

Vivification

Ephesians 2:1–10

Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 88, 90

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THE Christian life is likened to death and resurrection. Like Jesus, there is a once-for-all-ness to our death and resurrection when we were converted. But we are also to be dying and rising continually in our sanctification. Last Lord's Day we thought about our dying and tonight we think about our rising.

A Climactic Rising

Not only were we put to death when we were converted, but we were also brought to life in a *climactic rising*. We were buried with Christ into his death and raised with him in his resurrection (Rom. 6). I want us to look at Ephesians 2 tonight, which should be one of those biblical texts that's like your prized award or trophy. Never let it lose its luster!

Paul states the depths of depravity before this new life in verses 1–3.

You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked— what an irony! We were dead men walking! We were on death row! Our lives were characterized by **following the course of this world** and

following the prince of the power of the air. Paul calls him **the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.** And it was **among** those sons of disobedience that **we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.**

But God (v. 4). There's no greater statement than that! **Being rich in mercy and because of the great love with which he loved us** (v. 4) Paul unequivocally says **even when we were dead in our trespasses God made us alive together with Christ** (v. 5). That's grace! While dead and unable to make any effort to come up out of the grave, while you walked in trespasses and sins, while you followed the ways of this world, while you once followed Satan's leading, while you lived in the passion of the sinful nature, while you carried out the desires of your sinful hearts, and while you were a child of wrath—*God* made you alive! Thus he can say **by grace you have been saved** (v. 5). And making us alive he **raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus** (v. 6).

This climactic rising to new life is described in amazing ways in Scripture. It's an *illumination* of the mind from the darkness of sin "that [we] may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God." It's a

penetration of the Holy Spirit into “the inmost recesses” of who we are. It’s a *conversion* of heart as the Spirit “opens the closed and softens the hardened heart” in the words of Ezekiel about Israel and Luke about Lydia. It’s a *circumcision* of heart. It’s an *infusion* of “new qualities into the will...from being evil, disobedient, and obstinate [to being] good, obedient, and pliable” (see Canons of Dort 3/4.11). When we were climactically raised to new life the Holy Spirit got inside of us, transplanted our hearts, rewired our circuits, and caused us to make a U-turn on the road of life.

That’s powerful stuff, amen? This making us alive is called regeneration, renewal, and resurrection by the supernatural power and grace of the Holy Spirit. The Canons of Dort says this is most delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable (CD 3/4.12).

A Continual Rising

Having died in conversion we continually die in sanctification. Having rised to newness of life we are to *continue rising*. Do you see that here, too?

For we are his workmanship, created [anew climactically] in Christ

Jesus for good works [continually], which God prepared

beforehand, that we should walk in them (v. 10). We once walked

in...trespasses and sins; we once follow[ed] the course of this world; we

once **follow[ed] the prince of the power of the air**; we once were **sons of disobedience...liv[ing] in the passions of our flesh and carrying out the desires of the body and the mind**. But now we are to walk in a new lifestyle of good works.

The ancient preacher, John Chrysostom, spoke of this two-sided aspect of rising with Christ climactically and continually, saying, “Just as you scrub a statue, recast it, then continue to keep it clean afterwards so too we are regenerated but must continue to get rid of the rust of sin.” John Calvin said it like this:

This restoration does not take place in one moment or one day or one year; but through continual and sometimes even slow advances God wipes out in his elect the corruptions of the flesh, cleanses them of guilt, consecrates them to himself as temples renewing their minds to true purity that they may practice repentance throughout their lives and know that this warfare will end only at death.¹

Paul continues this thought later in Ephesians 4. Notice how in verses 17–19 he speaks like he does in 2:1–3 of the depravity of the unregenerated world. Then he contrasts that lifestyle with ours in verses 20 and following. We were taught “to put off [our] old self, which belongs to [our] former manner of life” (v. 22)—that’s mortification—“and to be renewed in the spirit

¹ *Institutes*, 3.3.9.

of [our] minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (vv. 23–24)—that’s vivification!

Our Catechism speaks of vivification in Q&A 88 and 90. Let’s read it together as we close:

Q. 88. What is involved in genuine repentance or conversion?

A. **Two things: the dying-away of the old self, and the rising-to-life of the new.**

Q. 90. What is the rising-to-life of the new self?

A. **Wholehearted joy in God through Christ and a love and delight to live according to the will of God by doing every kind of good work.**