

INTRODUCTION

Last week I talked about how on the cross Jesus accomplished vertical reconciliation. Do you remember I told you the curtain in the Temple was torn in two pieces? God was saying, "Now, through the blood of my son, Jesus, you can be reconciled to me." We're going to see today there was also horizontal reconciliation accomplished on the cross. Not only did Jesus make it possible for us to be reconciled to God, but he also made it possible for us to be reconciled with each other. Today I want to talk to you about "The Fall of the Great Wall."

I am told the only manmade object on planet Earth visible to the naked eye from space is the Great Wall of China, built 200 years before Jesus was born. It took almost a century to build. It was originally 3,000 miles long. Today there are about 1,500 miles remaining. It varies in height from 15 to 50 feet high and the average width is about 12 feet. The cost of constructing the Great Wall of China was staggering not in terms of money, but in terms of lives. They used slave labor and thousands upon thousands of the slaves died building the wall. In fact, in China there is a saying, "Every stone in the Wall of China represents one life that was lost in building that wall. I think it is an interesting commentary on mankind that from Heaven, the only thing is visible to the eye is a wall man has built because you see that's what man loves to do build walls, because walls are always built to separate.

I discovered a couple of weeks ago there is a group called "The Great Wall Society of Texas" and for \$25 you can join them. Whether you are talking about the Great Wall of China or the Great Wall of Texas, there are walls we all build. Jesus died to destroy the walls, the barriers of hostility we erect.

Ephesians 2:14-17. "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near."

To the Jew there were only two kinds of people: Jews and Gentiles but when Jesus died, he made the two one, destroying the barrier. Are you reconciled with God? I hope so. But, are you reconciled to other Christians? *Reconcile* means "to agree." Every month most of you receive a bank statement in the mail and you are supposed to reconcile the amount in your check register with what the bank says. If those two figures don't agree, they are not reconciled and somebody is in trouble. What it means to reconcile with others is you agree with them. To be reconciled with God means you agree with God about your sinfulness and about how only God can save you.

I. THE BUILDING OF THE WALL

I want to say three things about the many walls we build. First is the building of the wall. We all build walls of separation and hostility.

When I was a teenager I remember Simon and Garfunkel had a very popular song and the words said this: "I've built walls, a fortress deep and mighty that none may penetrate / I have no need of friendship, friendship causes pain, its laughter and its loving I disdain." There's another line from the song that haunts me. "If I never loved, I never would have cried." They are saying we all tend to build walls around us to keep people away from us.

Stone #1: Racial separation

What are some of the stones we use to build these walls? Let me mention three stones we use to build these walls of separation. Number one, we use stones of racial separation. The Jews hated the Gentiles with a passion. One of the Jewish rabbis said the only reason God created Gentiles was to provide fuel for the fires of Hell. That's the only thing a Gentile was good for. I don't have to tell you that today in Tyler, Texas, we don't have the same kind of division between Jews and Gentiles, what we have here is a totally different kind of racial separation. There is hatred sometimes between the blacks and the whites. There's hatred sometimes between the Hispanics and the blacks, or between the Orientals and the whites. Today we still build these walls of racial separation. Jesus died to destroy these walls. Some of you are about to pick up immediately on the fact you may not like this sermon I am about to preach. Well, I am not here to preach sermons you like. God has not called me to preach sermons that tickle your ears. God called me to preach the truth and the truth of God's word is that he came and destroyed these walls.

Stone #2: Sexual separation

Number two. We use stones of sexual separation. Sometimes we think a woman is not as good as a man and we divide people by gender. We're going to see in a moment they did at the Temple as well, but it is still present today in our world. Satan allows husbands and wives to build this wall of separation and it seems like they can't get over that wall to love each other and communicate with each other.

God is always in the business of uniting and the devil is always in the business of dividing. Even in the workplace today there are some still practicing sexual discrimination. One woman said to me, "For a woman to make the same amount of money as a man today, she has to be twice as smart and work twice as hard but fortunately, that's not too difficult for most of us." Some are saying a woman is inferior to a man. I am going to make a categorical statement and ladies, I want you to get ready with an "Amen," because if there ever was a good place for an "Amen," here it is. I believe a woman is far superior to a man at being a woman and I think a man is far superior to a woman at being a man. This heresy going around today that says men and women are exactly the same is wrong. Many women are different. God made us different so he could make us one. I am glad men and women are different. "Vive le difference!" I'm so happy when I rub my face up against my wife's cheek she doesn't have all these old whiskers. I'm glad God made us different. He made us different so he could make us one, but there is no place for any kind of discrimination sexually.

Stone #3: Religious separation

The third kind of stone we use are stones of religious separation. Thousands have died through the years in the name of Christianity and in the name of religion. If you study the Spanish Inquisition, you find out about the thousands of people who were tortured in the name of Christianity. In Northern Ireland today and you find out why people are being bombed all the time: It is being done in the name of religion. We come over here to America and it may not be quite as tragic, but what we see are people building religious barriers. "I'm a Baptist" or "I'm a Methodist" or "I'm a Presbyterian." Sometimes we fall into the trap of looking at people and building walls and we say, "They're not in my camp and so they are not as good as I am." When you get to Heaven and stand before God, if He asks you, "Why should I let you into Heaven?" Please, *please* don't say, "Because I'm a Baptist," or "I'm a Methodist," or "I'm a Presbyterian." There won't be any Baptists in Heaven. There won't be any Catholics in Heaven. There won't be any Presbyterians in Heaven. The only kind of person who will be in Heaven is a Christian, a born-again believer. So many times when we build these walls, we keep people out we need to be fellowshiping with. I'll admit I'm proud to be a Baptist. I tell people, "I'm so Baptist, that if we practiced foot washing, I'd only buy my soap at the Baptist bookstore." But I have learned to love and appreciate all kinds of Christians and I consider them to be brothers and sisters in Christ.

Look at all of the stones we use. This was true in the day of Jesus and it is true today. If you had gone to the Temple in Jesus' time, you would have walked up to a certain place, and if you were a Gentile, that was as far as you could go, because you met a wall. There was a sign—and some of these signs have even been excavated by archeologists—the sign said something like "Unless you are of the nation of Israel, do not proceed beyond this point. You will be killed if you go any further." Then there was a series of three steps going up to the next level and all the Israelites could proceed, but, ladies, that's as far as you could go. Next was the Court of the Women, another barrier they could not pass. There were another ten steps (I guess because the men felt like they could really look down on the women) but the Israelite men went ten steps higher at this wall then they would enter the Court of the Israelites. Then, men that's as far as you could go unless you were a priest, then there would be another wall, another barrier and you had to walk up six steps to go to the Court of the Priests. The Temple was just a series of walls separating groups of people and Jesus was saying, "When I came and when I died on the cross, I died so all of these walls could be dismantled and torn down." The stones in those walls were racial, sexual, and religious separation.

Any time you build a wall, you must use mortar to keep the bricks together. What kind of mortar do we use today to build walls of separation? One ingredient is pride, because anytime you look down on another person because of their face, their race, or their place, you are basically saying, "I am better than you are. I am better than the way you act, the way you live, the possessions you have I am better than you." That's nothing but dirty, stinking pride and the Bible says, "Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall." There are some people who know the message I am preaching about how you ought to have love for all of God's people, but there are some of you who are saying, "I was raised differently, and I don't care what you say, my mind is made up I'm not going to change my mind. My mind is made up don't confuse me with the facts."

As I studied philosophy years ago, I discovered although Aristotle was brilliant in his philosophy, he came up with an incorrect world view. It was called the Aristotelian View of the Universe. Aristotle said the earth is the center of the universe and the sun and the stars rotate around the earth. For centuries that's what everybody believed. But an Italian named Galileo took two lenses and separated them in a tube, making the first telescope, and looked out there and said, "Hey! That's not right. There are planets and there are stars." And he came up with the idea the earth is not the center of the universe. Instead of the sun rotating around the earth, the earth actually rotated around the sun and there are many other planets and many other stars. We're just one little part of the universe. People didn't like that. Heresy! And Galileo was arrested and put on trial to be excommunicated from the church. During his trial he set up his telescope and invited the opposition to look through it. He said, "See if what I'm saying is not the truth!" All of them refused to look through the telescope. There is none so blind as he who will not see—and there are some people like that today. They say, "I know what the Bible says about loving all kinds of people, but my mind is made up. I'm not going to change!" That's called pride.

The other ingredient in the mortar that holds the wall of hostility together is prejudice, Pride and Prejudice. That sounds like a good title for a book, doesn't it? Prejudice is when you prejudge a person, meaning you have already made up your mind about a person because of the race they are, or because of their background, maybe their religion. You prejudge them before you get to know them. Do you believe prejudice is a sin? Yes, I believe it is a sin. But, we have all been guilty of it at one time or another and where did we get it? I don't know about you, but I got it from my parents. You know where my parents got it? They got it from their parents. I grew up in South Alabama. There's a lot of prejudice there. We didn't have any Hispanics, but there were plenty of black people there, and I can remember as a first grader going in an automobile with my grandfather in Panama City, Florida, to a restaurant. We called him "Paw-Paw" and I loved him. We pulled up in the parking lot of this restaurant. My grandfather looked in that restaurant and said, "Wait a minute. We can't go in there." and I'm thinking "Why not? I'm hungry. We're all hungry." Then he said we can't go in there because there are a couple of _____ (then he used the "N" word) in there. We drove off to another restaurant. As a first grader, I thought, "Huh? Why did we do that?"

I can even remember watching when George W. Wallace stood on the steps of the University of Alabama and refused to allow the first black student to be admitted to the University of Alabama. Federal troops came in and set him aside. It was all a staged publicity stunt for Wallace but I can remember my mother watching it on television and my mother, whom I love dearly, saying, "Good for him!" I remember thinking, "What's wrong? This person only wants to go to college. Why won't she be allowed to go to college?" I just remember thinking that. I was a product of what I was taught, so when I was in the ninth grade and our schools were first integrated, I can remember the first black guy who came out on our basketball team. His name was Johnny Dorsey. The white guys on the team prejudged him. We didn't like him, because that's what we had been taught and we decided we were going to make sure he left the team. We were going to outplay him, out-rebound him, get rough with him under the boards... We discovered it wasn't him we were going to run off—he was going to run US off, because he was a great basketball player. I was sort of surprised, and to show you how ignorant I was, I remember going up for a rebound with him in practice and rubbing up against him and honestly

looking at my arm when I came back down to see if any of his color rubbed off on me. You talk about being ignorant and stupid! But, I got to know Johnny Dorsey and came to find out he was a nice guy and a good athlete, a good student—shy, but friendly—and he became one of my friends. I had prejudged him because of the way he looked.

By the way, color has nothing to do with it. I am color blind. Is this green? Well, that makes sense: “Green Acres Baptist Church green.” I am color blind, but I also try to be color blind when it comes to people. Color has nothing to do with it, because there may be a person who is dark tanned and just because they are not a Negro you will say, “Well, I don’t have anything against you.” There may be a light-skinned Negro you prejudice, because they are that way. It’s not color. It’s just all prejudice. Pride and prejudice are the mortar that makes up the wall of hostility we tend to build.

II. BONDAGE OF THE WALL

Number two. What about the bondage of the wall? There is bondage whenever you build these walls of separation. The biggest, tallest and strongest walls you find built in our culture today are around prisons. When you build these walls of hostility, you are imprisoning yourself. You are in bondage.

1. It separates us from fellowship with Believers

Let me tell you what happens when you build walls of separation. Number one. It separates us from fellowship with believers when we build these walls of hostility. One of the great things about working together for this Luis Palau Crusade is the exposure I have already received from Christians of other churches. If I was the kind of person who built these denominational walls and said “I’m not going to fellowship with you.” I would miss out on knowing some of the finest Christians in Tyler, Texas. Wherever you are, on whatever part of the planet you are on, you can always find believers. If you have these walls up you will miss out on that fellowship.

Several years ago Keith Parks, the President of our Foreign Mission Board, spoke to 30,000 Southern Baptist Convention messengers. He talked about the \$70 million annual budget. One week later he went to Africa to one of our mission points and instead of preaching to 30,000, he preached to 30 Africans. After the service was over, he said the pastor came up to him and he said it wasn’t a matter of black and white, it wasn’t a matter of African and American, it wasn’t a matter of rich and poor—this African pastor put his arm around Keith Parks’ neck and said the one word that says it all. He said, “Brother.” My friend, whether you like it or not every child of God is your brother or your sister and when you have walls of hostility you miss out on the great blessing of fellowship with them.

2. It separates us from our mission in the world

There’s another consequence. The bondage of the wall separates us from our mission in the world. Jesus said, “Go ye therefore into all nations” and the word there is *ethnos* “into all people groups taking the gospel.” If you are one who builds walls because of racial differences or religious differences, you’ll be hindered from the mission Christ has called us to. In Acts 10, old

Peter was a good Jew through and through. One evening before supper he was taking a nap and God gave him a dream. The Bible says he saw a sheet lowered from Heaven, the kind of sheet where you hold all four corners and there is something inside it. He looked in that sheet and there were all kinds of unclean animals according to Leviticus. I imagine there were a couple of hogs, some catfish, and certain birds they were not allowed to eat. In this dream God said, "Peter, get up and kill those animals and eat them." Peter was appalled. "No, Lord not me! I've never done that I'll never do it." God said, "What I call clean don't you call unclean!" Then Peter woke up. He wondered what he was doing, but he was going to learn God wasn't talking about animals: He was talking about people, because immediately after that came a messenger from Cornelius in Caesarea who said, "Peter, come to the home of Cornelius, the centurion who is a Gentile, because an angel told him you would come and tell him about Jesus." So, Peter got up and went to Caesarea and he walked to the doorway of Cornelius' house and he stops and thinks, "I can't walk inside this house, because he is a Gentile and I am a Jew" Peter had built a wall. He said, "It is unlawful for a Jew to enter the home of a Gentile." It wasn't unlawful according to the Old Testament. You don't find it in the Old Testament. It was part of the oral tradition they had built up. Then he said, "I can't enter this home." Then he remembered his dream. "What I have called clean don't you call unclean." So he walked in and preached the gospel to them. Cornelius and his whole house were converted to Christ. Then, Peter makes that all-encompassing statement. "I am coming to understand a truth that God is no respecter of persons." If you want to be godlike, you will come to a place in your life where there are no walls of division and God is no respecter of persons. So, if you are not open to let God tear down your walls, you'll miss out on his mission in the world.

III. BREAKING DOWN THE WALL

1. The cross of Jesus makes us one

Number three. What about the breaking down of the wall? One of the songs I enjoy singing at Promise Keepers says, "Let the walls down." All the walls we have built up let them fall down. If there are walls in your life this morning, I'm going to ask you to allow God, the Holy Spirit to dismantle every wall of hostility you have erected. How can you do that? Realize a couple of things. First, it is the cross of that Jesus makes us one. When Jesus died on the cross he was reversing the tower of Babel, because in Genesis we read at the tower of Babel they were speaking one language, one family of people and they said "Let's get together and build this tower into Heaven." God says, "You can't make yourselves God!" So he sent them confusion and disunity and give them different languages and they went to different lands—but on the cross of Jesus Christ, He reversed all of that and he brings us all back together into one family.

Look at Galatians 3:28. When we come to a certain word in it, I would like for you to read it out loud with me just the one word. The Bible says, "There is neither Jew, nor Greek, slave, nor free, male, nor female, for you are all ONE in Christ Jesus." God is saying there is absolutely no room for racial, sexual, social, religious walls of hostility. We are ONE in Christ Jesus.

I love reading biographies. After the Civil War in a very fashionable church in Richmond, Virginia, the all-white congregation was shocked one Sunday morning when a poorly dressed, black man entered and sat down. It was on a Sunday morning when they were receiving the

Lord's Supper and in this particular church people would come to the front and kneel at the altar and the pastor would come and give them the Bread and the Cup. About halfway through the Lord's Supper this man got up and went to the front and knelt down and the people were aghast. They got up and moved away from him and went back and sat down until he was the only one there and the pastor didn't know what to do. It was one of those situations I imagine where everybody was thinking, "Why doesn't somebody do something?" So, somebody did do something. A deacon in that church got up and walked down to the front and knelt beside that black man and asked the pastor to give them the Lord's Supper together and the pastor did. The deacon was none other than the former Civil War general, Robert E. Lee. Later he commented on that, saying, "The ground is level at the foot of the cross." When you realize that on the cross of Jesus, he died to bring us together not only to accomplish vertical reconciliation but to accomplish horizontal reconciliation. You'll hate every wall that gets built in your life.

2. The love of God frees us to love others

There's another truth that will help you allow God to dismantle those walls: The love of God frees us to love others. It is only because God loves you that you are free to love others. There used to be a wall between you and God, but when Jesus died on the cross, that wall was knocked down and God says, "I love you. Now that that wall is knocked down, don't let there be any horizontal walls in your life."

Look at verse 1 John 4:11-12. "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but IF we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." He is saying God loves you and you can see God to love him back, but when you love your brother or your sister, you are loving God.

CONCLUSION

I shared this story several years ago with some of you but it fits this so well. When I was serving my first church out of seminary in Central Alabama, we bought a 15-passenger van and sent it out in the neighborhood to pick up the children, and we loaded that thing up! One Sunday one of the little boys said, "Can I invite my neighbors to come to church next Sunday?" I said, "Sure," not knowing they were black kids. It wouldn't have mattered to me anyway, but apparently it mattered to some people in the church, because when I got to church the next Sunday morning, the van was already there and the kids were already in Sunday School and there was a deacon in the church a big man with red hair and that wasn't the only thing that was red that morning. His face was red. His name was Vernon Harrison: my neighbor, Sunday School Director, on the Pulpit Committee and I mean he was HOT that morning! The first thing he said to me (Don't you like being greeted this way at church) He said, "Preacher, there's a couple of _____ (then he used the "N" word) here in church. Either they go or I go. I pulled him into my office and I said, "Now, Vernon." (I prayed Lord give me some wisdom what to say to this man) I said, "Vernon what do you think Jesus would do?" He just mumbled something and walked out. I'm just kind of getting excited about preaching now. Doesn't everybody like to be greeted that way on a Sunday morning? So, all during Sunday School I am thinking, "Lord what am I going to do? Is this going to cause a problem in our church today?" I even found myself thinking, "Lord, I hope those two children don't stay for church." I walked in and there they were sitting on the front

row. One of them was about 8, and the other about 10 years old. I thought, "Well, they're here, but at least it's pretty good, because they are so short, the people behind them couldn't tell whether they were white or black. Only the choir and the people on the platform knew those little kids were there." This was the wrong attitude by me too and I said, "Whew, I'm saved nobody knows."

We passed out visitors cards and of course they got visitors cards. The offertory was being played while the offering was taken everybody was sitting there and this youngest little kid got up, walked up on the platform where I was sitting right there on the stage and asked me how to fill out his card. He was just as innocent as he could be about it. I said, "Lord, you really have a sense of humor. You got me good this time!" Well, the service went fine, but what happened on Tuesday night is the rest of the story, because on Tuesday night Vernon comes to my house and it wasn't his face that was red this time, it was his eyes that were red. He had been crying. He said, "Preacher. I remember what you said on Sunday when you said, "What would Jesus do?" He said, "I decided Jesus would let those black kids come to our church so I'm going to let them come. If they want to come back, I am going to be the first one to welcome them." Do you know what happened in his life? BOOM! A wall fell.

And for some of you, there are some walls that need to fall. I know you are sitting out there piously saying, "Oh, I am not prejudiced. I don't discriminate. I say let black people come to our church as they do. I say let Hispanics come to our church as they do and that is wonderful." Well maybe your wall is around your home. When was the last time you had a black family in your home for dinner? An Hispanic family in your home for dinner? It sure is quiet in here isn't it? You might have allowed God to tear down the wall around your school, your church but what about around your home? Are there any walls of separation remaining in your life? Jesus died to tear down the walls.

OUTLINE

I. THE BUILDING OF THE WALL

Stones of separation we use:

1. Racial
2. Sexual
3. Religious

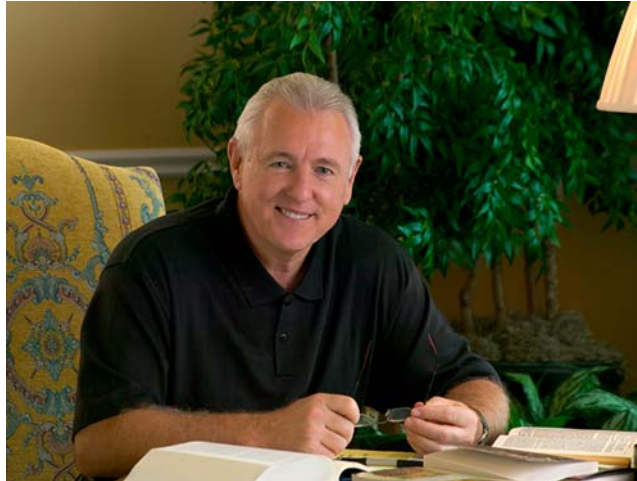
II. BONDAGE OF THE WALL

It separates us from

1. Fellowship with Believers
2. Our mission in the world

III. BREAKING DOWN THE WALL

- a. The cross of Jesus makes us one
- b. The love of God frees us to love others



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes