

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Scripture Memory		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	18		Gary L.W. Johnson
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OUR ORIGINAL CONDITION¹

Whatever Became of Sin? This was the intriguing title of a book written in 1973 by noted psychologist Karl Menninger. He complained that the loss of the sense of sin was undermining all sense of moral responsibility. The last two decades have demonstrated that Menninger's concerns were well-founded. More recently, Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. has perceptibly written that this same loss of the sinfulness of sin has permeated the church. Contrasting the older (and biblical) view of sin with the contemporary therapeutic one, he writes: "the newer language of Zion fudges: 'Let us confess our problem with human relational adjustment dynamics, and especially our feebleness in networking.' Or, 'I'd just like to share that we just need to target holiness as a growth area.' Where sin is concerned, people mumble now. Why should we speak up? Why retrieve the awareness of sin? Why restate the Christian *doctrine* of sin? The reason is that although traditional Christianity is true, its truth saws against the grain of much in the contemporary culture and therefore needs constant sharpening. Christianity's major doctrines need regular restatement so that people may believe them, or believe them anew. Its classic awarenesses need to be evoked so that people may have them, or have them again. Recalling and confessing our sin is like taking out the garbage: once is not enough. But anyone who tries to recover the knowledge of sin these days must overcome long odds. To put it mildly, modern consciousness does not encourage moral reproach; in particular, it does not encourage self-reproach. Preachers mumble about sin. The other traditional custodians of moral awareness often ignore, trivialize, or evade it."²

I. **CONDITION OF MEN (Eph. 2:1)**

Verse 1 opens with the conjunction KAI, translated "and." It serves to connect this section with the preceding. The power that quickened Christ from the dead has quickened you who were likewise dead in the sphere of sin. **Note:** The words "hath he quickened" (as in the King James Version) are not in the Greek text at this point. The idea of "quickening" does not come into view until v. 5.

A. *The Fact - Dead* (NEKROS, dead, lifeless, without life). The death spoken of here is not physical death (it will lead to physical death). Men are said to be "dead" in sin. They are dead while they live, because they live in sin (cf. Colossians 2:13, 14). In Scripture the term "life" is often used to express union with God, while "death" expresses alienation from God with the accompanying conditions of corruption, misery and helplessness.

B. *The Sphere - Transgressions* (PARAPTŌMASIN) and *sins* (HAMARTIAIS). The words are closely related in meaning, but there is a distinction. *Transgressions* refer to "falling" and may refer to overt actions of disobedience, while *sins* (the classic term) "to miss the mark" and may designate the sins of heart and thought and the inclination of the will (cf. Psalm 29:13, 14 where both are used). Both terms are no doubt used to express the fullness of man's rebellion against God.

Each word carries the definite article, which declares the strong awareness of personal wrongdoing.

II. THE CONVERSATION OF MEN (v. 2a)

I am resorting to the Old King James Version expression, “conversation,” to denote manner of life. Paul now describes more particularly the lifestyle of those who lived in transgressions and sins.

- A. **The Manner** – *You followed* (Greek PERIEPATĒSATE, literally to walk about). It is used to denote a manner or course of life. That which characterizes a person’s behavior. Thus living and walking are synonymous. Unregenerate men literally are “death-walkers.”
- B. **The Pattern** – *The ways of the world* (TON AIŌNA TOU KOSMOU, literally the age of this world). The expression is Hebraic and is often found in Rabbinic writings where it stands in contrast to the glorious age to come (i.e., the Messiah’s advent). It is a favorite expression of the Apostle Paul (cf. Romans 12:2; Galatians 1:4; 1 Corinthians 7:31), and is used to express the evil and transitory nature of the present world.

III. THE CONTROLLER OF MEN (v. 2b)

If things were not bad enough, what with man being dead in sin, we learn that the actual situation of man entails the active agency of the most wicked being in the entire universe: Satan.

- A. **His Domain** – *The ruler of the power of the air* (TON ARCHONTA TĒS EXOUSIAS TOU AEROS). The picture presented here is that Satan is the ruler of the demons and other agencies of evil (cf. Colossians 1:13; Acts 26:18; Matthew 12:26; Mark 3:22; esp. Ephesians 6:12). Although not seen, Satan and his forces actively control and exert an evil influence on the lives of men, primarily in blinding men to the truth of the Word of God (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4).
- B. **His Function** – *He works* (ENERGOUNTOS, literally energizes) in the lives of men. “The phrase,” comments J. A. Robinson, “is carefully chosen so as to suggest that the world-power as a whole stands in sharp contrast to God. It is ‘a spirit,’ and it ‘worketh’ – the same forcible word which has been used twice already of the Divine working.”³
- C. **His Subjects** – *The sons of disobedience* (TOIS HUIOIS TĒS APEITHEIAS). This also is a Hebraic expression indicating their chief characteristic. This disobedience is unbelief (cf. Hebrews 4:6, compare with 2 Thessalonians 2:3).

IV. THE CONDEMNATION OF MEN (v. 3)

Not only are men dead in sin and under the controlling influence of Satan, but they are subject to the wrath of a holy God.

- A. **Man’s Habitation** – Paul declares that *all of us* (without exception) *lived* (ANESTRAPHĒMEN, literally to conduct one’s life). The word has special reference to man’s social behavior, whereas the word used in verse 2, PERIPATEŌ, is used more of personal conduct.
- B. **Man’s Actions** – Men live in the sphere of the flesh. They are controlled by *cravings of the flesh* (TAIS EPITHUMIAIS TĒS SARKOS). Men live according to the dictates of their nature; they are “sons of disobedience” and behave as such. Furthermore, their sinful impulses are geared in accordance with the evil desires *of the mind* (TŌN DIANOIŌN). Man’s nature controls his thought patterns. An unregenerate person will *only* choose and think in harmony with his nature. He will not do otherwise. To expect him to do so is like expecting a tiger to choose to become a vegetarian.
- C. **Man’s Dessert** – Men are *by nature children of wrath*. James Boice points out that, “In the Old Testament, there are more than 20 words used to express God’s wrath. More than 600 important passages deal with it. In the New Testament, the chief terms are *thumos* (from a root which means “to rush along fiercely” or “be in a heat of violence”) and *orgē*, the term used in Ephesians 2:3. *Orgē* comes from a root meaning “to grow ripe for something” and indicates God’s gradually building and intensifying opposition to sin. *Orgē* is the word most often used for “wrath” in the New Testament. Taken together, these passages

indicate that God's wrath is consistent, controlled, and judicial. That is what makes it so frightening. The doctrine of wrath does not mean that God merely gets angry from time to time, lashes out in anger, and then forgets about it. It is rather that his wrath is an inevitable and growing opposition to all that is opposed to his righteousness."⁴

Ezekiel Hopkins, one of the best of the Puritan preachers, declared that the wrath of God, "appears to be exceeding dreadful, in that *it is set forth to us in Scripture by all those things which are most terrible to human nature*. God maketh use of many metaphorical expressions of things most grievous to our senses, that from them we may take a hint to conceive how intolerable his wrath is in itself.

"It is called a *prison*: 1 Peter 3:19, where mention is made of *the spirits in prison*: that is, the souls of those men to whom the Spirit of Christ in Noah went and preached in the days of their mortal life; but which, for their disobedience, are shut up under the wrath of God in hell. And, certainly, hell is a prison, large enough to hold all the world: Ps. 9:17; *The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God*. A prison it is, where the Devil and wicked Spirits are shackled with chains of massy and substantial darkness: 2 Peter 2:4, they are, says the Apostle, *reserved in chains of darkness, unto the judgment of the great day*. And they are there kept *in everlasting chains under darkness*; there being not one cranny in this great prison to let in the least ray or glimpse of light.

"It is called a *place of torment*: Luke 16:28. It is a region of woe and misery: wherein horror, despair, and torture forever dwell; and are in their most proper seat and habitation.

"It is called a *drowning of men in destruction and perdition*: 1 Tim. 6:9. One would think that to be drowned might signify death enough of itself; but to be drowned in perdition and destruction signifies moreover the fatalness and the depth of that death, into which they are plunged.

"It is called a being *cast, bound hand and foot into outer darkness*: Matt. 22:13: a being thrown *into a furnace of fire*, to be burnt alive: Matt. 13:42, 50.

"It is called a *lake of fire*: Rev. 20:15, into which wicked men shall be plunged all over; where they shall lie wallowing and rolling among millions of damned spirits, in those infernal flames. And this lake is continually fed with a sulphurous stream of *brimstone*: Rev. 19:20. And this fire and brimstone is that which never shall be quenched: Matt. 3:12; *He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire*.

"And, lastly, to name no more, it is called *everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels*: Matt. 25:41. And now we are arrived at the highest pitch of what sense can feel, or imagination conceive."⁵

John Stott has summed up the passage, "Paul was under no illusions about the degradation of mankind. He refused to whitewash the situation, for this might have led him to propose superficial solutions. Instead, he began this paragraph with a faithful portrayal of man as subject to three terrible powers, namely 'sin,' 'death,' and 'wrath.' Yet he refused also to despair, because he believed in God. True, the only hope for dead people lies in a resurrection. But then the living God is the God of resurrection. He is even more than that: he is the God of creation. Both metaphors indicate the indispensable necessity of divine grace. For resurrection is out of death, and creation is out of nothing. That is the true meaning of 'salvation.' ,m "⁶

CONCLUSION: Paul has set forth in 2:1-3 the terrible situation that all men, whether Jew or Gentile, are in by nature. Humanity is not on trial before God; the verdict is in, and the sentence has been passed – GUILTY, one and all. No one deserves salvation; all need it, but none deserves it, nor even seeks it! (cf. Romans 3:11). Our condition is such that we surely cannot earn salvation. Sinners, living in sin and being controlled by "the ruler of the kingdom of this age" (and willing subjects at that), were by nature (PHUSEI, literally "innate disposition," compare Galatians 2:15; 4:8) "objects of God's wrath." Sinners therefore need mercy. But if the standard by which mercy is given is merit, we are doomed.

ENDNOTES

¹Original sin is not a substance or a positive attribute, but a defect in human nature caused by the fall and consisting in the loss and consequent absence of original righteousness, *iustitia originalis* and of the *image Dei*. This *peccatum originalis* is (1) the *culpa haereditaria*, or hereditary guilt, which is imputed to all mankind because of the sin and guilt of Adam – in Reformed theology this imputation rests on the federal headship of Adam. It is also (2) the *corruption haereditaria*, or hereditary corruption, which, because of the guilt and corruption of Adam and Eve, is transmitted to all their descendants by generation. Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Baker, 1985), p. 221.

²C. Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Eerdmans, 1996), p. x.

³J. A. Robinson, *Commentary On Ephesians, Exposition of the Greek Text* (rpt. Kregel, 1979), p. 49.

⁴J. M. Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Baker, 1997), p. 49.

⁵*The Works of Ezekiel Hopkins II* (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria 1997), p. 90.

⁶J. R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (IVP, 1979), p. 85.