

# In His Grip...

This title is one that I use to sign all of my letters and articles. If you have read my previous articles you will notice that I use it in many different ways but always as a reminder of the one who holds us and watches over us. It is a hopeful and comforting way of being reminded that we are never out of God's hold on our lives, even when things seem so out of control. It is a saying that gives structure to my life and reminds me that I am walled in and held up by an amazing God who loves me. This grip on our lives is what holds us together, the walls of a comforting fortress surrounding each of us and molding all believers into the body of Christ.

Ephesians 2:13-22 contains some of the verses that bring this to mind for me. It talks about walls, barriers and most of all about a loving savior and what that means for living as believers today.

“ 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, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit”.

Every year my family gathers in Idaho for a massive reunion. We spend the time eating, playing and building a camp where we can continue to gather for years to come. Belief in Christ has always been important to my family, so after breakfast we gather for devotions so that we can be built up as a family rooted in Christ with Him as our focus for the day of work and play to come. We always plan a theme for these times of devotion. A couple of years ago the theme was, “Walls: Jericho to Jerusalem.” Each family member that led during the week spoke on different kinds of walls in our lives, both physical and spiritual, and I have to admit I learned a lot.

Since that time I have realized just how much that topic has an effect on all of our lives. We all experience walls in our lives whether in work, home, school or even in church. Of course every building has walls made of brick or wood and these walls are good because they give structure to the places where we dwell, work and socialize. As families we create walls around ourselves with rules on how to act and live within the family setting. These are also good walls because they guard the family and give us foundation. These walls can be guides as they structure how we live out our vocations in society.

But not all walls are good. There are walls that exist in our lives, that do not mold or give form, but instead keep people apart. We set up walls that divide kids from adults, men from women and set the classes against one another. Most of these today are set in place by attitude and behavior but that has not always been true. At the time that Jesus lived, when the temple in Jerusalem was the center of worship, there were physical walls that divided people based on

nationality. There was a wall surrounding the inner temple by which no gentile, a person of non-Jewish descent, could cross. In 1871 there was an inscription uncovered on the remains of that wall that warned gentiles that if they crossed it they forfeited their lives. This wall, in Herod's temple, is the "dividing wall of hostility" to which Paul speaks in the Ephesians passage. Paul understood Christ's purpose in coming and sees that Jesus' death and resurrection are for the salvation of all, Jew and Gentile alike, so although not physically, in spiritual terms that wall has been broken down. The wall represents the Jewish Law that was thought to be needed for salvation; however because of Christ on the cross, we have a new way to be reconciled with God. The Jewish law that once divided people is no longer necessary for salvation and in the death and resurrection of our savior we are brought together as one people: the body of Christ.

The verses above explain to us what God has done and is doing constantly in Christ. The things that divide us still, like denominations, or how we worship, what songs we sing or whether or not we dress the right way, put us at odds with each other and are evidence of sin in the world. Learning to work together and work through our differences does not mean that we will always agree on everything. But it does mean that we must ultimately find our unity and identity in Christ who is our foundation. It is Christ who breaks in and tears down our sinful ways. He gives us the structure of Grace, making us new creations in Him, both individually and as a whole. Christ is our form and structure and as we live together in Jesus, He will continue to build us up as His body and as a dwelling place for the Spirit. In acknowledging Christ as our only wall, we are fortified not against one another but instead against the forces of evil that would have us spend our time bickering, instead of spreading the Gospel. As we celebrate Pentecost and the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are reminded that the disciples preached the Gospel in many languages and to all who would listen! We must rely on Christ and His Gospel; we must allow the love and grace of our savior to break down the walls that divide us, so that we live as a people truly and forever...

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Pastor Karen