

The Gospel – A Message of Conflict

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The angelic host proclaimed “PEACE ON EARTH” at the birth of Jesus (**Luke 2:14**). He is called the “LORD OF PEACE” (**2 Thessalonians 3:16**), and His Father is the “GOD OF PEACE” (**Romans 15:33**). King Jesus reigns over a kingdom of peace (**Romans 14:17**), which is governed by the “GOSPEL OF PEACE” (**Ephesians 6:15**). He pronounces a blessing upon those who seek to make and keep peace (**Matthew 5:9**). All of these truths have their root in one great principle: “FOR GOD IS NOT A GOD OF CONFUSION, BUT OF PEACE” (**I Corinthians 14:33**).

Jesus’ coming resulted in peace between Jew and Gentile:

“FOR HE IS OUR PEACE, WHO MADE BOTH ONE, AND BRAKE DOWN THE MIDDLE WALL OF PARTITION, HAVING ABOLISHED IN HIS FLESH THE ENMITY, EVEN THE LAW OF COMMANDMENTS CONTAINED IN ORDINANCES; THAT HE MIGHT CREATE IN HIMSELF OF THE TWO ONE NEW MAN, SO MAKING PEACE” (**Ephesians 2:14-15**). We should not be surprised to read Paul’s exhortation: “IF IT BE POSSIBLE, AS MUCH AS IN YOU LIETH, BE AT PEACE WITH ALL MEN” (**Romans 12:18**).

Even a simpleton could hardly fail to understand that God’s way is one that seeks peace among all men and between mankind and Himself. One of the most compelling attractions of Heaven is the promise of its atmosphere of perfect, everlasting peace.

In spite of these truths, the Lord warned that He came to “CAST FIRE UPON THE EARTH” and division rather than peace (**Luke 12:49, 51**). When Jesus first sent the apostles out, they were to preach the soon-to-come kingdom and to spread peace (**Matthew 10:7, 13**). However, He also cautioned them: “THINK NOT THAT I CAME TO SEND PEACE ON THE EARTH: I CAME NOT TO SEND PEACE, BUT A SWORD” (**v. 34**). As they preached the imminent kingdom, he warned them that their message would stir up enmity, strife, and opposition, leading to their arrest, betrayal (even by their own kindred), persecution, and hatred in general (**Matthew 10:16-23; 35-37**).

It was not long after the Gospel began to be preached on Pentecost until the conflict began to rage. Arrests, warnings, then beatings, and finally the callous murders of Stephen and then James all resulted, paradoxically, from the preaching of the “GOSPEL OF PEACE.” The conflict followed the preaching of the Word as Paul carried it to the Gentiles. By the close of the first century, Imperial Rome was persistently persecuting the people of God for refusing to worship the image of the emperor. Opposition has not always come in the same form through the centuries since that time, but it has been (and will be) always present for God’s faithful people: “YEA, AND ALL THAT WOULD LIVE GODLY IN CHRIST JESUS SHALL SUFFER PERSECUTION” (**2 Timothy 3:12**).

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As it was with David of old, so shall it ever be with God's faithful servants in a wicked world: "I AM FOR PEACE: BUT WHEN I SPEAK, THEY ARE FOR WAR" (**Psalms 120:7**). While it is the nature of the Gospel to bring peace, it is as truly its nature to bring conflict. Perhaps for this reason the Gospel employs the military motif for the Lord's church so frequently. Perhaps for this reason the Gospel identifies the Word of God as the "SWORD OF THE SPIRIT" (**Ephesians 6:17**). It is at the same time God's instrument of peace and His weapon of war.

While God willed that the Gospel would produce peace, He knew that man's stubborn will would generally reject and oppose it because it made demands of him that he would be unwilling to meet. Verily, if the world is not opposed to the message I preach or the kind of life I live, I very likely am not living or preaching the Gospel. We are not to beware when people oppose us, but when all speak well of us (**Luke 6:26**).

The Gospel reproves the world, and the world does not like it---and it never will. This is what makes the Gospel a message of conflict. Woe be unto those disciples who alter it, soften it, or compromise it in an effort to make a truce with all that it opposes. Such a message becomes a "different gospel," which is anathema to God Almighty (**Galatians 1:6-9**). All who rob the Gospel of its nature to create conflict and opposition rob it of its power to save (**Romans 1:16**).