

Series: God Saves #1430

**Title: Romans 8.29b; Romans 5; Ephesians 2
Spiritually Dead**

Thank you for joining me today from wherever you are and by however you listen as we meet together coast-to-coast here in the United States and all the way around the world. Yesterday we talked about regeneration. Do you remember that? Regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit in creating new life in the sinner, by which act the sinner repents of sin and believes in Christ. Regeneration is a great word that we can use to summarize what it means to be born again. And that fits with Jesus' words to Nicodemus that he must be born again. We read those words in John chapter 3.

Friends, God regenerates us. He makes us spiritually alive. He gives us life, and then we have the moral ability to choose Christ. If God does not regenerate us, then we are spiritually dead. And we are left with the moral *inability* to choose Christ. The only way a person can choose Christ is if God regenerates the person. That is why regeneration precedes faith in Christ. In regeneration God transforms our will such that whereas previously we had no desire for Jesus, now we have a desire for Jesus.

Being logical, we know what this means. If God has to regenerate us to make us spiritually alive, then that has to mean we were spiritually *dead*. And yes, that is exactly what we were (if we are Christians) or that is what we *are* (if you are a not a Christian). So I want to talk a little more about spiritual death. The reason is that I meet and talk with Christians who do not take seriously the fact that fallen man and woman are really, truly spiritually *dead*. Oh, to be sure these believers to which I refer may say that sin is a serious problem, that sin is a mortal illness, and that non-Christians are on their spiritual death bed, *but* they are not quite dead yet!

The unregenerated person still has a heartbeat, there is still some spiritual life there, there is some righteousness in the heart (as little as there may be), and men and women *do* have the moral ability – even if it's just a little ability in their will – to choose Christ. And so certain preachers will use the analogy of the terminally ill patient on his deathbed. The guy is nearly dead. The man is so sick that he cannot move. And so God bends down and offers him the spiritual medicine of salvation. God puts the medicine on a spoon and lifts it to the mouth of the dying man, ah, but the nearly comatose man must do something. He has to open his mouth so he can swallow the salvation medicine. So the man exercises his free will and opens his mouth, wraps it around God's spoon, and swallows. Using his free will, he is saved. He hops off the deathbed and runs exuberant in health down the hallways of the hospital and out the door.

Or, there is the popular illustration of the woman out on the ocean of life, nearly drowning. She cannot swim. She is struggling just to keep her head above water. The waves are crashing over her and all around her. Just when she is almost drowned, along comes God and he throws this woman a life preserver. He throws the life preserver of salvation and it lands *just* outside the reach of the young woman's fingers. If she does not grab a hold of the preserver, she will die. But, if she uses her remaining strength to take hold of this help, she might live. And so, exercising her free will, she reaches, and grasps the preserver. Using her free will, she is saved. She holds onto her help until she gets to shore and then runs out of the water down the sands of the beach, a saved woman.

But there is a fatal (no pun intended) flaw in these illustrations. They do not match what the Bible actually says. Here, the man is still alive. He can use his mouth to receive God's help. Here, the woman is still alive. She can use her arms and fingers to receive God's help. In fact, the illustrations are used to demonstrate that our eternal destiny depends on *us*. God does a lot, but there is still something we have to do. We have a little life left in us.

But, the Bible says we are *dead* in our sin. We are spiritually dead. We have absolutely *no life* left in us. And therefore there is absolutely *nothing* we can do to be saved. If we want to stick with the illustrations, then the patient has already flatlined, and the swimmer is already drowned. The man and the woman are dead. *Until God* revives them. *Until God* breathes new life into them. *Until God* resurrects them from the dead. *God saves* them. There was nothing they could do to be saved. They contributed nothing to their salvation, except their spiritually dead bodies. God is Savior.

(By the way, a hat tip to Sproul for reminding me of these illustrations preachers use. I heard both regularly when I was going to church in my youth. I didn't realize then what poor illustrations these were/these are.)

The Bible so clearly teaches that sin leads to *death*. Sin kills. If you doubt it, just listen to a few verses of Romans chapter 5. Romans 5, verse 12, **“Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned...”** And Romans 5, verse 15, **“By the transgression of the one the many died...”** And Romans 5, verse 18, **“Through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men...”** As well as Romans 5, verse 19, **“As through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners...”** Who is this one man? He is Adam, the first man. These verses teach us that we suffer death as a result of Adam's sin. Adam, who is our representative, his one sin is imputed to us all, resulting in spiritual *death*. We are like the walking dead. We are physically alive, but spiritually dead.

I must say that I, personally, do not question that my sin made me spiritually dead. I knew I was dead until God resurrected me from the dead, regenerating me, and making me able to choose Christ. And then, this is many years ago, I felt so *alive*! What I question is why, after being saved, do I still sin? Why – being so alive – do I still struggle with my sin nature every day? Put more succinctly, why do Christians still sin? That is not a question I am prepared to answer now. I tell you that to say this. I have been re-reading a slim, but very convicting book from John Owen with the title *Indwelling Sin in Believers*.

Banner of Truth is the publisher. It comes in their Puritan Paperback series, aptly named because John Owen was a Puritan pastor, writer, theologian, and academic at the University of Oxford. He was even briefly a member of Parliament. He lived in the 17th century but, thankfully, we have access to his writing. The title again is *Indwelling Sin in Believers*. You should read this, especially if like me, you struggle with/against your sin.

Anyway, I was reading along the other night and I came to a very interesting and, I think, appropriate word he uses to describe the effect of original sin in us. Adam's sin is our sin. Adam's sin is imputed to us. And here is the word Owen used: *inbred*. Inbred means existing from birth. He describes sin as being inbred. He says sin is bred into us (*Indwelling Sin In Believers*, 9). And that because sin is bred into us that makes sin like a law that rules us. I will quote Owen now, “Not an outward, written, commanding, directing law but an inbred, working, impelling, urging law...An inbred law always prevails (9).” Unquote.

We must think of our sin this way. Inbred. Sin is inbred in us. Sin is existing from birth and it kills us spiritually. Perhaps this is said in no better way than by Paul in his letter to the Ephesians. Ephesians 2, verse 1 says this, **“You were dead in your trespasses and sins...”** I want to come back to Ephesians 2 next week, but as we head into the weekend, consider that. Before God regenerated us, we were all *dead* in our trespasses and sins. Completely dead. Totally Dead. Nothing short of resurrection will do. And we cannot resurrect ourselves from the dead. That's impossible. It takes God to do that.

That is why Paul continues in verses 4 and 5 of Ephesians chapter 2 writing, **“But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ...”** We thank God for His resurrection power in our lives. God made us alive together with Christ. What a tremendous truth on which to end our week together. Rejoice with me over this great news, and come back again on Monday. We will pick-up here as we continue to discover who God Is.

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