

Walls, Fences, and a Bridge Ephesians 2: 11-22

Early in the morning of August 13, 1969 hundreds of trucks filled with soldiers and construction equipment broke the silence in East Berlin. While most of the country slept, streets were torn up, holes were dug and soon a barbed wire fence separated the cities of East and West Berlin. As morning broke, residents of both cities found themselves isolated from each other. Telephone wires were cut, and since there was no internet and no cellular phones families and friends living on opposite sides of the fence were also left without any means of communicating with each other. It was a heartbreaking time.

The fence ran through the center of Berlin, a city that had had stood physically undivided for nearly 750 years and stretched nearly 100 miles in length. Throughout its 28-year history, the barbed wire fence evolved into a fiercely defended concrete and razor wire wall that effectively separated people from each another. It symbolized the divide between two different political philosophies- Marxism and democracy. A new war had begun. Historians referred to it as the Cold War. It was a war not fought in battlefields, oceans, or skies but in the hearts and minds of freedom loving people. The wall in East Berlin was not built to keep the freedom loving West Berliners out, but to keep the East Berliners from fleeing the tyranny and oppression of Soviet Communist rule. At this very moment, citizens of Cuba are engaged in a similar conflict. They are not separated by a wall but political oppression, fighting for freedom and the end of their slavery to the totalitarian Castro government.

On June 12, 1987, nearly 26 years after the German wall was built, President Ronald Reagan and his wife Nancy arrived in Berlin and the president made a speech that would soon change Germany and to some extent the world, at least for a time. 45000 people gathered near the Brandenburg gate and heard these words:

We welcome change and openness; for we believe that freedom and security go together, that the advance of human liberty can only strengthen the cause of world peace. There is one sign the Soviets can make that would be unmistakable, that would advance dramatically the cause of freedom and peace. General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization, come here to this gate. Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate. Mr. Gorbachev, Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!

President Reagan went on to say this: "As I looked out a moment ago from the Reichstag, that embodiment of German unity, I noticed words crudely spray-painted upon the wall, perhaps by a young Berliner, 'This wall will fall. Beliefs become reality.' Yes, across Europe, this wall will fall. For it cannot withstand faith; it cannot withstand truth. The wall cannot withstand freedom." Less than 2 years later, on November 9, 1989 the gate was opened and within days the wall was gone, torn apart piece by piece not by the armies of East and West Berlin but by the people living within their borders. President Reagan and the person who spray painted those words were right: beliefs do become reality. Our actions are a result of our beliefs. **We become what we believe, and we become free people by our belief in the truth. John 8: 31-32**

I share that story to remind us that until Jesus Christ came to earth some 2000 years ago another kind of wall held people captive. **John 8:34** Unlike the concrete and razor wire separating the nations of East and West Germany, this wall was an invisible fence that effectively divided two peoples- Jews and Gentiles. Not only were Gentiles separated from the Jews, but they were also separated, **perhaps a better phrase might be "cut off", from God. Jesus came to tear down that wall and free God's people from captivity to sin.**

This is a good time for a quick anthropology lesson. Jews are people of Hebrew descent. They are not necessarily a religious denomination, but a culture that traces their family roots back to Abraham and Isaac. They are considered God's original chosen people because of the covenants or promises that God made with Abraham. **Deut 7:6-8.** Today they remain fiercely proud of that heritage, even though many have largely abandoned the God that first chose them. Gentiles are those who are not solely of Hebrew descent, in other words everyone else.

Separation of Jew and Gentile was seen in three distinct ways- social, political, and spiritual. Jews and Gentiles had vast cultural differences. They had different traditions and customs, they ate different foods and Jews had strict dietary restrictions. Both had an entirely different understanding as to who their ruler and king was and on top of that Jews worshiped the God of the Scriptures and Gentiles worshiped the gods of pagans or else didn't worship at all. On the surface it seems Jew and Gentile have little in common with each other, but we will soon see that is not the case.

It is true that good fences make for good neighbors, and it was God who first put up that distinct fence that symbolically separated Jews and Gentiles. It consisted of two parts, much like fence posts and barbed wire. They were the early covenants or promises God made with Abraham and Moses, and the law that God gave to Moses to be passed down to His people. Both were given for their own good, meant to help keep them holy, faithful, and obedient to God. They were given to keep them safe from harm and all alarm, and to set them apart, a Biblical word would be sanctify from the rest of the world. The Gentiles were on the opposite side of the fence, and much like the East Germans, they were largely excluded from the benefits and privileges those on the other side enjoyed.

In **2:12**, we see five ways Gentiles, or shall we say you and I, were once cut off from God. **First**, we were living without Christ, living without a savior to rescue us from our sins. God is holy, and because God is holy there can be nothing unholy in His presence. The law was given to keep God's chosen people holy, but at the time it was not for Gentiles. And as we know, laws alone are never enough to make people holy. They were not enough for the ancient Jews, and they are not enough for us. Jew or Gentile, it is only the blood of Christ shed on the cross that can make one holy and found righteous before God. Perhaps Jew and Gentile are more alike than what we might initially think.

Hebrews 10:5-10. Hebrews 10:14

Second, we were living without a home, living as foreigners in land promised to someone else. We were unable to enjoy the benefits of citizenship in Christ's kingdom. No peace, no security, no knowledge of the truth.

Third, we were living without His promises. Among other things God promised His people a land, a nation, a priesthood, a kingdom and a King and we were once unable to share in those promises.

Fourth, because we were not part of those promises we were living without hope, living with no certainty of eternal life or an eternal home. A mansion just over the hilltop was out of the question.

Last, and this sums up the first four, we were living like the world. Gentiles could not recognize God as their creator, their master, and their king. But like the wall that once stood in Germany, the one that once separated Gentiles from God also came crashing down. **2:13-14** The dividing wall that once separated us from God was dissolved by the blood and tears of Christ.

The early church would have recognized Paul's reference to the dividing wall to be the wall which once stood in the temple that kept Gentiles from entering the inner courts to worship. It was also a reminder of the veil that blocked the entrance to the Most Holy Place, the place that only the High Priest could enter once a year, that was torn in two the moment Christ died on the cross. The work of Jesus was finished, and as a result God's grace was extended in a way never seen before. **Because of the cross, people of all nations and tongues could approach the throne of God without fear. 2:16**

Jesus broke down the wall of hostility to give God's people freedom to worship together in Spirit and truth, to truly worship Him without barriers. The wall separating Jew from Gentile and Gentile from God is gone forever, completely removed by the power of the blood of Christ. **We become what we believe, and we become free people by our belief in the truth. John 8: 31-32**

The wall of hostility between God and fallen humanity was broken down and replaced with a one-way bridge called Christianity. **Biblical Christianity, the Gospel truth, is the only thing that will allow us to cross the river of depravity that is raging within us.** On the far shore stands a holy temple. **2:21-22** In Christ Jesus the whole structure- the entire church body made up of saints and prophets of every age and time, is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord. **The church is the earthly body of Christ,** and each believer is a vital part of it. For those who wonder what Jesus looks like, they need look no further than His church.

Even so, there are some unnecessary fences that need to come down. The wall between working class and ruling class gets stronger each day, built by a power-hungry government with bricks of false promises. The walls of class warfare and ethnicity are still standing, and by all indications it appears they are being reinforced and made thicker and taller. As part of the body of Christ it is up to each of us to do our part and tear those walls down, even if it is one brick at a time.

Of course, there is a wall that must remain. It is the structural wall that separates Biblical truth from false teaching, and it does seem to be crumbling. Depending upon which kingdom you are living in, that is either good news or bad news, for it is one sign of the end of the age. **Math 24:11-12** As part of the body of Christ it is up to each of us to do our part and do all we can to shore it up, even if it is one brick at a time.