

Ephesians 2:13-22 *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. ¹⁹Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²²And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

Pictures of Peace

1. Walls Separate
2. Jesus tears down the walls

Have you been to a family reunion lately? Some families, like my brother's, get together every year. Some families only once in a while, if ever. We used to have Frey family reunions. My dad was one of eleven brothers and sisters and with such a large family, Frey family reunions were quite large. There were cousins from all parts of the country there that I didn't know. But many of us were together because of our common connection: We are Frey's. Now, what's one thing that you must do at a family reunion? You have to get a picture. You cram all these people together and try to get a shot where you can see everybody. You do that because you want to try to remember who was there.

Last week, Pastor Holtz told us that as we study Ephesians this summer, we are seeing different snap shots of the Christian life. Last week we saw that we are adopted. According to the eternal plan of God, he worked out our adoption in Christ and made us part of his family. Today, we see the picture of the whole family. We see it is a picture of peace.

In our study of Ephesians, we are skipping a few pictures in the photo album. Paul opened the second chapter with this picture: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins." (Ephesians 2:1) That's not a pretty picture. Can you see it? Can you see yourself as a tangled mess of flesh and bone under a collapsed apartment building? Can you see yourself as an aborted baby in a pan? Can you see yourself lying in a coffin, stiff and unnatural? That is the picture Paul is painting of us.

That's the only picture we are left with when we look at God's law. Those commandments show our selfishness, self-centeredness, greed, lust and unholy desires. They show that we are dead inside. So dead that Paul concluded, "you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world." (Ephesians 2:12)

The law of God stood as a wall, excluding us from hope and from each other. At the Temple in Jerusalem where the Jews worshiped God, there were several courtyards. Right around the Temple was the courtyard of the priests, outside of that the courtyard of the men, then the courtyard of the women and at the very outside was the courtyard of the Gentiles. Between the courtyard of the Gentiles and the others there was a wall and on the wall signs that threatened death to any Gentile that went beyond that wall.

That's a pretty good picture of what God's law did. God designed the law to make Israel different from other nations, that is, the Gentiles. The law with its rules about circumcision, resting on the Sabbath, only eating kosher foods and others made the Gentiles feel separate. It also made the Israelites think they were better than the Gentiles. It became a wall that separated Israel from everybody else.

What the Jews refused to see is that law was also putting up a wall between them and God, between all people and God. It's not so much the law, though. It's sin against God's law that separates us from God and from each other. Think of how sin separated Adam and Eve from God. They had perfect fellowship with God in the garden, but after they ate the fruit, we are told that Adam and Eve hid from God.

Sin separates us from God and from each other. When we think that we are better than the mother struggling to keep her child quiet in church, when we compare our volunteer efforts to others, when we exploit the mistakes of others so that we can look better, when we gossip about someone – we are building walls that separate us. When we carry bigotry and prejudice in our hearts, we are building walls that separate us.

In 1961, the communist East German government put up a barbed wire fence between communist East Berlin and the free West. That fence soon became a wall that trapped people in East Berlin. In 1987, President Ronald Reagan stood before the Brandenburg Gate and gave a speech in which he said, *"As long as this gate is closed, as long as this scar of a wall is permitted to stand, it is not the German question alone that remains open, but the question of freedom for all mankind. . . .General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization, come here to this gate. Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!"* (Quoted in archives.gov)

That is what Jesus came to do. *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.* ¹⁴ *For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,* ¹⁵ *by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace,* ¹⁶ *and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.* He said he is reconciling us to God.

Husbands and wives may sometimes have a hard time getting along. But sometimes, they make up and get along. We say they are reconciled. That is what God has done for us. We were dead. But there is another picture that we skipped. Earlier in this chapter Paul proclaimed, *"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved."* (Ephesians 2:4,5) We were dead. In Christ, we have a new picture. We are not dead, but alive in Christ.

We were also separate from God, but now God reconciled us. How? Through the blood of Christ. Jesus brought about reconciliation by suffering separation from his Father for us. Now reconciled with God, the way has been cleared for us to be reconciled to each other. *For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.*

The result is that we now have a picture of peace. *Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household,* ²⁰ *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.* The Gentiles and Jewish believers in Ephesus weren't supposed to keep a respectful distance from each other – the Jews worshipping at 8 am and the Gentiles at 9:30 am. The cross had brought them together like a big magnet attracting bits and pieces of scrap metal from all over the junk yard. Those believers were now not ugly scrap metal, but living stoned that God was using to build one temple in which the Holy Spirit would live. (Daniel Habben)

Back in 2003, Siamese twins, Laden and Laleh, were joined at the skull. They had individual brains but they shared the same skull. Doctors attempted to surgically separate the 29 year old twins, but they didn't survive. They were joined together so closely it couldn't be done.

Paul tells us that we are joined together like that in Jesus, wholly dependent on each other, brothers and sisters for eternity. And in Jesus we find the strength to build each other up until we become a marvelous mosaic that projects his loving face to a dying world. (Matthew Doebler)

Is that the picture people see when they look at St. Paul Lutheran Ministries? Do they see the picture of a family of believers bonded together in Christ, working together in love to bring him to a dying world? Or, do they see an assembly of spiteful squawkers who love to tear each other down behind the back?

And what about you? How do you see yourself? Are you someone who goes to church, or are you someone who is the church? There is a big difference. There are people who just go to church. They talk about attending. Once in a while they get their act together and show up. They hear the Word of God, and they find it somewhat interesting. Then they go home, and continue on in their lives. Nothing is different. Nothing has changed. Their lifestyles are the same.

Are you someone who just goes to church or are you someone who is the church? Are you a brick in the house of God? If so, you hear the Word of God on a regular basis. You pray regularly. You live your life guided by God's Word. You know that you are forgiven because of the blood of Jesus and so, you live your life forgiving others. You know that you are not in this alone but you have a whole family living and working together for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² *And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.* What a comfort those words ought to be for all of us. You might feel out of place because you are single or widowed, too young or too old, but with Jesus as your Savior, you are never out of place. You are part of his family, part of the temple in which the Holy Spirit lives.

It's quite a picture, isn't it? A picture of love and caring, a picture of peace.