

With “Jesus Followers: "Religion is the Cause of All Wars."

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Written on: 7/15/2005

War and Peace

When sharing about my faith in Jesus, a person responded with this blanket statement, “Religion is the cause of all wars.” Is Christianity part of the problem of wars, or rather the solution- to life, to war and to man’s desperate need?

Accusations Regarding War and Christians

One who holds that Christianity is the cause of wars will say things like:

“If we just got rid of religion (and narrow minded Christians), we’d have a world of peace.”

“Look at all the wars fought in the name of Christianity: the Crusades, Northern Ireland, the bombing of abortion clinics, the Inquisition... it’s evident that Christianity, just like other religions, is the cause of wars.”

“Religious exclusivism is the cause of so many wars. What we need is to embrace the parts of Christianity that bring religions and people together, that are common with other religions, and reject the exclusivistic and divisive parts of the Bible and religion- these cause wars and unrest.”

I think John Lennon sums up some people’s attitudes about religion:

IMAGINE

Imagine there's no heaven,
It's easy if you try,
No hell below us,
Above us only sky,
Imagine all the people
living for today...
Imagine there's no countries,
It isn't hard to do,
Nothing to kill or die for,
No religion too,
Imagine all the people
living life in peace...
You may say I'm a dreamer,
but I'm not the only one,
I hope some day you'll join us,
And the world will live as one.

Christianity the Cause of Wars?

Has Christianity caused wars? Yes and no. We have to separate true, Biblical Christianity with those who claimed to be Christians but didn't follow Christ's teachings. We also have to distinguish between what Jesus taught and what His followers throughout history actually did. The word "Christian" is a word that must be defined properly. In the Bible the word means "followers of Christ and His teachings" (*Acts 11:26*).

Did Jesus promote wars? Not the kinds of wars mentioned above. The only wars Jesus asked us to engage in were spiritual wars, and our enemies were spiritual enemies-demonic powers and principalities, headed up by Satan. At times those spiritual enemies worked through deception to accomplish their tasks of attempting to hinder the kingdom of God through people, governments and religious authorities.

When Jesus Christ began His amazing ministry of teaching, preaching and healing, the Jews were under oppression from a Roman government and numerous Jewish freedom groups, such as the Zealots, were eager to take on Rome by force. The Jews longed for the day that the Christ would come and establish His kingdom on earth, centered at Jerusalem. In their zeal, some thought that God needed some help in accomplishing this. Once they recognized Jesus as the Christ, they sought to find ways to get Him to lead a political/military coup to conquer Rome. Jesus had to rebuke them repeatedly to point them to the purpose of His mission: to die on the cross for payment for mankind's sin. Just after Peter recognized that Jesus was the Christ, Jesus had to tell the disciples His mission: "From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day." (*Matt 16:21*) The disciples continually struggled with this. "Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!' But He turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.'" (*Matt 16:22-23*)

One of His disciples, Simon, was a Zealot. Jesus had to reprogram His disciples repeatedly to remind them what the Kingdom of God was all about. At His trial, Pontus Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews" (*Luke 18:33*) and Jesus replied, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." (*Luke 18:36*)

Did Jesus ever teach His followers about going to war physically and defeating their enemies and advancing His kingdom through war, such as we have seen in the religion of Islam with Jihad, or the Crusades of the Middle Ages? No. Rather, He talked pointedly to His followers about how to address the Roman soldiers who abused them. Soldiers had the right to force anyone to carry their gear for one mile according to Roman law. Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person... whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two... You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your

enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you...” (*Matt 5:38-45*)

Jesus Christ was teaching an attitude that His followers were to have about how to advance His Kingdom- it wasn’t through war or politics or political agendas, but through a radical love for the very people that abuse us. “For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?” (*Matt 5:46*) Our attitudes are to love other people so much that their needs are equal to our needs. Jesus said, “Do onto others as you would have others do unto you”, the “golden rule”- a rule that none of us, any day of our lives, have perfectly fulfilled. But Jesus lived the golden rule perfectly.

Anyone who claims that Christianity is the cause of political wars is sadly mistaken, but if they want to say that other religions are the cause of wars, then they need to investigate that religion’s teachings and see if the argument holds true. Also, if a group declares itself to be followers of Christ yet uses politics or religion as the means to advance the Kingdom of Christ, they are sadly mistaken. Why should true, Biblical Christianity be criticized by the failure of religions to obey the truth of the message of Christ? Let God be called true and every man a liar!

Why are There Wars?

The Bible tells us why there are wars- both large scale wars and the wars that each of us struggle with in our own hearts- prejudices, hatred, anger, bitterness, jealousy, envy and covetousness... “Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your *desires for pleasure* that war in your members? You *lust* and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You *fight and war*. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your *pleasures*. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” (*James 4:1-4*)

Wars come from lust- wanting something we don’t have. There’s a spiritual war going on in each of us. Ask yourself: who’s winning the war on your heart- is your life one of pursuing pleasure or pursuing God as its’ primary goal? Such pursuit of pleasure (love of self) makes one an enemy of God. Such a person may blow smoke about the wars committed in the name of Christianity, but it’s a smokescreen for the unresolved war that reigns in that person’s heart- a war with their Creator who is calling him/her to a life of repentance and faith in Christ.

Paul described this war, “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who *suppress the truth* in unrighteousness.” (*Rom 1:18*) The truth that is suppressed is that God has revealed Himself (His power, wisdom and divinity) to all mankind through His creation (*Rom 1:19-20*), through man’s conscience, which demonstrates we’re guilty before a holy God (*Rom 2:14-16*), and through death itself- our final judgment for our sin (*Rom 6:23*).

Do you measure up to God's righteous standards? I know I don't. How about the Ten Commandments- deep down we each know they are truth, though we may try to suppress the truth. Have you ever told a lie? Ever stolen anything (the value is insignificant), ever lusted after a person (that's adultery in the heart) or had sex outside of marriage? Ever hated anyone or called someone a "fool" or worse (Jesus said that was "murder"), ever wanted something that someone else owned (as James taught, wars come from covetous hearts)? These are just five of the Ten Commandments. If you were judged according to God's perfect standards, would you be innocent or guilty before God on Judgment Day? Would you deserve heaven or hell? Honesty before a holy and just Judge of the Universe acknowledges our multitude of sins- our actions, our motives, our thoughts and our words have fallen short of God's requirements. "God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day. If he does not turn back, He will sharpen His sword; He bends His bow and makes it ready. He also prepares for Himself instruments of death." (*Psalm 7:11-13*) We're at war with God Almighty- yet He has offered terms of peace. He became a man, lived a perfect life, died on the cross and bore all our sin in our place. God's wrath was poured out on Jesus Christ on that cross, His blood shed for us as a substitute. Just payment for sin was made and justice was satisfied. Through Him we can receive forgiveness and enter into peace with God. All other wars are of little significance- we need to make sure we are on the right side of this eternal war. God through that sacrifice wants to deliver you from "the wrath to come" (*1 Thess 1:10*).

He offers His terms of peace, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ...God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." (*Rom 5:1, 9-10, cf. Tit 3:3-7, John 3:36, Rom 2:5*)

There are terms to this peace treaty: God has offered a free gift. You need to "sign the treaty" by repenting of your sin and believing in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord. We need to "believe" in Christ- to trust Him as we would trust a parachute before jumping out of an airplane.

Christianity is the Cause of Some Wars

On the other hand, the Bible does say that followers of Christ will be involved in some tremendous wars in the world. People (or governments, institutions or religions) hating to see the light of a person converted to Jesus Christ will go to extremes to put out that light- through mocking, persecution, hateful words and even murder and war. Why? "This is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed." (*John 3:19-20*)

Jesus declared where the enemy lines were in this spiritual war: “He who is not with Me is against Me.” (*Matt 12:30*). Whose side are you on? Are you truly following Jesus Christ and living by His teachings- all of them, to the best you know how?

In God’s eyes, this is the true war. All other wars are insignificant in comparison. The ultimate war is a spiritual one waged in each person’s soul. Jesus warned His followers, “I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles...Brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake.” (*Matthew 10:17-23*) The true war is a spiritual one, and the stakes are eternal life. Those who don’t receive the truth of the gospel of Christ will persecute those who do, because their words of truth are a reminder that they’re on a journey leading to eternal damnation unless they turn, repent and place their trust in the Savior. It is in this war that believers in Christ are to stand fast- not fighting with physical weapons, but fighting by preaching the gospel of salvation, perseverance, prayer and love, “Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (*Matt 10:28*)

This spiritual war is so intense that it even divides families. It is a “Civil War”. Our loyalties to Jesus Christ in this battle will be tested even to the point of family loyalty- whose side are you on in this spiritual battle? Would you dare to follow Christ when no one else in your family will, even to the point of death? Jesus said, “Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven. Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’ He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.” (*Matt 10:32-39*)

Have you surrendered your life over to Jesus Christ? In this spiritual war, there are only two sides- you can’t be neutral. Jesus warned, “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.” (*Matt 12:30, cf. Eph 2:1-6, Titus 3:3-7*) The Bible warns, “It is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you...in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.” (*2 Thess 1:6-9*)

Which side are you on? Ever since Jesus Christ was crucified there has been a violent battle where men have sought to stifle the words of the gospel of salvation. Peter quickly

met up with opposition after preaching just weeks after Jesus Christ ascended to heaven. The religious leaders “commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.” (*Acts 4:18*) Weeks later, because of Stephen’s preaching, the religious leaders stoned him to death (*Acts 7:51-8:4*) and “Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church.” Throughout the centuries governments, religious authorities and even churches have tried to stifle the good news of salvation through faith in Christ, to no avail. This is the true spiritual war. Millions of Christians in Sudan, North Korea, China and other countries today are imprisoned, tortured and even killed for their faith in Jesus Christ.

The Bible gives followers of Christ this unsettling promise about the intensity of this war, “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.” (*2 Tim 3:12-13*) Is there any way to fight back? What weapons are followers of Christ to use against our enemies? “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God...” (*2 Cor 10:3-5*) Our weapons are prayer, love and continuing to faithfully live and preach the gospel until the day that Jesus Christ takes us home. Jesus was prophesied as the Child who would be born of the virgin who in the end times would reign over an everlasting government as “Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end” (*Isa 9:6-7*) Until then, the forecast from God is war. Jesus prophesied, “You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another...And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.” (*Matt 24:6-14*)

Signing the Peace Treaty

Have you invited the Prince of Peace to reign in your heart? Come experience true peace- lay down your arms of defense, pride and self-justification. Unveil all of your wickedness before the Lord of all the heavenly host. In confession and repentance turn from your sinful ways. Bring every last selfish sin to the foot of the cross, where the blood of Christ cleanses the repentant heart from all sin.

War leaves broken countries, families and devastated land. “War is hell.” A prostitute came to Jesus weeping at His feet. She longed for peace in her sin-stained guilt ridden soul. She poured an alabaster jar of expensive perfume on His feet and kissed them while weeping, wiping His feet with her hair. Jesus saw her faith and proclaimed, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.” (*Luke 7:50*)

This is the peace that I found in Jesus Christ as a teenager. I was at war with God- guilt filled my sin-stained heart. I came to grips with my own sinfulness and cried out for Jesus to make peace through His blood shed on the cross for me, and a huge weight of guilt dropped off my shoulders. I was at peace with God- the war was over.

If you don't know the Savior, today is the day of decision. Don't wait while your heart becomes harder to the truth. Lay down your weapons- all of your sin- give up those filthy rags that cannot possibly satisfy you, but have been such a burden to you and lead to the pit of hell. Sign the peace treaty. You can't come to God on your terms- you've lost the war of sin and death. He has offered incredible terms of peace.

In Christ's Love,
Mike Porter