

## THE GOSPEL—A MESSAGE OF CONFLICT

The angelic host 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 the message of peace would stir up enmity, strife, and opposition, leading to their arrest, betrayal (even by their own kindred), and persecution and hatred in general (Mat. 10:16–23).

After the Gospel began to be preached on Pentecost, it was not long 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 (and will) always been 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 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 that 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 reproveth the world, and the world does not like it. This is what makes the Gospel a message of conflict.

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