

WALLS

THREE PEOPLE ARE SEEN WITHIN A SHORT DISTANCE of one another. A woman tenderly holds her newborn child, absorbed in the experience of being a mother. Just a few feet away is a deranged person with murderous intent in his heart. A casual glance at this fellow will warn anyone to keep their distance from him. And yet the mother with her child stands just a few feet away.

THE SCENE SHIFTS TO A HOUSE JUST DOWN THE STREET. A teenage boy has stopped by to see the girl who lives at this place. As the boy visits with the girl's father, the girl begins to change her outfit just a few feet away. Though she does not know this young man well, she goes about her business without blushing, and her father makes no effort to stop her.

A THIRD SCENE TAKES US TO A BUILDING FURTHER downtown. We see an older man in his fifties; his wife and grandchild have come to visit him. How he longs to kiss his wife and hold his first grandchild! But he cannot. Despite all of his strong desires and his best efforts, he cannot enjoy the physical touch of those whom he loves most of all.

SCENES LIKE THESE WE'VE DESCRIBED HAPPEN every day. You and I both participate in them, just as everyone else we know. Though the scenarios may seem foreign to us, when I mention the one factor that links them all in common, you'll immediately say "Ah, yes, now I understand." That factor? Walls. Something we take for granted, but something incredibly useful -- or frustratingly prohibitive.

WALLS SOMETIMES SERVE TO PROTECT US from the deranged psychopaths that may lurk nearby. Walls provide us with privacy so that we can carry out the normal, but private, functions of our lives. At other times walls imprison us, and can keep us from the contact that our hearts yearn to enjoy. I'm not sure when walls were first introduced to the human experience, or who was responsible for their "invention". But I do know that they are an essential and undeniable feature of our existence.

WALLS CAN BE MADE OF MANY KINDS OF MATERIALS. The most common are wood, brick, steel and plaster. It's not uncommon to see walls of glass; any shopping mall contains much evidence of this. There was even a man named Peter who once made walls from a giant pumpkin, we are told. In the security of this unconventional cell he was able to keep his wife very well. (I've always wondered about Peter and his wife, haven't you?)

PLUTARCH OF ANCIENT GREECE TELLS OF another kind of wall. He related the story of Sparta, one of the most fabled of the city-states of Greece. The king once boasted to a friend that Sparta enjoyed the strongest walls to be found anywhere. When the friend came for a visit, he did not see any walls. When asked about the seeming lie, the king of Sparta pointed to his loyal army. "Look at those soldiers," he exclaimed in pride. "The walls of Sparta, and every man a brick!"

HOW DIFFERENT OUR LIVES WOULD BECOME if walls everywhere suddenly vanished. Some would enjoy liberation, others would run for fear. Undeniably this is one of the most fundamental characteristics of our lives.

PEOPLE OFTEN "BUILD" WALLS TO SEPARATE themselves from others. We're not now speaking of criminals, but of people who happen to be different. In our nation's past, and to a lesser extent even today, walls of prejudice were erected simply because someone looked different. These divisions often

draw a line between those who enjoy advantages, and those who have few, if any, advantages. It can be a very frustrating thing to be on the outside.

GOD'S WILL IS THAT THERE BE NO SUCH WALLS of prejudice, separating people who might be close friends were it not for the difference in the color of their skin. In fact, that was one of the reasons Jesus Christ came to this earth: "For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us" (Ephesians 2:14). Paul was referring to the strong bias that many Jews felt toward non-Jews (Gentiles). Gentiles were not immune either; many of them felt the same hatred toward Jews.

ARE SUCH WALLS OF PREJUDICE HARMFUL? Indeed. They prevent us from enjoying the friendship and resources that others have to offer. We could enjoy a better life if we didn't isolate ourselves from certain other people. But we do it; we commonly harbor prejudices in our hearts on the basis of skin color, economic standing, levels of education, etc. In our minds, if you don't meet certain visible standards, then you can't possibly have anything to offer me! We pre-judge a person even before we know anything about him.

JESUS TOLD A STORY IN LUKE 10 THAT SHOULD SHATTER such illogical thinking. He told of a man who was accosted by thieves; they left him wounded, near the point of death. At least two people passed this man by in his desperate need. The person who did stop to help was someone that Jews of Jesus' day would never have called upon for help -- a Samaritan. But despite the strong prejudices of his day, the Samaritan showed compassion and saved the Jew's life. Others may have built walls to shut out Jewish people, but this "good Samaritan" didn't. Jesus commended his example to all of us.

WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO PLEASE GOD? Won't it be enough to attend church now and then, offer an occasional prayer and do some good deeds? Jesus was asked, in that same chapter, the requirements for eternal life. He confirmed that love for God was supreme. We would have expected that answer. But the second most important command? Loving "your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27). And who is our neighbor? That's the reason for the parable of the good Samaritan. Anyone who is in need, regardless of their external conditions, is our neighbor. And we are wrong to build walls that separate us from them.

THE MOST FOOLISH WALLS WE BUILD are those which separate us from God. Before we protest that we would never do such a thing, let us hear the prophet Isaiah: "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2). Sins, whether committed willfully or in ignorance, build a wall that separates us from God. That may not alarm us now, but there will come a day when we realize what an awful prison we have constructed!

PRAISE GOD FOR HIS WILLINGNESS TO TEAR DOWN walls of separation! "'Come now, and let us reason together,' says the Lord, 'though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow . . .'" (Isaiah 1:18). What an offer! God will help us dismantle the prison of sin in which we are confined. But we must have His help. Walls like this are more than I can demolish. With the help of God, though, walls will come tumbling down!

WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT GOD'S offer to forgive sins? Get in touch with us, and let's look together at some exciting statements in the Bible about Jesus' power to forgive. We'd love to hear from you!

"HEM*-Lines"

August 31, 2000, Volume 4, Number 13

(*Heaven and Earth Meet)

~~~~~  
Copyright, 2000, Timothy D. Hall. All scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New King James Version (Copyright, 1990, Thomas Nelson, Inc.).

"HEM-Lines" is produced by the Central Church of Christ, 2722 Oakland Avenue, Johnson City, Tennessee, 37601, and is written by Tim Hall, minister. It is sent free of charge every Thursday to all who request it. To subscribe or to receive more information, write to "central@planetcc.com" (our E-mail address), to the U.S. mail address above, or call (423) 282-1571. Permission to reproduce and/or use the messages for non-commercial purposes is freely granted provided the messages are not altered.