

Life and Reconciliation in Christ

SCOTT HOEZEE

A friend of mine once suggested to another friend that he read the works of one of the most famous writers in English literature, John Dunn. Dunn, of course, is the person who gave us such phrases as: No man is an island, and ask not for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee. Well, some while later, my friend asks this other person: Say, what did you think about John Dunn? He replied: I liked it, but he sure used a lot of cliches. Well, no; Dunn is the one who gave us what became such cliches. Ephesians 2 might be like that. So many of the best known phrases in the New Testament come from this one chapter, but these must never become cliches. These are the dearest truths of the gospel; and today on *Groundwork*, we will dig into this rich chapter. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this is now episode two of our planned six-part series on Paul's letter to the Ephesians. There are six chapters, and so we will have six episodes here. We looked, in the first episode, at Ephesians Chapter 1, where Paul showed how much he loved the Christians at Ephesus, and he also spent a lot of time exploring the mysteries of our divine election, or our predestination in Christ.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it is important to bring up from that episode that we did that God had this plan in motion way before creation...before the problem of the fall, he has the solution of the resurrection and redemption plan in place; and not only does it include all of creation, it includes the fellow believers like the Ephesians and like us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; so, we don't want to study this incredible second chapter of Ephesians just, again, for information or just to take note of this or that rhetorical feature. Paul wanted the Ephesians to be deeply energized by what he was writing here; and perhaps they needed that because of, you know, they faced difficult times; they faced persecution; they lived in a very, very pagan city there in Ephesus, full of religious idolatry and bad practices; and so, Paul wants to reach into the hearts. In fact, we saw in that first chapter, Darrell, in the previous episode that Paul had this prayer, and he said: I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened—that the eyes of your heart may be opened. I love that phrase. That is what Paul wanted for the Ephesians, and that is what we all want for us today. That is why we are looking at Ephesians 2 in this program.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it says: As for you, you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ²in 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. ³All 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. ⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, we talked in the previous episode about how Paul was really celebrating predestination...divine election. In history, we have kind of turned those things into problems; but here, we touch on something else. Those of us who come from the Reformed neck of the woods, and particularly the Calvinist Reformed neck of the woods, John Calvin sometimes gets accused of being rather gloomy, and Calvinists are sometimes said to be kind of gloomy because we talk about "total depravity," it is sort of one of the main teachings of Calvinism, that we are all totally depraved; and some people find that kind of talk to be off-putting; but again, like with predestination and election in Chapter 1, the idea behind total depravity comes right from Paul, not from John Calvin or Augustine...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Paul is talking about that.

DARRELL DELANEY

You were dead in your transgressions and sins, that is the total depravity that you are talking about. So, they are not just sick, they are not just ailing, but they are dead spiritually speaking. So, they cannot hear the things of God; they don't want to be involved in the things of God; they are actually heading in the opposite direction of what God wants them to go in; and that is the total depravity that you are speaking of right now. In that situation is not just a bleak one, it is not just a bad one, it is horrible!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

There is no way around it, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No; my high school religion teacher, Lew VanderMeer, had an analogy. He said: You know, suppose you've got a dog... If your dog is sick and he is lying on a blanket on the other side of the family room, you can *whistle*...you can call...you can whistle for the dog; and if the dog is sick, he might be old and sick and stiff, but you know, he can hoist himself up and come lay at your feet. If, however, the dog on the other side of the room is *dead*, you can whistle all you want, you can call all you want, the dog is not coming to lay at your feet. He is dead. That is what Paul says they had been spiritually. The Ephesians had not been just sick...dead! As the undertaker and author Thomas Lynch points out: When people are dead, you have to do everything for them. The dead just cannot do for themselves; and that is what you were spiritually, Paul says.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, there is this movie I like, it is called *Memento*, where everything is backwards; and there is a guy who has a memory problem. He wakes up in the morning and he looks at a bottle of wine. It is empty, and he says: I don't feel drunk. So, he is trying to figure out what happened, because he cannot remember. Now, in this situation, where they are dead in their transgressions, they don't *feel* dead...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

But they actually are spiritually dead. So, they are going to do what they think living it up is. They are going to go party; they are going to go to the pagan place over there that have these things happen. They are going to get involved in all the cultural things that are moving them away from God, because they think they are

feeling alive...they want to be alive...they want to be the life of the party; but they are actually dead inside, and none of that will give them the salvation that they need; and they actually became objects of wrath, so it gets worse!

SCOTT HOEZEE

It gets worse! So, yes; they are spiritually dead, but by being spiritually dead, that means that they have no interest, as you said, they don't pay any attention to the things of God. So, they just smash through God's moral boundary fences with abandon. Whether you know it or not, when you are spiritually dead, you actually are spending most of the time kind of thumbing your nose at God, or worse. So, in other words, you are anti-God, and therefore, deserving of wrath, Paul says. God would be right to be wrathful toward you. So, what is going to get them out of this death spiral? They are dead and they are making their situation worse. What can get them out of it? Only a clean start called grace.

DARRELL DELANEY

The grace is something that God has to initiate because evidently when these people are dead in their transgressions, like when we are all dead in our transgressions, we don't want anything to do with God...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And God has to intervene. We talked about this in another episode, where intervention needs to happen to stop you from destroying yourself; and God knows that we would continue on this path and destroy ourselves if he doesn't jump in with his grace. That is why I like this verse that we are going to read here from Ephesians 2, where it says;

⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us [with him] in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed [in his kindness] to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast.

So, we see that God has not only made us alive, but he has raised us up to dwell spiritually with Jesus in heavenly realms. We would never have had that opportunity before. It is all a gift from God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; the dead had to be made alive; the blind had to have their eyes opened; the past had to be dispensed with through forgiveness; we cannot undo it, but God can give us this new beginning. So, it is all grace; it is all gift; it is all God; it is all Jesus all the time. Now, we do still have to live lives of gratitude, but basically, when you have been given a gift like that, everything after that is gravy—everything after that is just a giant thank-you card to God.

So, that is just ten verses, Darrell, of Ephesians Chapter 2, and Paul somehow managed to pack in all the theology of the gospel in ten verses; but wait, there is more. So, we will continue to explore Ephesians 2 in just a moment.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, let's dive right back into Ephesians 2, Darrell. We have read the first ten verses, but now let's grab the next eight, starting at verse 11:

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision"—¹²remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far away have been brought near by the blood of

Christ. ¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁸For through him we [both] have access to the Father by one Spirit.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, in this situation, Scott, we see that there is a distinguishing between the Jews and the Gentiles. We've got those who are circumcised; we've got those who are uncircumcised; and there was a separation that God spoke to his covenant people, God was moving among his covenant people. If they believed the press, which they did, they thought they were special—they thought they were somebody, because they were told for centuries: You are my prize possession...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

But they didn't realize that it wasn't because of their merit or because of their status or because of their place in the world that God chose them. They forgot that it was a grace thing; and so, this incorporation of now the new humanity with the Jews and the Gentiles coming together is also a work of grace; but God always had a plan to involve the entire creation, and not just one people group.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; now some people could take offense at this, right? This is in religious terms called *particularism*. Israel, for a while, was unique. Israel was special. You were either in Israel, and therefore in the embrace of God's love, or you weren't; and you know, these days...well, back in those days, too probably...you know, everybody wanted: Let's just be tolerant, pluralistic, let's all get along...

DARRELL DELANEY

Let's all get along.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, that we are all a little bit in touch with the truth, right? So we don't want one special people; but Paul says no. For a time...and it was temporary, as you just said, Darrell...for a time, Israel was special; and if you weren't in it, then you were out with God. You didn't have God in the world, Paul says here; but it was temporary. God was going to bring everybody in. Israel was just the beachhead—it was just the beginning. It wasn't the permanent state of affairs; although, we have noted, Darrell, that Israel forgot that. We did a series on Jonah...

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

a while back, and Jonah forgot that, because he didn't want the Ninevites to come into the club, right? But God wanted to save them, and did. We also did an Advent series on the family tree in Matthew 1, where we noted that the first four women noted in that genealogy—that family tree—were all non-Israelites.

DARRELL DELANEY

We have noted in many of our episodes the fact that God has always had the whole world involved...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

Into that redemption plan. Isaiah 49:6 says:

^{46b}I will make you [Israel] as a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

And Jesus literally sends the disciples to go into all the world, because he wants to make sure that the new humanity that they have...Jews and Gentiles...these distinguished markers are not as important anymore as their identity in the family of God and the body of Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Paul draws this out now in interesting ways. So, he says: Look, there used to be a dividing wall of hostility between the Gentiles and the Jews. The Jews unfortunately sometimes got a little full of themselves, as you just said. They forgot that they were in by grace, too; and so, they would look down their noses at Samaritans and Gentiles and, you know, everybody else. What Jesus did, Paul says, is he knocked down that dividing wall; he knocked down all the dividing walls that separate people; and what an important message it is Darrell, because if human history proves anything, it is that we have been really good at building dividing walls.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; you think about the Great Wall of China; you think about the Berlin Wall; you think about redlining as a geographical wall racially speaking for real estate. We see walls all over the place. So, there are external walls and there are internal walls; some people because of race, because of identity, because of status, because of gender, there have been walls and labels they have made even in this contemporary world we live in; and Christ broke down all the dividing walls, and the unity is what we need now, and God is calling us to that based on the person and work...the finished work...of Jesus on the cross.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; that is a good point. You pointed to some literal walls. There are metaphorical walls like the Iron Curtain that the Soviet Union drew across eastern Europe that wasn't...I think it was Winston Churchill who coined that phrase. There wasn't a literal iron curtain, of course...

DARRELL DELANEY

Sure.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But if you ever came up on the border between West Germany and East Germany like I did, it felt like an iron curtain. You didn't cross; you didn't go in there or you would get shot; but yes, the redlining thing, you know. City planners drawing a red line on the map, saying: No black families can buy beyond that line. We are going to keep them out. Maybe that has mostly ended, but now we've got gated communities and people building other walls...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Christ came to break down all those walls, Paul says, but Darrell, unfortunately the Church has sometimes been guilty of helping to build walls, or sometimes we help prop up walls that are already in existence; and that may be racial walls or white supremacist walls or white nationalist walls, or whatever they may be. Whenever the Church helps to prop it up, whether the Church built the wall in the first place, if we help prop it up, we show that we don't get the gospel—we don't get what the cross means.

DARRELL DELANEY

Dr. Martin Luther King said: Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere; and he said that because he was actually a gospel minister who understood this passage, where Protestant, Catholic, Jew, Gentile could hold hands and make sure that they knew the unity that Christ offers could be afforded to anyone and

everyone; and in our lives, we need to not be complicit and continue to build up walls. Even the online and digital places, there are walls built up; on our Facebook pages, on our...we have walls...we call it a wall...we put that stuff up, and we have to allow Christ to show us how the tensions can be worked through, how the racial and cultural barriers can be worked through, because God has called all nations and all tribes, all people and all languages to worship and honor him. This is something that Ephesians 2 says has already been set in place, two thousand years ago thanks to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; God's specialty is calling those who are afar off to come near. That is what he says: You Ephesians were afar off; before God called Abram, the people who became Israel would have been afar off. Everybody would be afar off if God didn't draw them near; and the cross and the blood of Jesus shed at that cross, that is what does it, Paul says; and that is all grace. So, the family way of God is the way of grace; and for us...and we will think about this in just a minute as we conclude this episode on Ephesians 2...but if that grace gets inside of us, if we realize that grace is where we live and why we live, then grace should permeate all of our words and actions, too; and we will think about that in just a moment.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, here is how Paul wraps up this amazing second chapter from Ephesians. Verse 19: Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²²And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

DARRELL DELANEY

Okay, okay, Scott; so, we see earlier that we have been seated in the heavenly realm with Christ, right next to him; but now, we are a holy building being built together, in which the Holy Spirit dwells. That is big news, Scott; that is encouraging. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit and he lives in here. So, we are included in that...like I said in the earlier episode, we are included in the redemption plan, but now he is showing that we are being built up as the temple in which God dwells.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Some while back on *Groundwork*, Dave Bast and I did a series on biblical symbols for the Church, and the temple was the one that we saw that went all the way back to Genesis 1, and temple, temple, temple, and it goes all the way to Revelation 22, in the very end. So, the temple literally in Jerusalem was sacred because the Israelites saw God as living there. The Ark of the Covenant was there, and that was like God's earthly throne. So, the temple was holy because on Mount Zion there, there was a profound place of deep, deep holiness because God lived there. Now, when Jesus died, what happened to the second temple? Solomon's temple was long gone, but Herod had rebuilt a new one; but what happened when Jesus died? Well, the curtain...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple was torn in two, and the biblical writers always say it was torn from the top...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So you know who is doing the tearing. It is God opening it up, and now we are told we are all the temple of God, and that is stunning.

DARRELL DELANEY

What is beautiful is that God seems to be moving closer and closer in creation.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, exactly.

DARRELL DELANEY

He is out there creating, but that is not close enough. So, he walks with Adam in the cool of the day, that is not close enough. He gives them a tent and a tabernacle, that is not close enough. He gives them a temple, that is not close enough. At Pentecost he gives his Spirit inside, that is still not close enough. He is trying to get as close as he can to believers to encourage them that he is working, that he is in them, that he is among them; and now he is applying that to not just Jews, but to Gentiles as well in this new humanity. So, I don't know what would amaze them or startle them or surprise them. If that doesn't, I don't know what will, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, think about the movement, Darrell, in this chapter. Verse 1: You were dead...you were dead, and then a couple of verses later, you were objects of wrath; and now we end the same chapter by saying: You are the walking, talking, living, breathing temple of the Holy Spirit! God wants to live inside you through the Spirit. That is a major, major move in this chapter, from you were dead to you are so alive now that the very life of God through the Spirit is in you. That is a transformation of stunning proportions; and Paul wanted the Ephesians to be stunned by that, but if *we* are not stunned by it, even yet today, then something is wrong with us. We've got to get our wiring checked or something, because most days we don't think about it all the time because it would be hard to think about it all the time because it is so amazing, but the Holy Spirit lives in us now. That is amazing!

DARRELL DELANEY

This isn't just some old dusty writing that was great for the Ephesians back then, but we need to understand that God is actively involved and at work in our lives today. So then, even if I struggle with sin, he is in me and he is working to get rid of that and change that behavior to conform me to the image of Christ. Even if I have a problem standing up for my faith, he is in me giving me the strength I need to speak up the truth at that time. If there are systems and structures that are full of injustice, he is banding us together as believers to work against it. That is his power that he rose Jesus from the dead to use on us and in us; and I think that the Ephesians are blown away by this. I mean, it humbles me to think about it in my own personal life, how he overcomes my brokenness to get his will accomplished in my life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Paul is just so excited about it. You know, I think we noted in the first episode that we think Paul probably wrote this letter from prison. So, just picture Paul in a cell with maybe a small little window letting in a shaft of light, and he has maybe got handcuffs on and shackles on his feet; and he is writing this letter, in which he is all but jumping up and down in his jail cell, rattling those chains by saying: Oh, my goodness! God has lavished all of this on you. He is just hopping up and down with excitement over grace. You know, Darrell, it may be an embellished, or even an apocryphal story, and we have probably told it before on *Groundwork*, but there was a conference one time in London, England that brought together scholars from around the world; and in one breakout session, they were trying to decide: Is there anything among world religions about Christianity that is unique? So, they went on and on. What about God becoming human? Well, no; lots of religions have god becoming human. What about this, what about that? Anyway, C.

S. Lewis walked in a little late and said: What's the rumpus? They said: Well, we are trying to figure out if Christianity has anything unique, and Lewis, without missing a beat, said: Well, that is easy. It is grace; it is grace. Everybody thought about it and said: Yes; it is. That is what makes Christianity...with no karma building up, no five pillars of Islam, no climbing the ladder of success...it is all grace.

DARRELL DELANEY

Grace: God's riches at Christ's expense. Grace is the reason why we don't have to figure out and muster up enough confidence or strength or intelligence or will to get to God's terms, but God condescends to our level so that we may have a relationship with him, and then he doesn't leave us where we are, Scott. He exalts us to the place and status that Christ has afforded for us in the heavenly realm; and now because we are the very living, breathing temple of God, there is nothing but grace and mercy attached to that story. We are saved by grace, we are saved by faith alone, and we thank God for that. Amen.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Amen. Thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Darrell Delaney and Scott Hoezee. We hope you will join us again next time as we continue to study Paul's teaching about God's great plan, and Paul's wonderful prayer for the Ephesians found in Ephesians Chapter 3. We have a website: groundworkonline.com. Visit it; tell us what *Groundwork* means to you and make some suggestions for future *Groundwork* programs.

DARRELL DELANEY

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