

As we continue this Christmas series, ***Prince of Peace***, I want to share with you a story. In my 1st yr. in Bible College after wasting a whole day with my friends studying for the NT Exam and getting nothing done, I went back to my room to study on my own and prepared to burn the midnight oil. But I did my devotional first and read Eph. 2:14a which says, “Christ is our peace.” I found instant relief from fear, stress and anxiety; I finished studying all the materials in a couple of hours and aced the exam the next day.

Most of us understand peace as being the absence of conflict or being in a perpetual New Age-like state of tranquility, an anxiety & worry-free condition.

The state of Shalom is the state of flourishing in all dimensions of one’s existence.

Nicholas Wolterstorff

The biblical concept of peace denotes the absence of quarrel, a sense of security, tranquility or serenity, the acts of reconciliation and forgiveness, underlying the idea of the person’s and the community’s wholeness or well-being that is grounded upon God’s expectation of His creation; it points to the proper ordering of society.

A person has peace when he is *spiritually vibrant, emotionally stable, intellectually sound, vocationally focused, physically healthy, socially adapt, and materially content.*

Such peace cannot be generated by man alone; it takes supernatural works of God.

And today we want to look at “Barrier-breaking Peace.”

¹¹Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" ... ¹²remember that at that time 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. *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.* ¹⁴*For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility ...* ¹⁵His purpose was *to create in himself one new man out of the two [i.e., Jews and non-Jews], thus making peace,* ¹⁶*and in this 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.* (Eph. 2:11-18 NIV)

Shalom is God’s vision of how His whole creation ought to be and very much *relationally* determined.

Jesus breaks down the wall of hostility – He is the peace offering and the peace-maker between God and humanity, as well as between humans.

Jesus, the Prince of Peace, paves the way and empowers humanity to begin a shalom-making journey. He becomes our example and guides us to flourish in our relationships with God and people in this world and the new heaven and new earth.

The primary challenge of the passage is more about mending broken relationships and removing hostility between God and humanity as well as between humans.

God stretched out his hands on the Cross so as to embrace the farthest corners of the universe.

– St. Cyril of Jerusalem, 4th century

The defenders of the Christian faith considered themselves as the 3rd race – neither Jews or Gentiles – who used their freedom to do good and God used them to turn the world upside down.

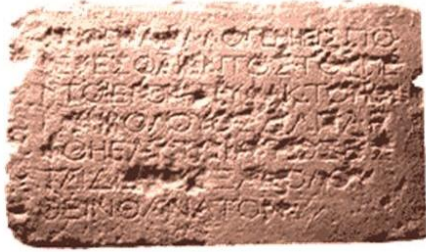
In order to appreciate and feel the force of Paul's words, here is an important bit of historical background about the Jewish temple:



There are different partitions in the temple precinct: Holy of Holies – Court of the Priests – Women's Court – Outer Court of the non-Jews.

Cf. Archeologists discovered an inscription of the Jerusalem Temple on the outer wall, destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D., that carries a stern warning from the High Priest:¹

¹ <https://images.app.goo.gl/x66JqgXCYUvAvA1H8>



- **No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.**

Christ has torn down the walls of separation and brings 'shalom' in God's world-restoring mission.

How can we bring peace into a war-torn world terrorized by hatred and fear?

How can we create harmony in a fragmented country shattered by ethnic cleansing and economic disparity?

How can we be kind to each other in a survival-of-the-fittest society that awards only winners and not losers?

How can we celebrate unity in a community separated by racial stereotypes and cultural enclaves?

How can the church – God's people – live out their Identity and embody the good news of peace and reconciliation?

Paul didn't pull any punches when he told the church that we're all in the same boat in 2:1-9:

Eph. 2: ¹As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ²in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, *we were by nature objects of wrath.* ⁴*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 ...* ⁸*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—* ⁹*not by works, so that no one can boast.* (Eph. 2:1-5, 8-9 NIV)

Here, Paul reminds the Ephesian church:

Now that you're "IN," don't forget that you were "OUT" – don't exclude anyone.

There is no first or second or third class sinners in God's eye:

we are all spiritually and morally deficient in view of God's holiness;

we all need His forgiveness in order to have a fresh start.

Hence, grace, mercy, acceptance, and humility are the catchwords!

Set aside personal pride and self-righteous attitudes.

Listen to the challenging words of Pastor/Professor Dennis R. Edwards:

“Humility is the thread that holds people together ... humility rejects self-promotion, pursues unity, and provides the piece (or peace) often missing from congregations that desire to be multiethnic and socioeconomically diverse ... Humility is a weapon against polarization because it repudiates arrogance, pride, vainglory and anything else that thwarts harmony ... Humility works to create community, to develop relationships ...”²

Whatever that feeds our sense of pride, or whenever we raise our emblem of superiority and wave our badge of honour at other’s expense and diminish their humanity, we alienate them and vandalize God’s image in them.

We can’t distort the message of the cross by turning it into a license for exclusion when it’s intended to be a declaration of inclusion.

God’s world is not mono-colour & one dimensional but multi-colour & multi-dimensional; Scriptures declare that God desires all humanity to be redeemed.

God’s vision of intercultural people must first be seen “in house” [i.e., in the local church] before the unbelieving world would take our message of peace/reconciliation seriously. The integrity of God’s intercultural vision depends on our relational integrity.

We are entrusted with the same mission as Christ’s. What we share in common is far greater than whatever that divides us.

This leads us to the next lesson:

**Remove any barriers so others can draw closer to God;
look out for creative opportunities of service.**

Sometimes it’s more difficult to tear down invisible walls than physical ones; we can be sitting beside each other yet separated by invisible walls of discomfort, prejudice, biases, hurts, anger, bitterness, and hatred.

We have walls between nations, between family members, between relatives, between neighbours, between Protestants and Catholics, between different Christian denominations and missions agencies, between friends and

² Dennis R. Edwards, *Humility Illuminated: the biblical path back to Christian character*, pp. 50, 53, 63.

colleagues, between males and females, between the rich and the poor; we have conflicts and rivalries of all kinds everywhere.

Walls are erected between us and 'them' when we ...

Measure our best with other's worse.

Hold us vs. them/in vs. out mentality.

Neglect the poor and marginalize the "unwanted."

Hold prejudice against other ethnic heritage/origins

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph. 2:10 NIV)

All Christ-followers are redeemed/restored to do good works, i.e., to live as God's master piece demonstrating His creative genius and goodness.

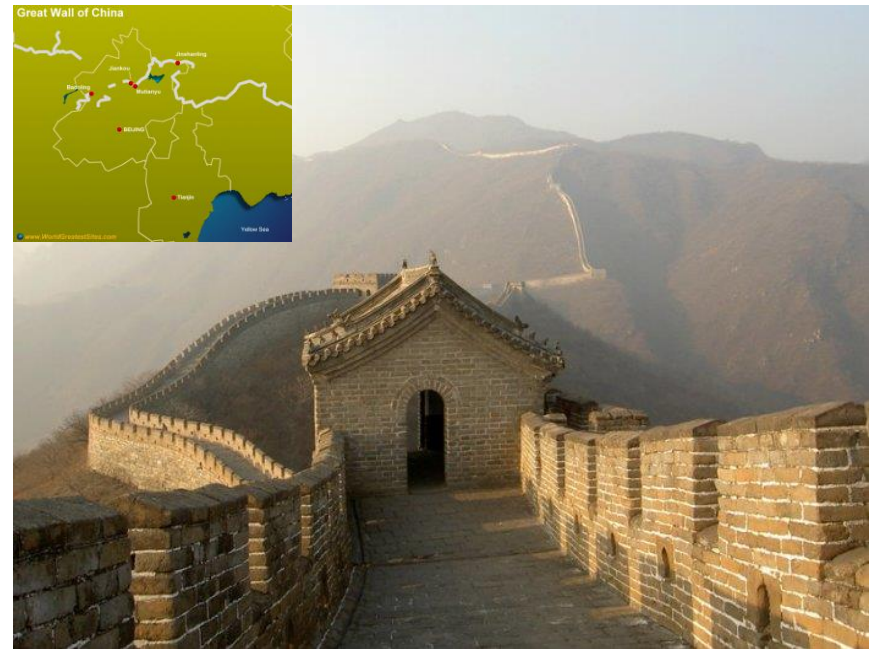
Paul writes about the intended purposes God has for His people, as they carry out this peacemaking mission:

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. (Eph. 2:21-22 NIV)

We have the privileges of being citizens of God's kingdom, family members of His household, priests in His temple.

If Christ is the centre of Cornerstone, we are called to build a community of Christ-like characters who take responsibility to exercise their stewardship of time, talents, and treasures!

Conclusion:



Cf. Great Wall of China: over 2,000 yrs old; 6,700 km; to keep the hordes of Genghis Khan out.

Look at the length man had gone to keep others out; and now consider what God had done on the cross to open a way for His enemies to come in!

Let me share some barrier-breaking practices that manifest God's presence and make space for Jesus to shape us together in His love:

Appreciate each other's uniqueness and understand individual strengths, weaknesses, as well as limitations.

Be the change you want to see in others.

Be hospitable to "strangers" or guests.

Learn about other cultures in our community.

Develop relational intelligence.³

Pray and live out church unity.

³ See Dharius Daniels, *Relational Intelligence: The People Skills You Need for the Life of Purpose You Want*. "Relational intelligence is the ability to discern if someone

should be a part of our lives and what place they should occupy, and then align them accordingly."