



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Ephesians 2: 11-22

Winter 2024

"The Broken Wall"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and yes, we are back in Ephesians, and with a glorious passage as well. It's a rather lengthy text but I try to, as I've explained before, try to keep a passage together and follow the thought—and this is a great passage on the grace of God that He poured out on the Gentiles. And it reminds us of the grace He's given to us—and the blessings, the privileges into which He has brought us; and he reminds the Ephesian Gentiles of that as well. We begin with verse 11 of chapter 2, and I'll read through to verse 22,

¹¹Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," *which is* performed in the flesh by human hands— ¹²*remember* that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, ¹⁵by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. ¹⁷And He came and

preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near; ¹⁸for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, ²⁰having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, ²¹in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, ²²in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Ephesians 2: 11-22

What a great text. What a privilege to read it and then to spend some time of study in it together. Let's pray that the LORD will bless us, enable us to understand and appreciate all that we have in Christ. Let's pray.

Father, what a privilege it is to be together as Your people and do this, read the Scriptures together that remind us, just as those Gentiles in Ephesus so long ago were reminded of the great privilege that they had, of what they had been brought into—those, “who were far away.” (vs17). They had no connection to the Light of the Gospel, to You, or to Your people...and You brought them into Your family and gave them open access to the throne of grace. You brought enemies together into one family. So help us to appreciate this, LORD: The unity that we have with one another and that we ought to cultivate—and that we ought to seek to establish increasingly.

And we can do that only by Your Spirit, Father. And we are all in the Spirit; He binds us all together, and so we pray for that power and that blessing, that we would grow in Christ and would grow in maturity and understanding, and in unity with one another—and take advantage, constantly, of the blessings You've given us and the access we have to the throne of grace, as we are doing at this moment.

So we pray Your blessing upon us, build us up in the faith. And we pray that for this city wherever Your Word is taught, and throughout this nation and the world, Father, that on this LORD's day Your Word would go out clearly and Your people would be

built up and strengthened for this day, and for the week to come and the difficulties and challenges that we will face.

We do face difficulties, particularly at this time of year, with the sicknesses going around. And we pray for those that are sick, and who are going through whatever it may be, whatever the virus is. But LORD, You know our needs, and we pray that You would bless those who are under the weather now, and bless us who aren't, that we won't be. We commit it all to You. We're in Your hand. We move and exist in You, and we know we're safe.

LORD, we thank You for all that we have in Christ, and we thank You for this time together. Bless us now we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) Not long ago I stood outside the old city of Jerusalem, and looking to the southeast I could see a concrete wall winding over the Judean hills. It was built in desperation to keep terrorists out. And it's been effective; it separates Jews from Arabs; it separates Israelis from Palestinians. And there is a lot of distrust and dislike on both sides of that wall.

There was a wall in Paul's day which kept Gentiles out—kept them from Jewish worship and from any inclusion in the nation. There was distrust and disdain on both sides of that wall, too. It wasn't concrete; it was a wall of words, the Law of Moses. And Paul wrote in Ephesians chapter 2, that a change has come. The wall has been broken down by Christ's sacrifice. He's reconciled the people on both sides with one another—and with God.

Christ has established peace between heaven and earth. And on earth He has made friends out of enemies, to create a new society of Jews and Gentiles—what Paul calls in our text, “one new man”. (vs15c). We are all equally in Christ, joined together in a vital relationship with Him. And together we have access to God the Father—and all of us are to make use of that great privilege.

That's the lesson of the passage. It's another example of, "the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe", (Eph 1:19), and all of the glorious consequences of it which are all rich blessings. And to show the Ephesian saints the 'surpassing greatness of that power toward them', Paul began by reminding them of how lost they once were, and how desperate their condition was.

He's already done that in verse 1, where he wrote that they, (and we and all believers), were originally, 'dead in our sins'. But here he reminds them of how far from God, uncircumcised Gentiles were. He lists five ways in which they were separated.

First, in verse 12, they were, "...separate from Christ..." (vs12a). They were in sin and in spiritual darkness with no expectation of the coming Messiah. They were living in impending danger and doom without knowing it.

Secondly, they were, "...excluded from the commonwealth of Israel..." (vs12b). They were Gentiles and unqualified—unfit to be citizens of Israel and come under the government and the protective providence of God.

Third, they were, "...strangers to the covenants of promise...: (vs12c). They were ignorant of the promise that God had made to Abraham, (a covenant that He had made with him), and outside of the covenant that God made with the nation at Sinai, (as well as all the revelation of that covenant—the laws and the principles of it). So not having any part in the covenant, Paul wrote that they were, 'separated from all *hope* and from *God*.' (vs12d).

Well, those are the *fourth* and the *fifth* aspects of their separation. Gentiles could not look at their future with any certainty or hope. Many of them were slaves in the Roman society, with little immediate hope of change in their life in this present world—and no hope beyond this life. Their future was dreary; their future was dark.

Homer, in his *Odyssey*, gives us a glimpse of the pagan idea of the afterlife. It was in the house of Hades, and Odysseus visits there—and he speaks there with Achilles, the great hero of the Greeks, who had perished and was there, (in Hades), and said,

"Better to be a slave on the earth than a king of kings in Hades." There's nothing of hope in that understanding of the future after death.

The Gentiles were, "...without hope. ...", and Paul added, "...without God in the world." (vs12d). Literally that statement is, 'They were atheists.' It doesn't mean they were philosophical atheists, but they were simply ignorant of the true God. They had no knowledge of Him and were without peace as a result.

William Hendricksen summarized the fivefold separation of the Gentiles as, "Christless, stateless, friendless, hopeless, and Godless." They were alienated from God and men and that was their future: Alienation, separation from God and men, isolated and alone for all eternity.

No longer! That has changed. And Paul introduces the happy news in verse 13 with another magnificent contrast; "But now", he said. He did that earlier in the chapter: "You were dead...But God, being rich in mercy...made us alive.", (vs1,4,5). And here, in verse 12, 'You were separated', "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." (vs13). That's the amazing grace of God's love, and "the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." (1:19). It is the power of grace, specifically as explained here. It's the power of the cross. It's all of God.

In Romans chapter 10, verse 20, Paul quoted Isaiah 65 where this Gentile salvation was prophesied in the beautifully ironic words of God, "I was found by those who sought me not." It's a way of saying that, 'God did the seeking and finding. He took the initiative.' Otherwise, Gentiles would still be separated, "far off", and "having no hope."

But no longer. These Ephesians were, "brought near by the blood of Christ." Paul said, (vs13b); because on the cross, by the shedding of His blood, Christ settled all accounts with God. He paid our debts, the debts of our sin, in full. The cross is where Christ accomplished salvation for His people—and now, in every generation, He applies

that salvation to them through the Holy Spirit—who brings us to faith in Christ and joins us to the Father, into His family, and with one another.

And all who believe in Him, at that moment, that moment of faith, have peace with God. Or as Paul puts it in verse 14, "He (*Christ*) Himself is our peace." Christ, by His death, established peace. That's his meaning—but he puts it in this special way by personifying peace and saying, "He Himself is our peace", rather than, 'Christ achieved peace'; 'Christ established peace'. He emphasizes the personal aspect of His work as 'Peacemaker.'

It's not enough to believe the facts about Christ, as essential as that is, we must believe in Him personally; we must be joined to Him personally, in a vital, living relationship in order to have peace. He is it; *peace* is in Him. He alone has reconciled us with God—and especially here reconciled us, not only with God, but with others.

This is a great emphasis that Paul is making here in this passage. He made both groups, Jews and Gentiles, into one—made peace between them and made them into one group. That's the emphasis here, the reconciliation of two very different people.

But in order for peace to be a reality between them, "Much had to be dismantled", as Dr. Harold Hoehner put it in his commentary. The first thing that needed to be dismantled or broken down was, 'the great wall' that divided the two groups. That's how Paul put it. He, (*Christ*), "broke down the barrier of the dividing wall". (vs14b).

It's clear from verse 15, where Paul speaks of "the Law of commandments", that the dividing wall is the Law of Moses with its commandments to, 'be separate from all that is unclean'. This instruction, 'to be separate', caused enmity, hostility, ill feelings, and hatred between Jews and Gentiles.

It seems likely that Paul borrowed this picture of, 'the Law as a barrier', (vs14), from a literal wall in the Temple of Jerusalem that shut out the Gentiles from entering. The entire Temple was constructed with a series of "courts" that became increasingly segregated, increasingly exclusive. There was "the outer court", then "the court of women", where Jewish men and women could be. Then "the court of Israel" where only

Jewish men could enter. Then "the court of priests", where the altar was, and where only the priests could enter.

But the outer court that surrounded the temple was "the great court of the Gentiles." Gentiles were allowed there, where they could observe something of Israel's religion. But they could not go further than that. And to keep them out, there was a low stone barrier about five feet high, which surrounded the temple. And on it was posted a notice in both Greek and Latin forbidding Gentiles to enter, "on pain of death."

In 1871, during an excavation on the site of the Temple Mount, a discovery was made of a white limestone slab which was set into this barrier, this wall, with an inscription on it. It reads, "No foreigner may enter within the barrier and enclosure round the temple. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death."

Paul had seen that many times. And while the barrier was not the dividing wall that Paul refers to here, it certainly illustrates the separation and the hostility that the Law produced on both sides of it. The Jews considered Gentiles and pagans "unclean." They were called 'dogs', 'pariahs'. And the Gentiles looked down on the Jews as 'peculiar', as 'strange and antisocial.'

But Christ, the peacemaker, the "Prince of Peace", has changed that. He has broken down the barrier, and with it the enmity that it caused—and He has made the two groups into one.

In verses 15 and 16, Paul explains how He did that, and how He reconciled these two ancient enemies. He did it first by abolishing, in His flesh, the Law with its commandments and ordinances and ceremonies that caused the separation between people. Through His perfect life and sacrificial death He fulfilled the Law. And He satisfied the just demands of that Law, so that all who believe in Him, who are joined to Him through faith alone, are counted righteous by God and free from the Law and its judgment.

God demonstrated this to Peter when he was in Joppa, (on the Mediterranean coast), and had a vision. It's recorded in Acts chapter 10: A sheet came down from heaven, full of unclean animals; and a voice commanded him to, "kill and eat!" (vs13). Peter protested, but the voice said, "What God has cleansed, no *longer* consider unholy." (vs15). In other words, the dietary laws and separation were over. And so too, the separation between the Jew and Gentile.

The moral principles of the Law, of the Mosaic Law, have always been God's will for people. Murder, theft, adultery were wrong before the Ten Commandments were given at Sinai—and they still are. And the Law still has relevance for us; we should not think that the Law is something bad. We should not think that the Law is something that is to be completely disregarded. It is vital for our instruction; it is Scripture; it is the Word of God—and we still learn from it.

But we are not bound to its ordinances and ceremonies. It was 'The Constitution' of the nation of Israel; however, it is not the constitution of the church. It has all been fulfilled in Christ for us.

And so, having ended the Law as the rule of life for God's people with its regulations of separation, Christ has brought the Jew and the Gentile together into what Paul calls, "one new man." (vs15c). [Not 'new men'—though we are that: "If any man is in Christ, *he is* a new creature..." That's 2 Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 17. We are new people, men and women "in Christ"—individually new creatures, a new creation.] But here it is singular; it is "one new man." That is what the church is—and it's put this way to emphasize the unity that we have in Christ. This is a major point that Paul is making here and what we need to understand: We are a new society, a new humanity. That's what the church is.

There's a United Nations in New York that is a repeat of Babel—there's no unity there. The real united nations is here in the church. That was the purpose of Christ's death: To create the church by making peace among men, between Jew and Gentile, and by reconciling them to God. Verse 16, That He "...might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by having put to death the enmity."

Reconciliation is one of the great words of the Bible. It has the idea of bringing enemies together as friends and of establishing peace between them. And so, *reconciliation* assumes a previous state of hostility, a 'state of warfare', what is here twice called "enmity."

It's the word that Paul used in Romans chapter 8, verse 7, to describe the 'natural man', the 'unbelieving' man's relationship with God. In his mind, he is at war with God, his mind is "enmity against God", Paul wrote, (or "hostility toward God"). He will not submit to God.

And that was all of us. "Sons of disobedience," as Paul wrote back in verse 2 of this chapter, and "children of wrath", (vs3)—meaning our *enmity*, our *hostility* could only end badly for us; for mankind cannot win its war with God.

Fortunately, God won the peace for us—and at great cost to Him. He *reconciled* us to Him through the cross. And there Paul said, 'Christ killed the enmity, He Himself being our peace.' (vs16).

Again, as in verse 13, at the cross He took on Himself the judgment that the broken Law required. In that way He satisfied God's justice so that He can bring us into this freedom that He speaks of, so that we can go free at the moment of faith. That's what we are; the moment you believe in Christ, you are free from the condemnation of the Law. The moment you believe in Him, you are part of His family. We are no longer children of wrath; for we are children of God. We have the peace of God, and we have, fundamentally, the peace with God.

And because of that we have peace with people, Jew and Gentile, transformed from enemies to friends. That's the Gospel. That's the Good News. The war is over for all who believe.

And Christ announced that upon His victory at Calvary. We read that in verse 17, "And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near;" Now that's what the Lord did—and said to His disciples. Remember, when

He appeared to them after the resurrection, when they were hiding in terror, behind closed doors? He came and said, "Peace be with you." (Jn 20:19). —And He continued that message by the Holy Spirit through the apostles and through the church and the missionaries that have gone out throughout the world giving the Gospel. He is the "Prince of Peace", and He gives that peace to all who believe in Him.

And as a result, because we have peace, we have open access to God Almighty. That is what Paul said in verse 18. We can freely approach His throne of grace in prayer and have fellowship with Him. That access is through Him; it is through Christ. And it is for both the Jew and the Gentile equally; and it is in "one Spirit", the Holy Spirit, who joins us all together in this oneness, this "one new man" ...this 'family of God.'

That is a great privilege, but it's an exclusive privilege—only those in Christ, Jew and Gentiles together, who have been made into "one new man"—what one of the ancient Christians called, "a third race."

How highly do you...how highly do any of us value this great privilege of access to God? It is so easy to neglect it—and to forget it. We were praying before we came in, (as we always do), and one of the prayers was an acknowledgment that we so easily forget the blessings of God's grace and the privileges that we have. —And we do! And so again, for the third time in this second chapter, Paul reminds them, (and reminds us), of what they once were in order to appreciate the great privilege that they have been brought into; "So then", he said in verse 19, meaning, 'Because of the changes that have come', "...you are no longer strangers and aliens..." 'And don't ever forget what you once were, and were saved out of, and were saved from.' 'Look to the pit from which you were dug,' God told Judah in Isaiah 51, verse 1. You who were once "strangers and aliens" are now, "fellow citizens with the saints." (vs19b).

We are the people of God. We are citizens of heaven with the greatest of the saints. That's who we are: From the pit to the heavenlies! That's what God has done for

us. And because of our spiritual citizenship we have great privileges: We have access to God.

I got a sense of that privilege once when I was in Romania. I used to go there, usually once a year, to visit churches. My first trips were made when it was a communist country. And then, in 1989 as many of you will remember, the communist regimes began collapsing across eastern Europe—and then the Soviet Union. Suddenly people had freedom, and they could travel, and they could visit the west.

And so on one visit I was asked to help a friend, the sister of one of our members, to get a visa so she could come to Dallas and visit family. To do that, I went to the embassy in Bucharest. Outside the gate were hundreds of Romanians hoping for an opportunity to enter the American embassy and make application for a visa to come here. Some had been there waiting for days.

Yet all I had to do was approach the gate, show my passport, and I was given entrance. No waiting—immediate access. I may have appeared to be a very important person to those people waiting at the gate as I walked straight into the embassy and got what I was seeking. I wasn't special—my citizenship was special.

And our citizenship in heaven gives us the greatest rights and privileges in the entire cosmos! We have immediate access to heaven's throne room at any moment, where we can seek help in time of need.

'The wall is broken down', and the door is always open to God's children. He is the perfect Father. He is the archetypal Father—and our example. I think there's a lesson in that for all fathers and parents. We should always be available to our children and grandchildren to give them the counsel and the encouragement that they seek and that they need. None of us is perfect in that. Still, the care we give to our sons and daughters teaches them a lot about God—rightly or wrongly.

Paul has instruction on this later in chapter 6. It's an important witness that we have with our family and our children—and others. Our heavenly Father is a caring

Father, always accessible. The door is never closed. We can never come too often. He desires our relationship. He invites us to come.

We have confidence in Hebrews chapter 4, verse 16. "Therefore let us draw near", the writer wrote. It's the blessing that *reconciliation* has obtained for us. Use it! We are citizens of heaven. We're members of God's family, His beloved children, His "household." Understand that. Take advantage of that; use it.

Now, that is a more personal and warm description of our relationship with the LORD, this word "*household*", that Paul uses. (vs19). It indicates the intimacy of our relationship. A family is a place of acceptance. A family is a haven for a child in this world. And every believer in Christ has that in our spiritual family, where we are being encouraged, and where we are being strengthened by the Holy Spirit and by the ministry of God's Word. We're being built up through that ministry spiritually within us through the Spirit of God, and through the teaching of the Bible.

But that *household* is not only a place of warmth and care; it's also a place of *holiness*. Paul describes it in verses 20 and 21, with a second picture where the *household* becomes the *temple*. We are "citizens" of heaven. We are "God's household", verse 20, "...having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord." (vs20-21).

Jews and Gentiles together are God's temple on the earth. It's foundation is the apostles and prophets. [That is New Testament apostles and prophets—not Old Testament prophets. The word order indicates that.] These were men who were given revelation before the canon of Scripture was complete. They were necessary—and the initial phase of the building of the church.

There are no apostles and prophets today. That's a controversial statement, but I think it's indicated very clearly here: The word *foundation* indicates that. A building has one foundation; and it's restricted to the *base* of the structure. The apostles and prophets were the *first* generation of the church, until it was established. We are built

on their instruction and we are built by their instruction. We're "being fitted together." We're being joined together in a unity—and we're growing. So we are a living temple—and one that must be united in both doctrine and deed. So we need instruction.

Paul's final plea to Timothy was not prophesy but, "Preach!" 2 Timothy 4, verse 2, "Preach the Word." That's how the church grows, through instruction in the canon of Scripture, through the Word of God—all 66 books of it. And we have a guide, we have a compass in that growth and that establishment—and that is Christ, the cornerstone.

Now today, cornerstones are the last stone that's laid at the time of dedication. But in ancient times, it was the opposite—it was the first stone laid. It determined the bearings of the walls throughout the building. The cornerstone of a building gives unity and precision to the structure.

And that's what Christ does for the church. The ministry is about Christ. We learn from Him. We take our direction from Him. The Old Testament is about Him as well. We cannot dismiss the Old Testament as irrelevant. It was the Bible of the apostles. It's a major part of our Bible—and it's about Christ. In John chapter 5, verse 39, He told the Jewish leaders, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me."

Luke wrote that on the Emmaus road, after the Lord's resurrection, He explained to the two disciples, "...the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures...beginning with Moses and with all the prophets." Luke 24, verse 27. He is throughout the Old Testament.

And Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, verse 2, that when he came to that great Gentile city of Corinth, he wrote, "I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."

We preach the whole counsel of God—all the doctrines. But at the center of it all is the person and work of Jesus Christ. If He is neglected, the church loses direction and loses its way. When He is preached in all His glory, then the church is nourished and the church flourishes. Its built up; it grows; it matures. I believe that when we preach Christ

and His person and work broadly, we will fall in love with Him and with one another—and that will naturally produce the unity that is implied throughout this passage.

That's how Paul concludes the chapter in verse 22, on this theme of unity, 'In Christ, in Him', he wrote, "...you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." I've read that the stones of the walls of Byzantium were fitted so closely together that the wall appeared to be as one stone. And that should be the church—this church, so united that we appear as one person, "one new man," that we appear as Christ.

And we can. At the cross, Christ broke down the dividing wall, fulfilled the Law that separated Jews and Gentiles, brought them together, gave them access to God, and made us into His temple, where the Spirit today dwells.

John Stott observed that the Ephesians lived between two great temples. There was the temple there in Ephesus, the temple of Diana, a huge pagan edifice, one of the 'Seven Wonders of the World'. The other temple in Jerusalem, Herod's temple, was a glorious building. In fact, a rabbi said, "He who has not seen the temple in Jerusalem has not seen a beautiful building." But God wasn't in either one. Both were empty. He dwelt in those humble saints in Ephesus; and across the globe.

God said in Isaiah 57, verse 15, "I dwell *on* a high and holy place. And *also* with the contrite and lowly of spirit..." That's us. The world takes no notice of us. And when it does, it's often dismissive of God's saints. But He dwells with us, and He dwells in us. And that is a great privilege. —That is a great, great blessing.

That's true of every believer in Jesus Christ, Jew and Gentile. This, again, is an example of "the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe." So if you've not believed in Christ, but you want such a relationship with God and man, one of peace and growth, then look to Christ. Trust in Him. God will receive you and forgive you, and make you one of His saints, and receive you into His *household* for all eternity, make you

a part of this growing temple that is His, and live within you, and live for that world to come—which is “a world without end.” (Eph 3:21 KJV). That's our hope, and that's our future. It's all in Christ. So may God help you to come and trust in Him.

And you who have, may we all take advantage of the great blessings that we have.

(Closing prayer) Father, we do thank You that we have that glorious hope of dwelling on high with You in glory forever. What a privilege.

But what a blessing and privilege we have in this present life, that we can do what we're doing at this moment: Come into the throne room of God Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, the LORD of the entire universe...and You have interest in us. You hear our prayers, and You answer them—not often, or not always (at least) as we hope, but as is best, according to Your wisdom. Accepting that is part of the life of faith. Help us to do that.

Help us to grow in our faith. And as men and women, young and old, whose faith is in our Triune God, we, Father, need to come daily, routinely, to the throne of grace. Help us to do that, and take advantage of the great blessings You've given us.

We thank You for that. It's all in Christ, all because of His work for us; and we thank You for Him.

Now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In Christ's name, Amen.

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