

DEMOLISHING WALLS CREATE DEBRIS ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US Dan Burrell

Good morning Life Fellowship. I have a friend who is a member of this church and we were talking recently. He is at that station and stage in life where he has a little bit of freedom. He is retiring and wants to build a house out along the coast that he will use for a vacation home and that his family can enjoy. But the house that he bought was a landmark that had a location name and reputation. People knew about it and they called it 'The Pink House.' There was even a storybook that had been written about the house. Everyone in the community would talk about the house as it had been there for all of their lives, and even some of their parents had known the house when they were children.

So my friend bought this historic landmark on a beautiful spot on the ocean which was considered prime real estate. He began to do some exploration of the structure and discovered that over the course of time it had been greatly neglected. The wood was rotten, the foundation was broken, and the local ordinances regarding upgrading historic buildings went on and on and on. Reluctantly he had to reach the decision that there was no way to salvage this famous landmark.

So he brought in people and leveled the house. And where one day people had driven by and saw 'The Pink House,' the next day there was nothing left but a pile of broken debris. And oh, the response! Heartbroken people saying things like, *'If I had only known I would have taken a picture of my family in front of it.'* *'Oh, that house had been there since my childhood and I was so attached to it.'* *'How dare you.'* *'How could you do that?'* *'That house was part of our community.'*

But in the end if he had not torn the house down it would have fallen down. If a hurricane had come the debris would have been scattered for miles. There was no way to salvage the house because it was beyond repair. But man, did the debris cause a storm, because people looked at what had been tradition and part of their culture and part of their identity and now it was in ruins.

Last week we looked at Acts Chapter 10 as we are continuing our yearlong study of the book of Acts. And today we are in Acts Chapter 11. In Chapter 10 last week we looked at the passage of two visions. There was a vision by a Gentile man by the name of Cornelius who was told there was a message he needed to hear. He was to send for a man to be brought back to him so he could hear what this man had to say. The other man was a Jewish man by the name of Peter, and we know him as one of the great apostles.

And while the Gentile's vision was happening in one city, Peter was somewhere else hearing from God. God put this unusual display in front of Peter in the form of a vision of a sheet with animals on it. God had spoken and said, *'Take these animals and eat.'* But some of the animals on the sheet were unclean and were the kind a good Jew would not eat, such as pork or shellfish. And when God told Peter to eat them, Peter

DEMOLISHING WALLS CREATE DEBRIS
ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US
Dan Burrell

responded by saying he would not eat that which was common or unclean. And God responded by telling Peter not to call anything common or unclean that He had created.

Not once, not twice, but three times God gave Peter that message in this vision. Peter then got the invitation to go to the house of this Gentile where he spent time with him and God put the pieces of the vision together. Peter realized that what God was telling him was this: *'Your old traditions, your old customs, your old identity, the days of its purpose are gone, and I am tearing it down. What I have declared clean, don't you declare unclean. The gospel is not just for the Jews; it is not just for Sabbath keepers, it is not just for those who keep the Law, it is not just for those who were born of the seed of Abraham but the gospel is for everyone. That is my message and I want you to take it to all the world, Gentile and Jew, men and women, bond, slave and free. The gospel is for everybody.'*

And last week I showed you an illustration of the walls that we build in our lives, those walls that we use to communicate that maybe we are a little more special to God than others, that we are a little more important to God than others, that our way is superior to others, and our identity is best. I put those bricks up bit by bit so that you could see the wall that you and I frequently will construct that prevents us from being all for the gospel that God has called us to.

Whether it is politics, or race, or accents, or appearance, or education, or the amount of money we make, we use these to say, *'I am just a little more special than you are.'* *'I am a little more important than you.'* *'My way is a little better than yours.'* And God is in the process in all of us in helping us identify those barriers between us and those who need the gospel, breaking them down, tearing them apart and leveling them to the ground. And in doing so, we are left with debris.

But as the song that we just sang says, God is in the reconstruction business. And what we have in our lives, our traditions, our identity, our good works, whatever it is that we think makes us just a tad more superior than the person sitting next to us, God has to tear that down so that He can build in our hearts, in our lives, and in our mission that which glorifies Him most and best. He is building a palace.

So what do we do with all of that debris? I want us to take a look at Acts Chapter 11. We are going to read several verses here to see what is embedded. In fact when I began studying this for the last few weeks I looked at it and I asked God what He was trying to say here. And quite honestly there is a lot of repetition here and I am going to address that with you.

DEMOLISHING WALLS CREATE DEBRIS ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US Dan Burrell

It seemed very confusing for a while until finally a few things jumped out at me that I believe are important for Life Fellowship Church, for American Christians, for Life Group leaders, for all of us to look at, because whether we want to admit it or not, a lot of us like our walls. We like the bricks that we have. We like the debris. We like the identity. We like The Pink House. We like the things that give us comfort and a sense of belonging. And yet many of those things that we grasp onto so tightly are facades of something that is rotten, and it is the thing that keeps us from being all that God wants us to be, and to declare all that God wants us to declare.

So let's look at Acts Chapter 11 and beginning is verse 1. "***Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea .***" These were the ones who had already trusted Christ. The ones beginning in Jerusalem, then in Judea and Samaria and now were getting ready to go into the uttermost parts of the world. These are the ones who had already heard the gospel over a ten year period.

"Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him." Now I just have to stop here, okay? I mean there are some things that demand your attention like a needle scratching across an old fashioned record player. (Laughter.) By the way if you look at other translations it says, '*The Party of the Circumcision,*' and that sounds like a party you want to join, right?

So I had to stop here and explore this. Why were these guys wanting to be known as the circumcision party? And I looked at it in the Greek and actually the word connected to circumcision is *iana*, and it literally means 'the party of, or the identity of.' So I looked at other uses of it and for instance those who worshipped Herod were *Herod ianas*, or *Herodians* as they would drop the a. Those who worshipped Caesar in a kind of cult like fashion became *Caesarianas* or *Caesareans*.

At the end of this chapter, for the very first time, we see those who were followers of Jesus Christ referred to as *Christianas*, the first use of the word Christian. We want to be identified with Christ, right? These folks here wanted to be identified with something that made them very Jewish, very unique. They were The Party of the Circumcised. But what they were saying is this, '*We are set apart. We are different.*' And at its core they were saying, '*We are superior. In fact we are so superior that we are going to form a club, we are going to form a society, we are going to form a party.*'

Maybe you think that is just silly, but they were serious. It was quite an initiation process they had going there, right? However today don't we do similar things? Many want to be identified as a member of the GOP, Democrats, Libertarians, Southerners,

DEMOLISHING WALLS CREATE DEBRIS
ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US
Dan Burrell

Yankees, Americans, or as Brits. We look for titles that we can adopt that we think make us a little special.

And some of the titles are silly. All you have to do is go to a football game and afterwards if you pay attention on the way to the parking lot you are going to see a fist fight. In fact that is one of the reasons I like going is to see the entertainment value of people who are about twelve beers in. (Laughter.) By the end of the game the only thing worth watching lately for the Panthers is what is Cam going to wear and what fight is going to break out, right? (Laughter.) Did I say Cam? I meant Madea. (Laughter.) If you have not been paying attention to the Panthers you probably have no idea what I am talking about.

But we do, we really do. We get our identity for sports teams, for regions, for where we went to college, who we work for, our neighborhood, our skin color, our accent, our political bent, and we want to be 'the party of.' So let's see how that worked out for The Party of the Circumcision.

“So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, ‘You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.’ So it would be like saying to the Panthers, ‘You ate with the Saints people. You ate with Tampa Bay. How could you do that? Verse 4, “But Peter began and explained it to them in order: ‘I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me. Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. And I heard a voice saying to me, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’”

“But I said, ‘By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.’ But the voice answered a second time from heaven, ‘What God has made clean, do not call common.’ This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction.”

“These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man’s house. And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household. As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’”

DEMOLISHING WALLS CREATE DEBRIS
ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US
Dan Burrell

Notice he finished telling the story, and I will come back to that in a moment, and then he sums it up with a declaration. Peter looks these guys in the eye and he says in verse 17, *“If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way? When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, ‘Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.’”*

I have to tell you that I struggled a little over this because as I was studying this passage I saw it was kind of apparent that Chapter 10 and Chapter 11 tell the same story. And if you were here last week you know that we read the story twice. We read it from Cornelius’ perspective and we read it from Peter’s perspective. And when Peter went to Cornelius’ house we read it again. We heard the story over and over again in Chapter 10 and now in Chapter 11 we hear it again. Three times we get to hear how Cornelius had a vision. And two times, with an allusion to a third time, we get to read how Peter heard from God with this big sheet story.

Now I couldn’t just look at this without thinking about it. *‘God, why in two chapters, in one book consecutively did you tell this story over and over again? What is the purpose of that?’* And it makes you think even more about it when we remember how the Scriptures were written. They were written on papyrus which could only be so long. So it is interesting that one of the longest books in the New Testament is the book of Acts and it is filled with all kinds of stuff. But there was a certain limit to how much Luke could record on this piece of papyrus that would then be copied and rolled up to be shared.

They didn’t have books, they didn’t have publishing companies. You couldn’t buy it from Kindle. They had to have it on a scroll of papyrus and someone had to write it out knowing that the scroll could only be so long. And the book of Acts would surely have filled up a scroll. So of all the things that could be recorded, and realizing that there was a lot going on during this ten year period between Jerusalem and now this story, why did God have them tell this story over and over - three times in two chapters? Why?

Here is the conclusion that we have to reach - that this is very important! This is epic! This is major transitional truth being taught here. And we better not miss it. Any time God repeats something three times one of the rules of hermeneutics says you better pay attention. By the way how many times did God say to Peter, *“Feed my sheep?”* It was three times. How many times did God say to Peter, *“What God has made clean, do not call common?”* It was three times. If we go through the Scriptures and notice the times God says something three times we realize that He is making a point and driving it home over and over.

DEMOLISHING WALLS CREATE DEBRIS ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US Dan Burrell

So three times in two chapters we get this story. In other words God is saying, *'Look at this wall I am tearing down. I am tearing it down on purpose for a reason and don't miss the details. This is big.'* And it was big because at that moment it was dawning on the Jews that salvation wasn't just for them. And it was dawning on the Gentiles that salvation was for them. It was dawning on them that the gospel was for every person on the planet. It was taking 'whosoever will' and giving it an object lesson.

You didn't have to be a faithful Jew, you didn't have to be a descendant from Abraham. You didn't have to be a keeper of the Sabbath, you didn't have to watch the dietary laws. You could mix your fabrics, you could do all the things that the Gentiles did. You could be in bondage, you could be a slave owner, you could be male or female, you could be from Rome, Greece or a pagan. You could be devout or not, you could be all of these things and the message would still be the same, *'Repent of your sins, trust in Christ, give Him your life for eternal hope.'* That was it. It didn't matter where you came from.

And yet, what do we do today? We get into the debris and we try to find that which is salvageable. And we put our blocks back in place to rebuild those walls that makes us feel a little bit more special, a little more loved, a little bit superior. And in doing so, we do a disservice to the sacrifice of Calvary and the Great Commission of Christ.

So what can we learn from this, and where do we go with it? This is a huge theological turning point and it is also a cultural turning point so what should we notice? I think there is something to notice and that is this - no sooner had this great theological point been made then revival broke out in the house of Cornelius. People repented of their sins, they trusted in Christ, the Holy Spirit came and people were baptized.

Now Peter thinks his work there was done and he was going to go back home. He throws open the door to his house, he is tired, and he is hot after traveling for days. He probably has blisters on his feet and he is probably looking forward to sleeping in his own bed that night. But he goes into the living room and there sits a committee.

'Peter, we represent The Circumcision Party and we need to talk.' Even before Peter got home the news had spread. Was the news, *'Hey, Cornelius, his family and friends all trusted Christ?'* No! Was the news, *'Man, you should have been at that baptismal service; it was awesome?'* No! Was the news, *'The Holy Spirit came again and fell down on Gentiles?'* No, they were not interested in that. They were there to talk about the report that on Peter's recent journey he had not only visited the home of a Gentile but he also ate with them.

DEMOLISHING WALLS CREATE DEBRIS
ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US
Dan Burrell

‘Peter, you are going to need to explain yourself because this just isn’t done. We thought you were a rabbi and a teacher. You are a Jew and you know our heritage and where we stand. You know our traditions. You know what you are supposed to do and not to do. How dare you sully the gospel, sully your standing, sully your reputation by visiting in the home of the unwashed heathen, the uncircumcised. We thought you were one of us. So you need to explain yourself.’

And what was Peter’s response? **“If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?”** Now I have to tell you that my response might have been different because when I get tired, I get a little grouchy. I don’t know about you, but if I am hungry or tired you get a different Dan. If you don’t believe me ask my wife and she will tell you. But please don’t ask her. (Laughter.) If I had been Peter I might have said, *‘Who in the world do you people think you are with your petty little political agenda? I want you to know that I walked with Jesus, I talked with Him, and He speaks to me in dreams. How dare you come into my house and question my actions?’* That’s probably the way I would have done because I can be a real jerk at times.

But that’s not what Peter did. Peter said, *‘Have a seat, guys. Let me tell you a couple of stories.’* And then after he told them the stories he told them that he had reached the conclusion that if God accepts them then so should he. If the Holy Spirit that fell on him had fallen on them as well, who was he to say they were not their brothers. And the people having heard Peter’s explanation went silent. And then they said, *‘We are brothers. We are brothers.’*

It was a messy debris field. It was ugly. It was shocking. It was uncomfortable. Things just weren’t done that way. But in the end there is patient teaching and the message was getting through. *‘Look over the debris. Look over the wall. And see what God can do.’* And folks, that is what we are going to need to do in a lot of areas during our Christian journey. We are going to have to admit that all of us are expert wall builders and debris admirers. We like the comfort, the identity of our history, our traditions, of those who look, talk and think like us, those with which we have shared experiences both good and bad, those who have married our daughters and sons, and those with whom we have cried and laughed are partners in our journey.

And in doing so we don’t even know we are building the walls and we forget about those who have not yet heard, those who are still walking apart from the gospel. We forget those who walk in pain, those who don’t look or sound like us, those who curse and dye their hair weird colors, have tattoos all over their body, or have different color skin or accents. We forget about those who don’t vote the way we vote, and those

DEMOLISHING WALLS CREATE DEBRIS
ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US
Dan Burrell

who live on the other side of the tracks. Or those who may be crude, unsophisticated, maybe even illiterate, or under educated. Perhaps they are broken, or addicted, carnal, or even violent.

But of all the things they do possess there is one thing they don't possess and that is the transformative work of the Holy Spirit because they have never heard the gospel. So they are trapped in their sins, they are trapped in their condition, they are trapped in hopelessness. And between us and them we have these walls that are unnecessary, built of traditions and identity, but not by God.

And when we kick those walls down and we start reaching them, they come to our church, they come to our Life groups, we have lunch and dinner with them, there may be times when we may feel the rub, we may feel a distance because we have not yet learned their language or appreciated their journey. And instead of joining them on their journey many times our tendency is to judge them for their journey. You see broken walls create debris.

I want us to consider a little of that this morning as we look at this passage. The first thing I would like you to consider is this - the spread of the gospel always creates resistance. It always creates resistance. And here is the reality - many times a great portion of that resistance is from within. I am going to be honest with you and tell you that the worst scars I have received over the years have come from ministry. I have never been to jail. No one has ever beaten me because I am a Christ follower. I have never been run out of town. I have been threatened by unsaved people in foreign countries and even had someone threaten to kill me a couple of times when I was overseas, but those gave me a rush because I was doing it for Jesus.

But do you know when it hurts the most? It hurts when you have sat next to them in church for a long time. It hurts when you call them brother, or pastor, or friend. That is when it hurts. I have seen dissension within the church all my life from my youngest childhood. Sometimes it was just, other times it was petty, but it was always painful. I have seen churches split, I have had friends attack me, I have seen honest disagreements resulting in separation, and I have seen racism.

I remember one of the first times I baptized as a pastor it was a Jamaican fellow and a blue eyed blonde haired lady from Wisconsin. Picture that image. I baptized them after they sweetly trusted Christ, and they are still active in the church I used to pastor. I came out of the baptismal pool and was going to change into my street clothes so I could go out and greet people. And an old Southern guy came up to me and he said, '*What was that?*' And I said, '*That was a baptism.*' And he said, '*You know good and well that is not what I am talking about.*' And I did know good and well what he was talking about.

DEMOLISHING WALLS CREATE DEBRIS
ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US
Dan Burrell

Now this was 30 years ago, but he said, *'Are you going to be that kind of pastor?'* And I said, *'Yes, I am.'* Now he eventually repented and I actually conducted his funeral a few years later, but the fact is I have seen that ugly side of people who are Christians. I have had to be silent many, many times and absorb the blows rather than to return evil for evil. I have had to be patient and let the Lord reveal truth in his time when I wanted to scream my side of the story.

I have had people criticize me for being too harsh and for being too loving, for being too conservative and for being too liberal, for being too political and for not being political enough, for meeting with homosexuals, for introducing new worship styles, and even for changing the time of church services. I could go on and on and on.

But I want you to know something - in spite of all of this I still love the church. And sometimes when God brings opposition from within, it is so that we can lean into it and not run away from it. Part of being a shepherd is loving the sheep, even when they are stupid. (Laughter.) And part of the great shepherd that I really appreciate is that Jesus has loved me when I have been trying to work as his under shepherd and many, many, many times I have been stupid. But He didn't give up on me.

I want to say this - I think sometimes, and particularly right now, we have turned the church into a punching bag for things that are unrealistic. Do you know what a church is? It is not an institution. It is an organism, not an organization. It is filled with a bunch of people, and I don't know about you but I am a mess, and I think if you are honest you will say you are a mess as well. You get us all together and we are just messy. And there are things that we are good at, and there are things that we are not good at, and there are things that we are getting better at, and there are things that we have been good at in the past and are not good at currently.

Why? It is because we are all messy. If you have been married for 30 or 40 years you know there have been periods in your marriage where it was all caviar and roses, and there are other times when it was dandelions and Spam. (Laughter.) That is reality. And there are times when you wake up in the morning and you wonder why you are even still in this marriage, and there are other times when you can't imagine your life without your spouse.

And that is the way it is going to be in a church. The church is not perfect. It is not a museum for perfect relics. It is a hospital with a bunch of broken, messed up people. And you know hospitals try to do their best, but some people die in them every single day. And sometimes the doctor didn't see that one coming. And sometimes the nurses get tired and crabby. But you know why they are there? It is because they believe

DEMOLISHING WALLS CREATE DEBRIS
ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US
Dan Burrell

in what they are doing and it is still the best hope for someone who is sick. And we all point to the Great Physician and know that ultimately healing comes from Him.

So I want you to have realistic expectations about the body of Christ which is the church. I think we need to be a little less willing to blame the church, the bride of Christ for everything, and a little bit more willing to accept our role in what is broken in any body that we are a part of. (Applause.) I am probably going to do a podcast about that a little bit more because I think it is an important thing. I have seen it a lot on social media and so forth, and I think it is worth exploring.

But today I want you to consider these things. I want you to consider the fact that the spread of the gospel is always going to create resistance, and you are always going to find reasons to be upset. You are always going to find traditions you wish were kept. You are always going to find changes that you wish hadn't been made, or would have been made sooner, or need to be made still.

You are always going to find these rubs, and you know why? It is because that is what Satan wants us to focus on. He wants us to focus on the debris fields. He wants us to focus on the broken walls. He wants us to focus on the things that were important to us that are no longer in place. He wants us to see those things and be frustrated by those things because as long as we are focused on the debris field, we are not looking at the mission field. And when we are not looking at the mission field there are people that are slipping into hell, slipping out of reach, slipping into eternity, walking in darkness, and experiencing pain when the gospel is there for them but we are not there with them in their journey because, *'But man, I liked the pink house.'* *'But I liked it that way.'*

And that is what was going on here in this passage. We see this example and it won't be the last time we see it because Paul had to address it in letter after letter. Peter had to address it here, and they are going to have a problem with the Hellenistic Jews, they are going to have a problem with the widows, and we will read about problems over and over and over in the church. So what makes us think we are any different than they were then? They were that close to Jesus' resurrection and we are 2,000 years removed from it, and yeah, we have issues too.

But it doesn't mean the gospel isn't true, the mission isn't sure, that love isn't able to overcome, and that sin isn't able to be forgiven. Those things are still true and on those things we know that is the foundation of our hope and our faith. We serve a risen perfect Savior. (Applause.) That is the foundation. And when we scrape all the debris, all the rotten wood, all the termite infested timber away from it you will find the foundation that has never changed, it has never cracked, it is always sure and on that Christ builds His church.

DEMOLISHING WALLS CREATE DEBRIS
ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US
Dan Burrell

Number two - when we face opposition it is better to lead and learn than it is to leave. It is better to lead and learn than to leave. I have to tell you if I had been Peter and I was tired and cranky I might have told those guys to get out of my house. And if they didn't leave then I would have been out of there. Instead Peter told them to pull up a chair because he had a story to tell them. And he told them the story of Cornelius, the story of the sheet, and then the story of the conversion. And he said, *'Can't we really agree that this is of God and that we ought not stand in between what God is doing and changing, and what He wants to perform in our lives? We need to understand that this is of God.'* They went silent, thought about it and said, *'You are right; we are wrong. Let's move forward.'*

Sometimes we need to persist; sometimes we need to persevere. I Timothy Chapter 4 and verse 16 says this: ***"Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers."*** He said it was that important that you would keep on. And folks, I think we live in a society where life is hard and we are always trying to make it easier. And you know our walk with Christ can be hard as well. There are going to be times of disappointments, tragedies, difficulties, people stabbing you in the back, and people hurting you, and it is because people are broken. But we can't leave, we can't run, we can't quit; we must persevere.

And sometimes we persevere in our walk and sometimes we persevere by helping others in their walk. And what Peter was saying to these men, The Party of the Circumcision was *'Guys, I love you enough to patiently explain things to you. Let me lead, let me help you learn, but don't you dare leave because the gospel needs every person in their spot.'*

The research in America tells us that every four years the average person changes churches. And that a large number of the people that change churches are not doing it because the doctrine has gone bad, or they have moved out of the area, but that they have gotten bored or upset, too comfortable, or critical. And in doing so they may be missing the lesson that God wants to teach them. Now I am not saying that everybody that leaves the church is wrong, and obviously if you move you may need to change churches. I am not saying if a church becomes unsound doctrinally that you stay in that.

Sometimes you may need to stay so that you can help change the doctrine and make sure the doctrine is protected. I am not saying that it is wrong to change churches in every situation, but I am saying that when we are moving from this church to that church and then to this church, we are also leaving this lesson, that lesson and another lesson. And we need to ask ourselves the question, *'Is God trying to teach me something that I am not learning yet?'* They didn't have that option in those days. They didn't have

DEMOLISHING WALLS CREATE DEBRIS ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US Dan Burrell

a church on every corner. In our corner we are facing a temptation they may not have faced.

Number three - there is much that can be learned through conflict. Conflict doesn't always have to be negative. Sometimes it is for the purpose of gaining clarity. Sometimes it is so that issues can be addressed. Sometimes it is to bring light into something that is in the dark. Sometimes it is necessary so that we can deal with problems. It can help us deal with error or wrong conduct. It may even force us to wrestle through some uncomfortable things in our theology, or in our practice. Not every conflict has to lead to a war. Not every argument needs to lead to a divorce. Not every disagreement needs to end in separation. Sometimes the purpose of conflict is so that we can learn what we are doing wrong, and what God is doing, and then go forward better together.

And where you have people you have opinions. And where you have opinions you are going to have disagreements. In the end we need to be careful that we don't make our personal position more important than God's plan. We are to grow in wisdom. I am at that stage where when I look in the mirror at myself I don't know this guy that I am looking at. Where did that gray hair come from, and those wrinkles and those bags under my eyes? But I do appreciate this, after 35 years of ministry, and after 58 years of life, I realize that I may see God in a richer way and in a more patient way because I have endured things in the past. And I have learned that not everything is as important as we thought it was when our passions ran hot.

So sometimes we just have to be still and say, *'God, this battle is for you; not for me. You have to win this one because I can't win this one. I don't have enough power, I don't have enough strength, I don't have enough energy, I don't have enough brains, or I don't have enough money. Whatever it is, God, I just trust in you.'* And then watch what He does that is completely different than what you might have done had you had the resources. The more we know the Word of God the more likely we are to be able to survive conflicts, because then our hope is in Him and not in us. When we use Scripture as the filter it will give us discernment and perspective that negates all the potentially negative impacts, the disagreements, resistance and rebellion.

The fourth thing is this - change is a process and it takes place at various speeds. Not all of us learn at the same rate. I was a crammer. The night before a test I would study, go to sleep on it, and next day ace the test. My roommate hated my guts for that. He would study for hours and hours and hours, and he would pass the test too, but it was different. Not everybody is a sprinter, some people are marathoners. Some of us are in for the long haul while others are in for the short distance, but all of us are to be moving

DEMOLISHING WALLS CREATE DEBRIS
ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US
Dan Burrell

forward, and that is the important thing. And you are moving forward at the rate that God has gifted you to do so.

And so some of us need to remember the fact that not everyone learns at the same rate, and we could use some patience. When your kids were learning to walk and they fell every two or three steps, you didn't say, '*You stupid kid, you are lazy. I want a new one.*' You didn't do that, did you? If you did, you are not a good person. (Laughter.) No, what did you do? You said, '*Oh look at you. You took three steps that time. Good for you. Yay! Now get back up and try it again and let's see if you can do four steps.*'

And some of us watch a Christian fall and say, '*Yeah, I saw that one coming. He must not be right with God.*' No, no, what are we supposed to do? You pick them up and help them learn what they did wrong. You help them take the next step, and the next step and the next step. And one day they are running. They may sometimes run in the wrong direction, but that is part of joining in their journey and not judging their journey. That is part of being Christ like.

Maybe you wonder how do we know that it is right? We study the Word. That is what gives us the authority; not our opinions, not our traditions, not our preferences, but the Bible. If the Bible does not address it then it must not have been important enough for God to put it in there, so why is it so important to us? Why do we make it a big deal? Why do we make it a test of fellowship? The reason is that Satan wants us to put bricks up that prevent us from doing the will of God. He wants us to look at the debris and think about what used to be, while the harvest continues to rot in the field.

The last thing is this - there is an important difference between unity and uniformity. There is a big different between unity and uniformity. Let me give you a quick illustration. I took piano lessons and I was so bad at it that after six years the piano teacher went to my mom and said, '*Really, you need to quit wasting your money.*' (Laughter.) The first song that I learned to play on the piano was in a little red book and it sounded like this. (Plays song.) I have hidden talent, right? That was one note at a time being played with one finger at a time, and it was very dull and very boring.

However what I learned eventually was that you can take one note, add another note, and another note, and so on, and it sounds much more sophisticated. (Plays another song.) It sounds much richer and much deeper played that way. Those all weren't the same note though, were they? They weren't played one at a time, and it wasn't played over and over until you wanted to shoot me. It just becomes irritating. But when you play a chord you have individual notes, unique, separate, but played in a way intentionally so that something beautiful occurs. By the way if I had played this (Plays

DEMOLISHING WALLS CREATE DEBRIS
ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US
Dan Burrell

random notes) it would not have been so lovely, right? I played the exact same number of notes but they weren't played with intention this time.

In this church God has a lot of different notes, and the difference between whether they sound like a cat sat on a keyboard, or whether they make beautiful music is whether or not we intentionally use them in a unified way that brings glory to God. We don't want the one note wonders; we don't even want to play one finger at a time. We want to use the diversity that is the body of Christ in a way that glorifies God. And if we are going to do that we have to be focused on unity. And unity does not happen accidentally; it happens only by purpose.

So it is okay if they don't look like you, don't sound like you, don't run as fast as you, if they come from a different part of the world, or are further along in their Christian journey, or they are just getting started on their Christian journey. It is okay whether they went to college or didn't go to college. It is okay whether they live on this side of the Interstate or on the other side of the Interstate. It is okay whether they took a bus here today or they drove a Mercedes here. All of that is okay because when we work together with intentionality glorifying God on His keyboard, the music that will come out of it will change the world. (Applause.) And that is what we are here to do. *'But I liked it better when we played it one finger at a time.'* Peter looked at them and said, *'Guys, God is doing something bigger here than The Party of the Circumcision.'* We have to trust and we have to live in it joyfully.

Here are my questions as we close. Number one - am I guilty of resisting the change that the gospel has created in me, or around me? What are the bricks that I am wanting to put back in place in my life so I feel just a little more comfortable? We need to realize that God may want us to level that wall, bulldoze it, dump truck it away, and build a new palace. When He builds it for us He is building it for Himself because He lives in us. And how beautiful it is, the Bible says, for brothers to walk in peace. How beautiful it is for us to fulfill the Great Commission. How beautiful are the feet of those who share the gospel of peace. And so when we let God walk in us, live in us, and work through us we are creating beauty.

Number two - am I helping others with the debris cleanup in their lives with patience by leading, learning and leaning into them instead of running from them? You and I are broken. There are things in your life you don't want me to know and there are things in my life I don't want you to know. But God's grace is real and it will forgive us. There is healing and I don't care what sin is in your past, what addiction is in your present, or what heartbreak is in your future, understand that when God makes you family it is forever. So let's learn through it, lean into it, don't leave, don't lock people out,

DEMOLISHING WALLS CREATE DEBRIS
ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US
Dan Burrell

don't criticize, don't reject and don't build any more walls. Let's help clean up those debris fields by loving people to truth.

The last question is this - am I committed to unity as a value treasured by God and enabled by the Holy Spirit? Am I committed to unity as a value that is treasured by God? He said it is a beautiful thing when brothers walk in peace. Then enabled by the Holy Spirit as that is the only way it is going to happen because we are selfish. But when we are living for the Holy Spirit and not ourselves we are generous. And God wants in us a spirit of Christlikeness that sees people where they are and loves them to where they need to be. And in doing so we will be patient with each other, longsuffering with each other and joining each other on this journey that will culminate in that day when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is Lord.

That is when all the vestiges of our sinful nature are wiped away once for all, when the palace of our lives has been completed and we will dwell in His presence forever. That is when the pains of this earth will fade away into memory, and the hope of life everlasting with God who loved us enough to create us and redeem us stretches out in front of us. We need to build the palace and not the wall.

As we close I ask you to consider this - what is it that God would have you to know or do, act upon or change, repent of or add to your life, as a result of the testimony of Scripture this morning and the work of the Holy Spirit in your life and your heart? If you don't know you are a Christ follower, but today you realize the Holy Spirit is calling you to be a part of God's family, I will be standing right over there during this next song and I invite you to come over and talk to me. Someone will show you from the Bible what it means to be a follower of Christ. That can be you.

Or if you don't want to come up front, you can slip out those doors and go to the right where there is a prayer room. Someone will meet you there and you can tell them that you want to follow Christ, or you have tough questions that you need answers to. Maybe you have had a bad week, something is going on in your life and you just want to pray with someone. I was glad to pray with some this morning, and I would love to pray with you as well, or you can go to the prayer room if you prefer.

Maybe you would like to know how to become part of this church, or when the next Life Quest is, or how to become part of a small group, or how to feel connected here. If so, there is a Next Step Station right outside the doors. You can go there now, or you can wait until after we dismiss to talk to someone who will be glad to help you join arms with others who love Christ and follow Him to where He wants you to go.

DEMOLISHING WALLS CREATE DEBRIS
ORIGINS SERIES PART 3 - IT'S NOT ABOUT US
Dan Burrell

Whatever we do as we sing these last songs, let's ask God what it is He wants us to know, do, change, learn, or grow from this morning. Let's stand as we pray.

Father, we love you, we love your Word, we love you, Father, for your patience with us. Thank you for tearing down the walls that stood between us and you. Thank you, Father, for regularly showing us where we keep building those walls back. Father, in my own life I pray that you would show me the debris that keeps me from being all that you want me to be, and reaching those you would have me to reach. And Father, I pray for this church that we would be so singularly minded on doing what you would want us to do, and obeying your word, that the debris fields that often come with human existence, that those things that are traditions, that are priorities, that are agenda items on our lists, would fade away into nothingness as we just pursue the Great Commission, and the Great Commandment, sharing the gospel wherever we go and loving you first, most, and best, and loving others like we love ourselves. For we ask this in Christ's name. Amen.

The preceding transcript was completed using raw audio recordings. As much as possible, it includes the actual words of the message with minor grammatical changes and editorial clarifications to provide context. Hebrew and Greek words are spelled using Google Translator and the actual spelling may be different in some cases.