

Sermon Notes, May 28, 2017

The Christian Lifestyle: Alive in Christ, Ephesians 2:1-10

Today we're looking at the reality of an ongoing ethic, not a type of silver-bullet mentality, but actually an ongoing ethic. We're driving a stake into the ground. The stake we need to drive into the ground; it's that the Christian life is first a life made alive in Christ, then it is a life that is ongoing in its ethics of renouncing what is old, rerooting in what is new, and perpetually asking God for help.

The Christian life is a life of ongoing ethic. It is a life that, as we have said, relies on the Holy Spirit because it is the Spirit that renews us. It is first his work and it is decisively his work. We are radically dependent on him. Our efforts follow his initiatives and enablings. It is lived a day at a time.

Ephesians 2:1: "As for you, *you were* dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live." "You were..." Is that past tense or present or future? This is speaking to what we were, not what we are. I'm talking to Christians here. We were. In these first four verses, he's talking about what we were. It says that every one of us was dead in our trespasses and sins and we followed in the way of the world. Do you want to know what it's like to be dead in your trespasses and sins, to follow in the way of this world?

Because the things of God and the reality of his work in Christ are not real to someone spiritually dead, to be dead in your sins is to just perpetually believe that what you need that is going to finally satisfy you is simply to work harder at trying to be good and then God might just be pleased with you. At some point, you have to wake up to the reality that this is a lie. If you just work harder and think you can be your own savior and that is going to make you happy with you, then you're dead in your trespasses and sins, then you're following the course of this world.

Here's another way to be dead in our sins. It's the path of religion. It's an incessant pursuit of evening out the scales so that we might put God in our debt. There are no scales, so a life spent in active busy-ness to try to tip the scales in our favor that don't exist is a life wasted.

Another way. It's the need that you have to have others validate you. If you need others to give you worth, then you're never going to let anyone know you. All your relationships are going to be shallow, because to be fully known is to have our weaknesses shown. This kind of life completely enslaves us.

Another way to be dead in sins. Follow the path of the world. You just, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow, we die." It's what dead people do. It means to follow the path of this world, to expect the world and all it has to offer to give your life meaning and happiness and security and self-satisfaction.

If external religion is how you're working out how the world works, then you force yourself into perpetually comparing where you are spiritually with others. Then you have yourself a competition. That is certainly not what God has for you in Christ.

Then Paul says something that is wildly unpopular. He says we were by our nature objects of God's wrath. This is the consequence of being sinners. It is God's judgment against sin. The wrath of God is most often seen in the Bible as God allowing men to pursue the very thing they want to pursue that will kill them, all the while patiently waiting for them to realize it's a dead end. And then we come to this: But God. Let's not get past "but God." It's the essence of the gospel. The essence of the gospel is God has done something that can undo everything else. He has done what? He has made us alive. He has done it why? Out of his great love and rich mercy. This is the new birth. He has made us alive. How? Through union with Christ. We're now together with Christ. Why? Out of his great love and mercy.

His gracious love transforms us. What does that mean? Does it mean all those things we struggle with roll up now? Perfectly? Absolutely not. First, we need to be reconciled to our Father, because being reconciled to our Creator begins to uproot those things and the fruit they bear. Because of that we have roots that go deep; roots of guilt and shame, of fear and anxiety, and then the fruit of those roots bear in all sorts of different ways: anger, abuse, self-hate, hate of others. We have been made alive with Christ, which means those roots are being pulled up. You're struggling with fear, anxiety, guilt, shame, anger? If you are a Christian, your loving heavenly Father is pulling upon the roots. They get pulled up by being exposed. Do you want to kill a root? Drag it into the sunlight. It's God's grace at work.

So, we ask, "God, why don't you just cut off the fruit and leave me alone?" He loves you too much. He's not going to play it that way. For you to just have the fruit of sin removed while the plant remains is no good for you and brings no glory to God. The Holy Spirit of God has his hands around the base of that those things, and with all his power that exists is uprooting those things that derail and destroy you.

God is at work in you. You are his handiwork, his workmanship. Created in Christ Jesus to do good works. Don't you see? Because of his great mercy and because of his great love, he has made us alive. Are you alive or are you just a moralist, engaged in external religion, just trying harder and harder to be good? Or are you alive? Dear friends, you were. Now you are. He made us alive with Christ.