

KNOWING CHRIST IN POWER & SUFFERINGS

Read Ephesians 2:1-10

How do we know we are heading towards Christ? Is it when everything is going right for us? Paul warns us that we are heading in the wrong direction if we are simply following the desires of our physical body, and equally of the mind. It will lead us to ruin. In verse 2 Paul mentions two forces that are at play, luring us in the wrong direction and note that Paul uses the word 'we', referring to the Jews and therefore the challenge is for us here today.

- The present age: What might seem right to those who are simply going with the flow in the world around us, actually isn't in keeping with what God intends as the age to come. Is there anything about our modern culture that comes to mind? What do you think of this quote

'in modern life, we live in a world of abundance rather than scarcity, and Lembke says our brains weren't evolved for the "fire hose of dopamine" of sugar, social media, TV, sex, drugs or any number of dopamine-triggering stimuli so easily available.' Elise Hu, *Too much pleasure can lead to addiction*, 2022, [npr.org](https://www.npr.org)

- The ruler of the power of the air: seems to refer to satan, his deadly ideas for defacing Gods creation and harming humans are 'in the air'. How might we know or sense that satan is at work?
- How did Jesus show us to live life?

So the solution is.. read verse 4 onwards again. What amazing, almost unbelievable, magnificent kindness of God!

Read Philippians 3:1-11

What Paul means by 'flesh' here is pride of physical descent cherished by the Jews. Your ancestry and all that went with it was very important in the ancient world. Paul knew all about it and had been an expert in the law, to the point of being blameless. Paul is very strong here in what he calls out as a superiority complex.

With the focus on the flesh (identity through circumcision) instead of stressing something that actually made you different from the pagan world around, you were instead stressing that which you had in common with them. You were setting up your Judaism as just another ethnic, geographical, religious and cultural grouping, along with all the other ones in the world. To emphasise ethnicity meant being the same. It is easy to fall into this trap today, where the church becomes another grouping of people who tend to all look and speak the same, another ethnic grouping whose light doesn't seem to translate well into the rest of the community that surrounds them. The postmodern mantra that we can easily find ourselves agreeing with, is that your truth is yours, my truth is mine, and let us all be tolerant of one another and all will be well in the end.

Do you agree with this? How is the church of Englands vision and strategy for the 2020s challenging this? <https://www.churchofengland.org/about/vision-and-strategy>

Prayer: *Help us to recognise what is for you God and what is against you in our lives, our communities, our culture. Forgive us when we have reduced your good news for our ears alone, open up our hearts and eyes to those in our community who need you Jesus.*