

BORN TO MAKE US ONE

By Pastor Paulus Budiono

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Shalom,

Year by year, Christmas celebrations have been sparkling more than ever. A variety of ornaments, glitter and tinsel are up for grabs at the shopping malls orchestrated by a non-stop play of Christmas carols all day long. Quite many shopkeepers harvest cash on this yearly festive occasion by catering to Christian shoppers who take great delight in trimming Christmas trees at home and in the church alike. When the festivities are over, they store the glistening decorations away or just trash them somewhere and buy new ones the next time New Year rolls around. Christmas season is a world-wide event, but not many reflect on the real essence of Christmas itself. In reality, the celebration of Jesus' birth is unique of its kind in comparison to that of any birthday we commonly know. Ephesians 2: 17-18 say, "And he [Jesus] came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, so that through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father."

It is crystal clear that Jesus came into the world to proclaim peace both to those who are far off and those who are near. That way, through the same proclamation, the once opposing parties will have access in one Spirit to the Father.

Isn't the Triune God one inseparable unity? Likewise, we are supposed to be closer and closer to one another over time in order to be one. It is true that it is not that easy to establish unity although we ground it on the same Bible. Right after we throw even a fancy birthday party, for example, things go back to normal. How about after Christmas? In the post-Christmas period, our hearts should keep on glowing and bring us all closer to oneness.

Please note this: Since 1888, the world has been organizing various pageants such as Miss Beauty, Miss Tourism, Miss Health and the list goes on and on. In the meantime, the world first staged Miss Peace Pageant in 1968. Without a doubt, the beautiful, smart and peace-loving contestants were ready and longing to be crowned as Miss Peace.

However, what happened thereafter? Is there peace on the face of this planet Earth today? What is currently taking place in Jerusalem and Palestine? The long-time enmity between these two nations has been going on for ages. Yet, the issue has not been resolved and no peace has been achieved so far. The reality is that the situation has been gravely worsening lately. Western as well as Eastern countries have been matching strength to display their super advanced armaments. What for? To realize the long-desired peace that they have been campaigning at international platforms? The love-voicing slogans sound far and wide, but, at the same time, weapons are produced to exterminate anyone considered as an enemy in the name of defence - to defend oneself or the state.

Man undeniably needs peace in the true sense of the word. That's why Jesus came to bring the message of peace (shalom). This same message was first extended by the heavenly host to the shepherds way back around 2017 years ago while they were watching over their sheep in the field. Then they shared the news with Mary and Joseph (Luke 2: 13-17). Is peace real? Or a myth? Truly, without involving Jesus, the Peacemaker, it will be unquestionably difficult to make peace come true (John 4: 27). It is His coming that glues the far off (Jews) and the near (Gentiles) together in one Spirit.

The Apostle Paul wrote about his first-hand experience concerning the union of two hostile groups through Jesus Christ, the Peacemaker. What did he claim? In 1 Timothy

1: 15, he wrote, "This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance: 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners'—and I am the worst of them!"

Why did the Apostle Paul feel he was the worst of them all? Did he commit inhuman or unpardonable crime, like sadistic murder, corruption or fornication? Circumcised on the 8th day, he was a born Jew of the tribe of Benjamin. Judging his viewpoints regarding the Law, he was undoubtedly a Pharisee - the prominent Gamaliel was his teacher (Acts 22: 3). On top of that, he followed through the Law without blemish (Philippians 3: 5-6).

Why in the world did he call himself the worst sinner, being a brilliant Pharisee who meticulously lived out 613 laws? It turns out that every single letter the Apostle Paul wrote makes up his biography unfolding his day-to-day experiences after his encounter with Jesus Christ whom he had persecuted (Acts 9: 5). His meeting with Jesus led him to his repentance and enabled him to benefit His peace.

That the Israelites (Jews) were the apple of God's eye was a fact. It was because they belonged to the smallest of all nations (Deuteronomy 7: 6-7). Sadly, this fact triggered their self-pride. Being the descendants of Abraham, they had never been anyone's slaves. That's the way they felt (John 8: 33). Somehow, Jesus harshly slammed the Pharisees and the Scribes because they felt they committed the least sin of all (Matthew 23: 2-36).

Jesus (God the Savior) came into the world to save the sinful and the lost as experienced by Zacchaeus (Luke 19: 10). Zacchaeus was a wealthy tax collector, but in the public eye, he was a sinner - a thorn in their flesh. Despite his bad reputation, Jesus stretched out His hand to save him.

Aside from the gentiles in Ephesus, Rome and other places, the Apostle Paul also wrote letters to Timothy, the son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father (Acts 16: 1) due to the Apostle Paul's past when he was bitterly hateful to the gentiles. But after meeting and knowing Jesus, he repented and ended up experiencing a total life transformation. Then God commissioned him to preach His name not to the Jews but just to the gentiles (Acts 9: 15).

Both the Jews and non-Jews receive the same message, namely Peace. In what way did the Jews outdo the gentiles? The Jews felt they were the best and the most pious while the gentiles dedicated themselves to idolatry. But the reality is that no one is righteous before God. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3: 10, 12, 23).

The Jews as well as the gentiles had the same ancestors - Adam and Eve. To begin with, God created Adam and from this same man, God created another human, namely Eve. And these two became

one (Genesis 2: 7, 21, 23). Because they transgressed God's command by eating the forbidden fruit, their oneness fell apart.

Once a husband-and-wife relationship has fallen apart, the broken relationship impacts the family unity. Please note this: When husband and wife miss peace in their marriage, their children miss peace in their lives. On the contrary, a god-fearing married couple imparts the fear of God to their children. That's what exactly happened to the Noahs who survived the flood (Genesis 8: 16).

With their passing, Noah and his wife left behind three children: Shem, Ham and Japheth. Their next generations later populated the whole world over time. They spoke the same language and shared the same vision. Then they built a high-rise tower reaching the sky to keep a diaspora at bay (Genesis 11: 1, 4).

For the sake of unity, their vision was marvelous on the surface. But God did not let their mission happen because they did not put the name of God, the Savior, way out front. Instead, they made a name for themselves. In doing so, they did not teach their children their duty to remember and fear God. Rather, they simply oriented their children's mindsets on parents and families. Consequently, God scattered them by confusing their language. And that brought about mass miscommunications.

Without Jesus, the Peacebringer, not a single nation is able to make peace with another because He alone knows the way how we can get reunited.

Among the scattered tribes, God singled out Abram to leave his homeland, his father's home and relatives for a land that God would lead him to (Genesis 12: 1). God selected Ishak, Abraham and Sarah's son. Then He chose Ishak's son, Jacob to bless all nations. Later God's choice fell on King Solomo - a God-fearing man respected by all nations, including the queen of Sheba who personally came to see him (1 Kings 10: 1-13). As long as a God-fearing king ruled the country, the whole nation of Israel was richly blessed. But, once the king turned his back on God, the whole country crumbled and the enemy took the Israelites captives.

Who is able to stick a broken marriage together and restore a broken home? Isn't Jesus able to make them reconcile with each other? How did man treat Jesus, the Peace and Love Proclaimer? He came to His people, the Jews, but they gave Him the thumbs down. Then He shifted His attention to the gentiles, but they despised Him. He was crowned with thorns, crucified to death and buried in someone's grave.

Having been saved, the Jewish Paul ministered to the gentiles, preaching the message of Peace and testifying about the death of Jesus that tore down the walls of separation and hostility (Ephesians 2: 14). In the Temple built by Herod, there was a partition/wall separating the Jewish from the gentile worshippers. If a gentile persistently broke through the border, he had to pay for his action with his life because the Jews considered the gentiles as dogs and pigs.

When a husband has done something wrong, his wife should come to Jesus, the Peacemaker, who is mighty to pull down any wall of resentment to make way for peace between them. Keep this in mind: hostility leads to death.

Once Jesus got mad. Turning over all the tables of the money changers and the benches of the dove sellers, He drove out all who were doing business in the court of the Temple because His House was called a house of prayer. In fact, they were making it a den of robbers (Matthew 21: 12-13).

Aren't we the temples of the living God (2 Corinthians 6: 16) to accomodate those who do not know Jesus (yet) and share with them the message of peace? But what we often see is that disputes among church members break out and, as a result, some find their way to another church. Why do we attend church? Do we expect church attendance to satisfy our profit-making motivation in some way or other?

Jesus knew that He would someday be "cast out," and crucified to death. In reality, He was God who came into the world as a man and even took a lowly position as a servant. Yet, He was branded as a sinner who deserved the death penalty on the cross. He did all these in atonement for the sins of hard-boiled humans.

The once merciless Saul was overwhelmed with the light of Jesus. And this phenomenon brought him to repentance, empowering him to hold the cross of Jesus in high esteem. One hanging on a tree was a cursed person (Galatians 3: 13). Saul (later called Paul) was commissioned to preach the crucified Jesus.

Indeed, the message of the cross was a stumbling block to Jews who demanded miraculous signs and foolishness to gentiles with their logic-centered thinking patterns (1 Corinthians 1: 22-23). Adhering to their idols, the gentiles had their own perception of salvation. They simply could not take it that one could rise from the dead. But, for us, the greatest miracle ever is the cross on which He died and rose from the dead to save us.

Take this seriously: Christmas without the message of the crucified Christ makes the jubilee meaningless because He came, died and rose from the dead to provide peace for all of us. Anyone may call us fools or idiots but God's weakness exceeds human power. And His foolishness surpasses the wisdom of man.

God does not judge on appearances. But, have we possessed the heart of a servant? In Christ, we are new creations. All the while, we have obtained a mandate to proclaim the message of peace to others (2 Corinthians 5: 15-18, 21). Only if we belong to

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Christ will there be peace dominating the whole wide world. A m e n.
Scriptures taken from the Holy Bible, New English Transalation (NET Bible)