

Civil War

I think most of us would agree that peace is an important aspiration for our lives. We want peace. We seek peace. But can we attain it? Not to be a pessimist, but the facts throughout history show that peace is a rare commodity. All countries, nations, and principalities of the world have been affected by war. Great countries like Egypt, Babylon, Greece, Rome, Ethiopia, Mongolia, China, Aztecs, Incans, and hundreds more have been devastated and restructured over time. Consider that there are close to 200 countries in the world today. Presently, less than 20 countries in the world are actually free from military conflict. If one considers the existence of all countries, you can count on one hand how many countries have not had civil war.

The United States has been involved in many wars, police actions, and conflicts in its 250-year history. But the civil war in the 1860's produced the most casualties of any of its conflicts. The immediate effects of civil war are injury, death, destruction of homes, businesses, livelihoods, crops, and enmity between brothers and friends. Infrastructure is destroyed. Economy is devastated. Education, enrichment, and opportunity grind to a halt. Millions of people are traumatized and alienated, seeking survival in the most adverse conditions. And the long-term effects may never fully recede. To this day in the United States, for example, there are remnants of bitterness and polarization. This is common for most if not all countries.

What is the source of wars, fights and conflicts? They all originate from the desires that wage war **WITHIN** each one of us? We lust and do not have; so, we commit murder. We are envious and cannot obtain; so, we fight and quarrel.¹ There is a constant battle raging within each person and eventually this issues forth in outward conflict. If we honestly assess our inner being, we find a daily battle between what we desire to do and what we actually do. We may want to do something good, but we often end up doing the things we hate to do. We have the desire to do what is good, but often cannot carry it out. We do not do the good we want to do, but the evil we do not want to do — we keep on doing.²

What are the evil desires we struggle with? Here is a short list: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. What are the good things we long for? Again, a short list that everyone can agree on: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such good things there is no law.³

It seems simple enough ... just choose good over evil. But history and our own experience proves that choosing good over evil is anything but simple because of the inner battle, the war raging within each one of us. Not to mention, who gets to define “good” and “evil”? Every culture varies on these definitions.

There are four main categories of struggle for all of us, summed up by lust, anger, idolatry, and pride. These are the real enemy to peace within us and between people. They are vicious foes that never relent and always continue. **LUST** includes immorality (adultery, homosexuality,

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pornography, masturbation, etc.), gluttony, addictions (drugs, sex, media, gaming, gambling, etc.), excessive indulgences, the need to win at all costs, having to have the last word, coveting. Lust is never satisfied. **ANGER** involves malice, bitterness, evil speaking, slander, envy, hypocrisy, issuing in hatred, hostility, alienation, vengeance, bigotry, division, sarcasm, strife, ostracizing others, and murder based on an unwillingness to forgive. **IDOLATRY** replaces normal, healthy love relationships, and fosters greed, anxiety, obsession, the need for instant gratification, and the lack of accountability or taking responsibility for one's actions. Yet, the overarching category all people struggle with is summarized by pride. **PRIDE** causes us to lift ourselves above others, breeds selfishness, taking glory for oneself often at the expense of others. We live as if we are the center of the universe. We may knowingly or unknowingly deem ourselves as gods. We do not honor, respect, or submit to others because we hold ourselves "higher" than others, we judge others and condemn others, we gas light others, we are critical and injurious towards others ... as if we have that right as finite human beings in a vast universe.

Is there any hope? Is there a remedy? The hope and remedy can only come IF we recognize this civil war and are willing to fight. Only when we experience enlightenment can we begin to fight effectively. The fact that we see our condition shows that light is shining within our hearts. The problem is that light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.⁴ However, we can choose to have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. Everything exposed by the light becomes visible.⁵ Now, we can fight the civil war that begins WITHIN each of us.

Once we realize and accept that we are dark and full of negative things, we need to repent. Repentance is a change of mind and heart that precedes our actions. The Bible says, "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."⁶ The light that exposes us is from God. We then choose to continue in that light or to remain in our darkness. If we walk in the light, the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.⁷ God gives us a choice: to repent and turn to Him or not. However, if we reject the light from God, we remain in our sin and are subject to God's judgment.

People don't like the concept of God's judgment. This is especially true when they try to justify a loving God doling out an eternal punishment. But God gives us the CHOICE! He tells us personally, that whoever believes in Jesus Christ is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the condemnation (or judgment): Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.⁸ ... and they refuse to repent.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us and cleanse us!⁹ Your Choice!

¹James 4:1-2; ²Romans 7:15, 18-19; ³Galatians 5:19-23; ⁴John 3:19-20; ⁵Ephesians 5:12-13;

⁶Acts 3:19; ⁷1 John 1:7; ⁸John 3:18-19; ⁹1 John 1:9