

Ephesians 2

Made Alive in Christ

¹And you were dead in your trespasses and sins,

This verse is a continuation of chapter one, which ended by speaking of the spiritual power of Jesus that is given to people who are born again. The death mentioned in this verse is not just about our upcoming physical death. It is not just about the truth that all who die without knowing Jesus fail to gain life after death. It also refers to a very real “death” in this life. A person who does not know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is spiritually dead. Death of any type is awful.

HE IS NOT RESPONDING!

At the beginning of a mission trip in Mexico I remember watching a little boy being pulled out of a swimming pool. He was not breathing. He was unresponsive. People yelled his name but he could not hear them or respond to them in any way.

Before we were born again, we were totally unresponsive to God. There was no pulse. We did not hear his voice. We could not speak to him. In fact we are born unresponsive to God. We are born spiritually dead. And sin in our mind and heart and actions prove that we are unresponsive to God.

²in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

Not only were we spiritually unresponsive to God. Before we knew Christ we had no motivation or spiritual power to resist sin. Before we came to Christ, our lives proved that we were spiritually dead. Paul describes three identifying marks of the spiritually dead person in verse 2 and 3.

1. They live like the rest of the world. This means that there are many behaviors that many people have no problem with, even though God has a big problem with it. Getting drunk or stoned or sleeping with people to whom we are not married or even failure to encourage or serve others. These are all acceptable options for many people. Before we knew Christ these things were no big deal.
2. They followed the mighty prince of the power of the air. The bible says our battle is not against flesh and blood but against principalities, powers, rulers and thrones. Satan and his demons have real ways that they tempt us, accuse us and generally try to steal from us, kill us or destroy us. Apart from Christ we cannot resist the temptations or accusations of the devil.
3. They were enslaved to “gratifying the craving of the sinful nature. This is described in verse 3

³Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Indulging the desires of the flesh and mind is a reference to the sin nature. This is our way of thinking and our body appetites apart from the controlling influence of the Holy Spirit.

OUR THINKING BEFORE CHRIST

A lot of my thinking before Christ was about money and houses and cars. I was focused on how quickly I could become rich and powerful. Funny thing happened... the more I worked my way up the ranks in management the more I felt empty and dead inside because my career in business was a pursuit of the sin nature. For those who are called to be God's witnesses in the business world career advancement is no problem.

For me it was a means of trying to get life out of money, cars, power and other sordid things. In the end, only Christ satisfied me.

BEFORE AND AFTER CHRIST

Paul is going to show us the difference between life before Christ and life after Christ. The first three verses discuss the condition of persons who have not given their lives to Jesus Christ.

Verse one says; ¹*And you were dead in your trespasses and sins...* And we know that means a person who does not know Jesus is spiritually unresponsive to God. Unable to hear God, understand him or communicate with Him.

The contrast comes in verse 4;

⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

Before we ever did one thing right God loved us and died for us. Before we ever played nice with God, he died for us and invited us into His family. Salvation is totally one sided. Left on our own we would never choose God.

SAVED BY GRACE, KEPT BY WORKS?

As a Christian sometimes I get the idea that I am saved by grace but then I have to work really hard to keep God's love and approval. In fact if truth be told there are many times that I doubt God approves of and loves me because I know I could have prayed more, told more people about him, or served people from the church a little better than I do. I am so eager to do something that will catch God's attention so that maybe I will be sure that he really does love and approve of me. I find myself working for his approval when I already have his approval in Christ.

I hope one day to truly believe and get my hands around the truth that God loves me for free and he saved me by his works and he keeps me by his works. And if I fall down on the job he is the one who wakes me up and renews my passion and love for him.

TRY HARD CHRISTIANITY

The truth is that much of what passes off, as Christianity is really not about Christ at all. Many Christians are saved by God's grace or begin to hear about God's grace and they want to get closer to God. So they try to impress God. So here is how it works.

If I don't feel as close to God as I would like to be I begin to make a list of do's and don't in my life. And if I get my list of do's and don'ts lined up then God will love me more and I will feel his love growing for me.

So we make a list of things. I need to stop drinking so much, and I need to stop chewing tobacco and stop smoking and I need to attend church more and perhaps a small group. And I need to stop swearing. And I need to turn off the television and have nothing but praise music on. I need to put a smile on my face so that when people see me they will want to come to church.

Here is the problem. All the focus is on what I am doing and none of the focus is on what God is doing. The truth is that if we want things to change in our lives we do not need more rules we need more power. God does not need our help to change us. He saved us before we ever did anything right.

God will clean us up and change our desires and help us to live a life that is pleasing to Him. If people are struggling with sin, they do not need a rule and pressure. They need God's power to set them free. It is not about trying hard. It is about walking in God's power and watching Him change

us. When we are filled with the Spirit of God all the things that used to tempt us no longer give us pleasure. The drink does not hide our pain because in Christ our emotional pain is healed. We do not need to sleep around so that we can get a quick fix of fake intimacy and shallow love. When we are filled with the Spirit of God we get to have Jesus tell us that he loves us and wants to spend time with us.

⁶and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

This is a description of something that happens in this life for the Christian. Yes we will be raised from the dead. Our bodies will become like the body of Jesus. No more aches and pains and we will be in the prime of our youth. We will be raised up after we die.

But the present day reality is that we are born spiritually dead. I believe that humans are created with a body, soul and spirit. Our bodies are the vehicles in which we move. Our soul, also called our mind, is what we think with and process information with. And our spirit is the part of us that is designed to communicate with God. I could be wrong but that is the way I understand it. Our spirit is born dead.

And when we said yes to Jesus our spirit was resurrected and given life so that even as we walk around and do our business in this world behind the scenes, a part of us that was brought to life is talking with God. We used to have a body and soul. But now since we were made alive in Christ we have a body a soul and a spirit. We are fully alive and in a very real way my spirit or my heart of heart can be leaning toward Christ and praying for people even as I am walking around doing what ordinary people do.

The biggest problem Christians have is walking around like ordinary people do and never exercising our spirit by talking to God and praying for God to show us His will.

⁷so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Our salvation is not primarily about us. God when he saves us is bringing glory to himself by showing off his grace and kindness.

TURTLES ANYONE?

There is an expression: “When you see a turtle on a fence post, you know he did not get there by himself.” It is obvious that someone had to put the turtle up there. How could a group of people that includes the like of me be included in God’s church? How could God use someone like me, with so many flaws, problems, quirks and bad habits for any good thing? If God does any good thing through me I know it is because God put me where I am.

⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;

Many people understand and believe that we are saved by faith. But what many people do not understand is that faith is a gift from God.

God sends the Holy Spirit to those who will believe and the Holy Spirit does something to a person so that they suddenly have the faith to understand God’s call to salvation and to know how to respond to Jesus. Faith is God’s gift to make us do His will.

⁹not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Did you know that most religions in the world teach some form of salvation through works? Many so-called evangelical churches preach all of their sermons in such a way that most people get the idea that people are

saved by good works. If you ask most people on the street how one gets into heaven, most of them would say; “it is by being a basically good person.”

That is a lie. If good works saved us the cross of Christ would be unnecessary. Salvation is about God giving us a gift because he wanted to.

¹⁰For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

God, what good works do you have planned for me right now that you want me to walk in? God created us and saved us so that we would live a life that gives people an idea about what Jesus is like. Our lives are to bring glory to Christ. But the good works are something God thinks up. The good works are God’s plans for our life. It is all about what he wants to do using our hands and feet.

If I go and write a check to save the children ministries and God wants me instead to support crisis pregnancy shelter in Hayward, then my check to save the children is not a good work. The only good works are the things that God thinks up. Good by definition is doing God’s will.

TAKING IT HOME

1. Did you realize that part of you was born dead? Did you also realize that we have to exercise our body, our mind and our spirit?
2. Are you spending at least three times each week in silence long enough to connect with the heart of God?
3. Do you really believe that if God has called you to salvation he loves you for free as a gift?
4. Have you spent time learning to give away rules or teaching people how to walk in God’s power? What is changing people in your sphere of influence; pressure or power?