

Joke: David received a parrot for his birthday. But there was one problem the parrot had a bad attitude and an even worse vocabulary. Every other word at least it seemed like was a cuss word. If it wasn't a cuss word then it was something rude that the bird would say.

David tried to change the bird's attitude he would constantly say polite words, play soft music; anything that came to mind to try and get the bird to change his behavior, but nothing worked.

He yelled at the bird, the bird got worse. He shook the bird and the bird just got madder and ruder.

Finally, in a moment of desperation, David put the parrot in the freezer. For a few moments he heard the bird squawking, kicking and screaming and then, suddenly, all was quiet. David afraid that he might have actually hurt the bird quickly opened the freezer door.

The parrot calmly stepped out onto David's extended arm and said: "I'm sorry that I offended you with my language and actions. I ask for your forgiveness. I will try to improve my behavior. . ."

David was astounded at the bird's change in attitude and was about to ask what changed his attitude when the parrot continued, "May I ask what did the chicken do?"

That's probably not the best way to be a bridge builder

Bridge Builders Week 4 - Breaking Barriers

Welcome church, here we are in our last message in our series called Bridge Builders. So far we have looked at making sure we are using the correct blueprints, by the way in case you forgot that would be the Scriptures. And when you open that spiritual toolbox we can see that we have the right tools, and today we are going to look at the next step in the process.

If you look into the New Testament it is filled with conflict between the Jews and Gentiles. But, because of Christ's death and resurrection there was made a way for the two groups to come together.

And in case you didn't know, Jesus is the reason that there can be peace, and He is the reason divided groups, whoever they might be, can unite.

Rebuilding is a key component to bridging the gap and mending broken relationships. Broken relationships between churches, denominations, family, friends. Jesus is wanting us to be ministers of reconciliation.

Now let me begin by saying first off that forgiveness is something we can offer to everyone and are commanded to do so. And we talked about that our first week in this series. Reconciliation, however, cannot and should not always happen. Cannot because it takes both parties to do so. Should not because some relationships were toxic and best left in the past.

With that said, the ones that came about by a simple misunderstanding or something like that, that could be and should be fixed is what I want to talk about today.

Part of the rebuilding process is that we must break the barriers we face each and every day. By breaking down barriers, reconciling and mending relationships we become united as one in Christ and it leaves a message, an impact, on those that may not know Him.

Let's face it we live in a world that gives us plenty of opportunities to get and leave offended. But that is not what Jesus desires for us to do.

And for us there is a level of peace that is followed by this process that is like no other you can experience.

Let me share a story with you: During World War II, Hitler commanded all religious groups to unite so that he could control them. Among the Brethren assemblies, half complied and half refused. Those who went along with the order had a much easier time. Those who did not, faced harsh persecution. And in almost every family of those who resisted, someone died in a concentration camp.

When the war was over, feelings of bitterness ran deep between the groups and there was much tension. Finally they decided that the situation had to be healed. Leaders from each group met at a quiet retreat. For several days, each person spent time in prayer,

examining his own heart in the light of Christ's commands. Then they came together.

Francis Schaeffer, who told of the incident, asked a friend who was there. "What did you do then?" "We were just one," he replied. As they confessed their hostility and bitterness to God and yielded to His control, the Holy Spirit created a spirit of unity among them. Love filled their hearts and dissolved their hatred.

When love prevails, especially in times of strong disagreements, it presents to the world an indisputable mark of a true follower of Jesus Christ. When we come together, break down barriers, show love and reconcile with each other we become united.

Unity, harmony, and peace are trademarks of the Kingdom of God.

As we've talked about this before, it's necessary as bridge builders to take action. And this week the action takes us to the book of Ephesians where Paul is passionately discussing the division between Jews and Gentiles and the reconciling work Christ did on the cross to bring harmony.

Ephesians 2:11–12 (TPT): So don't forget that you were not born as Jews and were uncircumcised (circumcision itself is just a work of man's hands); you had none of the Jewish covenants and laws; you were foreigners to Israel's incredible heritage; you were without the covenants and prophetic promises of the Messiah, the promised hope, and without God.

Paul makes it clear in this portion of the scriptures that before coming to Jesus, Gentiles were in a desperate place. They were aliens, strangers, having no hope and without God. In other words, we were not only spiritually dead, but also did not have access to the God that the Jews enjoyed.

The word Reconcile in the Greek is '*Katallasso*' which is an intensified word that describes an exchange. Originally used to describe two people exchanging money, the New Testament picks it up in it's description of people exchanging an old way of life for new. Trading in an old life for a new life.

And I'm afraid too many in the Body of Christ have sold out to culture, we have comprised the message to feel welcome. But we should be changing our old life for a new life. Some believe you can live how you want, do what you want, say what you want anyway you want and think Jesus is still ok with all that but that is a cheap and dishonorable grace and not the gospel. How can can really believe that you encountered God and still do the same things you were doing before you ever met Him.

Romans 6:1–14 (TPT): So what do we do, then? Do we persist in sin so that God's kindness and grace will increase? 2 What a terrible thought! We have died to sin once and for all, as a dead man passes away from this life. So how could we live under sin's rule a moment longer? 3 Or have you forgotten that all of us who were immersed into union with Jesus, the Anointed One, were immersed into union with his death? 4 Sharing in his death by our baptism means that we were co-buried and entombed with him, so that when the Father's glory raised Christ from the dead, we were

also raised with him. We have been co-resurrected with him so that we could be empowered to walk in the freshness of new life. 5 For since we are permanently grafted into him to experience a death like his, then we are permanently grafted into him to experience a resurrection like his and the new life that it imparts. 6 Could it be any clearer that our former identity is now and forever deprived of its power? For we were co-crucified with him to dismantle the stronghold of sin within us, so that we would not continue to live one moment longer submitted to sin's power. 7 Obviously, a dead person is incapable of sinning. 8 And if we were co-crucified with the Anointed One, we know that we will also share in the fullness of his life. 9 And we know that since the Anointed One has been raised from the dead to die no more, his resurrection life has vanquished death and its power over him is finished. 10 For by his sacrifice he died to sin's power once and for all, but he now lives continuously for the Father's pleasure. 11 So let it be the same way with you! Since you are now joined with him, you must continually view yourselves as dead and unresponsive to sin's appeal while living daily for God's pleasure in union with Jesus, the Anointed One. 12 Sin is a dethroned monarch; so you must no longer give it an opportunity to rule over your life, controlling how you live and compelling you to obey its desires and cravings. 13 So then, refuse to answer its call to surrender your body as a tool for wickedness. Instead, passionately answer God's call to keep yielding your body to him as one who has now experienced resurrection life! You live now for his pleasure, ready to be used for his noble purpose. 14 Remember this: sin will not conquer you, for God already has! You are not governed by law but governed by the reign of the grace of God.

And in 2 Corinthians. . .

2 Corinthians 5:17–21 (NIV): Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

And hear this church, just because our culture has Re-defined what's sin and what's not. Doesn't mean the Word has changed course. God's Word is still Gods Word and it changes not.

As we look to break barriers among us and prepare to build bridges, we must look to Christ as our example when we begin the process of reconciling. We have the blueprints, the plans, and the tools.

And we need to realize that in Christ we have been given the ministry of reconciliation.

We're called to be ministers of reconciliation, facilitators of divine exchange. From old to new, from broken to whole, from offended and hurt to forgiven.

Let me share with you another story to illustrate what I'm talking about today. . .

In one of the most powerful stories of reconciliation I've ever heard, Corrie Ten Boom meets her concentration camp prison guard after a talk she gives on forgiveness. The guard asks her forgiveness, and as Ten Boom reaches out her hand to accept, this is what she describes;

"And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

"I forgive you, brother!" I cried. "With all my heart!"

A concentration camp survivor being reconciled to her nazi guard, that is an incredible exchange. . . Only in and through the power of Christ can something like that happen.

God's work of reconciliation is not only between individuals, It's also between groups of people that are at odds, like the Jews and Gentiles were in the days of Paul. It's also our calling to lead others to Christ so that they can be reconciled back to God.

Reconciliation is powerful, and it's power is rooted in Christ.

Just as the Jews and Gentiles became one in Christ, we too can take the tools and blueprints we have been discussing to break any

barrier we face in order to build the bridge that will close the gap in relationships.

Let's pick back up with Ephesians. . .

Ephesians 2:13–18 (TPT): Yet look at you now! Everything is new! Although you were once distant and far away from God, now you have been brought delightfully close to him through the sacred blood of Jesus—you have actually been united to Christ! 14 Our reconciling “Peace” is Jesus! He has made Jew and non-Jew one in Christ. By dying as our sacrifice, he has broken down every wall of prejudice that separated us and has now made us equal through our union with Christ. 15 Ethnic hatred has been dissolved by the crucifixion of his precious body on the cross. The legal code that stood condemning every one of us has now been repealed by his command. His triune essence has made peace between us by starting over—forming one new race of humanity, Jews and non-Jews fused together! 16 Two have now become one, and we live restored to God and reconciled in the body of Christ. Through his crucifixion, hatred died. 17 For the Messiah has come to preach this sweet message of peace to you, the ones who were distant, and to those who are near. 18 And now, because we are united to Christ, we both have equal and direct access in the realm of the Holy Spirit to come before the Father!

Paul gives us this beautiful ending to our reading today. When barriers are broken, there is a level of peace and unity unlike anything else.

There have been so many ideas on different ways you can draw near to God. Some think you can draw near by keeping the law or by belonging to a group, rather than be Israel or a church.

And listen, I believe it's important to be a part of a local body. But ultimately, the only way to be brought near to God is by the blood of Christ. What Jesus did on the cross, suffering as a guilty sinner in the place of guilty sinners, unites us with Christ.

He has reconciled us to the Father. He has built a divine bridge where there once was only a vast chasm.

In their book on reconciliation, Emmanuel Katongole and Chris Rice share the true story of Billy Neal Moore, who would both find Jesus in prison and ultimately find his victim's parents to be his greatest advocate.

When Billy Neal Moore was in Jail, awaiting trial in which he would be sentenced to death, a minister shared with him the good news that Jesus loved him and wanted to forgive his sins.

Moore learned that no one is beyond redemption. From prison, he wrote to his victim's family and asked for their forgiveness.

Astoundingly, they immediately wrote back to say that they also were Christians and that they forgave him. Then the family decided to petition the Georgia parole board to commute Moore's

death sentence. In 1991, Moore was paroled from prison, transformed by the grace of God and his victim's family members. "When I was released, they embraced me like a brother." Moore said of Stapleton's family.

He has been preaching the gospel of forgiveness to schoolchildren and church groups ever since.

Much like Moore, when we come to Christ we realize that in Him we can break any barrier, any hostility. Moore had a barrier of prison and bitterness based on his actions but was able to come closer to God in order to reconcile a relationship that was severed by murder.

By any measure, this is an unthinkable exchange only made possible through the power of Christ.

And maybe there is some relational barriers that your facing today that should be broken down, Jesus is there to help you through the process. The pressing question is; Are you choosing to seek the ultimate barrier breaker for that help?

Anything less than Christ won't do. As Jesus himself describes in John 15:5. . .

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

The work of Jesus on the cross is the common ground of salvation for both Jews and Gentile. Therefore, there is no longer any dividing wall between us today. Jesus broke down the wall.

If the Lordship of Jesus Christ is not greater than any difference you have with others – be it political, racial, economic, language, geography or whatever, then you have not fully understood what it means to be under the Lordship of Jesus. *“For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.”*

Romans 12:5 (TPT): And so it is in the body of Christ. For though we are many, we’ve all been mingled into one body in Christ. This means that we are all vitally joined to one another, with each contributing to the others.

The church is unified as one body, yet we are distinct as individual members of the church. In the body of Christ there is unity but no uniformity. We err when we neglect either aspect. Unity should never be prompted at the expense of individuality, and individuality should never diminish the church’s essential unity in Christ.

Jesus is our common ground, we are one body in Christ

Galatians 3:28–29 (NIV): There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Diversity in the body was God's plan. Division was not. This distinction is vitally important as you consider the job of bridge building, reconciliation, and forgiveness. Diversity in the body is beautiful and good and necessary, hostility and division does not reflect the Kingdom of God to a watching world.

Division and hostility are far from the heart of God.

Reconciliation is the heartbeat of the kingdom.

Let me try and close out today. . .

A.W. Tozier has said, "Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshipers meeting together, each one looking to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could ever possibly be..."

I love that, it's a reminder that when we "tune" ourselves to Christ. The one who is our example, our teacher, our leader, our Rabbi, our Lord and Savior. . .When we are all pointed towards Him, worshipping Him. . .we are closer to each other than we could ever get by any other means.

Jesus is the key.

He is our example and He's given us the divine blueprints and plans we need to follow.

However, in order to follow we must be willing to take action. We must be willing to get out of our comfort zones and routines in pursuit of forgiveness and healing.

Like the father in the story of the prodigal son, we run towards reconciliation. We extend a hand in the process and we celebrate when relationships are healed.

Healing is at the heart of the Father.

Reconciliation is the ministry He's given us.

What can you do, *today*, to build a bridge? What can you do, *today*, to close the gap and decrease the chasms around you? What can you do you to help others encounter Jesus?

It takes intentionality and grit, but it starts one person at a time. And it can start today - with you.

It's time to tell others how to encounter Jesus so they can be reconciled back to God. To reconcile some relationships that need mending. To bring people to healing through the power of the Holy Spirit.

It's time to love God and love people. Amen?

Oh, by the way that's what we will begin looking at next week.
Loving God and loving people.

Let's pray.