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FROM THE PULPIT

# Your choice is whether to build walls or bridges

By Brad Bryant  
FOR THE PANTAGRAPH

It around us are people who are "different" from us, even here in Central Illinois. They differ in countless ways: gender, age, race, language, habits, faith, height, weight, employment, clothing, tattoos, politics, etc.

Often, in our self-focused society, we take the attitude, "I am right, therefore 'they' are wrong." We judge others based on our internal standards and "programming" of what is right and wrong, whether true or not.

Sometimes, the behavior of the "other" person is contrary to what we believe and stand for. "They" make poor choices, "they" waste their money, "they" hang around with the "wrong group," "they" make too much noise at night, etc. But as Christians, people who have chosen to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ, we

are invited to rethink and repent of those "judging attitudes." We are called to a higher relationship with everyone.

We whine "but they are sinners!" And you're probably right. So are we! The Bible tells us that "All have sinned and fallen short" of the vision that God has for our life (Romans 3:23).

Sin is anything that separates us from the living God, who created us, loves us and calls us into relationship with him today. When we choose to judge others, we're actually building walls of separation.

That's the power of Jesus' sacrifice. Jesus paid the price for our sin, so that we are free to be forgiven, and again choose to be in God's presence. "Do not judge," we are told (Matthew 7:1-2). How much clearer can that instruction be? And it goes on: If we choose to judge others, we too will be judged. Instead of judging, Christ-

followers are called to learn and offer unconditional love, to seek out those things we have in common with people, and to build upon those. We are called to be part of open, honest dialog, exploring needs and understandings, and empowering God's diverse people to work together for the common good.

God still speaks today, and in modern-day revelation God has addressed this problem of people who choose to separate themselves from others: From the Book of Doctrine and Covenants, 162 (2004):

6a. From the earliest days you have been given a sacred principle that declares the inestimable worth of all persons. Do not forget. b. The One who created all humankind grieves at the shameful divisions within the human family. A prophetic people must work tirelessly to tear down walls of separation and to build bridges of understanding."

When we choose to "judge," we cause even more separation and division between "us" and "them." We add to the problem, rather than working with God to help "tear down" separating walls and build bridges. God values the worth of every person, and loves each unconditionally.

And in the midst of God's call for us to rebuild relationships and cooperation, both within and outside the church, God reminds us, in his 2007 message to the world, of his great love:

10a. Collectively and individually, you are loved with an everlasting love that delights in each faithful step taken. God yearns to draw you close so that wounds may be healed, emptiness filled and hope strengthened.

b. Do not turn away in pride, fear or guilt from the One who seeks only the best for you and your loved ones. Come before your Eternal Creator with

open minds and hearts and discover the blessings of the gospel anew. Be vulnerable to divine grace." Book of Doctrine and Covenants 163:10 (2007)

Every day we have the opportunity to choose to be "bridge builders" or "wall builders." God, your loving creator, invites you to build bridges, not just with those who are "the same as us," but with all persons, especially with the least, the last, the lost and the labeled.

Remember: God loves you unconditionally, and wants you to find him and choose to be with him.

Search until you find a church family that helps you meet the "living, loving God," who knows you personally and wants to be involved in your life every day!

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# Mendel called model for balancing science and religion

By Kathy Matheson  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHILADELPHIA — As a 19th-century Augustinian friar, Gregor Mendel was expected to pursue his groundbreak-



a 2007 speech in New York, he said that "the first page of the Bible is not a cosmological treatise about the coming to be of the world in six days." He also said that "the Catholic faith can accept" the possibility

discovery of day genetic Mendel's grew from the garden what is now His gl