

# THE SCROLLS

All is Well | Ephesians 2:11-22

## Life Lesson

Christmas reminds us that when we were completely helpless—spiritually dead, separated from God, and without hope—God reached out to us in grace. In Christ, He tore down every wall that separates us from Him and from each other. Because Jesus is our peace, we are called to live as people who extend that same grace, seek reconciliation, and invite others into the nearness we have received.

## Examine Scripture

**11** So, then, remember that at one time you were Gentiles in the flesh—called “the uncircumcised” by those called “the circumcised,” which is done in the flesh by human hands. **12** At that time you were without Christ, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world. **13** But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. **14** For he is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility. In his flesh, **15** he made of no effect the law consisting of commands and expressed in regulations, so that he might create in himself one new man from the two, resulting in peace. **16** He did this so that he might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross by which he put the hostility to death. **17** He came and proclaimed the good news of peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. **18** For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. **19** So, then, you are no

## Tearing Down the Walls

“MARLEY was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that . . . Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.” This opening passage is, of course, from *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens. Though it might seem odd for a Christmas story to start with such a dark and haunting beginning, yet a similar phrase marks the start of our Christmas celebration: “And you were dead in your trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). Before we can delve into our text or celebrate Christmas, we must recognize that we, like Marley, are “dead as a door-nail” without Christ.

Our text begins with “So, then” (v. 11). Some translations render this as “therefore.” In other words, it connects to the previous verses. Ironically, our text does not just relate to the last verse but to the entire first part of Ephesians 2. In the Greek, Paul writes (vs. 1-10) as a single sentence. In Paul’s mind, everything in (vs. 1-10) is one complete thought that cannot be separated. So, when he wrote “So, then,” he is linking his main idea from the previous verses with what comes next. In other words, in (vs. 1-10), Paul shows the need for peace, and in (vs. 11-22), he explains how Christ brings that peace.

Therefore, it is appropriate for us to briefly review verses 1-10 before proceeding to verses 11-22. Paul clearly states that without Christ, we are “dead in your trespasses and sins” (v. 1). Outside of Christ, our condition is not simply that we are bad or sinful; it is that we are dead. Although we are alive physically, without Christ, we are dead spiritually. We are dead in trespasses and sins. The word “trespasses” means “to deviate or go the wrong direction,” indicating a willful choice to follow a path other than God’s. The word “sins” refers to “actions or thoughts that are completely against the nature of God.” Paul writes, “you were dead in your trespasses and sins” (v. 1), which suggests this is part of our nature. At our core, without Christ, we are completely dead in trespasses and sins. We lack sensitivity to God’s things, any desire to follow Him, or the ability to fix our sinful nature. This reveals the desperate situation we face as sinners. Without grace, we are hopeless.

*longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God's household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you are also being built together for God's dwelling in the Spirit.*

- Underline "So" in (v. 11) and write "Eph. 2:1-10" above it to show the connection.
- Circle "at one time" in (v. 11) and "at that time" in (v. 12). Draw an arrow to "without Christ."
- Underline "But now" in (v. 13).
- Bracket "He is our peace" in (v. 14).
- Circle "made of no effect" in (v. 15). Write abolish above it.
- Circle "reconcile" in (v. 16).
- Circle each occurrence of "peace" (4 times in CSB).

## Personal Notes

We are entirely dead, disobedient, and depraved—living in darkness, facing God's wrath, and headed for Hell.

"But God" (v. 4). Amid darkness and rebellion, God intervenes. When everything seems hopeless, God acts. As we read in (Is. 59) a few weeks ago, when we cannot save ourselves, God steps in. The first three verses reveal the truth of our sinful nature and our desperate situation, but then comes the beautiful declaration of (v. 4-5): "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!" (Isaiah 9:2-6) reminds us: "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; a light has dawned on those living in the land of darkness . . . For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace." God steps out of eternity into time, from the throne to a womb, removing the regal robe of glory to don flesh to save us! Christmas is hope! Christmas is grace! Christ is light! Christmas is life! Christmas is peace!

## V. II

Now, with a clearer understanding of our sinful condition and the hopelessness we face without Christ, we turn to our passage. As if it were not bad enough to be told they were dead in their trespasses and sins, Paul reminds the Ephesians: "So, then, remember that at one time you were Gentiles in the flesh—called 'the uncircumcised' by those called 'the circumcised,' which is done in the flesh by human hands. At that time you were without Christ, excluded from the citizenship of Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world" (vs. 11-12). This serves as a strong reminder of the alienation felt by Gentiles from Jewish believers. The term "uncircumcised" was a derogatory word, a slur used against the Gentiles; yet, Jewish believers were still using it to refer to Gentile believers. It was used to foster division within the Church and to maintain a wall of separation between Jews and Gentiles.

The Jews considered the Gentiles to be less than human. In fact, Jews believed that Gentiles were created to fuel the fires of Hell. It was unlawful for a Jew to help a Gentile woman give birth because that was to bring another heathen into the world. The Gentiles, the Greeks, were not free from their own walls of prejudice. The Greeks saw anyone who was not Greek as a barbarian, and it was lawful to wage a just or unjust war against any barbarians. This mentality and prejudice slithered into the Church. Surely, we do not have to look too far to see the same sinful tendencies in our own lives. It is far too easy for us to look at others and, for whatever reason, begin to build walls of prejudice to shut them out. These walls may be racial, social, economic, or religious, but we construct them and see ourselves as superior to others.

## Personal Notes

### V. 12

In this verse, Paul outlines five elements related to the Ephesians' spiritual condition. First, and most painfully, Paul tells the Ephesians that they were "At that time you were without Christ" (v. 12). When is that? This refers back to the first part of Chapter 2, where Paul states, "you were dead in your trespasses and sins" (v. 1). During that period, in their spiritual death, they were without Christ. Since Christ is life, lacking Christ equates to death. Therefore, the Ephesians were dead; as a result, they were without Christ. Anyone still dead in their trespasses and sins remains without Christ.

Secondly, Paul reminds the Ephesians that they were "excluded," or more precisely, alienated from the citizenship of Israel, God's chosen people. This word, "excluded," is a powerful term. It literally means to be "shut out from one's fellowship and intimacy; to be estranged." This perfectly describes what walls do: block people from fellowship and prevent them from forming relationships. The Gentiles understood this concept of alienation. In fact, at the Temple in Jerusalem, there was a designated area called the Court of the Gentiles where they could gather. However, a large wall separated this area from the rest of the Temple. Inscribed on the wall were warnings that read: "No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death." Paul uses this image to help the Ephesian believers grasp the intensity of alienation they once experienced.

Third, to make it even clearer, Paul reminds the Ephesians that they were "foreigners to the covenants of promise" (v. 12). In other words, they had no rights or benefits under the covenant between God and Israel. They had no community; they were outsiders. Without Christ, they had no promise to hold onto.

Fourth, the Ephesians had no hope. On their own, apart from Christ, there was nothing they could do to fix their desperate situation. Again, they are like what we read in (Is. 59:9-13): "We hope for light, but there is darkness; for brightness, but we live in the night. We grope along a wall like the blind; we grope like those without eyes . . . We hope for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far from us."

Lastly, the Ephesians were "without God in the world" (v. 12). Add all these elements together, and you have a life without God. The Ephesians were without God in the world, so what did God do? "For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son" (John 3:16). "For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us" (Is. 9:6). Since we were without God in the world, God sent His Son, Jesus, into the world! Jesus came as Immanuel, God with us!

## Personal Reflection

1. What does it mean to be completely “dead in trespasses and sins”? Why is it important to understand our spiritual condition apart from Christ?
2. What walls—whether of prejudice, pride, resentment, or fear—have I built between myself and others, and how is Christ calling me to tear them down?
3. How does recalling my own past separation from Christ (being without hope and without God) influence how I view and treat people who are far from Him today?
4. How am I actively allowing Jesus—who is my peace—to bring reconciliation in my relationships, attitudes, and community?
5. How does the truth that God initiated reconciliation while I was spiritually dead change my understanding of Christmas and the meaning of Christ’s incarnation?

## Commentaries

*Believer’s Bible Commentary* by William MacDonald

*Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Abridged Edition): New Testament* edited by Kenneth Barker

*NIV Application Commentary: Ephesians* by Klyne Snodgrass

## Mt. Zion’s Mission

*Mt. Zion Baptist Church exists to **MAKE, MATURE, and MULTIPLY** disciples of Jesus Christ.*

## Vs. 13-22

“But . . .” (v. 13). Here is the transition our exhausted hearts need! In our desperation and despair, when we believe there is no hope, when we feel all is lost, when we sense complete separation from God, and when we have no peace... “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (v. 13). Under the Law, Jews had to offer sacrifices to come near to God. Yet, Paul reminds the Ephesians that, though they were far from God, they have been brought near by the very blood of the Lamb of God. Christ took on flesh to offer Himself as the ultimate sacrifice to satisfy God’s wrath against sin; He died for us and in our place! It is His blood that now brings us near to God.

“For he himself is our peace” (v. 14). As Pastor Jeff has reminded us over the past few weeks, peace is a person—Jesus Christ. Christ is both peace and the peacemaker. He is our peace because He has removed every wall of hostility and separation; He is our peacemaker because He Himself ushers us near to God. Peace is not just a feeling; it is a position we hold in Christ. Peace with God enables us to live in the peace of God, which in turn allows us to live in peace with others.

Christ effectively abolishes the Law. This is a common expression used by Paul; it means “to nullify or to make ineffective.” The Law that created division between Jews and Gentiles was completely abolished by Christ because it was fulfilled in Him. As a result, the Jews could no longer use it to look down on the Gentiles, since Christ has now united both Jews and Gentiles in grace and glory.

In (vs. 17-22), Paul demonstrates the outcome of the peace we have in Christ. First, both Jews and Gentiles share the same “access in one Spirit to the Father” (v. 18). We are now reconciled to God through Christ; as a result, we have full access to God. Second, we are no longer strangers; we are now “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (v. 19). Lastly, we are united, being built together as a holy temple, the dwelling place of God. Paul uses this imagery to show that God dwells in all followers of Christ, whether Jews or Gentiles. We are united with all believers in harmony, unity, and peace.

Look back to what Paul writes in (v. 16): He “might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross by which he put the hostility to death.” Reconciliation means restoring broken relationships—our broken relationship with God and others. In Scripture, it is always man who is reconciled, and God who reconciles. In other words, God is the one who initiates reconciliation. Why? As Paul reminds us, we are “dead in our trespasses and sins” (v. 1). Dead men cannot reconcile nor seek reconciliation, so God initiated it through the incarnation and completed it in the crucifixion. Our reconciliation that began in the manger was finished on the cross!