

**1. 13. 2011**

As I interact with my son, I have been thinking about my father a lot. My dad used to always say to us that we were lucky because we could eat meat whenever we wanted. He grew up in a village in Fujian province, and he always used to say that one day he would bring us back to his hometown and show us his old house. It was probably dirty and we didn't really want to go. But my dad wanted us to see the condition in which he grew up. He only could eat meat once a year, during Chinese New Years, and he would be so hungry that he couldn't study. Where he came from is also where I came from, and he wanted us to see it so we could appreciate more greatly what we had now.

Paul does the same thing to us. He takes us believers back to where we came from, because in order to appreciate the state of salvation we are in now we must first understand what life was like before. In verse 1, Paul says that we were dead in our transgressions and sins. We followed the ways of the world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air.

He is addressing mainly Gentiles here. He is saying that we Gentiles, before we were saved, worshiped pagan gods and were dead because we lived in sin and without spiritual vitality. We were characterized by death and wretchedness. We did what the world told us to do, which is another way of saying we did what everyone else did.

In addition, we followed Satan, the ruler of the kingdom of the air, and he controlled us and made us disobedient to the Lord. We were diametrically opposed to God. In the original language, it says that we were "sons of disobedience" and Satan was at work in us. We were sons of the devil before we were children of God. Although we might rightly claim to never be so wicked, Paul tells us that we were sons of Satan nonetheless.

This *former* state of ours is also the *current* state of unbelievers. We may say that we know many unbelievers who are nice and good people. They volunteer in soup kitchens and never hurt others. Nevertheless Paul says they too are dead in their sins, following the world, and acting as children of Satan.

How can Paul use such strong language against such good people? Last week we saw how Jesus Christ is the center of all things (1:20-23). In several different ways, Paul makes clear that Jesus is the authority above all else – in this world and in the spiritual realm. This is the key

to understanding our former state (and the current state of unbelievers). Regardless of how morally we lived at one point, before we recognized Jesus as the Son of God, we were all children of Satan because we rebelled against His intrinsic authority. Thus, we know that our spiritual state as sinners has nothing to do with how many sins we committed, as if to say we can measure our sinfulness by how many deeds of sin we have committed. Some unbelievers probably commit less individual sins than Christians. But because Jesus is nothing to them, they rebel against Him and do not recognize His sovereignty. Therefore no matter how few sins they commit, the source of that sin and spiritual death remain as long as they reject the source of spiritual life and salvation, Jesus Christ. And to Satan, it doesn't matter what you follow as long as you do not follow Jesus. Therefore whether you are Buddhist, atheist, or pagan, if you do not follow Jesus, you belong to Satan.

In verse 3, Paul shifts from Gentiles to Jews. He says that even the Jews were sinful, gratifying the sinful nature, and they too were objects of wrath. Both Jews and Gentiles, before accepting Jesus, did what felt good to them and were destined for death and destruction. This is our former state; Paul takes us back to our "hometown" so we can appreciate where we are today, and what God has done for us.

In verse 4, the crux of the whole chapter is the first two words. It reads in our Bible, "But because," however the original language says "But *God*." We, Jews and Gentiles alike, were dead in sin, followers of the world and children of Satan. We gratified our flesh and were destined for God's wrath and destruction. "But God" changed our state. God turned our darkness into light, our destruction into glory, our misery to hope, our death into life. Not because of anything we did, but because of who God is and what he did do we enjoy eternal life today.

Hopefully going back to our "hometown," seeing where we come from, and realizing that God took us out of that horrible state will help us appreciate our salvation all the more and motivate us to live a life worthy of the calling we have received.