

UNITED WE FALL! DIVIDED WE STAND—WITH CHRIST!

"I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed! Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

What is a contradiction? If I told you I was a Minnesota Twins fan while wearing a Detroit Tigers cap that would be a contradiction. We are facing what appears to be a contradiction in our text. We always thought that Jesus came to bring peace. Isaiah calls him the "Prince of Peace." The angels sang on the night of his birth, "peace on earth." The night before his crucifixion Jesus said, ***"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you."*** Paul's familiar greeting to the churches and which we so often use before sermon states, "Grace and peace be to you." Yet, Jesus says in our text, ***"Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division."***

But there is no contradiction. This text stands alongside all the rest of the Bible as God's true, infallible, inerrant Word. So how can Jesus who brings peace say that he did not come to bring peace? Simple. By knowing the difference between the ends and the means. The ends is peace, peace between the sinner and God. But the means to get to that goal must be division between the sinner and his sin and this sinful world.

Thank God Jesus came to cause divisions. You see, if we stand united with the world, we will fall, but Jesus divides us from this world so in the end we will stand with God forever.

I. How Jesus caused trouble for himself.

Have you noticed how certain things divide people? Sports is one. In my own family there are Packer, Viking, Lions, Falcons, Bears, Buccaneers, and Forty-Niners fans. Politics is another. You can have in the same family Democrats and Republicans and Independents, liberals, conservatives, and moderates.

But there is one more thing that causes divisions. It is Jesus Christ. Simeon predicted this when he prophesied over the baby Jesus, ***"This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many will be revealed."*** Either you love Jesus, or you hate him. There is no middle ground. Wise men traveled a great distance to worship Jesus while King Herod tried to kill him. In his hometown, some believed him, others wanted to stone him to death. At his crucifixion, some mourned, others mocked him.

Why does the mention of Jesus' name cause such divisions? It doesn't make sense. Jesus speaks of love. He healed hundreds. He came to save us. The reason isn't Jesus. It is us. Listen to this stinging indictment of the sinful world: ***"... the sinful mind is HOSTILE to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God."*** All men are by nature slaves to sin and to the devil, and have a mission statement: resist God at all costs.

Now, how can you make peace? One way is to give up. A parent can keep the peace by giving in to a whiny child. A boss can keep the peace by not enforcing company rules on a lazy worker. Jesus could have kept the peace. All he had to do was keep his mouth shut. He could have just healed people without sermons. He could have stopped calling the Pharisees hypocrites. He could have stopped pointing out sin. He could have avoided the cross and left the world alone.

But he didn't. He couldn't. Jesus understood that he needed to divide and destroy in order to give us peace. He came to break up the monopoly and destroy the unity the sinner has with sin, the devil, the world, and hell.

To save us, Jesus had to suffer great and terrible things. ***"But I have a Baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed."*** In war, if a unit or regiment who never saw battle before finally got into action, they called this baptism of fire. Jesus had a baptism. It would be the suffering and death on the cross. It would be the moment when he would become sin. At that moment Jesus was divided from God and united with the sinner. At that moment God abandoned him as Jesus desperately cried, ***"My God. My God. Why have you forsaken me?"*** At that moment Jesus faced the eternal separation of hell.

Jesus brought trouble into his life. He also endured the anger of God over our sin. Thank God he did, for the trouble he brought on himself brought peace to us. God can't be angry over our sins because Jesus paid for them. They are forgiven. Heaven is no longer locked to us. Jesus is our righteousness and holiness. We are at peace with God because of Jesus. And now, to maintain that peace with God, he must divide us from the world. Peace with God means war with the world.

II. The trouble Jesus brings into our lives.

"I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled." I remember some years ago a fire that broke out in Yellowstone National Park. The Park Service had adopted a new policy of letting these fires burn. They figured it was nature's way of clearing out old, dead growth to make room for new plants and trees. I remember pictures of thousands of parched acres. The Park Service was highly criticized for their actions. But a year later, pictures of those same acres

showed green grass and plants and new trees. Fire can be good, to remove the dead growth and allow new growth. They still perform “controlled burns” today with that same philosophy.

John the Baptist prophesied that Jesus would baptize with fire and the Holy Spirit. Jesus started a fire in you. He killed your sinful nature so a new growth, the new man, the believer may arise. He broke the power of the devil. He conquered death. In Ezekiel it says there is a resurrection of all the dead, some to everlasting life, others to everlasting death in hell. What does it mean to you that you will not share in the fate of this sinful world? It means you don't rise to everlasting death but to everlasting life.

This division from sin and death and the devil Jesus offers to every soul in every generation. Yet, so many reject it. The truth is, humans love their sin. And this is where the division occurs. When you walk with Jesus, talk like him, love as he loved you, when you believe him and submit to him as Lord and Savior, others will hate you. I tell teenagers, if you want to be real radicals, be a Christian for then you will go against all that the world holds dear. Hippies at Woodstock were not radicals; they only did what the world thinks and desires. Be different. It will mean trouble, jokes, mocking. It will break the peace and cause divisions.

“Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.” If the Atheists of America hate us, fine. It shows we are divided from the world and united with Christ. But it hurts when division occurs within families. Jesus describes a family of five: a husband and wife, an unmarried daughter, and a son and his wife. Two are against three in this family because of Jesus. He doesn't say who is on which side. That is not the point. The point is Jesus will divide families.

Friends, every family I know is experiencing this. The division may be small where some in the family don't understand, or don't want to understand everything God says in his Word. But often the division is wider. Maybe a family member is falling away from Jesus and his Word. Maybe temptation has seized them and they are united with the world and act like everyone else. Jesus' own brothers and sisters once rejected him as their Savior and considered him a madman.

Now you have a choice, peace with Christ or peace in the family. You can keep the peace in the family by not talking about Jesus. Give in to them. Give it up. Shut up. But there is another way you can make peace in the family and that is to share you peace with them so they may share in the unity you have with Christ. In other words, you can establish peace in the family as all come to believe in Jesus as their Savior.

It would be terrible if Christ, seeing the trouble he would bring into our lives, decided not to share the gospel with us. It would be awful if Jesus saw how many will reject him and thought it wasn't worth the effort. But he is not discouraged by the rejection of so many. He continues to preach the gospel throughout the whole world. He continues to send us out to make disciples. And don't be discouraged yourself. View division as proof we are saved. View division as an opportunity to share our salvation.

Where do you stand? Jesus has stirred things up in your life. Yes, it means trouble, even with family. It means no compromise, no neutrality. But we accept such trouble, for united with the world, we fall; divided from the world with Christ, we stand. INJ Amen.