

The Walls Came a'Tumblin Down

Ephesians 2:11-22

One of the first things we do when building a new structure is to clear a spot for it. If we are building on a vacant lot, we level the area, remove rocks and brush, and perhaps bring in fill to raise the area. If we want to build on a spot with an existing building, we need to tear down the previous building first. The 21st Century way of tearing down large structures is to use strategically placed explosives to cause the building to fall in on itself. I've seen videos of this, but I've never been present when a building was brought down. It's probably an exciting thing to see. Ephesians 2:11-22 describes a different type of demolishing and rebuilding, the demolishing of the old dwelling of God and the building of the new.

In the time of Jesus and the early church, people demolished buildings by hand. And it was common to salvage as much building material as possible for reuse. In fact, because of this practice, it is sometimes difficult for archeologists to track the history of a community. When building something new, the old would be taken apart, usable material would be salvaged, and the rubble would be smoothed. Then the new structure would be built on top of the foundation or the rubble of the old structure, using both salvaged material and new material. A new building might have centuries-old support beams, last century's window frames, rocks hewn by six generations before, and a newly constructed front door and door frame.

Ephesians 2:11-22 is an important passage. Here, Paul explained to the formerly Gentile Christians that they had become a part of the family of God, just as the Jews had been chosen to be. But he made it clear that even the Jews needed to be reconciled in Christ:

11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands

(Romans 2:29 reminds us that the true circumcision is an inward one, of the heart and by the Spirit. Galatians 6:15 tells us that what counts is new creation.)

12 remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

(As pagans, they were not God's people.)

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

(They are no longer separated from the Lord Jesus Christ; they are now in Christ.)

*14 For He Himself is our peace, Who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the **dividing wall** of hostility* (His peace is for Jews AND Gentiles)

*15 by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that He might create in Himself **one new humanity** in place of the two, so making peace,*

16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death hostility.

17 And He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.

(However, even though the Jews were near to God, they didn't have access to Him.

The walls of the temple actually kept them from approaching the place God's "glory" where His presence was said to dwell. But through the Lord Jesus Christ, the Christian Jews were also reconciled and given access to God the Father.)

18 For through Christ we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

(Now, as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Gentiles ARE God's people too.)

Back in verse 14, we saw the first step in construction, the clearing of the building site. Christ had “broken down the walls of hostility.” Now we see how the new “temple” of God is being built.

20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets,

(The prophets who had been sent by God to the Jews, and the apostles who had now come to both the Jews and the Gentiles)

Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone,

(The cornerstone was an extra large foundation stone; the rest of the stones of the foundation were placed based on its placement, and the building was built from it.)

21 in Whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

(The whole structure **grows in** our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ’s church is not a dead lifeless structure, but something that grows!)

22 In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

(The Greek verb tense for “being built together” means continuous, ongoing building and growing.)

So, we, both Jews and Gentiles, are being built together by the Holy Spirit into a dwelling place for God. We continue to grow, the temple continues to be built, and God lives in us.

The Temple’s Outside Courtyards

In a spiritual sense, then, we are a “rebuild” of the Jerusalem temple, using some of the existing material and some new material. But there is a major difference. The dividing walls of hostility have been broken down! And there were quite a few walled off divisions in the Jerusalem temple.

The Court of the Gentiles - Gentiles could enter the temple grounds, the outer court, and could pray and worship there, but they were not allowed to go up the steps into the inner courts. There was a sign that warned Gentiles from entering the inner courts on pain of death.

Court of the Women - All Jews were permitted inside this section. This was said to be an area of continuous music, singing, and dancing. During the Feast of Lights, giant candelabra were erected and lit and huge musical celebrations were held each night in their light. But Jewish women could go no farther than this.

Court of the Israelites – This area was for Jewish men only. The altar of sacrifice could be seen from here, so the men could witness the sacrifices, but unless they were priests, they could go no farther.

Court of the Priests – This was where the altar of sacrifice stood, only priests could enter this section.

The Actual Temple Building

The Holy Place - This was the first part of the actual temple building that was encountered. Twice a day, a priest, chosen by lot, went up the steps and inside the door to offer the incense offering on the golden-incense altar. Four assistant priests went with him to prepare the altar and the candelabrum and to assist him with the incense.

The Holy of Holies -This innermost area was accessed only by the High Priest on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement.) It was separated from the Holy Place by a huge 4-5 inch thick set of embroidered linen curtains. This separated even the priests who offered the daily incense from the holy presence of God. The penalty for anyone entering the Holy of Holies, other than the High Priest on Yom Kippur, was death (Numbers 17:13).

Barriers Destroyed

But, through His death and resurrection, our Lord Jesus Christ broke down all these barriers separating His people from intimacy with God and began building His new temple!

The dividing walls of hostility were demolished! Let's picture the spiritual reality in 21st Century terms, using the physical analogy Paul gives us in Ephesians 2. As our Lord Jesus Christ clears the building site, can you hear the explosions?

The walls restricting the Gentiles to the outer courtyard:

Colossians 3:11 . . . *there is no Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.*

KABOOM!!!

The walls restricting the women to the women's courtyard:

Gal 3:28 . . . *there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

KABOOM!!!

The walls restricting all but the priests to the role of observer of worship and sacrifice only

1 Peter 2:4-7 *As you come to Him, a Living Stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For it says in Scripture:*

Is 28:16 *"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."*

Peter 2:9-10 . . . *you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*

KABOOM!!!

And then, as the people rush forward, singing, dancing, and shouting with joy

Matthew 27:51 *And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.*

KABOOM!!!

Finally, **all** the walls, and **all** the barriers are torn down through our Lord Jesus Christ! And now He is continuously building a new temple, a temple without dividing walls, out of living stones, out of one new humanity!

John 17:21-23 *that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.*

But, brothers and sisters, when we look at the history of the church, we can see that, too often, people who claim to follow Jesus Christ want to rebuild the walls that our Lord has demolished. Churches have divided by race, culture, gender, or ethnicity and have built walls to keep others out. The royal priesthood of every believer has often been forgotten and people have been told that they can only access God through the mediation of ordained religious professionals.

How many churches today have “walls” that keep people out of certain areas or functions in the church?

Jesus gave His life to reconcile us to the Father and to each other, to break down the dividing walls of hostility, so that He *might create, in Himself, one new humanity*. He suffered so that we could continue to be built together by the Holy Spirit and continue to grow. He died so that we, the church of living stones, could be built together into a dwelling place for our God. Amen.