

You, O Christ are worthy to receive honor and praise, because You gather for Yourself a Church out of every kindred and tongue and nation. Because You have called us into Your kingdom, make us Your loyal subjects that, dressed in Your *garments of righteousness* and justified in the sight of the Father through Your redemption, we may also walk as Your subjects, glorifying Your name upon earth. Amen. (Reading the Psalms with Luther, CPH, Ps. 132, p. 319)

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-- remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through Him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

In Christ Jesus, who tears down all walls of separation, which have arisen in our world on account of sin, dear fellow redeemed:

Walls and fences are often erected to keep people out, sometimes they are used to keep people in. Regardless, they go up and are maintained on account of the wickedness of men. We might call it the Babel effect. It was through that episode that the confusion of languages resulted and hostility increased among peoples and nations. Nations have often had natural barriers from one another, mountains, rivers, deserts and oceans. Skirmishes, even wars have resulted because these barriers were breached.

God even established a spiritual wall to protect His people who would be looking for the Christ when the fullness of time would come for Him to enter our world. It started with Abraham being called out of the land of the Chaldeans. It would be codified on Mt. Sinai through Moses. The civil and ceremonial laws of the people of God would build a spiritual hedge around them. Gentiles, non-Jews, would be allowed certainly to enter into the proper relationship with the one true God, but there would be certain restrictions. Once Christ appeared on the scene and secured salvation for all people, all such barriers lost their purpose. This is what our text addresses to the

Ephesian Gentiles. Let us then rejoice in this truth for us also today:  
**The Love of God for the Human Race Knows No Bounds.**

### I

We might think this God-imposed hedge around the children of Israel was an unloving act by our Lord toward the Gentiles. But this was no more unloving than it was when He sent the world-wide flood to preserve His Church of believers in this world, Noah and his family. God has and will always want all people saved and come to the knowledge of the truth of His love for us all found in His Son.

Judgments here in time are brought about against unbelief at times for the sake of the Church. But our Lord is merciful and slow to anger. Think of how it was that Abraham was called out of Ur to possess the land of Canaan. This land was filled with some of the most wicked people of that day, but God did not destroy them during the days of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It would be yet another 400 years before His judgment would be meted out through Joshua.

During the days of Jesus' public ministry among the Jews, He would also encounter Gentiles from Samaria, Syro-Phoenicia, Decapolis and even Roman citizens, as in our Gospel. He was condemned for this by His Jewish enemies, but He was not violating God's law in the least by showing love and concern for Gentiles too. Before He ascended to the right hand of the Father, Jesus directed the Church to go out into all the world and make disciples of all nations.

It was this that the Ephesian Gentiles were to "remember that at one time [they, the] Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands-- ... were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." Although separated by thousands of years from this transition period of time, most of us having Gentile roots, would also be separated from this rich spiritual heritage, without hope, without peace with God.

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off (by blood, time, and location) have been brought near by the blood of Christ." What a gracious action was performed for you. You were brought near to God, with all barriers removed by the blood of the Holy One sent by the Father for you. Your sin once separated you and there was an insurmountable gulf between you and your Creator.

### II

Paul goes on to tell us how this being brought near exactly took place: "[Christ] Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility by

abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that He might create in Himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility."

Most sinners think that there is no wall of hostility between us and the holy God. Most sinners think that sin is our natural condition and that God has to accept us just the way we are. The sinful heart will even claim to have a right that the wall of hostility be torn down since God is gracious and merciful and cannot deny these His loving characteristics. In fact, you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, find yourself thinking along some of these same proud ways at times. But when you realize your all too common arrogance over against God, our Lord leads you to repent and seek His pardon and forgiveness.

But this wall of hostility is impenetrable by us sinners, since it requires absolute perfection from each and every one of us. The Law of God's commandments are not suggestions nor are they negotiable, but absolute in all of their requirements. The wall does not come down by our efforts at keeping them. Our separation from God and His everlasting glory is permanently, i.e., eternally in place. There is only One who has the ability to tear it down.

The Israelites who were brought close to God through His revealed Word and ordinances and we who have roots that were far removed from where our Lord came to dwell among His people, were made one people reconciled by the same shedding of blood on the cross. Just as the curtain in the temple separating the sinner from the Holy God was torn apart at the death of this Holy One substituting Himself for all sinners, so now there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, we have been made one.

Nothing stands in the way between God's eternal love and we the human race. Sin and evil, which our just God hates, was all punished with His full hateful wrath in His most beloved Son. Yes, the source of this wall is the sinful heart of mankind, but the righteous God was not incapable of tearing down that wall of hostility through the suffering and death of His holy beloved Son.

Consider how it is that God, the offended one tore down the wall of hostility for us the offenders. We know how we sinners would operate if we were the offended. We would demand the offender make that move of tearing down the wall of hostility. But God knew we are spiritually incapable of such a things, so He tore it down and has been reconciled to us through His Son.

We saw such walls of hostility breached by Jesus in our Gospel lesson. He reached out and touched the untouchably unclean leper

and he was healed immediately and Jesus offered to enter the home of the unclean Gentile Roman Centurion. Our Lord's love for the entire human race knows no bounds.

It has reached you. He found you and "came and preached peace to you who were far off." You have heard it and believed it. Your sins are all forgiven and you are at peace with the God you have so grievously offended in so many ways. You now have "access in one Spirit to the Father".

It is so contrary to the Christian faith for a redeemed child of God to hate someone from another tribe, language, nation or people. For God's love is boundless and is equally extended to all through the shed blood of His Son for us all. Here is the joy we all have who know and trust in Christ Jesus as Savior: we will be among the many who will come from the east and the west, and will take our places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. "You who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning is now and shall be forevermore. Amen.