

6. Let the wall fall down

October 21, 2012

On June 12, 1987, commemorating the 750th anniversary of the City of Berlin, late United States President Ronald Reagan demanded Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to destroy the Berlin Wall by saying the four most famous words of Ronald Reagan's Presidency "Tear down this wall".

For twenty-six years, since 1961, the Berlin Wall had stood as a visible icon of separation – a division that was not only physical but also ideological and political. A mass of concrete, barbed wire, stone, and many armed sentries, it separated the world into two minds – that of the Soviet Union and that of the free world.

Yet, just two years after President Reagan's address, Gorbachev met his challenge. When sentries laid down their machine guns on Gorbachev's orders, German citizens from both sides took up their picks and jackhammers and began tearing down the wall.

I know many of you think that I am from the Southern Sweden due to my heavy Swedish accent, I am really from South Korea where we also have a separation between South Korea and North Korea which is a hardcore communist country. I wished that two Koreas would unite together like East and West Germany, but I realized that North Korean dictators had no intention to give up their power and let their people to find out the real truth of the horrible communism.

Even this great event, however, can not match what Jesus accomplished when He, through His work on the Cross, tore down the wall that separated God and mankind as well as the Jews and Gentiles. This wall had stood for centuries, representing not political separation rather spiritual alienation.

God had poured out His cup of blessing into the hands of Abraham and his descendants, the Jews. The laws of Moses and the sacrificial system had formed God's pathway for holy living for Jews. But Gentiles stood outside the gate of salvation, destined to live in spiritual poverty and to die in a state of eternal separation from God. However, all that changed when Christ tore down the wall.

Let's look at what Paul had to say about this monumental event, and let's particularly examine where the Gentiles stood, what the Savior did for them, and why we can be so grateful for what He did.

A. SEPARATION – WHAT GENTILES WERE

Ephesians 2:11-12 Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh-- who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the (1) Circumcision made in the flesh by hands-- 12 that at that time you were (2) without Christ, (3) being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and (4) strangers from the covenants of promise, having (5) no hope and (6) without God in the world.

Most of the believers of Christ in the Ephesian church were Gentiles, and they knew that much of God's program in the OT for the Jews only. For centuries, the Jewish people who were circumcised had looked down on the uncircumcised Gentiles with an attitude that God had never intended them to boast.

The fact that a Jew had received the physical mark of the covenant was no proof he was a man of faith.

Galatians 6:15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.

But those who have trusted Christ have received a spiritual circumcision in the heart of the believers made without human hands.

Colossians 2:11 In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,

1) The reason for circumcision for the Jews

Do you know the reason that God had in mind for circumcision for the Jews?

Since the hour that God called Abraham, God made a difference between Jews and Gentiles with the physical marking of circumcision. He made this difference, not that the Jews might boast, but that they might be a blessing and a help to the Gentiles by having the Messiah for mankind from Israel. In other words, God set the Jews apart that He might use them to be a channel of His revelation and goodness to the heathen nations.

Sad to say, Israel kept this difference nationally and ritually, but not spiritually. Israel became like any other lost nations around her. For this reason, God often had to discipline the Jews because they would not maintain their spiritual separation and minister to the nations in the name of the true God.

2) Without Christ

Paul first characterized the Gentiles as separate from Christ. The Jews always had the hope of a Messiah, the Christ. Their Scriptures revealed that He had been in God's plans since the beginning and that He would come from their people.

Genesis 3:15 And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel."

Isaiah 9:6 For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

The Lord also assured them through His prophets that the Messiah would save them from their sins, conquer their enemies, and lead them into the presence of the Father. The Gentiles, however, had no such promise of a future Messiah.

3) Being Aliens

Paul added that the Gentiles were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. In other words, the Gentiles were without a spiritual home. A wall of exclusion stronger than the Berlin Wall kept them apart from Israel's privileged relationship with God. This wall took literal form in Herod's temple.

Under Herod's design, the Jewish priests had the closest access to the Lord, with their courtyard built nearest the temple building. The men of Israel were in the courtyard beyond them, and Jewish women worshiped beyond the men. Two walls and a number of steps down later, you'd reach the Court of the Gentiles. The Gentiles could only look up at the temple, but that was as close as they were allowed. Notices posted on the thick stone barrier between them and the Jews read "Trespassers Will Be Executed."

To say that the Gentiles had been alienated is an enormous understatement.

4) Strangers from the Covenants of Promise

The Gentiles also hadn't received any of the promises God had made to the Jews. These promises included the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 12, the covenant with Moses and the Israelites in Deuteronomy 28-30, the covenant that the Lord made with David in 2 Samuel 7, and the new covenant in Jeremiah 31.

These promises, all pointing to the Messiah and the blessings that would come through Him, assured Israel of their national existence, land, king, and spiritual inheritance. The covenants reminded them of their past and promised them a future. But because the Gentiles did not receive these promises, they could not claim either.

5) No Hope

Without Christ, being aliens, and no covenants of promises, the Gentiles had no hope. Since the promise of a future rested with the Messiah, they couldn't expect things to get any better – in this life or the next.

6) Without God

The people of Ephesus lived in the city where there were gods just about at the every corner of their streets like Walgreens Drug Stores. But these so-called deities were powerless to save them from their hopeless and God-less situation.

Keep in mind that every "not born-again" person, Jew or Gentile, is without God and that means eternal condemnation.

B. THE DIFFERENCE CHRIST MADE

The Gentiles' lives and futures were absolutely bleak before God. But God tore down the wall forever that separated the Jews and the Gentiles and removed their sentence of hopelessness and eternal death.

1) Christ brought the far-off near

Ephesians 2:13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Christ first brought the far-off near to Him. He made it possible for the Gentiles – and all unbelievers today – to approach Him through faith. How? By His blood on the cross. Redemption of our sins could come only through Christ's death; sin's penalty had to be justly paid.

Hebrews 9:22 And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.

In case you've ever wondered why God killed an animal which bled for Adam's and Eve's sins and covered them with its skin, this is the reason – without shedding of blood, there is no remission of our sins. That's what Jesus did for our sins on the cross once and for all.

Genesis 3:21 Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.

Once the separation by sin was removed by forgiveness through His blood Christ made possible remission of sins and reconciliation with God – anyone who trusts in Christ's sacrifice are invited into God's family to enjoy intimacy with Him and with others of His household.

2) Christ brought peace to the divided

Ephesians 2:14-16 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, 16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

Jesus not only created peace between God and mankind, He also created a new group of believers made up of reconciled Jews and Gentiles. By His death, Jesus gave Jews and Gentiles alike access to God and unity with each other in the church.

In case you wonder where in the Bible we see the evidence of that access to our God, you need to turn your Bible to Matthew 27:

Matthew 27:50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. 51 Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split,

The veil is what separated the holy place from the most holy place in the temple. It was a vivid demonstration of the separation between God and man. This veil was massive: sixty feet high, thirty feet wide, and ten inches thick according to Talmudic sources. It was made of seventy-two braids, each consisting of twenty-four cords. The veil was so heavy that it took three hundred priests to hang it. Notably, the veil was torn from top to bottom, and it was God who did the tearing and He was giving all of us access to the Throne of Grace directly without any human's assistance.

The moment Jesus died with the proclamation, "It is finished," the veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom and it was the same time a priest who was located on the top of the temple blew a ram horn to declare that the sacrifice had been accepted by God. Try to orchestrate that by human effort. It is not possible.

Having united Jews and Gentiles, Christ also reconciled them together to God through the Cross. Christ's death put to death the barrier that separated people from each other and from God. As a result, on the horizontal and vertical planes, Christ has made us one. How thankful we are!

C. APPLICATION

Don't build any wall within the body of Jesus Christ.

Because we are sinful human beings even though we are forgiven by the grace and mercy of God, we sometimes segregate along ethnic, racial, financial, even educational lines within the body of Jesus. If we truly believe what we've read, though, we'll strive to show our unity by treating one another with acceptance, respect, and grace.