

Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. 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. Ephesians 2.3-5.

So, as we begin the 2nd chapter of *Ephesians*, what has God revealed to us so far? He has told us that, despite the awful state of the world, he hasn't finished with us yet. He has a plan, we see at 1.10, 'to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ'. Not only does he have this plan to join all the world's brokenness, but he has the power to carry it out. He has demonstrated his power by raising Jesus from the dead, 1.19b-20... In fact, raising Jesus to new life from the dead at Easter is only the *beginning* of this plan of God. One day we also will be raised with him. Meantime, God has given us the Holy Spirit, (who is none other than God-with-us), as a deposit, a down-payment, 1.13-14...

One very important thing we learnt from *Eph* is that all this is something that *God* will do, not what we will do. *We* are not building the kingdom, or transforming the kingdom; *God* is. Christianity has been well summed up as 'not do, do, do, but done, done, done'. *Eph* 2.8-9 famously says it all:

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.

It's not what we must do. It's what Christ has *done* for us on the Cross and at Easter. We didn't deserve it, but he did it because he loves us. The Bible word for that is *grace*.

So God has a plan to join this broken world back together in Christ. But why is it broken at all? It's because of the devil. *Dia-bolos* means 'one who throws between'. The devil is

the divider. *Satan* means 'opposer'. He opposes God who is love. Jesus spoke of 'the prince of this world', Paul of 'the god of this age' who blinds us. Look now at *Eph2.1-2* on p1174... The Bible speaks plainly of the spiritual reality of evil, working to divide people and to take them away from God. Modern-day preachers sneer at this as mediaeval superstition, but they have must a high opinion of themselves if they think they have better insight than Jesus himself. In fact, the devil laughs loudest when people stop believing in him!

We all like to think that we are basically decent and kindly, but just look under the surface, and it's a different story. Derrick Bird was by all accounts a decent man, well liked in his community. And then he went on his terrible killing spree in Cumbria. What was going on just under the surface of his life? In Bradford with the discovery of the deaths of three prostitutes we have peered into a different world. Here were women so hooked on drugs that they had to sell their bodies and put themselves in harm's way each time. And behind all this is the world of drug-dealers. But behind them are people out in Colombia and Afghanistan living squalid and crime-ridden lives to feed this loathsome habit. And all the time are decent, middle class liberals in our own country who take drugs for recreational purposes who think it has nothing to do with them. Are you really going to tell me that the devil isn't somewhere in all this? We accept the nationwide addiction to drugs as inevitable and growing. There is nothing inevitable about it!

Then we have respectable clergymen who have been leading a secret life of paedophilia. Even the church, the Body of Christ, is corrupted by the devil. He's laughing all right!

Of course, these are all exceptional cases. We're not like that, are we? But would you really like your mothers to see a video of your entire life? Would you like your wives to know everything about you? *Eph 2.3* seems to me be spot-on ... Today's society acknowledges no restraints or taboos. Let it all hang out, Be authentic. Do what makes you feel good. We are obeying the lower nature all the time, 'gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature'. And what a mess we've made of things!

You see, our *natural* state is to look after number one all the time. It is *natural* to be selfish. Human beings are the most violent creatures on the face of the planet. And God doesn't like us this way. He's angry, and that's why we are 'by nature objects of wrath', 2.3b... God is *angry* that women who led that awful twilight life were murdered; *angry* that someone lost it and murdered 12 people; *angry* that lives are being wrecked by drink and drugs and gambling and pornography; *angry* that we have turned our backs on God to lives selfish lives.

God who loves us and cares for us, wants us out of all this. He wants to raise us up to something better, v6... He isn't going to raise up only the deserving people, the ones among us who are 'good enough', but *anyone* who repents and puts his trust in the Lord Jesus. It's all grace. You don't need to be good enough to be loved by God. His love for you is his gift. The fact that he loves you is a reflection on *him*, not on you. All you need to do is to reach out and accept his love.

All the time I come across people who feel terribly inadequate and unworthy. They *aren't* inadequate, but they *feel* it. Perhaps it was how their parents made them feel. Perhaps it's the world which has a very strange value system of who is a success and who is a failure. You're a success if you're beautiful; if you're rich and important; if you've been to Oxbridge and got lots of lovely letters after your name.

Do you know what? God doesn't give a rip about any of that. That's not how *he* judges you. He doesn't think of success/failure, or winner/loser. As the holy God, he thinks only of righteous and sinful, and I'm afraid that by *that* criterion we're *all* failures. It doesn't matter how high up you are, how rich and educated and beautiful, we're all sinners.

But God doesn't want to leave it that. He doesn't want to leave us in the gutter. He wants to raise us up. Can you lift yourself up by your bootlaces? I can't. But *God* can do it for you, and *wants* to do it for you, by including you 'in Christ'. God wants to seat you right by his side in glory. I'm not making this up. Just look at *Eph 2.6-7*... Incredible! That's the destiny he has planned for you. The devil might want to pull you down. The world might try to make you feel inadequate. Your parents might have put you down, but God actually wants your company. He wants you right by his side. He likes you!

How can a sinner come so near our holy God? Not by *your* efforts to try harder. Jesus has paid the price at Calvary's Cross. It's done, done, done, not do, do, do! God in Christ has lifted us up from the living death of the world of the devil and sin, to new life in his presence, and it's all grace.