

Matthew 10:34-37

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Jesus warns of the deep division that His kingdom message sows among men. It divides even families. He tells His disciples that anyone who does not love Him more than the dearest relationships within their households is not worthy of Him.

The parallel gospel accounts of this teaching are found in Mark 13:12-13, Luke 12:51-53, and Luke 14:26.

At times it can be tempting to *think that Jesus came to bring peace and harmony on this earth*; that the societies of men of this age or any era before Kingdom Come will find unity among each other in His name. But Jesus tells His disciples this thinking is mistaken. He explicitly tells them *I did not come to bring peace but a sword*.

What can Jesus, whom the prophet Isaiah called the “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6), and the Teacher who taught His disciples to “love your enemies” (Matthew 5:44), and who said “Makarios are the peacemakers”, (Matthew 5:9) mean by such a remark?

This apparent paradox was addressed in the Matthew 5:9 commentary.

The paradox emerges when we consider Jesus two statements:

Blessed are the Shalom-makers for they shall be called sons of God.

“Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34).

How can Jesus be summoning His followers to both peace and war at the same time?

These statements may be reconciled when we recall two truths that have been previously mentioned.

1. It is impossible for the corrupt kingdoms of this world to experience Shalom. Evil and Shalom are mutually exclusive. Jesus is not calling His disciples to compromise with the sinful dominions of the world.
2. Instead of the hollow peace of compromise with evil, Jesus and His Kingdom offer the fullness of Shalom.

With those truths in mind, we see that a major aspect of what Jesus meant by being a Shalom-maker is to be a faithful witness; to lay down your life for what is true and good; to resist compromising with the world; to expose false teaching; to stand against injustice and corruption. In so doing, as we follow Jesus we bring the sword to the world system—the sword that is the Shalom of Jesus.

This idea of Shalom as an uncompromising witness also feeds into both the next Beatitude—“Makarios *are* those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness” (Matthew 5:10) and Jesus’s declaration that His disciples are “salt” and “light” (Matthew 5:13-16).

The Messiah *came* to draw a line between His Kingdom of light from the kingdoms of darkness. He *came* to call people to repentance (change of mind), to change their affiliation, allegiance, citizenship, and identity from the kingdoms of men to the eternal Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:17). This is the same message that John the Baptizer preached (Matthew 3:2). Indeed, it is the same message Jesus was commanding His disciples to preach as He was sending them out to the lost sheep of Israel (Matthew 10:6-7).

But Jesus knew that as He called people to light and life, that many would hate and reject His offer. Men would fight and even murder to resist the light.

“Light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the Light; for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light, so that his deeds will not be exposed.” (John 3:19-20)

The *sword* of the Gospel divides between the dark ways of this world and the ways of light—the ways of God. It divides between those who *love* Jesus and those who *love* the things of this world. It divides between what is true and real, and what is false and untrue.

It is important to clarify that in His remark, Jesus is not summoning His disciples to physical militant action against those who oppose them. The physical *sword* will be used against believers by those who hate Christ’s followers. But Jesus will equip His followers with the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God, and dispatch them to fight the spiritual forces of evil with the truth of the Gospel (Ephesians 6:10-17). Jesus never commands His followers to use *the* physical *sword* as a means of advancing His Kingdom or Gospel in this life. On the contrary, Jesus instructs His disciples to “turn the other cheek” (Matthew 5:39). He commands Peter to put away his physical *sword* (John 18:11). And Christ models laying down His life even for His enemies (Luke 23:34, Romans 5:8). Even as our enemies hate us, we are to love them.

However the scripture is clear that believers are called to battle, but not human enemies. As Paul explained to the believers of Ephesus:

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

(Ephesians 6:12)

Jesus acknowledges that the *sword* of the word of God and the Gospel will divide *a man against the members of his household*. This indicates that identification with Jesus and obedience to His kingdom is deeper than the deepest of earthly relationships. He gives three familial relationships as an example: *For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law*.

Jesus is quoting Micah 7:6, which says,

“For son disavows father,
Daughter rises up against her mother,
Daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;
A person’s enemies are the people of his own household.”

In his passage, Micah describes an unjust society where the wicked plot against the righteous and “the godly person has perished from the land” (Micah 7:2). But Micah foretells a Babel-like day of judgment and predicts that a great “confusion will occur” (Micah 7:4) where no one will be able to trust their neighbor, friends, wife, or family members. Micah claims, “But as for me, I will be on the watch for the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation” (Micah 7:7).

Jesus tells His disciples *I came to* bring about this judgment of confusion among the wicked that Micah 7 describes. This is the tenth time Matthew has demonstrated that Jesus is the Messiah by use of Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah. (The previous nine are Matthew 1:22-23, 2:5-6, 2:16-18, 2:23, 3:1-3, 4:4-6, 4:13-16, 5:17, 8:17). But this quotation is extra noteworthy, because it is the first time Matthew records Jesus claiming that He, Himself, is the fulfillment of a particular Messianic passage.

The *father/son* relationship is one of the most foundational bonds humans can experience. From early in life, a son measures himself through the approval *of his father*. A *father* naturally loves his son and desires his son to excel, and make him proud. And yet Jesus says that if a follower *is to be worthy of Me*, he must love Jesus *more than* his own *father* or son.

The *mother/daughter* relationship is similar. By specifying, Jesus reveals that this command is not limited to men. His kingdom call and its demands are also applicable for women. Whoever *loves mother or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me*.

The third relationship Jesus mentions is *daughter-in-law/mother-in-law*. This is a relationship bonded not by blood, but by marriage. It is interesting that Jesus does not mention the husband/wife relationship, which is the deepest human relationship of all (Genesis 2:24). Perhaps this was because husband and wives are “one flesh” and God holds marriage in high regard (Matthew 19:4-9). The Micah prophecy does not say “marriage” or use terms like “husband” or “wife,” but it does describe a sexual relationship:

“Guard your lips
From her who lies in your arms”
(Micah 7:5).

This could apply to marriage, but because the society that Micah describes is so wicked it does not automatically presume marriage.

Even though Jesus does not mention the husband/wife relationship by name, the principle that God desires His followers to love Him more than their spouse would seem to apply (Genesis 3:17). However, scripture is clear that if a believer is married to an unbeliever, so much as it is in

their power they should remain in the relationship in order to positively influence their spouse (1 Corinthians 7:12-16). In this manner, such a person is still putting God's kingdom first.

Of the division His kingdom will bring, Jesus says that *a man's enemies will be the members of his household*. Such division between beloved family members would naturally be extremely painful. But if we have to face this choice, we must decide who we are going to *be worthy of* and who we are going to be *enemies* with. The rejection from those we respect and deeply love is undoubtedly more painful than the scorn of strangers. But if we are to be *worthy of* Jesus and His kingdom, we must be willing to be rejected, hated, even persecuted by our own *household*.

As the Divine Messianic King, Jesus should receive our utmost allegiance, deepest trust, and highest love. Jesus promises that such love will be repaid many times over.

Biblical Text

Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came 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 man's enemies will be the members of his 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.