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WALLS, WALLS, AND MORE WALLS

Ephesians 2:13-22

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The largest construction project ever undertaken by mankind was the building of a wall - the Great Wall of China. **(Click)** Building on this wall began in 1368 under the Ming Dynasty and it took an astounding 1,700 years to complete. **(Click)** It is said there is enough stone in the Great Wall to build an 8-foot wall completely circling our globe at the equator. **(Click)** It travels along some 5,500 miles and it is probably the best example of Man's obsession with walls. **(Click)** You have probably heard it said that the Great Wall is one of the few structures to be visible from space – but let me set the record right – this is NOT true.

The Great Wall of China was built to keep out foreigners. Many of us can remember another famous wall that was built NOT to keep people out, but rather to keep people in.

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It was known as the Berlin Wall. **(Click)** It was constructed in 1961. It was only twenty-five miles long, but it divided a great city and it came to symbolize the failure of communism. **(Click)** On the East Berlin side the wall was topped by barbed wire, separating an area called the “death area.” **(Click)** This area included guard towers, bunkers and trenches, and then a second wall. We have no idea of how many people were killed trying to escape over the Berlin Wall. **(Click)** And then an incredible day of rejoicing on November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall came tumbling down. Many of us have probably forgotten what a symbol of hatred and fear that wall became. It is just another illustration of humanity's obsession with walls.

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Even in churches there are walls. We don't like to admit it, but it's true. **(Click)** A pastor in a church in upstate New York tells about a man in his first parish named Jimmy. Jimmy was a well-known figure in town. No one knew Jimmy's age, but he walked the streets at all hours of the day and night carrying a large portable radio on his shoulder and singing to the music at the top of his tuneless voice. **(Click)** Sometimes Jimmy's elderly mother walked with him. When she did, they argued. Nights when the arguments got violent, Jimmy slept in the church doorway.

Well, Jimmy and his mother began coming to church. The first Sunday they sat in someone else's accustomed seats. Jimmy enjoyed the hymns and sang lustily, but he talked during the sermon, and kept getting up and walked around. Regular worshippers began to wait to see where Jimmy and his mother would sit so as not to get too close. After a few months

Jimmy and his mother became an issue in the church. **(Click)** People said, “They’re disruptive. They smell. They’re a nuisance. We wish they wouldn’t come at all.” Fortunately, Jimmy and his mother were blessedly unaware to this firestorm.

A year or so later, Jimmy and his mother found an independent church that had a bus ministry, so he and his mother began attending elsewhere. This pastor writes, “My congregation was relieved of coping with Jimmy. I however, was deeply shaken. The church, where people like Jimmy should have been welcome, was no different from anywhere else.” This pastor continues, **(Click)** “Didn’t Jesus come to be among the Jimmies of the world? Didn’t Jesus extend hospitality to people who were otherwise outsiders? Didn’t he heal when he wasn’t supposed to and touch people when no one else would?” **(Click)** Even in Churches there are walls.

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You know who doesn’t like walls? (Click) Jesus. Listen to what the Apostle Paul says, **(Click)** “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace,

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and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”

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The wall St. Paul is referring to in specific is the wall between Jews and Gentiles. **(Click)** The first Christian congregation was all Jewish. **(Click)** Most of the members would have preferred to keep it that way. **(Click)** And resisted any change to include Gentiles. **(Click)** Simon Peter had a vision to include Gentiles. **(Click)** Paul had a passion to include Gentiles. And together they broke down the wall that kept Gentiles out. Good thing too, **(Click)** because if this did not happen, who of us would be in the Church today? We're all Gentiles.

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The first thing we need to see is that all wall building usually is a form of hatred. ,

(Click) And this comes only from Satan, not from God. I hope you already understand that. You cannot love God and hate your brother or your sister.

The John's first epistle, he makes this very clear. **(Click)** We read, "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." (4:7-8) **(Click)** There is no hatred in God. God is pure unadulterated love. Anyone who says they hate anyone for any reason cannot be filled with the Spirit of God. It is a logical impossibility.

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Sometime back we are told the American Red Cross was gathering supplies--medicine, clothing, food, and the like for the suffering people of an African drought and civil war. Inside one of the boxes that showed up at the collection depot one day was a letter. **(Click)** It said, "We have recently been converted and because of our conversion we want to try to help. We won't ever need these again. Can you use them for something?" **(Click)** Inside the box were several Ku Klux Klan sheets.

For any of our younger members who may not be familiar with the Klan, in parts of our nation historically the Klan has been the very epitome of racial and religious hatred. The most interesting manifestation of their hatred was that they used a cross--a burning cross--as a means of intimidation. The truly sad thing is that, in their twisted minds some of them actually believed they were serving Christ with their hateful acts. They were serving Satan.

Anyway this particular group had come to know the love of Christ and had disbanded, and they sent their robes, their white sheets, to the Red Cross. Quite significantly, the Red Cross cut the white sheets into strips and eventually used them to bandage wounds--the wounds of suffering black people in Africa. (5) Now, that is a conversion that would thrill the heart of God.

All forms of hatred are from Satan, not from God. Nothing could be more evident from the New Testament. It is difficult to see how Christians can hate anyone in Jesus' name. In our lesson for today, **(Click)** St. Paul says that Christ came to break down the "wall of hostility." That is my prayer, too, that, if anyone in this room has any hostility in your heart toward any other person for any reason, or toward any other group of people, that you will ask God to deliver you from that hostility.

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Wall building has no place in God's Family, the Church. Why? Because, **(Click) We all belong to one family.** The biblical testimony is that we all belong to one family. **(Click)** We

all descended from one set of parents. The Genesis writer called them Adam and Eve. We know that the first man was fashioned from the dust of the earth and that God breathed in His own Spirit. But scripture is clear--we had one set of parents.

(Click) You are my brother and my sister, but so is the man working long hours in a factory in China and so is the tired woman in the Sudan carrying her starving child across the desert, as well as the teenager in Pakistan seething at what he perceives as an unjust world. We need to be reminded of that from time to time, and where will that happen if not in church? We are all one family, the family of God. The only hope this world has is that some day we will reach across the walls of hostility between peoples and religions. When that day comes we will understand what the Kingdom of God is--that time when God will reign in every heart.

And this brings us to the final thing to be said: **(Click) God's kingdom comes when we have the love of God living in our hearts.**

Every Sunday, we join to pray the Lord's Prayer. In that prayer, we say, **(Click)** "Thy Kingdom Come." What does that mean? It means simply that we bring forth the Kingdom of God when love flows through our hearts. **(Click)** There is a little chorus that many of us learned to sing in grade school: "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me . . ." And that is the way peace always comes. It is when we as God's people open our hearts to God's love and then pass that love on to others. We may not be able solve all the world's problems, we may not be able to speak to all the world's people, we may not be able to personally intervene to prevent the death of innocent people in places where hatred is strong and life is cheap. But what we can do is take responsibility for our lives, to pray for God's love to reside within us, and then live out that love on a day-to-day basis so that everyone we come into contact with is touched by that love.

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Wallace Hamilton wrote many illustrations for sermons. In one story he told the story about **(Click)** a Christian farmer who raised sheep. But he had a serious problem. **(Click)** His neighbor's dogs would come and attack his sheep, injuring many or even killing some of the sheep. **(Click)** The farmer went to talk with his neighbor but his neighbor didn't do anything about it. So the farmer thought, the next dog that attacks my sheep **(Click)** will be a dead dog. But he knew that was wrong. **(Click)** His next thought was to sue the man. But that didn't work because Christians don't sue Christians. **(Click)** "I'll build a wall," he thought, but that would have been expensive. He didn't have that kind of money. And besides, walls are such ugly things.

(Click) Finally he prayed, "Lord, what should I do about my neighbor's dogs?" Then that

night the answer came to him.

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The next morning he went out to his sheep. **(Click)** He selected two baby lambs and he took those lambs to his neighbor's house and gave them to his neighbor's **(Click)** daughters as pets. The girls were thrilled (there is nothing cuter than a little lamb). His neighbor was thrilled because his daughters were happy, and since he now had sheep of his own to protect, he had to control his dogs.

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When God wanted to make peace with the world he sent us **(Click)** the Lamb of God. But do more than that. **(Click)** Christ came to tear down the wall of hostility. Never has the world needed the peace that Christ brings more than it does today. God's intent is that we all be one family. We are to surrender ourselves completely to the love of God through Jesus Christ.