Eph 2:1-10

2:1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed 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. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

NIV

1. You were dead. Who is you? The tense of the verb gives us the answer. It is past tense, which means Paul is speaking to believers. A believer is someone who once was an unbeliever, but no longer is. Hence, past tense. If he were speaking to unbelievers, he would have used the present tense: you ARE dead in your transgressions and sins.

In verse 3 he includes himself (and presumably his entourage) in the same grouping of those who were formerly dead in their transgressions and sins. I personally think it is very important for us to notice this. Paul is reminding us that we have all been there – dead in our transgressions and sins – so we really have no excuse for not understanding why someone is an unbeliever (because we once were unbelievers) or why anyone, believer or not, behaves is a way that is not completely in accord with the will of God (because we once behaved that way, and probably still do quite often).

2. What does dead mean? It means spiritually dead. And the most consistent definition of spiritually dead I have found among all the authors and commentators I’ve read on this passage, and other passages about spiritual death, is that it means apart from God, or separated from God, or alienated from God.

What does dead not mean? It does not mean that people who are spiritually dead are incapable of making moral decisions or value judgments. And it does not mean that people who are spiritually dead are always going to make moral decisions or value judgments that are against God’s will, or that they will make bad decisions or judgments when compared to those made by believers.

It just means that those decisions will not be made in the context of a close, personal relationship with God, and thus will not be made with a primary objective of pleasing God.

Unbelievers make moral decisions all the time. Some of them are very good moral decisions. Some of them are better than the moral decisions that believers make. Some of our decisions when we were unbelievers were better than some of the moral decisions we have made since becoming believers.

The bible does not refer to believers as being spiritually dead, but rather as being spiritually alive. Yet both believer and unbeliever sin. So is there another term like “Alive in your transgressions and sins?”

And the answer is yes, and we see it in today’s passage. It is in verse 5: “Alive with Christ.” And it is in verse 6: “in Christ Jesus.” And it is in verse 7: “in Christ Jesus.” And it is in verse 10: “in Christ Jesus.”

Nowhere in the bible does it say that a person stops sinning once they become a believer, once they are in Christ. The bible encourages us to tap into the power of the Holy Spirit that is available to all of us when we are in Christ, which can certainly help us to sin less, but it does not say that we will stop sinning.

In fact, as is confirmed in today’s passage, becoming a believer, being in Christ, is not primarily about stopping sinning. Verses 10 does not say that we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to stop sinning. [Pause]

It says we are created in Christ Jesus to do good works.

The phrase “In Christ” is mentioned over 100 times in the New Testament. A person is “In Christ” when they are saved by faith. Faith, “pistis” in the Greek, is a covenant word expressing the commitment and trust that bind together believers and Christ. Faith has an adhesive quality to it. Salvation does not come from believing ideas or from an emotional decision, but from being bound to Christ.

1. Think of a current or past close friend (or relative) who is not a believer. Talk about their best qualities, the things that you really love about them.

2. Can you think of anything you’ve done in life that you’re pretty sure you never would have done if you weren’t a believer?

3. Talk about one personality trait or behavior of yours that has changed since becoming a believer.

4. Talk about one personality trait or behavior of yours that has NOT changed since becoming a believer.