

Christ Tore Down This Wall

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[0 : 00] Okay, so sometimes I begin by doing sort of one of those show of hands surveys, and so we're going to do that here. So a show of hands, how many of you were watching the evening news on November 9th, 1989?

How many of you are watching the evening news November 9th, 1989? A couple of people there have good memories. The rest of us, obviously, our memories are slipping, you know. Let's be more specific on that question, and maybe this will help.

How many of you were watching the evening news on the night that the Berlin Wall was torn down? Oh, wow, okay, our memories are working a little bit better now. I actually remember seeing this on TV as a kid, right?

And some of you who are younger are like, oh, he's old. It's not that long ago, okay? You know, I didn't really, as a kid, I remember seeing this happen, and as a child, I didn't understand all of the significance of this.

I understood in general terms what was going on, but really it didn't hit home until I grew up what a momentous event this was. I didn't understand what the Berlin Wall was, why it was being torn down.

[1 : 09] But the news broadcast made it clear that everybody seemed to think this was an incredible event, momentous, historic. And it was, because the Berlin Wall, it was built by the communist East German government, and when it was brought down, the bringing down of that wall, it signified that the division had ended.

The division between the communist countries of Eastern Europe and the democracies of Western Europe. And for Germans in particular, the fall of the Berlin Wall meant that friends, families who'd been cut off from one another for decades, they were now reunited.

They were brought together again. It meant that Germany could become one nation once again. It meant the beginning of an era of peace, an era that's continued today in Germany.

Now, those of us this morning who are Christians, we can say that the fall of the Berlin Wall, we can think of it as an echo. It's an echo of a greater event that took place 2,000 years before.

Because we're about to look to the pages of God's Word. We're about to look to the Bible to read about a massive wall that was torn down. We're going to read about unbreakable hostility that was turned to peace.

[2 : 31] So if you have a Bible with you, turn with me to the book of Ephesians chapter 2. If you're using one of the blue Bibles that our ushers handed out as you walked in, Ephesians chapter 2 is on page 976.

Page 976. So here's the message that God the Holy Spirit has for us this morning. And the words we're going to read come from the pen of his Apostle Paul.

They're written in the first century A.D. to the church in the city of Ephesus in what is now modern day Turkey. And these words are found in Ephesians chapter 2 verses 11 through 18.

Ephesians chapter 2 verses 11 through 18. So let's read about how a great dividing wall was brought down. Therefore, remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands.

Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.

[3 : 47] But now, in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

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

This is the word of the Lord. Now, whenever someone writes you a letter, and that someone keeps in that letter repeating a word, keeps repeating it over and over again, you can tell that word is really important to the letter writer.

And so for Paul, the really important word that begins our passage is the word remember. Remember. And he says it in verse 11, again verse 12, remember, remember.

That's the command he's giving. And it's kind of a funny command to give, right? If you're talking with a friend who's, you know, trying to recall the lyrics to, I don't know, Taylor Swift's song, and you, if you're trying to recall a friend who's trying to recall that, you don't grab her by the head and yell, remember, remember, and just yell at them.

[5 : 30] That doesn't help you remember. I mean, I don't do that. Maybe you do. The idea here is that remembering, we don't think of it as an act of will, but sometimes it is.

Sometimes it can be an act of will. You and I, we have a tendency to stop thinking about important things. We just don't think about them. We don't bring them to mind. And it's in that respect that we forget things.

Things that we don't really consider to be important, things that we don't keep bringing back to our mind, they become things that we forget. The mental connections deteriorate and degrade.

They stop coming to mind. And we need to be reminded, we need to have somebody tell us, hey, hey, remember, remember, this is important.

We need to consider these things carefully once again, and once again, and once again. We need to remember them. You know, this is why we collect souvenirs from foreign countries when we visit them, right?

[6 : 36] That French, the French word souvenir, to remember. Because we want to remember our experiences through those souvenirs. souvenirs. A physical object, it helps us to remember.

And I once had a roommate who went to the Berlin Wall. He went and he chipped off pieces of the wall while he was there and he brought them back. He brought one home to me and this little piece of wall, and I put this chunk of concrete on my desk as an interesting souvenir.

And now you're probably thinking, this is the part of the sermon where the pastor takes that chunk of the Berlin Wall and shows it off. That's a powerful moment, right? It would be if I weren't a heartless robot who throws out sentimental tokens.

You know. After a few months, I took that piece of Berlin Wall and I threw it in the trash can under my desk and it's buried in an Indiana landfill somewhere.

So, there you go. Maybe that's a callous way to respond to such an important event in world history, right? Sort of a tragedy to so quickly forget.

[7 : 41] How much greater a tragedy is it to forget, to move our thoughts away from the greater fall of a much greater dividing wall, a fall of this wall that took place 2,000 years ago.

Brothers and sisters, you who believe in Jesus Christ, you and I are called to remember the dividing wall that shut you out. remember the dividing wall that shut you out.

Now, if we're going to remember this wall, we have to know what the wall is exactly. What was this wall? What is God, the Holy Spirit, urging us to remember, remember, remember through the words of the Apostle Paul?

Well, we see in verse 11 what we are called to remember. So Paul, he's writing to a church and this church in the city of Ephesus, it consists mostly of Gentiles, mostly of people who come from all sorts of different nationalities, maybe they're Greek, maybe they're Roman, maybe they're from a number of other places, it's a very international city.

But these are people who are not Jews, they're not Jewish, they're not from the nation of Israel. And Paul writes this in verses 11 and 12, remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands.

[9 : 14] Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

There may be a good reason that we forget the dividing wall because sometimes we want to forget the bad news. Sometimes we want to forget the bad news.

Paul has already delivered the bad news back in verses 1-3. And if you move your eyes up the page or flip a page back depending on where it lands in your copy of Scripture, you can see back in verses 1-3 these words.

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

That is very bad news. That is a very bad situation to be in. That is the worst news that there is. But it is bad news in the past tense.

[10 : 42] This is something that was the case at one time. at one time for the Gentiles that Paul is writing to. And Paul wants these Gentiles to think back to the past.

Think back. Remember the dividing wall that shut them out. And he tells you and me two things about this wall. Two things that give us a clue as to what this wall was.

And the first clue is that this dividing wall was man-made. It was built by human beings like you and me. Paul writes in verse 11 that these Gentile outsiders on the wrong side of the wall, they were given a label by the Jewish insiders.

And that label was this. The uncircumcision. The uncircumcision. Jews were circumcised and most of the Gentiles of Paul's day were not.

So circumcision was the marker that determined whether you were in or whether you were out. And Paul says in verse 11 this marker was made in the flesh by hands.

[11 : 50] It was made in the flesh by human hands. The dividing wall was maybe literally hand-made or man-made. The Jewish nation of Paul's day had walled off his Gentile readers.

They were convinced that you had to become a Jew to be one of God's people. Gentiles were the dirty, unclean outsiders. They didn't belong. Now haven't we all felt like outsiders at one point?

All of us can think back to a time when other people made you feel like an outsider, when they shut you out. Maybe you don't have to think back at all.

Maybe you feel that way right now. Maybe you feel that way even sitting in this room. It's hard. You feel out of place. You feel worthless. You feel like you don't belong, ashamed.

You've been left out of something good. So there's this wall. There's this man-made barrier that held out the Gentiles. But if it were simply a man-made wall, maybe there would be hope that, you know, this can be torn down.

[12 : 59] Human beings put this up. They put up this barrier. Maybe with some effort we can take it down. But here's the problem. The wall is not merely man-made.

It is man-made, but there's something more to it. Paul gives a second clue to tell us what this wall is. And the second clue is this. This wall is built by divine decree. This wall is built by divine decree.

So this dividing wall was man-made, and this wall was also built by divine decree. Look at verse 12. Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

So, to the Gentile who genuinely, sincerely wanted to be one of God's people, to the Gentile who wanted to worship the Lord, who wanted to love him and to serve him, this was the harsh reality of their situation before they were saved by Jesus Christ.

You couldn't remain a Gentile and also be called one of God's people. Now, Paul calls you and me to remember what this wall was like.

[14 : 21] This wall that was man-made and also built by divine decree. Let's try to put ourselves in their shoes. It's not a fun exercise, but we really need to understand what it feels like to be that Gentile, to be that outsider.

So, I'm imagining this. I'm imagining that I'm separated from God's Messiah, his Christ. The king that God has chosen from the lineage of the great King David, the king that God has anointed to lead the people of Israel, he is not my king.

I'm separated from God's Messiah because I'm alienated from God's people. I'm not from the nation of Israel, which the Lord has chosen as his own people, which he has set apart for him, which are holy and dedicated to making his name known on the earth.

And because I'm alienated from God's people, therefore I am excluded from God's promises. They have nothing to do with me. And this king has nothing to do with me. Because God made covenants, promises, he formed a special relationship, made special commitments with the ancestors of Israel, with men like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David, with the whole nation under the leadership of Moses.

God promised to make their name great, to provide them with a kingdom, a land, to provide them with a hope and a future. And those promises are not for me.

[15 : 52] I'm excluded from God's promises, so I am severed from God's hope. Maybe I've got small hopes. I can just have a comfortable life and a nice house with a happy family.

Or maybe I can look for that thrilling life of adventure that Squamish tourism promises me. Those hopes often don't come true.

And even if they do, I'm going to lose it all anyway. I'm still going to die. It's all over. There is no Messiah to save me or my family. I'm severed from God's hope.

Worst of all, I am shut out from God's presence. I am not a part of his people. He is not my God. I'm left alone in a cold and merciless universe and no one is looking out for me.

Shut out from God's presence. That is the fate of every man and woman who is not one of God's people. That is the fate of every man and woman who is on the wrong side of the dividing wall.

- [16 : 58] So remember the dividing wall that shut you out. It is a man-made wall. It is also a wall built by God's decree. And Paul identifies it in verse 15. Paul calls it the law of commandments expressed in ordinances.

Exodus. This is the law that God gave to his people of Israel. We encountered some of it last year as we studied the book of Exodus. And you can read all of the rules, all the ordinances of this law in the Old Testament book.

Books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. You can read all the civil and moral laws of the nation, all the religious laws of the temple, all the ceremonial laws to keep you holy and clean.

Each of these things was another brick in the wall and the dividing wall of God's law. The dividing wall of God's law. Now, the danger is we could be making a mistake here.

We could be making this mistake of portraying the wall as something that was evil. And the wall was not evil in and of itself. The wall was a good thing. In this respect, that dividing wall was not like the Berlin Wall.

- [18 : 11] This wall was actually a good thing. Each of these precepts, each of these commandments had a purpose. They were meant to set Israel apart as a nation holy to God. They are meant to keep Israel distinct, uncontaminated from the terrible idolatry and injustices of the nations that were surrounding them.

These rules, they communicated to the Israelites the holy and just character of their God. These rules revealed the love that he had for the widow and orphan, the immigrant, and the alien who were at the mercy of the powerful.

These rules communicated that vast chasm of holiness between God and man. They were good laws that communicated the nature and the character of God.

They were an expression of his will, of what he wanted. But this collection of commandments also divided the world into two camps, Jew and Gentile, circumcised and uncircumcised.

And if you were on the wrong side of the law, then you were on the wrong side of the dividing wall. You were on the outside looking in. You were standing in those grim neighborhoods of East Berlin.

- [19 : 23] You were looking across the dividing wall at the prosperous and hopeful West and you were longing to find a way across. But there seems to be no way. If this wall were merely built by men, then men could tear it down.

But this wall was decreed by the Lord God. This wall was encoded in his law. You cannot tear down what God has built up. You might as well hack of the Berlin Wall with a butter knife.

There is no way through. There is no way across. There is no way to end the Cold War, the hostility, the separation. So what can be done? What can be done?

Who will tear down this wall? Well, here is where the good news begins. We read the bad news earlier in chapter 2.

We stopped at the end of verse 3. But the good news begins in verse 4 with two words. But God. But God.

- [20 : 26] Because yes, the situation, humanly speaking, is hopeless. 100% hopeless. Yes, there is no way out. Yes, we were dead in our sins.

Dead people don't spring back to life on their own. Yes, we were in bondage to the world and the flesh and the devil. And people in prison, in this sort of prison, don't ever get out.

Yes, we were subject to the righteous wrath of God, his anger against those who defy him and do what is evil. But God made us alive together with Christ.

And so in verse 13, we find that same word on which our lives hinge. But, and Paul writes in verse 13, but now, in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

So all of a sudden, just like that, the wall is gone. It is gone. And we who were separated, we who were far away from God and from his people have been brought near.

[21 : 44] That's utterly astonishing. It's like you're a person from, you know, 19, you know, 1988, and you're living in East Berlin, and then you jump into a time machine, and you appear again 30 years later.

It's the year 2018. And you're walking through Berlin, and you find that this wall that defined your world, that defined your very identity, that utterly controlled who you were, it's vanished.

And the city that you once knew has changed. Everything has changed. There's hope, there's life, there's joy around you once again. And so you grab a pastor by the shoulders, and you ask, what happened?

What happened to the wall? Well, Paul tells us what happened to this wall. Christ happened to this wall. Christ, our peace, tore down this wall.

Christ, our peace, tore down. this wall. Paul says in verse 13 that you and I have been brought near in Christ Jesus and by the blood of Christ.

[22 : 57] We've been brought near first in Christ Jesus, and we've been brought near second by the blood of Christ. So those are the words that tell us how the wall came down, how it was brought down.

What do those words mean? What does it mean to be in Christ Jesus? What does it mean to be brought near by the blood of Christ? Well, Paul takes those two phrases and he unpacks each of them, he unfolds each of them in verses 14 and 15.

So here's what Paul tells us how the wall came down. for he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace.

So here's how Christ Jesus brings peace between Jew and Gentile, between any two, in fact, any two of his disciples who believe in him, who trust in his salvation.

Jesus brings us peace by bringing us himself. He himself is our peace. peace. What that tells us is that what does our world need for peace?

[24 : 19] So many people talk about what does this world need for peace? Well, I'll tell you what, our world doesn't need a peace plan for the Middle East, it doesn't need the big stick of the American military, it doesn't need the financial intervention of the World Bank, the world needs Jesus Christ as Lord.

He himself is our peace. peace. Reconciliation takes place among us when we have all been made one in Jesus Christ, united in Christ.

Being in Christ, it's the central theme of this letter to the Ephesians. We who are true Christians, we are, quote, unquote, in Christ, and we talked about that a little last week.

We are united together with Jesus Christ. We are part of his family. We are identified with him, called by his name, bound together with him, our sins accounted to him, his righteousness, his goodness accounted to us, so that when God looks at you and me, he sees Jesus Christ.

He sees his own dearly loved son with whom he is well pleased. that's what it means to be in Christ, to have that relationship status and to have all that power that is in Christ given to you.

[25 : 43] It means that in his crucifixion, we died with him to that old way of life that we lived. In his resurrection from the dead, we rose again to a new life, lived in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Christ has made us one with himself. And if we are one with him, then that means that we are one with one another.

When the Berlin Wall came down, there was no more East Germany and West Germany. There is only Germany, a new creation. And in the same way, there is no more Jew and Gentile there.

There is only the church of Jesus Christ, a new creation. In Christ, we are a new people. We are a new humanity. We are holy to the Lord.

We have been brought near in Christ. And what about that dividing wall? There is nothing left of it.

[26 : 49] Christ, our peace, tore down this wall. So let's read it again, beginning in verse 14. He has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances.

That law that he gave to Israel, it's now obsolete. It's not that God has changed. It's not that God doesn't value this law anymore.

It's not that God has stopped caring about sin. It's not that God has stopped loving what is good and hating what is evil. It's not that God doesn't care anymore what you do. Far, far, far from it. Just that the law in its expression in the way that it was given to Israel, it has served its purpose in drawing us to Christ.

It showed us our deadness to God. It showed us our bondage to sin. It showed us that we deserved God's wrath. And it prepared Israel for the coming Messiah who would save God's true people from the death and the bondage and the wrath that they had earned.

The law was like a fence at a construction site. And it kept the site safe from those who would ruin it. And it was like a scaffold which helped move the structure towards completion.

[28 : 15] But now the Messiah has come and he has fulfilled the law. He has carried it out in its totality. The building project is complete. So you take away the scaffold and you take away the fence.

The law code is obsolete. It's done away by the blood of Christ. His death on the cross was a sacrifice fulfilling the law of Moses. It atoned for our sins in accordance with the law.

So now the law stands fulfilled. It is still useful in becoming that common law that we talked about last year that still helps us understand the will of God and still helps us obey God and helps us know how to live in the family of God.

But in this sense its purpose was fulfilled. It has brought us to Jesus Christ. And so it can come down. It can no longer drive us apart. We who are genuine disciples of Jesus Christ are now at peace.

And best of all we have been reconciled to one another as one humanity because we have been reconciled to God. It is because we have been reconciled to God that now we can be reconciled to one another.

[29 : 29] Paul writes in verse 16 that Jesus Christ has torn down this wall in order that he might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross.

there by killing the hostility. There was hostility between Jew and Gentile. And you know what?

There was hostility between you and me. There was hostility between God and me. There was hostility between God and you. In the Old Testament prophets they often wrote about that hostility between God and man.

In Isaiah chapter 57 verse 17 the Lord God had this to say to unjust and sinful people like you and me. Isaiah 57 verse 17 reads because of the iniquity of his unjust gain I was angry.

I struck him. I hid my face and was angry. But he went on backsliding in the way of his own heart. that is conflict.

[30 : 34] That is an ocean of hostility between us and God. And in that case God was in the right we were in the wrong.

But now Jesus Christ has drained that ocean dry. Jesus Christ has taken that hostility and he has nailed it to the cross.

Jesus Christ has killed the hostility. And you and I have peace with man peace with other people who have also believed in Christ our peace.

You and I have peace with God. We've been reconciled to God through the cross of Jesus Christ. And so in Isaiah chapter 57 then in verses 18 and 19 the Lord continues his message.

I have seen his ways but I will heal him. I will lead him and restore comfort to him and his mourners creating the fruit of the lips.

[31 : 35] Peace peace to the far and to the near says the Lord and I will heal him. And those are words that are fulfilled by Jesus Christ because in Ephesians chapter 2 verse 17 Paul says he came and preached peace to you who are far off and peace to those who are near.

For through him we both have access in one spirit to the Father. So do you see that? Through Jesus Christ we both have access in one spirit to the Father.

That means that through the Son of God we have access through the Spirit to the Father. That's the whole Trinity. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God the three in one. They have been working together from before time began eagerly working to invite you to come near. through the words of Scripture Jesus Christ is preaching peace to each and every one of you this morning.

Because we have aimed our bow and we have missed the mark and we have fallen short of the glory of God. But Jesus has hit the target for us dead center.

[33 : 02] Jesus has perfectly fulfilled the righteous law of God. Jesus has become the human being that we were meant to be. He has done all that we should have done.

The good news is that you and I are accepted by God not because of who we are not because of what we've done. We're accepted by God because of who Jesus is and because of what Jesus has done on our behalf.

And so Jesus is saying to you you cannot break down this wall but you don't even need to. I have already done it. I have torn down this wall. So respond to Christ's proclamation of peace.

Respond to Christ's proclamation of peace. If you feel far off if you feel cut off from God and from other people in this room there is peace through Christ.

and if you feel close to God if you feel like you do belong among the people in this room then you already know it's true. There is peace in Christ.

[34 : 15] If you've come wondering whether there is something to this church whether there is something to this man Jesus Christ there is reconciliation there is peace with God and with his people through Jesus Christ.

if you will believe in him as your savior and your Lord. If you've come skeptical of God skeptical of his people I encourage you to stick around our church tell you what I can 100% confirm we are not a perfect and sinless people but there is peace here.

There is peace thanks to the blood of Jesus Christ. Watch and see it. Now maybe you do believe there is a God but you don't buy into what we believe about Christ.

Maybe you wouldn't call yourself a Christian. Maybe this talk of hostility has put you off. Maybe you feel like you're okay with God. I encourage you re-evaluate your situation consider it carefully.

Keep in mind outward appearances can be deceiving. Keep in mind our feelings are a very terrible guide to truth. Remember there was never a shot fired between East Germany and West Germany.

[35 : 28] To the casual observer it might look like there's no war going on. But guess what? Those two nations were not at peace. Maybe there's a cold war going on between you and God.

Maybe you're not willing to surrender your entire being to him and to his son Jesus Christ. I strongly urge you to consider are you truly at peace with God? For those of us who are already believers in a couple minutes we're going to be taking communion together.

We're going to be celebrating the Lord's Supper. This is something that not only communicates our oneness with Christ but it also communicates our oneness with one another.

We need to take that oneness to heart because this is an expression of peace. If you feel secure at Squamish Baptist Church if this church feels like home if you feel like you belong here then let's work together to make others feel the same way that you do.

Now I read an article about the fall of the Berlin Wall a few years ago and the author of that article wrote about the feelings of some of the East German women that she met and she noted that they felt like they were treated as second class citizens by their West German neighbors.

[36 : 46] They felt treated like they were inferiors. We as a church we've been brought together in peace we've been made one in Christ so let's make every effort to tear down the walls that divide us and I encourage each of you who know the peace of Christ look for people who are outsiders look for guests look for people you don't recognize look for people who go for people who seem out of place who feel socially awkward maybe our first instinct is to just sort of like oh I don't want to get involved with that I'll go to people I feel more comfortable with no those are the people who need to hear your peace welcome with them talk with them as equals learn about their lives and their passions invite them over for dinner make it clear to one another that we're at peace let's tear down any walls that divide us if there are people here that you found yourself resenting or you're feeling even a low level of frustration or bitterness towards them don't let that linger don't let that just continue that's so often our tendency is just to kind of

I just don't want to deal with that just let that just let that go on don't do that talk with them about it be open with them but hey I've been deep down I've been holding this against you for a while and I know I shouldn't be doing that let's work this out ask for their forgiveness for holding on to things for so long as far as it depends on you live at peace with everyone Paul's words from Romans chapter 12 let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which indeed you were called in one body we're going to take communion together after I lead us in prayer what we're not what we're doing here this is not an empty ritual this is an expression this is an experience of our oneness with Christ and with one another so first of all if you aren't a Christian thank you very much for coming I'm really glad you're here we're all so glad you're here this morning what we're going to be doing here communion this is limited to those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ as their only Savior and Lord those who have peace with God so as the trays containing the bread and the cup as they're passed around if you don't believe in Christ just simply take it and pass it to the person sitting next to you don't take part in it if you are a Christian before we begin stop for a moment examine your heart carefully are you at odds with anyone else in this room are you at odds with someone else here

I urge you instead of taking part take them aside if possible the moment the service is over take them aside talk with them reconcile your differences this is a supper of peace and oneness there is no room for division here and if you are at peace with one another take part with joy and gratitude because Christ our peace tore down this dividing wall so let's proclaim together that we are one body in Christ brought near by his blood