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THE CASTLE AND THE WALL

One of the old and magnificent ruined castles of Ireland came to a strange end. It was the ancient home of the Castlereagh family, one of the most princely residences on the Emerald Isle. But the ancient home fell into decay and was no longer inhabited.

The usual happened. When the peasants wanted to repair a road, build a chimney, or pig-sty they would scavenge stone from the fine old castle. The stones were already craftily cut, finished and fit. Best of all, they were available without digging and carrying for miles.

One day Lord Londonderry visited his castle. He was the surviving descendant and heir. When he saw the state of his ancestral home, he determined to end immediately the robbery of the building for its stones. The ruin itself reflected the earlier glories of his family and was one of the treasures of Ireland. He sent for his agent and gave orders for the castle to be enclosed with a wall six feet tall and well coped. This would keep out the trespassers. He went on his way.

Three or four years later he returned. To his astonishment the castle was gone, completely disappeared, vanished into the air. In its place there was a huge wall enclosing nothing. He sent for his agent and demanded to know why his orders had not been carried out. The agent insisted they had been. "But where is the castle?" asked the Lord. "The castle, is it? I built the wall with it, my Lord! Is it for me to be going miles for materials with the finest stones in Ireland are beside me?" Lord Londonderry had his wall - but the castle, without which the wall meant nothing, had disappeared.

This approaches to being a parable of the Southern Baptist Convention this June noonday in the Alamo City. It is high noon, in more ways than one. Many of us felt for years that a wall of orthodoxy had to be built to protect the convention castle. We grew up in the convention castle. We did not want to see the castle scavenged and savaged by the predatory peasants of theological liberalism. We saw in our own cities the raped ruins of other denominational castles, lifeless, empty, shells of what they had been. We saw the predatory peasants who had demolished other denominations approaching our castle and we said in the majority, "We will not have it. We will build a wall." So we have built a protective wall around the convention castle.

But in continuing to build the wall, we must ask if there will be a castle when we are finished. If we do not take care, we will be in the ridiculous position of Lord Londonderry - we will have built a great wall, but there will be no castle. Is it possible to have both the wall and the castle? Yes, but only if we stop savaging the castle by attacks of personal animosity. Can we have both the wall and the castle? Yes. But only if we totally abstain from the malice murdering our mission. We can survive years of theological debate and investigation. But we cannot survive many more months of the malignant malice maligning

our mission. We can have the wall and the castle when we turn from personal animosity and toward kind, tender-hearted forgiveness.

I. WE CAN BUILD THE WALL AND KEEP THE CASTLE IF THERE IS A CONSECRATION OF OUR CONVERSATION (Eph. 4:29).

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."

The apostle writes of the consecration of our conversation that we should not grieve the personal Spirit of God. There is a prohibition. In the Authorized Version it is stated, "Let no corrupt communication come out of your mouth." Then there is an admission: "[let that out of your mouth] which is good to the use of edifying."

Note the absolute prohibition: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth." The word "corrupt" obviously embraces vulgar or profane speech. But we Baptists cannot therefore be comfortable. For the term itself refers to any word that is diseased or disgusting, worn or worthless, rotten or scurrilous. When such a word is conceived in your mind and would be born on your tongue do not let it out. It may try to triumph over you tongue - do not let it out. It may cry for release - do not let it out. It may try to ram its way through your teeth and your lips - do not let it out.

George Adam Smith the biblical scholar noted, "The lips are, as it were, the blossom of a man. It is in the blossom of a plant that the defects become conspicuous. It is when all of a man's faculties combine for the delicate office of expression in speech that any fault which is in him will come to the surface."

Can you think with me over the decade of our controversy of some of the words that have been spoken. I do not have to repeat them. They have become watchwords, battle cries, slogans, flashpoints, hot spots. There are individual words, phrases, and sentences that have erupted like volcanoes. They have taken on a life of their own. Some of these words divided us. Many of them have goaded and galvanized us. These words have chained us and stained us. They have forged us together or forced us apart. Some of these words have polluted us and adulterated us. Some of these words have been spoken from the platform. At other times we have been wrapped around with rotten reams of words on paper. In this controversy these words have not altogether come from one camp, they have been bilateral, not unilateral. They have taken upon themselves a life of their own. If we do not immediately watch our words, we are going to build the wall and tear down the castle.

In earlier years the Australian House of government revised its House Behavior Code. The revision stated that members may no longer refer to one another as "asinine, blood-drinker, cad, cur, gasbag, ignoramus, lap dog, mendacious mongrel, miserable body snatcher, rat, sewer rat, and slimy reptile." If a secular

assembly recognizes the need to temper personal attack, how much more a sacred assembly. No one can deny that the heat of personal rhetoric escalates in religious combat. There is an abundance of historical evidence. The pastor nicknamed "the Texas Tornado" once called Southwestern President L.R. Scarborough the greatest Christian then alive. Later he called him a "low-down flop-eared suck-egg dog." After years of such abuse, the second President of Southwestern finally compared the pastor to a bank robber, highwayman, bootlegger or other murderer. The cause of Christ was not helped by either comment. All the while it stood written, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth." In a religious war of words personal animosity always only escalates unless we say, "No more." I am not insinuating that many have used such scurrilous words in the present debate, but we are far on the way. If we do not stop now, we will build a wall and tear down the castle.

But the negative prohibition is balanced by a positive admonition: "but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." Our words must be spoken with a view to building up others, not tearing down others. Our every word is to be useful, suitable, serviceable for edification. The very text suggests that there is a gap, a need, an empty space in my brother's life. My words are to fill up that need solidly, surely, and constructively. If there is a hollow place in his life, I am not to hound him, heckle him, hack him with my words. I am to dignify him, not destroy him, build him not belittle him, edify him, not crucify him. We are to speak to one another in such a way that our language ministers grace. Our words are vehicles of the very grace of God. God's grace should clothe our words, adorn our language, cling to our conversation. Our very mouths ought to be fountains flowing with divine grace.

What most frustrates our witness and retards our testimony in the world? What is the largest impediment to power in our communities? What blocks the flow of the power of God in our assemblies? Is it apostacy that most hurts us? Is it the scandal of fallen figures in the church that most hurts us? If you were to weigh the hurt to our cause by scandal and apostacy on the one hand and the hurt to our cause by our own words on the other - what hurts us most? Is it not the sullenness, the half-veiled resentment, the icy fridigity, the ominous reticence, the smoldering bitterness that erupts in our words about one another?

There is someone listening to me just now thinking, "This idealistic young man does not understand. The end justifies the means. I am justified in saying anything I desire to protect my institution against the fundamentalists." Or someone is saying to himself, "Truth must triumph. Anything I say is justified to build a wall of orthodoxy around the Southern Baptist Castle." Would you recognize that the words of Paul are not qualified. He did not say, "These things are true unless you are a major combatant in a denominational debate." He did not say, "These things are true unless you are stung into fury by your opponent." He said without qualification, "Let no, no, no

corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth."

II. WE CAN BUILD THE WALL AND KEEP THE CASTLE IF THERE IS A
ABSTINENCE FROM SOME ATTITUDES (4:31)

"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice."

This text calls for total abstinence of attitude. We Baptists call for abstinence at the point of some beverages. The word of God equally calls for a total abstinence of attitude. The six attitudes and acclamations of this text move from the hidden state of a bitter heart to a public disgrace caused by angry words. The mandate of scripture is categorical - get rid of all of them. The imperative of the inerrant scripture is absolute - be gone with them. Be gone with them - not just in the world but in the church; not just in the church but in the denominational gathering; not just in the denominational gathering but in the Baptist debate.

Get rid of bitterness. The very word signifies the attitude which cherishes resentful feelings. Aristotle called it the attitude which is unwilling to be reconciled. It is a harshness and spitefulness which frets and sours. But Paul amplifies this with the significant word "all bitterness." We must abstain from all of it comprehensively and from every form of it individually. Bitterness begins in the mind. Slay it there. Never let it become an attitude, no less an action.

The great southern gentleman General Robert E. Lee said of the North: "I have never cherished bitter or vindictive feelings against them, nor seen the day when I did not pray for them." Do you suppose that in San Antonio we could all rise to the ethical level of a Civil War General? Who could argue that we are not more bitter toward one another than we are those outside the church and the Kingdom of God. Why is this so? Is it not because the offenses of our fellow Christians disappoint us and surprise and sting us more than those of the world?

Bitterness is deadly to the spirit. After we have conquered more carnal capacities, we can still be incapacitated by bitterness. After some volcanoes are extinct, poisonous gases still hover around cracks and crevices at their mouth. After the grosser vices of the flesh are extinguished, still the noxious fumes of bitterness can poison us forever.

Bitterness erupts into what Paul calls rage and anger. Rage is that explosive burst of fury which strikes like lightning. It is an emotional earthquake. Rage is a damburst of anger that floods all around us. There is a progression in v. 31. Bitterness explodes in rage. Rage when cherished becomes wrath, that smoldering disposition that burns in the incendiary center of life. No one may see it, but it burns [Lake Powell story].

This attitude then becomes a spoken acclamation: brawling and slander. The phrase signifies an outcry of passion. You find it

mentioned in Acts 23:9. During Paul's appearance before the Sanhedrin he proclaimed that he was prisoner because of belief in the resurrection. You will recall that this disrupted the entire hearing because the Pharisees believed in the resurrection and the Sadducees did not. So there was a great uproar. The very word is the characteristic of a mob or assembly which covers up the lack of sober argument by its very loudness. There is an old saying in law. If you have the facts on your side, argue the fact. If you have the law on your side, argue the law. If you do not have the facts or the law on your side, attack the witness. Southern Baptists should mark well those who talk about substantive issues as over against those who savage other brothers and sisters in Christ. We can survive years of theological debate; we cannot survive many more months of such personal animosity.

At the end of verse 31 is the godless gangleader of these six attitudes - malice. If you tied together all of these ugly, malignant attitudes you would have malice. Malice is the attitude of active ill will, it is the desire to hurt by retaliation. When Paul wrote Titus a vivid description of the life of the lost he said, "At one time we were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another" (3:3). That was a description of the pagan Graeco-Roman empire. If someone stumbled on that verse in a San Antonio paper, would they say it is a description of us?

Malice is a craziness in our convention that will tear down the castle. The word crazy comes from the French "ecraze" which means that which is split up, shattered, broken. One girl quit a university sorority. When asked why, she said, "I am sick of calling people sister who so hate and envy one another." Malice is an individual matter in the individual heart. Factions, ideologies, institutions, partisan parties do not have malice. Individual hearts are malicious. Inerrancy or non-inerrancy are not malicious. People are malicious. One pundit said of Ireland, "It's too bad that all Irishmen are not atheists; then they could live together as Christians."

Edwin Markham was swindled of his life savings. At age 60 he was broke. He began to lecture on poetry and remade a fortune. But his activity on the lecture circuit prevented his creativity in writing. When the first wave of resentment swept in on his soul he cried to himself, "No! I shall not let you in. There shall be no hatred in my heart. Love will outwatch the stars." Some of us have had that happen to us which could cause a explosion of resentment. Stop it, slay it, crucify it, end it. If you do not stop it, malice will place a film over your eyes so that you cannot see God, wax in your ears so that you cannot hear God, and encrust your heart with folds of insensibility so that you cannot feel God.

The Roman Catholic Church practices the process of canonization. In that process individuals are formally named saints of the church. The process involves an elaborate trial. In that hearing there is one man who is called "The Promoter of

the Faith." Actually, he is nicknamed the Devil's Advocate. He is formally set aside by the entire church to watchdog the procedures of the meeting and to criticize the candidate for sainthood. In the proceedings he attacks, criticizes, and uses the evidence at hand to undermine the candidacy of the proposed saint. We do not believe in that process. But at least they have recognized that everybody cannot be the Devil's Advocate. Everybody cannot snipe at everybody else in their convocation. There may be room among us for one or two devil's advocates, but there is not room for 35,000 of us no less an entire denomination to embrace that role. If we do, we will build the wall but tear down the castle.

III. WE CAN BUILD THE WALL AND KEEP THE CASTLE IF WE IMITATE GOD.

"And be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

There is a way to build the wall and keep the castle. It is by imitating the God in whose name we are meeting. The word reads, "Be ever more kind to one another." The name for our Lord in the New Testament is Christos. The word for kindness is chrestos. This is no accident. Those who imitate Christos are chrestos. Our Lord mandated, "Love your enemies...and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked" (Lk. 6:36). We repent because of God's kindness: "Do you not know that it is the kindness of God that leads you to repentance?" (Rom. 2:4). When we imitate God we are kind. Instead of being less and less so we are to be more and more so. Redwoods leave a record of their growth each year by successive rings. The nautilus leaves a record of growth by new chambers in its shell. We are to leave a record of Christian growth in kindness, not in malice.

About the strongest thing most Baptist pastors say is, "Goodness gracious." Perhaps we should ask the question, "Is your goodness gracious?" We not only need goodness, we need gracious goodness. Alice Freeman Palmer, a President of Wellesley College, spoke of working with Christians that were "kind but cold. There was no intentional freezing, but an absence of the sunshine that melts away." What a tragedy it is that men who believe the same thing exactly now meet one another with a guarded look, a forced smile, a limp handshake and an only half-concealed contempt. God only knows what the unkindness of this controversy has done. Do you not know that the principle leaders of this controversy have wives, children, parents, families. I have seen good men become tired, drawn, haggard, and completely change their personalities across this decade. Precious brothers and sisters, we are not called to be as kind as necessary. We are called to be kinder than necessary.

Could we not in the midst of this say, "We will again seek to be kind to one another?" One pastor wrote twenty friends at random the same identical note: "Just to let you know I am thinking of you in your difficult situation...." More than half of them wrote back, "How did you know...I did not think anybody

cared." We can build the wall and have the castle if we are kind.

We can build the wall and have the castle if our hearts are tender. This is a sweet sensitivity that desires not to hurt one another. Bitterness and malice desire to hurt, to wound, retaliate, to give retribution. The call of the hour is for a tender heart. Controversy invariably ossifies, petrifies, and encrusts our hearts. Scientists have a comparative scale of hardness: talc is 1, fingernail is 2, window glass is 5, and a diamond is 10. It is a comparative scale of hardness. What of your heart toward your brother and sister? If there were a spiritual scale of hardness, where would your heart be this June noonday? We can build the wall and keep the castle if we let God tenderize our hearts.

But most of all, we can build the wall and keep the castle if we return to forgiveness in the body. The call of Ephesians 4:31 is that we forgive one another. This is not a word about things outside the church. This is a word about things inside the church - forgiving one another. One of the most neglected sayings of the Lord in our climate is Matthew 6:14-15, "If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." This also includes denominational sins, sins committed in ecclesiastical battles. I have been told the same identical thing by a partisan on both sides of our dispute. Their words have been identical: "I have a long memory." When you stand before almighty God, the One from whom no secrets are hid, to whom all things are known, before whom all things are open, in the presence of His august Majesty, in the whitest light, do you wish Him to look down at you from the cosmic throne of the universe and say, "I have a long memory?" You want Him to say Psalm 103, that your sins are as far as east is from west. You want Him to say Isaiah 44, that He has blotted them out. You want Him to say Micah 7, that He has buried them in the depths of the deepest sea. You do not want Him to say, "I have a long memory."

Is it a categorical necessity that we learn nothing from history? In vibrant and vital days of Methodism when it was a firey force for evangelism, John Wesley ruled with some simple rules. If you had something against your brother, you said nothing about it until you went to that brother. In Wesley's Journal there is an entry for a Monday in 1787. Fourteen persons were read out of a Methodist meeting because of a dispute. Wesley reinstated them requiring only one condition of the contenders on both sides, to say not one word of anything that was past. Would we really be worse off if someone could turn us all out of this assembly and readmit us on one condition: that we say nothing of that which is past? Is it really necessary that we lick every wound, retaliate for every hurt, settle the score for every slight?

How unlike God most of us are. We more easily identify with a sweet, gentle Irish lady who spoke of going to confession, and a

friend said, "Surely, Brigit, you have no sins to confess." "Ah, yes. I had to confess using a strong word when I couldn't get the ice cube tray out of the refrigerator. And I also confessed my anger was so intense that I chased by mother-in-law out of the kitchen with a broom."

"But that happened last year. Surely you've been to confession since then!" With a shy smile, Brigit responded, "I have, indeed; but I confess it every time. I do so love to remember it." Is that not our problem? We do so love to remember it!

It is a long way from San Antonio in 1988 to Marburg in Germany, October, 1529. Martin Luther the German Reformer and Ulrich Zwingli the Swiss Reformer stood face to face. They had been in a written war of words concerning the Lord's supper. Luther held that the real corporeal presence of Christ was in the elements, like fire in iron. Zwingli held a symbolic view like that of Baptists. They had exchanged increasingly hateful words in a series of written disputes. Finally, they met face to face at the Marburg Colloquy. Both were forty-six years old. Luther wrote on the table the words, "This is my body." He refused to budge an inch from his view of the real presence of Christ in the elements. Zwingli would not budge an inch from his Baptist view of a symbolic Lord's Supper.

On a Monday the two reformers met for the last time on earth. With tears in his eyes, Zwingli approached Luther, and held out the hand of brotherhood - not the hand of compromise. But Luther declined it and said, "I am astonished that you wish to consider me your brother." And then the Germans said, "You do not belong to the communion of the Christian Church. We cannot acknowledge you as brethren." There were many great moments in Luther's life, but he is a lesser man because of that moment. I can still picture that great expository preacher Ulrich Zwingli holding his hand out to Luther with whom he agreed on everything essential, a hand never taken and never shaken.

I cannot speak for every person here this noonday, but I can speak for many. I hold out my hand to you Brother Adrian, Winfred, Jerry, Richard - will it be untaken and unshaken. We can build the wall and keep the castle if we will bury personal animosity now!