7-22-18

Ephesians 2:3

In the first three verses of chapter 2, Paul is painfully describing human life apart from Jesus Christ. Paul is writing to Christians and there are a couple reasons he is reminding us of these things. First off, to remind us of where we come from. We must remember this so that we will be continually grateful to God for delivering us from slavery to satan and death; to be grateful to God for resurrecting our spirits which were dead in separation from God.

Secondly, in the earlier part of this letter, Paul prayed that the eyes of our hearts would be opened. He wants us to have an understanding of the hope of God’s calling, of the riches of God’s inheritance, and of the surpassing greatness of God’s power in us who believe. Part of the opening of our eyes would include a better understanding of where we come from. Few of us have any idea of our terribly poor condition when we accept Christ. Again, the more we realize this, the more we give glory to God for saving us and for having the tremendous love required to make a way for us in spite of our iniquity.

Thirdly, this is a description of the rest of the world who are not in Christ. This is the kind of people we are dealing with, whether they are good to get along with or not; all these things apply to them.

As an aside: Keep in mind that all the epistles in the New Testament are written to believers. They are instruction to those who have already believed on Jesus Christ. We must be very careful in using information in the epistles when talking with a non-Christian, because these words are foolishness to the natural man, to those who are perishing. When talking to a non-Christian, stick with the Gospel. Talk about what we read in the four Gospels of the Bible. This is what will get people thirsting for the rest of Scripture.

So far in chapter two, we find that outside of Christ, we are spiritually dead because we live our lives contrary to God. We are controlled by the world, which follows satan and is in rebellion against God, its creator. We are controlled by satan, who works to corrupt every good thing God has made. He has many who follow him and do his bidding.

Now in verse three, Paul brings up the third source of temptation: the flesh. The flesh here is not simply the stuff that covers our bones. It is our lives, it is every part of our minds and emotions that drive us and make us who we are.

*Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind.*

Paul starts off by letting the gentiles he is writing to know that he and all the rest of the Jews were in the same shape as they were. Even though they were God’s chosen people, and even though they had been blessed by receiving the law, they still messed up. The Jewish nation was proof that no one could come to God by obeying the law. No one was good enough. The only access to God was by grace, through a Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Notice how Paul uses the word “indulging” or “following” the desires of the flesh. Our bodies have certain desires such as eating and sleeping. These desires are not wrong, God gave them to us and they are good. The problem comes in when we allow these desires to take over. This is part of the effect of the fall; these desires reach an unhealthy level.

When eating becomes gluttony, we are indulging our body’s craving for food. When sleeping becomes sloth, we are indulging our body’s desire to be inactive. By indulging these types of things, we are following them; at this point, they have become idols. Not only are they unhealthy physically, but they are unhealthy spiritually; they are sin.

Lusts of the flesh includes the mind. Sometimes thoughts come in that we don’t want; we have to make sure that they pass on out. It’s when we hold evil thoughts and dwell on them in our minds that they become sin. If we don’t dig them out, they will take root and grow. The longer they grow, the harder they are to get rid of. These sins of the mind include anger, lust, pride, greed, feelings of superiority. If we allow these thoughts, we will begin to think of them more and more. If we are thinking of these things, we can’t be thinking of the good things that God wants us to think on. Worse, these thoughts are actually sin, because when we dwell on them, we commit the acts in our hearts.

In Christ, we have the desire and the power, to fight these sins of the flesh and mind. This is what we are called to do. It is easy to see people who helplessly follow these desires of the flesh. Just as with the world and satan, they are enslaved. The only chance for freedom from slavery to any of these evil forces is Jesus. He leads captives free. Again, Paul is writing to Christians, and he is able to tell them that they *formerly* walked according to the lusts of the flesh.

The next section of verse 3 has a lot in it. *And were by nature children of wrath.* There are three things to look at more closely here. The first is *wrath*. This is specifically the wrath of God. We need to understand that the wrath of God is different from the wrath of human beings. People are overcome by wrath; we fly off the handle, it is an emotional response. Often, we don’t know when it’s coming and it’s unpredictable. Sometimes, it just doesn’t make any sense.

The wrath of God is His holy and just action in response to sin. It is part of His being to be opposed to evil and because of His nature of justice, sin must be punished. God’s wrath is never vindictive and it is never a spontaneous reaction to something. God is always fully in control and not overcome by emotion when expressing His wrath. We know what causes it; God’s wrath is a result of sin and there is no case in which sin will not bring about His wrath. The Christian is safe because Jesus took the wrath of God on our behalf.

God’s wrath is not opposed to His love or His mercy. These are also an intimate part of His nature. It is because of His love and mercy that He made a way for us to escape His wrath. It is the grace, that is also part of His nature, that allowed Him to apply His love and mercy to us; on we who clearly deserve His wrath.

Secondly, we need to clarify the word “*children*”. This is not little kids. It is a way of saying “those who belong to”. We belonged to wrath; we were subject to it; we were going to experience it, before we came to Christ. All human beings are children of wrath, unless they are children of God through Jesus Christ.

Thirdly is the phrase “*by nature*”. This is referring to the way we are, even before any outside influence from living in the world. “By nature,” means how we tend to do things and look at things simply because we are human beings. And Paul tells us that our nature is not good; he tells us that by our nature we are subject to wrath.

Let me clarify that this does not mean that simply by being born we bring on ourselves God’s wrath. Although that is sometimes taught, it is no where supported in the Bible. What it does mean is that we are born with a tendency to sin; a strong tendency. Eventually we do sin and at that point we come under God’s judgement.

To see this, just consider a young child. He is sitting on the floor and his mother reaches out to him and calls him to her. He looks at her, grins a big toothless grin, then turns and crawls away as fast as he can. We all laugh when we see this because it’s cute and mom can still easily catch him. The child did not sin; he’s too young to know better. But it demonstrates the natural inclination to rebel; to go against authority and pursue selfish interests.

This nature come from a long time ago in the garden of Eden. We are affected by the sin that Adam committed when he disobeyed God. This is often referred to as “original sin”. That term can be a little misleading but “original” means the first and it is the sin Adam committed. How does it affect us? We have inherited the guilt of this sin and we have inherited a sinful nature because of this sin. We are born sinners: Remember, we are not sinners because we sin, we sin because we are sinners.

Paul talks about this in Romans 5:12-14.

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

Paul is showing that from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, the law had not been given. Because there was no law, nothing during that time that people did could be counted as an infraction of the law. However, it is obvious that people still died during that time. God held them guilty because of Adam’s sin.

Also, in Romans 5:18-19.

So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

So, through one transgression, all people are condemned. Through Adam’s disobedience, all of us became sinners. It is a biblical way, and therefore God’s way, of looking at human beings as always existing in their forebear’s loins.

Hebrews 7:9-10

And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him.

What this is saying is that the priestly tribe of Levi, who received tithes from all the other tribes, had actually paid tithes to Melchizedek even though they weren’t born. They were considered to be in Abraham’s loins.

In the same way, we all are considered to have been in the loins of Adam when he sinned, and so, we have inherited the effects of that sin. Adam’s guilt has been imputed to us. Our first natural response to this is to say it’s not fair. Actually, after the fall, nothing was fair.

But more importantly, keep in mind all that Paul said in our verses from Romans. Each mention of Adam was counter-balanced by Christ. Jesus came to undo what Adam did. When we accept Christ, His righteousness is imputed to us. Really, that’s not fair either, but we’ll take it. Guilt was imputed to us by Adam, righteousness was imputed to us by Jesus.

Look at the difference in the good nature with which God made us and the nature we are now born with. We don’t know how long Adam and Eve lived in the garden before the fall. Regardless of how long it was, there was never any problem; they didn’t bother the fruit of the tree. It took temptation. It took the lies and deceit of satan to get Eve to consider eating the fruit. Now, although we do face temptation, we will sin without it.

Let’s look at children again. Nobody has to teach them to lie. Not long after they learn to talk they will begin to lie naturally. We have to teach our children not to do that. Gratitude is not inherent; we must teach our children to say “please” and “thank you”. Even then, it will not be long before they use those words to try to manipulate people to get their own way. We are born sinners and we are trapped there, unless we are freed by Christ.

The very last part of verse 3 says “*even as the rest*”. This is referring to the rest of mankind. Paul lets us know that we were under God’s wrath, just like everybody else. This is comforting to us. We are saved. We don’t have to face God’s wrath.

But this is also a terrible reminder to us that everybody else does. Any who have not truly believed on Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour will have to face God’s wrath and they will face it for eternity because they have sinned against an infinite God.

This should move us. By the Holy Spirit, our hearts should be moved to pity and compassion for those who are lost. This knowledge should help us deal with other people; we know that they are slaves to unmerciful tyrants and we know that they can’t see it. Prayer is our strongest weapon against the enemy and to bring these people out of slavery and into Christ. Pray for people; intercede for them; they desperately need your prayers. Tell people the Gospel. The very words of the Gospel have the power of the Holy Spirit to bring people to Christ. God has had mercy on us; don’t keep it to yourself, give it away, there is plenty for everybody.

Prayer

What can we do LORD but praise You and worship You and thank You? There was no part of us unstained by sin; our thoughts, our words, our actions. By our disposition to evil, we were at enmity with You; we were Your enemy. But even in this condition, You had mercy on us and called us back to You.

By the power of Christ, we have the desire now to please You and resist sin. Help us in that desire and increase it; You know that we are still weak. Sanctify us that we resist the world, the devil, and the flesh. Protect us from temptation, protect us from ourselves.

Also, LORD, remind us to pray for the salvation of others. We know that You desire that none should perish; give us that same desire. Give us boldness in proclaiming Your Gospel. Build in us a spirit of intersession. Let us see others through Your eyes.

In Jesus’ name we pray

Amen