

ephesians

LIVING IN SYNC WITH REALITY

PART FOUR
ALIVE!



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LIVING IN SYNC WITH REALITY

Part Four: *Alive!*

By Pastor David Fields

Ephesians 2:1-10

I. The Bad News

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in 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.” – **Ephesians 2:1-2**

- We should not over-read this text, meaning – this isn’t Paul giving us all he thinks about humanity. Paul has a fully orbited, Jewish understanding of the beauty of humanity who are made in the image of God and capable of beautiful and loving things. This isn’t Paul’s entire “anthropology” – not his full theology of a human.
- But we can’t downplay either. We might think, “Surely, it can’t be as bad as Paul says. He’s being a bit overdramatic.” And so, we’ll tend to *downplay* the significance of what he says of life apart from God.

Living in sync with reality means being realistic about all of life – even the parts we’d rather not pay attention to.

The one part of the Gospel story that is empirically verifiable is the fact of human sinfulness. It’s verifiable because...just open the news.

“We were dead. And we could not make ourselves alive. Try as we might, nothing gives us the life for which we were originally created. “You were dead.” “We were dead.” All of us...dead. Doing our jobs, buying, and selling, relating to people. But, at the core, dead.”

– Darrell Johnson

“All of us lived among them [the “disobedient”] at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh [meaning, the dark impulses of our hearts when we are bent in on ourselves] and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.” –

Ephesians 2:3

God’s wrath: “A strong and settled opposition to all that is evil arising out of God’s very nature.”

– Leon Morris

“There are two kinds of people in the world: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, ‘Thy will be done!’

– C.S. Lewis

II. The Good News

In the Greek text of Ephesians 2:4, two words are “fronted” in the sentence – a way of giving emphasis – like putting an exclamation point behind it. δὲ θεός “But God...”

Swiss theologian, Karl Barth, said something like: “The most important word in the whole Bible is ‘But.’”

“But God” could be, as Darrell Johnson suggests, “the title for the whole Bible, stamped on the cover. From the beginning of the Great Story, all through the middle, and at the end: ‘But God.’”

– Darrell Johnson

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. – **Ephesians 2:4-7**

Made alive. Saved. Seated. Now *that’s* good news! For all the bad news *that was true of us*, there is a new reality. This reality springs from the very heart of God: “Because of his great love for us.”

There is a tension between who we now are and how we sometimes act. But we need to remember who we are. That’s what Paul is trying to do through this section.

We have to learn how to walk in a new way – to “work out” what our salvation means – sometimes through our failures and foibles. But this is the key: the failures don’t define you. They don’t change who you are.

“I’m not the man I should be. Nor am I the man, with Christ’s help, I someday will be. But thank God I’m not the man I used to be.”

– Martin Luther King Jr.

III. The Good Life

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do [walk in - *peripaeeto*]. – **Ephesians 2:8-10**

1) Faith

“By grace you have been saved, *through* faith.”

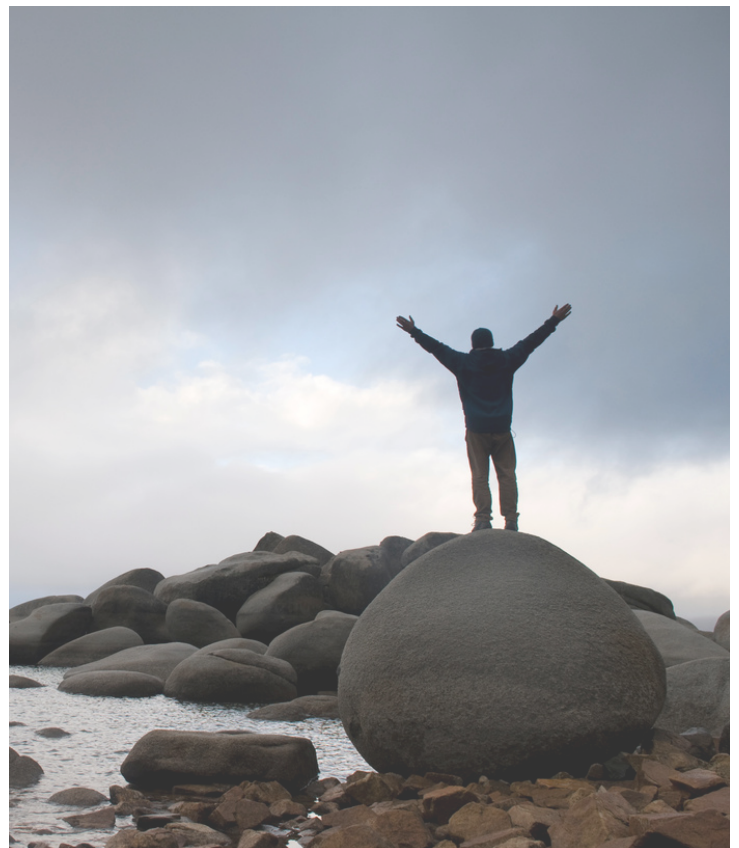
Faith does have “content.” The Gospel is “news”; is something we need to know. There are things we that must “think about.”

The word for “faith” is “*pistis*” and it also means “to trust.”

Faith is Relational. It’s not just relying on a set of ideas, but relating, in love, to a person.

Faith is Adhesive. Paul’s language of being “in Christ” reminds us that faith in Jesus binds us to him. We are in “union” with him forever.

Faith is Embodied. Again, Christian faith isn’t just something you do with your mind, but with your feet... your “walking.” Yes, with your mind, and your feet... and your hands, and your money, and your words, and your time.





2) No Place for Boasting

Paul repeats that we are “saved by grace”. He’s dealing with the human propensity toward “boasting,” to a sense of pride, of superiority, of self-righteousness.

Jesus tells this parable of two men. The first, a Pharisee prays in the Temple:

“God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”— **Luke 18:9-14**

When I’m honest about how gracious God has been with me, I know that I have no basis for superiority over anyone. This enables me to treat people, well, a lot like God treated me. And those kind of people – those who know that our new standing with God is total gift – these are the kind of people who are able to participate in God’s good work.

3) Learning to Walk

“For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to [*peripaeto*] walk in.— **Ephesians 2:10**

This last word is the same word Paul used in 2:1: “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to [*peripateo*] to walk in when you followed the ways of this world...”

As we are brought to life in Jesus, we are a “new creation”, and we take on a whole new way of walking in the world. We are “created in Christ Jesus” for good works.

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LIVING IN SYNC WITH REALITY DISCUSSION

Open Up

What was one of the best gifts you received as a child?
What made it so special to you?

Dig In

1. Read Ephesians 2:1-3. Why might we be tempted to downplay this bad news?

2. How might remembering where we came from shift how we think about where we are now – through God's loving actions in Christ?

3. Read Ephesians 2:4-7. What is so good about the Good News? In your view, is it sweeter in light of the bad news? Why or why not?

Live It

4. Read Ephesians 2:8-10. In what ways might we still be tempted to feel superior (and thus 'boast') in our relation to others in our world?

5. How might Paul's words here be a corrective for that posture of superiority or self-righteousness?

6. Consider what it means to be God's "handiwork" and created in Christ Jesus "to do good works" which God planned for us to "walk in." What "good works" might God be calling you to step more fully into? What steps could you take this week to realize that?

Prayer

Take time to give thanks for God's work of giving you new life. Pray for any specific requests from your group. Ask God to give you the courage to step into the good works he has prepared for you.