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The Middle Wall of Partition

"For he is our peace, who hath made both one,
and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us."
—Ephesians 2:14

Disunity can occur in many ways. The "*middle wall of partition*" which stood around Israel's temple and to which the Apostle Paul here alludes illustrates the tremendous distinction and division that existed in "time past" between the nation Israel and the Gentile nations.

Paul identifies this division as two-fold: First there was the fleshly distinction where *social* division was obvious:

"Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands" (Eph. 2:11).

No doubt the emphasis of Paul's pen was on "*called*"—"called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision." That the term "uncircumcision" was often used by the Jews as an insult aimed at the despised and outcast Gentiles cannot be doubted. It was so thoroughly established in Jewish thinking as a term of derision that even young David is heard exclaiming about Goliath: "who is this *uncircumcised Philistine*, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (I Sam. 17:26).

If Israel was guilty of "name calling," surely the Gentiles were no better. Notice that Paul identified Israel as those who are "*called* the circumcision." Clearly Gentiles returned the reproach with equal disdain. Who can miss the sting of mocking accusation at "being Jews" in Acts 16:20, John 18:35 and elsewhere?

There was, however, something far more important to Paul than this social division. In "*time*

past" God Himself had made a far more critical distinction between the Circumcision and Uncircumcision, between Israel and the Gentiles. Ephesians 2:12 records this:

"That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world."

Israel had a clear advantage while the Gentiles were at an equally distinct disadvantage. The religious and *spiritual* disadvantage of the Gentiles is simply unmistakable.

Place Romans 9:4,5 alongside Ephesians 2:11,12 and this is set in bold relief:

ISRAEL'S ADVANTAGE (Rom. 9:4,5)

1. "Who are Israelites" (v.4)
2. "The adoption" (v.4)
3. To whom Christ Came (v.5)
4. "Whose are the fathers" (v.5)
5. The Covenants and the Law (v. 4)
6. The service of God (v. 4)
7. The Promises (v. 4)

GENTILES' DISADVANTAGE (Eph. 2:11,12)

1. "Gentiles" (v.11)
2. "Uncircumcised" (v.11)
3. "Without Christ" (v.12)
4. "Aliens from the commonwealth of Israel (v.12)
5. "Strangers from the covenants" (v.12)
6. "Without God" (v. 12)
7. "Having no hope" (v. 12).

In "*Time Past*" God Himself had made an absolute difference between Jews and Gentiles. "*But Now!*"

"But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

"For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

"Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the

law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace" (Eph. 2:13-15).

The Jews had enclosed the inner portion of their temple with a "middle wall of partition" and they jealously guarded it. Paul was all too familiar with this fact, for it explains the reaction he received in Acts 21:28-30. Luke records that when the Jews saw Paul in their temple, "they laid hands on him" and

"Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.

"(For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)

"And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut."

According to the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, a century ago excavation at the temple site unearthed portions of this wall and discovered this inscription: "No man of another nation is to enter within the fence and enclosure round the Temple. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame that his death ensues."

This wall, of course, only stood as a testimony to the divinely ordained barrier that separated Jew and Gentile. "*In the flesh*" there was bitter hatred and enmity such as could never be excused. But *before God* there was a distinction too, for it was *God Himself* who had erected the *real* "middle wall of partition" that separated Jew and Gentile—"the covenant of circumcision" (Acts 7:8).

Romans 1 succinctly demonstrates that the Gentile's alienation was their own doing. There Paul presents the sad history of rebellion, evil thinking and self-will that resulted in the three-fold declaration:

"Wherefore God also gave them up..." (v. 24)

"For this cause God gave them up..." (v. 26)

"God gave them over..." (v. 28).

As a wise old preacher once said, "Light rejected becomes lightning!" Thus God cast away the nations of the earth and turned to one solitary figure:

"Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy fa-

ther's house, unto a land that I will show thee:

"And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

"And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:1-3).

Abram obeyed God and when he was 99 years old, God changed his name to Abraham and erected His "*middle wall of partition*." Genesis 17:4-14 records the event:

"As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.

"Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.

"And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.

"And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

"And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, and the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

"And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations.

"This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee: EVERY MAN CHILD AMONG YOU SHALL BE CIRCUMCISED.

"AND YE SHALL CIRCUMCISE THE FLESH OF YOUR FORESKIN; AND IT SHALL BE A TOKEN OF THE COVENANT BETWEEN ME AND YOU.

"And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed.

"He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and my covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.

"And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant."

Now there were to be *two* peoples in the world: the *Circumcision* and the *Uncircumcision*.

Sometime later the Law was "*added*" (Gal. 3:19) and the distinctions were strengthened and fortified. We are plainly told that the Gentiles "*have not the law*" (Rom. 2:14). The Covenant of the Law

was made just with Israel, and that covenant and those laws made Israel a distinct and different people in the earth. Moses reminded them of this as they prepared to enter the promised land:

“Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it.

“Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.

“For WHAT NATION IS THERE SO GREAT, WHO HATH GOD SO NIGH UNTO THEM, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for?

“And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?” (Deut. 4:5-8).

This priority given to Israel in the purposes of God explains much that otherwise is baffling about our Lord’s earthly ministry. Many a preacher and personal worker, for example, have quoted Luke 19:10—but few there are who know or quote the *whole* statement made by Christ:

“And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, FORSOMUCH AS HE ALSO IS A SON OF ABRAHAM,

“For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:9,10).

And how are we to explain our Lord’s refusal even to *answer* the Gentile woman of Matthew 15:22-24, while Himself pleading the case of the woman in Luke 13:16 because she was “*a daughter of Abraham*”? How is this to be explained except to recognize that the Gentiles were on the “wrong side” of the middle wall of partition?

An often overlooked verse in the Book of John is no less clear:

“...we know what we worship: FOR SALVATION IS OF THE JEWS” (John 4:22).

And what were Gentiles to do? God had covenanted with Abraham: “*In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed*” (Gen. 22:18). Gentile blessing, then, could only be through their submission to Israel and her privileged position. Go back and read Matthew 15:22-28 again and see that this is exactly the order ultimately followed by this Gentile lady—and which Christ sovereignly honored.

That this order was no less true *after* the

cross is clear from the record of the Book of Acts. At Pentecost, three times Peter identified his intended audience:

“...Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words:”

“Ye men of Israel, hear these words...”

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly...” (Acts 2:14,22,36).

Standing on Solomon’s porch, Peter cries to his nation:

“Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

“Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (Acts 3:25,26).

In fact, as late as Acts 11:19 we are told:

“Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word TO NONE BUT UNTO THE JEWS ONLY.”

Some thoughtful reader will ask, “But didn’t we just read Paul say that the middle wall has been broken down? Didn’t he declare that the law has been ‘abolished’ and that Christ had made ‘peace’?” Ah, yes indeed, Paul does say this and much more. But remember: It is not *until* we come to Paul and his message that we learn all this.

The “*But Now*” of Ephesians 2:13 is the same as the “*But Now*” in passages like:

“Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;

“Even THE MYSTERY WHICH HATH BEEN HID FROM AGES AND FROM GENERATIONS, *BUT NOW IS MADE MANIFEST TO HIS SAINTS*” (Col. 1:25,26).

“Now to him that is of power of stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the MYSTERY WHICH WAS KEPT SECRET SINCE THE WORLD BEGAN,

“BUT NOW IS MADE MANIFEST, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith” (Rom. 16:25,26).

It is Paul who declares: “*But now the righteous-*

ness of God without the law is manifested" (Rom. 3:21), that there is "no difference between the Jew and the Greek" (Rom. 10:12; 3:22); that in Christ Jesus "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). It is Paul who gives us this message, declaring that in the Body of Christ "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:11).

It is to Paul that this blessed message of "the mystery" was revealed—and through him to us! Thus it is *Paul* who writes:

"For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us;

"Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace;

"And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

"And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and them that were nigh.

"For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph. 2:14-18).

This is the heart of his special message and why it is so dear to us today. No longer must we belong to a special family, follow a certain religion, perform prescribed exercises in ceremonial correctness. No longer must we fear being "too far gone," too far off, too deeply sin-stained. Now, even the simplest believers who know that Christ died for them, that He alone is their peace and life, can know for sure they are saved and have personal access to God and are fellow citizens of His household.

All we need today to go to God is simple faith in Christ.

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

"By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:1,2,).

THE SUREST WAY WE KNOW

to help others come to know "the wonderful message of the wonderful grace of God" is to get that message *out to greater numbers*. It is the special focus of this ministry to do just that. Will you join us in prayer as we continue to reach out into the market place with the message of grace and determine in your heart what part *you* should have in it?

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The flow of anti-Christian values flooding into our culture means life just got harder for anyone who really does want to follow God's word. This chaotic river of culture is surging headlong over the brink, carrying away even believers by the millions. For those, however, who are ready to dig in and hang on, the key to surviving this onslaught and being prepared to extend a helping hand to those who are drowning is found in *The God Factor*!

Reading through Paul's epistles you quickly learn he lived and ministered in a world much like today. Take the church at Corinth as an example:

After preaching the gospel in the local synagogue, Paul relocated next door and the church at Corinth soon developed into a mixture of former Jews—raised in their “Hebrew home-school co-ops”—and formerly pagan Gentiles—who had worshipped the wrong gods, practiced unspeakable sinful perversions and lived without any real knowledge of the God of the Bible. When we talk of sinful backgrounds and diverse cultures, Paul's ministry faced a world much like ours has become!

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As “the apostle to the Gentiles,” Paul was the one God chose to help untangle all these Gentile knots. He brought *The God Factor* to bear on a world “fast bound in sin and nature's night.”

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Like all the human race;
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Now I'm saved forever
From the sinner's judgment day.

—Pastor J.C. O'Hair

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June 12-18: Florida Grace Camp (Des Strydom)
June 24-26: Sacramento, CA (John Versteegen and Alex Kurz)
July 9-11: St Charles, IL
Aug. 25-27: Billings, MT (Alex Kurz)
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