

The New Humanity in Christ

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Date: 19 October 2014

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[0 : 0 0] We are now going to turn to the Bibles, and as we were this morning in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, we are also this evening. Paul was preaching to us in Ephesians chapter 1, and Terry is taking that up now in Ephesians chapter 2, the first half of it this evening.

It's page 976 if you have one of our large church visitors' Bibles. And we're focusing on the first half of the chapter, but I'll read the whole of Ephesians chapter 2.

In fact, I'll read the last two verses of chapter 1, where Paul says, He put all things under his feet, that is Christ's feet, and gave him as head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world. Following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he has loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.

[1 : 3 3] By grace you have been saved. For we are his workmanship. Created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that he has loved us in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. This is not your own doing. It is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

For we are his workmanship. Created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision, by what is called the circumcision which is made in the flesh by hands, remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

But now in Christ Jesus, you who were once far off, have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both, that is Jews and Gentiles he's talking about here, reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

And he came and preached peace to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father.

[3 : 3 1] So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundations of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure being joined together grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. Amen.

May God bless to us this, his marvelous word about the glory of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. I invite you to take your Bibles and to turn with me again to Ephesians chapter 2, which you will find in page 976 of the Pew Bible.

Ephesians chapter 2. And as you do so, let me say a word of prayer. Make the book live to us, O Lord.

Show us thyself within thy word. Show us ourselves, and show us our Savior. And make the book live to us. We ask this in Jesus' name.

[4 : 57] Amen. Amen. C.S. Lewis once said, The church is a building site. It is not a show home.

It's a building site. It is not a show home. Now, I don't want to risk falling out with my good friend Bob Foyle, but I'm going to disagree with C.S. Lewis. Though, Bob, not entirely.

The church is a building site. Just look around the room tonight. We are not yet all that we are going to be. But although we are not yet all we are going to be, although we are a building site, we are yet at the same time a show home.

Remember, the church is not the building, nor is it the denomination. No. No. The church is the people. The people. The assembly who God has called out of darkness and to His wonderful light.

And the church is a show home. For it is through the church that the unfolding plan and purposes of God are displayed. The plan to unite all things in heaven and in earth and Christ.

[6 : 11] This plan is displayed to ourselves, the church. It is displayed to a watching world. It is also displayed to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Chapter 3, verse 10. Showing these rulers and authorities that the time for their destruction draws ever near. Chapter 2 of Ephesians, which Willie read to us, is all about the church, God's new humanity in Christ.

In chapter 1, the apostle Paul has outlined our spiritual possessions in Christ. And now in chapter 2, he outlines our spiritual position in Christ.

Chapter 2 falls into two halves. Two halves that outline two great realities that God has accomplished for His people, the church, His new humanity in Christ.

In verses 1 to 10, God has made alive in Christ those who were dead. And in verses 11 to 22, God has made one in Christ those who were divided.

[7 : 24] Jew and Gentile together, making one new people of God. Our focus this evening will be on the first half of chapter 2. So under our consideration this evening are verses 1 to 10.

God making alive in Christ those who were dead. Most of you know that I lead our ministry here in the church to those who struggle with addictions. And that has brought me into contact with all sorts of agencies and organizations doing similar work.

Alcoholics Anonymous is one of the organizations I have been involved with. And they do a tremendous work in this area. At every AA meeting they have some readings that tell you what the meeting is and isn't about.

And one of the sentences from the reading that gets read out at every Alcoholics Anonymous meeting all across the world goes like this. Our stories disclose in a general way what life was like, what happened, and what life is like now.

What life was like, what happened, and what life is like now. And in much the same way the Apostle Paul in these first ten verses of chapter 2 outlines to the Ephesians what life was like, what happened, and what life is like now.

[8 : 49] So firstly we have in verses 1 to 3 what life was like. Sins work against us. Secondly we have in verses 4 to 9 what happened, God's work for us.

And thirdly we have in verse 10 what life is like now, God's work through us. So firstly then verses 1 to 3 what life was like, sins work against us.

It might seem rather odd that after speaking in chapter 1 about all the great things that God has done in Christ and what Christ's death now meant for the Ephesians.

It would seem rather odd that Paul now goes on to speak about how awful our condition is outside of Christ. Well why does he do this? Is it the case he thinks that too many positive things have been said in chapter 1 and now it's time to balance the book with negative reality?

Of course not. We only need to read Paul's letters to see he wasn't the kind of man to say hard things for the sake of it. So why does he write what he writes in verses 1 to 3 about the Ephesians being formerly dead in sin, of them following the ways of this world and the devil, and how they were once by nature children of wrath?

[10:07] The reason Paul goes on to mention the Ephesians former condition is very simple. He knows if they fail to grasp the severity of their sin and the reality of being outside of Christ, they would never grasp the wonder and the power of the gospel.

Paul does in the first three verses of chapter 2 what jewelers do on a daily basis. He takes the sparkling diamond that is the gospel and he puts it against the black backdrop of humanity's condition without Jesus.

Paul knows before the Ephesians could appreciate the blessings they'd been rescued for, they had to see and understand the curse they had been rescued from.

In 1995, Sean Penn starred in a film called Dead Man Walking which was about a man in death row. Although the character of the film was alive, due to having a death sentence hanging over him, he is what is termed a dead man walking.

In the first verse of chapter 2, Paul says, until such time we trust in Jesus to save us from sin, until we embrace the gospel and the power of God, we too are dead people walking.

[11:27] Paul writes, and you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked. Paul is saying outside of Christ we are dead, dead spiritually, and the cause of our deathly condition is sin.

That is sin's work against us. Our friend and former Archbishop of Sydney, Peter Jensen, describes sin as the habitual experience of moral failure.

He goes on, sin is not under control as though by an act of the will we can bid it stop troubling us, for it has affected the will too, and it arouses unbidden thoughts and desires which design all against others, against ourselves, and against God.

Sin shames and attracts us at the same time. We love it. We hate ourselves for it. We are gripped by it. We are accountable for it.

The Bible tells us sin causes death because it separates us from the source of all life, from God who is holy. The God who the prophet Habakkuk says has eyes that are too pure to look upon evil.

[12:42] The prophet Isaiah sums it up like this. Your iniquities have separated you from your God. Your sins have hidden his face from you. See, friends, Paul wants the Ephesians to see outside of Jesus Christ that is unless ransomed and rescued through Christ's blood, the human condition is we are spiritually dead.

And this lets us see why many consider the Bible to be such an offensive book and why society does everything it can to silence its message and keep the Bible's pages closed.

People get on with their lives thinking they're doing good, contributing to the lives of others. They're trying their best. And all of this convinces us if there is a God, He must be, He must look down and be pleased with what He sees.

Then the Bible is open and we hear a message like the one we're hearing this evening and the assessment is the total opposite of what we thought. We're told that outside of Christ, God is not pleased.

Neither is He indifferent. Rather, He is angry. He is hostile. He looks upon us and rather than see light and life, all He sees is death and darkness.

[14 : 05] The Bible confronts us with the cold, hard truth of who we are and what we are. And it commands us to repent, to turn away from ourselves and our sin and to run to Jesus for rescue.

Friends, Paul doesn't say on any of this just to make the Ephesians or us feel bad about ourselves. Rather, he writes these words to churches full of Christians because he wants us to be clear about our condition before God and in order that we might see more clearly God's grace, power, and love towards us in Christ.

Well, after telling the Ephesians that outside of Christ, sin's work against them is that they were dead, Paul then tells them some more of the effects of sin's work against him.

They are following the course of this world. You might ask yourself, what are the ways of the world? What does this look like? Well, I think the best description is found in 1 John 2, verse 15 and 16.

John writes, Do not love the world or anything in the world. For everything in the world, the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does comes not from the Father, but from the world.

[15 : 27] Here is the course of this world. Cravings, wanting our own way, lusting, wanting more things for ourselves, boasting, wanting to show off to others what we have and who we are so that we appear more important both to them and to ourselves.

If you read the papers, watch the news, or look around and listen to everyday conversations, you'll see that this is our world. And the most disturbing truth about all this, we recognize this in ourselves.

Although Paul primarily addresses the church at Ephesus, everything he says here is also true about us. And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world.

In verse 2, Paul gives another effect. Sins work against us. He's just spoke about following the ways of the world. But now he goes on to say that outside of Christ, we follow one who is mastermind behind the ways of this world.

He's described here as the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. But you and I might know him better as the devil or Satan.

[16 : 43] Alarming, Paul says, until such time we come to Jesus, this is who we're following. Does that shock you? Does that surprise you? Well, that's what the apostle Paul writes.

That outside of Christ we are following Satan. And friends, the devil wants us to follow him all the way to hell. Perhaps someone's sitting here just now and telling themselves that no such being exists.

Isn't it interesting that those who in one breath say, I don't believe in the devil, in the next breath say, I don't know why I did such and such a thing or I don't know who or what came over me.

Polite man though he is, Paul gives the answer. Outside of Christ we were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked. Following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.

We might at this point think Paul has said enough and that this indictment on humanity can't get worse. Well friends, Paul's not finished. His diagnosis continues.

[17 : 54] Why? Well because as we've already mentioned, unless we acknowledge who we are, we will never appreciate who Christ is and what it is he has done for us through the cross.

Paul continues in verse 3, Among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

It's not pleasant reading, but to our shame we identify with Paul's words. Before coming to Jesus, we lived only to gratify the cravings of our sinful nature, following its desires and thoughts.

Even though we knew something was morally wrong, we ran with it anyway, for it was what we wanted. Nothing else mattered. And the terrifying consequences of everything Paul's been saying is what it makes us, verse 3, by nature, our children of wrath.

Under God's judgment and facing the just consequences and penalty for our sin. And Paul says this is the case for everyone, for every man, woman and child, including himself, by nature, children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

[19 : 17] Outside of Christ, this is what all our lives are like. This is sin's work against us. Simply put, we are dead, disobedient and doomed.

If we left it here and went home at verse 3, we'd probably be depressed for the rest of the day. In fact, the rest of our lives. But thank God we're not leaving it here.

And thank God that he doesn't leave it here either. In verse 4, we have the word but, which is like sunshine bursting through on a cloudy day. It's at this point, after outlining what life was like, sin's work against us.

Paul goes on to tell us what happened. God's work for us. Verses 4 to 9. Verse 4 to 9 are really the heart of the passage we're looking at.

And if you scan over it, you'll see the main subject is no longer us and our condition, but God and his amazing grace. In these verses, Paul wants the Ephesians to see they've only escaped their awful condition only through what God has done for them.

[20 : 27] And look what it is God has done. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ, by grace you have been saved.

In these verses, the grave clothes of sin, verse 1 and 3, are replaced with the grace clothes of Christ. Christ. And look what we're being told here.

God's motivation for saving us lies in nothing to do with us, but in his character alone, because of his great love for us, because he is rich in mercy.

These are astonishing words which tell us that the God, the God who has no need of anyone or anything, shivered those deserving of his judgment and wrath with love and mercy instead.

Note, he made us, he made those who were dead in sin alive with Christ. Not when we were trying to sort ourselves out or trying to turn over a new leaf or to get religion.

[21 : 38] No, he, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. Romans chapter 5 puts it like this, God demonstrates his love towards us in this, while we were still sinners or while we were still powerless, Christ died for us.

Friends, the God we are dealing with this evening is a good, loving, merciful and compassionate God, which begs the question, why don't we come closer to him?

Why do we doubt him? Why won't we commit to him more? To emphasize the point just made about God making us alive while we're dead in transgressions, Paul adds in verse 5, by grace you have been saved.

And in case we don't get it the first time, he says it again in verse 8, by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

What a relief that salvation is all of God through grace. And that we've not been left trying to save ourselves through good works.

[23 : 00] If God had made it this way, then no one would be saved. Focus on those words in verse 5 and verse 8. You have been saved.

Christian, you have been saved. There is no condemnation for you. Nothing shall separate you from the love of God that is yours in Christ Jesus. All this is ours, not by working hard or by trying to be good or moral.

By grace you have been saved, through faith. And this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God. Doesn't this speak about how kind God is?

He gave us what we don't deserve. and kept from us what we do deserve. Verse 3 says, we deserve wrath. That's the rightful punishment, the rightful penalty for our sin.

But verse 4 says, because of God's great love and mercy in Christ, we get grace and are made alive. on no other basis will we stand before God with confidence other than what He has done for us in Christ and the grace that comes through Christ.

[24 : 15] We must be in Christ. And friends, being in Christ, it mustn't be confused with having a belief or an opinion about Jesus.

Being in Christ means being connected to Him, united with Him, in His death, His burial, and His resurrection. All that Christ is, all that Christ has, all that Christ has done and accomplished is of absolutely no use to us as long as we remain outside of Christ.

Paul is saying what we need in relation to Jesus, we need to be in Christ, covered by Him, surrounded by Him, forgiven in Him, raised by Him.

The tragedy is, many churches throughout Scotland today will hear a similar message to this. They'll be told they must be in Christ, yet they'll leave only with admiration or an opinion about Jesus.

Their head is touched, but not their heart. Let's pray that's not the case with us. What life was like, sins work against us. What happened, God's work for us.

[25 : 36] And now, thirdly and finally, what life is like now, God's work through us. Verse 10. Paul says in verse 10 that those trusting in Jesus, those who've received God's mercy and love through the cross of Christ, are God's workmanship.

Note, God's workmanship reflects God Himself, for we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

One of the things Paul wants us to see here is that there will be evidence of salvation in our lives. God didn't save anyone so they could sit about and do nothing.

He didn't save anyone so they could give Him back one day or one hour out of the week to come to church with the rest of the time for themselves. What would that say to a world looking on about how much we value the grace of God?

Evidence of true salvation is we will be working models of God's saving grace and power. No longer walking in sin, verse 1 and 2, but now walking in service, verse 10.

[26 : 49] Paul calls believers God's workmanship who've been created in Christ Jesus to do good works. This doesn't mean being perfect, but it does mean being active.

We've been created in Christ Jesus, not by good works, but for good works. We are saved by faith alone, says John Calvin, but that faith never comes alone.

It is always followed by works. We are not saved by faith plus good works, but by a faith that works. As James writes, faith without works is dead.

Saving faith always results in a changed life. It's not enough to say that we have faith. We must demonstrate this faith by good works. Although our work begins here in the present time, look at verse 6 and 7.

We are told heaven is the showroom where God's workmanship will be displayed in all its glory for all eternity. God raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ so that in the coming ages he might show his immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.

[28 : 07] All heaven is waiting to see God's masterpiece. Well, who or what is this masterpiece? Well, it's God's new humanity. The church. Those who at one time were dead in sin, falling the world and the devil, who lived not for God but for self and had no interest in God except when rebelling against him.

But in an astonishing and incomparable act of love, mercy and grace and eternity past before the world was created, God the Father set us aside for himself and planned to win us for himself by sending his own eternal and beloved son into the world on our behalf to be a sacrificial offering for sin.

God's new humanity, friends, the church, the show home of his immeasurable grace in Christ, those that were dead in sin now made alive in Christ.

Solid joys and lasting treasures none but Zion's children know. Are you part of this new humanity? Are you part of the church?

Are you wearing the grave clothes of sin? Or are you wearing the grace clothes of Christ? Christ, let us pray.

[29 : 41] We stand amazed in your presence, Father, as those who were once dead, disobedient and doomed, now made alive by your wonderful grace and kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

How marvelous and how wonderful is your love towards us in Christ. Help us to walk in a manner worthy of our calling so that our light may shine before others and in seeing our good works they may give glory to you, our Father in heaven.

We ask this in Jesus' name and for his glory alone. Amen. Amen.