7-15-18

Ephesians 2:1-2

Paul is speaking to Christians and he wants them to have a better understanding of the power of God. He reminds us that God’s power was able to raise Jesus from the dead; He stopped the process of decomposition in the grave, created for Him a glorified body, and gave Jesus life that would last forever. Through Jesus Christ, God showed He is stronger than death and even defeated death; death was no longer permanent.

That same power of God’s brings about spiritual resurrection in those who have turned to Christ. As Paul starts off in chapter 2, “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins”. We are sinners; and when we sin, we are separated from God; fellowship with our Creator and Sustainer is broken. Separation from the One who sustains us means death; immediate spiritual death followed by physical death. When we believe on Jesus Christ as Saviour, our spirits are resurrected, made alive again; fellowship with God is restored. We are also promised a physical resurrection when the time comes for us to be called from the grave by our King.

In these two verses, Paul is drawing a picture of humanity outside of Jesus Christ. This is to continue to demonstrate the power and glory of God. The picture is not good, but it is one we must face in order to have some grasp of what God has done for us. These verses describe all of us when we are separate from Christ; not just some particularly bad individuals. When we look in the mirror, this is what we see looking back. Fortunately for Christians, God looks at us through Jesus.

Last week, we discussed this first verse in detail. We sin, physically and mentally. There are sins of commission and sins of omission. Things we do that are opposed to God’s sovereign rule, and things we fail to do that God commands. Even by entertaining evil thoughts, we violate God’s moral principles and incur the same guilt as had we physically done what we were thinking.

In verse 2, Paul says that in these sins and trespasses is how we “formerly walked”. This does not mean a leisurely stroll through a few mistakes here and there. This is a term for the very fabric of the way we lived our lives. We not only committed sin, but continually leaned in that direction. What keeps most of us from becoming horrible sinners is the expectation of society and the enforcement of laws in civilization. This is why both Peter and Paul remind us to be subject to the civil authorities: These are institutions that God has ordained to provide order. Without them, there would be complete disorder and chaos. This is an example of the common grace that God has for all people.

Remember that common grace is the unmerited favor that God shows toward all people. In spite of our rebellion, God provides the things needed for life and more. This is different from saving grace, which is the unmerited favor offered through Jesus. By accepting Jesus, we obtain salvation, which we don’t deserve either.

Paul next mentions two of the sources of sin: the world and satan. The original source was satan, but the world has followed after him and follows his rebellion. The effect of Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden is that we ourselves also tend toward rebellion against God. Our life as a Christian is a constant battle against all sources of temptation. We, as people, don’t stand a chance against these forces outside of the power of the Holy Spirit. Non-Christians can resist some temptation but that is because of the natural conscience that God has instilled in each of us and due to fear of consequences. The Christian’s desire is to please God.

The idea of walking in sin, under the influence of these evil factors, brings us to another point: slavery. Think of slavery in the most vicious, oppressive way you can, and that is the effect of sin. The irony is that it presents itself as freedom. Freedom from rules, freedom to do what one wants, freedom to define one’s own truth. But these things are not freedom and sin leads to bondage.

First, Paul tells us we walk “according to the course of this world”. This is what society says is okay, or perhaps what the loudest voices in society say is okay. The world also has its own definition of success. The problem is when society divorces itself from God and from absolute truth as it is presented in the Bible.

Without the guidance of absolute truth, our opinions are told to us by the television, the internet, and what we read. Laws are made that say killing babies is acceptable, marriage between a man and a woman as ordained by God is no longer true, and even being man or woman are simply ideas that should be discarded. Success is based on money, possessions, and power; character is not a concern. More and more we are being lead to worship the god of “self”.

This is the world and it opposes God constantly. It does its best to lead us away from Him. This is why we cannot love the world. The world demands to be our master; if you don’t believe this, see what happens when you confront it with absolute truth from the Bible. We cannot serve two masters, if we love this world, we cannot serve Christ; the two are completely opposed to each other. To become a Christian is to completely change our point of view, and our point of view will not align with the world’s.

For instance: The world needs civil government, it is needed to try to maintain order, but civil government will not fix the world’s problems, no matter how good intentioned or how hard it tries. We know that only God can fix this, so, as Christians, we look to God and offer up prayer as His word tells us. The world tells us to look to ourselves; be self-sufficient, take care of number one, help others because it makes you feel good. The Christian point of view is to look to God because we are inadequate. We understand that He provides everything and without Him we would perish. Additionally, God blesses us so that we may bless others. God expects us to be someone He can use to provide what other people might lack.

James 1:27

Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world.

We are called to be holy; set apart from what is considered normal. We are to give up our time and resources with no expectation of reward; at least not in this life. To love this world and only seek what it has to offer is to become stained by it. It will lead us away from God; it will enslave us, ultimately keeping us in the grip of satan.

Secondly, Paul says we formerly walked, “according to the prince of the power of the air”. This is, of course, satan; the devil. Make no mistake, satan is real, he exists. He is an actual spiritual being, not just some general force or an idea we have to name evil. The Bible tells us about him. Isaiah 14 tells us that he was the most beautiful of God’s creation. It tells us that he fell from heaven for rebelling against God. In his pride, he wanted to be like God and so, was cast out. We also know from the Gospels that satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness and Jesus spoke to him directly. Also, in Luke 10:18, Jesus prophetically saw “satan fall like lightning from heaven”.

Demons are also real; they too exist as individual, spiritual beings. We see their actions a lot in the Gospels where Jesus releases those who are afflicted by them. What we call demons used to be angles; they were created by God for good. These followed satan in rebellion and also lost their place in heaven.

Revelation 12:3-4a

Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads *were* seven diadems. And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.

This is a picture of satan, the dragon, seducing a third of the angles to follow him and thereafter they have lost the place God had given them. We don’t know how many demons there are, but there are a lot. A third of the angels followed satan, and later, John still sees myriads of myriads of angels in heaven.

Satan was the first to sin. We read in Genesis 1:31 that God saw all that He had made and it was very good. In Genesis 3:1, we read that satan, through a serpent, temped Eve to disobey God. Sometime during the period between Genesis 1:31 and Genesis 3:1, satan had turned against God and began sin.

Although these fallen angels are far more powerful than we are, they are restricted by God in what they can do. They can do nothing to us without God’s permission. One example of this is in the book of Job. Satan could do nothing to Job until God had given him permission and he had to follow the restrictions that God placed on him. Think also of the last supper: Satan had already entered Judas’ heart to betray Jesus, but he couldn’t actually do it until Jesus told him “What you do, do quickly.”

It is also important to remember that satan is not like God in power. He does not know what we are thinking. He can only be one place at a time. As we have seen, he is not all powerful. In fact, he has already been entirely defeated by Jesus Christ and His work on the cross. Satan and his demons have as their goal to destroy everything that God has created; especially human-beings, who have been created in God’s image. Their objective is to keep people from receiving Jesus Christ as Saviour. For those who are already Christian, their objective is to render us ineffective in doing the work God has for us.

Later in our study of Ephesians, we will go more deeply into spiritual warfare and the tactics used by the fallen angels against us. For now, keep in mind fear: we are afraid to talk to someone because we are afraid of rejection. Also, judgement: we look at someone and decide that they would say no or that they are not worth talking to. Certainly, temptation is a weapon used against us. Pastors, evangelists, and missionaries who succumb to temptation have their ministries ruined and their usefulness to God is severely limited. Prayer is the weapon against all these tactics; for ourselves, for fellow Christians, for those in ministry.

Notice in our verse in Ephesians, that satan is called a prince. This is a way to designate that he has rule. He rules over the demons and he rules over “the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience”. The sons of disobedience are all those who are non-believers. These people are followers of satan, even though they don’t know it. This is why they are enslaved to him: They do his will and aren’t even aware of it. Jesus called out some sons of disobedience who were in religious leadership and it is important for us to realize that they still exist.

John 8:44

You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Considering this description of satan and the number of non-believers in the world who are under his influence, it is no wonder the world is in the sorry shape it’s in. We who are believers have been freed from this slavery, but we must continue to fight his influence. We are still subject to temptation. But as James tells us in James 4:7.

Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

By the strength of the Holy Spirit we can resist satan. As an encouragement, keep in mind that every time we resist temptation we bring glory to God. Because satan has been defeated, we don’t need to fear him. But we must be aware of him because “Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” He is our adversary, he is our enemy; don’t give him any ground or sympathy; he will use it against us.

Prayer

Again, LORD, we pray, open the eyes of our hearts, give us understanding of the terrible power of sin and what evil has caused. Show us how it will enslave us and how much our thinking was influenced by it before Salvation. Give us this knowledge that we may be more grateful for what You have done for us and so praise You.

This world that You created is so damaged by sin. Creation now groans under its weight. The influence of evil seems to have touched everything. But LORD, we know that You still control all things. Nothing happens outside of Your consent and You cause all things to work according to Your plan.

We praise You Lord Jesus, You have defeated evil and You have made a way for us in spite our rebellion. You have given us life, even though we were dead; and restored our fellowship with the Father. Guide us that we may be Your servants, truly children of God.

We pray in the name of our Lord Jesus

Amen