

4



EPHESIANS

2:11-22

GOD TAKES DOWN WALLS AND BUILDS CHURCHES



The pictures above are of some walls. We all probably know the former Berlin wall, the planned wall between the US and Mexico, and the dividing wall between Israel and Palestine. But it isn't just other countries that 'do this stuff'. The fourth picture is in Oxford, a wall built by a property developer to separate rich and poor residents, which stood for **24 years**. We know of neighbours arguing over fences, family members falling out about Brexit... we really do like putting up walls.

I put up walls in all sorts of ways too. I put up walls between me and people who think differently from me. But I catch myself putting up walls in other places, too. I put up walls between myself and people who look differently from me, for example. Where there is difference, there can be fear, and where there is fear, people put up walls. People build walls, but God takes them down.

In the bible text we see an old and bitter separation, going right back to the first time that God separated a people for himself. And in separating a people for himself, God separated a people from himself. There were two separate peoples. There were Jews and Gentiles, there were the circumcised and the uncircumcised, there was Israel and there were foreigners, there was an in crowd, and there was an out crowd.

And writing to the Ephesians, Paul says that as they were mostly foreigners, they were in the out crowd. They did not belong. He uses some really strong words in verses 12 and 13. Separate, excluded, foreigners, without hope, without God, far away. As with the image of death and life in the first part of the chapter, Paul is using strong word pictures to make us realise where we are without Jesus. We can all picture being separate, being excluded, being far away. None of us, I don't think, feels that those are good places to be. I want to belong. People are *made* to belong. Paul looks at the Ephesians, obviously mostly Gentiles rather than Jews, and he

reminds them where they have come from. But he has something more important to do than tell them where they have come from. He wants to tell them where they have got to. He holds out his hands to them, and he says, "You who were once far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ."

God is breaking every wall down. He is breaking down everything that would separate you and me in our sin from the holiness of God in his people. We talk of coming to Christ, and rightly so, but here Paul emphasises the greater movement of God. Any movement of us towards God is always secondary to the extraordinary movement of God towards us. I love the fact that when I looked up the Berlin wall, it was really much harder for me to find a picture of it standing up than it would have been for me to find a picture of it being knocked down. That's what God is doing in Christ. He is breaking barriers down.

We have been brought near by the blood of Christ (v13); we have been reconciled to God through the cross (v16); we have access to the Father by the Spirit (v18) Aren't these so often our worries? Are they yours? "God is so distant from me." You have been brought near by Jesus's blood. "God holds things against me." You have been reconciled to God through the cross. "God wouldn't have me in his presence." You have access to the Father by the Spirit.

Jesus has brought us near, he has given us peace, he is breaking walls and barriers down. Jesus is taking two groups of people who are totally opposed to one another, and he becomes the way they are united. Jesus has reconciled Jew and Gentile to God through the cross.

Jesus is reinventing the way the world works, because God is building something. He is taking you, and me, and everyone in this community who believes in Jesus, and he is building a church. God doesn't build walls, he builds the church.

He takes the strongest of foundations, which is Christ himself, and he builds it on everything the prophets foretold about who Jesus is, and what he would do; and everything the apostles told forth about who Jesus was, and what he had done, and he builds a church. Everywhere people agree to make Jesus the thing they build on, God is building his church. It is the holy temple of the Lord. And it is not only them, then. It really is us, now. You too, Paul writes to the Ephesians. You too, I want to say to you.

And he will do it. I love the fact that Paul does not talk here about people building a church. Do we know it is God who does the building? I am prepared to admit to trying in about a hundred different ways to build God's church. But I am not sure how often I try just letting him. And I know that God wants to build his church, and he wants to build it using you and me, together, and he wants to dwell amongst us.

Think and pray about these amazing ideas: when we gather together to worship, we are being built into a place where God lives... when we decide to make Jesus the one person we build our life on, we are being built together into a place where God lives... when we pray and pray for difficult people, when we share Jesus in our own way, when we love and serve people not expecting anything in return, we are being built together, and God dwells amongst us.