

EPHESIANS 2:1-4

INTRODUCTION

In chapter 1 Paul looked at salvation from God's point of view, showing how he has blessed us with all blessings in Christ and how one day all things shall be subjected to Christ. Now as we move into chapter 2 Paul talks about salvation from the perspective of the individual Christian. He shows what we were before God's work in calling us to Christ and what we are now to become and to do as a result of God's working in us (vs. 1-10)

Chapter 1 gives us the past, present and future of God's great plan of salvation. Chapter 2 gives us the past, present and future of the people who Christ has saved. When we think of the past we always seem to look at it with nostalgia. We always remember the past in the way we want to remember it. Well as Paul looks at our past in the opening verses of this chapter he does not look at our past with nostalgia but Paul is real and looks at our past with a good dose of realism.

This realism causes Paul to paint one of the most pessimistic pictures of human nature found anywhere. You will not find this sort of realism concerning our past in any other book in the world but the bible is real and deals with real people as they actually are. There is no glamour here there is no covering up here, human nature is displayed here in all its ugliness. John Stott in his commentary on this says, "Paul first plumbs the depths of pessimism about man." However we also ought to note for the sake of balance that Paul also and again I am quoting Stott "rises to the heights of optimism about God." and how his grace saves sinners.

So how are we to assess human nature? This is an important question for our conclusions will shape the way we discipline our children and the way we educate them. It will shape the way we deal with people's problems it will affect the way we deal with criminals and with those in mental institutions etc. Our view of human nature shapes the way that we view life in general. Now throughout human history there have only been three basic views concerning human nature.

The first view says that basically mankind is OK. We do have our flaws and there are one or two bad apples among us but basically these can be explained by blaming their upbringing or circumstances in life. But basically at the heart of human beings there is a goodness and as we are evolving we will get better, all we need to do is to encourage that nature to come out more. That is the view that in general is expressed and believed today.

The second view says that mankind is sick but everything is not hopeless for as long as there is life then there must be hope. It's a pessimistic view that we do not have today but was at one time very popular within our world.

Now the third view and the biblical view agrees that man is indeed sick, in fact the bible says human nature is even more serious than this for it is in fact dead. Dead so far as our relationship with God is concerned (v 1). God told Adam that if he disobeyed him then he would die and since then every person born into our world is born dead, that is spiritually dead towards God as far as his or her nature is concerned.

1. HUMAN BEINGS ARE WALKING CORPSES. (Vs. 1-3)

This means that like a spiritual corpse no one is able to make a single move towards God or think a single thought about God or even correctly respond to God unless God is first present to bring the spiritual dead person to life. Even our human will is unable to freely turn us to God the bible teaches that our human wills are in bondage and in that sense there is no such thing as free will, all our wills are **not** free, they will never freely choose to follow Christ but will in fact choose to reject Christ.

So when we talk about man's free will we have to be careful that we don't give the impression that mankind is free to turn to God that there is nothing stopping us from doing so. That is not true

there is the problem of death. Dead people do not will anything. The bible is clear that sin is our master so that instead of turning to God and accepting his gracious offer of salvation of salvation we turn from him.

Now this biblical idea of human nature is completely foreign to our world today. Our world has adopted the first explanation of human nature and as a result our schools and homes lack discipline, our jails are full, crime is not decreasing, drug use is increasing, and we still have the highest pregnancy rate in Europe for teenage girls.

The reason is that if you see people as basically good then all you need to do is to educate those who are causing the problems and they will get better. Only the biblical view of human nature fits the facts of our world today, but of course no one will accept that for to do that would mean having to accept God and people are not prepared to do that because that makes them accountable. The theory of evolution and its wide scale acceptance has done more harm to our society than most of us realise.

Paul gives us the picture of human beings living as dead corpses in these verses. Although as sinners before God we are spiritually dead nevertheless we walk actively in sin. We are dead towards God but we are alive to wickedness. Paul uses very strong words to show that although sinners are spiritually dead we actively follow the ways of the world and the devil and spend our time gratifying the cravings of his own sinful nature.

We are alive to sin but dead to God so in that sense we are the living dead we are walking corpses. Moreover as sinners we are trapped by the very things that are destroying us.

We walk in the ways of the world and unless we cease to do so this way will actually eventually destroy us but we do not realise it and when we are told we simply don't believe it. How can following the ways of the vast majority of people in our world lead to our destruction? How can so many be wrong, is the thinking of the world today. To follow the ways of the world means that we are entirely controlled by the world's thought system.

We think as the world thinks, and the worlds thoughts are sadly reflected in the media today. The way that people dress is not controlled by their own free choices as they think but it is controlled by the world by those who dictate to us what modern fashion is; what is acceptable to them. This is why people have to have designer this and designer that, they are simply following the ways of the world.

The way we think and behave is controlled by the world in which we live, we are slaves to it we dare not go against the current trend or the current thinking, we are simply afraid of the consequences of doing so.

Paul also says that we are enslaved by the devil too (v 2). The ruler of the kingdom of the air is the devil; he is the one who is at work in the disobedient. Paul here is telling us how the devil enslaves us, it is not that he is personally present in each person's life for he is only one creature and can't be in more than one place at one time. But it is through the evil spirit of the age or perhaps outlook would be a better word, the present outlook in the world is how he rules today.

He rules by simply presenting lies as truth and truth as lies. He convinces us that there is no God or if there is he is so weak that he is no good to us except when we need him in a crisis situation. Evolution is the dictating spirit of the age, a dismissal of God keeps the devil in power; he keeps ruling those who are sinners.

Paul also tells us that we are slaves to our sinful nature or what the older versions call the flesh (v 3) we are fallen sinful human beings, this embraces our wicked deeds our evil desires and our perverted thoughts. We all love to gratify our sinful desires and cravings. Gluttony is a massive

problem in Britain today. Why? The answer is because we are slaves to our sinful desires and cravings.

Lust and greed are displayed before us everyday of our lives, as we see another marriage fall apart because someone gave in to lust; everyday people are seeking help with their debt problems because they are slaves to the cravings of their sinful nature. But then there are sins that we might not see as easily because they really take place within our hearts and result from the cravings of our sinful natures.

Sins like pride, sinful ambition, hostility to the revealed truth of God, malice, envy. The truth is we are trapped by these sins. In such a condition we cannot and will not turn from them, we will not seek after God and we simply cannot stop ourselves from sinning and from giving in to our sinful nature. We go after the world; we go the way of the devil we go on seeking to satisfy our cravings even though this way often leads to misery.

We cannot change we cannot stop it we simply are in slavery to our own sinful human nature. Is there no hope then? Well we will come to hope in a minute but the picture gets even worse before it will get better.

2. WE ARE OBJECTS OF HIS WRATH (v 3)

Just when we thought things couldn't get worst we are told that we were by nature objects of God's wrath. Now this does not sound as terrible as it is today simply because the world has been deluded by the Evil One not to believe in a God of wrath. People speak about the wrath of God even some Christians speak about it in such a way that it suggests that this teaching is almost an embarrassment to the Christian church. People don't mind us speaking of God's love, or even his mercy or justice but not of his wrath.

Wrath and people's idea of God does not fit together but the truth is that the fact that we no longer believe in the wrath of God is simply another outcome of our deadness and active following in the ways of the world, the devil and our own sinful nature. The fact that the wrath of God seems an out of date concept is just further evidence of the bondage that Paul has just been describing. The worldly mind does not take God's wrath seriously because it does not take sin seriously.

Yet if sin is as bad as the bible says it is then nothing is more just or reasonable than the wrath of a holy and righteous God. God's wrath is not like man's wrath, God's wrath is consistently against sin, it is always controlled it is not a hot tempered sort of wrath that you see in people. It is also judicial; that is it is his judgement against sin. Now God's wrath is being revealed against sin in this world. Romans 1 gives us examples of ways that God's wrath is revealed today in our world.

Paul shows that when the truth of God is rejected then this leads to a darkening of the understanding (Romans 1:21). It leads to the worship of false and dare I say stupid gods (vs. 22-23). Sexual perversions, lies, envies, hatred, murder, strife, deceit, and disobedience to Parents are all consequences of our rejection of God they are all an outworking of God's wrath against sin.

But there is also a future dimension to the wrath of God that is yet to be revealed. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:28-31). How much worst can things be for the human race, we are in slavery under the control of the world, the devil and our own sinful nature. We are experiencing the wrath of God now because of our sin but one day we will experience his wrath in his final judgement on sinners, when we are cast into hell because of our sin.

I said earlier that all is not lost there is hope for sinners like us and that hope is found in verses 4-5. We will come back to these verses against next time but for now notice:

3. GOD'S RADICAL SOLUTION (vs. 4-5)

Just when it seems there is no hope God gives us hope. We soon discover that we cannot help ourselves out of the situation because we are dead in our sins. Others can't help us out of it, they can only point the way to us, only God can help us, he is the solution to our problem. We are dead in our sins so what God does for us is he makes us alive unto God. He performs a spiritual resurrection on us. He reaches down to us in grace and he brings us to life, he gives us spiritual life.

This means that whereas before while still in our sins we ran from God now we run to him, whereas before we could not respond to him now we respond to his call, whereas before we rejected his offer of salvation now we accept it. This is what God does, we cannot do it ourselves for in our deadness we have no desire to do it but now God has made us alive. You see apart from the power of God in bringing us to spiritual life, there would be no hope for anyone. But because God in his grace and mercy, which he shows towards sinners, there is hope for even the most hardened and determined sinner we know. This is why Paul said that it takes the same power to raise one sinner to newness of life than it did to raise the Lord Jesus from the dead (1:20). If we are saved then we simply ought to raise our voices in praise to almighty God for reaching down to us in our deadness and making us alive in Christ Jesus.

It ought to also lead us to want to tell others about our great and gracious God who is the only solution to the problems of the world and finally it ought to lead us to pray for sinners that God in his grace and mercy might come to them and make them alive unto Christ. You see once we really grasp the hopeless situation of sinners then we will make prayer our number one priority. The question is have we really grasped the plight of sinners or have we been taken in by the worldview that people are basically good?

Our prayer life will reveal to us what we **really** believe about human nature and whether we **really do believe** that God and God alone has the answer to sin and death.

Amen