

Preparatory Service at the Church of the Great Commission  
Camp Springs, Maryland, February 1999  
**Bishop Perrin's Opening Sermon**

Once again, as we begin this service, we want to acknowledge President Kérékou, president of Benin, and his wife, and those that are here with him from Africa, and the ambassador of Benin. Would you stand and join with me in honoring their presence among us.

If you would pull out your Bibles and let us look at the book of Ephesians 2:11-18. For those of you who may not be aware of it, the country of Benin is a French-speaking country, so therefore this morning I am very pleased to have our brother Israel King to be able to translate the message.

In Ephesians the second chapter, beginning at verse 11, it reads as follows: "Therefore remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called uncircumcised by those who call themselves the circumcision—that done in the body by the hands of men—remember that at that time you were separated from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel, and foreigners to the covenant of promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near through 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 His 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."

Today as we get ready to take communion, there's going to be a table set, and that table is the great equalizer. It represents the place where all of us have one thing in common: that we have been sinners saved by grace.

I want to illustrate this message this morning by using two of our members. In the last part of that verse, He says that through the cross, God was able to minister to those who were near and to those that were far away. When he speaks about those that are near, he's speaking about the Jews, so I'm going to ask my brother [name] to come and represent the Jews. The Jews did not associate with Gentiles. They didn't eat with Gentiles, they didn't have any fellowship with Gentiles. I'm going to ask our sister [name] to come and represent the Gentiles.

There was a rift, there was a wall that existed between Jews and Gentiles. In fact, *he* [points to man representing the Jews] had an attitude. It was an attitude of disdain. Jews were proud because they were the chosen people and they were given the Law, and the law had become a middle invisible barrier between them and Gentiles.

In our own lives there are barriers, walls. Sometimes they're invisible, but they're there. In America, we have whites and we have blacks, and there is a wall that needs to be torn down. In America we have Hispanics, blacks, whites, and we're constantly building walls. In America, we have educated and the non-educated, the literate and the illiterate, and it becomes a wall that's

between us. I grew up in Cleveland. Some of the other people are from Cleveland. If you lived in Cleveland, there's a river that runs right through Cleveland, it's called the Cayahoga River. On one side of that river, white people live. On the other side of that river, black people live, and it's a wall, a boundary, a barrier. As a child, I understood that there was a great separation—schools, people—and there was an attitude.

Jesus said, "I am coming into the earth to destroy this middle wall, to destroy this hostility"—cliques that all of us naturally seem to form.

When I went to Africa, I thought that because everybody's skin color was one color, that we would be able to love and to receive each other, but when I got to Africa, I discovered that one tribe is against another tribe. The Yoruba people don't necessarily like the Ibo people, and the Ibo the Fon; and there is a wall, another wall, and everywhere you go there's a wall.

But Jesus said, "I have come to destroy the wall. I have come to abolish in my flesh the wall that separates." So what he did: he fulfilled the law [ . . . ] so that the Jews would no longer have to feel an obligation; to make the law inoperative, so that everybody could come through one door: grace, grace, amazing grace, *amazing grace* that makes Nancy Coen my sister; amazing grace that makes sister Mays my sister; amazing grace that makes the President of Benin my papa; amazing grace, grace that makes us all one family.

So in his flesh, he abolished the law with all its commandments and regulations, and therefore [unclear] to the Gentiles that opportunity to become a part of him and the Jew to become a part of him, and they became one new man. In Christ, and in the cross of Christ, they were both joined. In his flesh, he took the affliction, he took the hostility, and bound them together in one new man. So now in Christ, there's no longer male, and there's no longer female; there's only Christ; there's only our Lord; there's only our Savior, and we look to him and we're free, we're *free*, WE'RE FREE. Stand on your feet and let's give him an offering. [People stand and applaud.]