

I had nightmares about dying, when I was in my late 20s. They came out of nowhere. I was healthy. Our marriage was sweet. Life was good, and there I was, awake in the dead of night, perspiring and afraid. It happened several times. The last time it happened, I went to another room, and like a whisper from heaven the words of the Apostles' Creed came back to mind: I believe in the resurrection of the dead. They not only came to mind. They waited for an answer. "So, do you believe or not?" There, alone in the dark, I said, "I do believe. Let death come and take me – take me right now. I will go to meet him, but I believe in the resurrection of the dead." The nightmares stopped. My faith in Christ climbed to another level of conviction.

### Spiritual Death

The letter to the Ephesians places another watershed article of belief before us. If you don't believe this truth, Christianity will forever be a riddle. Paul expressed it like this: **As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins. Dead** is the crucial word. He did not mean people who were dead and buried. He was writing to people who were very much alive. Some of them were the life of the party, but in some dreadful way they had been dead. How can we know what Paul meant?

Here's a hint about good Bible study. Does Paul help us know what he meant from what we read in the surrounding verses? Yes, he does. Listen to Ephesians 2:12: He was describing the pre-Christian life of his readers: **remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.** Every Ephesian in the room would have said, "Yep! He nailed it. That was us." To be **separate from, excluded from, foreigners to, and without** a relationship with God and His purpose is spiritual death. That's what Paul meant, and it's not pessimism. It is diagnosis.

### Costly Love

So, if that's the diagnosis, what's the treatment? Treatment begins with Ephesians 1:7. **In him** (in Christ) **we have redemption through his blood.** In a flash we are standing again at the foot of the cross on Good Friday. Why did Christ die? Was it a travesty of justice? Was it a tragedy? The Bible never talks about the death of Christ in those terms. Here are examples of how the New Testament talks about it.

Jesus said of Himself: **"The Son of Man came . . . to give his life as a ransom for many."** (Mark 10:45) The Apostle Paul said: **When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son.** (Romans 5:10) The Apostle Peter said of Jesus: **He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross.** (1 Peter 2:24) The Apostle John said that **Jesus Christ . . . is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.** (1 John 2:1-2)

The unanimous witness of those closest to Christ never saw the death of Christ as a tragedy or a travesty of justice. They saw it as the wisest and most powerful thing God ever did, because we were **dead in transgressions and sins**, and His death did something decisive about that root of human evil and misery.

Look at the same truth with the major theme of Ephesians in mind. God made the decision to create a community on earth He could call His people. He made that decision before

the creation of the world, and love prompted Him to make it. The opening verses of Ephesians 2 explain that He had to create that community out of people, who are **dead in transgressions and sins**. That is why His decision entailed a costly rescue operation. Jesus carried out God's decision by emancipating His followers from guilt by His blood, thus constituting them as God's Holy People, the Church.

**God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.** (John 3:16) That reality now governs all human life. I don't mean that the nations seek to be guided by the love of God. They don't. It doesn't work like that, not yet. Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:22: **God placed all things under his feet, under Christ's feet.** Christ is authorized to wield the power of God anywhere on earth in any way His love and justice deem wise. He does it to open hearts to the love of God.

### Life

The treatment is applied to the patient in Ephesians 2:4-5. **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.** We were dead, separate from Christ, excluded from the people of God, foreigners to God's covenant promises, without hope, and without God in the world. But now in union with Christ we have been joined to the people of God in covenant with the living God. We are alive with Christ. We came to life when we believed in our hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead, said publicly, "Jesus is Lord," and were baptized into His name. Is that your story?

The Bible uses a noble word for this entire process from God's decision before the world began to the most recent baptism and forward to the New Jerusalem. The end of verse 5 uses it: **it is by grace you have been saved.** The dead do not bring themselves back to life. Only God can do that. Earlier, I called God's action a costly rescue operation. The Bible calls it salvation. Jesus Christ has saved us from spiritual death.

### The Eucharist

The baptism we witnessed this morning is a visible representation that those people like the rest of us have been called from spiritual death and made alive with Christ. It calls for celebration. We should shoot off fireworks, dance around the maypole, kill the fatted calf and have a blast. Since we are momentarily short on fireworks, maypoles, and fatted calves, let's celebrate Communion – another visible representation that we who were dead to God are now alive with Christ.

If you believe in your heart that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and if you have said publicly, "Jesus is Lord," then we want you to share Communion with us. You are one of us. If you do not yet believe, it is better to let the bread and wine go by, but while it is going by, pray to Christ to call you from spiritual death and give you spiritual life. Believe in your heart that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and prepare to say publicly, "Jesus is Lord" at the next baptism.

Many Christians call the Lord's Supper the Eucharist. It's from a Greek word that means give thanks. The name comes from the fact that before distributing the bread and wine to His disciples Jesus gave thanks. As we receive the Eucharist, let us give thanks that God **made**

**us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.**

Also, as we receive the Eucharist, would you take the prayer of Ephesians 1:15-20 and pray it to God on behalf of BVBC?