

PEACE BETWEEN PEOPLE, EPH.2:11-22

Awed By God #5

◆Intro: Here's an interesting observation: few if any animals on the planet



build walls to keep others of it's kind away. But man certainly does. What's up with that? You've heard of the Great Wall of China, begun as early as 700 BC, spanning enough distance over hill and valley that it

can be seen from space (equivalent to distance from Washington DC to Los Vegas, back to Texas). In 1961, during the Cold War, East Germany built the Berlin Wall right through the city of Berlin to keep people from defecting from the socialist side to West Berlin and



democratic freedom. A death strip lined the wall on the east and anyone in it could be shot to death. That one came down in 1989. Donald Trump promises to build a wall on our Mexican boarder if elected president. When my wife and I visited Israel a decade ago, we saw huge walls dividing parts of Jerusalem and Bethlehem where Jews and Muslims had their own areas of town. A few years before that, in Paul's day, there was also a wall in Jerusalem, at the temple. It came to symbolize the hatred that Jews felt toward gentiles. The Gentiles, said the Jews, were created by God to fuel the fires of hell. Herod's Temple was elevated with a court to the east for the priests, and a court further east for Israel's men, one further for women. These were all on the same level. Then you could descend 5 steps and there was a wall. Passing through the wall one would descend another 14 steps and come to another wall and the court of the Gentiles. Signs warning of death were posted at this point should a gentile presume to venture nearer. Hardly the a pinnacle of evangelism, you might say! This is

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all the background to what Paul has to say in Ephesians 2. The first half of the chapter talked about our deadness, our separation from God due to sin and how Christ overcomes that by grace. Now he will observe how Christ can also break the wall separating people from each other.

◆ *“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,” Ephesians 2:14, NIV.*

◆ *“and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.” Ephesians 2:16, NIV.*

◆ **1. We display the awe of God by letting his reconciliation of us lead to our reconciliation with others.** That is, when we love very different people, it displays the awe of God who loved us first though we were so different from him.

◆ **A. People are by nature wall builders.** One pastor I know in the Chicago region tells me there’s great competition and animosity between the Norwegians and the Swedes in his part of town. Another I know on the south side tells me that the prejudice between Puerto Ricans and Mexicans is worse than that between the blacks and whites. In our text Paul references the ironic nature of God’s own people, Israel, and their disdain for all those not-Israel, or gentile. If a Jewish boy married a gentile girls or vs, it was customary for the Jewish family to hold a funeral for that child!

◆ The irony is that while Israel cherished their covenant relationship with God, their chosen-ness as his vice-regents in the earth – they allowed this privilege to become a favoritism. They were the “circumcision” that is, children of Abraham’s treaty with God of which

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circumcision was a symbol. They called the Gentiles “uncircumcised”, or “un-Abraham” as it were. Something like you calling your next-door neighbor “unAmerican.” But here’s the curious part: they were a covenant people for the very purpose of showing God to all the other peoples!!

◆ *“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” Genesis 12:2, 3, NIV.*

◆ he says: “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.” Isaiah 49:6, NIV.

◆ B. God’s people (church) are by nature wall-breakers. God reconciled us when we were dead, far off, distasteful, sinners. Therefore, when the love that saved us lives in us, we reconcile with people across walls from us! You might notice that both halves of chapter 2 follow the same structure.

◆ For the individual Paul says 1) you were dead (v1), 2) God made you alive (v4). Then to the gentile church as a whole Paul says 1) you were separated from God (v11), and 2) But God has brought you near (v13). the parallel points us to the fact that as in Christ we are reconciled to God, so in Christ people become reconciled to each other.

◆ That has a lot to say about what the church ought to look like.

What denominations ought to look like. Racial reconciliation is not

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merely a political issue, it is a Christian issue. It is not merely a social issue, it is a church issue. And it's worthy to note here that the abolition of slavery in our country and the movement for civil rights were both lead and instigated by Christians. The Buursmas, missionaries we support, are caucasians living among Philipinos because all peoples matter to God. Our denomination today is made up of African, Hispanic, Korean, Chinese, Hmong, Lao, Zuni, Vietnames, Indonesian, Navajo, Philippino –because all peoples matter to God.

◆C. What does this mean for us as a church? Our vision for what God will do among us needs to include God's chosen from people different from us.

2. We do not display the awe of God by pretending he stands for nothing.

◆Now, we don't throw our faith and doctrine to the wind in the name of being inclusive. Some might infer this from verse 15

◆“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.” Ephesians 2:14, 15, NIV.

◆Paul is not talking here about God's commandments and moral laws, as though because of Christ murder is now OK, or sexual promiscuity, or cheating, or the like. Not at all. Jesus himself said he did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it! (Mt.5:17) Listen...

◆“*In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. “Do not think that*

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I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.” Matthew 5:16-18, NIV.

◆ Clearly there are still things that are good and things that are not. Clearly the purpose and meaning of God’s commands continue. Paul is more likely referring in text to the ceremonial laws which would cause a Jew to avoid a gentile. So, being inclusive never means being standard-less, or lacking any moral conviction, or allowing for divergent faith positions. This is one of the lies in our culture today; we are urged to maintain that diametrically opposed faiths (say Islam, and Christianity) are really pretty much the same and compatible. They are not. One believes in killing the infidel. The other believes in loving the infidel even if it kills us. So no, a Christian does not compromise the teachings of Christ to be inclusive.

◆ “God’s people and members of God’s household [are], built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.” Ephesians 2:19-22, NIV.

◆ Do not think for a minute that crossing barriers or breaking down walls means forsaking truth taught by Jesus or the apostles who learned from him, But neither does a Christian shy away or avoid people who are different, in color, in accent, different culture, different status. We can

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become one family through faith in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. A common Father, makes us brothers and sisters! A common savior puts us in the same family.

◆D. Who in your world isn't like you? What kind of neighborhood makes you nervous when you drive past? Who is it of whom you might say, "Oh we don't fit in with them."?

◆Do we assume people on assistance are lazy?

◆Do we conclude that recent immigrants are endangering our way of life?

◆Do we suspect every democrat is a leftist liberal or every republican is a right wing fundamentalist?

◆Have we pre decided that you have to use our translation of the bible to be a sincere believer?

◆Or that someone who is traditional in style does not have a vibrant faith in Christ?

◆

◆You know, it is a sad reality in the Christian church that we have divided over so many small things and then let those labels make us suspect of one another. Did you know there are over 24,000 denomination of Christianity in North America? If there is any place that love and reconciliation should abound it is in the family of Christ.

◆*"God... reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore*

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Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. " 2 Corinthians 5:17-20, NIV.

◆ God's reconciliation of you is your call to work toward reconciliation with others especially in the Church. Christians are not to think of people as rich or poor, black or white, Dutch or Irish. In the church position is given according to giftedness and calling, not according to wealth or accomplishment. How well are we living this out, friends?

◆ When Charles Evans Hughes was appointed Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States 1930, he moved to Washington and transferred his membership to a Baptist church there. His father had been a Baptist minister, and Hughes had been a lifelong witness to his own faith in Christ. It was the custom in that Baptist church to have all new members come forward during the morning service and be introduced to the congregation. On this particular day, the first to be called was a Chinese laundryman, Ah Sing, who had moved to Washington from San Francisco and kept a laundry near the church. He stood at the far side of the pulpit. As others were called, they took positions at the extreme opposite side. When a dozen people had gathered, Ah Sing still stood alone. Then Chief Justice Hughes was called, and he significantly stood next to the laundryman. I suggest that he was a fine example of what we are studying in Ephesian 2 today.

◆ **Conclusion:** Walls don't just divide us. They make us ill. After the Berlin Wall went up, East German psychiatrists observed that the Berlin Wall caused mental illness, rage, dejection, and addiction. The closer to the

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physical wall people lived, the more acute their disorders. The only cure for "Wall Disease" was to bring the Wall down. Sure enough, in 1990, psychiatrists noted the "emotional liberation" felt after November 9, 1989 when the Wall finally fell. Thousands of jubilant Germans climbed the Wall, wept, and embraced each other atop the concrete, and proceeded to tear the Wall down with joyful abandon. It's in your best interest to follow the ways of Christ!

◆ One last thought. Why do we build so many walls anyway? Walls are for protection, right? So what is it we are afraid of? Getting hurt? Losing comfortable routine? It's always *easier* to do our own thing, pay attention to our own lives. Sit where we're used to sitting. Drive the roads we already know. Eat the foods we are familiar with. So then isn't it true that to break down a barrier, or to reach across an aisle, or to invite in someone different –is difficult because it takes effort, and requires sacrifice? We'll have to suffer looking at the world anew. We'll have to put out to have another come in. We'll have to learn, and bend, and accommodate. We might have to deny self, to love other.

◆ Most of us like to assume that we're enlightened, tolerant, and unprejudiced people. Unfortunately, a new study reveals many of us have a hidden bias against anyone with a foreign accent. According to a summary of the study in The Wall Street Journal, "The further from native-sounding an accent is, the harder we have to work, and the less trustworthy we perceive the information to be." It gets worse: "Researchers found that the heavier the accent, the more skeptical participants became." In other words, if it sounds like you're not from

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around here, my suspicion radar is on high alert. My bias about you isn't based on your character; it's based on the fact that you talk "different."

◆ The researchers want to reassure us that we're not really racist or prejudiced (thank goodness). Apparently, we're just lazy. Well, again they don't want to pass judgment: we're not actually lazy; our brains are lazy. In the researcher's words, "Our brains prefer the path of least resistance."

◆ That seems like a nice way to say that, despite our best intentions, we all have pockets of prejudice and bias. In biblical terms, we show favoritism toward people who resemble us. Perhaps this study shows why we need Jesus' help to uproot our partiality and love people who don't resemble us, especially people from different racial, ethnic or national groups. *Clayton M. McCleskey, "Accentuating Bias," The Wall Street Journal (10-2-10)*

◆ But that my friends is precisely what our leader did and does.