

“TEARING DOWN THE WALLS...”
by Rom A. Pegram (2/11/18)

Sometimes in life, walls are a good thing. But, at other times, they are not. They are those things that hold us back from where God wants us to go. We’re going to touch on a couple of those walls today, as we conclude this series—Wired for Worship. Listen now to our scripture lesson for today (1 John 4:7-21, NLT):

“Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. ⁸ But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹ God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. ¹⁰ This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

¹¹ Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. ¹² No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us. ¹³ And God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us. ¹⁴ Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ All who confess that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God. ¹⁶ We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.

¹⁷ And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. So we will not be afraid on the day of judgment, but we can face him with confidence because we live like Jesus here in this world. ¹⁸ Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love. ¹⁹ We love each other because he loved us first. ²⁰ If someone says, “I love God,” but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is a liar; for if we don’t love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see? ²¹ And he has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their Christian brothers and sisters.”

Folks, in order to be that Holy Temple that God desires to build us into, we need to **LOVE UNCONDITIONALLY!** The kind of love that God wants to see in his Church (as a Holy Temple) is a self-sacrificial love!

One time, there was a worship leader of a particular church who was attending a worship seminar. The seminar leader, in order to illustrate a particular point, told the story of a husband who had left his wife. What he noticed, as he told the story, was that this worship leader who was in attendance began to cry in the midst of that story...

During a break, he went to this worship leader and asked the woman about her tears. She explained to him that awhile back her husband had left her. Not only had he left her, but the woman he left her for was her cousin and the youth leader at her church!

The worship leader and her husband had married early in life, and he had become nearly everything to her. When he left, she was devastated. She was so badly wounded that there were times where she didn't show up for musical rehearsals. There were even a couple of times where she was absent on Sunday mornings—when she was scheduled to lead the music.

The same church had an administrator for their worship ministry (this, of course, freeing the worship leader to do what she did best and not be bothered with the details of organization). During the worship leader's crisis, the administrator approached the other members of the worship team with a choice: "We can either ask her to leave the team and totally devastate her life, or we can help her through this. Which one would you like to do?" They chose to help her through this time...

So, when she did not show up for rehearsals, they continued without her. On the occasional Sunday morning when she was scheduled to lead worship but failed to show, the administrator challenged the worship team with this: "Okay folks, who's going to lead this morning?" In the midst of all of this, they covered so well for her that—although the congregation was aware of her situation, they were completely oblivious to the depth of her struggle.

After some time, the worship leader finally began to pull her life back together. When she did, she went back to the worship team and thanked them. "You'll never know what you did for me," she said. "You loved me when I was so unlovable. You helped me through the toughest time of my entire life. Thank you!"

Folks, here in this church—within the life of this Body of Christ—we need this kind of honest caring for one another! As his Body, we need to be demonstrating the kind of *unconditional love* that Jesus spoke of and modeled for us ... if we want to be that Holy Temple that God so desires!

Once again, the Apostle John (1 John 4:7-8, NLT) urges us, as the Body of Christ, in this way: "Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. ⁸ But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love." What a statement! If we don't love, we don't know God! It could also be stated in this way: "You cannot claim to know God and refuse to love others!" Pretty clear, isn't it? That being said let me also make this comment...

One of the most damaging actions to any relationship, including relationships in the Church, is withholding love. Whether it's...

- A spouse withholding love from their partner...
- A parent withholding love from a child (especially a father withholding love from a daughter can have a lifelong affect on their daughter's relationships)...
- A child withholding love from their aged parents...

- A brother or sister in Christ withholding love from another brother or sister in Christ...

It's all devastating to life itself—life with one another... I have to mention, however, that the opposite has positive affects; people have held on through tough situations in life *because they knew that someone loved them* (i.e. soldiers away from home, miners trapped in life-threatening situations, earthquake survivors, etc.)! We must love as Christ has loved us—*unconditionally*! That's one wall that has to come down; here's another...

FORGIVE AS THE LORD FORGAVE YOU! An important KEY to walking together as brothers & sisters in Christ—and thereby becoming a worshiping temple—is *forgiveness*! And, folks, that is a choice: *We have to choose to forgive!* It's an attitude that *we* choose—that *we* decide...

All too often, we in the church act like the unforgiving servant in Jesus' parable from Matthew 18:23-35. Do you remember that story? In this parable, Jesus told the story about a man who had been forgiven a humongous debt, when he ran into a man who owed him a minor debt. Instead of offering forgiveness, as he had recently been shown, the first servant had his fellow servant thrown into debtor's prison.

When we look at this parable, sometimes we find it difficult to even comprehend how someone could be that insensitive. We can't even begin to conceive of ourselves doing anything so harsh, if we were in a similar situation. How could anyone do that? How could they receive incredible compassion from someone they owed, just to turn around and do exactly the opposite (no compassion) with a fellow servant?

Yet, nearly every Christian acts out this scenario from time to time. We've received the most amazing pardon ever! We were completely guilty (and we continue to be guilty, I might add)! We did not deserve mercy! What we deserve is the full force of God's wrath ... but that's not what we get!

Instead, because of Jesus' sacrificial love, ending up in his death and resurrection, we get ... MERCY! So, how can we—who've been forgiven beyond our imaginations—turn around and refuse to forgive others? Ridiculous, isn't it? Incomprehensible! Yet, those in the Church tend to do this on a pretty regular basis...

We can *choose* to forgive ... or *refuse* to forgive; it's a choice and *we own it*... And let me remind you that forgiveness is serious business, for each one of us as a disciple of Jesus Christ, for he told us (Matt. 6:14-15, NLT): "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins." Our actions with one another truly do affect our relationship with God ... and our ability to worship! This is another wall that needs to be torn down, if we're to be that Holy Worshiping Temple that God is building us to be...

Here's the bottom line today, as we're 'wired for worship' God's way: Our attitude should be one of a deep desire to be an answer to Jesus' prayer! What? You know ... THE REAL LORD'S PRAYER (John 17:11, 21-23, NLT) ... where Jesus prays for us:

¹¹ Now I am departing from the world; they are staying in this world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father, you have given me your name; now protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are./²¹ I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. ²² I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. ²³ I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.”

Is that our prayer today? The Lord wants to build us into a *Holy Worshiping Temple*. We can fight against Him or we can willingly cooperate. Which will we choose?

Please do not let disunity hinder the worship of God in this place!

- Recognize the necessity for unity...
- Foster a sense of community...
- Love one another...
- Forgive one another...

Let the Lord form you—collectively—into a *Holy Worshiping Temple*!