

But God...

Have you ever heard something like this? Or maybe you've even thought it yourself: "I'm not sure about Christianity. I don't fully understand it. It seems kind of complicated. It seems like something for a bygone era. I don't get the whole point of it. I don't really see the need for it." Some people who feel this way occasionally show up in church, but don't feel a need to attend regularly. Other don't go to church at all because they don't see the need or the relevance of what goes on there.

Today, I hope to address this. Before us today are some of the most important words in all of Scripture. In a clear, concise, complete form, a man named Paul explains for us the most important spiritual truths that every human being needs to know and believe.

Paul was the first missionary of the Christian church. He spread the good news about Jesus to places far and wide. He went into different countries with different cultures, with different priorities, different priorities and different worldviews. But he preached to them a message that is universally needed by everyone on the planet. It's what God wants us to know about our dangerous situation, and his solution for our dangerous situation.

So let me start by just giving you the outline of what we're about to read. The outline is this: "You were... But God... You have been... so you are..."

You were...

2 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed [walked according to] 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 flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

Spiritual death. You were dead in your transgressions and sins. A transgression is falling off the path... to walk where you're not supposed to walk (where it's not *safe* to walk.) There is a path of life that God has given us, but

You were dead in your sins. Sin: Missing the mark. God shows you the target he expects all people to hit. It is perfection. Every time we miss being perfect, we sin. We miss the mark. Our transgressions and sins are the proof and evidence that we are spiritually dead.

Another evidence of our spiritual death is that people naturally walking according to the ways of this world. If you throw a piece of dead wood into a river, it goes with the flow. The way or flow of this world is not God's way... it is sin. So it's the way you will flow if you do nothing. It is the Spirit of this age. Dead in God's world but alive in this one. The flow of this world is humanism, materialism, sex, self-esteem, a hunger for power, and the false religion of works. People naturally walk according to the ways of this world. Walking with God is life. Walking opposed to God is death.

Walking according to Satan (the ruler of the kingdom of the air. That term is a little hard to interpret. I think the best way to understand it is this: Satan and the other fallen angels were cast out of heaven, so he has no power in the kingdom of heaven. Yet he also does not have flesh and blood and so does not strictly speaking inhabit the earth. So Kingdom of the air would be that part metaphorically speaking “above” the earth but below heaven. So he is not in the heavenly realm, but he is in the spirit realm – the ruler of the kingdom of the air. Other titles: god of this age. Prince of this world. Even though he doesn’t physically inhabit the earth, he does spiritually influence it.)

Our natural way is to walk according to world and Satan, living selfishly fulfilling our own desires, opposing God and his will. That is the walk of death.

You are dead to God. You cannot respond to God because you are spiritually dead.

ILLUSTRATION: Mother crying over the body of her dead teenage son. She was talking to him, questioning him, hugging him. But no response. Her love poured out stirred no response... because he was dead. We too by nature are dead. God’s love for those dead in sin is no less than his love to us. But because they are dead there is NO response to it.

ILLUSTRATION: In pop culture today, zombies are a very dominant theme. Many movies and TV shows speak of this zombie apocalypse where bodies are animated and walking around, yet they are dead and mindless. They aren’t useful or beneficial in any way. But neither are they harmless. Just the opposite, they seek to devour everything in their path.

This is how God describes human beings by nature. Zombies. The living dead. Apart from God, people are of no use or benefit to God and his kingdom. Yet neither are such people harmless. They are still animated. They still do things. But all they do is destructive to God and his kingdom. They only devour, only kill, only destroy. I’m talking spiritually. They do not know God or his love in Christ. Denying or ignorant of his Son, they can only oppose God.

And then it says: that by nature, people are **deserving of wrath**. This is where it all ends up. Those who are spiritually, doing what God hates, opposing God’s will, living for self are subject to the wrath and anger of the Almighty God. And that, friends is terrifying!

Do you see why we’re all in trouble? This is not a message of a bygone era. It is a contemporary message deeply needed by you and every other person on the planet! This is not a message that’s for occasional thought and use. But it’s needed daily... constantly! And this isn’t complicated. It’s quite simple: By nature, you were (and if you don’t know Christ, still are!) dead. At odds with God. Disobedient. Walking with the world and with Satan. Destined for eternal separation from God and eternal destruction.

Well, so far we’ve heard a message that’s relevant and contemporary... but it’s horribly disheartening and discouraging. We better continue. And two words summarize this next section:

But God... God did something about this. Listen:

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.

God did something about our condition. He did it why? Because of his love. Because he is rich in mercy. It’s not because God saw some good in the walking dead. It’s not because God saw the spiritual zombies beginning to be useful or beneficial in his kingdom. He did something for them only because of his love and his mercy.

What did he do? He made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions. So there is a cure for the spiritual zombie apocalypse of the living dead. It is God acting for us. It is God making us alive in Christ Jesus.

How he made us alive in Christ? That which makes us spiritually dead had to be cured... it had to be eradicated from us. And so he sent his Son. Jesus was not affected by this spiritual death because he did not sin. Conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, he was God in human flesh and without sin. And he remained that way his whole life, even though he was tempted in every way just as we are. And then he took our affliction of sin upon himself and took it down the only way it could be: through death... even death on a cross. He suffered under God's wrath for us and in our place. He died and was buried because of our sin. And so there could be no doubt about his victory, he rose on the third day. He became alive again so we can become alive again in him! Trusting in Christ, his life becomes your life. You are no longer the living dead. You are alive now and will live with him forever in heaven.

To this all, someone might object: "Well, I don't see a difference. As I see people walking by on the street, I can't pick out the Christians. And it appears Christians and unbelievers all die at about the same rate. This objection is handled in the next verses: **⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,** [So you don't see it with your eyes, but is real. The person who has received life from God has already been raised up with Christ and is already seated with him in the heavenly realms. The new life is a spiritual reality even though we don't see the physical reality of it. But one day we will: **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.** We will see this new life one day with our own eyes. But not until this sinful world has passed, the final judgment will take place, and then the life which Christ has already given will be seen clearly and outwardly and evidently as we begin our eternal life in his eternal presence.

So, **you were** dead, lost and under God's wrath. **But God...** gave you life through the Lord Jesus Christ.

So you have been...saved.

⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast.

The walking dead do nothing to contribute toward their salvation. God does it all by grace, not by works. It's not your choice, it's God's choice. Not your works, but God's work. Not your performance, but Christ's performance. It's not your track record, but Christ's track record. It's not your love, but God's love.

And this is all yours **by faith**, God connected you to Christ. Now all that is his flows to you. His perfect life. His death for sin. His burial. His resurrection. His rescue. All flow to you through this connection you have to him which is faith... a connection God himself established when the Holy Spirit created faith in you through the Word and Sacraments.

You were... but God... So you have been... which means you are...
¹⁰For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

You were created by God, but sin meant you were dead and unable to do a thing that please God. So God created you a second time in Christ Jesus. Now the newly created you can indeed do good works which God finds pleasing... and even those good works are prepared by God.

So we no longer walk according to the world or according to Satan. We walk according to the Spirit of God, and that is true life. It's a life of good works. It's a life lived in harmony with the Creator. It's real life. Meaningful life. Joyful life.

So what's Christianity all about? Is it a belief system from a bygone era? Is it irrelevant and distant from our daily lives? Not at all! In this age like in every other, people are born dead in sin... completely oblivious to God's will, God's ways and God's love. Conscience testifies that we've messed up. Everyone must deal with their guilt. Every person on the planet feels the tension of not living up to who they want to be. Everyone has this notion of having not lived up to a higher standard. Everyone is searching for the meaning of life. Everyone seeks the truth.

Friends, you have it. You heard it today. You have discovered what your heart yearns for. You have discovered today the life changing, "But God..." "But God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life." God loved. God gave. God saved. You have been saved. And so you are God's workmanship... God's masterpiece... God instrument here on earth to declare and live out his love for the world in your daily life.

You know people who desperately need this this truth. Share it with them. Give it to them. Show them the spiritual death that is so real. Don't soften the fact of God's wrath over sin. Where you see a worried look, where you hear repentance, a terror over sin and a turning from it, you have the honor and privilege to tell them "But God..." He made us alive in Christ. His life, death and resurrection give us life and salvation. By grace you are saved through faith.

Live this good news daily. Do the good works God has prepared for you daily. Share this good news daily. What could be more relevant to daily life than this? Amen.