

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost – Epistle

BUILDING WALLS

Ephesians 2:11-22

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 11)

Analysis by Kris Wright

11So then, remember that at one time you were Gentiles by birth, called “the uncircumcision” by those who are called “the circumcision” – a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands – 12remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens 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 once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. 15He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, 16and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. 17So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; 18for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, 10built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; 22in whom you also are

built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

DIAGNOSIS: We Build Our Walls

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – Walls Go Up

Paul, having just carefully explained that God has saved us by his grace (2:8ff) and not by anything we have done for ourselves, now goes on to speak of the divisions between two groups of Christians: Jews and Gentiles. These divisions, based on heritage (bloodlines) and keeping the Mosaic law, are precisely what Paul says have nothing to do with our salvation. These sound like first-century Christian feuds. And yet, even—or especially—today, the Church is no stranger to dividing walls and hostility between Christians, even within denominations. We label each other according to categories “made by human hands.” We find no shortage of issues on which to exclude “the other”: numbers, method, meaning of sacraments, role of women, sexual orientation, liturgical practices, etc. Each one becomes a brick in the walls we build out of fear or to protect ourselves and our “right(eous) way”; all are attempts to keep God on our side of the wall. Worse than the hostile and divisive signals we give each other is the signal those walls give to the “aliens” and “strangers” to the promise (v. 12), who have no hope and live in a world without God.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – Walled In

Assured that our way (the right way) is God’s way, we lock ourselves behind the walls we build ever thicker. And our hearts become as hard as the bricks we are using. Thus we imagine that we are safe (saved) and protected behind the walls we have built for God and ourselves. What we don’t even recognize is that we are captives in a fortress of our own making. In our attempts to preserve ourselves, we have eliminated the need for a savior.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – Walled Off

Indeed, we have come to so fear, love and trust our walls of self-righteousness for life—we have hidden behind them for so long—that they now have become a wall between God and us. We have walled off the one thing that can truly save us: the grace of God. We have now become aliens, strangers to God who have no promise. No hope. No peace. We are “far off” (v. 13) from our life and our God, but we don’t even know it.

PROGNOSIS: God Breaches Our Walls

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – Walls Fall

“Remember,” Paul says, “that you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (v. 13). Not by the bloodlines of our ancestors as we had imagined. He has abolished the very law that we used to construct our walls, and has created a new humanity instead. Our Savior has come to set us free from all that divides us from God and from one another. Where there was hostility Christ brings peace and reconciliation. Where there were two (or more) he brings unity. Now no walls can come between the Father and us because Christ has given us his Spirit who breaches all walls.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – Wall Gone

With the abolishment of the power of the law to condemn us, Christ not only breaches the walls between peoples and God, but tears down our walls of self-righteousness, and we are open now to receive the grace God so freely offers. With our walls torn down he is able to join us together to become the house of God. A house built not on laws, commandments and ordinances, divine or human, but a house built on the cornerstone of Christ Jesus himself.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – God’s Builds A Church Without Walls

Now all people may come to the Father through Christ. When we

are joined together in Christ, when we build on him and are held together in him, the church can indeed become a “holy temple, a dwelling place for God” (v. 20) as Paul envisions. The sign to the world will then be, as we confess in the Apostles’ Creed: “one holy, catholic and apostolic church,” a place where those far off are drawn near to God through the blood of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.