

## God Is an Artist

What in the world. . .?” the 77-year-old Pastor Sanders breathed in astonishment.

“It’s a conveyor belt for the Thanksgiving dinners,” said Kenny.

For the past four years, Kenny had helped serve his church’s Thanksgiving meal to the homeless. The idea of placing the prepared to-go meals on a conveyor belt had come to the 25-year-old engineer soon after last year’s Thanksgiving meal.

“I don’t think it’s a good idea to have food moving on a belt,” said 65-year-old Sister Robinson, the Thanksgiving meal coordinator and lead cook. “I mean what’s next? Hurling the plates onto their laps?”

“I like it!” offered Sister Jones. “Kenny is a smart, wonderful young man who loves God. He sounds so spiritually alive with his new ideas.”

“I’m just trying to help out,” said Kenny. “I’ve been working on this for months. I remember last year we couldn’t get the food out fast enough. The belt can be operated as fast or as slow as we want. We can also stop and start it whenever we want.”

“Kenny, your invention is a blessing,” remarked Pastor Sanders. “God has obviously laid this idea on your heart, and it is a good one. Why would we look a gift horse in the mouth, especially one that has come from God? Let’s not discourage our young people or anyone else whom the Lord has gifted to help the kingdom of God.”

- 1.** *Would you describe yourself as spiritually dead or spiritually alive? Explain your answer.*
- 2.** *Why is salvation a gift and not something you earn?*
- 3.** *What are some gifts you have that you can put to work for Christ?*

## Former Lifestyle

*Ephesians 2:1-3, KJV*

1. And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;

2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:

3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

*Ephesians 2:1-3, NIV*

<sup>1</sup>As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, <sup>2</sup>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.

<sup>3</sup>All 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.

Paul tried to help the Ephesian believers develop a deeper sense of understanding and appreciation for what God had done for them. Often, the best way to come to a better appreciation of what we currently have is to remember how things once were, and this is just what Paul did for his readers. Whereas they had become alive in Christ, before coming to a saving faith in Him, they had been dead in their trespasses and sins.

Everyone who has not put their faith in Christ is spiritually dead and separated from God. If having been spiritually dead was not bad enough, Paul reminded the Ephesians that in their past life they also had followed after the ways of the world and the “ruler of the the kingdom of the air” (Eph. 2:2). This ruler is commonly understood to be the devil himself (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).

All around us we can see the evidence that the devil currently rules this world system as he works through those who are disobedient to the Word of God. However,

we should remember that prior to putting our faith in Christ, we walked among them, both approving and practicing the very things they did.

**4.** *In what way are lost people—those who are without Christ—dead?*

**5.** *In what manner do lost people walk or conduct themselves?*

**6.** *As a result, what end do lost people face?*

## Future Hope

*Ephesians 2:4-7, KJV*

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,

5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

*Ephesians 2:4-7, NIV*

<sup>4</sup>But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup>made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

<sup>6</sup>And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>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.

At times, the word “but” can be one of the most beautiful words in the English language. This is one of those times, because it provides the transition from the stark warning of God’s wrath to the blessed hope of His mercy. Paul was helping people understand that God demonstrated His rich mercy toward us by making us alive in Christ though we were dead in our sins. God does not desire people to be under His wrath (see Ezek. 33:11).

The underlying foundation of God's rich mercy is His great love for us. It has been said that the God of the Old Testament was a God of wrath, while the God of the New Testament is a God of love. However, the truth is that even the New Testament, which reveals the love of God through His Son, also speaks much of wrath and judgment (e.g., Heb. 10:26-31; Rev. 19—20).

The principle here is that, then and now, there is nothing in people that commends us to God. While we were still sinners and enemies of God, our glorious Savior died for us. By shedding His blood in our place, Jesus saved us from God's holy and righteous wrath. Jesus' death on the Cross reconciled us to God, and now His life makes us whole and gives us every reason to rejoice in His loving and gracious presence.

All of this leads us to a better understanding of what our future hope is in Christ, thanks to the loving grace and mercy that God bestowed upon us. For even as we walk this earth and face the many challenges here below, our spiritual position is in the heavenly realms where we are seated with Jesus. And God did this so that in "the coming ages" (vs. 7), His exceedingly incomparable riches and kindness toward us will be on display for all to see.

**7.** *How does God demonstrate His rich mercy toward sinners?*

**8.** *Where are God's people seated?*

**9.** *What is our future hope?*

## **Faith, Not Works**

*Ephesians 2:8-10, KJV*

8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

*Ephesians 2:8-10, NIV*

<sup>8</sup>For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup>not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup>For we

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Up until this point in his letter, Paul could not have made it any clearer that salvation from sin is God's gracious gift, and this gift must be received by faith for a person to be saved from sin. By definition, a gift is free and is not something that people work for to earn. We cannot earn it; we can only receive it by faith with gratitude and love. Faith is necessary because we must believe in what we cannot see with our physical eyes—that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, and then rose from the grave to save us (see 1 Cor. 15:1-4).

Though God's gift of salvation is free, its value is absolutely priceless. Our Lord died horrifically on the Cross to pay the price for our salvation. How could we possibly think that we could do something to earn it? We have nothing to boast about in ourselves.

Though we cannot earn salvation from sin by works, as His handiwork, God created us and saved us to do the good works He has prepared in advance for us. Many of the good works He has prepared apply to all believers in general such as sharing the Gospel, ministering to widows and orphans, helping aging parents, etc. Other good works are specific to each of us such as a call to a specific mission field, teaching a Sunday school class, singing in the choir, etc. Whether general or specific works, God has called and gifted each of His children to serve Him and others for His glory.

**10.** *How are people saved from sin?*

**11.** *From our passage, what does not save people from sin?*

**12.** *Where do good works come in as far as believers are concerned?*

## Joining God in Good Works

Left to ourselves, we usually focus on what we want and how we might get it. Being stuck in a self-focused life leads to feelings of entitlement, which usually makes us disagreeable to others. Even though such a life is full of pleasure-seeking, it rarely works because we get addicted to wanting more of whatever pleasure we chase. Satan, the “ruler of the kingdom of the air” (Eph. 2:2), tempts us to think of number one, to think of ourselves before others.

Thankfully, God saves us from ourselves. Even if we think we can never change, God’s tremendous power can turn us around. Instead of being focused on individual wants and pleasures, we can cooperate with God as He cultivates in us a character that seeks to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

The biblical phrase for this is that God is “rich in mercy.” God never runs out of ideas to bring us to Himself and to bring us into wholeness and abundance in life.

So, God invites us to partner with Him in loving people and creating things that bring joy, beauty, love, and well-being to others. Such a life is so much more engaging as we reach out to friends and strangers. God created us for this because this is what God Himself is like.

This is how we partner with God in the midst of simply being a neighbor or doing our job. The key to sensing God’s invitations is to respond to each little nudge from God—to make that phone call, to send that card, to make that encouraging comment. The more we respond to the nudges, the more nudges we sense coming our way.

**13.** *How can Satan keep people muddled in entitlement and self-focus?*

**14.** *What helps people stay focused on what God is doing in them and in the people around them?*

**15.** *When have you had a sense that God was leading you to do something?*

## God's Invitations

Ephesians 2 is rich in invitations for us. We are invited to let go of our self-focus, which leaves us dead in transgressions and sins, and to accept Jesus' invitation to be made alive in Him as our Lord and Savior. If we have already accepted that invitation, we are invited to come alive to how God wants us to join Him in the "good works" He has prepared for our lives.

► *Ask God to show you which of these two invitations are being made for you today. Write here what your answer to the invitation is, and what you will do after you accept.*

### KEY VERSE

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. —Ephesians 2:10, KJV

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. —Ephesians 2:10, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of November 21 through November 27

(See *The Quiet Hour and Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** Revelation 2:1-7—Remembrance and Repentance.
- Tue.** Ephesians 3:1-13—The Mystery of Christ.
- Wed.** Ephesians 4:1-8, 11-16—Build Up the Body of Christ.
- Thu.** Ephesians 4:17-27—Put On the New Self.
- Fri.** Psalm 91—God Is Our Refuge.
- Sat.** Isaiah 54:6-17—God Rebuilds the Afflicted.
- Sun.** Ephesians 6:10-24—Strength in the Lord.