



“Rebuilding Walls that God Tore Down”

Kevin Presley

We’ve heard a lot about building and tearing down walls in the world. In 1987, President Ronald Reagan famously stood in West Berlin at the Brandenburg Gate and challenged Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev to tear down the wall that had divided East and West Berlin since 1961. In 1989, people finally began to cross over that wall, and by 1992, it had been demolished. Then there are some today who are interested in building walls. Some say the United States should build a wall along its border, arguing that it is necessary to preserve the security and prosperity of America. We’ll leave that to the politicians to debate.

Instead, I’m concerned about walls that God has built. When you look back through the Bible, walls were important. In ancient times, they were used to fortify a city. A wall was erected around a city, and a gate would allow people in and out. Watchmen would be perched upon the wall to scan the horizon for danger and warn the city leaders of any threat that approached.

Spiritually, God is concerned about walls around His city of truth, around His kingdom. The book of **Revelation** pictures the new Jerusalem as having a wall great and high around it (**Revelation 21:12**). We know that a wall is to exist today between the church and the world. A wall of demarcation and distinction, as the people of God are told to be *a holy people, called out from the world, separated and consecrated unto God*. That was also the case in the Old Testament. The scriptures picture the Jewish people as having a wall about them as a nation, separating them from all of the other nations of the world since they were the covenant people of God. God wanted them to be very careful to maintain moral, ethnic and religious purity throughout their days as a nation. Not that they might look down on the nations about them; rather so God could use them as a channel of revelation and blessing to the other nations of earth.

In **Ephesians 2**, the apostle Paul teaches us that that wall or fence that separated the Jews from the Gentiles was the law that God exclusively gave to them through Moses. But as he argues throughout the

chapter, we're not saved today by keeping the law of Moses, but by grace through faith in Christ. The law of Moses served its purpose, then was taken out of the way and mankind was reconciled together and to God through Christ. This is what he is teaching them here.

Ephesians 2:11-14 “Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;”

What was that *wall of partition*? And how did God remove it? What happened when He did so? And are men today trying to re-build the wall that God tore down?

It's a dangerous thing to tear down walls that God builds. It's also a serious matter to rebuild walls that God tore down. In fact, that's what it seems men are doing today in religion. On one hand, it seems that many want the wall that God built between the church and the world taken away. While at the same time, they are eagerly taking their trowels, stones and mortar and building the very walls that God DID decree to be torn down.

Paul refers to one such wall in our text passage of **Ephesian 2:14** as *the middle wall of partition* that had divided Jew from Gentile. What was he talking about? Some scholars say that he was referring to a literal wall that existed in the Jewish temple. It was a wall or partition that separated the court of the Gentiles from the rest of the temple that was restricted to Jews. Gentiles were forbidden to pass that point. That physical partition was even representative of the spiritual division, and even by this time, a hostility between Jews and Gentiles. You may recall that in **Acts 21:28**, Paul himself created an uproar when he was accused of taking Trophimus beyond that wall, thus polluting the temple according to the Jews. Some argue that Paul makes reference to that wall here. Perhaps there is a spiritual allusion to it, but the problem with that interpretation is that if he is speaking of the literal wall of the temple, it actually stood until the entire temple was destroyed, and that didn't happen for at least eight years after Paul wrote this letter to the church at Ephesus. Rather, Paul tells us what *the middle wall* refers to.

Ephesians 2:15 “Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;”

In other words, the law of Moses. He goes on to imply that the Old Testament law created two groups of people. How did the law distinguish between Jew and Gentile? Well, the law of Moses was not given to all mankind; it was only given to the Jews. It was part of the Abrahamic covenant—that is, those who were born of the seed of Abraham and were heirs to the promises made to him. That's very important to note. The law was not given to ALL peoples. Every other nation of the earth was excluded from the covenant and thus, the law pertained not to them, but to those who were in a covenant relationship with God. All of the other nations of the earth were Gentiles according to the flesh. But Paul says the wall that divided Jew and Gentile (the law that made that distinction) was torn down and taken out of the way, thus *making one new man (or body) instead of two*. That means that today, God's people are made up of people of every nation and tribe, and not just those who are Abraham's children by physical birth. That was a very difficult lesson, especially for the Jewish Christians of the first century to accept. They placed great confidence in the flesh—in the fact that they had the blood of Abraham coursing thru

their veins. The great tragedy was that they misunderstood this distinction that God had made at that time between them and the Gentiles. Oh, they were very careful to maintain that fleshly and national separation from other peoples, but they weren't so concerned about the moral and spiritual distinction. In **Romans 2**, Paul shows they were just as great sinners as the Gentiles, yet they went about boasting of their Abrahamic lineage. They might have been able to trace their physical line back to Abraham, but the fact was they were not his children spiritually because they did not possess the faith and character that he possessed. If they had, they would not have rejected the word of God and the prophets. They would not have crucified Jesus and rejected the gospel preached by His apostles.

Paul is showing in **Ephesians 1-3** as he does in some of his other epistles, that there is now no difference in the eyes of God as pertaining to the flesh. That Christ, by fulfilling the law in His life and death, had torn down the wall between Jews and Gentiles, resulting in one body made up of those who are redeemed by the blood of Christ through the kind of obedient faith that Abraham possessed. In fact, Paul tells us who the true children of Abraham are. Paul wrote the following to Gentiles who had been converted to Christ.

Galatians 3:26-27 “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

Who were the children of God during the time of the law? The children of Abraham, by physical birth of the lineage of Abraham. But he says now, *ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*. Let's read on.

Galatians 3:28-29 “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

You see, he's saying that even Gentiles are Abraham's seed. No longer was there to be hostility between the Jew and Gentile. In fact, the law was never intended to make the Jew despise or hate the Gentile, as ended up being the case. Rather, the law was God's way of using the Jewish people as channels of revelation and blessing to the whole world. God would give the lost human race a Messiah and a redeemer from sin through the children of Abraham. That's why God told Abraham when He repeated the promise to him *In thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed* (**Genesis 22:18**). That's a Messianic promise. That's talking about the fact that through the lineage of Abraham, God would provide the world with a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now let's go back to our text and read it in the full context.

Ephesians 2:13-19 “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off (Gentiles) are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our (Jews and Gentiles) peace, who hath made both (Jews and Gentiles) one (How and where? In the church of Christ), and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us (that is, the law that delineated us); Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances (talking of the Old Testament law that came by Moses); for to make in himself of twain one new man (the church of Jesus Christ), so making peace; And that he might reconcile both (Jew and Gentile) unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both (Jew and Gentile) have access by one Spirit (the revelation of the Spirit—the gospel) unto the Father.

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God;”

Paul clearly says that the wall has come down! Even in his own time, there were those trying to re-build the wall that God tore down. Their efforts continue even today. Did you know that many beliefs and religious practices are in effect an effort to re-build what God tore down and took out of the way? For example, there are those who still seek to make a national and racial distinction between people. The whole doctrinal system known as *dispensationalism* which is wildly popular and widely believed among many denominations today, makes such a distinction. They tell us that the church is a Gentile institution and the Jews, on the other hand, are still a covenant people with God today. In other words, they say God has two programs: one for the Gentile, through faith in Christ, and one for the fleshly Jew. They say His plan for the Jews is delayed until later, while presently He is blessing the Gentiles in the church age. Well, that’s not what Paul teaches in **Ephesians**. Paul says He has made *both one*. No distinction. *Both one in Christ*. When? Not in the world to come, but *now*. In the church. The church’s very beginning consisted of whom?—Jews, who kept their covenant with God and accepted the Messiah when He came. They believed and obeyed the gospel when it was preached. They were added to the church beginning on the Day of Pentecost (**Acts 2:47**).

We read what Paul wrote to the Galatians in **Galatians 3:28** where he said *there is neither Jew nor Greek*. Under Christ’s economy, as opposed to the Mosaic economy, there is neither Jew nor Greek in the flesh. *Neither bond nor free, neither male nor female. But all are one in Christ, and if in Christ, then Abraham’s seed*. Who are Abraham’s seed?—All those who are Christ’s. Just Jews?—No, Gentiles, too. Not by physical birth, but by the new birth. *And heirs according to the promise*. Spiritual Israel is not made up merely of Jews, but *spiritual* Jews—Jew and Gentile—who have come to Christ.

Any person who makes a racial, ethnic or national distinction between people does NOT understand the gospel. There is not a Jewish religion and a Gentile religion. There is not a church for the Jews and one for the Gentiles. There is the church of Christ, made up of all who have obeyed Christ, Jew OR Gentile. Also, the church is not an American institution. Nor is it a Roman institution. Nor a European or African institution. It is a heavenly institution. That’s it. God does not have a white church and a black church, a red church and a yellow church. He only has the blood-bought church of Jesus the Lord. Consequently, any person who discriminates, hates or looks down upon another person because of the country they were born in, the color of their skin, or their socioeconomic status, any person who would withhold the gospel from such an one, or would not allow such an one a seat of honor in the kingdom of God equal to their own is what the Bible calls *a respecter of persons*. And the Bible plainly states that such a person commits sin (**James 2:9**). There is no place for racism and ethnic or national delineation or distinction in the kingdom of the Lord.

Secondly, the religious division in the form of denominationalism and sectarianism that exists today is an affront to God and is an unwitting effort to re-build the wall that God tore down. Many say that denominations are simply an unavoidable fact of religious life. In fact, the religious diversity that surrounds us is even strangely celebrated by many. We’re led to believe that the church is made up of all kinds of varied beliefs and practices represented by distinct fellowships of Christians around the world. My friend, nothing is farther from the truth. Nothing is more contrary to the spirit of Christianity as Christ authored it.

Think about it. If Christ had built His church to consist of many sects and fellowships and differing denominations, wouldn’t we immediately see that in the writings of the New Testament? Yet, we see

the opposite. We see the apostles working *against* that. Couldn't Christ have established a Jewish church and also a Gentile church, thus avoiding some of the conflict of the first century that was due to the brethren's immaturity and misunderstanding? Some seemed to treat the church as though it were divided into two branches, including the apostle Peter. He was guilty of treating his Jewish and Gentile brethren in an inconsistent manner, and Paul had to rebuke him for it when he saw him in Antioch (**Galatians 2:11**). No, instead Christ *reconciled both Jew and Gentile unto God in one body by the cross*(**Ephesians 2:16**). What's *the body*?

Colossians 1:18 "And he is the head of the body, the church..."

The body of Christ is the church of Christ. That is the will of Christ Jesus today: one body, one fellowship, one church. The idea is foreign to the scriptures to have Baptist Christians, Methodist Christians, Presbyterian Christians, Holiness Christians, Assemblies of God Christians or Seventh-Day Adventist Christians...Rather, what we read about in the book of **Acts** and throughout the New Testament are simply Christians. Members of the one church that Jesus established on the Day of Pentecost, and made thus by obedience to the gospel. Being baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (**Acts 2:38**, **Galatians 3:27**). Added by Christ Himself to that church (**Acts 2:41,47**).

May God help us to restore the faith that was once delivered and respect the fact that Christ tore down the wall of religious division in His death. When people come along today and celebrate the multiplicity of churches in the world with statements like *one is as good as another* and *we are to honor, accept and respect all religious ideologies and philosophies*, they are taking their brick and mortar and re-building a wall that God tore down.

I would lastly point out that men are re-building the wall that God tore down in Christ when they seek to observe the law of Moses today. We've been made free from that law. Paul was very plain about that in his epistles.

Galatians 2:18-19 "For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God."

What's the broader context here? He is addressing the efforts of Judaizing Christians to go back and enforce the law of Moses (particularly circumcision under the Abrahamic covenant) on this side of the cross. To hold that over Gentiles and enforce that on them. Paul spent much of his time and energy combatting that false doctrine and heresy that afflicted the early church.

You may ask *is anyone really doing that today? Are there any Judaizers left in the world today?* All around us, if you stop and think about it. We see Sabbath keeping, instrumental music in worship (I know that is very popular and widely accepted today, but that is an Old Testament precept that is not taught in the New Testament.), the idea of a special priesthood (distinction between the clergy and laity), the burning of incense in religious service, the keeping of Old Testament days and feasts...All of that comes from the Old Testament—not the New Testament.

Think of it this way: if your pattern for worship and church organization necessarily comes from the Old Testament and the temple, your worship is not in *spirit and in truth*. If you must point to an Old Testament scripture to justify something that you offer to God as worship today, you are going back to the law and unwittingly, you are helping to build a wall that God tore down in Jesus Christ.

May the Lord help us all to preserve the walls that He has built, and on the other hand, respect the results of other walls that He, in Christ Jesus the Lord, tore down. And thank the Lord that He DID tear them down, that we might be saved in Christ.

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