

## Introduction

Over recent months we've spent time taking a detailed look at what Paul has to say to the believers in the church in Ephesus, and I'm sure Paul's comments, enthusiasm and encouragement apply to us just as much as to the Ephesians. The second half of the first chapter includes a powerful prayer in which Paul prays that the eyes of their hearts may be opened and they may be enlightened as they learn more about Jesus and all He has done for them. That prayer leads to the closing verses of the chapter which tell of the power of God Himself as Paul explains how God used His enormous power to raise His Son from the grave, seat Him at His own right hand and finally appoint Jesus as Head of the Church; a church which Paul reminds us is Christ's "*body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.*" (1:23)

As we move on from **Ephesians 1** to the opening verses of **Ephesians 2** we seem to make quite a jump. In no time at all we move from picturing the glories of the risen Son of God Who was raised, seated and appointed, to the degrading sins of mankind. What Paul is doing in a very stark way is comparing the glories of the risen and living Christ with the sins of a fallen and condemned mankind.

## Overview

We are told on many occasions in Scripture that Christ died to bring us salvation; but salvation from what? The simple answer to that is sin which is why, before expanding on his thoughts on salvation; Paul outlines our sinful state in **2:1-3**. In the closing verses of **Chapter 1** Paul gives us that glorious picture of the risen Lord as we see Jesus sitting at His Father's right hand and being appointed as Head of the Church; we can almost hear the joy in Paul's heart as he writes those words. It truly is a glorious picture and as I think on these things I can hear the opening words of a Stuart Townend song where he writes: "*All heav'n declares the glory of the risen Lord. Who can compare with the beauty of the Lord?*"

Having glimpsed at the glory and beauty of the risen Christ we move on to these opening three verses of **Chapter 2** and soon detect a change of tone from the Apostle as Paul moves from a mood of being in awe of the power and glory of God at work to the utterly dark and sinful state of mankind. These are not an easy few verses in that they are anything but positive and are full of dark thoughts. They paint a very negative picture of life as we knew it before we came to faith in Christ when we didn't have Him in our lives. Paul puts it very simply when he says we are "*dead in our transgressions and sins*" (**2:1**) and I'll expand on that thought shortly.

I mentioned a moment ago that the risen Lord came to bring us salvation from sin. Whether we know it or not or like it or not, we were born sinners; it is in our nature and in that state we are unable to approach God since as sinners we are not worthy to be in His presence. Before moving on to talk in depth about salvation in later verses Paul describes our way of life before we met Christ. He gives us a stark reminder of what being a sinner means when he says of sinners, "*They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every*

## But As For You

*kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.” (Ephesians 4:18-19) As we look at 2:1-3 we are given a view of the sinful lifestyle that we used to follow and it’s true to say that none of the thoughts that Paul talks of are particularly uplifting or inspiring. However, I need to remind you that the Apostle is writing these words to the believers in Ephesus and so we should look upon them as showing us a picture of our lives before we came to faith in Jesus Christ. It isn’t pretty.*

### As For You

As I mentioned earlier, in the verses at the end of Chapter 1 Paul has given us this amazing vision of the risen and glorified Lord, and if you listen carefully to those words at the end of Chapter 1 you may hear Paul’s tone of joy and awe as he contemplates that vision. It is at this point we should remember that Jesus was totally sinless and yet He died on the cross of Calvary bearing our sins on His shoulders so that all those who sought His forgiveness and asked Him into their lives would be forgiven and accepted into His family. Now, as this short passage opens, Paul’s tone changes to one of contempt. You can almost hear his voice change as he utters those opening words, “*As for you ...*” (2:1) as he moves away from talking about the glories of the sinless Lord to talking about sinful man; and in these next three verses Paul expands on those thoughts about the state of sin in which man finds themselves. I’ll remind you again that as we contemplate what he is saying Paul is talking to the believers in Ephesus and painting a picture of what they have left behind by coming to faith in Christ. We should also note that what Paul says is in the past tense; all this is what we used to be like before coming to faith.

### Dead in Sin

First and foremost as sinners we are all spiritually dead. We may be physically alive and functioning as human beings but because of our sins we are cut off from any form of relationship with God; we have no communication with Him. Our sins have rendered us alienated from Him and as a result unresponsive to anything He has to say to us. All of this means that we are unable to live life to the full in the way that God wants us to even though we may think that we have wonderful and fulfilled lives. That is misguided thinking and couldn’t be further from the truth if we tried. To live life to the full and to be alive in the real, spiritual sense means we need to know Christ; we need to have faith in Him as Lord and Saviour.

### Used to Live

What a terribly bleak picture with which to open a passage. If we read these verses without considering the context then it would be all too easy to become very despondent indeed. Thankfully though Paul adds those words at the beginning of 2:2 where he simply says, “*in which you used to live*”. That’s a relief! He has just described how we used to live our lives before we met Christ and so we know that that very dark picture has been replaced by the light of Jesus Christ.

### Followed & Ruled

## But As For You

Although he has just reminded us briefly of the ways in which we used to live Paul now moves on in [2:2](#) to expand on that thought. He makes it very clear that we were guilty of following the wrong things and being ruled by the wrong people.

Firstly, we “*followed the ways of this world*”. It is all too easy to take the soft option and go with the flow; become part of the gang simply because if we don’t then we will be left out and won’t be regarded as cool. In our modern way of life we foolishly follow the wrong things or the wrong people.

On the afternoon of Boxing Day in a night club in central Birmingham a young man was stabbed to death and it goes without saying that his murder was an evil act that needs to be punished. However, when the Police arrived they discovered staff were sweeping the floor of various items of drug paraphernalia. It seems that people were unable to attend this supposedly happy event without the need for so called “*soft*” drugs. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a ready supply of these “*soft*” drugs. For all too many people these “*soft*” drugs soon lead users to graduate to the harder, more addictive drugs. Too many think that using such substances will bring the way of life that they crave although sadly they soon discover the price to be paid for such addictions.

Now I’m definitely not saying that all sinners have become drug addicts but there are too many who have chosen to follow the crowd by indulging in that way of life and Paul is reminding us that we too have followed “*the ways of ways of this world*”. Such a lifestyle is the exact opposite of following the ways of Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately in many parts of the country it seems that people have become so entrenched in a particular lifestyle that they have probably become blinded to the wrong things that they do or follow and such behaviour has become the norm.

I’ve mentioned the use of drugs so let me suggest another idea of how society has gone astray. In the world in which we find ourselves too many people deny the existence of God; they reject His Word, the Bible, in any way shape or form; and in doing that they deny the truth. There was a philosophical movement that began in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, and which I believe continues today, known as post-modernism. This philosophy was mainly characterised by a total scepticism shown towards modern thinking and ideology. The occasionally reliable Wikipedia has this to say on the subject: “*Postmodernists are ‘sceptical of explanations which claim to be valid for all groups, cultures, traditions, or races, and instead focuses on the relative truths of each person.’*”<sup>1</sup> That final clause is the important one since it refers to how people see truth; each person may have their own version of the truth which won’t necessarily agree with anyone else’s. That is what is happening today; people have their own idea of truth and so deny the words of Jesus Who said, “*I am the truth*” ([John 14:6](#)). Writing in his book *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, Graham Johnston says of followers of post-modernism, “*Jesus appears fascinating but not the unique Saviour, the attitude ‘whatever’ rules, and so there’s little belief in an absolute*

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<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia article titled *Postmodernism* on [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmodernism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postmodernism) accessed on 06 Jan 2023

## But As For You

*truth*".<sup>2</sup> Having such an attitude and denying the existence of the Son of God is surely yet another example of the sin that is all too prevalent in today's world.

Alongside the changing view of truth, there are those who no longer believe in sin; it's become an outdated concept and is rarely referred to, even in churches. However, whilst it may no longer be acknowledged or accepted, it certainly does exist. Let me expand on that thought a little. The Amplified Bible version of this phrase in **2:2** tells us that we are "*Following the course and fashion of this world*". What are the fashions of this world? In recent months it seems to me that there has been a growth in interest in transgenderism and I worry that amongst the young in particular, it may have become a fashionable thing to be or to do and so it surely falls into that category of the "*course and fashion of this world*" to follow. That is a worrying development and it goes without saying that it is not what God intended for His creation. My Bible tells me that "...*God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*" (**Genesis 1:27**). There is no mention there of other genders such as non-binary nor is there any mention of changing one's gender to suit the mood of the day. And yet things seem to be changing very fast indeed; for instance, in Scotland it will soon be possible for anyone over the age of 16 to register a change of their gender almost as easily as changing their address. This cannot be right and in my view is not only anathema to God but also contrary to His Word.

Secondly, many also follow "*the ruler of the kingdom of the air*" and we are told that he is now at work among those who are disobedient. This ruler never rests and will continue to work in and amongst those who are weak and open to mischief such as all those who have turned their backs on God.

If you are wondering just who this "*ruler*" is, take a look at **6:11-12** where Paul tells us more about him when he reminds us that we are to "*stand against the devil's schemes*" since "... *our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*" That's who the ruler of the kingdom of the air truly is; Satan; and it is his avowed intent to thwart God's work at every step and if we follow Satan then it is he who controls our whole lives and minds. He will also do all he can to prevent the good news of Jesus being spread round the world. Paul confirmed this when he told the Thessalonians that whilst he wanted to visit "*again and again*", "*Satan stopped us.*" (**1 Thessalonians 2:18**). Paul goes on to tell us in his letter to the Romans that when we are ruled by Satan our "*sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.*" (**Romans 8:7-8**). Lest that worry you I should point out that later in **Romans 8** Paul tells us that Satan will not succeed. He makes it clear in **Romans 8:31** that "*If God is for us, who can be against us?*"

Given all that, my question is: who rules your life? Is it Satan or is it Christ? Are you an unrepentant sinner who follows Satan or a redeemed follower of Christ?

### Paul Too

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<sup>2</sup> Johnston, Graham, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, Inter-Varsity Press: Leicester, 2001, page 87

## But As For You

As we read those words in [2:2](#) and think about them we may come to the realisation that we probably did follow the ways and fashions of the world as well as the ruler of the kingdom of the air. However, this all sounds very accusatory and one sided as if Paul himself is standing in judgement over the rest of us. Nothing could be further from the truth since the Apostle makes it clear in [2:3a](#) that “*All of us also lived among them at one time*”. Quite simply Paul numbers himself as being amongst those who sinned against God and disobeyed Him at every opportunity. We know from his comments in [Philippians 3:4b-6](#) that he was a well educated Jew and a zealous Pharisee. In that role he did all he could to prevent the spread of the good news of Jesus Christ by being the principal persecutor of the followers of Christ. Indeed, at the time of his startling encounter with Christ and subsequent conversion he was on the road to Damascus with letters of authority to seek out and imprison, or possibly even kill, Christians. He later admitted in [Philippians 3:6](#) that as a zealous Pharisee he “*persecuted the church*”.

In saying all this Paul is trying to show that he was no better than them; he too was a sinner who needed Christ in his life.

### Gratified

As we lived our lives following the ruler of the kingdom of the air and the fads and fashions of modern life Paul reminds us that we were only satisfying and “*gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts*” ([2:3](#)). In living in that way we ignored anything that God may have wanted us to do and we did that which brought the instant gratification that can only satisfy in the short term. I believe that modern society as we know it could well be the most self centred and “*me, me, me*” generation of all time. The vast majority of people seem only concerned with their own immediate enjoyment and gratification whilst giving no thought whatsoever to eternity or anyone else. That is what Paul is talking about, that instant buzz that comes from following our own evil desires and thoughts. Of course these cravings don't last long and soon fizzle out leading us to seek more and more sinful ways of satisfying those desires for more and more instant gratification.

### Wrath

Nothing is free and that includes sin which is why Paul makes it very clear in [Romans 6:23a](#) that “... *the wages of sin is death*”. For the sinner pursuing the decadent way of life that Paul has been talking about, everything seems wonderful. People feel that they can do what they like, how they like, when they like with impunity. There will be no repercussions and even when their lives do end they will simply go to heaven and hopefully continue with the same lifestyle. They have a shock coming and will soon discover the truth of that simple statement “*the wages of sin is death*”.

For those living the way of life that Paul has been describing I have to ask, how wrong can their way of thinking be? How wide of the mark can their assessment of their future be? If anyone disagrees with that then Paul soon gives them a rude awakening by making it very clear that by living in the way he has been describing people have become “*objects of wrath*” ([2:3](#)). Now there's a word we don't hear very often: wrath. What does it mean and

## But As For You

whose wrath is Paul talking about? My Concise Oxford Dictionary defines “*wrath*” as being “*extreme anger*”. And that is God’s attitude when He is confronted by sin and evil; He is full of “*wrath*”, in other words, He is extremely angry, which means that as sinners we are unable to come before Him. Whilst Paul tells us in **2:3** that as sinners we are “*objects of wrath*”, in Romans he goes further when he talks of our being “*objects of his wrath — prepared for destruction*” (**Romans 9:22**). The solution to this dilemma is Jesus Christ Who, Paul tells the Thessalonians, “*rescues us from the coming wrath*” (**1 Thessalonians 1:10**).

Thankfully in these verses Paul is writing to the believers in Ephesus who have already been rescued from this wrath. However, there are many today who will face God’s wrath because they are unrepentant sinners. Where do you stand? Will you face the wrath of God or will you be rescued by the living Lord?

### Conclusion

As I hope I’ve made clear, these three verses paint a very bleak picture of our lives as sinners and they do not make a pretty sight. Paul gives us quite an insight of how life without Christ can be. Quite simply God hates sin and unrepentant sinners cannot stand in His presence. Many may read these verses and think nothing of them, the attitude being “*so what?*”. There is a prevailing attitude of live for today without any thought for tomorrow and yet by doing that we are moving further and further away from God and have no relationship whatsoever with Him. That means quite simply that we have no future; we are condemned to suffer the wrath of God and be punished accordingly.

Whilst these verses do paint a rather negative picture of our lives as sinners, I’ll remind you again that Paul talks of all this being the way “*in which we used to live*” (**2:2**) when we followed the ways and “*ruler of the kingdom of the air*” rather than the risen Jesus Christ.

The choice is yours; follow the world and suffer the wrath of God or follow the risen Jesus Christ and spend eternity with Him. Over to you!