

Matthew 10:34-39

I. Verse 34a – “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth.”

These words are shocking to many people, because they fly directly in the face of everything they think they know about Jesus! What about “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men”? There are many in the world today who preach peace, and sing about peace, and call for peace. It’s especially at Christmas time that we see signs in front of religious buildings and municipal centers that read “peace on earth” or “let there be peace”. The assumption, of course, is that the spirit of Jesus is the spirit of peace. Isn’t Jesus, after all, the Prince of peace? Here’s a song the world might want to sing at the celebration of Christ’s birth:

I'd like to build the world a home and furnish it with love
Grow apple trees and honey bees and snow-white turtle doves
I'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony
I'd like to hold it in my arms and keep it company
I'd like to see the world for once all standing hand in hand
And hear them echo through the hills for peace throughout the land.

Now some Christians are quick to mock and scorn lyrics like this, and when they do this they bring disgrace to the name of Christianity. When we disdainfully scorn the world’s calls for peace, we are denying the fact that Jesus said: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Mat. 5:9). We forget about the fact that Jesus told us not to resist the one who is evil (Mat. 5:39). Instead of choosing violence, it is better to go the extra mile and turn the other cheek (Mat. 5:39, 41). Instead of hating our enemies, we are to love our enemies and pray for them (Mat. 5:43-44). When we scornfully disdain the world’s calls for peace, we deny the fact that Paul said: “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with *all*” (Rom. 12:18). We must not, by our attitudes, deny the truth of God’s word and bring dishonor to His name. But this is exactly what many Christians do (though perhaps without knowing it because they have become self-deceived). Instead of a commitment to truth that leads us to *genuinely* weep and sorrow over the lost estate of those around us, we have a commitment to truth that results in an attitude of arrogant disgust and disdain. When we hear the world’s calls for peace, we must not respond in such a way that we deny our calling to live peaceably in this world.

However, we must also be faithful to affirm that Jesus did *not* come to bring peace to the earth – at least not the kind of peace the world dreams of. Jesus said it Himself: “*Do not think* that I have come to bring peace to the earth.” The world dreams of a universal peace *on earth*, but not of peace with the holy and righteous God who is full of anger and wrath against our sin. And yet the Bible teaches that if we want true and lasting peace among *men*, then we *must first of all* have peace with *God*.

- ✓ Romans 5:1 – Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.
- ✓ Ephesians 2:14, 17 – For *he himself is* our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility... And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.

- ✓ Luke 2:14 – Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace *among those with whom he is pleased!*

The point here is first of all peace between earth and heaven, and then flowing from this vertical peace comes a horizontal peace among those with whom God is pleased. Therefore, it is only when the *whole world* has peace with God that there can possibly be any such thing as peace on earth. And the whole world will have peace with God only after the final judgment and the separation of the righteous from the wicked. Then there will be a new heavens and a new earth in which only righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3:13). Then there will be world peace.

- ✓ Isaiah 9:6-7 (cf. Hag. 2:9) – For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.

But the world wants peace without truth, peace without absolutes, peace *without God*. The world wants peace on earth, but not peace with heaven. But this is ultimately impossible.

- ✓ Romans 3:9-11, 17-18 – We have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God... the way of peace they have not known. There is *no fear of God* before their eyes.”

Like the false prophets in Old Testament Israel, the world today cries out “‘peace, peace,’ but there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14; 8:11) – because there is no peace with God. So now listen to what Jesus says:

II. Verse 34 – “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

Once again, we need to remember that this is the same Jesus who commanded Peter: “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matt. 26:52). Jesus is not saying that He came to create a Christian army with guns and tanks. Jesus is simply saying that He came to create opposition and enmity and division between men. Jesus came *in order to* bring a sword. He goes on to say:

III. Verses 35-36 – “For I have come [in order] to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household.”

But is this something that Jesus needs to *bring*? Haven’t we already seen that there is no man who knows the way of peace? Since there is no peace with God, it is *already* true that there can be no peace on earth. How then can Jesus say that He has come to *bring* a sword – as though it didn’t already exist?

Well, there *is* something new and unusual about this sword. It stands between a man and his father, a daughter and her mother, a daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law (in Bible times the daughter-in-law would move in with her husband and his family). Jesus says that now a man's enemies will be those of his own household. There are natural alliances even among those who do not know the way of peace. And generally speaking, the very strongest and tightest of these natural alliances is the family. The strongest bonds are the ties of kinship and family. And yet the sword that Jesus brings will divide even the *family*, actually setting one member *against* another! This sounds like bad news! And yet I agree with one commentator when he writes: "The division of the family is presented not as an unfortunate side effect of Jesus' ministry but as the very purpose of his coming" (Tannehill; quoted in Bruner). So what is this new sword that Jesus brings? What is this new division that Jesus has come to create? To answer this question, we need to go back to Genesis chapter three. Immediately following the fall of Adam and Eve, God addressed the serpent with these words:

IV. Genesis 3:15 – "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring [seed] and her offspring [seed]; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

If Jesus' words about family division sound like bad news, God's words to the serpent have always been heard as *good* news. This verse has been called the "proto-euangelion" – the first *Gospel*, the first announcement of the good news. The gospel was first announced by God *immediately* after the fall! And this first announcement of the Gospel begins with the promise that God will *create* *enmity*, *strife*, and *division* between the serpent and the woman, and between the serpent's offspring and the woman's offspring. In Revelation 12:9, John refers to "the great dragon... that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world." So the serpent is Satan. Who then are the serpent's offspring? Not serpents, and not demons, but rather all of fallen and sinful humanity.

- ✓ John 8:44 – You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires.
- ✓ 1 John 3:8 – Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning.
- ✓ Romans 5:12 – Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.

With the fall of Adam, the whole human race became the offspring of the serpent – sons of the evil one and those who carry out the desires of their father, the devil. And yet in the very hour that the whole human race became the offspring of the serpent, God promised to *create* enmity between the offspring of the serpent and *the offspring of the woman!* To create *enmity* assumes the creation of another offspring – another seed that will stand opposed to the seed of the serpent. Who is the offspring of the woman? Notice that God does not talk about the man's offspring (seed), but rather the woman's offspring (seed). Here is a foreshadowing of the virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14; Mic. 5:3; Mat. 1:23, 25; Luke 1:34-35)! The seed of the woman was traced not through Cain, but rather through Seth, Enoch, Noah, Shem, and Abraham. And then God promised Abraham that through His seed (offspring) blessing would come to all the nations of the earth. Paul explains:

- ✓ Galatians 3:16 – Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed [offspring]. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as referring to many, but rather to one, “And to your seed [offspring],” that is, Christ.
- ✓ Galatians 4:4 – But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, *born of woman*.

Christ is the seed of the woman, and so all those who are *in Christ* and united to Christ by faith (from Seth down to the present day) are also the seed of the woman! So now can we see that when God promised to put enmity between the serpent’s seed and the woman’s seed (Mat. 13:38), it was a gracious promise of good news. The creation of enmity, and conflict would require the creation of a new people. And if this conflict was to continue until the final day of judgment (when the serpent and his seed would be crushed by the seed of the woman), then it would require the preservation of this people until the very end. When God promised to *create enmity and conflict* and to *perpetuate that conflict* until the end, it was really a gracious promise of *salvation* and redemption for the seed of the woman – the offspring of Christ (from Seth to Noah to Abraham to David to John the Baptist to *us*; Is. 53:10-11; Heb. 2:13). We don’t often think of the creation of enmity and conflict as good news. But it *is* good news, because it means that God is saving for Himself a people out of the rebellious seed of the serpent, and thus in this act of grace, He is creating a perpetual hostility and enmity.

In these words of Jesus in Matthew 10, we hear an echo of Genesis 3:15, only now it comes to us not in the hour of the fall, but in anticipation of the cross. “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household.” I have come to create a new offspring, so that instead of harmony and agreement with the offspring of the serpent, there might be perpetual enmity and conflict until the kingdom comes. This is *good* news, and yet in the good news there is also a sobering warning and exhortation for us. This new offspring that Christ has come to create will sometimes cut *through* the natural ties of family so that within the same family some will be offspring of the serpent, and some will be the offspring of Christ. A son will repent and believe while his father will refuse. A mother will repent and believe while her daughter will refuse. The division will even extend at times to husbands and wives (Luke 18:29-30; 17:34). And so Jesus goes on to say:

V. Verse 37 – “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”

Notice that Jesus *assumes* here that we *will* love our family! Jesus is not trying to diminish the beauty of that special love between members of a family. God gave us this love and created these special bonds! We need to remember Paul’s warning that “if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8). Jesus gave a stinging rebuke to the Pharisees for making void the word of God by teaching that children could dedicate their things to *God* so that they would not have to provide for their *parents* (Mat. 15:3-9). However, our ties to Christ and to His family are ultimately *stronger* and *more binding* than the marital or biological ties of family. So whenever there is a conflict of interests, our commitment to Christ and His church must supersede and

overrule all commitments and obligations to family – whether to children, parents, or spouse. Indeed, whoever loves father or mother, or son or daughter more than Jesus is not worthy of Jesus. If our natural *affection* for family members causes us to *compromise* so that we can avoid enmity, conflict, and hostility, then we are not worthy to be part of *His* family. Jesus came to *create* enmity and to *bring* a sword. We need to be careful that we don't try to illegitimately *undo* this enmity that Jesus came to *create* – because this enmity is a sure sign of God's mercy and grace to us. Unless it is through our gospel witness, we must not try to get *rid* of the sword that Jesus came to *bring* – because this sword is the sure sign of our salvation. By God's *grace*, our ultimate commitment is not to biological family or to *any other* earthly ties, but *only* to Christ and His family. Therefore, *as a direct result* of God's grace in our lives, we will now be in fundamental and perpetual and irreconcilable conflict with the offspring of the serpent, even if that offspring is found in our own family. If our parents were to expect us to act in any way contrary to God's Word, then we must not compromise in order to maintain a relationship. We must esteem the approval of Christ more highly than the approval of our parents. When our children choose the world, we must not compromise in order to maintain a relationship. We must esteem the love of Christ more highly than the love of our children. If our spouse were to seek to hinder us in our relationship with Christ, then we must not *compromise* in order to maintain the marriage relationship. We must esteem the intimacy of our marriage to Christ as more important than the intimacy of any earthly marriage. Bruner writes: "When apparently unavoidable family [including extended family] arguments and divisions begin, disciples may recall these words of their Lord – 'he told me so' – and take heart [knowing that this is a sign of their salvation]."

- ✓ Exodus 32:26-29 – Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, "Who is on the LORD's side? Come to me." And all the sons of Levi gathered around him. And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'Put your sword on your side each of you, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor.'" And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And that day about three thousand men of the people fell. And Moses said, "Today you have been ordained for the service of the LORD, each one at the cost of his son and of his brother, so that he might bestow a blessing upon you this day."

The Geneva Study Bible concludes: "In [defending and guarding] God's glory we must have no respect to person, but put off all [earthly] affection."

- ✓ Deuteronomy 33:8-11 – And of Levi he said, "Give to Levi your Thummim, and your Urim to your godly one, whom you tested at Massah, with whom you quarreled at the waters of Meribah; who said of his father and mother, 'I regard them not'; he disowned his brothers and ignored his children. For they observed your word and kept your covenant. They shall teach Jacob your rules and Israel your law; they shall put incense before you and whole burnt offerings on your altar. Bless, O LORD, his substance, and accept the work of his hands."
- ✓ Deuteronomy 13:6-11 – If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or your daughter or the wife you embrace or your friend who is as your own soul entices you secretly, saying, "Let us go and serve other gods," ... you shall not yield to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him, nor shall you conceal him. But you shall kill him. Your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. You shall stone him to death with stones, because he sought to draw you away from the

LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. And all Israel shall hear and fear and never again do any such wickedness as this among you.

Jerome says: “Priority in all love is important. Love, after God, your father; love your mother, love your children. But if it becomes necessary to balance the one against the other... then hatred for one’s own is piety toward God” (quoted in Bruner). Of course, these Scriptural examples no longer apply to us *in the same way* now that the covenant people are no longer composed of believers and unbelievers – a spiritual Israel within an ethnic Israel. Since the covenant people today is composed only of those who are Jews *inwardly* and who have circumcised *hearts* (Rom. 2:28-29; 4:11-12, 16-17; cf. Rev. 2:9; 3:9; Heb. 8), it follows that there is no longer any call to stone idolaters since they are already outside of the covenant community. *However*, these Scriptures do clearly and powerfully illustrate the principle and teaching of Jesus here in Matthew chapter ten. It may seem all wrong and all backwards to some, but Jesus goes on to say:

VI. Verses 38-39 – “And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it”

We’ll reflect on these words more in depth when we get to Matthew sixteen (24-25), but even now, they can certainly speak well enough on their own. Whoever succeeds in eliminating the sword *that Jesus came to bring* will in the end find himself faced with another sword – the sword of Christ’s wrath (Rev. 19:11-16). Whoever succeeds in eliminating the enmity *that Jesus came to create* will in the end find himself at enmity with God (1 Jn. 2:15; James 4:4). Enmity and division is really the sign of God’s gracious salvation.

Conclusion

So where does our true allegiance lie? Bruner writes: “Jesus’ *self*-consciousness is distracting. Who does he think he is? He comes crashing into history, and then into our lives, and *takes over*, preempting our most instinctive loyalties, presuming on our deepest affections, usurping our natural ties, and asking (and so claiming) to be the most important person in our lives. We would not tolerate this presumption in most. [But] somehow it is appropriate in Jesus. We sense that his claim [actually] restores us to the [first and original] family [the family and offspring of God].” And so we see how it is possible to truly *love* the one who *demand*s our love! Where does our true allegiance lie? As the Geneva Study Bible puts it: “*Nothing* without exception is to be preferred before our duty to God.” *No* earthly relationship is worth maintaining if it comes at the expense of our relationship to Christ – not even the relationship between a parent and a child or a husband and a wife. And when conflict or hostility arises, we can learn in true humility and trust to give God glory for this evidence of our salvation.

Teaching our Children

Q. Fill in the blank – Jesus said: “Do not think that I have come to bring _____ to the earth.”

A. “Do not think that I have come to bring **peace** to the earth.

✓ Talk with your children about how surprising this might seem to many people. Talk about our responsibility to pursue peace with all men if at all possible (Mat. 5:9, 39, 41, 43-44; Rom. 12:18).

Q. If Jesus did not come to bring peace to this earth, then what did He come to bring?

A. Jesus came to bring a sword.

(This sword is not a literal sword, but a picture of division and conflict).

Q. How can this sword that Jesus came to bring be a *good* thing?

A. Read Genesis 3:15 (See IV. on page 3)

Q. Who is the offspring of the serpent?

A. The fall (Adam and Eve’s sin) made the *whole human race* the offspring of the serpent (See Scriptures on page 3)

Q. If the fall made the whole human race offspring of the serpent, then how can God create enmity and division?

A. God will have to create another (and different) offspring (the offspring of the woman)!

Q. Who is the offspring of the woman?

A. The offspring of the woman is Jesus Christ and everyone who has been united to Jesus by faith. (See Scriptures on top of page 4)

Q. God’s promise to create conflict and division was really a gracious promise of what?

A. God’s promise to create conflict and division was really a gracious promise of *salvation!* (Compare this to Jesus’ saying that He came not to bring peace but a sword.)

Q. Can the sword that Jesus brought even divide families?

A. Yes. Sometimes one member of a family will repent and believe while another one will not. (See Mat. 10:35-36 on bottom of page 2)

Q. Since conflict and division can be a sign of *salvation*, what should we *value* most of all, our relationships with family or our relationship with Christ and *His* family?

A. No earthly relationship is more important than our relationship with Christ and His family. (See Matthew 10:37 on page 4 and consider some of the implications of Jesus teaching) (If your children are old enough spend time reflecting on the Scriptures on page 5)