

NEW WORKMANSHIP Ephesians 2:1-10

I was hopping mad when I saw a recent TV programme a few weeks ago, which was about a family in America that all made up one church

This church bases its work around their belief, that every tragedy in the world is linked to homosexuality – specifically society's increasing tolerance and acceptance of gay and bisexual people. It maintains that God hates homosexuals above all other kinds of "sinners" and that homosexuality should be a capital crime.

The family and the father had started this church .The daughter of Pastor seems to be the activist and along with her 11 children they picket in the town and shout aggressively to all who pass preaching against one type of sin above others and what they believe to be, the fast-approaching day of judgement. They take all of their children and most of them, when asked, have no idea of the message which they expressing, but the obvious strong emotions of HATE is very evident.

All of this family had missed the mark on the key issues of the Christian message!

The next day I had calmed down a bit! I went into work, after the first showing of the TV programme, and a colleague was chatting to me and mentioned the programme.

"You go to a Church don't you? Did you see that TV programme last night?' About the family and what they are doing in relation to homosexuality."

Fortunately she said:

"Yes I knew you would – don't worry I hadn't labelled you with the same brush..... we know you much better than that!"

However if was with this background of events that I came into the preparation for this morning's passage – and with the contrast of emotions I read this passage with such passion, seeing it in a new way!

"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath." v1-3

Before we look in detail at this devastating description of the human condition who is apart from God, we need to be clear that this passage is making a description of EVERYONE. In the case of the aforementioned family they were saying that God is against a CERTAIN TYPE OF people in society, and pouring doom and gloom of the judgement of God. It was all about 'OTHERS' –.and not about 'ME' and 'US'. Theirs was a message which was obsessive about "You must' – 'You will', - 'You should' - with controlling language that was dictatorial.

Paul is not giving us a picture of 'OTHERS' and labelling CERTAIN people in society – were some are worse than others.....He saying it's ALL of us and there is not a grading or scale in which one person is worse or better than the other!

Here we have a Biblical diagnosis that says we have ALL fallen short BECAUSE the 'fallen short' refers to being OUTSIDE OF GOD.

It is true that in the first opening words of this passage it says YOU, but he is referring to the Gentile readers in Asia Minor. He quickly goes on to write (verse 3a), that WE all once lived in the same way, as he adds himself and his fellow Jews into the next verses.

Paul singles out truths about OURSELVES:

1 "WE WERE DEAD"

"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live"

Paul isn't referring to being DEAD literally, but rather as a spiritual condition of being outside of Christ. He traces it the symptoms to the cause of their transgressions and sins.

- DEFINITION of 'TRANSGRESSIONS'
 - A 'transgression' is a false step of going over a known boundary
 - or it could mean a deviation from the right path of life
- DEFINITION of a 'SIN'
 - Missing the mark
 - Falling short of a standard

Together the 2 words cover the positive and negatives; the active and passive of human wrong doing. And as a result, we are alienated from the life of God. We are separated from God.

2 WALKING IN FOG

v 2 - *"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient."*

It's strange how we live when we are outside of God's world. It's a kind of foggy existence and it's interesting to see the effect. The same picture and words are on the screen, but when the fog comes – it's marred.

Many years ago our city of London was polluted with a foggy atmosphere to the extent that I recall my Aunt saying that *"You couldn't see the end of your nose!"*

Not sure if this was true, because she always multiplied her thoughts, in order to emphasize HER point! – BUT you've got the picture!

The spiritual air is polluted and this phrase gives us a picture *"of the prince of the power of the air"* or the *"ruler of the kingdom of the air"* who seeks to pollute our view of God and sets out to distort the spiritual picture.

Nowadays it is unfashionable to think about Satan as the enemy of spiritual darkness. Society prefers to create images of darkness in the forms of Dr Who's enemies with weird heads and snakelike skin – or images like the supernatural scene where aliens come to earth and take away choices from humans – throwing their world into complex cascading events that threaten mankind forever!

We smile as we reflect on these TV programmes and for many of us we view them and see JUST as make believe, and images of someone's imaginationand that's all they are!

BUT Paul says that people outside of Christ are also living in images of darkness – not Dr Who's world..... But a world that is full of temptations, which take us away from God. Satan does this subtly as he increases the desire within us to change our moods to think more about our own needs than others or of God. Indeed we do live in a ME, ME, ME culture! When Satan creates his EXTERNAL world he is intrinsically changing our INNER world as our mood is inspired within us, and can pull us to stay in the 'EARTHLY' realm, rather than move into the GODLY world where Christ raises us up and sits us with Him. He does this by us seeking to fulfil the passions of 'SELF' as our materialistic world beckons and the need to full our 'SELF-NEEDS'!

V3 *“All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.”*

Eddie Askew, a previous Director of Leprosy Mission and now a well-known Christian author, tells of a story of a man who kept a big, large guard dog. The man gave the dog a long extended lead, so the animal would not leave the boundaries of his land, or wander away. One day the man's brother came to visit him, they had a lot to discuss and decided to get a bit of peace and quiet and go for a walk. The brother suggested that the dog came with him so the owner unfastened the lead.....but something strange happened! This big, large guard dog became like a scared little puppy and would not take a step over the boundary line. It started to wince and whine and anxiously moved back into the safety of its kennel. The dog's power was secure in its own back yard, but over its boundary line it became the little vulnerable puppy! It found the great 'outside' a scary place.

Sometimes the world which holds people – the 'Non-God world' – is not about the pull of v3 *“gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature”* (as it reads in this passage).....It's about being in the 'Non-God world' for so long that they don't know the opposite*Perhaps they haven't heard about it because no-one has offered to show them the exit sign!*

If this happens, a person can become like the dog in the story. They have been so long in the perimeters that they simple don't know the contrasting Christian world, and see this new world as a threat; a fear of the unknown.

It is this contrasting world which Paul is calling us to understand:

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved.” Paul is showing that through God's love we can move from the confinements of the old world into the new one and start to feel spiritually ENERGISED AGAIN – free from our sins.

My Nana died when she was 98 years of age. She had a PROFOUND effect upon my life. She was just ordinary person who was even shorter than me – but had an inner strength within her that made her 10 foot tall!

When I was a little girl I went to stay with her. She lived in a very old house with a thatched roof, which was situated on the High Street of the village she lived in.

The bedroom, which I had when I visited, had a VERY tall bed in it. I had to have a little stool to get onto it and when my brother gave me a 'leg up' I would sink down into the duck-down mattress, until I rescued myself to sit upright and move the bolster into place. (That a long hard pillow that spread the width of the double bed! If you're under 50 you won't have clue to what I am speaking about!)

In front of the bed was a double fronted wardrobe with a BIG mirror in the middle...and there I would rest my weary head all night long!

In the morning Nana would bring me breakfast in bed! Bacon, a 'Walls' chipolata sausage, tomatoes, mushroom, fried bread in those days! PLUS 2 sunny little bantam eggs, which smiled at me on the plate!

I would move from the confinements of sleep and raise myself up with the pillows, which surrounded me, as I sat myself upright, waiting for this wonderful treatand even to this day I can still hear my Nana saying to me:

'Look in the mirror, Susan! See yourself RAISED HIGH UP – you look just like the Queen of England, RULING HER KINGDOM!'

.....And you know something! That's how I felt!

Coming from the unsafe world, which does not acknowledge God, is vulnerable – it might feel safe on a temporary basis – but it doesn't last...because it only gives temporary pleasure and when the chips are down it doesn't sustain our inner deep needs or our spiritual thirsts!

BEING RAISED UP – comes from God expressing His love and makes us alive in Him as we read the next verse –

v4 – *"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus."*

Within THESE verbs of:

- Made alive
- Raised
- Made to sit

We see that these phrases refer to the 3 historical events of Jesus saving power for each one of us. If we were Anglicans we would weekly reflect these as we recited the creed together:

"On the third day He rose again from the dead, he ascended into heaven and he sits at the right hand of God the Father"

Paul is not writing about Christ in these verses – He is writing about US!. He is affirming WE are raised and seated with Christ. It is by OUR union with Christthe Being in Christ.....that all believers have actually shared in His Resurrection, Ascension and are now seated with Christ, reigning in the heavenly places.

We might have a tendency to think that '*reigning in the heavenlies*' comes when we are dead, but we have the Spiritual Blessing now and can claim our position while we are on earth. No-one or NOTHING can gazump us!

Paul concludes his paragraph by saying that:

v8 - *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no-one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*
(Eph 2:1-10 NIV)

Through these last verses, he gives us the understanding of WHY he has done this, so that we, who are saved, can be His tools and His instruments on earth and enable others to find the love and depth of God's blessing that He wants to give He has created.

So if this is the case – *and this is the truth.....* WHY do we who believe in the spiritual blessings and truths that he gives us – indulge in a game called '*Insects under the stone*'!?

What do 'Insects under the stone do?

If a stone is overturned the insects are exposed, as they run quickly to find another stone – it's returning to the dark place that they want – even if they come out to get food, they will eventually take themselves back into the darkness - they just can't help themselves!

I have friend who is in a terrible situation. She is in a relationship, which is abusive – indeed her partner does not want to leave his lifestyle and 9 times out of 10 tries to stop her from the path she wants to take. They have been in this unhealthy partnership for years now..... and quite frankly the relationship is offensive.

He wants to spend money and work the systems, but she is wanting out and to make more of a commitment to God. But she is impaired. She works and has a stable income, so what stops her?

WHAT AND WHY?

.....Because in spite of the way he treats her and the difference lifestyle he craves for – She still goes back for more!SO WHAT IS drawing her back under the stone in the dark?

- Dependence?
- Power?
- Insecurity?
- I think it's about a deep, deep longing to find love from him – which never comes?

What's it all about?

Does this happen to us?Maybe not being trapped in this type of relationship.....but being 'an insect scampering back under the stone'?

What draws you away from God and takes you into the Non-God world...the one whose subtlety changes your mind and mood as we start to believe in false 'belief tapes' that circulate around in our heads.

.....And then the picture changes! It's a picture that has one foot in the dark place and one in the light...representing a 'half and half' trying to harmonise between the two lifestyles.

To stay in the light means developing a relationship with God and putting ourselves in places which bring us wholesome spiritual food – It is in the light that we find the truth, not scampering between the two lifestyles.

As we look at this image on the screen. (Insects scampering under a stone).

Let's reflect on the spiritual message, which it expresses – the light dawns and starts to level the darkness behind. Let us be people who STAY in the light and put ourselves in the places where we can sustain our Christian walk and relationship.

PRAYER

(See the picture described of an insect scampering back under the stone).

What takes us away?

Where do we go?

Do we come back and forth and feel that we are slowly getting unbalanced?

What happens when we are moths in the light?

What is the pull that draws us?

What's the consequence of this?

Do we want to change?

How can you do this?