

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

Removing the Wall

Ephesians 2:14-18

Intro: In this section of **ch2**, Paul is dealing with the plight of the unsaved Gentiles. Now, as we have stated, anyone who is not in Christ, who has not accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, is pretty much up a creek without a paddle. But the Gentiles were in a much worse predicament because they didn't have access to any of the blessed advantages that the Jewish nation possessed. Not only were the Gentiles without Christ, they didn't even know there was a Christ to be with! They weren't expecting Him to arrive and they were completely in the dark when He did show up. The Gentiles were completely excluded from all of Israel's blessings and that by divine design. In essence, not only were the Gentiles up a creek without a paddle, they didn't even have a canoe!

As the Apostle Paul lays out the unfortunate situation of the Gentiles, his line of thought moves from the differences between Jews and Gentiles to the complete separation of the 2 groups. The enmity between these 2 groups was both well-known and reciprocal. The Jews detested the Gentiles and could hardly even refer to them as humans and Gentiles held the Jews in the most severe contempt because of their national arrogance and the peculiar rites and ceremonies of their precious religion, which were different from those of all other nations on earth. Far from working to smooth things over, this separation was actually intensified and emphasized by certain Jewish institutions which were designed (in part) to isolate Israel from the rest of the world. But this separation went far beyond ethnicity, nationality – even theology! It was more than just a distrust, it was an out-right hatred.

Of course, Paul provides the solution to this great separation in **13** – the blood of Christ. God had put this difference between Jews and Gentiles so that His purposes in salvation might be accomplished. But once those purposes were accomplished, there was no more difference. In fact, it was His purpose that these differences be erased forever and they were and are erased through the work of Christ in reconciliation. Paul will take the next few passages to explain and elaborate on what this reconciliation entails and how it has taken place.

14-15 – Every generation has its buzz words and one of the most used words in the political arena today is disenfranchised, which means to deprive someone of a right or a privilege. While the word may be new in the common vernacular, the concept is not new at all. A few generations in the past, the concept was pushed using a different word: alienation. The popular use of this word probably goes back to Karl Marx, who used it to describe the exclusion of workers from the privileges that go with ownership. Today we talk about alienation more broadly. We speak of political alienation, where a person is excluded from the democratic process. There's alienation in marriage as they fall apart. There's hardly a relationship in life that hasn't this idea applied to it at one time or another.

Modern man didn't invent alienation, mind you. It has existed in the world from the moment Eve ate the forbidden fruit in defiance of God's command and gave some to Adam so that he ate also. But the point here is the way alienation was evident to Paul at the time he wrote this letter to the Ephesians. In Paul's mind there was a great tangible, visible symbol of alienation in the wall that surrounded the inner courtyards of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem; walls that divided them from the outermost courtyard, called the Court of the Gentiles.

The temple of Paul's day had been built by Herod the Great to replace the older, inadequate temple built in the days of Nehemiah by Zerubbabel. Much of Herod's Temple was overlaid with gold, and quite naturally it was the glory of the city. It sat on a raised platform on what is today still called the temple mount. The temple was surrounded by courts. The innermost court was called the Court of the Priests, because only male members of the priestly tribe of Levi were to enter it. The next court was the Court of Israel; it could be entered by any male Jew. After this there was the Court of the Women, which any Jew could enter and which was called the Court of the Women because it was as far as a woman could go in this hierarchy.

These courtyards were all on the same level. So although there were great differences between them, they weren't as great as the monumental division that came next. From the Court of the Women one descended 5 steps to a level area in which there stood a 5-foot stone barricade that went around the temple enclosure; then, after another level space, there were fourteen more steps that descended to the Court of the Gentiles. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, the wall dividing Jews from Gentiles was marked at

intervals by stone inscriptions stating that no foreigner was permitted to enter the Jewish enclosures upon penalty of death. Several of these inscriptions have been found. One complete inscription was found in 1871 and it reads: "No foreigner is to enter within the balustrade and embankment around the sanctuary. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his death which follows." It was a serious threat; like our modern Trespassers will be prosecuted. Except it means, Trespassers will be killed.

If Paul was writing this letter to the Ephesians from Rome, as scholars believe he was, he own personal experience of the hostility associated with this wall must have been fresh on his mind. Just a couple of years before, when he had been in Jerusalem to deliver the offerings of the gentile churches to the Jewish Christians there, he had entered the temple to take a vow and had been set upon by an angry mob and almost killed. Paul was Jewish himself, of course, but the Jews knew of his sympathetic dealings with Gentiles and somehow fostered the idea that he had brought a gentile Christian named Trophimus into the temple enclosure with him. The result of this riot was that Paul was taken into Roman custody, was held in Caesarea and eventually (as he appeal to Caesar) was transported to Rome as a prisoner ([Acts 21:27-36](#)).

It was this great visible symbol of Jewish-Gentile enmity that Paul had in mind as he wrote of the work of Christ in removing alienation. In all the ancient world, no wall (whether figurative or literal) was so impassable as the wall between Jew and Gentile. No wall gave greater occasion for scorn or arrogance. But now Paul says all that has been removed ([14-15](#)). Paul doesn't say that Jesus simply made peace between Jews and Gentiles (and between God and man) but that Jesus Himself is our peace! By His work on the cross, Jesus didn't just make peace possible; He (the Prince of Peace) became peace Himself in order to bring and end to the enmity and the resulting hostilities.

The sacrifice Jesus made of Himself on the cross is the common ground of salvation for both Jew and Gentile. Thus, there is no longer any dividing wall between Jew and Gentile. Jesus removed that wall; He demolished it. The wall of separation is gone because the common Lordship of Jesus Christ among believers is greater than any previous division, no matter how long-held it may have been. If the Lordship of Jesus is not greater than any differences you may have with others – be it political, racial, economic,

linguistic, geographic or whatever – then you have not fully comprehended what it means to be under the Lordship of Jesus, or you have not fully surrendered to it.

Earlier, I had mentioned that there were certain Jewish institutions that were partially designed to isolate Israel from the rest of the world. The main institution was the Law of Moses and the Law was the primary source of contention between Jews and Gentiles because Gentiles didn't keep the Law! The Law made a definite distinction between Jews and Gentiles itself. The dietary laws reminded the Jews that God had put a difference between the clean and unclean but since the Gentiles didn't obey these laws, they were thus, unclean and untouchable.

These divine ordinances stood as a wall between the Jews and all other nations but Jesus annulled these laws and requirements by fulfilling them. Since Jesus fulfilled the Law on our behalf and since He bore the penalty for our failure to keep the Law, Jews and Gentiles can now be reconciled through Christ's work on the cross. His death finally put to death the source of the contention. By fulfilling the demands of the Law in His righteous life and by bearing the curse of the Law in His sacrificial death, Jesus removed, once and for all, the legal barrier that separated Jew from Gentile. The Law as a source of righteousness was no longer an issue, that source of enmity between Jew and Gentile was now dead. The cost of destroying the enmity was the blood of Jesus Christ.

Paul also says that Christ created in Himself one new man. Early Christians called themselves a "3rd race" or a "new race." They recognized that they were not Jews, not Gentiles, but a newly created designation that encompassed all who are in Christ! It wasn't as if Jesus had brought one group up to the level of the other, He actually created a higher level, a greater position; just as if someone were to melt down a silver statue and a lead statue and together they would come out as gold!

16 – To understand what this means and how Jesus did this we need to understand something more about the temple in Jerusalem. We've seen that the temple was surrounded by a series of concentric courts, each designed to discriminate among people based of how near or far they could be to the temple. These concentric courts were all that a normal person could see. But, the greatest barrier of all was not outside in the courtyards

but was inside the temple itself. Within the temple there were 2 main sections, the Holy Place (which any regularly assigned priest could enter) and the Holy of Holies (which only the high priest could enter, and that only once a year after first making a sacrifice for himself and his family) Separating these 2 sections was the great veil. This was a curtain about 6 inches thick, which was used to seal off the inner temple. In the Holy of Holies was the Ark of the Covenant, above which, in the space between the wings of the cherubim mounted on its cover, God was understood to dwell symbolically.

In other words, the entire system of this inner veil and outer walls was not meant to just show the differences among people, it was to show the greatest and most fundamental alienation of all, the alienation of all humanity from God. The cause of this alienation, like the cause of all other alienations, is sin. People don't want to face this truth. They think that all that's necessary to preserve peace in the world is for all the leaders to get together and simply agree to be gentlemen. Neville Chamberlain thought he could do this with Hitler. Before that, the world thought it could forestall another Great War by establishing the League of Nations in 1919, which only led to the rise of Hitler. The 2nd iteration, the United Nations, has also failed to keep the peace around the world.

Don't get me wrong; talking is always better than fighting. Agreements are always better than having no agreements at all. My disagreement is with the idea that this will bring peace. At best, it might stall or delay the inevitable hostilities but it'll never bring peace. The enemy of peace is not a lack of negotiations; it's the fundamental alienation that exists between every individual person and God. It's because we're at enmity with God (true meaning of sin) that we're also inevitably at enmity with ourselves, one another, and with the world.

But see what Jesus has done! Remember the incident from Matthew's account of Christ's death where, at the very moment of His death, "the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" ([Matt 27:51](#)). Matthew is considered the most Jewish of the Gospels so his reference to the veil of the temple is one that would've been understood by every Jewish reader. It's a clear reference to the veil between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, and the fact that it was torn in two from top to bottom indicates in as graphic a way as possible that as the result of Christ's death, sin has been

removed as a barrier between man and God, reconciliation has been achieved, and the way is now open for anyone to approach God—if they comes through faith in Jesus Christ and His work of redemption.

Most of us recognize and understand the word reconciliation but there are actually 5 shades of meaning to the word and they all appropriately apply to its usage here in [v16](#). 1st, its most basic meaning refers to a change from a hostile to a friendly relationship. That's the simplest meaning. 2nd, it doesn't just mean a friendship after an estrangement, or simply doing away with the estrangement. It's not just that it brings people into speaking terms again who formerly at odds with one another. It means more; it means really bringing together again, a reuniting, a re-connecting.

3rd, it also emphasizes the completeness of the action. It means the enmity is so completely laid aside that complete amity follows. It's not referring to a compromise. It's a complete action; it produces complete amity and concord where there was previously only hostility. 4th, it also means that it's not just that the 2 parties in the dispute or quarrel have decided to come together. This word Paul uses implies that it's just One of the parties that takes the action and it's the greater One that does it. Part of the Greek word *kata* implies an action that comes down from above. It's not that the 2 sides come together voluntarily; it's One bringing the other into this position of complete amity and accord.

5th, it also means a restoration of something that was there before. Our "reconcile" suggests just that. Re-concile! They were conciled before, now they're reconciled: brought back to where they were. It's hard to think of a more comprehensive word for describing what God has done through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Before this great work, we were estranged or alienated from God. We were in fellowship with God once—in Adam. But since the Fall every baby born into the world has been born in a state of enmity against God. From our end the situation is utterly hopeless. We can't make reconciliation, and, even worse, we don't want to.

But God made reconciliation. God the Father sent God the Son, Jesus Christ, to bear the full punishment due to us for our sin. He bore it away in His own body by dying on the cross. Thus, our friendship with God is restored, and the way is open for us to come to God freely, as Paul says. This reconciliation didn't just happen. It was the hard-fought

accomplishment of Jesus. This means that Jesus' prayer in [John 17](#) "that they all may be one" wasn't just a prayer. It was a prayer Jesus prayed knowing that His suffering on the cross would accomplish the answer. It was a prayer He was willing to pray knowing that His agony would be used to answer it.

17-18 – Jesus Christ is our peace ([14](#)), He made peace ([15b](#)) and He preached peace ([17](#)). As the Judge, He could have come to declare war but in His grace, He came with a message of peace. As they respond to that same gospel message of peace, both those who were afar off (Gentiles) and those who were near (Jews) experience both the peace of God and peace with God. They also enjoy the same access to God, access that comes by one Spirit to the Father. Access is likely the best translation of the Greek word here but it can also be translated as introduction. In Near East royal courts, there was often a designated person who escorted people into an audience with a king. The Holy Spirit brings us in and makes the necessary introductions and He does the same for all who accept Christ.

So not only are Jews and Gentiles saved by the same gospel, they also have the same essential walk with God and the same access to God. One group doesn't have a greater access than the other. When conflict arises among Christian groups of different backgrounds, as often happens, you can be sure that they have forgotten that they were saved by the same gospel and have the same access to God. One or both groups usually fell they have superior access to God. A faulty understanding of our common position in Christ leads to faulty relationships in Christ's body.

Reconciliation with God is a glorious blessing but, as with all of God's blessings, there is a great responsibility that goes along with it. If you are in Christ, not only has fellowship with the Father been gloriously restored, but, by its very definition, fellowship between estranged human beings must also be restored—if they're also in Christ.

Notice the progression of thought. We began with human alienation, showing it from the great hostility between Jew and Gentile in Paul's day. We traced the cause of this alienation to a greater alienation, the hostility between all people and God because of sin. We then focused on the solution to the greater alienation, which was the bearing of sin by Jesus on Calvary. His death for sin opened the way to God for all who will come to

God by Him. We now circle back to the beginning. Since the greater barrier has now been completely removed (the veil), there's no need for the lesser barriers (the wall). In fact, they inevitably fall with the large one.

The reason for this is that the veil between ourselves and God drops only for those who are in Christ. And if we are in Christ, then there can never be a barrier between us and others who are also in Christ, otherwise Christ would be divided. If we're in Him, we're in the same place. We're members of the one body, and peace has been restored between all who are members of it. So, if you are in Christ, then in God's sight you're one with every other believer regardless of any distinction. Therefore, you must act like that. You may not see eye to eye with every other Christian on everything. No one expects you to. But you must not break with them! And you must realize that regardless of your differences of opinion, the unity that you have with them is greater than the unity you will ever have with anyone else in the world, even if the unbeliever is of the same class or situation as you are, even family.

Also, if you are not yet in Christ, you should know that in the final analysis the solution to your most basic problems is to be found in that relationship. It's to be found in your personal relationship to Him. There's an objective side to Christ's work; it's described as His making peace between men and reconciling both to God (15-16). It's what Jesus did on Calvary by His death. But there's also a subjective side to this as well. It's the part in which we are joined to Him by faith as we hear and respond to the gospel. This is why **v17** speaks of preaching.

So the final question, the most important question is this: Are you in Him? If not, then you still remain divided from all other human beings and, much worse, from God Himself. If you come to Him, He will remove the both the spiritual and tangible barriers that exist in your life and make you a part of that new humanity that He's uniting in Himself. Will you come to Him today and finally breathe the air of spiritual freedom? 😊