

Out of this World

Most people have no idea there is a daily battle going on every hour between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. As we speak, Christ is in the process of reclaiming all of creation, both heaven and earth, in order to establish his reign forever. He is battling evil, and its leader, Satan, for that domain. We who follow Jesus with our hearts and lives are being used by God to defeat lies, evil, and injustices of the world. But, until our eyes are opened by the work of the Holy Spirit, we don't see the battle or even have a glimpse of what God is doing in the world. In fact, the Bible says we are blind, living in the darkness of the world until the eyes of our hearts are opened by the loving grace of our Lord.



Spiritual Warfare

The kingdom of the world has a spirit. That spirit drives people towards pride, selfishness, insecurity, and lies. It also lures people into worldly pleasures, often fueled by greed, lust for power, indulgences of the flesh, and debauchery. And, the spirit of the world is deceptive. It does not tempt us in an obvious fashion. If it were obvious, we would see the pitchfork and devilish ears, and run from it. But the spirit of the world does not operate that way. Led by the deceptive mastery of Satan, it looks and acts godly, but it isn't. Only the Spirit of Christ can fully rescue us from these powerful tides and pulls of the world. The Apostle Paul constantly encouraged his followers to be wary of the spirit of the world. When he wrote to the Romans, he said, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Romans 12:2)

This past week, I was blessed once again to meet with a number of Christian leaders of Egypt. Each year, these Egyptian Christian leaders visit the United States to update the American Church on what they see God doing in their country. They could not have been more optimistic. In fact, they were effusive with joy. Most of us in the West think that Egyptian Christians are miserable with their churches being destroyed by militant Muslims.

But, these leaders told us a completely different story. We learned that Egyptian Protestants, Orthodox and Catholics are as close and united now as they have ever been in history. Our Egyptian friends were disappointed that American media was not doing a good job telling the real story of last summer's revolution. Nearly 40 million Egyptians took to the streets last June protesting the Morsi government,

demanding that he step down. That is half the country in protest! The economy was in ruins. Average Egyptian families were running out of gasoline, food and had no electricity. But, worst of all, President Morsi was ignoring all his campaign promises to be inclusive and share power in the government. He appointed almost exclusively those from the Brotherhood of Islam to fill important government posts. He thrust upon the Egyptians a new constitution, which in effect made his government a theocracy against the will of the people. They said Morsi was more concerned with exporting his theology throughout the Middle East than caring for the basic needs of his fellow Egyptians. When the Egyptian military eventually became involved and ousted Morsi, it was only after the vast majority of Egyptians spoke clearly and loudly - enough is enough! It was the overwhelming will of the people, not a military coup which removed Morsi from power.

The most riveting message at the conference last week was hearing about the 88 Christian churches that were burned by the Brotherhood of Islam in protest of Morsi's removal from power. When Morsi was ousted, his followers lashed out at anything they perceived was opposing them, including government buildings, police stations and churches. The Brotherhood of Islam was clearly expecting that Christians would retaliate, strike back, and thus begin a civil war. But, the opposite happened. One hundred percent of the Christian people and churches did not lift a finger. Instead, they expressed love for their enemies and prayed for them. This response confounded the Brotherhood and helped bring the majority of the street violence to an end. One night, on the most popular television news station in Cairo, a Christian mother of a young girl who had been murdered by the Brotherhood, asked the government not to give the killers the death sentence so they had time to repent and discover the true love of God. It became a most famous interview on Egyptian television. This brave woman referenced the Apostle Peter when he wrote the following; "Finally, all of you should be of one mind. Sympathize with each other. Love each other as brothers and sisters. Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude. Don't repay evil for evil. Don't retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing." (1Peter 3:8-9a)



Egyptian boys pray in burned church

These Christian leaders in Egypt are some of the bravest and most beautiful people I have ever met. They are helping to change, albeit slowly but surely, the entire map of the Middle East and Arab world in regard to greater freedoms for individuals, inch-by-inch, day-by-day. These days, Syria, Iraq and Iran are grabbing attention because of the despicable, out-of-control violence and repression in those countries. But, keep your eye on Egypt and Tunisia, too. This

past week, Egyptians, by an affirmation of more than 90 percent of voters, agreed on a new constitution that makes religious freedom absolute and guaranteed by the government.



Egyptian women voters,
January 2014

In order to become a citizen of the kingdom of God, we must first become humble. Humility is the key to life. Those who admit their mistakes, are aware of their own shortcomings, and are willing to be vulnerable about their own frailty, are in a most blessed place to ask Christ to become Lord of their lives. It is then that reconciliation with God and eternal life becomes possible. But those who are tempted by pride, who want to go at it alone and are unwilling to admit their own mistakes, are driven even further from the presence of God. In doing so, they choose to follow the spirit of this world, not the kingdom of God.

What my Egyptian Christian friends know better than most Christians in the States is that God is love. Unfortunately, God is not known as love in Islam, especially among the fundamentalists and militants. He is not known as having agape or unconditional love at the core of his being. In Islam, God can be merciful, but that motivation is not because of grace or unconditional love. For us in the human race, it is pride that makes us want to strike back and retaliate. That is why the famous Christian author C.S. Lewis said that pride was the greatest of all sins. It can cause us the most harm. An incomplete view of God will often support this kind of retaliatory and angry behavior. But, for those of us who follow and believe in Jesus, the fullest revelation of God, we must remember the unconditional love of our Lord, which is always available to us. If we ask humbly to become children of God through Christ, we are blessed with an extraordinary capability to love others as God loves us - unconditionally.

Too many people in the world today are unaware of the spiritual battle that is raging all around them. As a result, they are sitting ducks for becoming enthralled by the spirit of the world, and being led down dark paths of pride, self-centeredness and worldly power. That is why Christ is called our Savior. He saves us from ourselves, sin, Satan and the spirit of this world. May the teaching and preaching of this truth become stronger every day, in our own country, the Middle East, and throughout the entire world.