

THE GOSPEL AND CONFLICT

The angels proclaimed “peace on earth” at the birth of Jesus (Luke 2: 14). He is called the “Lord of peace” (2 The. 3:16), and His Father is the “God of peace” (Rom. 15:33). King Jesus reigns over a kingdom of peace (Rom. 14:17), which is governed by the “gospel of peace” (Eph. 6:15). He pronounces a blessing upon those who are “peacemakers” (Mat. 5:9). All of these truths have their root in one great principle: “For God is not a God of confusion, but of peace” (1 Cor. 14:33). 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 go, spreading peace (Mat. 10:13). However, He warned them that their message would stir up enmity, strife, and opposition, leading to arrest, betrayal (even by their kindred), and general persecution and hatred (Mat. 10:16–23).

After they began preaching on Pentecost, the conflict soon began to rage. Arrests, threats, beatings, and finally the callous murders of Stephen and then James all resulted, paradoxically, from the preaching of the “gospel of peace.” The conflict continued as Paul carried the Gospel to the Gentiles. By the close of the first century, Imperial Rome was persistently persecuting God’s people for refusing to worship the image of the emperor. Opposition has not always come in the same form through the centuries, but it has been and always will be present for God’s faithful people (2 Tim. 3:12).

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 Word of God is called the “sword of the Spirit” (Eph.

6:17). It is at the same time a peace treaty and a war weapon. While God willed it to produce peace, He knew that man's stubborn will would generally oppose it because it makes demands of him that he is unwilling to meet. Verily, if the world is not opposed to the message we preach or the kind of lives we live, we very likely are not living or preaching the Gospel. We are to beware not so much as 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. This factor is what makes the Gospel a message of conflict.

[*Denton Record-Chronicle* article, 12/22/06—by Dub McClish]