

Let the Walls Fall Down  
Part 5 of the Series, "Why Are We Here?"  
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A church newsletter contained the following announcement: To make it possible for everyone to attend church next Sunday, we will have a special "No Excuse Sunday." Cots will be placed in the foyer for those who say, "Sunday is my only day to sleep in." We will have steel helmets for those who say, "The roof will cave in if I ever come to church." Blankets will be provided for those who think the church is too cold, and fans for those who think it is too hot. We have hearing aids for those who say, "The pastor speaks too softly," and ear plugs for those who claim he preaches too loudly. Score cards will be provided for those who wish to list the hypocrites present. There will be a hundred boxes of KFC available for those who cannot go to church and cook dinner at the same time. One section will be filled with artificial trees and flowers for those who like to worship God in nature. Finally, the sanctuary will be decorated with both Christmas poinsettias and Easter lilies for those who have never seen the church without them.

Friends, we are not planning on having a "No Excuse Sunday" here at CBC, but we do like it when folks come to church. It is our desire to see more people come to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. That is the Great Commission we have been given: Go and Make Disciples of Jesus.

We also are interested in seeing at least some of those folks join us here at CBC so that we can support and encourage each other as we serve the Lord together.

Now, some of you probably feel there are already a lot of people in this church, but there is always room for more. The Lord is working in our midst, and we are excited to have other people join us.

Yet, many of us have had the experience where we've invited friends or family members to come and visit our church and have had them say, "No, I am not interested. I really don't want anything to do with your church or your Christianity."

Why do they respond that way? Are they really afraid the roof will collapse if they come to church? Or are there some deeper, more complex reasons why someone is so resistant to the idea of coming to church? Are there things we can do differently which would make it easier for people to come here and learn about the Lord?

As we continue our series on the purpose of our church, we are going to explore how we might take down any unnecessary barriers, tear down any man-made walls, which keep people from coming to this church or from turning to Jesus Christ. This is an important topic because we never want to be standing in the way of other people following the Lord. Let's pause and pray that God would speak to us through His Word today.

Why are people not interested in the church or the Christian message, the Gospel?

#1) Sometimes, it is their fault. Sometimes their own pride makes them want to stay as far away from anything to do with God as they can. Some people are repulsed by the very idea of a sovereign God, a Creator and Ruler of the universe with the right to demand our worship, love and obedience. These folks often think they have no need for God. They can do just fine by themselves. They like to put their trust in science or human progress. These are the types of people Paul describes in **Romans 1:25 – They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served what has been created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever.**

Other folks are offended by the cross of Jesus Christ. The idea that we are not good enough the way we are, that we deserve to experience God's wrath in Hell, that we need God's grace and mercy is something they totally reject. The biblical teaching that Jesus had to suffer and die on the cross in our place, as a sacrifice for our sins, seems hideous to these folks. A few years ago, a professor at a protestant seminary said, "We don't need Jesus dying on the cross and other weird stuff like that."

When we read the New Testament, however, we find these attitudes are hardly a surprise. In **1 Corinthians 1:23**, the Apostle Paul says, "**We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles.**" The Gentiles are us, non-Jews. The message of salvation through Jesus' death on the cross often seems foolish to people. The reason it seems foolish, Paul says, is that spiritual truth doesn't make sense unless the Holy Spirit is revealing the truth to them. **1 Corinthians 2:14 – The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because**

### **they are discerned only through the Spirit.**

Paul addresses this issue in 2 Corinthians. He says even though he makes sure he proclaims the gospel clearly, the message is confusing to those without God's Spirit. **2 Corinthians 4:4 – The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.** A result of this is what Paul describes in **2 Corinthians 2:15-16a – We are the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To some we are an aroma of death leading to death, but to others, an aroma of life leading to life.**

To those who are perishing, to those whose eyes have not been opened by the Holy Spirit, the message of the cross is often the stench of death. They want nothing to do with it. When we try to talk with them about Jesus, they usually don't want to listen. When we invite them to church, they seldom want to come. For these folks, it is really their pride, the fact they are offended by God's sovereignty and by the cross of Jesus Christ that puts a big wall between them and Christianity.

And friends, it is very important we don't try to take down that wall. Some Christians, some churches, in their desire to see people embrace Christianity, are willing to modify the Bible's message to make it more palatable to folks who find it distasteful. This is nothing really new. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a theologian named Rudolf Bultmann noted that modern, scientifically informed people had a hard time accepting some of the miracles described in the Bible. The idea that Jesus could calm a storm just by giving a command or feed over 5000 people with a little boy's lunch or that He could rise from the dead within three days of being executed seemed just too incredible. Some folks were deciding that the Bible must be just a bunch of fables. Bultmann thought the solution was to get rid of all the supernatural parts of the New Testament. That would take away obstacles and allow people to accept the heart of Christianity, which he said was "love your neighbor as yourself." Though Bultmann's motives may have been good, he was terribly wrong. We cannot throw out the miracles and still have Christianity. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, Christians are fools to be pitied. Miracles may be a wall which keeps some people from turning to the Lord, but it is a wall that has to stay.

Likewise, we cannot change what the Bible teaches about God's sovereignty or about the cross of Jesus

Christ to make it easier for people to become Christians. Without a sovereign God or a crucified Savior, we do not have Christianity.

A few years ago, our denomination, then known as the Baptist General Conference, was embroiled in a controversy over Open-Theism. I think this was an attempt to create a more user-friendly God, someone easier for people to understand and accept. Proponents of the so-called "Open View of God" argued that God should not be blamed for someone being killed in a car accident because He didn't know the drunk driver was going to cross the center line. Now, personally, I don't find a God with such a limited knowledge of the future and who is so impotent in the face of evil, to be very attractive. However, even if some people do find such a God easier to embrace, He is still not the God of the Bible. As Isaiah 46:10 says, the true God knows the end from the beginning, including all the details of the past, present and the future. That is why our church spells out a belief in God's complete knowledge of the future in our Statement of Faith. Though the Bible's teaching of who God is and what He is like may form a wall that keeps people away from Christianity, it is not a wall we can take down.

There are also churches who very purposely do not display a cross in their place of worship. They see the cross as a negative, outdated, confusing symbol. They sometimes view the teaching about the cross of Jesus as something which creates unnecessary barriers to folks who are not believers in Jesus. Instead they just want to keep the message very positive, focusing on how following Jesus Christ can help make life more meaningful.

Yet, friends, even if a lot of people prefer to go to a church which doesn't display or talk about the cross, we cannot try to take down that wall. My hope and prayer is that as long as CBC exists, the cross will always be displayed, and even more important, always be preached because it is only through the cross that we can truly find forgiveness, freedom and hope. Sometimes the truth is a wall that keeps people from being interested in the church or the gospel. That is not our fault. We must never try to take that wall down.

#2) Other times, however, at least part of the reason people are turned off to Christianity is us. Sometimes we are guilty of putting up unnecessary walls that can keep people from coming to church or joining the Christian family. Sometimes people being moved by the Holy Spirit and open to hearing the gospel are turned

off, not because they find the truth offensive, but because the actions or attitudes of some Christians are offensive. Some folks refuse to come to church, not because they have no interest in God, but because they have no interest in being around Christians. That is very sad.

Now, very few, if any, Christians try to build up barriers to keep folks from the Lord. Yet, sometimes we do it unconsciously. That is why it is a good idea to, every once in a while, take a close look at what we are doing as individuals, what we are doing as a church, and make sure there are not unnecessary walls that are keeping people away from the Lord.

The Apostle Paul did that. I want you to listen to what he writes in **1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (NLT) – Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ. When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too, lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I could bring to Christ those who are under the law. When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too, live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ. When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings.**

Friends, do you realize what Paul is saying? He is going to tear down any wall he can which separates him from someone else, just so he will have a better opportunity to encourage that person to turn to Jesus Christ. He knows that as a Jew, a leader of the Pharisees, he was a rather intimidating figure to some Gentiles. Yet, he wanted to show the Gentiles that he didn't think of himself as any better than they were. So he says, "Hey, when I am with Gentiles, I will eat ham sandwiches just like they do. I'm not going to insist on a Kosher Diet because to do so would erect a wall that doesn't need to be there."

Paul says, "In whatever situation I am in, with whatever group of people I happen to be, I want to do everything I can, without compromising the truth, to make it easier for them to embrace the Lord Jesus."

Friends, at this point, Paul is a great model for us.

Because we understand that Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation, because we know that people cannot have their sins forgiven or be ready for heaven without trusting in Jesus, we want to do everything we can to help them place their faith in Him. Yes, it is ultimately God who draws people to Himself. Yet, in whatever role He chooses to give us, we should do the best job we can. If there are some unnecessary walls that are keeping folks from coming to this church or keeping them from trusting in Jesus Christ, we need to do our best to take those walls down.

So, let's look at some of the unnecessary walls or barriers which may keep people from coming to CBC. Now, let me be clear that people don't have to come to this church to be a Christian or put their faith in Jesus. Yet, often the barriers which make it harder for people to come to this church also make it harder for them to follow the Lord. OK, what are some of the walls?

1) **Lifestyle Expectations** – Some folks think CBC is a church where people don't drink, smoke, chew or go with girls who do. They decide, "Well, I smoke cigarettes, so I guess I really wouldn't be welcome in that church." Friends, that is simply not true! Our doors are open for everyone, no matter who they are, what they have done, or what choices they are making. Last week we talked about Romans 14 and how when the Bible doesn't speak clearly on a topic, we should not make up rules and demand others follow them. It doesn't say anything about tobacco in the Bible. Now, I think smoking is a lousy habit. I have never smoked and am pretty sure I never will, but I know some wonderful Christians who do smoke. Yes, a case can be made that because smoking is bad for one's health, a Christian should avoid that habit, since our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Yet, at the same time, we need to keep these types of vices in perspective.

D.L. Moody and Charles Spurgeon were two of the most important Christian leaders of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. When Moody, the American evangelist, visited Spurgeon, the English Baptist pastor, Spurgeon was smoking a cigar, as he often did. Moody said, "Mr. Spurgeon, how can you, a Christian pastor, smoke like that?" Spurgeon placed his finger on Moody's rather round stomach and responded, "Mr. Moody, how can you, a Christian pastor, eat like that?" Friends, neither smoking nor gluttony are healthy habits, but we don't exclude people from our fellowship for struggling with either of them. Yes, we want to encourage people to make good, healthy lifestyle choices, but we don't want it to be a wall that

keeps people from the church. People who smoke cigarettes are welcome at CBC.

But what about people doing something the Bible clearly condemns, such as living an immoral lifestyle, either heterosexual or homosexual? Would they be welcome at CBC? Yes, indeed! This church is a hospital for sinners, not a country club for saints. Friends, if you are practicing sexual immorality, you are welcome to attend this church.

Now, please don't expect us to tell you that what you are doing is OK. We will tell you that we are all sinners, in need of God's grace and forgiveness. That is what Jesus provides if we turn to Him. We always want to welcome sinners, but we never want to affirm sin. If you don't think that is possible, if you believe you cannot love someone if you don't approve of their behavior, give me a call and we can talk about how to better show love to people we think are making sinful choices.

2) There may be an **Economic Barrier** for some people. Years ago, Baptists, Catholics and Methodists were often considered lower class, while the Presbyterians and Episcopalians were upper class churches. Yet, I know that today some consider CBC to be a wealthy congregation. These folks may think, "I don't live in the right kind of house, don't drive the right kind of car, don't wear the right kind of clothes to fit in with the people who go to that church."

Now, I don't think that is true. Yes, we have been blessed with a magnificent building. And yes, some folks here have been successful in their careers and maybe live in a nicer home, drive a nicer car and wear more expensive clothes than most folks in our area. But, believe me, not everyone in this church has a lot of money. Many folks are on fixed incomes or struggle from paycheck to paycheck. Yes, there are some brand new SUV's in the parking lot. But there are also some old beaters. And do you know what – the best thing is, **IT DOESN'T MATTER!**

That is one of the things I love about CBC. Someone who lives in a huge, beautiful house will treat someone living in a tiny mobile home as a brother or sister. I don't see any class distinctions in this church. And, by God's grace, there will not be any. If the reason

someone is not coming to CBC is because he doesn't think he has enough money, he should think again. That is not a good reason.

What can we do to take down that wall? I'm not sure, other than tell the people we know and show them by our actions that it is not about money. It is not about what you have. It is about who you have. Do you have Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?

3) Let me mention a few other barriers that don't need to be there. Maybe some folks **don't think they have enough education** to come to CBC. Oh, we love to read and study the Bible, but it doesn't matter whether you have a Ph.D. or didn't finish the eighth grade. If someone doesn't know anything about the Bible, that's fine. We are here to learn together.

Maybe some people think they **have to be a Republican** to come to this church. No, there are plenty of Democrats, Independents, and probably even some Libertarians in this room today. We don't all agree on political issues, but that is OK as long as we agree on Jesus Christ.

Maybe someone thinks, "I can't go to that church because **I like Country Western music.**" That is not true! Many folks here like Country Western. No, our worship music on Sunday isn't exactly Country, but if someone is a good banjo player, we can find a way to fit in a little Country Gospel once in a while.

Or maybe there is someone who thinks, "I cannot go to that Baptist Church because **I am not a Green Bay Packer fan.**" If someone thinks that, they take me way too seriously. Packer fans are a small, but vocal minority in this church. Fans of any team and folks who hate football are welcome here.

Friends, I hope God has given you a desire to see people in this area become believers in Jesus Christ. I hope He has given you a desire to invite people to our church and encourage them to become part of this fellowship. If that is the case, then I want you to join me in doing whatever we can to take down unnecessary walls which might be keeping people from hearing our message.

Let the walls come down, so that we never hinder anyone from seeing the glory of Jesus clearly or hinder anyone from trusting and following Him.