

One New Person

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 14th of January 2001. The preacher is Phil Muleman. His sermon is entitled One New Person and is from Ephesians chapter 2 verses 1 to 10.

Well, keep your Bibles open at that passage which we're going to be looking at tonight. Let me pray. Our Father, we thank you for your word.

We thank you that you are our Lord and God. And Lord, I pray that that would be real in everyone's hearts here tonight. Amen. Don't you love those magazine surveys where you have to rate yourself on a scale?

You know, where you answer a whole lot of questions about yourself and add them all up and then find out on a scale of 1 to 10 that you will make a great friend or a terrible lover or something else.

If you had to rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 tonight according to how good you are, where would you place yourself? Let's say down at the bottom of the scale at this end 1, we have all the perverted, debauched members of humanity down throughout the ages.

[1 : 21] Hitler, Mussolini, Pol Pot, child molesters, those who do all sorts of intrinsic evil, the scum of the earth. And then up here at the other end of the scale, at number 10, we have those who show the best side of human nature, the Mother Teresas of this world, those who are the Nobel Peace Prize winners, the people who quietly, caringly give their lives in service of others.

Where would you rank yourself? Down here? Up here? In the middle? Somewhere else? Now I want you to think about how good you have to be to be acceptable to God.

What number along this scale makes it into God's good books? Was Mother Teresa good enough to win priority seating in heaven?

What about you? Is your rating high enough to make it? Well, tonight we're going to look at Ephesians chapter 2, those verses that Ali read to us, and discover God's radical view of humanity.

We'll find out who makes it and we'll find out who doesn't. And to many people in today's world, God's standards may come as a bit of a shock. So let's have a look at what it says together.

[2 : 40] Now as we look at these verses in Ephesians chapter 2, 1 to 10, I want to make it clear to each one of us here what Paul writes is not just for some small group of people.

True, he begins in verse 1 by saying with a personal pronoun, you, you were dead through the trespasses and sin, as if it was referring to this small group of people in Asia Minor.

But in verse 3, he goes on and he says this, all of us, all of us once lived among them. And he goes on to say, we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.

We were. So what does it say about all of us? We were all dead in sin by nature, and by nature children of wrath. Our rating is not sounding very good here, is it?

We're all dead in sin by nature, children of wrath. Paul is saying that we are all sinful and therefore all subjects of God's wrath.

[3 : 44] None of us make the grade. You see, God's standard is very high here, and we all flunk. Verse 1 says, you were dead through your trespasses and sins.

Now, it's not a physical condition that Paul is talking about here, but a spiritual condition that affects everybody, absolutely everybody, you and me included. Now, a trespass is a false step involving the crossing of a known boundary or a deviation from the right path.

Whereas a sin means missing the mark or falling short of a standard. And both can be active. For example, trespassing on private property when there is a sign that clearly says, no trespassing.

Who's ever done that? I have. Or sinning actively against someone verbally or physically. So that's the active dimension out of it.

But our trespass and sin can also be passive. For example, outwardly obeying what you've been asked to do, but inwardly, inwardly rebelling against what's been asked of you.

[4 : 51] Either way, our trespasses and our sins before God make us all rebels and failures before Him. And friends, we have all trespassed.

We have all sinned against God. As a result, we are spiritually dead. And therefore, we are separated. We are cut off from Him. So this is how God rates humanity.

None of us, not one of us, is truly good. We are all tainted by sin and therefore, separated from God. Now, Paul goes on in this passage to explain this further with three things that humans follow.

The first thing that humans follow is seen in verse 2. And that is, we follow the course of the world. Following the course of the world, it says. That is a world and a society that is organised without God as the centre.

What we might call today as secularism and so on, where institutions become the norm and the presence and so on. The second thing that we see that humans might follow is in the second part of verse 2.

[6 : 01] And that is, it says, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. If we are not following God, then we are following something.

And here, Paul is saying that we are following Satan. Ignoring God's power now, ignoring God's power now means that we are enslaved to the powerful influence of Satan.

Well, Satan's influence is powerful but in the end it is as nothing compared to God's power. So, that's the second thing that we are following.

Now, the third thing that humans follow is the passions of our flesh. Flesh here means our fallen, self-centred human nature.

And its passions are further defined as the desires of flesh and senses. Now, it's not wrong for us to have natural bodily desires whether they be for food, sleep or even sex.

[7 : 07] For God has made the human body that way. It's just a natural bodily function. It's only when the appetite for food becomes gluttony, for sleep, sloth, and for sex, lust, that natural desires have been perverted into sinful desires.

Now, all these things mentioned by Paul makes everybody, not just some people, children of wrath. wrath. It's quite clearly God's wrath that is talked about here in this passage.

And, you know, to talk about God's wrath is not a popular term these days. How can a loving God, God who's supposed to love us, how can he get angry? Well, in some ways, the Bible from the third chapter of Genesis right through to the end of the last book of the Bible, Revelation, is the story of the wrath of God, of God's reaction to disobedience and sin.

So, how can love and wrath then exist together? Many of us have seen these two qualities working together in parenting, for example. There's that famous line that parents utter when disciplining their children.

I'm doing this because I love you. I say it regularly. Because of great, God's great love for us, he cannot ignore our sin.

[8 : 40] Our sin therefore leads to God's wrath. Now, the story of the Bible, as I said a moment ago, is the story, well, it's the story of God himself taking the initiative, taking action to keep his anger from destroying humanity, the feeble humanity that we are.

And, seeing throughout the Bible, we see God look after his people after the fall back in Genesis 3. We see God come in and rescue and provide for Adam and Eve.

In the wilderness, again, when Israel is wandering in the wilderness, we see God come in and provide for his people who are wandering. with the sacrificial system that is set up in the Old Testament where sacrifices are brought before the priest to offer before God, again, we see God taking the initiative to work for his people and so that salvation might come about.

Again, we see God working with the prophets in the Old Testament, warning and speaking through the prophets and warning his people about the wrath and the danger to come if they keep persisting in their sin and their disobedience of God.

Again, in the exile and the return from exile, we see the initiative and action of God at work and supremely in the Bible, we see the initiative and action of God at work most of all at the cross.

[10 : 11] God in all of those areas but is supremely at the cross was at work dealing with his own anger and showing mercy. Yes, God gets angry.

He gets angry because he cares deeply and his anger, God's righteous anger, is both an expression of his love and the context in which his love is demonstrated.

So we are children of wrath because of our sin we are smeared and we are less than perfect before God and we fall short of the bar.

We don't make it over the bar. It's like that ad on TV where they pour a cup of tar over a human lun to demonstrate what smoking does to you. What does it do?

It kills us. Sin is like that. It kills us and it cuts us off from any relationship with God. Well, what's the solution then?

[11 : 10] Fortunately, we are not left on our own to try and redeem ourselves just like a smoker might be that's trying to quit smoking. We have something far greater on our side than Nicorette or Nicobate or whatever those ads tell us about.

Look at verse 4. Verse 4 begins with two words. But God. But God. And with these two words set aside against the desperate condition of fallen humans in verses 1 to 3, it reminds us again of the sovereign initiative and the divine action of God.

We are the objects of his wrath. There's no doubt about that. But God who is rich in mercy out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses made us alive together with Christ.

Well, what's God done? What has God done in a word? He has saved us. At the end of verse 5 and at the beginning of verse 8 Paul writes by grace you have been saved.

Only by grace can we enter as the psalm we sung just before the Bible was read. Now please remember here that Paul is writing to a group of Christians who have experienced God's saving grace.

[12 : 33] God has saved these people that he's writing to and he's reminding them in this passage of their former condition before God and before God and what they have become or what they've now become in Christ.

This isn't a letter that's written just to any person but to people who have received God's generous offer of salvation. Well, God has saved his people from his wrath and what's he brought them into?

Verse 5 at the end of verse 5 he has made us alive together with Christ. The beginning of verse 6 he has raised us up with him. Again in verse 6 he has seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

He's made us alive he has raised us up and he has seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Now here at 7 o'clock we don't say the creed very much in this service and if maybe some of you don't even know what the creed is Stephen and Melissa will probably learn what the creed is a little bit more in the time that they're here but let me remind you of what we say in the creed about Jesus Christ when we say the creed we get to the point where we acknowledge that Jesus died and that he was buried and then it says this on the third day he rose again in accordance with the scriptures he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father now the exciting thing that we read about here in verses five and six is that Paul is not writing about Jesus but he's writing about us he's affirming not that God made alive Jesus or not that God made alive and raised and seated

Christ although that's what God did but here Paul is saying that he made alive raised and seated us with Christ that's really exciting news and these are all things that we enter into now as Christians as well as in the life to come and this is all made possible because of God's initiative because of God's generosity because of his undeserved favour if you like his grace shown to us in Jesus Christ it was made possible back there for these Ephesians and is made possible for us today due only to God's kindness to us and through Jesus death on the cross and it's the only way now I am a recipient of God's grace his undeserved favour but I've got to tell you that it took me a while to understand what God's grace meant I didn't understand a long time ago that it was a free gift at first

[15 : 29] I like many people I meet today thought that I had to earn God's forgiveness thought that it was the good things that I did that earned me salvation if you like and I used to think that if I just make myself a little bit better in this area if I can just tweak this little thing a bit or in another area then I would be acceptable to God but the truth is I was always failing in this area or that area or whatever area you care to think of I was always failing and the more I tried the more unworthy I felt before God then it was explained to me by God's grace that salvation is not brought about by anything I could do but it's a gift freely given to us by God let me try and illustrate it for you suppose your friend came by one day with a special gift just a special gift for you how would you respond with this special gift this person just turns up and he wants to give you a gift or she wants to give you a gift would you immediately want to pull out your wallet and offer to pay for it of course you wouldn't to do so

I think would be a great insult to the person who's wanting to give you the free gift wouldn't it a gift must be accepted for what it is something freely given and unmerited just given to you if you have to pay for a gift or do something to deserve or earn it it's not a gift then is it true gifts are freely given and freely received to attempt to give or receive a gift in any other manner i don't i don't think makes it a gift and so it is with salvation god offers us salvation as a free gift it is there there are no strings attached to it because to do so makes it something other than a gift in addition any attempt on our part no matter how small to pay for our salvation by doing something or giving up something is an insult to god no one no one no one in heaven will ever be able to say look at me i made it with a little help from god no one will ever say that because salvation is all by god not even the smallest part of it is the result of what we do or that we don't do as paul writes in verses 8 and 9 for by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not your own doing it is the gift of god not the result of works so that no one may boast how do we respond to this free gift given to us by god our response to it is in faith a faith that acknowledges our utter dependence on god and taking him at his word and our response in faith to god's free gift of salvation is further seen in verse 10 for we are what he has made us created in christ jesus for good works which god prepared beforehand to be our way of life it's not the other way around our works which brings us salvation we are what god has made us and forgiven given been forgiven and created in christ jesus for good works out of our gratitude for the free gift of salvation that we have in christ we will seek to help and serve others with kindness with love with gentleness and not merely to please ourselves but out of grateful thanks for what god has done for us in christ jesus you see god's intention is that our salvation will result in acts of service not acts of service resulting in our salvation but salvation result resulting in acts of service we are not saved merely for our own benefit but to serve christ and to build up his church as we will see particularly when we get to chapter 4 of this letter so where do you stand tonight are you trying to work your way up that goodness rating so that god will accept you is that what you're trying to do well if so let me leave you with one wonderfully liberating word g-r-a-c-e grace god's undeserved favour to us nothing you can do will earn god's favour so out of his great love for you he offers it to you free it's all been done god's salvation has all been done through jesus work on the cross and it stands there for us you can stand perfectly righteous in god's sight tonight because of jesus dealing with

your sin on the cross and that my friends is grace and that my friends is truly amazing we're going to sing a song which is a great song about god's grace so thanks to you