

A Critical Contrast

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 0 0] Now, please turn back with me this morning to Ephesians chapter 2 and verses 1 to 10.

I think it's fair to say that the stuff of life can snuff out spiritual realities for us. If you think back to maybe your own week, this last week that you've lived, and how easy it is for just the ordinary every day, nothing wrong or sinful about these things, but the ordinary everyday things of life just to almost swamp us, to take up so much time and energy that there's nothing left in us to think about spiritual realities so that we're living for the moment.

We're simply living for the day, to survive the day maybe, to survive till the end of the week or whatever it might be. Just the stuff of life can snuff out spiritual realities.

And my job as an undercheppard and as a teacher of God's word to the congregation, part of my job with the help and the aid and the empowering of the Holy Spirit has to be to be for you and to be for me a kind of spiritual defibrillator.

I've got to be someone that goes, boom, that we come not just here obviously, but in our lives that we are given this spiritual defibulation.

[1 : 3 8] Not sure what the word is. Excellent. You got a spiritual cardio synchronization which enables you to know and understand and remind yourself, and I remind myself of spiritual realities.

And that's very much what Paul's doing here. He is restating and reminding the people and reminding himself of basic, important spiritual truths that need to be constantly brought before our minds.

And what is said here is the message of the Bible. It's the consistent, clear, ongoing message of the Bible from beginning to end.

And we need to remember that, that the Bible gives that clarity. And it doesn't tell us to major kind of doctrinal pathways to go down.

It doesn't give us different choices of doctrine that we want to take. There is a central core basic message that everything in the Old Testament is looking forward to.

[2 : 5 2] Everything in the New Testament points back to it and it comes around Jesus Christ, the person of Jesus Christ. Trouble with the sun shining is that you can all see me spitting.

Sorry. It will not reach you. That's why the seats are that far back. It's absolutely clear. And this is God's self revelation.

What God reveals about himself and what he reveals about our need and about his solution to that need is what he tells us, what he wants us to know.

And we must be very careful about changing that. I should have never changed that. I don't change God's word and God's vision. But we do it. Maybe not explicitly, but very often implicitly.

We want to change what God says about himself and about us because we find it too offensive and too difficult for us. Be careful about that in our lives and in our understanding.

- [3 : 54] Now, if I overheard a conversation somewhere between two people and someone was saying, yeah, I know Derek really well. I know Derek Lamont, the minister.
- I know him very well. He's a tremendous musician and he is an outstanding academic. He can stand tall with all these PhD students that are in the church and everyone else.
- So he's really clever and he's bright. But when he goes home and he's violent to his wife and he's brutal and even sometimes he'll steal from the collection so that he can spend it on whatever he wants to spend it on.
- Now, if I heard someone saying that, I would say, stop. Hold on a minute. That's not me. That's not what I'm like. I have many faults and failings and I hope the occasional gift.
- But I know that these are not my gifts and these are not my failings. And I say, well, you can't speak about me like that. This person might say, oh yeah, I had gone really fantastically well with Derek.
- [5 : 00] We're great friends. I say, I hardly know this person. Why are they saying that about me? Because you'd be incensed if someone misnamed you or miscalled your character or said things about you that might have been very nice but weren't true.
- And you can imagine God also, can't you? His word, if we believe his word at all, if we understand what his word is, it's his revelation. We simply haven't the freedom to pick and choose what we want from it and to cut out the bits that we find offensive and difficult.
- This is God who reveals himself, not only revealing our himself and our relationship to him or by nature, our lack of relationship with him, but he also reveals his remedy to our situation.
- And we mustn't change who God is. It's the consistent message of who he is throughout the word. And it speaks to us in our personalities, in our characters, in our spiritual realities today, as Corrie mentioned in this prayer.
- So this passage gives us a desperate diagnosis, okay? It's a very unpalatable diagnosis about our spiritual condition before God.
- [6 : 08] Verses 1 to 3, you are dead in the trespasses and sins which used to walk and so on right through to the end of verse 3. This is God speaking, God who is, well, we know him as the expert, don't we?
- On everything. He knows everything about everything. There's not an area of ignorance in God, but if we can talk about God in such terms, he clearly knows spiritual realities.
- He knows what we're like in our hearts because he's all seeing and all knowing. And he makes us diagnosis of our condition before him by nature, naturally.
- In our fundamental relationship with him, he says he gives us a desperate diagnosis. Now to keep the medical illustration just for a moment, we need to be, listen to what the great doctor says to the great spiritual medic.
- If you've got stomach pains and you go to a world-renowned cancer specialist consultant and he knows by the different symptoms that you have and by the x-rays that he takes and all these kind of things, he knows, he diagnoses stomach cancer.
- [7 : 38] You'd be very foolish as I would be to walk away saying, it's just indigestion. That's all it is. I'm not going to listen to that. We wouldn't do that.
- And we don't do that in life, generally speaking. And that's with people who make mistakes, but with God, he gives us this desperate diagnosis about our condition spiritually before him.
- And it's the consistent message of the Bible that I repeat today. And there's a threefold aspect to it in terms of the diagnosis itself.

He says in verse one, we're spiritually dead. You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked. He's speaking here to the believers and looking back to what they were before they were believers.

Okay. And he says you were spiritually dead in transgressions, which just means the meaning of the word is just that they had veered off the path that God wanted them to walk on.

[8 : 33] That's really in word picture. That's what it means. And they were dead in their trespasses and sins and sins just means that you did fall in short of the mark, you know, like an arrow that didn't quite reach the bullseye.

In fact, they didn't even reach the board and they missed the mark before God's standards, fallen short of God's standards, drifted away from God, turned their backs on God.

And naturally that is the condition that we were all born in. And even as Christians that we must remember, we battle against the remaining sin within us that naturally we don't love God.

We're not attracted to God. We don't care for him as we should. We don't listen to his ways as he wants us to. We aren't in relationship with him.

We don't love others as we should. We're at the center, not God. There's an unalignment. Is that a word? No, I made up one. It's a good word though.

[9 : 35] You know what I mean? We've moved away. We're out of alignment with God in our lives spiritually. We're rebels against Him. And it's like He's saying, look, you're dead to me.

It's a hard truth, isn't it? It's a hard truth. We're sitting here, blood pumping through our hearts. We're alive and lots of great things happen. But spiritually, it's like we say to God, you're dead to me, God.

But in reality, it's us that are dead to Him by nature. We're spiritually dead. He then goes on secondly to say that we are enslaved.

And He uses that well-worn classic triumphor's tale of ways in which we're enslaved. He says that following the course of the world, following the Prince of the power of the air among whom we once lived in the passions of our flesh carrying out the desires of our body and mind.

And so He's using what we know as a good description of the enslavement that we have in sin to the world of flesh and the devil.

[10 : 44] He uses these three things here. A description. That is that we are bound by nature to, when He speaks of the world here, the course of the world, He means the world without reference to God.

A kind of secularization of the world, a world that has abandoned God and God's ways, value systems which reject God so that it's a world in which greed and power and injustice and violence and pornography flourish.

And that's the world that we can't escape from. That's the world that we are enslaved to, that we are bound to. We can't release ourselves from it. Have you ever felt hugely paralyzed by the world in which we live?

That's the world in which we live. But also He speaks about being enslaved to the devil. Long words, the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, clearly describing the work of the evil one, the deceptive power under which this world reigns, that personal malevolent source of evil.

We believe in God. We believe in a sovereign, powerful, glorious, eternal, living God. He speaks about angelic rebellion and brokenness and the introduction of evil and the source of evil being through the prince of darkness, this malevolent, personal, lying being.

[12 : 28] And He is the ruler of this broken, rebellious, dark world that lives against God. And we, by nature, humanity, by nature, lie on His side of the divide.

That's where we are. And the third emphasis of the world, the flesh, or the world of devil and the flesh, He speaks about being enslaved also by the passions of our flesh carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.

Self-graphification. It may be old language in some ways or theological language, technical language, but it's expressing by nature, spiritually, the world in which we live, the world that we come from, the world of people that we belong to, where the natural appetite, the good natural appetites God has given us, we take and we abuse them naturally without God.

And we engage in gluttony and in sloth and in lust and in power and in all that goes with it. And these things separate us from God because they are anti-love, they are anti-God and they are anti His Lordship and His glorious sovereign power.

These enslave us. And they're too powerful by nature for us to overcome. And this is the restatement of the consistent message of God's word that we're enslaved by this big world in which we live that is a world that lives without reference to God.

[14 : 12] We're enslaved by our own passions and we're enslaved by the work and the deceptive power of Satan. So that threefold aspect reminds us of our diagnosis that in the first place we are those who have these three things.

But we're also people who are not only spiritually dead, not only enslaved but verse 4 says condemned. So a lot of people today would like to take out verse 6, 7, sorry, verse 3b, the second half of it, they would like to take out that verse about being children of wrath.

It sounds just dreadful, doesn't it, children of wrath. It's horrible. And yet God is describing that we become, we are, humanity is, everyone is born condemned.

Individually by God. Wrath, we don't use that word much now, I don't think really. I certainly don't use it much and that has a lot of bad connotations for people.

And people will take it and abuse the concept, certainly the biblical concept, because God's wrath is not similar to our bad temper.

[15 : 42] It's not like that at all. It's not that in any way God is spiteful or malicious or has animosity or revengefulness within him, when the Bible speaks about God's wrath, it speaks about his settled, absolutely consistent like the message of the Bible, his utterly consistent hostility to evil.

In other words, a good thing, because he hates and he judges and he will expunge ultimately evil because evil is destructive and evil is evil.

It's entirely predictable in God. He will always respond wrathfully against evil because it's anti love and it's anti grace and it's anti life and it's deceptive.

He condemns it and he will condemn it. Just as we, even in our fallen sinful natures, even in our brokenness, when we're faced with repugnant evil in society, we well up with a sense of just anger against it.

And isn't that right? If you just, ah, this mass, okay, no, rape that little girl, that's fine, that's no problem, it's just life, isn't it? Absolutely, we're repugned, repulsed by that kind of evil.

[17 : 13] And sometimes if you're honest, sometimes I've looked into my own heart, I just be repulsed by what's there. Repulsed by the thoughts, by the selfishness and the pride and the ignorance and the lust and the impurity.

And if that's sometimes our response as fallen broken sinful human beings, how much more will the perfect eternal Son of God, God of the universe, also have the settled hostility to all of its evil.

And of course, we need to remember his answer to evil, which is so unbelievable, as you look at it very shortly. So this three nature flesh of the world, especially dead, sorry, enslaved and condemned, is his diagnosis of our condition.

And it's interesting for us, and I think this is also very important, because let's not get self-righteous when we think or talk about or even share this truth with others, which ultimately as we share God's diagnosis, we must do, we must share it with others.

We must remember it's a universal condition that we see. He says, you were dead, that is, if we look at the context, you, this Gentile church were dead in trespasses.

[18 : 36] Then he says, all of us in verse three, that's all of us Jews, if they were you the Gentiles, all of us the Jews, who Paul includes himself in that.

And then he goes on to say that are like the rest of mankind in verse three B. So he's broadening out, focuses on who he's speaking to, and he reminds himself that he was part of that.

And then he says it's a condition that the rest of the world is also diagnosed under. And so it's a universal condition. There's no pride, there's no separatism, there's no say, well, I'm okay, I was born in the church and I was brought up in the church.

I was, I'm not like that by nature. Just like sometimes if we go to that cancer specialist and he tells us that we have got stomach cancer, but maybe we don't even feel any pain, because that could be the case with cancer, can it?

Well, it maybe we don't feel like we're condemned. We don't feel like we're guilty. We don't feel like we're enslaved. But God, the living God of the universe has consistently through his word said, this is your condition by nature.

[19 : 49] This is your heart. This is what I am saying we're like. This in our nature, we were by nature. She'll never, that's what we were born to.

In Adam, our first representative head, it is through him and his rebellion that we share guilt, not in some kind of unjust way that he did all these wrong things.

Why am I guilty because of it? But because as a representative head, we would have done exactly the same. We would have acted and responded and rebelled and gone against God in exactly the same way as Adam did.

We would have done the same thing by nature, but also by choice in our ongoing lives. It's part of our spiritual genetic code. We can't change it.

Naturally we are condemned. Naturally we're separated. Naturally we'd slave. Naturally we are dead. That's the relentlessly clear and consistent message of the Bible.

[20 : 53] Now, very briefly, that's not the whole story of course. It's not, we're not, we believe in total depravity.

That is that we are spiritually dead. We don't believe in absolute depravity. We're not as bad as we can be humanly speaking with one another. There's a lot of God pours out a lot of coming grace.

There's a lot of beautiful things happening in this world. There's a lot of beautiful people as we look at each other and as we see the good things people do. And it's a reflection, even in the brokenness of society, it's still a reflection of God there and it's beautiful and it points us to God.

But before God we are spiritually dead and we need that to understand and accept that diagnosis because I want quickly now to move on to the celebrated cure.

We should never really be talking only about the desperate diagnosis. We should always be moving as believers in testimony and in life and in our understanding of life to the celebrated cure that we have.

[22 : 05] I've entitled this sermon a critical contrast and that's exactly what Paul is doing here. He's highlighting a critical contrast between our desperate diagnosis that God gives us and the celebrated cure that God gives us.

And there's this link phrase but God. And so one of three tells us of our terrible condition and then we've got but God. And then we've got three, four, three, two, ten.

Gives us this amazing contrast and this amazing answer that gives us great confidence and joy and hope.

And even as we battle and as Cori prayed about the struggles and the battles that we face in life which undoubtedly we do, we look at them and we understand our own natures, even our redeemed natures.

We understand them in the light of His cure and it makes a difference. Never leave out the cure when we speak about the diagnosis. This is our reality as God says it.

[23 : 15] You might not feel this today as a Christian. You might not feel the things that God says about you but what we believe in God's living word is this is what is true of you and me as Christians today.

If we are Christians and if you're not a Christian please consider His diagnosis and His cure. Vital contrast.

We are united to Christ. That's what we are. We're united to Christ but God being rich in mercy because of His great love which He loved us even when we're dead in our trespass made us alive together with Christ.

Raised us up with Him, seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Repeated, repeated, repeated. We are united to Christ.

So for these early verses I was saying that we are united by nature. We are in Adam and there's in your questions in the Bible study for Wednesday night you'll have different references in the New Testament to what Paul says about being in Adam.

[24 : 24] But now, he said, now you are in Christ. If you're condemned in Adam, now this is what you are in Christ. If you've taken Christ to be your Lord and your Savior, this is now what you have.

You might not feel it today. I'm not saying that we feel this way all the time but this is God's word for us and the parallels are that we are privileged, all, I hope I'm right in saying this, we're as privileged as Christ is Himself in that we share in His victory and we share in what He has done.

The experience of Christ following death is paralleled in what He has gifted us. So we were dead.

We're made alive. We're raised up and we're seated in the heavenly places. Now that's just paralleling the post crucifixion experience of Jesus.

So on the third day He was made alive. He was raised up. He was ascended to the Father after 40 days and then He is seated, it's called a session.

[25 : 38] He's seated at the right hand of the Father in victory. That means He's victorious over death and over sin and over the grave, all that He came to do.

And that is what Paul says we share in our unity to Christ. So today as a Christian you're alive spiritually, not dead.

You're alive spiritually, which means you can love God. You can put Him first. You can serve Him. You can rejoice in Him.

You're alive because you by faith have accepted what Jesus has done. The death that we are under, the condemnation has been paid for by Jesus on the cross.

He has taken the price. He has had the wrath of the Father poured out on Himself.

[26 : 34] He has taken the cost of evil. You know I spoke earlier about remembering the answer, you know, when the diagnosis is so bad and we're condemned, can we remember that on the cross Christ took our condemnation?

God took it on Himself. That's the answer. That's why today we rejoice. That's why we sing about Jesus Christ. That's why we call ourselves Christians.

We call ourselves Christians because we follow this Christ in whom we are made alive. And we are raised with Christ. That is, we're united with Him. We are in union with this living Christ.

It doesn't matter what will happen to us in our lives, whether we die tomorrow or we die when we're 110 or if we have a great life and a terrible life, we are united to Christ and we are seated.

What does it mean? We are seated with Him in the heavenly realms. I think it's simply, it's not kind of vague mystic truth. I think it's simply illustratively telling us that we are like Christ we share in His victory.

[27 : 40] We can be victorious over sin. We spend a lot of our time saying, ah, gee, I just can't not sin. I can't overcome temptation. That's not true.

What we mean is I don't really want to give up, I don't really want to resist temptation. I actually want to do this because God has given us the victory and we have no right to say that we are enslaved anymore.

We were enslaved, but you can't now say, oh, well, I can't help getting drunk. You know, it's just a weakness that I have because God has broken the chains of enslavement to sin and doing what everyone else might be doing without reference to God.

And we have victory in Him, we're covered in His grace and we have His strength. That's the consistent, ongoing message that God keeps on giving to us that we can love and serve and follow Him and that Jesus Christ, He is our channel.

He's who we come to. He's our Savior. The cross is central to us because there we see where the buttons of enslavement and death were broken for us.

[28 : 51] He did it on our behalf, we're united to Christ and He did that because of His grace. That's why He did it. And this passage is full of being rich in mercy because of His great love with which He loved us, made us like, by grace you have been saved so that in the coming meeting with the insurmountable riches of grace and kindness towards Jesus, for by grace you have been saved.

This is not the case. It's the gift of God. It's just, it's that whole overflowing waterfall effect of language that He's using.

Great love. It's extravagant love. It's a tiny wee bit. Oh, it's okay. I don't mind Him. I'll maybe die for one or two of His sins. It's extravagant full.

He takes the cost because He is hugely in love. You know that that's your response when you love someone, isn't it? They're extravagant towards them. When you love someone, when you can't stand someone, it's really difficult to be extravagantly loving.

Grace can help us to do it, but sometimes it's difficult. But when we love someone, we just, we love giving them things. It's something we pour out. And that's what God is and that's what God has done for us.

[30 : 11] It doesn't seem like that sometimes. That's why we need the defibrillator, the spiritual defibrillator to, to waken us up and remind us, this is what we have. This is what we have in Christ, that He's not an ogre.

He's not looking over us to watch where we fail Him and then He's going to slam us. It's not like that. He's a loving, caring, rich and mercy, glorious kind God.

It's such an attractive characteristic here and it's in such contrast to what we understand by, sometimes by His wrath.

But His wrath is every... It's absolutely the only opposite there can be to perfect love, this perfect wrath. It can't be one without the other.

They're both needed because, you know, if someone punches my child, you know, I'm going to protect my child and I'm going to be angry against the evil that was perpetrated against my child.

[31 : 14] That's good wrath, isn't it? That's right wrath. And that's what God has in perfection by grace, we are saying, we love. This is a God who loves giving presents.

He's giving the greatest gift of all. He's giving us salvation. You haven't earned it? I haven't earned it. It isn't genetic for us. We haven't been born with it. We have accepted His gift.

That's what we have today. Now that is humbling. Someone gives you a Mercedes Benz. That's humbling. Free and cool. They give you that and you don't have deserved it.

They just give, show and great gift. But how much more in Jesus... This is our God. Are you sitting here today and you're not a Christian?

That's great that you're here. It's fantastic that you're under the word. But if you're not a Christian, what can you possibly be doing to save you or to keep you from this gift?

[32 : 17] Are you genuinely going to stand before Him on that day and say, I didn't need it. I think I was okay on my own. I did my best.

We not accept that? And you'll have the image of His Son nailed to a cross. You say, well, your best isn't good enough.

I needed to go as God, the Son, to the cross. And the conclusion is, of course, that we're God's masterpiece, unbelievably.

Verse 10, for we are His workmanship, could be translated masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Salvation therefore is recreation. You're not the same old Joe blogs. You're recreated your new Joe blogs. You're the same individual, but you've been utterly recreated by grace in Christ for good works, for His glory.

[33 : 23] This is a great thing. You know, what's my purpose in life? What am I here to do? Am I here to defend myself? Am I here to justify my own existence? Am I here to be ambitious? Am I here to be successful?

No. We are created to do good works. That is to do things that God wants us to do, to love Him and to love one another. That's the epitome of ambition.

The series is called A New Ambition. That's the epitome. You want to be a rocket scientist? That's great. But there's a higher ambition. That is to do good works that you've been created in Christ Jesus to do, to outwork the fruit of the Spirit.

You've got a new design for your life in whatever field, whatever area of life you are, you have a new design, whether it's in the home or whether it's a career in a different way or studying or sport, whatever it might be, the design is for you to do good works.

That's the height of your calling. That's the evidence of grace. Good works are not to earn your salvation. They are to prove it.

[34 : 31] You're not saved by your good works. You're saved for your good works. See the difference? We are saved to put Christ first, to serve Him and to follow Him.

We are servants. That's our highest calling. We are servants of the living God to do created in Christ Jesus. We created, gloriously created, which God has prepared us to do.

That's His plan. We spend a lot of time saying, well, I wonder what God's plan is for me. I wonder if I take this path. If I take this path, this is His plan. It doesn't matter what path you take.

This is His plan. We can take all kinds of different paths in life that are equally right to take. It's not like you're going to fall out of God's will by taking one path against another, unless it's overtly sinful.

What is plan, whatever path you take in life, is to do good works. That's your plan this week. This week in which you've entered. There's no application today. None.

[35 : 31] Just this. True. Go and live it. Go and live it this week. It's a great reason to be alive. And if you're not a Christian, what's your purpose this week?

What has God prepared you in advance to do? He's prepared you in advance to believe and to accept His gift. Accept His gift and be saved.

Let's pray. Father God, help us we ask and pray. This is great truth. Far too great truth to rush through in half an hour.

May we take time in our lives, our hearts to understand your diagnosis, a desperate diagnosis. We can never understand just how dark our hearts are, but show us our hearts.

Not to lead us to despair, but to lead us to your astounding gift, your cure, your help and your hope and this great future that today, today here in St. Colombe is everyone who is a Christian needn't fear death whatsoever.

[36 : 38] It is yes an enemy, but it's a defeated and crushed enemy and it is for us being clearly deputed by Jesus and we needn't fear life either.

Help us to be strong and courageous and understand what you consistently tell us about yourself and about your gifts to us and about your love.

And may we understand that your wrath is a good thing because it means that evil will not flourish and will not be victorious in this world that we see ultimately in the cross and the cross of Christ and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

When hell and the grave and the wrath of God was all poured out and where Christ and life was victorious on our behalf.

Lord may we rejoice today and give thanks for that. In Jesus' name, Amen.