7-8-18

Ephesians 2:1-10

As we continue our study of Ephesians, we don’t want to lose track of the main points of Paul’s letter. The overall focus is contained in verse 1:10.

with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, *that is*, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.

It is God’s will and plan, to bring everything together through His Son, Jesus Christ, and to have Him as ruler of all. Notice that God does everything and He does everything through Christ. By Him we are saved, we have redemption through Him, we are adopted through Christ. God freely bestows His grace on us through Jesus Christ. By these things, we know that there is no other way to the Father than by Jesus. God has ordained it so. Our common culture claims that there are many paths to heaven or even that all ways lead to salvation. What we have in this letter, is God’s word telling us that these claims are not true. Because of Jesus’ obedience to the Father, He is the only way.

For God to ordain this is fair; in fact, it is more than fair. As Paul points out to us in these first three verses of chapter 2, we do not deserve to be given any pathway to heaven. We are not “good people”, we have no redeeming qualities. It is only by God’s grace and mercy that we have a way to come to Him; and that is through Christ.

In the first three verses of our reading for today, Paul paints a picture of the human condition outside of Christ. It is not a pretty picture. But we need to consider what we are so that we have a better understanding of what Christ has done for us. Verses 4 through 7 let us know that God will fix us, but only through Jesus. If we have a better understanding of what we are outside of Christ, it should lead to proper gratitude for what God has done.

Overall, we have a very dim view of sin and that’s because we have lived in it all our lives. We don’t know any other way. Outside of Christ, we are entirely blinded to sin and its effects. It is good for us to try to get a better understanding of sin; of how horrible it is, and of what it is to God. Basically, if we look at the world and see how messed up everything is, we begin to see the effects of sin. Every war, every sickness, every death is the result of sin in the world.

Additionally, God is holy. Sin is entirely and utterly against His nature. Evil has no part in Him and He will not compromise with it. Evil is contrary to His very being. Sometimes, we need to pray that we have a better understanding of what sin and evil cause in ourselves and in this world. We need to pray for a better idea of how abhorrent sin is to God Himself.

Let’s again look at this first verse of chapter 2.

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins

See how this ties together with the end of chapter 1 where Paul wrote about the power of God. It was the power of God that raised Jesus from the dead. It is the power of God that enables Paul to say that “you were dead”. Also, God raised Jesus “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come”. Jesus is above the power of sin and evil which kill us.

Let’s consider this death spoken of here in verse 2:1; We know that we look forward to a physical resurrection in the future, but Paul speaks here in the past tense; as if we have already been resurrected. To understand this, we must go back to the beginning.

Gen 2:16-17

The Lord God commanded the man, saying, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.”

We all know very well what happened. Adam and Eve disobeyed God and now sin flourishes in the world. We also know that Adam and Eve died, just like all the rest of us do. The thing is that Adam lived to be 930 years old and God had told him he would die in the day that he ate. The Bible teaches us that what happened here was that Adam did suffer death immediately: a spiritual death. Our body dies when it is separated from our spirit; our spirit dies when it is separated from God.

Our spirits die from the first sin, our bodies just take longer to pass away. (This is a blessing because it gives us a chance to accept Jesus.) Here is the terrible thing that this first verse of chapter two tells us: All the people who are outside of Christ are dead. Yes, they move around, think, create; all kinds of actions. Still, they are dead. This is shown in their response (or lack of response) to God. They really aren’t concerned about Jesus or who He is. They cannot see the hand of God in all things. They cannot comprehend the Bible and its truth.

Sometimes, we who are Christians think, “How can they not see this?” It would be the same to wonder how the body in the casket in the funeral home can’t see the beautiful flowers. They can’t, they are dead.

So, how is it that the Christian is no longer dead? Why can Paul use the past tense in his statement? For that we must go to the Gospel of John, chapter 3. This is the account of Nicodemus coming to visit Jesus. Jesus tells him something truly startling.

John 3:3

Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Of course, poor Nicodemus tried to picture this in the physical and the image he came up with was absurd. Additionally, if our body is alive, what is the purpose of rebirth? We were alive before, we are alive after; there would be no change. The rebirth Jesus spoke of was spiritual; a spiritual resurrection. Nicodemus’ spirit was dead. Only by the power of God through Jesus Christ could his spirit be made alive again. To be alive again means to be brought back into fellowship with God the Father. This spiritual rebirth takes place when we believe on Jesus Christ as Saviour and is brought about by the Holy Spirit. Hence, we say that we are born again by the Holy Spirit.

This is the beautiful and powerful Gospel of Jesus Christ. We experience spiritual death, and eventually physical death because of sin. God has chosen to make a way for us so we don’t exist in that state for eternity. By depending on Jesus, our spirit is reborn by the Holy Spirit and our bodies will be resurrected to live with God forever. All by the power of God, all through Jesus Christ.

Going back to Ephesians 2:1, Paul refers to “trespasses and sins”. The two words he uses covers all types of personal evil. The term translated “trespasses” includes all those things we actually do in some way. This would be things like lying, stealing, adultery; also sins of the mind like anger, lust, or jealously. The word translated “sins” covers those things we don’t do that we should. Not helping our neighbor when we are able, not sharing the Gospel, simply not being kind when we can. We are guilty of sins of commission and omission. We are guilty of doing what we shouldn’t and not doing what we should.

Notice how it says “dead in your trespasses and sins”. Not only do these sins kill us, but they bind us. We continue to exist in them and do them. On our own, we are incapable of breaking away from these chains; for that is what they are. They take our freedom and make us slaves. Look at anyone who is outside of Christ and they are in bondage to sin. Perhaps it is constant anger or complaining; maybe always after enjoyment or wanting to experience all that the world has to offer; it can even be something good like charity work when the driving reason is pride or wanting recognition. This is the state of fallen man.

No wonder Paul spends so much time praising God. No wonder He blesses God and speaks of His glory. No wonder that Paul is so amazed at God’s grace and all the blessings He has given His people. The wonder is that we Christians don’t do the same. How negligent we are when it comes to recognizing what God has done for us and giving Him proper thanks. How is it, that we are not on our knees every day, grateful and adoring Him for His mercy? We are without excuse.

This is part of the reason that Paul prayed as He did in the previous chapter. He asked God that the eyes of the Christian’s hearts, or understanding, would be opened. He asked for us to have a better understanding of the hope of our calling, of His inheritance, and of His power. Along with these things would come a better understanding of what God has overcome on our behalf, what we would have faced without Him, and how repulsive sin truly is. All these things will lead to a greater worshiping of God which He deserves.

We know from Paul using the past tense in verse 1 that we Christians are no longer dead. Our spirits have been reborn. This should bring about a dramatic change in our lives. Now we can see how glorious Jesus Christ is, we have some comprehension of what He has done for us. We can read God’s word and know that it is true, even if we can’t understand how God does the things He does. We see the sin in the world and the depravity of man and come to realize that man can’t fix this. We see that everybody needs a Saviour.

We see that we are changed because even though the world still has a draw for us, it is not as strong and our desire is to look beyond this life to the next. This is how you know that your spirit has been reborn, this is how you know that you are alive in Christ.

Prayer

Thank You LORD, that You have mercifully determined a way for us to avoid eternal destruction. You have devised and prepared that way in spite of our rebellion and failure. You even provide the faith we need to accept the way You have prepared: Jesus Christ.

In Your sovereign will, You have determined to accomplish everything Yourself and to accomplish it through Jesus. In this way, You show Yourself to be all powerful and You set Your Son above all else so that He may reign. By His blood we are cleansed so that we may be ruled by Him forever.

Open our eyes, LORD, that we may see Your glory and understand what You have done for us. That way we will be more eager to worship You as You deserve. Give us a better understanding of sin and how You abhor it, that we may be more open to the leading of the Holy Spirit to avoid sin.

We pray these things in Jesus’ name

Amen