



# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

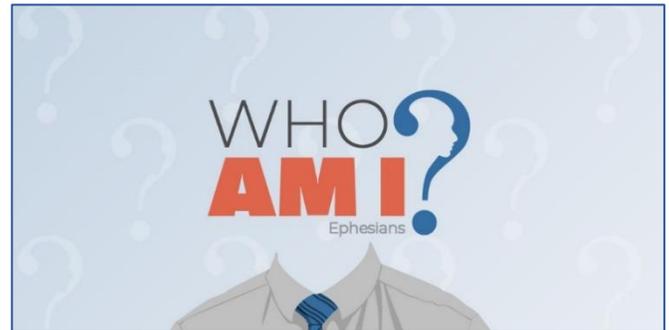
## SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

### Tear Down This Wall

### WHO AM I?

### Ephesians 2:11–22

Tim Badal | February 12, 2023



Please turn in your Bible to the book of Ephesians. I have the great opportunity this morning to open the Bible and teach from Ephesians. The series we're in is entitled "Who Am I?" Today we'll be looking at Ephesians 2:11-22, which describes a wall that needs to be torn down. There are walls in our lives, whether we know it or not, that need to be torn down.

Walls are structures we build for a reason. Usually, they're designed to create a barrier between us and someone else. They provide a separation between two people or two nations. There is probably no better picture of this than the wall of separation that was built in 1945 between the United States and the Soviet Union in the city of Berlin that became known as the Berlin Wall. It was over 90 miles long and stood for about 50 years. It was a symbol of the divide between communism and democracy. It kept people who were under communism away from liberty. Over the course of 50 years, more than 200,000 people attempted to break through that wall, but only 5,000 were actually successful. Thousands of people lost their lives trying to scale it because there were more than 300 manned guard towers to insure no one could cross that boundary.

Over and over again the United States sent a President to try to coerce the Soviet premiers into tearing down that wall. In 1987, Ronald Reagan spoke words that would ring down through history. "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" He was standing at the Brandenburg Gate, right in front of the Berlin Wall. However, it was another two years before his words became reality. When the people of Berlin began to tear down the wall, the wall of communism also came tumbling down a few months later.

Now there are other walls that need to come down, so let's think about the walls in our own lives. In our text today, Paul speaks of *"the dividing wall of hostility"* (Ephesians 2:14). There may be some marriages represented here today with a wall between the husband and the wife. You used to be in love with one another, but now there is a wall of hostility that separates you. Or there could be a wall between parents and children, where you're so at odds with each other and can't even speak to one another. Perhaps tomorrow you'll go to school and there will be a wall between you and your teacher. Or you might go to work and there's a wall of hostility between you and your boss. Maybe there's some kind of enemy in your life and you have built a wall of hostility so they can't come across that wall. You've built the wall to protect yourself.

We build walls to keep other people from being involved in our lives. Why is Paul bringing up this idea of a wall with the people in Ephesus in the first century? And what does he mean when he says Jesus has brought this wall down? In the church of Ephesus, there were two ethnicities represented in their congregation: Jews and Gentiles. The Jews had a common background and essentially the Gentiles were everyone else, but they were all under the banner of being Christians. They had all believed Jesus was the Savior and the answer to their problems, both in this world and in the world to come. Even though they believed the same thing, they still didn't like each other, and a wall of hostility had been created.

Because we don't understand the divide between Jews and Gentiles, let's move it into our day. Imagine the Jews and Gentiles coming to church to worship Jesus. Think of Shakespeare's story about the Montagues and the Capulets. Or maybe the American story of the Hatfields and the McCoys. Or it's the Sharks and Jets in "Westside Story." Or it's the Bears and the Packers. Or let's think of the Eagles and the Chiefs in today's Super Bowl.

We've built walls, so now it's them versus us. It's the United States versus the Russians. It's that table at the cafeteria against our table in the cafeteria. It's that side of the tracks against our side of the tracks. It's that town versus our town. It's our company against their company. We build walls of hostility all the time.

The book of Ephesians is a letter written to a church that is very similar to ours. I want you to picture Paul writing this letter. Most likely he's writing it from jail where he's imprisoned for teaching about Christ. Now the letter is in the hands of a pastor, someone like myself, who will read the letter to the people in a church where half the people are Jews and half are Gentiles who didn't like each other. The Gentiles are sitting on this side of the room—so you're the Gentile group over here. Then we have the Jewish group over here. We're reading through Ephesians 1 and everything is fine. Then we get to verse 11 of chapter two and Paul drops an absolute bomb.

You see, Paul knew the Ephesian church well. He's been to their potlucks. He's played softball with them. He knows how they operate, so this is what he says: *"Therefore remember that at one time you Gentile...s"* —he points over here. *"You Gentiles in the flesh"* —(he air quotes)— *"the 'uncircumcision' by what is called the circumcision..."* In other words, he's saying, "Don't forget who called you 'the uncircumcision,' that derogatory term. It was these guys over here." Paul is saying, "Hey, guys on this side of the room, let's remember what you were called." Then he drops a racial slur on them and makes things even more uncomfortable. He says, "You were called that by the other side of this room. Now, let's everyone stand up and greet one another." How awkward!

What Paul is saying is that the Jewish side of the room has thought before—and maybe still thinks—that the Gentile side of the room is less than human. They're not worth anything. Even though the Jews might let them in the church, deep down inside they're thinking all kinds of ill thoughts about the Gentiles. More than implying that the Gentiles are physically inferior, listen to what Paul says next in verse 12: *"Remember that you"* —the Gentiles on this side room—*"were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, without God in the world."* In a nutshell, Paul is saying to the Gentiles over here, "Physically, you're trash; spiritually you have nothing going for you."

So, this side of the room is thinking why you can be haughty about that side of the room. You believe your feelings are the same as God's feelings about them. You think you're totally vindicated in the way you feel about them because it's what God feels about them as well. But be very careful, friends, when you start presuming to know what God feels about people, because that's when real damage is done. You begin to believe you're fighting His holy war against other people. The Jews in Ephesus were thinking, "We're totally within our rights to treat these Gentiles as if they are second-class citizens—less than human—and that they have no hope and are without God. They have nothing."

What are we supposed to do with this situation? Yes, this happened 2,000 years ago and half a world away. So what can we understand from this? This text reminds us of two truths that lead to a decision.

## **We love building up walls of hostility.**

First, we need to admit that we love building walls of hostility. There's something about human nature that loves to build walls, going clear back to the garden of Eden. Before Adam and Eve sinned, they were walking around naked and having a good time. Then they chomped on the fruit and what was the first thing they did? They covered themselves. Why? They were totally fine as a naked husband and wife, no issue, but then they started covering themselves. That covering was Wall Number 1. It separated them from one another. That wall of separation then moved on to their children. Cain killed Abel. That was another wall of separation.

Then throughout history, there has been wall upon wall. There were walls of racism, walls of covetousness, walls of theft, walls of war. Everything in human history became wall upon wall upon wall. Every kind of sin and trespass we see in this world is a wall of separation we've created. Every hurt and pain are parts of walls of hostility people build up against one another. We are big on building these walls of separation and hostility. So Ephesus was a church that was supposed to find its identity in Christ, but it was building walls.

We're sitting here now, thinking, "But we're in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We've heard Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream. We've watched Rosa Parks. We don't believe that's an issue anymore. Our children sing that "Jesus loves the little children, red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight." We have this down. Jew, Gentile—we don't have any issues. So ethnically, this is not a problem for us. Maybe, maybe not. Do you have any issues with people who are ethnically different than you? Jesus says you shouldn't. Racism is something that should not be part of the Christian life. It should be eradicated from Christianity altogether.

Let's admit it, we still build walls. We do it politically, thinking, "The way I vote is the way you have to vote." Now, are there core convictions affecting the way we vote? Certainly. But we say, "If you don't vote for every line item like I do, then I start wondering if you're a Christian and, if you're going to be in heaven or not." We also do this with our list of beliefs, saying, "If you don't believe

exactly the same way I believe, then you're not going to heaven. God doesn't love you." And we build up walls. Then we look at each other's lives, proclaiming, "If you don't live the same way I live, then you can't be a Christian."

We love building walls. We love building lists. We love telling people they're not in with God. But God forbid if anyone ever tells us we're not in. God forbid if someone doesn't show us mercy. We want mercy, but we don't want other people to be given mercy.

When Paul's letter was being read to the people in Ephesus, this side of the room must have been cringing. They all looked up to Paul, so when they heard his words, they probably thought, "Man, does Paul think we're these things?" By the end of verse 12, they had to be dying inside. Just like he did back in verse three, for the sake of effect Paul has them thinking really, really dark thoughts, then he allows the sun to shine. He did it in verse four and he does it again in verse 13 with the same word: but. "But now Gentiles...." *"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."*

Why is this important for everybody in the room? Maybe today there is someone in this room who feels far off from God. Maybe today there's someone here who's looking at their life and thinking, "I've done this sin. I've done that sin. I'm doing these things. My life is full of shame and all kinds of rebellion that nobody knows about. I've been told I'm worthless trash. I'm told I'm a waste of space and good for nothing."

What Paul is saying here in this one sentence is this: "But now, you who were once..." Let me paraphrase what he's saying: "You who were once called trash, you who were once called good for nothing, you about whom it once was said that you never had a chance—you have been brought near by the blood of Christ. There's a second chance for you. There's a new day for you. There's mercy and grace for you."

If you are here today and are at the end of yourself, I want you to know today—Jew, Gentile, male, female, young, old, the worst of sinners or in your mind the best of saints—there's a new day because of Jesus Christ. You can have it, because Jesus has come to make all things new. Here's why.

## **Jesus loves breaking down walls of hostility.**

Even though we love building up walls of hostility, Jesus loves breaking down those walls. Christian, if you love building up walls, you're a contradiction of terms, because the Savior you love loves breaking them down. The very walls you're building up, He has a sledgehammer and is working to break them down. Notice what our text says, starting in verse 14:

<sup>14</sup>For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility <sup>15</sup>by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, <sup>16</sup>and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. <sup>17</sup>And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.

Four times in these verses it says Christ brought peace. So why are you and I not bringing peace? We are supposed to bring peace, but how?

### **We have to have vertical peace.**

There will not be peace in our world until we have peace with God. As it says in verse 13, we who are far off must be brought near to God. If you have strife in your marriage, you will not have peace until you first have peace with God. You will not have peace in your family until you first have peace with God. We will not have peace in this church until we first have peace with God. We will not have peace in this nation or this world until we first have peace with God. If we don't have vertical peace, horizontal peace is a pipe dream.

Some of us right now are wondering, "Why is life so hard? Why are we so unpeaceful? Why all the turbulence?" It's because we're fighting God. We're in rebellion against God. We're in Adam but need to be in Christ. We need to be in submission to Christ and His plan, following His direction for our lives.

### **We then can have horizontal peace.**

When we have peace with God, that wall between us and God comes down, then we don't have any reason to have walls between us and other people, allowing for horizontal peace with one another. Jesus came and preached peace to us. How did He do that? Verses 17-18 say, *"And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father."*

Here's what's happening. Whether you're a Jew or a Gentile, black or white or Asian or Hispanic, whether you're clean-cut or you came from the rough side of the tracks, whatever your list of sins were, your story is the same. About every six weeks, we show these "That's my story" videos and I hope you see that the storyline is always very similar: "Before I came to know Jesus, my life was a dead end. I kept running into brick walls. I finally came to the realization, through the work of the Holy Spirit in my life, that I needed a change—and Jesus was that change. Because Jesus changed my life, everything is different. He saved me and now I'm a new person." That's our story—same song and dance. This means we have unity through our stories. Obviously, the details are different because the walls involved are different walls. One wall might have been the wall of addiction. Another was the wall of an abortion. Another was the wall of pursuing fame and fortune. Another was the wall of self-righteousness. And it keeps going. We keep running into all these different walls.

Here's the problem. The walls of hostility we put up are because we judge people and their walls. "Well, you ran into that wall? What kind of person runs into that wall?" Who cares what wall you ran into? It left you with a bloody nose, but it also led you to Jesus. Paul is saying, "It doesn't matter whether you're Jew or Gentile, because at the end of the day, it led you to the same Jesus."

So it doesn't matter where we started, because it always leads us to the same Savior. We all have to get to God through Him. We go through the same cross, which has torn down the wall of hostility and has made Jews and Gentiles one. What then is the result?

## **Jesus changes how we view ourselves and others.**

When we decide to run to Christ, He changes how we view ourselves and others. Now, because of what Paul has taught us, we need to understand something about ourselves and others.

First, let's look at ourselves. You're not trash. You're not good for nothing. You're not a waste of space. God has planned good things for you, so don't let anyone tell you something different. I don't care who you told you you're trash; they're wrong. God says you're His creation, created in Christ for good things. You need to know that; you need to believe that about yourself.

Now, if that is true of you, then it's also true of others. If you're going to receive that for yourself, you can't treat others like trash, as less than human. We are to treat others as we want to be treated. Here's how Paul says this in verse 19: "*You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints.*"

### **Truth #1 – In Christ, there are no outsiders in the Kingdom of God.**

So stop treating other people as if they were outsiders and stop feeling like one yourself. It's not true. There are no outsiders. God says you're a citizen, a saint.

### **Truth #2 – In Christ, there are no orphans in the family of God.**

Verse 19 goes on to say that we are "members of the household of God." You're not an orphan—you're part of God's family. So don't feel like an orphan. Don't allow someone to treat you like an orphan. Don't make others feel like orphans either.

### **Truth #3 – In Christ, there are no obstacles in the temple of God.**

Verse 21 says, "*...in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.*" Remember, in the temple there were places where Jews could go but Gentiles couldn't. There were also places where only the priests could go, but no one else could. But in Christ, there are no obstacles in the temple of God, because your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

So, brothers and sisters, the great truths here are that because of Christ, there are no outsiders in the Kingdom of God, there are no orphans in the family of God and there are no obstacles in the temple of God. If that's true for you and me, then it's true for everyone, meaning every wall of hostility that we build against one another needs to come crashing down.

So love one another, showing care and kindness toward one another. Show kindness by deferring to one another, giving them grace and mercy. In doing this, you'll be doing what the Lord has done; you will tear down walls instead of building up walls. Our love will also show the world that Christians are what Jesus wants us to be. Amen?