



ISSUE

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Faithful Sayings

BULLETIN
OF THE
OLSEN PARK
CHURCH OF
CHRIST

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

9:30 AM

10:30 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Patrick Ledbetter

Brady McAlister

Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Ben Hight

Blake McAlister

Walker McNear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Justin Smiley

Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope

Alive in Christ

By Kyle Pope

We have all heard people use the expression—“now that’s living!” It’s applied when we see people enjoying an experience, or a lifestyle that is considered desirable and pleasant. In most cases, this determination is based on physical things. Does the experience involve enjoyable activities? Have those to whom it is applied attained a certain income level or social class? The inference is that those outside of this condition (whether they realize it or not) are not *really living*, because they don’t have what these people have attained. There is an Australian magazine that uses this expression as its title. The publication is aimed at those over 55 and promotes cruises, luxury retirement communities, and other experiences that can change the (supposedly) dull and mundane life of most people within this age group into a state in which it could be said of them—“now that’s living!” In Paul’s letter to the church in Ephesus, he is not concerned with cruises, retirement communities, or other material conditions to which our world might aspire. Nonetheless, he does promote and advocate a condition in which those who attain it may recognize that the life they lived in the past (in many respects) was not *really living*.

Paul tells these Christians, “**And you He made alive who were dead in trespasses and sins**” (Eph. 2:1, NKJV). Most translations supply the words “**He made alive**” (or their equivalent) putting them in italics to indicate that they are not present in the Greek. They are supplied to help English speakers understand a convention that was more suited to an-

cient Greek or Latin than it is to modern English. In these languages it was not uncommon for a writer to build suspense in setting the stage for something by waiting until the end of the thought to supply the verb. In the Greek it is not until verse five that Paul, through the Holy Spirit, offers the climax in his declaration that God **“made us alive”** (Eph. 2:5b).

Before this climax, Paul tells them what they used to be—**“you were dead in your trespasses and sins”** (Eph. 2:1, NASB). Is Paul speaking to those who had been raised from the dead by some miracle performed by the Lord or His apostles? Not necessarily. He describes a condition in which **“we all once conducted ourselves”** (Eph. 2:3a). Certainly not everyone in the church in Ephesus, nor Paul himself, had physically died and been resurrected. Paul twice describes this a being **“dead in trespasses”** (Eph. 2:1b, 5a). It was a condition **“according to the course of this world”** (Eph. 2:2a), conduct in accordance with **“the lusts of the flesh”** by which they sought to fulfill the **“desires of the flesh and of the mind”** (Eph. 2:3). The mind

and flesh of a dead corpse have no desires they seek to fulfill. Paul is not talking about physical death.

We note, however, that Paul describes a condition that most in the world would think of as *really living!* Don't we all want to do whatever our flesh desires? Don't all of us want to have whatever makes our heart and mind feel fulfilled? Wouldn't most look at such a condition and exclaim—“now that's living”? Paul, however, asserts the extraordinary claim that those who pursued such a course were in fact *dead!* Now Paul was not a mad man, as Festus would claim (Acts 26:24-25). Paul was addressing a spiritual condition. In sin they had not followed God's will—they lived as “sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2c). This course fulfilled the will of Satan, **“the prince of the power of the air”** (Eph. 2:2b). All who sin submit their will to the spirit and character of the devil—not through some possession or subversion of freewill, but by following his example (cf. John 8:44). This makes us **“by nature, children of wrath”** (Eph. 2:3b). Not as if to say “we couldn't help it,” or “our nature was incapable of any other course.” In Scripture, conduct that becomes habitual through repeated practice and custom can be said to be **“nature”** (cf. 1 Cor. 11:14). The fact is that just as Adam and Eve were promised death should they violate the command of God (Gen. 2:17), all human beings (having attained an accountable state) who sin against God die spiritually. Like Adam and Eve they die in the fact that they are separated from God (cf. Isa. 59:2). In such a condition we are **“children of wrath”** (Eph. 2:3c). The Psalmist says, **“God is angry with the wicked every day”** (Ps. 7:11b, NKJV). We may think we are alive, but the Holy Spirit tells us through the apostle, “now that's *not* living!”

So how can a dead man live? When we use the expression, “now that's living!” we are not saying that all others do not really exist. We are elevating a condition (usually on the basis of very superficial things) and declaring it to be superior. Paul does something much like this, but not as a result of his own superficial judgments. The Christians in Ephesus had changed from *dead men* (who thought they were alive) to *living souls* (who could now know they were truly alive) because of God's judgment of things. Before the climax of verse five, Paul tells us something about God. He is the subject of the verb **“He made us alive”** (Eph. 2:5b), but who is He? He is one who **“is rich in mercy”** (Eph. 2:4b). We were dead.

We deserved punishment. So, *how can a dead man live?*—**“Because of His great love with which He loved us”** (Eph. 2:4c).

A fundamental assertion of the New Testament is the claim that **“God is love”** (1 John 4:8, 16). In Paul’s words to the Ephesians, one might struggle to fully grasp this. He has told them that God viewed them (while living in the flesh) as spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1, 5). He has told them that in such a state God was angry with them, accounting them as **“children of wrath”** (Eph. 2:3). Can an angry God be said to be one who “is love”? Absolutely! Our world has skewed its concept of love to imagine that love means that the one who loves another is dispassionate with regard to the behavior of the object of his or her love. The loving father is right to be moved to anger when someone acts to harm his child. The loving mother feels outrage when her son or daughter is hurt. What should they feel when that child or daughter acts to harm *themselves*? Do parents have no right to feel anger when the guidance they have offered for the good of their children is rejected? The anger of God towards our sin is in no way incompatible with the beautiful definition of His character that **“God is love.”**

The Christian is **“made alive”** (Eph. 2:1, NKJV). It is a mistake to see this as only a future condition. Paul told the Ephesians God, **“made”** (past tense) **“us alive together with Christ”** (Eph. 2:5b). He has **“raised”** (past tense) **“us up together”** and even **“made”** (past tense) **“us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus”** (Eph. 2:6). This is not just talking about what will happen in the age to come. The next verse addresses that. He did these things, **“that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus”** (Eph. 2:7). What He has already done will demonstrate in the ages to come His loving gracious nature. Now the Christian enjoys a renewed fellowship with God. When did this begin? Paul told the Christians in Rome that in baptism the one who turns to Christ is **“buried with Him through baptism”** so that just as Jesus was **“raised from the dead”** the disciple of Christ might **“walk**

in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). In baptism one *is buried with Christ*. In baptism then, is when one is **“raised up together with Him”** (Eph. 2:6).

Some reject that baptism is the point at which one is **“raised up together with Him,”** because they miss the point Paul makes in describing how the Ephesians were **“made alive.”** Paul twice asserts, **“by grace you have been saved”** (Eph. 2:5b, 8a). The second time he makes this assertion he adds **“through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast”** (Eph. 2:8b-9). How has God *saved by grace*? Paul told the Romans that the gospel message is **“the power of God unto salvation”** (Rom. 1:16). His assertion to the Ephesians **“by grace you have been saved”** cannot mean *by grace alone!* How then could the gospel be **“the power of God unto salvation”**? To the Ephesians he asserts it is **“by grace through faith”** (Eph. 2:8b). Does that mean *by faith alone*? James said demons **“believe—and tremble”** (Jas. 2:19), yet demons are not saved (cf. Matt. 25:41). We must note that Paul says this change from death to life was

“not of yourselves” (Eph. 2:8c) even clarifying **“not of works”** (Eph. 2:9a). What *works* has Paul mentioned in our text prior to this? He has mentioned **“trespasses and sins”** (Eph. 2:1), walking **“according to the course of the world”** (Eph. 2:2), and conduct governed by **“the lusts of the flesh”** (Eph. 2:3). Did any of these works save us? No, when we did these things, we may have thought we were alive but we were really dead. The love that God has shown in Christ offered life *in spite of* these works—this was God’s grace. This was **“His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus”** (Eph. 2:7b).

Are *sinful works* Paul’s only focus? He told Titus **“the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward men appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us”** (Titus 3:4-5a). No good works moved God to send Jesus to die. One can-

not do enough good deeds to forgive a single sin, but does this mean that man does nothing to accept God’s grace? Paul told the Ephesians they were saved **“by grace through faith”** (Eph. 2:8b), but he told Titus he saved us **“through the washing of regeneration”** (Titus 3:5b)—a reference to baptism. Peter said, **“baptism now saves you”** explaining that this is **“through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”** (1 Pet. 3:21, NASB). To say that salvation is by *faith alone* ignores that Jesus said that faith is a **“work”** (see John 6:29). To reject baptism’s role in God’s grace, as if it is a work *of ourselves*, is to miss its purpose in the gospel plan of salvation. The mercy of a loving God in Christ Jesus has called us to **“obey the gospel”** (2 Thess. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:17).

Souls **“dead in trespasses and sins”** (Eph. 2:1) have nothing of which they can boast (Eph. 2:9b). But in accepting the grace of God, those reborn in Christ become **“His workmanship”** (Eph. 2:10a). The lifeless creature owes everything to its creator. The formerly dead child of God is one **“created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”** (Eph. 2:10b). To imagine that being saved by grace means we have no duty to obey denies the very purpose for which a Christian is saved in the first place. We were **“created in Christ Jesus for good works.”** To live in sin is to practice what killed us in the first place. Only in faithful obedience can it be truly said of us, “now that’s living.”



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4700 Andrews Ave.
Amarillo TX 79106
806-352-2809
www.olsenpark.com