

Ephesians
This Is Your Life (Part 6)
Ephesians 2:1-10
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Well, if you haven't noticed, we find ourselves in the middle of a country awash in politics. Turn on the television, pick up the newspaper, drive down the street and see the barrage of signs and billboards announcing all the candidates who stand for you to choose. So I thought in light of that fact, in light of the fact that we cannot ignore that reality, that today I would do something a little different, and just talk about who you should vote for for president. Just kidding. Just wanted to see if you were awake and I had your attention.

Seriously however, with the campaign for the presidency, we've all heard a lot of talk about change, and the need for change. And as I thought about that, and I thought about the passage that we come to today, I realized that I think the concept of change resonates with people because there is often a sense in the heart of man that things are not the way they ought to be. It seems that really nothing is ultimately the way it ought to be. And therefore, there is a deep-seated human desire for meaningful, lasting change at every level. Whether you're talking about the government, or whether you think that you need to see a change in others. We look around, the people around us, and we see the need for change. It reminds me, this week I read the story of a man from the mountains of Tennessee who found himself in a large city standing in front of an elevator. And it was the first time that he'd ever seen an elevator, and he really wasn't quite sure what it was supposed to do. So he stood there and watched with some degree of fascination as this older woman hobbled onto the elevator and the doors closed. And a couple of minutes later as he stood there and watched, the doors opened again, and to his amazement, a young attractive woman exited the elevator. So this man of the mountains leaned over and quietly whispered to his youngest son, 'Billy, go get your mother.'

We see the need for change in others. But we not only see the need for change in others, many people if they're honest with themselves eventually come to see the need for change in themselves. We realize that we are clearly not what God intended human beings to be. Life is not the way it ought to be. We are not the way we should be, but then comes the frightening realization that we do not have the capacity to change ourselves. We do not have the capacity to change ourselves at the deepest levels of our heart. We can change our appearance. We can change some of our habits. We can change some of the externals, but what we can't do is change ourselves where it matters most – at the level of the heart. We can't, to use the image Jesus used with Nicodemus, and Nicodemus back to Christ, we cannot go back into our mother's wombs and start all over again. And even if we could, we have this sort of suspicion that we would make the

same mess all over again. That is when God steps in. And He does what we could never do. He changes us, and He changes us not at the external, exterior level, but He changes us at the deepest levels of our hearts. Paul describes that dramatic change that has happened to some of us who sit here in this room this morning in Ephesians 2. Let me read this passage again for you as we move ahead today into the second section. Ephesians 2:1:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

That wonderful passage describes the dramatic change that God has produced in the hearts of every Christian. It's how He brought us out of spiritual death into life. It's how He rescued us, and it was entirely the work of God from beginning to end. Paul develops and explains this sort of dramatic change that has occurred in our lives in three very simple movements or expressions as he goes through this passage. We looked at great length at the first three verses, where we learned what we were. Paul takes us back and reminds us of how desperate our real condition and situation was. Last week we began to look at the second great part of this paragraph in verses 4 through 6 – what God did. And this second section begins with what John Stott calls a mighty adversative. *But God!* Last week we took the time, sort of paused in our study of this great chapter, to look at the powerful lessons contained in those two little words *but God*.

Today, however, we come to the heart of this paragraph. We come to what God did in our salvation. But before Paul gets to the main verbs that mark out the change God has produced in us, he first explains the catalysts. In chemistry a catalyst is a substance that initiates or accelerates a chemical reaction. In everyday language, we use the word *catalyst* to describe something that causes an important event to happen. So what were

the catalysts that prompted God to act on our behalf? What prompted Him to effect our rescue? Well, Paul tells us primarily it was God's own character. Notice verse 4 says "But God, being." It was because of the character of God that He moved to act. It was because of what is true about Him that He moved to rescue us. But Paul doesn't leave it general. Notice he gets very specific about what these catalysts were. There are several of them.

The first catalyst is God's mercy. "But God, being rich in mercy." Now there are two very similar biblical words that people often confuse. They're the words *grace* and *mercy*. Let me see if I can differentiate them for you because they both appear in this passage. *Grace* is God's goodness to those who deserve only His punishment. Grace is when God does good to those who deserve exactly the opposite. That's grace. You'll notice down in verse 5 there's a parenthetical statement in which he says "by grace you have been saved." You see, grace, too, stands behind God acting on our behalf. But I'm going to wait to look at grace in more detail when Paul does down in verses 8-9. So for now, we'll move on from the word *grace* to the word *mercy*.

This other word *mercy*. If grace is God's goodness to those who deserve the punishment of God, then *mercy* is God's goodness directed at misery and distress. It is God's goodness to those who find themselves in misery and difficulty and trouble and distress. It's God's goodness directed at the misery of His creatures. God's disposition is to relieve the misery of His fallen creatures. Louis Berkhoff in his systematic theology defines mercy like this. He says it is "the goodness of God shown to those who are in misery or distress irrespective of their deserts." It's not that they deserve it, but God's great heart is moved. A.W.Tozer, in his excellent little book *The Knowledge of the Holy* defines mercy like this. "It is an infinite and inexhaustible energy within the divine nature which predisposes God to be actively compassionate." An infinite, inexhaustible energy within God that causes Him to look at people who are in trouble and difficulty, who are in the midst of misery, and to be moved to act because of what He sees.

God is always merciful. This is who He is. You go back to God's great self-revelation in Exodus 34. You remember when Moses said 'God, show me Your glory.' Proclaim Your character before me. And what does God say? 'I am compassionate and gracious.' The word *compassion* is a Hebrew synonym for mercy. That idea of pity to those that are in trouble, in difficulty. This is who God is. And He shows this attribute toward all of His creatures. In Psalm 145:9 it says "The Lord is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works." He even shows this mercy, this concern for those in misery, toward those who don't trust Him. This is our God. In Luke 6 Jesus says God "Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." He says God

shows mercy to wicked, ungrateful, evil men. He looks on those who find themselves in a desperate situation, and His heart is moved to respond.

Now obviously in the case of unbelievers His mercy involves only the needs of this life. But God especially shows mercy toward believers. How does that mercy express itself? Well, sometimes it expresses itself in deliverance from physically difficult circumstances, trials of various kinds. God looks at us in our trouble and our misery and His heart is moved and He acts to relieve it. In Philippians 2:27, Paul writes of one of his co-workers "indeed he was sick to the point of death, [*had an illness that almost took his life*] but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow." Sometimes God intervenes because His great heart is moved with our misery – for physical deliverance.

But for those whom God has chosen as His own, His mercy not only expresses itself in physical deliverance, but in eternal salvation from sin and its penalty. Paul, in 1 Timothy 1 as he recounts his own testimony, listen to how he describes it. He says:

...even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; ... Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience...

But it's not only true for Paul. It's true for you as well. If you're a Christian here this morning, part of the reason you're a Christian is because of God's mercy. Titus 3:5 says God "saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done...but according to His mercy." God looked at us in our misery of sin in the desperate situation in which we found ourselves, and His great heart was moved and He reached to save us. A. W. Tozer says, "when through the blood of the everlasting covenant we children of the shadows reach at last our home in the light, we shall have a thousand strings to our harps, but the sweetest may well be the one tuned to sound forth most perfectly the mercy of God." Listen, Christian, if you're here this morning and you're in Christ it's because there is something in God that was moved when He saw you in the misery of your sin, and He acted to rescue you.

The second catalyst that prompted God to act on our behalf, was not only His mercy, but also God's love. Notice verse 4 again. "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us..." Scripture makes it clear that love is part of God's unchanging character. Three times Scripture tells us that *God is* something. It tells us that God is light. It tells us that God is spirit. And in 1 John 4:8 the apostle John writes that God is love. What John is saying is that love is an essential attribute of God. When

you think of God do you think of love? That's what John says you should. It doesn't mean that God isn't also just and holy and all of those other things, but he means that when you think of God you are to think of Him as a person characterized by, known by, described by, love. So what does that mean? When we say God is love, what are we saying about God? Well, this is the wonderful Greek word *agape*, and we've talked about that before, but let me give you my definition. I think I've given it to you before. When you take all the biblical data and put it together you end up with a definition something like this. 'Love is the unselfish, self-sacrificing desire to seek the highest good of the cherished person, regardless of their worthiness or their response to it.' Let me give that to you again. Love is the unselfish, self-sacrificing desire to seek the highest good of the cherished person, regardless of their worthiness of it or their response to it. Think about that in reference to God for a moment. God sacrificially, unselfishly desires to seek your highest good regardless of whether you deserve it – you don't – and regardless of your response to it – initially your response was to be a rebel against Him. And yet, that is the love of God.

By the way, there are people I know who come to embrace God's sovereignty in salvation, and they begin to say that God doesn't love all men; that He only loves the elect. I have to disagree with that. I think the Scripture is absolutely clear that God loves all men. Let me give you just a couple of examples. In Matthew 5:43, Jesus says in the sermon on the mount. "Love your enemies." That's a command to us. Why? So that you may be sons of your Father. What's the clear implication? God loves His enemies. And in the same way that God loves His enemies, you are to love yours. In Mark 10:21 you remember the story of the rich young ruler. He comes to Christ and he says 'Lord, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' And Jesus says to him, well you know what the commandments are, and He recites them, and he says, well, keep the commandments and you'll have eternal life. Now Jesus wasn't saying a man could earn his salvation by keeping the commandments. Jesus was trying to show this young man that he had not kept the commandments. But unfortunately he misunderstood the commandments, and because he had kept them externally assumed that he had kept them. And his response was – well, all those have I kept from my youth up. What else do I need to do? And Jesus, to illustrate to him that in fact he had a greedy heart that showed he hadn't kept the commandments, said go sell everything you have and come and follow Me. Jesus put His finger on the one issue in this man's life that loomed the largest. And the Scripture says the young man went away sorrowing because he had much wealth. As far as we know, that young man never comes to faith in Jesus Christ. He walks away from Christ because he loved his money. And yet the text says, when he walks up to Christ, Jesus saw him and loved him. And of course, John 3:16. I'm familiar with all the arguments of those who would oppose my view and how they try to make this passage say other things, but it

clearly states "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." So God loves all men.

But God loves those whom He has chosen to be His own with a special, different love. Just one place that's illustrated is 1 John 3:1. The apostle John says "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us." Here's a love that distinguishes us from what He does for others. And what is it that He's shown us in this great love? "That we would be called children of God." The greatest demonstration of the love of God was sacrificing His Son to make rebels His children. This love that He had for us moved God to do more than merely make our salvation possible. It moved Him to actually rescue us. And this is throughout the Scripture. A couple of my favorites, Romans 5, you're familiar with. You probably memorized it if you've been a Christian any time at all. Romans 5:8 says "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." When our response to Him was not one of obedience, was not one of love, while we were still in the habit of sin and rebellion against Him, Christ died for us. That is in our place, as our substitute. God, in Christ, rescuing us, and the cost was His own Son.

In Titus 3 the apostle Paul makes this same point. Titus 3:4. He says "when the kindness of God our Savior and ... love for mankind appeared, He [rescued] us..." Listen, if you're here this morning and you're a Christian, it's because of the love of God. It's because God loved you and sought you out. It's because He sought your highest good. In 1 John 4 is probably the most famous passage of all, 1 John 4:10: "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and [as a result of that love He] sent His son [and He sent His Son for one particular purpose] to be the propitiation for our sins." That's a big word, but it's a wonderful word. Propitiation simply means the satisfaction of God's wrath. So God sent His own unique Son to be the satisfaction of His wrath that we deserved, because He loved us. It was God's love for us that caused Him to act in our rescue. Ephesians 2:4, God "because of His great love with which He loved us..." By the way I love the last part of that, "His great love with which He loved us." Not only is our God a God of love, but that seems kind of impersonal and distant, doesn't it? But Paul finishes verse 4 by making it very personal. "His great love with which He loved us." Let me reconstruct that dependent clause into an independent one to make it clearer. Here's what Paul says. God loved us with a great love. That's what it says. God loved us with a great love. It's very personal – us – individually. You, God knew you by name, and He sent His Son to die for you if you're in Christ, or if you're willing to come to Christ. Very personal. It's a great love, he says. I love what William Hendrickson, the great commentator, has to say about this. He says:

This love of God is so great that it defies all definition. We can speak of it as His intense concern for, deep personal interest in, warm attachment

to, and spontaneous tenderness toward His chosen ones, but all this is but to stammer. Those and only those who experience it are the ones who know what it is, though even they can never fully comprehend it. They know however, that it is unique, spontaneous, strong, sovereign, everlasting, and infinite.

That's the love of God. If you're a Christian – if you have repented of your sins and believed in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior – it's because God loved you with a great love.

And, by the way, He still does. Ephesians 5:1 says, we are God's loved children. What amazing love. C.S. Lewis described God's love like this. He said:

God, who needs nothing, loves into existence wholly superfluous creations in order that He may love and perfect them. He creates the universe, already foreseeing the buzzing cloud of flies about the cross, the flayed back pressed against the uneven stake, the nails driven through the nerves, the repeated torture of back and arms as it is time after time for breath's sake. Herein is love. This is the diagram of love Himself, the inventor of all loves.

You know what Lewis is saying? You want to know what the love of God is? God knew what it would cost Him when He made the world, and when He created you. He knew it would cost the punishment of His own unique Son and yet still He acted to make you, so that He could redeem you as His own.

There's a third catalyst. Not only God's mercy, not only God's love, but our condition. In the Greek text, verse 4 begins “God being rich in mercy.” Verse 5 begins “us being dead in our transgressions.” God being merciful and loving; us being dead. It's been a while since verse 1 so Paul repeats what he said in verse 1 as kind of a point of contrast. God acted in love and mercy because of who He is, and because we had no hope otherwise. We were dead and unable to help ourselves. What were the catalysts that prompted God to act? His character, His mercy, His love, His grace, and our dead helpless condition. Don't miss the point Paul is making. Listen carefully. You know what he's saying? He is saying that the change that has happened to us is unearned, undeserved and unmerited. Nothing prompted God to act, in us, except our terrible condition. The catalysts were in God. Those were the catalysts.

Now, as we think about what God did, let's look secondly at the change. The change itself. Let me remind you that verses 1-10 are one long Greek sentence. The subject of

the sentence is in verse 4 – God – and the three main verbs that follow tell us what God has done. Look at them. Verse 5: God has made us alive together with Christ. That's the first one. Number two is in verse 6: God has raised us up with Him. And the third verb, also in verse 6: God has seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Each of those verbs gives us a rich insight into what God has done.

Now, you've got to put on your thinking caps and stay with me because this is not light stuff. This is not shallow. This is not *have a wonderful relationship and better sex in your marriage*, and all of the stuff and trivia that's so much a part of the Christian community. But this is important. Remember, Paul was with these people for more than 18 months. And as he writes back to them, this is what's on his heart for them to understand. These are deep things, but they are obviously crucial to our understanding as Christians. So let's briefly look at each of these things God has done, together; these changes that He has wrought.

Verb number one, verse 5: He has *made us alive*. Back in verse 1 and again in verse 5 we were told that we were spiritually dead; unable to respond to God. And in a miracle of grace God gave us spiritual life. He made us alive. But the most important thing to notice is that with each of these verbs, it's in conjunction with our relationship to Jesus Christ. Notice this new spiritual life becomes ours only because of our connection to Jesus Christ. He has *made us alive* together with Christ. That's an interesting expression. This really takes us back to chapter 1. You remember, if you have a good memory, go back to chapter 1. We looked at what it means to be *in Christ*. Remember that constantly recurring phrase, *in Him; in Christ?* We learned when we went through that, we discovered, that *in Christ* means two things. It means that Christ is our representative. Anything Christ does, we get the credit for. We are in Him in the sense that He is our representative. And secondly, it means that at the moment of our salvation we come to be spiritually united to Christ. We're in Him as the branches are in the vine. There is, as it were, a spiritual umbilical cord running all the way from Christ in heaven down to our spiritual life. So keep both of those in mind. *In Christ* means that He is our representative. Whatever He does we get the credit for, and secondly we are spiritually united to Him so that His life actually flows to us and gives us spiritual life.

Now, in chapter 1, Paul made the point that every spiritual blessing we enjoy comes to us solely because of that relationship; because we are in Christ. And here again, Paul reminds us that even the fact that we have spiritual life is because of that connection. Now, this is going to seem odd to you, but stay with me. This is what Paul says in a number of his epistles. Paul says that when Christ died, because we were in Christ, because He was our representative, what happened to Him, we get credit for. When He died, we died. We died with Him. That means that when Christ died, the person that we

used to be died with Him. We died with Him to the curse of the law. We died with Him to the wrath of God. When Christ died I was in Him as my representative, dying with Him. And the reality of what happened when Christ died as my representative, is applied to me at the moment of salvation when I am spiritually united to Jesus Christ. My representative then; actually applied to me at the moment of salvation. My new spiritual life is connected to the new life Christ Himself received when He rose from the dead. I have been made alive with the life of Jesus Christ. He is the life. He is my life. He's the reason I have spiritual life. It's His life that pulses through you and me, if you're a Christian.

Theologians call this miracle of new life that has been given to us regeneration. To *regenerate* simply means to *impart life*. Listen to Robert Raymond in his systematic theology. He defines regeneration like this. Listen carefully. Again, I warned you, you need your thinking cap on. Stay with me. It's worth the effort. Robert Raymond says:

It is the subconscious [that is regeneration] is the subconscious implanting of the principle of a new spiritual life in the soul. It effects an instantaneous change in the whole man – intellectually, emotionally, and morally. And it enables the elect sinner to respond in repentance and faith to the proclamation of the gospel directed to his conscious understanding and will.

Regeneration is when God gives you life. When He implants in you a new principle of life – the very life of Christ – and you are then enabled to believe the gospel and to repent and to turn to God. Regeneration is a divine act of God through His Spirit. John 1:13 says you were born not of blood, not of the will of the flesh, not of your own will, but of God. It is an instantaneous act. It happens like that! At a moment in time. At one moment I'm spiritually dead, and the next moment I'm spiritually alive. How does God accomplish it? He accomplishes it through the instrument of His Word. He uses His Word to bring that life to us. 1 Peter 1:23: "for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable" but of imperishable seed. What is this imperishable seed that has brought this life to us? "Through the living and enduring word of God." You heard the Word preached. God, the Holy Spirit, in your life connected you to the life of Christ; gave you new life. And you were able then to repent and believe and respond to the gospel.

Now, to help this make more sense to us and to make it clearer, the Bible gives us three illustrations to help us understand this new life that's happened. The first illustration is the image of the resurrection. That's what we have here in Ephesians 2. It occurs again in Colossians 2. There's a dead body. There's no life. The life is gone, and God comes

along, and He raises that person from the dead. That's one picture of regeneration. There's a second picture. It's the picture of creation. 2 Corinthians 5:17 literally says "if anyone in Christ, a new creation." It's as if God re-creates us. Not only does He bring our dead hearts to life and give us spiritual life, but it's as if He remakes us. He creates us fresh. He creates us all over again. That's the picture. By the way, that's here in Ephesians 2 as well. Look down at verse 10. We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works.

So there's resurrection, there's creation, but the third image is the image of birth. This is the most familiar one. Back in the 70s and 80s Christians used to talk about people needing to be *born again*. That image comes from John 3 where Jesus is talking to Nicodemus. And he talks to Nicodemus because Nicodemus really believed he could, on his own, accomplish salvation. He had bought into first century Judaism, and he really thought that of his own efforts he could see the kingdom of God. And Christ lays this heavy pronouncement on him and says, listen, unless you are born again, unless you are born a second time, unless you are born from above, unless you experience birth and start life all over again, you have no hope. And what's Nicodemus' response? I can't do that. How can anyone go back a second time into his mother's womb? And Jesus said that's exactly right. In fact, let me tell you how hopeless your situation is. The Spirit has to bring that life, and the Spirit is like the wind. You can't command the wind; you can't control the wind; you can't see the wind. All you see is the effects. You know what He was telling Nicodemus? Your situation is utterly hopeless unless God brings you new life; unless He births you all over again. It's a powerful picture. If you're a Christian, what happened at the moment of your salvation was you were resurrected from the dead. God recreated you and made you a new person. And God gave you a second birth. A new start. That's regeneration. We are changed at every level. We have a new mind that can understand the things of God – 1 Corinthians 2:16. We have a new heart that can love God – Romans 5:5. We have a new will that longs to obey God – Romans 6. I love Charles Wesley's hymn as it recounts this wonderful reality of regeneration. *And Can It Be?* You remember the verse?

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and error's night.
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light.
My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth and followed Thee.

That's regeneration, and if you're in Christ, that's what's happened to you. God made us alive. That's just the first thing God did.

The second verb comes in verse 6. God has raised us up. Now, of course, God raised Christ physically. Back in Ephesians 1:20 he says this. God raised Christ from the dead. But when Christ was raised from the dead, when God raised Christ physically, at the same time He did that spiritually for believers. We're not talking about your future physical resurrection. That's a reality, but that's not what this passage is talking about. It's talking about a spiritual reality in the past. Remember, Christ was our representative. We were in Him. Whatever happened to Him we get credit for. So Christ died. He was buried, but He didn't stay buried. He rose from the dead. And in the mind of God, He raised us spiritually from the dead. When God raised Christ up physically from the dead, He raised us up spiritually. And then at the moment we believed, the benefit of being raised up spiritually with Christ was applied to us. God treated you, at the moment you believed, as if you had been raised with Christ.

You say, well, why does that matter? Well, let me show you. Turn to Romans 6. Paul here, in one of the most profound and important passages in all the New Testament, explains it. And we don't have long to deal with it, so I'm not going to take long, but I just want to give you the big picture. Here Paul tells us that the dominion, or rule, of sin in our lives is broken. Verse 2: we died to sin. This is the heart of his argument through these first verses of Romans 6. We died to sin. Verses 3-5 tell us that our death to sin was accomplished because of our spiritual union with Christ. In other words, because we were connected to Christ; because we were in Christ. We died with Christ and we died to sin. Verse 6: our death to sin involved the death of our old self. Look at verse 6. "...knowing this, that our old self [that is, our unregenerate self, the person you used to be before Christ] was crucified with [Christ]..." Remember, He was your representative. What happened to Him happened to you. When He died, you died. Your old self died "...in order that our body of sin [and that's just another way to say our old self] might be done away with." Our old self was done away with, or rendered powerless; inoperative. Sin is still present in us, but its power has been broken. Our union with Christ and the death of our unregenerate self brings new life.

How do we respond to that? What do we do with this information? Seems pretty deep. What do we do with it? Well, look at verse 11: "Even so, consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." The word *consider* basically means *believe it; have unreserved confidence that this really happened*. We're not playing mind games. God says this happened. And then, the second thing you're to do comes in verse 13. And "...present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members [present them] as instruments of righteousness to God." With an act of the will, say 'I believe that's true, and I'm going to act in light of it, and I'm going to present myself not as a

slave to sin anymore, but as a slave to God.' This is developed more, by the way, in verses 15-18. I just don't have time to go there.

Let me let Sinclair Ferguson speak to this. Listen carefully to what he writes in his excellent little book on the Christian life. He says:

By the new birth a radical break with sin takes place. Although the character of sin in the Christian is no different [from its character before he became a child of God], the status of sin has been dramatically changed. Formerly it reigned like a king. But now, though it's still present, it has been dethroned and no longer has a rightful claim upon our lives.

The rule and dominion of sin has been broken because we were raised to new life with Christ. And that brings a second result of this being raised to new life in Christ. And that is: not only is the dominion of sin broken, but we are given a new ability to obey God. God gives us the capacity. Look at verse 17.

But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin [watch this] you became slaves of righteousness.

So our slavery to sin was broken and God gives us a new ability to obey Him and to be slaves of righteousness. But remember, this freedom from the slavery and dominion of sin is not the end of your war with sin. It's only the beginning. You will battle it all your life. But when we were raised up with Christ a radical change occurred.

So what do we do with the sin we still have? You say, boy, that sounds wonderful, but I look at my life and it doesn't look exactly like that. Again, listen to Sinclair Ferguson.

The great mistake many of us make is to look only at our sin and failure, and then ask, a little despairingly, what can I do? But our need is not to do. It is first of all to understand what God has done. To see that what He has made us through His Son is a man or a woman who has died with Christ to sin's dominion, and has been raised with Christ to new life. I am not what I thought I was, nor what I once was. I am not an ugly duckling Christian. I am a child of God.

He raised us up with Christ to new life.

The third verb comes in verse 6. He has *seated us* with Him together in the heavenlies. After His resurrection, of course, Christ ascended into heaven; took His seat at the right hand of God. This *in the heavenlies* simply refers as we learned in chapter 1 to the realm of heaven. So here's what Paul is saying. Listen carefully. Paul is amazingly saying that we were not only connected to Christ in His death, not only connected to Him in His burial, not only connected to Him in His resurrection, but in the mind of God we were also connected to Christ in His ascension and exaltation. Something has happened. We now are seated with Christ in heaven. You say, well, I feel a whole lot like I'm seated here in Dallas. Listen carefully to what Paul is saying. This is true. This has happened to you. This isn't a mind game. Christ is your representative. Whatever He does you get the credit for. After He was raised to new life, He ascended and He's now sitting at God's right hand. While you're sitting here in Dallas, in the mind of God it is as if you were seated with Christ in heaven. When Christ ascended physically, it's as if we ascended with Him spiritually, and today we sit with Him on His throne.

What are the ramifications of this? Well, before this dramatic change we lived here in the world as citizens of the world, in lockstep with everything that happens here in the world. But now we belong already to a different kingdom. The world doesn't enslave us any longer. And just as Christ is now exalted to a position of power and authority over the evil powers around Him, so do we. We are seated with Christ in His throne. We no longer belong to this world. We belong to the kingdom of God. We are no longer in the kingdom of Satan. We are in the kingdom of God. We are no longer under the power of Satan, under the prince of the power of the air. We are under the power of the Holy Spirit. As Lloyd-Jones says, we already know something of the life of heaven, even in this world. How should this truth affect us? It seems ethereal and unreal. How should it affect us? Look at Colossians 3. Very practical. Colossians 3:1:

...if you have been raised with Christ [and we have], keep seeking the things above, where Christ is [where you have been seated with Him], at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth.

Stop thinking like an earthling. Stop thinking like you belong here. You don't belong here. In the mind of God it's as if you are already seated with Christ in heaven. So stop thinking about all the stuff. And instead think about the things of heaven. You say, well, does that mean like streets of gold and you know, gates of pearl? No! That means what's in the Scripture. Think God's thoughts. Think on heavenly things. Don't occupy yourself with all the stuff. You don't belong here any more. Don't keep in step with the world like you used to. You've got a new kingdom. You belong somewhere else.

What a dramatic change God has accomplished for us. Instead of our being spiritually dead, God has united us to Christ and given us new spiritual life. Instead of slavery to sin, to our lusts as the first three verses describe, God has broken that power by raising us with Christ and giving us the power to live a new life of obedience. Instead of our being tied to this world and walking according to its course and being under the authority of the prince of the power of the air, God has put us into His kingdom and exalted us above our enemies – even to the throne of God Himself. That's the change.

Let me ask you this morning. Are you spiritually alive? Are you aware that spiritual life is in you, coursing through your veins, changing you, working in you? You see, where there is life there is self-awareness. There is evidence of life. Do you see the evidence? Do you see the results? Even though you still struggle with sin, do you sense that you are no longer under its power like you used to be? Do you now have the ability to obey God? Do you sense that you don't belong here in this world? That heaven, in a sense, is already your home, and you look forward to being there with the righteous, and with Christ, with God? If you're truly a Christian, then those things will be true to some degree. What a dramatic change God has produced in us by His grace. Let's pray together.

Our Father, these things are difficult and challenging for us to grasp, and yet we know they're important. We know that Paul labored under the inspiration of your Spirit to make them clear to us. And Father, we thank you that while we cannot in and of ourselves grasp these things, that we can pray, even as You taught us in chapter 1, that by Your Spirit You would grant us illumination. Lord, open our minds to get it. Open our minds to see. Help us to think and meditate on these things. Help us to set our minds on these truths that matter so much. Father, I pray that You would help us to give You thanks for Your mercy, for Your love, for Your grace, which were behind this change. And Father, help us to come to grips with and understand what it means that You made us alive together with Christ, that you raised us up with Him, and that You have seated us together with Him in the heavenlies. Father, thank You for the connection You have established between us and Christ. We are in Him. He is our representative and through Him we get our life. We thank You and praise You in His name. Amen.