

## **The Purpose Of Walls** by Jeff Strite

Ephesians 2:4-2:16

Once upon a time, there were three little pigs.

(You've heard this one, haven't you?)

The first little piggy built his house of straw, and the big bad wolf came and huffed and puffed and blew that house down.

The second piggy built his house of sticks, and the big bad wolf came and huffed and puffed and blew that house down.

But the third built his house and bricks, and the big bad wolf came and huffed and puffed and huffed and puffed and huffed and puffed and could not bring down that house...

Because he had built with the right stuff.

God has built His church.

And when God built his church, he built it with the right stuff.

But, if you were to look at the building material He used for his church, you might wonder if He'd actually used the RIGHT stuff.

When Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus, he told them :

"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions— it is by grace you have been saved." Ephesians 2:1-5

Did you notice WHAT God built His church with?

That's right – sinners!

We were dead in our sins and transgression.

We were objects of wrath.

God didn't save us because we deserved to be saved but because He loved us.

So when God built His church, He built it with... losers.

ILLUS: In the 3rd-century there was a debate between a Pagan and a Christian, The pagan (Celsus) declared "When most teachers go forth to teach, they cry, 'Come to me, you who are clean and worthy,' and they are followed by the highest caliber of people available.

But your silly master cries, 'Come to me, you who are down and beaten by life,' and so he accumulates around him the rag, tag and bobtail of humanity."

The Christian (Origen) replied: "Yes, they are the rag, tag and bobtail of humanity. But Jesus does not leave them that way. Out of material you would have thrown away as useless, he fashions men, giving them back their self-respect, enabling them to stand on their feet and look God in the eyes. They were cowed, cringing, broken things. But the Son has set them free."

That's you.

And that's me.

We were useless, we were broken, we were rejects.

Yet God built His church with people like us.

Now one of the problems with the church being made up of saved sinners is that saved sinners tend to bring into the church some of their old bad habits.

In the days of Paul, there was a division in the church.

For the first 3 or 4 years the only Christians were Jews who'd been baptized.

There were no Gentiles in the church during that time, just Jewish converts.

Just so we're clear here: a Jew was a person born of the tribe of Judah (all the rest of Israel had been swept away by invading forces). You had to be born a Jew to be a Jew, everyone else was a Gentile.

Oh yeah. And then there was the matter of circumcision.

All Jewish men were circumcised. Gentile men generally were not.

Do I have to explain circumcision?

Good, because I'd rather not.

So basically, Gentiles consisted of everyone who wasn't a Jew.

And for centuries Jews hated Gentiles.

They called them dogs.

They considered them offensive and unworthy of God.

They refused to eat with them and if they bought anything from a Gentile they washed the item with water to get rid of their filth.

(PAUSE)

Then God changed things.

God accepted Gentiles into His church and made it very plain to everyone in His church that the Gentiles didn't have to be circumcised to become Christians.

That didn't go down well with some of the Jewish believers. Many of them strenuously objected to the fact that these Gentiles weren't circumcised and they began to go around to the different Gentile churches (like Ephesus) and told them God wouldn't accept them if they weren't circumcised.

And so Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians and he said:

"... remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" Ephesians 2:11-14

The Jewish circumcision party was trying to create a wall for the Gentile Christians. They created the wall because the Gentiles were not circumcised.

But Paul was telling these new Christians – there is no wall.

Jesus tore that wall down.

It doesn't exist anymore for God's people.

Galatians 3:28 tells us "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

To drive this home, Paul expanded on this a couple of chapters later:

"There is ONE body and ONE Spirit— just as you were called to ONE hope when you were called—ONE Lord, ONE faith, ONE baptism; ONE God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." Ephesians 4:4-6

Now the problem is - Satan loves to create walls.

He likes to divide God's church.

He likes to turn us against each other.

And one of Satan's favorite ways of to do that is introduce prejudice into the church.

There are people out there who say: You don't look like me. You don't act like me. And you don't talk like me. And because you don't look and act and talk like me you're NOT acceptable to me. I don't want you in my church... because you're DIFFERENT.

Modern science has helped create this kind of bigotry by telling us there are several different races of people.

- There are people who have dark colored skin so they must be "black race".
- There people who have slanted eyes and yellowish colored skin – so they must be the "oriental race".
- And there are people who have "light" skin (like I do) so they must be "WHITE race".

You know, I looked in my crayon box.

I've found the white on.  
And I'm here to tell you: this (pointing to my face) is NOT WHITE!!

It's all a lie!  
There aren't several races of people!  
There is only ONE race, and you and I are it.

We can all trace our ancestry back to ONE couple.  
Do you know who that is? (Adam and Eve)  
They were made in the image of God.  
And because we've been descended from that one couple you and I are all made in the image of God.  
We are ONE race of people.

It is bigotry to think anything else.

ILLUS: Have you heard of Mahatma Gandhi?  
He rejected Christianity because Christians rejected him.  
He'd heard about our Jesus and he liked what he heard. So he went to church one Sunday. But he didn't look like they did. And he didn't act like they did. And he didn't talk like they did. So they told him to go on down the street to a church that was "like him."  
He reportedly said: If this how Christians treat others "I might as well remain a Hindu."

If that church had treated him like they should have - if they'd treated him as though he was of the same race as they were - imagine the impact he could have had for Christ in India!

We are all one race.  
We are all descended from one man and woman.  
We are all made in the image of God.

But if you are a Christian, you are MORE than that to me.

If you have believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.  
If you've acknowledged that you've sinned and seek to repent of that sin.  
If you've confessed that Jesus will now be your Lord and Master.  
If you've been in the waters of baptism and risen up a new creature in Christ.  
And if you're living for Him.  
You're more than just part of my RACE... you're part of my family.  
You are one of my close relatives.

As Galatians 3:28 says "... you are all one in Christ Jesus."

I may love my neighbor, but there's a special place in my heart for one of my close relatives.

ILLUS: Years ago, my brother Jack was troubled with a decision he had to make. He was afraid people would criticize him for the choices he'd make. And I told him – don't worry about it. I know you'll make the right choice. But if anybody gives you a hard time about it, I'm your brother and no one is going to bother you as long as I'm around. I've got your back.

ILLUS: That's the way it needs to be in the church. You and I are brothers and sisters. If the world gives you or me a hard time... we should have each other's backs.  
Amen?

When we hire a new staff person here I sit down with them. I tell them that unless they are immoral or teach heresy... we've got their back. No one will touch them here. In order for someone to hurt them, they'd need to get through the Elders and myself. And then they'd need to get through the rest of the church.  
And that's not going to happen.

THAT'S THE WAY CHURCH OUGHT TO BE!

I am so proud of this church I brag about it all the time.  
I brag about the English church.  
And I brag about the Hispanic church.  
Because this is how church ought to be.

We are not TWO churches meeting in the same building.  
We are ONE church reaching out to two groups of people in our community.

And I love this unity service!!! It's a great time where we get both congregations together and enjoy each other's company. We get to pray and sing and worship together as one big family. THAT'S the way church ought to be.

But I want to remind all of you about something.  
As wonderful as this kind of worship service is, it's just a staging area.  
It's a time for us to get together and prepare ourselves to do what we were saved to do.  
This is where we get together and encourage each other for the task at hand

Ephesians says "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Ephesians 2:10

We have been saved to do the good works that God has prepared for us to do!

You see, God didn't save us for us to simply sit here and enjoy each other. God saved us because WE are the building blocks of His church. And His church has a mission. Do you know what our mission is?

Jesus said it this way: When Peter said that Jesus was the Christ the Son of the living God Jesus commended Him and declared that "on this rock (Peter's confession) I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." Matthew 16:18

God saved us so that we could storm the very gates of Hell. God saved us so that we could reach into Satan's Kingdom and pull out sinners who were as bad or even worse than we ever were. And that's why Satan seeks to divide and drag churches down. That's why the devil wants to set us on each other. Because he knows that if we join together (as we have) in unity he doesn't stand a chance.

And Satan fears us... because we do have a great church. We do love each other here. We do try to protect and build each other up.

CLOSE: But in order for us to defeat Satan, we need to go beyond being united we must be committed to reaching into his realm and pulling out the lost. God did NOT build His church with decent and nice people. God built His church with the sinful and the sinning.

The only way you and I will do our part is to find sinful people and tell them about Jesus.

So how do we storm the gates?  
How do we reach the lost and broken and rejected in this world?

ILLUS: I went over to one man, took him lightly by the tie and said "Do we grab them and say 'you need to be in church?'"  
That's not going to work is it?

No, what we need to do is go to them and get to know them. Say things to them like: "I saw that your son/daughter was in the recent basketball game and I was pleased with how well they did."

Or, "I heard that your wife is in the hospital. Would you like me to pray for her?"  
If they say yes... pray with them right there and then.

ILLUS: Several years back the Elders and I were asked to go visit a woman in the

hospital. The only problem was – she was an angry atheist and didn't like God or His church. Well, we went to visit with her and talked about many things. When we'd finished our visit we asked if she'd like us to pray for her.

"NO!" she said firmly.

"Well, that's ok," we said and we quietly left the room.

About 3 weeks later this woman began coming to church.

About 3 months after that we baptized her into Christ.

ILLUS: I once read about a preacher who was trying to reach inner city kids and he wasn't having much success.

One day he talked to a local drug dealer hoping to find out why he was failing.

The drug dealer replied:

"I'm there when Johnny goes out for a loaf of bread for Mama. I'm there, you're not. I win, you lose. It's all about being there."

#### INVITATION

NOTE: This sermon was preached at our church's 2nd annual "Unity Service" where our Hispanic and English congregations joined together to worship. You can see a snippet of the sermon here:

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