

The Berlin Wall stood from 1961 until 1989. It was a tangible representation of the animosity between the West and the East, maybe more specifically between America and Russia. Of course, the history behind the wall is much more complex than that, even if that is how it has come to be remembered. After WWII, the Germany was divided into the East, occupied by Russia, and the West, occupied by Great Britain, America, and eventually France. Even though the capital city of Berlin was entirely located within the East, the city was divided in a similar manner to the country at large.

Almost immediately after the war the presence of Western forces, and Western ideals in the socialist territory occupied by Russia became a point of contention. There were blockades, there were standoffs, all as the Russians sought to drive the Western Allies out of the city.

Finally, in 1961 things came to a head and the wall was constructed, mainly to stem the tide of defections from east to west. And so, the antifascistischer schutzwall - the anti-fascist protective wall was built. The news in the east heralded this wall as a way to keep the evil fascists out of East Berlin. After all, it was the rise of fascism that had resulted in WWII, so the easiest way to make people not want to defect to the West, to make people fear the West was to make people think that the West was fascist.

Of course, the Berlin wall is not the only physical divider between people. We have the wall on our own southern border, there is talk of a wall being built between Pakistan and Afghanistan, there is a wall to divide Israel and Palestine. There are areas that protected by other means, like demilitarized zones. Humanity is very good at erecting barriers between people, whether they be physical barriers, psychological barriers, or emotional barriers. We even manufacture religious barriers.

Poets even speak about this. Famously, Robert Frost wrote, "good fences make good neighbors." However, if you read the entire poem, it is actually a call to remove barriers. The poem begins by the narrator speaking of a force that works to remove barriers.

“Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun”

Frost writes of an unseen force that works to tear down the barriers, that heaves the ground under the wall, knocking the stones of the wall to the ground, of making an opening in the wall wide enough for two people to walk side by side.

Ephesians also writes of a force that breaks down dividing walls between people. That force is Christ.

It is interesting as you read this passage. Towards the beginning we see a reference to those who are outside of the people of Israel, people outside of the covenant, people without hope, people without God. In the original Greek that phrase without God was *atheos*. In Greek this was more than a simple description, it was an insult, a label that depicted persons as uncivilized, practically anarchists. Those who were *atheos* were a threat to the well-being of society.

So, when the writer of Ephesians starts this passage basically saying, “Hey, you Gentiles, you *atheos*” he is in effect saying, “you despicable, good for nothing, scumbags”. Talk about your barriers between people, right? Our attitudes towards others are often the biggest, thickest, most difficult to break down barriers that there are. These are the barriers we need to destroy, the barriers that exist in our own hearts.

In our Scripture passage we see that there is a change that takes place. The writer says that “you *atheos* were once far off have now been brought near by the blood of Christ. For 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.”

He is, of course, writing to Gentiles who have chosen to follow Christ. But I look around today and I see Christian fighting against Christian. We look at

one another at call each other atheos. It's happening within our own denomination. The progressives and the traditionalists stand in their opposite corners and each claim to hold the only right way to follow Christ. They look across this chasm of difference and sneer atheos at the opposite side.

It happens beyond our denomination as well. Evangelical Christians tell more mainline Christians (and vice versa) that they are doing faith wrong. The age old dispute between Catholics and Protestants. The even older disagreements between the church in the West and the Eastern Orthodox church. We fight over who can be members, we fight over baptism and communion, we fight over hymns vs contemporary worship songs, we fight over dress codes, we fight over liturgy, we fight over whether or not to have a flag in the sanctuary. We fight and we fight and we fight and all the time we forget that Christ died for all.

We forget that when Christ stretched out his arms on the cross it was as if he was stretching out his arms to embrace all of us. Christ came to break down the walls between us, we should stop building new ones.

Let us remember that Christ's new commandment to us was to love one another, just as he loved us – in service, in liberation of the oppressed, in compassion and mercy.

I know that it seems a bit Pollyanna-ish to think that humankind, shoot even all Christians, could come to a point of peace with one another. But let us remember the mood around the world the day that the Berlin Wall came down. There was joy, there was hope, there was euphoria. There was feeling that if this seemingly impossible to overcome divide could crumble, what was next?

Then, not long after that, apartheid in South Africa was ended. Reconciliation between the blacks and the whites there became possible. ArchBishop Desmond Tutu at that time said, " God saw our brokenness and sought to extricate us from it – but only with our cooperation. God will

not cajole or bully us, but wants to woo us for our own sakes. We might say the Bible is the story of God's attempt to effect atonement, to bring us back to our intended condition of relatedness. God was, in Christ, reconciling the world to God. God wants to draw us back into an intimate relationship and so bring to unity all that has become disunited. This was God's intention from the beginning. And each of us is called to be an ally of God in this work of justice and reconciliation."

So, the next time you are tempted to separate yourself from "those people", whoever they may be, remember that you are called to the work of reconciliation, and that cannot happen by calling those people atheists.

God is with them, just as much as God is with you. If we want to experience the peace of Christ then we must recognize and celebrate that.

John Wesley once said, "Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences."

Friends, we don't have to agree on everything. Shoot, we don't have to agree on much except that Jesus is Lord, Jesus came to save us all, and Jesus love even you and even me. Beyond that, let us let go. Beyond that let us say "you love and serve God as God has called you, and I will love and serve God as God has called me, and let us all love one another and celebrate the great good work that God is doing in each of us."

That is the way to peace. May it be so.