

¹³ 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. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. ¹⁹ 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. ²¹ 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.

WHEN THE CHURCH IS AT HER BEST

Do you know about the Orphan Train? The Orphan Train Movement was a social welfare program that operated in the United States from 1854 to 1929. At its best the Orphan Train Movement took immigrant children who became orphans, living on the streets of New York in poverty, and moved them westward by train to families who would love them and care for them as their own. When the Orphan Train Movement was at its best that was how it worked. When the Orphan Train Movement was not at its best, the families saw these "train children", as they came to be called, more like unpaid laborers than as members of the family.

1. The members see themselves as one group through the cross.

The nation of Israel has her beginnings in the families of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And it was the Lord God who first made a distinction between the nation of Israel and all the other nations on earth, calling Israel, *"his treasured possession, chosen from all the peoples on the face of the earth"* (Dt 7:6). The difference between Israel and all the other nations was not just the way the Lord God looked at the nation of Israel, but the way Israel lived as God's chosen nation. All the ceremonial washings, sacrificial observances and other rules and regulations showed a clear distinction between the nation of Israel and all the other nations. And when the nation of Israel was at her best this Jewish way of life was a barrier of blessings. When the nation of Israel was at her best, the other nations would become envious of the good things going on in Israel and would want to cross the border into Israel. The Queen of Sheba was no stranger to Solomon. Na'aman the Syrian was no stranger to the prophet Elisha. Ruth the Moabite was no stranger to Naomi or to Boaz. When the nation of Israel was at her best foreigners would become like citizens of nation of Israel, supporting her with their gifts and their abilities. And in some cases, like the case of Ruth the Moabite, foreigners became members of an Israelite family and their Jewish way of life. When the nation of Israel was at her best, they saw themselves as one group and foreigners could become a part of their one group.

When the nation of Israel was less than their best, their barrier of blessings became a barrier of hostility, a barrier that could never be crossed because the Jews saw themselves as better than the Gentiles and that would never change. And when the nation of Israel was less than their best, there would be groups formed inside of Israel that saw themselves as better than others.

What about in our congregation at Grace and in the families that make up our congregation? Husbands and wives, do you see your marriage as one group or two groups? God has made you one flesh so how could there ever be the kind of hostility in a marriage where one sees himself as better than the other? And what about the members of the family and our congregation? There are any number of Grace groups within our Grace group, but why would any grouping ever see their group as better than another grouping? And why would we ever look at someone who is not a member of Grace or who is not a member of the holy Christian church as someone who could never join our group or if they did, they would have to be treated as lesser members of our congregation? Doesn't this separation all come down to our sinful desire to see ourselves better than other people, to erect barriers of our own making to make us feel good about ourselves and less good about others?

The law of circumcision didn't make the Jews better than anyone else. The law of circumcision made Jesus better than anyone else. The ways the Jews worshipped didn't make the Jews better than anyone else. The way Jesus worshipped made himself better than anyone else. The ceremonial washings and sacrificial observances didn't make the Jews better than anyone else. Jesus' baptism and one-for-all sacrifice made him better than anyone else. The Gentiles didn't have any of these Jewish practices like Jesus did. The Gentiles were on the wrong side of the wall of hostility, The Jews had these customs and practices, but they didn't fulfill all these customs and practices in the same way Jesus did. Like the Gentiles, the Jews were also on the wrong side of

the barrier of hostility. made the nation of Israel special was not their ceremonial washings and sacrificial observances. But Jesus destroyed this barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, as the Word of God says, *"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.*

Through the cross the Jews and the Gentiles were reconciled. Through the cross the Jews and the Gentiles were made one group, one body. Through the cross husbands and wives truly are one flesh. Through the cross, members of the family and members of the congregation are one body. And through the cross comes the unexpected truth, the church is for all people, that unbelievers, non-members would join and build together with us not because of the way we do things around here, but because for all of our groups we see ourselves as one through the cross.

2. The members are drawn closer and closer together in Christ.

And when the church is at her best the members are drawn closer and closer together in Christ. Listen to this result: "¹⁹ 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. ²¹ 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."

Foreigners...strangers...fellow citizens with God's people...also members of his household. Can you see these circles of trust get closer and closer and closer? Before we talk about how you can see these circles in your marriage and in your family and in your congregation, let's take a look at how we can see these circles in Christ? There is no one in all the world who is more different from us than Christ. Jesus didn't cross the border of Mexico to get to us. From heaven to earth Jesus came to live with us and to become one with us. His formal introduction was at his baptism. "This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased," is how Jesus was introduced to his cousin John and to us. Jesus knows us and through his teaching we get to know Jesus. As a citizen, Jesus carried out his civic duties as well as his family responsibility and his office as Messiah in the church. Like a loving parent, Jesus let the children come to him and did not hinder them. Living a loving sibling, Jesus told his sister Martha the honest truth, "Mary, has chosen what is better and it will not be taken from her" and brother Peter, "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times. Jesus followed the directions of his heavenly Father like a submissive wife and Jesus died for his spouse, the church, as part of his faithfulness to us. Jesus is so close to us, Jesus is the cornerstone of our building. Jesus fulfilled the words of the Old Testament prophets and the apostles witnessed to others everything they heard and saw in Jesus. These words, their witness is the foundation of our church. Jesus honored the faithful servants of the past and Jesus in faith had such hope in the future he prophesied his church would never perish and up to our generation it hasn't.

So, like the Canaanite women, seek the kingdom of God. Don't let the tests of Jesus or the frustrations of his disciples keep you from receiving your crumb of grace. You are welcome here. And don't be a stranger, you hear? No sliding in and sneaking out. If you truly need to click to be in church today, we love your comments. Accept responsibility. There are no taxes you have to pay to be in this church. Why would we want to put a cap on what you can give to the Lord? How you work and witness in the world and how you live and witness in your home is your most important church work. God bless you if you give the body of Christ here at Grace your time and talents free of charge. And God bless you if your brother points out your sin and you not only take the pointing out but thank him for it. The wounds of a friend, the Bible says, can be trusted. When the church is at its best the members are drawn closer and closer and closer, it can become difficult to make clear distinction between the church as the members and the church as the building.

Through the blood of Christ, God is building one, holy Christian and apostolic church, but it's here at Grace and in your home and wherever you are that this invisible church becomes visible for the next person to join us as one that's when the church at its best through the cross gets even better. Amen.