

## Alive to God Ephesians 2:1-10

This morning our scripture tells us what it means to be alive in Christ, alive to God. In this letter of Paul to the church of Ephesus, Paul is not talking to his readers about problems within the church, but reminding them and us who were are in Christ. It is as if Paul takes us to the mountaintops of Christian truth and invites us to look at the breathtaking view!<sup>1</sup> In the first three verses, Paul gives us a full-length picture of the terrible spiritual condition of the unsaved person.

Before we believed in Jesus Christ and what he did for us we were spiritually dead; that is, unable to understand and appreciate spiritual things. We possessed no spiritual life, and we could do nothing of ourselves to please God. We were unable to respond to spiritual things. Like a dead person our spiritual faculties are not functioning, and we could not function until God gave us life. The cause of this spiritual death was “trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1) and “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). We were separated from God (Isa. 59:2). We were not sick; we were dead! We did not need resuscitation; we needed resurrection.

We were disobedient to the will of God. God said, “In the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17). Satan said, “You shall not surely die” (Gen. 3:4), and because they believed this lie, the first man and woman sinned and experienced immediate spiritual death and ultimate physical death. Since that time, humankind has lived in disobedience to God. We were controlled by the world, the flesh, and the devil, the three great enemies of God! And we could not change our own nature or, of ourselves, overcome the world and the devil. We need outside help, and that help could come only from God.

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<sup>1</sup> Serendipity Bible for Groups: New International Version: Littleton, CO: Serendipity House, 1524

We lived to please the “desires of the flesh and the wishes of the mind.” Our actions are sinful because our appetites are sinful. We were incapable of doing anything to merit salvation or meet the high standards of God’s holiness. Jesus said that lost sinners do good to each other (Luke 6:33), and to their children (Luke 11:13), but they cannot do anything spiritually good to please God. Our lives were marked by transgressions, which to stray from the right path, and sins, which means we missed the mark.. By nature, we were children of wrath! By deed, we were children of disobedience! We were condemned already (John 3:18). The sentence had been passed, but God in God’s mercy stayed the execution of the sentence (2 Peter 3:8–10). We could not save ourselves, but God in His grace steps in to make salvation possible. “But God!”—what a difference those two words make! “Salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2:9). Paul reminds us of four activities that God performed on behalf of sinners to save us from the consequences of our sins.

First God loved us! By nature, “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Theologians call love one of God’s attributes. But God has two kinds of attributes: those that He possesses of Himself (intrinsic attributes, such as life, love, holiness), and those by which God relates to God’s creation, especially to humans (relative attributes). For example, by nature God is truth; but when God relates to humans, God’s truth becomes faithfulness. God is by nature holy; and when God relates that holiness to humans, it becomes justice.

Love is one of God’s intrinsic attributes, but when this love is related to sinners, it becomes grace and mercy. God is “rich in mercy” (Eph. 2:4) and in “grace” (Eph. 2:7), and these riches make it possible for us to be saved. In God’s mercy, God does not give us what we do deserve; and in God’s grace God gives us what we do not deserve. And all of this is made possible because of the death of Jesus

Christ on the cross. It was at Calvary that God displayed God's hatred for sin and God's love for sinners (Rom. 5:8; John 3:16).

Second God made us alive, even when we were dead in sins. God accomplished this spiritual resurrection by the power of the Spirit, using the Word. In the four Gospels, it is recorded that Jesus raised three people from the dead: the widow's son (Luke 7:11–17), Jairus' daughter (Luke 8:49–56), and Lazarus (John 11:41–46). In each case, He spoke the Word and this gave life. "The Word of God is living and powerful" (Heb. 4:12). These three physical resurrections are pictures of the spiritual resurrection that came to us when we heard the Word and believed (John 5:24).

But our spiritual resurrection is much greater because it puts us in union with Christ: God "made us alive together with Christ." As members of His body we are united to Him (Eph. 1:22–23), so that we share His resurrection life and power (Eph. 1:19–20).

Third, because we are united to Christ, and alive to God, we have been exalted with Him and we are sharing His throne in the heavenly realms. Our physical position may be on earth, but our spiritual position is "in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Like Lazarus, we have been called from the grave to sit with Christ and enjoy His fellowship (John 12:1–2).

Fourth, God's purpose in our redemption is not simply to rescue us from hell, as great a work as that is. God's ultimate purpose in our salvation is that for all eternity the church might glorify God's grace (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14). So, if God has an eternal purpose for us to fulfill, God will keep us for all eternity. Since we have not been saved by our good works, we cannot be lost by our bad works. Grace means salvation completely apart from any merit or works on our part. Grace means that God does it all for Jesus' sake! Our salvation is the gift of God. Salvation is a gift, not a reward. We can add nothing to it (Heb. 10:1–14); we dare take nothing from

it. When Jesus died, the veil of the temple was torn in two, from the top to the bottom, signifying that the way to God was now open. There is no more need for earthly sacrifices. One sacrifice—the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ—has finished the great work of salvation. God did it all, and He did it by His grace.

Sin worked against us and God worked for us, but the great work of conversion is but the beginning.

“For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus.” Our conversion is not the end; it is the beginning. We are a part of God’s “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17), and God continues to work in us to make us what God wants us to be. God’s purpose is to make us more like Christ (Rom. 8:29), through the Holy Spirit (Phil. 2:13). Christ finished His work of redemption on the cross, but He arose from the dead and returned to heaven. There He carries on His unfinished work of perfecting His church (Eph. 4:7–16; Heb. 13:20–21). Christ is equipping us for our walk and our work here on earth. To do this, He uses the Word of God (1 Thes. 2:13), prayer (Eph. 3:20–21), and suffering (1 Peter 4:11–14). As we read God’s Word, understand it, meditate on it, and feed on it, the Word goes to work in our lives to cleanse us and nourish us. As we pray, God’s Spirit works in us to release power. And as we suffer, the Spirit of God ministers to us. Suffering drives us back to the Word and prayer, and the cycle is repeated.

Too many Christians think that conversion is the only important experience, and that nothing follows. But this is wrong. We can use the resurrection of Lazarus as an example. After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, He said, “Loose him, and let him go” (John 11:44). In other words, “This man is now alive. Get him out of the graveclothes!” We are alive to God!

The same resurrection power that saved you and took you out of the graveyard of sin can daily help you live for Christ and glorify Him. At great expense to Himself, God worked for us on the cross. And today, on the basis of that price paid

at Calvary, He is working in us to conform us to Christ. God cannot work in us unless He has first worked for us, and we have trusted His Son. Also, He cannot work through us unless He works in us. This is why it is important for us to spend time daily in the Word and prayer, and to yield to Christ during times of suffering. For it is through the Word, prayer, and suffering that God works in you.

The Bible shows many examples of this principle. God spent 40 years working in Moses before He could work through him. At the beginning of his ministry, Moses was impetuous and depended on his own strength. He killed an Egyptian and had to flee Egypt, hardly a successful way to start a ministry. But during those 40 years as a humble shepherd in the desert, Moses experienced God's working in his life, a working that prepared him for forty more years of magnificent service.

There are other examples. Joseph suffered for thirteen years before God put him on the throne of Egypt, second to Pharaoh. David was anointed king when he was a youth, but he did not gain the throne until he had suffered many years as an exile. Even the Apostle Paul spent three years in Arabia after his conversion, no doubt experiencing God's deeper work to prepare him for his ministry. God has to work in us before He can work through us; and this leads to the fourth work in our passage.

Then Paul tells us we are "created in Christ Jesus for good works." We are not saved by good works, but saved for good works. The famous theologian John Calvin wrote, "It is faith alone that justifies, but faith that justifies can never be alone." We are not saved by faith plus good works, but by a faith that works.

The story is told of a Christian lady who often visited a retirement home near her house. One day she noticed a lonely man sitting, staring at his dinner tray. In a kindly manner she asked, "Is something wrong?"

"Is something wrong!" replied the man in a heavy accent. "Yes, something is wrong! I am a Jew, and I cannot eat this food!"

“What would you like to have?” she asked.

“I would like a bowl of hot soup!”

She went home and prepared the soup and, after getting permission from the office, took it to the man. In succeeding weeks, she often visited him and brought him the kind of food he enjoyed and eventually she led him to faith in Christ. Yes, preparing soup can be a spiritual sacrifice, a good work to the glory of God.

But these works are not only good; they are also “prepared.” “Good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life” (Eph. 2:10). The unbeliever walks “according to the course of this world” (Eph. 2:2), but the believer walks in the good works God has prepared for us. These means that God has a plan for our lives and that we should walk in His will and fulfill His plan.

It would be helpful to take a personal inventory. Is sin working against you because you have not trusted Christ? Then trust Him now! Have you experienced His work for you—in you—through you?

Are you wearing the “graveclothes” or the “grace-clothes”? Are you enjoying the life and liberty you have in Christ, or are you still bound by the habits of the old life in the graveyard of sin? As a Christian, you have been raised and seated on the throne. Practice your position in Christ! He has worked for you; now let Him work in you and through you, that He might give you an exciting, creative life to the glory of God.<sup>2</sup> Though people were spiritually dead and deserving only God’s wrath, God, in His marvelous grace, has provided salvation through faith. Believers are God’s workmanship in whom and through whom God performs good works.<sup>3</sup> Paul insists that it is by grace that we are saved. We have not earned salvation nor could we have earned it. It is the gift of God and our part is simply to

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<sup>2</sup>Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Eph 2:1

<sup>3</sup>Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:622

accept it. If someone fine loves us, we know that we do not and cannot deserve that love. At the same time we know with utter conviction that we must spend all life in trying to be worthy of it.

That is our relationship to God. Good works can never earn salvation; but there is something radically wrong if salvation does not produce good works. It is not that our good works put God in our debt; rather that God's love lays on us the obligation to try throughout all life to be worthy of it.

We know what God wants us to do; God has prepared long beforehand the kind of life God wants us to live, and has told us about it in his book and through his son. We cannot earn God's love; but we can and must show how grateful we are for it, by seeking with our whole hearts to live the kind of life which will bring joy to God's heart.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1976 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 94