



Wrestling with God

The Prince of Peace Who Bears a Sword

August 23, 2015

Happy Face vs. Sad Face

Easy vs. Hard. The Christian Faith is SO EASY that even a child can understand it (I spoke with someone this week who told me how she'd given her life to Christ at age 8 and she's 10x that now, but she remembers it so well.)

On the other hand...IT'S HARD. When I choose to follow Christ, I choose a different path. Jesus said there were 2 paths – an easy, wide road, and a narrow, hard path. To follow Christ is to choose to die to yourself. To choose Christ means you're going on a different road from the one some of your family/friends won't choose.

Peace vs. Sword

There are two sides to this coin. First, the "**Positive.**" Jesus gives us Peace.

1.) **A Gift of Jesus to His believers** (something we get)

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Peace is a gift from the Prince of Peace. But our peace comes at an incredible price – he died for us.

This "**Peaceful, Easy** Jesus" is seen frequently in the New Testament. He's "the Lamb" of God. Few of us are afraid of lambs! This is comforting. We love these verses. It's why we come to church – to be reassured. God is with us.

When the resurrected Christ met His disciples He said "*Peace be with you*" twice and then said the same thing to Peter (John 20:19, 21, 26). 3x in 7 verses.

The fruit of the Spirit: “love, joy peace...”

Phil 4:7 *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

2.) **A way of life for Believers** (something we give)

Rom 14:19 *Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace & to mutual edification*

Heb 12:14 *Make every effort to live in peace with all men & to be holy*

This is seen as a positive virtue; a benefit to all. “Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.”

However, there’s a **negative** side of the coin. Jesus causes conflict.

Much of American Christianity shuns this message. It’s like these words are not in the Bible. But Jesus said them, even if we wished He hadn’t, because it’s absolutely true. The smiling Jesus is appealing because He is safe. It’s like Christmas and Good Friday. We like the sweet baby Jesus but the cross isn’t follower friendly. It’s not popular. Being a Christian is more than having a peaceful, easy feeling. The very same Jesus who said, “*My peace I give you*” also said: (Matt 10:34-39) “*Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.*”³⁵ *For I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—*³⁶ *a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.*”³⁷ “*Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;*³⁸ *and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.* Luke 14:25-27 *Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: "If anyone comes to me and does not **hate** his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters — yes, even his own life — he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.* This doesn’t literally mean “hate” any more than Jesus meant for his followers to bear swords, but it’s the language of priority. Our first loyalty is the Kingdom of God. If we truly love Jesus that’s the best way to love others and to be a redemptive father, mother, etc.

³⁹ *Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*

3.) **The Sword** So, which is it? “Peace” or a “Sword?” It’s not either/or its’ both and. Jesus gives us an inner peace and helps us to live at peace with others. However, there are times when we profess faith in Christ that we have to make a decision about priorities, relationships, lifestyles and worldview. Thus, he talks about swords, enemies, cross, and losing your life.

This is the “**Tough Guy Jesus**” speech. *“I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”* Not a literal sword. This is a metaphor; a figure of speech. Matt 26:52 *“Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, “for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.* The church has forgotten this from time to time “Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

A sword = cuts things in half. Heb 4:12-13 *For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.* The “sword” is *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.* (Eph 6:17)

It cuts things in half. On one side are those who will follow the word of God, and opposed to it on the other side are those who resist it. There are 2 sides, 2 paths, 2 roads. Jesus never taught that there are many sides up to the mountain top and you can pick whichever one you want. Whenever we have to make a choice between two alternatives there is conflict. And sometimes this conflict involves family and friends.

Jesus was divisive. He was not always the sweet, loving, nice guy. He overturned the tables of the money changers because they’d turned the house of prayer into a den of thieves. Jesus said some **very** harsh things to the Pharisees. It was if he was intentionally trying to provoke them. He called them “fools, graves (whitewashed sepulchers), blind guides, hypocrites, serpents and snakes” (Matthew 23). The Pharisees were the spiritual leaders of Israel. Saying these kinds of things to the

people in charge was not a way to “win friends and influence enemies.” Using this language with this tone was setting yourself up for conflict.

There IS a time for **compromise**. Sometimes we can talk to a counselor and we don't have to get a divorce. Sometimes, a doctor can get us a shot or help us prevent going to see the surgeon?

But sometimes there's a time for **conflict**, too. “Peace” has to be disrupted and a war fought or before peace can ultimately be secured.. Neville Chamberlain was the Prime Minister in England in the days before World War II. He secured a “peace” with Adolf Hitler in 1938, which made him incredibly popular with the people in England. “The Great War” (World War I) had been “the war to end all wars.” It's estimated that 17 million DIED and another 20 million were wounded. Great Britain probably lost around 750,000 soldiers. It was absolutely devastating. The last thing the British people was another war on the European continent. So when Chamberlain came home and announced that he'd signed a treaty with Hitler, he became enormously popular. He didn't really want to say it, but got caught up in the moment and uttered this memorable line, the one which became his mark of shame as an appeaser: *“There is peace for our time.”* The reality is making a pact with Adolf Hitler was making a deal with the devil. Hitler said the treaty he signed was a worthless piece of paper. In 1939, Hitler invaded Poland. Chamberlain was distraught by the treachery. In 1940 he resigned from being Prime Minister. Winston Churchill became the Prime Minister, in part, because nobody else wanted the job. It seemed the only role he had was to negotiate the terms of surrender with Hitler. But he had a far different perspective. ***We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.*** Later when asked if he was “for peace or for war” he

said he was for both, for he believed that you could only have peace when you were willing to fight for it.

Churchill didn't want war. He personally knew what that was like.

However, he knew England had an enemy who DID want war. If England failed to stand up to this evil monster, Hitler would prevail.

The only way to secure peace was to win a war.

And so it with following Jesus. We really want there to be peace on earth. Sometimes it's the wise thing to do to avoid issues. "You can't die on every hill." But sometimes, the issue is so important that it can't be overlooked. In the context of Jesus, the issue was about following Him.

"Our lives begin to end the minute we become silent about things that matter." (Martin Luther King, Jr.)

Just as there are times when you speak to a fool and times when you don't speak to a fool, so there are times we must turn the cheek and times we must stand up for injustice. There's a time for everything.

Ecc 3:8 "There's a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace. "

Application:

Have I **received** the peace of Jesus Christ into my life?

Am I **passing it along** to others? What happens between us/Jesus has a carry-over effect to others.

Is there a **conflict** I need to address? It takes courage to confront.

Following Jesus will cause conflict. Sometimes it's within your immediate family. Couples or parents/kids who have a spiritual disagreement. Is there a **conflict** you need to address? Sometimes just letting things slide is the surest way to destruction. Do you need to create a conflict in your marriage by raising a difficult issue? Is there a conflict you need to raise with a child or with a parent? Is there someone you love who's caught by addiction that needs to be addressed? Is there someone at work or at school where the policy of appeasement, of just "getting along" isn't working? Is there someone you need to speak to about your faith – this is the real context of Jesus

– that following Jesus will create some conflict along the way because not everyone follows Him.

You need to have the peace of Christ in your life. You need to remain absolutely resolute in that commitment, even when others get in your way. There can be peaceful ways to resolve conflict. We certainly need humility and wisdom as we live this out.

He is the Lord – and we must die to ourselves. He is the potter and we are clay. Who is the Lord of life? Dying to self. It's not natural and innate. This is about sacrifice and surrender. Nothing comes before your relationship with Jesus. Seek first the Kingdom of God. Take up your cross = sacrifice. Your money, your time, your relationships.