

Hallowed Ground Ephesians 2:1-7

Introduction:

In 1971, three local high schools (two white and one black) in Alexandria, Virginia, were integrated by court order. The 2000 film, *Remember the Titans*, tells the true story of Herman Boone, the football coach for T. C. Williams High School as he seeks to unify his team fraught with factionalism, distrust, disunity, and racial tension. Boone, played by Denzel Washington, takes his team to camp in Pennsylvania, hoping that a new environment will inspire his team to get along. However, tensions only go from bad to worse. Finally, Coach Boone wakes his team up in the middle of the night and takes them for a run. They run and they run and they don't stop until they reach hallowed ground. Play clip...(34:36-36:57)

It was on Hallowed Ground that Coach Boone's football team was called upon to make their decision as to whether or not...

- they would come together in unity as a team
- they would learn to respect one another
- they would learn to be victorious together.

If they didn't, he knew that they would be defeated—together...both on the practice field and when the game was on the line.

Sometimes churches are a lot like football teams...

We've been studying the book of Ephesians, a letter written to the church at Ephesus, a church founded and "coached" by the Apostle Paul. It was a church ripe with economic diversity, doctrinal differences, social divides, and ethnic tension.

Acts 19-20 (Paul's stay in Ephesus) and 1 and 2 Timothy (leader at Ephesus) provide us with the background to these challenges...

- Economic Diversity
 - Rich and Poor (1 Timothy 6:17)

“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant...”

- Social Divides
 - Slave and Free (1 Timothy 6:1-2)
“All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of respect...”
“...masters are not to show less respect for them [slaves] because they are brothers.”
- Doctrinal Differences
 - Abstinence and Freedom (1 Timothy 4:1-5)
“They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from food...”
(4:3)
- Ethnic Tensions
 - Gentiles and Jews (Acts 19:34—Alexander shouted down)
We can rest assured that this level of ethnic tension didn’t end at the front door of the church! (Ephesians 2:11ff)

The Ephesian church had been forced by God to “integrate” themselves together. And if these and other texts offer us any clues, it wasn’t working out very well. A trip to “Hallowed Ground” might be just the thing they needed to begin to find common ground, a foundation from which unity might be built. And that’s exactly where Coach Paul takes them.

And I’m wondering this morning if our congregation might join Paul and the Ephesian church as they make their way to “Hallowed Ground”. We might benefit from the lessons learned. As I look out on this congregation I see different...

- Genders
- Ages
- Ethnicities
- Nationalities
- Denominational backgrounds
- Doctrinal positions
- Worship preferences
- Educational levels
- Financial situations
- Life Situations--Students/non-students, married, single, etc.

Gratefully, this morning, for us this isn't about **coming** together in unity. When it comes to unity, VCL is way ahead of the church at Ephesus. Our church is unified! For us, it's more about **continuing** together—that we would preserve and persevere in the unity that God has given to us. It's on "Hallowed Ground" that, we too, will be reminded of the common ground that we all share.

Main Points: (Ephesians 2:1-7, pg. 869)

There are two lessons that Paul would want us to learn today...

1. All of Us Were Spiritually Dead by Our Own Sin (2:1-3).

Read 2:1-3.

Illustration: When I travel on vacation, I enjoy stopping at historical sites. Not surprisingly, this has taken me to a number of cemeteries. I've visited several in recent years...

- Arlington National Cemetery (Arlington, VA)
- Old Granary Burial Ground (Boston, MA)
- Lake View Cemetery (Cleveland, OH)

At each of these sites, visitors are handed guides so they can find the final resting place of those who have died...

- Arlington National Cemetery—Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Audie Murphy, JFK, etc.
- Old Granary Burial Ground—Paul Revere, John Hancock, Samuel Adams, etc.
- Lake View Cemetery—J.D. Rockefeller, Elliott Ness, President James A. Garfield, etc.

This morning Paul transports us to the VCL Burial Ground/Cemetery. He hands us this letter which marks the site of some important gravestones he wants us to be sure we visit—MINE and YOURS!! In your mind's eye, you might envision yourself standing there as Paul says to you... "as for you, you were dead..." (v.1). And not just you alone, but everyone who's here this morning that's a follower of Jesus Christ. Paul goes on to say, "all of us" (v.3) were dead, and that would include himself. When it comes to being dead, there are no exceptions! Maybe your gravestone is right there beside that of the Apostle Paul. Maybe my gravestone is

right next to yours. If we ever need to look for common ground in our church, we simply need to visit this “hallowed ground” that Paul has shown us. **All of Us Were Dead!**

Not only were all of us dead, all of us were dead...

- In the Same Dimension—Spiritually
 - While this “death” impacts the emotional, mental, social, and physical dimensions of our human existence, Paul’s primary emphasis is on our spiritual “death” as it relates to “transgressions” and “sins” (v. 1). These are the attitudes and actions that are directly linked to our desire and ability to relate to God as we should. **All of us were spiritually dead in our relationship to God.**
- To the Same Degree—Completely
 - There isn’t one way/one area in our lives in which we have lived up to God’s standard for our lives...
 - “Transgressions/trespases”—crossing a known boundary or straying from a marked path.

Illustration: Growing up in Indiana, it wasn’t unusual to see a sign like this one (“NO TRESSPASSING”) on a gate, fence, or tree, clearly marking the appropriate boundaries. There’s no excuse if you find yourself on the other side of the line. You know exactly where the line is!

Similarly, these are deeds/acts that we knew were wrong even before we did them. We often know all too well where the line is...

- Honoring our parents
- Integrity in our business, school, etc.
- Loving our kids
- Purity in our relationships

And time after time we knowingly crossed the line with God.

- “Sins”—missing the mark or falling short.

The idea here is that we always failed to measure up to God’s standard of perfection. We continually missed the mark in some way or to some degree. Our good deeds were...

- tainted with selfishness
- thinking how good we are

Even when we chose to stay on the straight and narrow and to do what it right, we all fell short. The character and quality of our obedience always missed the mark.

Illustrations: Author, Carl Sandburg, wrote: “There is an eagle in me that wants to soar and there is a hippopotamus in me that wants to wallow in the mud.”

And the cause of our deaths, according to Paul, were essentially the same. We all fell victim to...

- **Toxic Environment**—“you followed the ways of this world” (v. 2). These are the systems, ways of doing things, priorities, etc. of how the world works and operates. Our politics, national values, culture, business structures are all tainted and toxic. They work against the will and ways of God and they deadened us to the very presence of God around us.

Illustration: It’s like eating a healthy diet while living in nuclear waste.

- **Spiritual Attack**—“the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit of disobedience who is now at work in those who are disobedient” (v. 2). According to Paul, there were spiritual forces actively seeking to deceive us and distract us from the things of God. We were targeted by Satan himself, the ruler of the kingdom of the air, and at that time had no defense against him (Eph. 6:10-18). We were shot full of holes by...

- Pride
- Lust
- Anger

We didn’t have a sporting chance...

Illustration: We were easy targets—like shooting fish in a barrel.

And where there are those who are disobedient to God, we can be rest assured that there are spiritual forces at work—even now.

- **Inward Deficiencies**—“gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature” (v. 3). As fallen human beings, our bodies, wills, emotions, and minds always work against what would bring life to our spirit. Our...
 - Bodies would rather sleep than pray
 - Minds would rather think about anything rather than God
 - Emotions lead us to do what is easy rather than what is eternal
 - Minds choose what is evil rather than what is good

Illustration: A little girl was disciplined by her mother for kicking her brother and then pulling his hair. “Sally,” her mother said, “why did you let the Devil make you kick your little brother and pull his hair?” To which she answered, “the Devil made me kick him, but pulling his hair was my idea!”

In a church marked with distrust, division, and disunity, Paul calls the Ephesian Christians to look out over what was the cemetery of their lives. They were all spiritually dead. The causes were varied and their spiritual death was comprehensive and complete.

Illustration: They weren’t just “mostly dead”—Princess Bride. They had...

- Kicked the bucket
- Pushing up daisies
- Bought the farm...dead

The Ephesians may have been “good” people, but they weren’t “Godward” people. When it came to a relationship with God, there were no...

- brainwaves—didn’t think about God (ignored)
- heartbeat—didn’t love God
- speech—didn’t speak of God (blasphemed)
- movement—didn’t live in a way that was pleasing to God.

The Ephesian Christians needed to admit that it was true—to them God was as good as dead. Their unity would depend on it. On Hallowed Ground all are equal. There is no...

- rich/poor
- slave/free
- Jew/Gentile

Death is the great equalizer.

The question then is this... “How willing are you to admit that at one time in your life that God was dead to you? For some of us...

- this would be very easy to admit
- this would be very hard to admit...
 - good person
 - grew up in a Christian home (not that bad)
 - more an issue of resuscitation than resurrection

However, Paul might challenge us on this point. This isn't to say that we are as bad as we could be. It's only to say that when it comes to living a life that meets God's perfect standards, the best word to describe us is “dead”. And if we insist on claiming that that our good works make us good enough for God, then the danger of disunity will always be present among us. The seeds of disunity can so easily bear fruit in the lives of those who see life where this only death.

Illustration: I still remember the first time that I realized I was dead! When I was 8 years old, I knew I was spiritually dead. After having a fight with my brother, I admitted to God that I was dead and that there was nothing I could do to make myself alive. And I admit it to you today.

And if I didn't have Jesus Christ in my life today, I would still be dead. I wouldn't...

- care about God
- come to church
- be compassionate

As a congregation, can we agree that at one time we were all the same? Can we agree that God was not our first priority? Can we agree that the life of God was

not in us. I was dead. You were dead. We were all dead. And if it weren't for the resurrection power of God in our lives, we would still be dead.

But even though God may have been dead to us, we weren't dead to God!

2. All of Us Were Made Spiritually Alive by the Grace of God (2:1-3).

Read 2:4-7.

As we stand here at the VCL Burial Ground, we see the common ground of spiritual death that we all once shared, but we also see the common ground of grace that we all share as well. We see the headstones which were once the cornerstone of our relationship with God, but as we look closer at the graves around us, we realize that they are now empty. We're no longer there!!

And was it anything of our own...

- Choosing?
- Doing?
- Strength?
- Desire?
- Ability?

It was all due to the will and work of God in our lives. It's only because of God's...

- Great love
- Rich mercy
- Good grace
- Mighty power (1:19)

And so if it was only by God's love, mercy, grace, and power, why would we focus on those things that would divide us?

And all of this was not just extended to "you" and "me," but to "us" (5x). Paul begs us to see that we are all in this together.

Illustration: "What God has brought together, let no man separate!"

We shared a common ground in death and now we share a common ground in life—a life that is...

- By Christ
- Through Christ
- For Christ
- In Christ
- With Christ

And we now stand together on a new “Hallowed Ground”. God has moved us from...

- Death to life
- Enslavement to enthronement
- Condemnation to coronation
- Hell to heaven
- Wrath to riches

For the Ephesian Christians, how can there be any room for...

- Economic Arrogance—rich and poor alike now have the same bank account filled with the riches of God’s grace
- Social Divides—slave and master alike have the same position seated with Christ himself

The Ephesian Christians have all experienced a...

- Common death
- Common life
- Uncommon grace

On Hallowed Ground there are no grounds for disunity, discord, and division. We are humbled in recognizing that we’ve all fallen short of God’s holy standard. And we are humbled even more in being reminded that we all now together share in an exalted position achieved only by the love, mercy, and grace of our God.

We are all the same you and me—trophies of God’s grace by which He can and does show off just how marvelous His goodness and grace truly is! *“...in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace...”* (v. 7)

Grace is the great equalizer. Here, there is no...

- Rich/poor
- Student/non-student
- Jew/Gentile
- Married/single
- Ethnicity
- Nationalities

We only know what it is that we've been shown—love, mercy, and grace.

Conclusion:

Coach Boone ended his speech with these words...“Take a lesson from the dead. If we don't come together right now on this hallowed ground, we too will be destroyed.” We'll, his football team did come together and they went on to a perfect 13-0 season, an undefeated season, the 2nd best team in the nation.

As God continues to integrate new people into our congregation, may we remain unified and undefeated, embracing both the humble beginnings which we all share and the exalted position we all now share in Christ. May we continually extend the love, mercy, and grace to others that we've all been shown.