, prayer, and corporate worship would make this recognition more habitually present in your daily experience and more consistently productive of the specific wonder and gratitude that Ephesians 2:4–5's "But God... even when we were dead" deserves to generate?

Prayer Focus

Open this lesson's time of prayer with a slow, deliberate reading of Ephesians 2:1–10, the diagnosis followed immediately by the provision, the death followed immediately by the making-alive, the “by nature children of wrath” followed immediately by the “But God.” Read verses 1–3 as a specific, personal account of your own pre-conversion condition: you were dead in specific trespasses and specific sins; you walked according to the world's organizing framework of values and priorities; you were subject to the satanic direction that the “prince of the power of the air” exercises over the spiritually dead; you were by nature, constitutively, before any personal choice, in the condition of those for whom the holy wrath of God is the natural and inevitable response. Allow the full weight of each phrase to settle before moving on. This is not a generic description of humanity in general; it is the specific apostolic account of what you were, personally and specifically, before the Spirit's work of making-alive.

Then read the “But God” of verse 4 as the personal pivot of your own spiritual autobiography. The entire catalogue of verses 1–3 stands on one side of this two-word pivot; the entire catalogue of verses 4–10 stands on the other. And the two words, But God, are the specific theological statement of the sovereign, unilateral, gracious divine initiative that crosses the uncrossable gap between the death of verse 1 and the life of verse 5: “Even when we were dead in our transgressions, [He] made us alive together with Christ.” Pray with the specific wonder of one who knows that the making-alive occurred while the condition was death, that the God of Ephesians 2:4 did not wait for signs of spiritual life before He gave spiritual life, did not wait for the first stirrings of faith before He gave the faith, did not wait for any human initiative before He took the divine one. He was rich in mercy before you were aware of needing mercy. He loved you with a great love before you had any capacity for loving Him. He made you alive when you were dead, because that is what He does, because that is who He is.

Pray in three directions, structured by the three main provisions of the gospel's answer to spiritual death. First, receive John 5:24 as a personal assurance, prayed with the specific gratitude of one who knows that the perfect tense of “has passed out of death into life” applies to her: “Lord, I thank You that I have passed, past tense, completed, irreversible, secure in Your faithfulness, from the death that was my condition by nature to the life that is now my possession by grace. I thank You that I do not come into judgment because Your Son bore my judgment; that I have eternal life not because I have maintained a sufficient level of spiritual performance but because You made me alive when I was dead. Ground my assurance not in the fluctuating quality of my experience but in the permanent, Spirit-guaranteed, irreversible character of this passage.” Second, receive Romans 8:6's “life and peace” as the specific description of the daily experiential reality that the Spirit's indwelling has made available, and ask for the specific grace to inhabit it: “Lord, the life and peace of the mind set on the Spirit is mine in Christ. Help me to live in it, not merely to affirm it as a doctrinal proposition but to inhabit it as the daily experiential reality of a person who has been given what once seemed impossible: genuine life in place of the death that was my condition, genuine peace in place of the enmity that was my orientation toward You.” Third, pray with the specific urgency that the knowledge of spiritual death generates: naming specific persons for whom you are interceding, identifying the specific form of their spiritual death's four incapacities, and asking the God who is “rich in mercy” to do for them what He did for you: to act even when they are dead, because that is what He does, because that is who He is.

Close with Isaiah 59:1–2 and then Isaiah 59:16–20 as the Old Testament frame for the doctrine's movement from diagnosis to provision. Read verse 2 as the diagnosis: “Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.” Then read verse 16–17 as the divine provision: “His own arm brought salvation to Him, and His righteousness upheld Him. He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head.” The arm that brings salvation is the arm that is not too short to save (verse 1); the face that was hidden is the face that Isaiah 40:10–11 promises will be revealed when the arm of the Lord acts. The gap between the hidden face of verse 2 and the revealed arm of verse 16 is the specific gap that the gospel's provision of Ephesians 2:4–5 crosses: from the separation that iniquity made to the making-alive that mercy provides; from the face hidden by sin to the face revealed in the Son; from

death to life. To the God who crossed this uncrossable gap, by His own arm, at the cost of His own Son, for the glory of His own name, to Him be the glory forever. Soli Deo Gloria.

“For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace... having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand.”

Romans 8:6; 5:1–2, NASB 1995

Key Texts: Ephesians 2:1–10; Isaiah 59:1–2, 16–20; Romans 8:5–8; Colossians 2:9–15; 1 Corinthians 2:14; John 5:19–29; John 6:44; Proverbs 14:12; Jeremiah 17:9; John 16:8; Romans 4:17; Romans 5:1–11; Romans 11:33–36

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

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