

## Wall of Enmity

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*Tear Down that Wall*  
By Bob Vincent

**Bible Text:** Ephesians 2:14-18; Acts 13:44-45

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**Trinity Presbyterian Church**

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Some people responded to my poll. I'd finished 10 sermons on Christian Liberty, which were trying to expound ideas in chapter 20 of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, and so I ran a poll, and I got some responses, and the person who won the poll is not here today. And so, we're going to turn in our Bibles to Ephesians 2 and beginning at verse 11.

Ephesians 2, beginning at verse 11 and that is on page 1,819. Page 1,819.

11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called 'uncircumcised' by those who call themselves 'the circumcision' (that done in the body by the hands of men) — 12 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 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, 16 and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. 19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are

being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

The word of the Lord.

*Lord, help me as I attempt to expound this chapter around the theme of “Tear Down that Wall.” Help me, Lord, to be clear, concise, compelling, and very practical in application, and would you move through the proclamation of the word powerfully. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.*

Now I want you to notice here this reference to a dividing wall. If you look at human history, humankind has been dividing itself up from time immemorial. You can think back to the first division. Remember the homeschooled, home-churched family. Who was the first homeschooled, home-churched family? Adam and Eve. And they had two boys—they had other children as well—and in this perfect world, in this pristine environment where the kids are protected from “those ungodly heathen” out there—because there were no ungodly heathen out there—the depravity within the hearts of children that is there, rose up and Cain killed Abel.

Without going to the wrong kind of school, without living in a terrible society, Cain killed Abel. Why did he kill him? He was jealous. Jealousy drives human history in the most powerful way, and all you have to do is look at the early chapters of Genesis until you get to chapter 6, and you discover that violence increased on the earth, people took other people’s things, they took their wives, they took their children, they stole. Constantly, this is going on. This is the history of humanity; enmity between people and races and cultures is as old as humanity itself since man fell in the garden of Eden, and so we have this wall of division.

Now in this case, in Ephesians 2:14, he says there on page 1,819, “For he himself”—that’s the Lord Jesus Christ— “is our peace, who has made the two one, and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.” Think about that for a moment.

I want you to think about one of the greatest conquerors in all of history was a Macedonian who adopted Greek culture, and that’s Alexander the Great. He was an inventor of what we might call blitzkrieg, a lightning war, and he rode across Asia, and he only stopped in Afghanistan, where no empire has ever successfully conquered, not even Alexander the Great. But Alexander

the Great had a vision. Alexander the Great's vision was that we would all become one, that we would have a great global government throughout the entire—the Greek word is *oikoumene* (oikouménē, οἰκουμένη), we get the word ecumenical from it—throughout the entire known world, there would be one government, one set of laws, one culture, one religion, one language.

God used Alexander, by the way, to bring the Greek language, which made the spread of the gospel so easy.

But the thing you've got to remember about Alexander the Great, in his zeal to make all men Greeks, all women Greeks, he was the worst persecutor of God's people up until that time, because he was hell bent—bent by Satan himself to wipe out the distinctiveness of God's people. God's people believed that their children belonged to the Lord, not to the state, and therefore they sought to educate their children. They sought to put a mark of God's ownership on their children, just as cattle are branded today to show that they belong to this particular ranch and not that one. And so, the Jewish people, under divine instruction, cut their children, their male children, with a mark called circumcision, and that was to identify that child as belonging to God, not the state. And so, what happens is, Alexander said, no way, no way. And so, his successors—eventually his empire is divided up between four generals: Cassander, Lysimachus, Ptolemy, and Seleucus, and under those generals, particularly the Ptolemies out of Egypt and the Seleucids out of Syria, persecuted the Jews terribly.

And all you have to do is read 1 and 2 Maccabees in the original King James Version of the Bible, which included those books, and you see unbelievable tortures. They put a woman on a frying pan and fried her with her child around her neck (conflating 2 Maccabees 6:10 with 2 Maccabees 7:3-7). I mean, unspeakable things. The “New World Order” of Alexander the Great is to end all the world's conflicts and wars and divisions, but it's spread by the sword.

But notice how different the Lord Jesus is. We're told in Ephesians 2:14, “He himself is our peace, who made the two one and 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 so, this is striking. Instead of Alexander spreading his One World, New World Order by the sword, forcing people to become one, Jesus does what?

Jesus allows himself to be circumcised on the cross (Colossians 2:11). That means he was cut off on the cross from the land of the living (Isaiah 53:8). Jesus takes the hostility and the enmity that is inherent in human nature, all of the jealousy that people have against each other: “Why has he got that, and I don’t have it?” All of that Jesus takes in himself. When he hangs on the cross, he is, in the words of Colossians, circumcised. He’s cut off from the land of the living. And so rather than spreading world peace with the sword, forcing everybody to conform, Jesus himself submits to the wrongdoing and jealousy and enmity of this world and allows himself to be tortured to death. That’s amazing. He does it. He removes that barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.

Now there’s something else here that’s interesting. Do you remember when Paul was arrested in Rome? What was the accusation against him as the Jewish worshipers grabbed him and were taking him and beating him and ready to stone him? What did they say he did?

He brought Greeks into the temple (Acts 21:27-29). He brought Greeks into the temple. Did he bring Greeks into the temple? No, he did bring Greeks to Jerusalem, but he didn’t bring them into the temple. There was a wall that was there in the Jewish temple that Herod had done in the great remodeling program beginning in 19 BC. There was a wall that warned upon penalty of death, “No Gentile may cross this barrier.”

(ὄν περιεῖχεν ἐρκίον λιθίνου δρυφάκτου γραφῆ κωλῶν εἰσιέναι τὸν ἄλλοεθνῆ θανατικῆς ἀπειλουμένης τῆς ζημίας. “This was encompassed by a stone wall for a partition, with an inscription, which forbade any foreigner to go in, under pain of death.” (Josephus, Flavius (1999), *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 15, chapter 11, 5, 418, in *The New Complete Works of Josephus*, trans. William Whiston. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications), p. 524)

There was a wall. There was a dividing wall, and you remember Ronald Reagan’s words to Mikhail Gorbachev, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down that wall.” And I use that as a title for this series, “Tear Down that Wall,” because the Lord Jesus did, by dying on the cross, tear down that wall, and he opened the way for Gentiles as well as Jews, to come into the very presence of God.

Notice he calls it here in Ephesians 2:14 “the dividing wall of hostility.” I want you to turn to the left, to the book of Acts for a moment, Acts 13 and verse 44. Acts 13 and verse 44 and you’ll find that on page 1,716, Acts 13:44.

“On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.” Now they’re in Pisidian Antioch, which is in modern Turkey. And now notice verse 45,

“When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.” I want that to sink in for a moment.

They were very open to what Paul was saying as he would—every Sabbath he would go to the Jewish synagogue. You know, some people look at that and say, “Well, we’re supposed to worship on the Sabbath.” No, no, no, no. After the resurrection of Christ, we worship on the first day of the week, the Lord’s Day. Why do we find that in the book of Acts they’re worshipping on the Sabbath? Because if you went on the first day of the week to the Jewish synagogue, nobody would be there.

So they attended the Jewish synagogues wherever they went on the Sabbath, and they’re invited to speak, and so Paul always used these examples to preach the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and so far, everything is okay, sort of, but if you look there, verse 45, “When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. Jealousy.”

Are you ever jealous about your church? Jealous? “We like being this way. We don’t care if we’re not big. We don’t need to reach the *hoi polloi*. We are the elite. We have sound theology.” And we can have sound theology and be as dead as a doornail.

The Jews became jealous when the Gentiles began to respond to the message of the gospels and that’s when they turned against what Paul was preaching. They were jealous. “Oh no! Oh no, we’re different from the Gentiles. We can’t mix with them.”

You know, when I was in Israel in 2000, I never could get a cheeseburger. Why could I not get a cheeseburger in Israel? Because in Phariseism, you

do not boil a calf in its mother's milk (Exodus 23:19; 24:26; Deuteronomy 14:21). I never thought of doing that anyhow. But that was the law. It was kind of, you know, this is super cruel, but out of that, legalistic minds extrapolated adding to the law this, adding to the law that, so you can never mix a meat with a milk meal. No cheeseburgers in Israel! You get plenty of cheese and plenty of milk, and you get plenty of meat, but never the twain shall meet. And if you go into an observant Jewish home, you will discover that there are sets of dishes that are designed for meat and sets of dishes that are designed for milk, and never the twain shall meet. And so that separatism, that elitism was very much a part of things. "We don't want the Gentiles coming into our synagogue. That would be horrible!"

Can we as Presbyterians have that attitude? I think about our neighbors next door. I remember preaching something along these lines about two months ago, and there had been a bit of noise over to the side. I didn't hear it because even with hearing aids I'm deaf. But I went over and spoke to them after church, and they were suspicious. "Why is he coming over here?" And I came over to invite them to come to church.

You know, the deal is this: If we believe that we have the truth, does jealousy keep us from opening our doors to others? Are we so hell bent, driven by Satan, as Alexander the Great was, in our way of doing things that we don't want other people to come in and change us? A church that's unwilling to change is a church that's going to die. I don't want this church to die. I want this church to live and thrive. I want to break down the barriers. I want to see all kinds of people come here and feel welcome, to feel loved.

Do you know what the world's looking for? It's looking for a place to be loved. That's our problem in the modern world. People are looking for love in all the wrong places.

The church ought to be the place where people feel loved and embraced just the way they are. What about people who struggle with sexual identity? The church is a place to welcome those people.

That doesn't mean that we should ordain people to leadership who are practicing immorality, but people who struggle with immoral thoughts... "Not me, Lord. Me?" "Yeah, Bob." I struggle with immoral thoughts from time to time, and if anybody's honest to some degree or another, at some

time or another, you struggle with thoughts that don't add up, thoughts of violence and anger.

When somebody insults you, what's your reaction? Insult them back. I have to be careful of the things I share, lest something happens, and I end up getting arrested. That is very cryptic, but I'm praying for a man who's struggling with the outworking of his anger, and I'm really praying for him.

Do you ever struggle with anger? Do you ever struggle with wanting to snap back when somebody strikes you on the one cheek? What is your impulse? Pick up *The Celebration Hymnal* and hit them on their cheek. One-upmanship. Jealousy. Strife. Enmity.

As you read the book of Acts, it's impossible to miss, and you find them in the next chapter, in chapter 14, they perform this amazing miracle in Lystra. Acts 14 and verse 8,

“In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed and called out, ‘Stand up on your feet!’ At that, the man jumped up and began to walk. When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, ‘The gods have come down to us in human form!’ Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.” And so, what do we read? Verse 14,

“But when the apostles Barnabas,”—did you know Barnabas was an apostle? “The apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: ‘Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.’ Even with these words, they had difficulty keeping the crowd from sacrificing to them.”

Now you see, they're all embarrassed. What has he done? He's left preaching and gone to meddling, because idolatry, like jealousy, is embedded in the human heart. Wow. And so, their gods, he's just insulted. He's saying that Zeus is no god. He's saying that Hermes is no god. He's saying that they did these miracles by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, they're set up, these pagans are, when what you read next in verse 19,

“Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.”

The point I want to make is this: The gospel is an offense to the pagan world, and the gospel is an offense to the Jews who did not put their trust in the Lord Jesus. In other words, it's offensive.

That's why if you talk about Jesus being a good man, a good example, a kind man, somebody that will help you be a better person, somebody who might become a Paul Harris fellow in Rotary, or become man of the year, or get the Silver Beaver in the Boy Scouts, a good man helps you become a better person.

If that's all you ever say, people love you. They'll love your message. They'll be happy with you. “Oh, yeah, I always feel so good when I hear Brother Bob.” Just call me Bob.

“I feel so good.” No, you don't. That's not who I am. I want to preach like Paul. I want to preach like Jesus himself. Do you know the Lord Jesus' sermons, as you read them, were incredibly offensive because, what did he do? (e.g. Matthew 23) He stepped on toes. But he always offered this, he offered healing for those bruised and broken toes.

And so, as we look back again at Ephesians 2, we see something there. He “destroyed the barrier,” Ephesians 2:14, “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.”



What is Jesus' goal for humanity? It's the same as Alexander the Great's, but he does it not by spreading it with violence and the sword, compelling people to follow him; he does it by the winsome wooing of the Holy Spirit, drawing people to himself. Jesus wants you to let go of anything in your life that is a barrier to your loving other people.

What is Jesus' vision for Trinity Presbyterian Church? I think of a little childhood song I learned in Sunday school in First Presbyterian Church. "Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight." I want to see a Dalmatian when I look out here. I want to see black and white. Why? Because America is being destroyed through racism.

The most violent places in the world are the inner cities where young men, raised without a father, are full of anger and rage at people that look like you and me. They're full of anger and rage and violence. Do you know the city where my former congregation worships, for the size city it is, at one point it was number one in homicides. Why? Because there're so many angry young black men, and their minds are being brainwashed with a message that they own what you've got. And we react to that, folks that look like you and me. We react to that. We react to it with equal anger, equal violence, equal protectiveness. "I've got to protect myself."

You know, the Lord Jesus Christ didn't worry about protecting himself. And here's the example that we just read in Acts 14 about Paul, when they stoned him, they thought to death, as soon as he rose up, he went into the city, and he went and continued and visited all the cities he'd seen. Was he worried about protecting himself?

I'll tell you what I want for my life, I want for my life to serve Christ, and I'm willing to go into the worst neighborhoods in the United States, places in Chicago, in Memphis, in Washington, D.C. and tell people, "God loves you, and I love you." And invite them into whatever church I'm serving or preaching in.

God's vision for Trinity, to keep it from absolutely ending up in the cemetery, is what? "Red and yellow, black and white. They're precious in his sight." Till we view black folks as precious in God's sight—the neighbors that are on our left and on our right—till we do that, till we make people feel welcome. . .

How do you make people of another race feel welcome? Well, the first thing is, you demonstrate to them a self-sacrificing love. A self-sacrificing love where they feel, “I’m loved here. I belong here.” Why do people come to a church and leave? Because they don’t feel loved. That’s my job, to make you feel loved. And how do I do that?

By stepping on your toes. Because I do love you. Because I count it the highest privilege to be here. And so, just as the Lord Jesus died on the cross to remove that wall, that barrier between a holy God and sinful human beings and to remove that wall between Jew and Greek, because those were the great divisions.

Remember, the Greeks were the ones who persecuted the Jews following Alexander the Great, worse than any group in the history of the Jewish people. Wow! Because they said your children belong to us. But the Lord Jesus, the Lord Jesus died that the church would be one.

Do you see it as we end here in Ephesians 2 and verse 17,

“He came and preached peace to you who were far away.” Who are those? Those are the Gentiles. Those are the Greeks. Those are those who were the greatest enemies of the Jewish people.

And he says he came and preached “peace to those who were near,” and he’s referring there to his own ethnic group, the Jewish people. So, what do we need to do? Well, if you want to sell this to Hispanics or to blacks, you can do that.

Or do you want to make this place become an oasis of love? A lighthouse of love? A place where people come, whether they’re poor and have nothing to offer, or whether they’re rich and have much to offer, where they feel loved?

I found love in this church. I don’t know about you, but I found love in this church. That’s why I love coming here. And that’s why I love you. Because I know you love me, and that’s the profoundest thing. Even our cat that our grandson left with us needs love. All sentient beings need love, and may this place be a place of love where every barrier of society is broken down, just as Jesus broke down that wall of division in the first century temple of God, where Jew and Gentile finally can worship together. The greatest enmity of people at that place, at that time—Jesus thus made of those people one.

The model you see in the New Testament is people from Africa, from Asia Minor, from Asia, from Europe, Eastern and Western Europe, worshipping together. They worshiped together because they were an outlaw religion, and that pressure to protect each other brought them together in an oasis of love, in a lighthouse of love (e.g. Acts 13:1).

May Trinity Presbyterian Church be such a church.

And I would speak to you who are listening on the internet, I will say to you this is a loving church, and you will be welcome, whether you're rich or poor, whether you are Hispanic or Anglo, whatever your background. I want you to know you are welcome in this church. I found so much love in the church.

When my son worshiped here two weeks ago, he told me as he drove me home, "Daddy, I understand why you want to move to Texarkana because that is such a loving church." And so, I would speak to you from Robison Road, here across from Texarkana Community College, this is a place where you will be loved.

May we pray.

*Lord, we pray that we would be those who practice tearing down the walls that have been part of human existence from the day that Cain murdered his brother Abel, that we would be open to all people and that we would go out of our way to make them know they are welcome, they are loved, and that their opinions are valued. Lord, help us. We need your help. In Jesus' mighty name. Amen.*