

God's Plan for Peace

By Bob Young

Human beings experience conflict for different reasons. Many conflicts in the history of the world have been political and geographic. Some, like the Rwandan genocide of the late 20th century, were based in ethnic distinctions. Other conflicts have been driven by social caste, economic privilege, and educational opportunities. Regardless of its origin, conflict seems a natural result of fallen human nature.

God's method of bringing peace to the earth is much different than human methods. Humans seek to force peace through armed conflict that brings opponents to their knees. Humans seek peace through war. God brought peace through his Son Jesus Christ. The angels declared, "Peace on earth" at the birth of Jesus. Paul reminded the Ephesian church that God brought peace through Jesus both to those who were afar off and to those who were near (2:13-18). He was referring to Gentiles and Jews. Jesus is the source of peace, breaking down barriers and partitions and destroying enmity. Jesus lived out a model of peace by refusing to revile when he was reviled, by refusing to retaliate (1 Peter 2:21-23).

It is reasonable to think that Christians who have experienced God's peace through Christ should be at peace with one another, but church history demonstrates that Christians have often generated more conflict than peace. The racial segregation and conflict that is part of U.S. history has, more often than not, been reflected in the churches.

Thankfully, as the 21st century marches forward, some progress is being made in establishing multi-cultural churches and in breaking down barriers. Our nation has come a long way from the segregation and forced integration of the 1950s, through the racial tensions of the 1960s and 1970s, moving forward little by little. An interesting case study in establishing multi-cultural congregations and declaring that God's people can exist in peace, and even in unity, is the Holmes Road church of Christ in Lansing, Michigan.

In 1968 God worked in a marvelous way to integrate the Holmes Road Church at a time when much of the nation was involved in racial conflict, a conflict especially intense in Michigan as seen in the events in Detroit during this summer of that year. During this tumultuous period, two churches merged as a group from Butler Boulevard (a black church) and the group on Holmes Road (a white church) united their works and dreams. Robert E. Hooper, professor of history and church historian, notes the significance of this event as an exception to the general practice and experiences of churches of Christ at the time (Hooper, *A Distinct People: A History of the Churches of Christ in the 20th Century*, 1993, p. 279). Soon after the merger, the church leadership was integrated, and the congregation, even more cross-cultural today than it was then, remains a bright example of unity and love.

God's plan for peace little resembles the usual human approach. The peace Jesus gives is not like the peace the world gives. God's people dwell in peace with God, in peace with one another, and provide to the world an example of what is possible when God is at work among his people who demonstrate their discipleship by their love one for another.