

The Walls Are Broken Down

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Date: 27 October 1991

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[0 : 01] Turn, if you will, as Steve asked, to that passage from Ephesians chapter 2, verse 11 following, and I attend most of the evening services here, and I look at you from the back and wonder who you are. Now that I see you from the front, I still wonder who you are, and I am delighted to be able to tell you that if you will listen very carefully, you will know who you are before we're finished tonight. I may not know who you are, but you will at least know who you are in a way that perhaps you've never known. And so I'm going to ask you to have the text right in front of you so that you can follow it, and I want just to pray before we start. Just bow your heads.

Our God, the text that we have in front of our eyes, that we hold with our hands, we take to be the Word of God. And that we don't understand it by talking to one another about it. We only understand it as you, by your Holy Spirit, talk to us about it. And so we ask that in these few moments that we devote to this passage tonight, that you will, by your Holy Spirit, speak to us and give us some understanding of who we are as we discover who you are. We ask this in Jesus Christ's name. Amen. Now what I want you to do is, all together, when I drop my hand to say the first two words of verse 11, that means I'll know you're there and you can know what I'm talking about. So all together, you will know that this service is a Holy Communion service. And it is therefore a service in which our obedience in participating in this service is obedience to Jesus' command, to do this in remembrance of me. And Paul is emphasizing the necessity of our remembering. In all the busyness of the week that you have lived, in all the fragmentation of the circumstances of your life. And so Paul says, remember, and Jesus says, do this in remembrance.

So the function of the service tonight is that you might remember who you are and you write, remember, what Christ has done and who he is. So those are the first two words, therefore, remember.

The rest of that verse, which I'll get you to read now, that... The rest of that verse, which I'll get you to read now, that...

Now that's all stopped there.

[4 : 08] What Paul is saying is that there arises between people means by which they identify each other.

And one looks down on the other. And Paul says, this is totally artificial. It is something, it's a distinction that is accomplished by hand, in the same way that idols are made by hand, it's something that people do. It's a totally artificial distinction, which has been created by people manufacturing it. Manu meaning it's handmade. It's a human distinction, which Paul is about to crush to powder. So he says, remember, these are artificial distinctions. Then he picks up the theme and look at the first verse, the first word of verse 12. And let me hear it please. So we're back there again.

You see, therefore, remember, remember. And what he wants them to remember is... And this is... This primarily is speaking to Christians. It's speaking to those who are believers. It's speaking to those who know themselves to belong to Christ.

But he wants them to remember where they came from. And so if you're not a Christian, you may find this a useful description of where you are. It's not very helpful, but it may be... I mean, it's not very positive, but it may be useful.

He says, this is what you are to remember. He says, remember that you are separated from Christ, that there is no bond.

[6 : 07] This is what you are. Remember that you are alienated from the commonwealth or alienated from citizenship, that you are a stranger to the covenant, that you had no hope, and that you were without God.

And that was because God had rejected you, not just because you had rejected God. The same word is used as atheism. But it's not necessarily that you are practicing not believing in God.

It's a declaration that God doesn't believe in you. And that's who you are. So if you want a perfect picture of total isolation, you've got it right here.

Spiritually, you're separated from Christ. Socially, you're alienated from citizenship. Legally, you're a stranger to the covenant.

Psychologically, you have no hope. And theologically, you are without God. Now, that's a very complete description. And there's not much left of you after that description is applied.

[7 : 22] And he's saying to them as Christians, remember, this is where you come from. Okay. That's verse 11.

Now look at verse 12. Sorry. I want you to look at verse 13. But the way I want you to look at it is this. I want you to start with me and read from verse 11 to the end of verse 13.

And omit verse 12, which I just described to you as being our total isolation. Verse 11 and verse 13 in sequence. Therefore.

But now.

But now. So that's what you're to remember as having been part of your past.

[8 : 30] And then you are to remember the vital reality of the present is that by the violent death of Christ on the cross, you who were separated are now brought near.

You who were isolated are now in Christ. That's who you are. Now, you may not feel like this, but Paul is telling it to you, not so that you will necessarily feel like it, but so you will understand what Christ has done.

Now we're going to have a hymn. And the hymn is verses 14.

Sorry. Yeah, it's verse 14 down to the end of 18. And the reason I say that that is a hymn is because some of the people who are experts in New Testament texts say, they think that at this point in the text, Paul recites a hymn.

It was a New Testament hymn. A hymn that was sung by the churches in the New Testament. So if you want to see what a hymn should be, you should look at this hymn here.

[9 : 59] And we won't sing this hymn. We'll just say it. Because I don't know what the music is. But listen to the hymn. It's a hymn of praise.

Remember we started tonight with, Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God Almighty, which talked entirely about God. Didn't talk about anything else.

Nothing else was included. It was just a description of who God is. Didn't say how you felt about him. Didn't say how you should feel about him. Didn't say how you should respond to him.

All it said was that this is God and he is holy. Well, listen to this hymn. And we'll read it together. For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing in his flesh that he might create in himself one new man, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing hostility to an end.

And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and to those who were near.
For through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father.

[11 : 30] You see, while a lot of people tend to think that their faith in Christ depends upon who they are and how they're doing and how they're feeling and what they're thinking and what they have achieved, Paul says the thing you really need to know is who God is.

And if you break this hymn down even a little bit, you will see that God is active. I think a lot of us grow up with the sense that God put the world together and hung it out in the universe and is watching to see what happens.

But Paul's concept, what Paul is teaching us here is that the God who created the world is very, very active in the world, fulfilling the purpose which he had from the beginning of the world and that he is fulfilling that purpose in your life, in mine, in our life together.

And so who he is and what he is doing helps us to understand who we are and what the meaning of our life is. So look at what he is doing.

First, he is our peace. That our whole world is divided into factions that are at war with one another.

[13 : 08] Male versus female. Rich versus poor. Powerful versus weak. And you know how they can go on and on and on. Finding divisions and exploiting the divisions which come between people.

The kind of artificial divisions that this passage started with. The circumcised and the despised and uncircumcised. All those kind of divisions go on. And we don't find any ground of peace between us.

No way on which we can relate to one another. No way in which we can approach one another. But he is our peace. It says. Then it goes on to say he has made us one in Christ.

That's the only way we are one is in Christ. We can't find any other oneness. All we can find is estrangement from one another. We are made one in Christ.

He has broken down the dividing wall of hostility. And this one sentence could have cost Paul his life.

[14 : 20] because this is one way one scholar interprets this breaking down the dividing wall of hostility.

He said in the temple in Jerusalem there was a wall and that wall divided the Jews from the Gentiles.

and that was the wall of hostility. And the reason Paul was arrested in the first place was because it was suspected that he had taken a Gentile friend through that wall as though it had never been there.

and so when Paul says the wall doesn't disappear he is he says when this wall has been broken down that would be virtually incriminating evidence against him.

But that's what he says has happened. There is no wall he says between Jew and Gentile. The wall of hostility is broken down. He then goes on to say what he has abolished and this is this is abolished in the sense that you are under condemnation.

[15 : 46] The law says this this is who you are therefore you are condemned. When I was at this mission in Toronto last week somebody said how come we're condemned you know why does God condemn us?

it occurred to me that one of the grounds of our condemnation is our mutual condemnation. We condemn each other we condemn the whole of the human race and that when it says that what Jesus has done by his death on the cross he has abolished in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two so making peace so that two people who are have nothing whatever in common come to have everything in common as they are believers in Christ that we have a lot in common as believers in Christ the most significant thing about our lives is what we have in common by reason of being believers in Christ as opposed to the things that divide us humanly the things that we do with our hands the partitions and walls of division that we create with our hands those have been abolished and then it goes on to say what else he's done what else God has done and this hymn he has created and I've lost my place but I'm getting there he has created one new man making peace that he has preached peace and that through him we both have access in one spirit to the father do you know that one of the things that we do when we sing psalms in the church you in the evening service aren't very good at this but I'll tell you about it it is sometimes thought when you sing one of the psalms that you haven't given a completely balanced theological statement about the nature and character of God so to make sure that it's balanced you end the psalm by saying you can all say it with me if you know what it is glory be to the father and to the son and to the holy spirit as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be world without end amen that means that you end up with the doctrine of the trinity to make sure that this is a balanced view of God that's being presented but you see in this hymn you have the holy trinity at the end of the hymn that's how the hymn ends when it says that we both have access in one spirit to the father so he goes on then in the next verse which is verse 19 and all the estrangement which we were to have remembered from verse 12 is now reversed in verse 19 and instead of estrangement you who were are no longer strangers you're no longer sojourners you're no longer aliens but fellow citizens with the saints and you are members of

the household of God built upon the foundation of the apostles prophets Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone now what what what is happening here you see is that you are being taken that the people of God are being taken and they are being built together into a temple it looks like this is a kind of fixed structure except that it's made up entirely of people and the foundation of this is the prophetic teaching concerning the Christ who was to come the apostolic teaching concerning the Christ who lived and died and rose again according to the testimony of the apostles so that this community is based on the foundation of Christ

Jesus himself he is the cornerstone he is the one in whom we all hang together if we try and find a relationship to one another all we will find is disaffection and alienation but with Christ as the cornerstone we can find ourselves drawn together by reason of being in Christ that's who you are you see when I told you at the beginning that I would tell you who you are who you are is that you are in Christ as a believer that's your identity that's your language that's who you are and God is at work here establishing on this foundation of which Christ is the cornerstone look in verse 21 and I'll get you to read there to the end of the chapter just so that I know you're all with me remember it's

Jesus Christ verse 21 there it is again listen to it Jesus Christ one of the accusations against the person of the Lord Jesus when he came to his trial was that he had said destroy this temple and in three days I will rebuild it and so Jesus portrayed himself there as a temple builder and Paul picks that up here and says yes this is what Jesus is doing Jesus is bringing us that in

[23 : 15] Jesus we are coming together as a structure we make up the living temple and the temple was that building whose purpose it was to offer a continual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God that's what the temple was for right in the middle of the city so that everybody could see that the central activity of the community was the offering of praise and worship to God and that we are to be made into a temple with the responsibility the highest responsibility that we have is offering praise to God we are built into that temple and whom you are also built into it for a dwelling place of God in the spirit I will abide in you and you will abide in me that God abides in us and it is as you know that your identity is that you together as those who are believers in

Christ are that dwelling place which is a temple which has in which God resides and in which is constantly offered praise and thanksgiving to God by the life that you live in response to the God who has made himself known to you in Christ the God who is in Christ is our peace who has broken down the wall of hostility has abolished the commandments against us and has created in himself one new man well that's who we are and that's why when we come together we find a bonding in Christ and we remember that we are one in Christ and we partake of one loaf as it were we partake of the wine and in that we share you know we share the life of

Christ that's the life we live that life which is imparted to us as we partake of as we partake symbolically of the of the bread and wine we are partaking of the life of Christ so that the life that is in you is a life which you have derived from Christ and which you share as the temple in which God is praised and the dwelling place in which God lives and that's who you are now there's a lot of particularity about each one of you but basically that's who you are and that's how you find yourself and as Paul as Jesus says to us do this in remembrance of me so Paul says remember who you are remember who you wear and remember what

Christ has done remember now who you are so remembering isn't just an act of mental recollection it is an incorporation into the very sort of fiber of your life of who you are in Christ amen I think somebody is going to lead us in prayer now thank you please sit or kneel whatever is comfortable for you let us pray almighty lord we come to you in prayer not to dictate our petitions or wishes to you but rather to seek your will and blessing to ask that you hear our voice and work mightily in us with us and through us loving loving

God we come to you with thanks for your great mercies and many blessings we think of those less fortunate be they in our neighborhoods our city our country or in the far reaches of the world at this time we ask that you give us hearts that love our neighbors that we may help those in need Lord Lord Jesus Prince of Peace we pray that you bring peace to our nations we think specifically of Yugoslavia we think also of the Middle East Russia and the Eastern Bloc countries we think of our own country and our cities we think of our homes at this time let us be quiet and think of and pray for peace in this world

[28 : 48] Lord giver of life we pray to you for the sick the hurting and the lonely we ask that you surround those with your caring love Lord we pray for one another we ask that you bless us our friends our relatives where we work our homes soften our hearts Lord teach us and guide us in your ways First have me words of them who ask in the Son's name, we beseech thee mercifully to incline thine ears to us that have made now our prayers and supplications unto thee.

And grant that those things which we have faithfully and according to thy will may effectually be obtained to the relief of our necessity and to the setting forth of thy glory.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Let's continue to pray, shall we, just as you're seated.

I'm going to ask that we turn to page 5 of our service book. As we come to confess our sin, let's consider how we've not lived up to who we are by relationships that have been fouled up between one another.

How we've looked down on some people or we've looked unduly up to some people. And at the bottom of the page, we say together, Father, almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, maker of all things and judge of all people, we acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness, which we from time to time most grievously have committed.

[31 : 35] Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord, and deed, against thy divine majesty, we do earnestly repent and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings.

Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father, for thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, forgive us all that is past and ground that we may ever hereafter serve and please thee in newness of life to the honour and glory of your name.

Our Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who of his great mercy has promised forgiveness of sins to all them that with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto him, have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness and bring you to everlasting life through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.