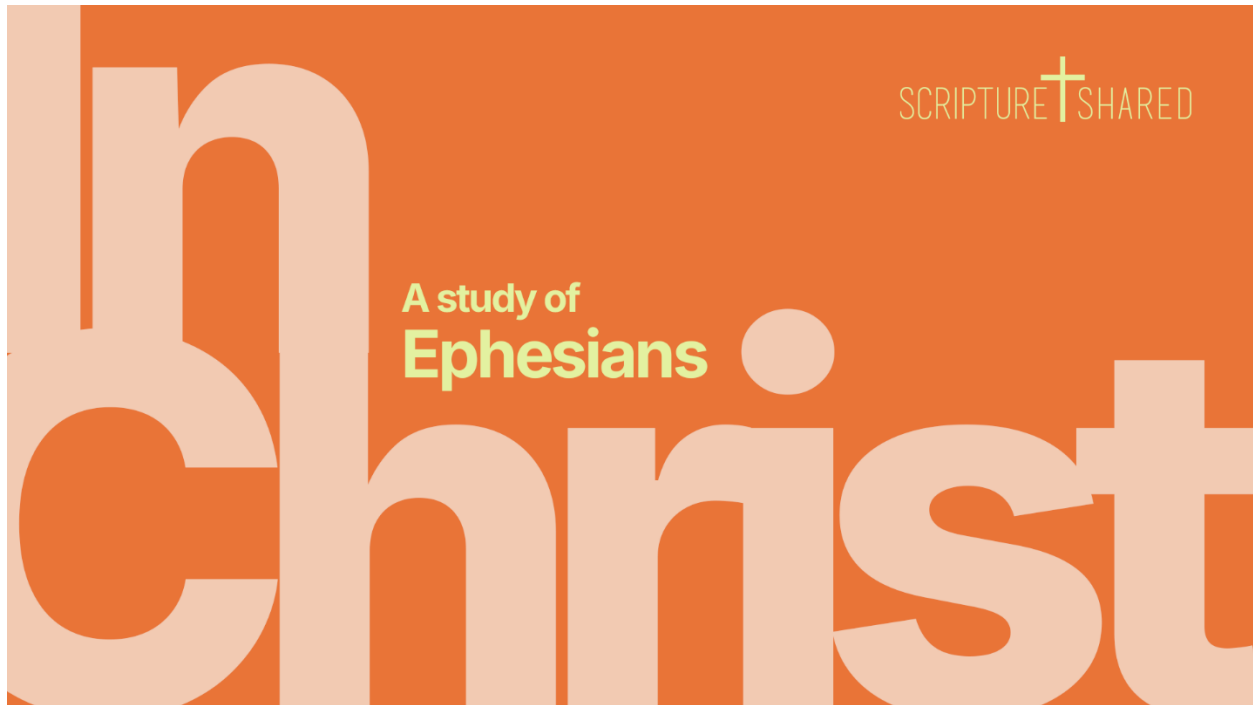




Week 2

Week 2, Day 1 – Dead Without Christ

Ephesians 2:1–3

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.

Understanding the Passage:

In Greek, Ephesians 2:1–7 is one long sentence. Verse 1 opens with “and you” as the object of a verb that doesn’t show up until verse 5: God “made us alive.” Paul starts the sentence, then interrupts himself to describe how dead we really were.

The word “dead” (*nekrous*) links back to 1:19–20, where God raised Christ “from the dead.” The power that raised Jesus is the power required for us.

Paul names our condition with two words. *Paraptōmata* (trespasses) which is stepping off the way given to us by God in Christ; *hamartiai* (sins) means missing the mark (colloquially, but also has a spatial connotation). We once “walked” in them.

Verse 2 names three influences on that “walk.” “The course of this world” is literally “the age of this world,” the prevailing spirit which Paul seems to think is in conflict with what God has done in Christ. “The ruler of the power of the air” reflects ancient cosmology, in which the air was believed to be inhabited by spiritual powers (gods, spirits, nameless entities). And “those who are disobedient” is literally “the sons of disobedience,” a Hebrew idiom for people characterized by disobedience.

In verse 3, Paul shifts from “you” to “we.” Jewish believers, Paul included, were no different. “Flesh” (*sarx*) means not the physical body but human life oriented away from God. And “by nature children of wrath” describes our condition, not only our actions. God’s wrath (*orgē*) is not a temper but his settled, just opposition to all that destroys his creation.

Wesleyan theology affirms this diagnosis: apart from grace, we cannot turn toward God. But Wesley also taught that *prevenient grace* is already at work before we respond. God is the initiator and we respond either by embrace or resistance.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Paul names three forces that shape our “walk”: the spirit of the age, spiritual powers, and our own desires. Which of these do you feel pulling on you most right now?
2. In verse 3, Paul says “we,” placing himself in the same condition as everyone else. How might remembering that no one stands outside this diagnosis change the way you see other people?

Week 2, Day 2 – “But God...”

Ephesians 2:4–7

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us 5 even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Understanding the Passage:

Verse 4 finally supplies the subject Paul has been withholding: *ho de theos*, “But God.” Everything in verses 1–3 is resolved by God’s initiative (*prevenient grace*).

Across these verses Paul piles up four words for God’s disposition toward us: mercy (*eleos*), love (*agapē*), grace (*charis*), and kindness (*chrēstotēs*). *Eleos* often translates the Hebrew *hesed*, God’s steadfast covenant love, and God is “rich” in it, echoing “the riches of his grace” in 1:7.

Verse 5 repeats verse 1, “even when we were dead through our trespasses,” making clear that God acted while we were still in that condition. Paul can’t wait until verse 8, so he inserts it here: “by grace you have been saved.”

The main verbs are three compounds built on *syn-*, “together with”: made alive together with, raised up with, and seated with. They deliberately echo 1:20, where God raised Christ and “seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.” What God did for Christ in chapter 1, he does for us in chapter 2.

“In the heavenly places” appears five times in Ephesians and nowhere else in Paul, describing the realm where Christ reigns and spiritual conflict takes place.

Notice the verb tense. In Romans 6, Paul speaks of our resurrection with Christ as still to come. Here he speaks of it as already accomplished. In union with Christ, believers already share new life.

Verse 7 gives the purpose: “so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace.” The church becomes God’s display of his kindness, a theme Paul develops in 3:10. Wesley distinguished justification, what God does *for* us, from the new birth, what God does *in* us. This passage is about the second.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Paul says God is “rich in mercy.” Do you tend to picture God’s mercy as abundant or as something you might run out of? How does that shape the way you come to him?
2. Paul speaks of being raised and seated with Christ as something already done. What would it look like to live today *from* that reality rather than striving *toward* it?

Week 2, Day 3 – Saved by Grace, Made for Good Works

Ephesians 2:8–10

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— 9 not the result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Understanding the Passage:

Verse 8 opens with “for,” explaining the parenthesis of verse 5. “You have been saved” is a perfect passive: a completed action with ongoing results, done to us rather than by us. Grace is the source; faith is the channel. Faith doesn’t earn salvation but receives it.

“And this is not your own doing” raises a question: what does “this” refer to? In Greek, “this” (*touto*) is neuter, while “grace” and “faith” are both feminine. Most interpreters take it to mean the entire saving event is “the gift of God.”

Verse 9 adds, “not the result of works, so that no one may boast.” Boasting is a recurring concern in Paul (Romans 3:27). Interestingly, Ephesians says simply “works,” not “works of the law” as in Romans and Galatians. No human achievement of any kind can secure salvation.

Verse 10 turns the corner. “What he has made us” translates *poiēma*, a word used in the Greek Old Testament for God’s creative work (Psalm 92:4) and elsewhere in the New Testament only for creation itself (Romans 1:20). “Created in Christ Jesus” uses the verb of creation. Salvation is new creation, not merely a legal adjustment.

We are created “for good works, which God prepared beforehand,” echoing God’s purpose in 1:4–5. Good works are not the cause of salvation but its intended outcome.

Finally, “to be our way of life” is literally “that we should walk in them,” the same verb from verse 2. The passage forms a frame: we once *walked* in trespasses; now we *walk* in good works God prepared.

Less than three weeks after Aldersgate, John Wesley preached on Ephesians 2:8 at St. Mary’s in Oxford in a sermon titled “Salvation by Faith.” For Wesley, saving faith is always faith “working by love” (Galatians 5:6).

Questions for Reflection:

1. Paul calls you God’s *poiēma*, his handiwork. How does seeing yourself as something God made change the way you think about your worth?
2. The passage begins with us *walking* in trespasses and ends with us *walking* in good works God prepared. What good work might God be inviting you to walk in this week?

Week 2, Day 4 – Brought Near, Walls Torn Down

Ephesians 2:11–16

So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called “the uncircumcision” by those who are called “the circumcision”—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands— 12 remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. 15 He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, 16 and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.

Understanding the Passage:

Verses 1–10 describe reconciliation between humanity and God. With “So then, remember” in verse 11, Paul turns to reconciliation between Jew and Gentile. For Paul, the vertical and horizontal belong together.

Circumcision is described as “made in the flesh by hands” (*cheiropoiētos*), a word often used in the Greek Old Testament for idols. Paul is quietly relativizing the boundary marker.

Verse 12 lists five things Gentiles once lacked: Christ, citizenship in Israel, the covenants of promise, hope, and God. “Without God” uses *atheoi*, its only New Testament occurrence, meaning not unbelief in gods but no relationship with the true God.

In verse 13, those “far off” have been “brought near by the blood of Christ,” language drawn from Isaiah 57:19, which Paul quotes in verse 17.

Verse 14 is emphatic: “He himself is our peace.” Christ doesn’t merely broker peace; he embodies it. He “has broken down the dividing wall,” literally “the middle wall of the fence.” Many scholars see an allusion to the temple barrier that barred Gentiles from the inner courts on pain of death, the barrier Paul was accused of violating in Acts 21 by bringing Trophimus the Ephesian inside. Jewish writings of the period also described the law as a fence around Israel. Paul may intend both.

Verse 15 says Christ “abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances.” The verb means to render inoperative, and most interpreters understand it to refer to the law’s function as a dividing boundary, not its moral vision.

The goal is “one new humanity.” *Kainos* means new in kind: Gentiles don’t become Jews, nor Jews Gentiles. Both are reconciled “to God in one body through the cross,” which “put to death that hostility.”

Wesley’s conviction that there is “no holiness but social holiness” is rooted here. Reconciliation with God is never separate from reconciliation with one another.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Have you ever felt “far off,” whether from God or from God’s people? What brought you near?
2. Who is on the other side of a wall in your life, relationally, culturally, or otherwise? What would it look like to let Christ be your peace with them?

Week 2, Day 5 – God’s Household and Temple

Ephesians 2:17–22

So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; 18 for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, 20 built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21 In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; 22 in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

Understanding the Passage:

Verse 17 says Christ “came and proclaimed peace,” weaving together Isaiah 52:7, the messenger announcing peace, and 57:19, “Peace, peace, to the far and the near.” Both groups receive it equally.

Verse 18 is one of the most compact Trinitarian statements in the New Testament: “through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father.” *Prosaḡōgē* (access) was used for formal introduction into a king’s presence.

In verse 19, Gentiles are “no longer strangers and aliens.” *Xenoi* are foreigners with no standing; *paroikoi* are resident aliens without full rights. Paul replaces both with “citizens” and “members of the household.”

Notice the wordplay in verses 19–22. Paul uses six words built on the root *oik*- (house): resident aliens, household members, built upon, building, built together, and dwelling place. Those who once lived outside the house now make up the house.

The foundation is “the apostles and prophets,” likely New Testament prophets (3:5, 4:11). Christ is the *akrogōniaios*, from Isaiah 28:16. Interpreters debate whether it means the cornerstone that aligns the foundation or the capstone that completes it. Either way, Christ holds the building together.

In verse 21, Paul calls the church a “holy temple,” using *naos*, the inner sanctuary where God’s presence dwelt, rather than *hieron*, the wider temple complex. The dividing wall of verse 14 stood in the *hieron*, keeping Gentiles out. Now Gentiles are part of the *naos* itself.

The present tense of verse 22, “you also are built together,” shows the temple is still under construction. Wesley’s emphasis on holiness formed in community, through class meetings and the means of grace, reflects this vision: God dwells in a people being built together.

Questions for Reflection:

1. Paul moves us from “strangers and aliens” to “members of the household of God.” Where do you feel most at home in your church community, and where do you still feel like a guest or an outsider?
2. The temple is still being “built together.” Who are the people God is building you together with right now, and how could you invest more deeply in that community?

Video Discussion Questions:

1. What are those things that one might think “give life” but are actually taking your life away?
2. Where were you when God encountered you for the first time? Would it be fair to say, looking back, that you were “dead” in your sins and trespasses?
3. Can you identify a “but God” moment in your life? A time where God entered into your experience and transformed you or something in you?
4. Is grace “fair?” How do you understand God’s grace?
5. Read Ephesians 2:8 aloud. Could you re-articulate this often-quoted formula in your own words? How is it that we are saved by grace through faith?
6. How do faith and works fit together?
7. God has given us the ministry of peace and reconciliation. What are some simple ways we might make peace in our lives?
8. Talk with each other about centering Christ, as a cornerstone, in your life. Is he your as cornerstone? What practices and rhythms might we adopt to center Christ?

Prayer requests and other notes: