

DOES JESUS BRING PEACE OR A SWORD?

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, we recall Isaiah's prophecy:

Isaiah 9:6 *For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. [NRSV]*

In a world beset by turmoil, deception and violence, we are comforted that our God has authority and we rejoice that He is the Prince of Peace.

We are also reassured by the confirmation that early in His earthly ministry, the Prince of Peace sent out the twelve apostles with these instructions of healing and peace:

Matthew 10:8 *"Heal the sick, raise the dead, cure those with leprosy, and cast out demons. Give as freely as you have received!" (NLT)*

Jesus then continued His instructions and said:

Matthew 10:34 *"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." [ESV]*

We may be confused and uncertain and may ask: is Jesus the Prince of Peace or the Prince of the Sword?

Is there a contradiction in the scriptures?

Rather than be confused, we may want to count our blessings, for I find that my confusion about the scriptures stems from my applying a carnal interpretation to them.

The blessing is that my initial confusion is often a way by which the Lord encourages me to seek spiritual understanding and clarity.

How so?

First:

John 4:24 *"God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." [NASB]*

Second:

John 6:63 *"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life." [NASB]*

God is spirit, His words are spirit: hence, we do need spiritual understanding to learn what Jesus is saying to us.

Third, the Apostle Paul explained that spiritual understanding resides in the heart:

2 Corinthians 1:21–22 *Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, 22 who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge. [NASB]*

And that understanding is hindered when the heart is hardened:

Ephesians 4:18 *They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. [ESV]*

It is the hardness of heart that darkens understanding, hinders comprehension and causes confusion; it is not the imperfect application of formal logic to the Bible nor is it the insufficient exertion of intellectual analytics upon the scriptures, as Jesus explained by His prayer of thanksgiving:

Matthew 11:25 *At that time Jesus prayed this prayer: "O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding these things from those who think themselves wise and clever, and for revealing them to the childlike." [NLT]*

Well then, does Jesus bring us peace or a sword?

It helps to consider what is the sword that the Lord brings: it is not one made of tempered carbon steel. That — Jesus told Peter — must be put away:

John 18:11a *Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath". [NRSV]*

The sword of the Lord proceeds directly from His mouth:

Revelation 1:16 *In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force. [NRSV]*

And the sword is this:

Ephesians 6:17b *..... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God [KJV]*

It is the sword the Lord used when He withstood the tempter in the wilderness, saying, "It is written." (**Matthew 4**)

Jesus' sword is the word of God. In fact, He Himself is the Word: He Himself is the sword of the Spirit.

What does such sword cut?

Hebrews 4:12 *Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. [NRSV]*

That sword separates the spirit from the soul and the flesh. Thus, our spirit — being released from the burden of sin and of the flesh — is free to join the Lord and enjoy the reconciliation with Him:

Colossians 1:19–20 *For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, 20 and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross. [NLT]*

Thus reconciled, we are able to receive His peace, which surpasses anything we may imagine:

Philippians 4:7 *And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [NASB]*

Is Jesus then the Prince of Peace? Yes, indeed He is the Prince of Peace with God.

Does this peace come at a price? Yes it does: His blood on the cross and persecution in the world:

John 16:33 *"I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!" [NRSV]*

Is there a contradiction then in the scriptures? Not at all, both statements are true: Prince of peace with God and His kingdom and sword to battle against the wickedness of the world.

1 John 5:19 *And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in wickedness. [JUB]*

How may we prepare for such battle and persecution?

Ephesians 6:11–13, 17b *"Put on the full armor of God, so that we will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 17b and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."* [NASB]

And having prepared, this is how we fight:

2 Corinthians 10:3–5 *For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. 4 For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. 5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ. [ESV]*

In conclusion: Jesus brings peace between people and God and a sword between faith in Christ and unbelief. All along, those who believe in Him shall rest in His perfect peace:

Isaiah 26:3 *"The steadfast of mind You will keep in perfect peace, because he trusts in You."* [NASB]