

Ephesians 2.1-10: Alive in Christ

Ephesians 2

Made Alive in Christ

¹As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature^a and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. ⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Introduction

We begin with a short grammar lesson on perhaps the most powerful work in the English language and Greek for that matter: the little preposition IN.

We will speak of being in love, in labour or in a rage. Paul gives us two such phrases in this passage from Ephesians 2 which correspond to two fundamental states of being in which we live:

Dead in sin; or
Alive in Christ.

I want to look at these two foundational modes of being and consider what they might mean for us. In this passage from Ephesians 2, the first three verses make for very painful reading for us, but verse 4 through 10 are glorious. So we begin with some discomfort before moving on to glory.

(2:1-3) DEAD IN SIN

This is a challenging passage for it shines an unflattering light upon human lives. Recently a friend from my teen years linked up with me through Facebook. I haven't seen him since high school and he asked me "are you still a member of the Monarchist league?" I said no. It was quite embarrassing to encounter someone who only remembers me as an eccentric 14 year old.

Here Paul goes back to the past to remind this group of Christians who they were before Christ came into their lives. :

Vs. 1-2 **AND YOU (it says in the Greek) you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live**

The key phrase here is: **you were dead IN your transgressions and sins**. Paul is not talking about physical death but spiritual death. That is to say that they once lived estranged from God, unconnected with God and they were spiritually dead. They were dead *in* their transgressions and sins literally in the Greek *in which you once walked*. They in the truest sense lived IN SIN.

Paul describes three bases for their lives in verses 2-3 which are the **world the flesh and the Devil**. All of these are controlling principles which govern how these people once lived and acted. All are at war with God, and are organized in opposition to him. Paul speaks of the Evil One or Satan as the one at work in those who are disobedient. Sin comes through disobedience and disobedience opens the door to evil in human lives. By flesh he means our sinful human nature unredeemed by Christ.

Thus far Paul has been speaking specifically to the situation of these Christians. But then in verse 3 he becomes more general:

All of us also lived among them at one time gratifying the cravings of the sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest we were by nature objects of wrath.

When Paul talks about all of us he means Jews and Gentiles. Jewish Christians were more accustomed to thinking of themselves as God's chosen people, who were righteous because they were Israel. It's like being an Anglican. Whereas Gentile Christians coming out of Paganism, especially in a major centre like Ephesus with its Temple to Diana were quite aware of what they have come out of. Paul is at pains to point out that *all of us*, Jewish Christians and Gentile stand in the same situation before God. He might well be thinking of his own life before Christ. A life that looked righteous in all outward appearances. Yet this was the same man who persecuted the Church and stood by when they stoned Stephen.

When he says we were by nature objects of wrath he means our *sinful* nature. He does not mean that the moment you are born you come under God's wrath. But He does mean that if you live out your life governed by the sinful human nature unredeemed by Christ, you will find yourself on a downward slippery slope of sin which will leave you liable to the judgment of God.

Dead in Sin: a state of being in which human beings live apart from God and his grace; spiritually dead in sin. This is a serious matter with eternal consequences.

You don't have to look very far to see that this grave picture is as relevant today as it ever was. Just read the newspapers look at the news. Wherever there is war, hatred and injustice in the world we see what Paul is talking about. The greed we have been hearing about on Wall Street: if that isn't living according to the appetites of the flesh what is? Or look at the Fritzl case in Austria; a man who committed evil of the worst kind. Nothing has changed. When human beings live in sin their lives move in a direction which leads further and further away from God.

We might not like to hear of God's wrath. But if evil and injustice did not make God angry, what would that mean to the victims of evil, injustice and hatred? Just like when things happen to our children. Otherwise where would justice be?

Let's look at our own lives. If like me you have been Anglican all your life, this picture might seem difficult. After all most of us are not coming out of a pagan lifestyle. Some of you here might be aware in your own lives, or in the lives of people you know of a great conversion from a very sinful life to Christ.

The challenge for us who are in Christ is to examine our lives, our hearts, and our conduct: are there areas in which you are sowing to your sinful nature or in which your sinful nature has the upper hand?

If you are in Christ, you are in Christ. But when we sow to our sinful nature, and go along with sinful tendencies, we are taking our lives in a direction that alienates us from God. It might be in things you do; or attitudes you cultivate; or things we say about other people.

Lent is a wonderful season to take an honest look and see how it is going. I know in my own life and I think it is true for us all the struggle is to obey God; when the option for disobedience beckons me.

So the first thing Paul reminds them is of their life before Christ: you WERE dead in your sin. But then he moves on. From being dead in sin to alive in Christ.

(2.4-7) ALIVE IN CHRIST

(4-5) But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in our transgressions. It is by Christ you have been saved.

The key phrase in verse 1-3 was **dead in sin**; the key phrase now is **alive in Christ**. These are two completely different contexts in which we live our lives. Having taken us to the depths of human sin, Paul then brings in the immense love of God to show us the extent of God's grace in Christ. It is an amazing thing that God entered into that darkness to bring life. He says even when we were dead in our transgressions **GOD MADE US ALIVE IN CHRIST**. He means spiritually alive. Being spiritually alive means your spirit has been brought to life so that you can now, in your life, enjoy the benefits and the joy of knowing God. God does it all. He moves us from death to being alive in Christ.

Why God does this has to do with his nature and character:

*4 because of his great love for us
Because he is rich in mercy
7 incomparable riches of his grace
Expressed in his kindness to us*

His love is so extensive it reaches out to us even in our estrangement from him. His mercy is so rich it encompasses us even in our sin. His grace is rich beyond imagining; this is not an impoverished but an overflowing grace extended to the entire human race. It is expressed in God's kindness to us in sending his son: **while we were yet sinners Christ died for us**. God's kindness? Kindness is often in short supply in a busy and confrontational world in which I can't sacrifice my career for someone else. But God in his kindness sacrificed his son for us.

Paul takes us into the darkest dungeon of human sin to demonstrate that the radiant light of God's love shines there. Not waiting for us to come to him, God came to us where we were. And that is grace.

Verse 5 **it is by grace you have been saved. BY GRACE**. He expands this in verse 8: **it is by grace you have been saved through faith – and this not from yourselves it is the gift of God.**

This is how we are made alive in Christ.

BY Grace: a gift; the instrument by which we are saved is all grace. It comes from *God* as a gift **and this not from yourselves it is the gift of God**; BUT **through faith** – that is how your life intersects with the incomparable riches of God's Grace. It comes into your life THROUGH Faith in Christ. Through believing. NOT THROUGH BEING A GOOD PERSON. If it was based on being a good person then only Canadians would go to heaven. That's not right. God's grace is being graciously and freely offered everywhere, even in the darkest of lives. And where human hearts respond to Christ in faith that grace will abound and save.

You were dead in your sin. You are alive in Christ. And finally:

CREATED IN CHRIST - Conclusion

This is the implication of being alive in Christ:

10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.

The key phrase again is: IN CHRIST: *IN CHRIST we are God's workmanship*. Please allow the glory of this picture of human being to sink into your minds. And then realize that in Christ Jesus this is you and this is me.

We are God's workmanship: the Greek word there takes the meaning: a work of art or a masterpiece. So listen to this again: *We are God's masterpiece*. That is you and me he is talking about. All of us: in Christ

...created in Christ Jesus. It is in Christ that we become God's masterpiece. There is finishedness about this. He doesn't say "you will become God's masterpiece" he says *you are God's masterpiece*. For there is nothing higher, nothing greater than that work of saving and redeeming humankind. There is no greater masterpiece God can point than you in Christ. This is what it means to be a good person; to be excellent. Look how far they have gone and we have gone in these few little verses. From being dead in their sins to being made alive in Christ to being God's masterpiece.

This is meant to cause us to fall down on our knees in thankfulness and praise at what God has done for us and in us in Christ. For it is all God's work. It is all God. It is all grace. It is in Christ.

And that is the state of being in which we are invited to live our lives

That is the power of the preposition IN. Apart from Christ we were dead in our sin. God made us alive in Christ. We are God's masterpiece, created in Christ Jesus.