

The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis

LESSON XIX : EXCURSUS — WHY ARE WE THE WAY WE ARE? – THE ‘R’ WORD (2:1-3)

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. (KJV)

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. (NIV)

Also you — being dead in the trespasses and the sins, in which once ye did walk according to the age of this world, according to the ruler of the authority of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all did walk once in the desires of our flesh, doing the wishes of the flesh and of the thoughts, and were by nature children of wrath — as also the others (Young’s Literal Translation)

WHY ARE WE THE WAY WE ARE? – (THE ‘R’ WORD)

Using Ephesians 2:1-3 as a spring-board, I would like to consider this question: *why are we the way we are?* To do that, let us flush out these verses a little more. *“The readers’ former lifestyle, which characterizes all who are outside of Christ, was not true freedom but evidence of a fearful bondage to forces over which they had no control. Three compelling influences directed their lives: the world (v. 2), the devil (v. 2), and the flesh (v. 3).” [O’Brien, 158]*

THE WORLD (environment)	THE DEVIL (spiritual warfare)	THE FLESH (depravity)
<i>“in accordance with this world-age” – v.2a</i>	<i>“according to the ruler over the realm of the air” – v. 2b</i>	<i>“were by nature children of wrath” – v. 3b</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● parents (or lack of) ● teachers, good and bad ● country / culture ● friends / enemies ● home, food, clothing, ● (genetics) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● angelic influences, good and bad ● (common) grace of God ● spiritual inheritance ● prayer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● our sin nature

ENVIRONMENT — *“in accordance with this world-age”*

- parents or lack of
- teachers, good and bad
- country / culture
- friends / enemies
- home, food, clothing,
- (genetics – possibly under final category but placed here for our discussion purposes)

SPIRITUAL — *“in accordance with the ruler of the realm of the air”*

- angelic influences, both positive (*Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation? – Heb 1:14*) and negative (satanic influences: *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour – 1 Pet 5:8; Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison – Rev 2:10*)
- (common) grace of God — *But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father*

which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matt 5:44,45) Paul does continue to discuss that special grace of God which comes to some but that is not part of what I am trying to illustrate here.

- spiritual inheritance — *You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me* (Ex 20:3-5)

- prayer — *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.* (James 5:16b) I have mentioned several times of the blessings some of you have enjoyed that was denied those of us who were not brought up in a Christian home. As we consider this lesson, let this statement rest on your soul: ***Some of us were brought up in a home where we were never prayed for, not once!*** Imagine being brought up as a child without a single prayer being offered on your behalf. That is an incredible statement.

DEPRAVITY — “were by nature children of wrath”

our sin nature – *Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned* – Rom 5:12; *There is none righteous, no, not one: there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.* – Rom 3:10,11

ONE OF THE MAJOR FACTORS AS TO WHY OUR CULTURE CONTINUES TO DECAY — These three things point out a major problem in our culture today: ***our leaders deny two out of those three things, therefore no solution coming from Washington will be worth the paper it is written upon. Why? – you cannot fix a problem if you do not know what the problem is!*** If our leaders see society’s problems but deny the effect of spiritual influences and believe that man is basically good, then all efforts will be directed towards the only thing left: man’s outward condition or our environment. This is why our culture is pushing outward change and self-esteem (for example: remove all the toy guns; if we would lay down our arms everyone else would do the same; light sentences on criminals since society is to blame for how they act; etc.). It is also the reason why our culture is degrading when it should be improving with all these ‘political cures.’

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HOW DOES THAT EFFECT US AS INDIVIDUALS? — Let us turn now from society as a whole to us as individuals. And this brings us to the title of my message. People are fond of speaking of their rights, their freedoms and what they deserve. But we do not hear this word much anymore: **RESPONSIBILITY.** ***We are living in an age of blaming others, where everyone is a victim, where no one is to blame anymore since “it is our society that is the problem.”***

I want us to look at something in relation to vss 2,3 which in my understanding directly attacks this kind of thinking. But I want to preface this first with a disclaimer: what I am about to say may seem very cold and calloused, and in some ways it is. But allow me first to express what I believe to be a biblical truth and then we can balance that with some compassion.

I need to speak to each of us as individuals. We would all agree that part of who we are finds its roots in our childhood, both positive and negative. Many good things are part of our character by the grace of God working through our parents or other loved ones as we were growing up. But for this example I do not want you to focus on the positive right now, rather I want you to think of some character issue that you have of which you may not be so proud. Something about your character that you see which is something you would like to change by the grace of God, either something you would like to start doing or something you would want to stop. Maybe you can even go back to your childhood and remember where that character trait came from: possibly your parents were like that, or you had siblings or friends back then that influenced you in the wrong manner. Maybe it was the school you attended, a teacher or the neighborhood in which you lived. Can each of us think of something in our lives which fit that description? (if you have problems thinking of something, you may consult your spouse)

That character flaw in some way relates back to some or all of these three areas from Eph 2:2,3. Follow along with me. Suppose

you could change one thing from these three major influences in our lives. Suppose you could keep the environment exactly the same as what you experienced; all the spiritual influences the same, the prayers that were offered or lack of prayers, suppose everything was kept exactly the same as it was in your life. But let us change one thing: suppose it was not you who were born into your family but it was Jesus. How do you think Jesus would be today? Would He have the same problems you are facing? Would He have that same character flaw of which you are thinking? How would have Jesus turned out today if He would have been born into your family instead of you and everything else was kept exactly the same?

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The answer to that question is obvious: Jesus Christ would have come through everything you came through and would come out shining. There would be no character flaw with Jesus. There would be no sin, no regrets, no personal issues with which He would have to struggle. Why? Because He was sinless — **AND THAT IS THE POINT!!!**

Please do not misunderstand what I am trying to say. The environment does effect us and we should strive to provide the best environment possible for our children. And there are spiritual forces at work in each of our lives, unseen but very real. But the point I am making is this: ***the problem is not what is outside of us, the problem is our sin nature! If we were sinless and we were born into the worse of circumstances, we would still come out shining. But since we are sinners, we could have been born in the best of circumstances and we would still turn out wrong. The problem is not outside (environment and spiritual influences), the problem is our sin (depravity). We are responsible! We are accountable!***

BALANCE — I believe the fact of what we just discussed: ***we are accountable for all our actions before God and there will be no blaming others on that day.*** But let us balance that with some compassion.

I knew a man years ago who was an alcoholic. In all the time I knew him, he almost never worked a full week of work. He would habitually take his paycheck, go across the street to a bar to cash his check and ending up drinking most of his money away. It got to the point that his company would mail his check to his family instead of giving him the check. His life was a mess and he never had much in the way of material things. But this man was born into a family of drinkers, and supposedly even as a baby he was given beer in his bottles. *Question: where would you and I be today if our parents had given us beer in our bottles?*

There are babies born today that will be addicted to crack because their mothers used drugs during the pregnancy – the baby never asked to be born like that. There are babies born today who will never know their father – no child would desire that. In the providence of God, we are each born into different circumstances – some more positive than others, some more negative, but none of them perfect.

How do we bring our providential circumstances together with what we have discussed? I think the closest we can come to understanding this is the principle given in Luke: “For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.” (Lk 12:48b,c NKJV) ***We are responsible for what we have been given. Some have not been given the blessings some of us have enjoyed, but we are each responsible for what we have been given.***

All of this is beyond us but we do know these things:

- ***man is accountable to God (we cannot blame our sins on anyone else)***
- ***we are to reach out to the less fortunate and have compassion (we are not their judge, we are here to lend a helping hand)***

RECOGNITION OF THE PROBLEM — I realize this hits us all square in the face. ***I think we are all much happier when we can blame others for our failings.*** I think that is part of our sin nature and we see it even in the garden when Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent. But there is a basic principal that regulates all of life: ***One must first define a problem before one can fix the problem.*** As long as my problem is someone or something else, then I do not have to change. But when we realize the real problem lies within and there is no one else to blame, that goes a long way to correcting our problem. I must change, I

must seek God's help, I must act differently if the situation is going to change. Not someone else, me! When a person comes to that place in their lives, they have taken a huge step towards truly being a different person.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS TRUTH — I am going to make a bold statement in regards to what we are considering: *no one can go to heaven until they come to grips with this truth at least in some degree.* How can I make such a statement? For this reason: *the first step in coming to Christ for salvation (and possibly the hardest step in coming to Christ) is to first admit one's need for Christ.* No one can be saved until they recognize in their hearts that they are a sinner, guilty before God and condemned — and that will never happen as long as someone is always blaming others for their actions!

HOW THIS RELATES TO THE UNSAVED — You need salvation. Without Christ you will one day stand before the holy God of the universe, your Creator, and give an account for every deed, every action, every word and every thought. *On that day you will not be able to blame others for your actions.* It will not hold water on that day, God will hold you accountable for all you have ever done. Take those words seriously. Flee to Christ for salvation. Recognize your guilt before God and plead for mercy. God will forgive you for Christ's sake for your sins if you come to Him accepting your guilt and willing to turn from those sins.

HOW THIS RELATES TO THE BELIEVERS — *How is your spiritual life?* How much do you serve Christ? How much are you in the scriptures? How much do you truly pray and spend time in fellowship with God? If you are not satisfied with your responses to those questions, let me ask you another: *who's fault is it?* Is it the Pastor's fault that we are not as spiritual as we should be? Is it another church member or a church incident that has turned you from Christ? Is it your wife's or husband's fault? Your children's or your parent's fault? If we were honest with ourselves, many of us would admit we are not as close to Christ as we should be but we each would probably be very quick to justify ourselves by giving the reason why we are not walking with the Lord. As with the lost, so with we who believe: those excuses will not hold water. *Each of us are as close to Christ as we chose to be!* If our walk with Christ is not what it should be, let us quit giving excuses, admit our own guilt and work on living in a manner pleasing to our Lord.

Again, to maintain a proper balance: yes, there are things that have undoubtedly happened to each of us which should never have happened. Someone did something that was totally out of character for a believer in Christ. And they are responsible for those actions, even if they never intended for their actions to have a negative influence upon your walk with Christ. Yes, they will stand before the Lord in judgement for those actions, but that still does not relieve us of our own responsibilities! We are still responsible for our reaction to that person (or persons) actions. *Did we use that as a stepping stone to grow in Christ or did we use it as an excuse to turn away from Christ? They are responsible but so are we.*

As with the lost, I believe the first step to correcting any problem is to properly evaluate the problem and then work on the solution. *If my relationship with the Lord needs improving, the first step to correcting that relationship is to quit blaming others for my own lack of spirituality.* Then we can precede on to growing and correcting the deficiencies in our own lives. We are responsible. Our relationship with Christ is exactly what we want it to be. Let us determine to make that relationship better.

YOUNG PEOPLE — I would like to address the youth in a special way. Perhaps you have been brought up in the church and you now are maybe at the age in which you are more free to choose whether you continue in the church or forsake the ways of your parents. Maybe as you were growing up you saw things happen within the church that as a child you did not understand. Maybe you saw adults who talked about the bible and God a lot and then acted in ways in which no Christian should ever act. Maybe you even would see areas in which your parents would act one way at church and then another way in the privacy of the home. As mentioned above, this is not to excuse anything someone may or may not have done as a Christian. Unfortunately we are all sinners and even as adults there are areas which may not be entirely consistent with what we profess to believe. And we will answer to the Lord for all of these things one day as adults and parents. But as we saw, this does not excuse your turning away from the truths you have been taught. So the question becomes this: *now that you are free to choose whether to continue on in the faith or go out in the ways of the world, what will you do? Will you use those things you may have witnessed as a means to grow in Christ, to pray for those people, to use those things as a warning for your own life? Or will you use some failures in other people's lives as an excuse for your own sin?* Do not be mistaken, anything someone else may or may not have done is just that: an excuse for your own sin. An alibi. It does not excuse you before the Lord and He will hold you responsible for your actions.

CONCLUSION — I want to repeat that our environment and the spiritual world around us are important factors on our growth and development. And when we as parents to our children or as church members to one another, do something which might negatively effect someone then it is our responsibility to make that right as much as we are able. But the thrust of this lesson is this: *regardless of our circumstances and regardless of how others have treated us, we are responsible before God to live in obedience to Him. The blaming of others is a result of our sin nature and whether we are saved or unsaved, if we want to truly do business with God, then we must come to Him accepting our responsibility and not making excuses.*