

Matt. 10:34-39 - The Division in Persecution

Written by Tim Black
Sunday, 21 June 2009 13:00 -

1.

Introduction

1.

Conversation topics. People say if you want to avoid arguments at family reunions, don't bring up politics or religion. Victorian novels will tell you it's better to discuss "the weather or the state of the roads." But we are intrigued by politics and religion because they are full of difficult questions, and because they are matters of life and death.

2.

In Matthew 10, Christ teaches us how to bring the gospel to others, and how to deal with its rejection and the persecution that may follow. The gospel always creates a division between believers and unbelievers, so Christ continues to teach us to "be wise as serpents, and innocent as doves."

3.

Outline.

1.

Christ Brings Not Peace But A Sword v. 34

2.

Christ Breaks the Closest Earthly Ties vv. 35-36

3.

Choose Christ Before Family and Life! vv. 37-38

4.

Ultimately You Will Lose, or Find, Eternal Life v. 39

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5.

Body

1.

Christ Brings Not Peace But A Sword v. 34. First, that you will be wise, Christ tells you he brings not peace but a sword

1.

Text

1.

34 Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

2.

Not Peace. You could be troubled by Christ's words here, because Christ did come to bring "Peace on earth and goodwill to men" (**Luke 2:14**), and "he...is our peace" (**E**

ph. 2:14

), but God said clearly in

Isaiah 48:22

and

57:21

,

"There is no peace for the wicked.

" God's peace is offered to unbelievers, but they do not receive it. His peace is for those who are reconciled to Himself. What is more, those who are not reconciled to God make themselves enemies

of God by their rebellion against Him. (

Rom. 11:28

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) "
While
we
were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.

" (
Rom. 5:10

) But "
many...walk as enemies of the cross of Christ

" (
Phil. 3:18

) and for that reason they make themselves enemies of the gospel and of those who
proclaim it.

3.

But A Sword. What is the nature of this sword?

1.

Causes a division. First, it clearly causes a division. A sword is made to cut things, to divide things into two pieces. The word for sword here brings that cutting and cleaving action to mind. Christ will divide people.

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Is Christ Guilty? Now you may worry that because this division is evil in part, in some way Christ may be guilty for that evil.

-

God is not the author of sin. But scripture consistently teaches that God is the creator of evil, but is not its author

. He is its cause
, but not the personal agent
who performs the evil act. He is its ultimate
or
primary
cause, but not its

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proximate

cause. God says, "

I make peace, and

create

evil

" (

Is. 45:7

); and "

When evil comes to a city, has the LORD not

caused

it?

" (

Amos 3:6

) But

1 Cor. 14:33

says "

God is not the

author

of confusion.

" God is the

cause

of evil, but He is not

guilty

for it. God sovereignly "

works all things according to the counsel of His will

" (

Eph. 1:11)

, including sin itself, but He is not the sinner, so is not guilty of committing a sin. Rather, it is Satan, the demons, and men who are guilty for the sins they commit. This is exactly what happens in the division Christ brings. It was Christ's purpose to bring a sword that divides people, but the only ones guilty for that division are unrepentant sinners who do not trust in Christ's atoning sacrifice to cleanse them from their sins. On the final Judgment Day Christ

will sovereignly separate the sheep from the goats, but He will also declare the goats

guilty for their sins and so deserving of the punishment to which He sends them. (

Matt. 25:32, 41

) We must emphasize both

God's sovereignty

and

man's responsibility

to the fullest extent to understand the division this sword brings.

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God's sword. God sovereignly wields the sword of divine judgment.

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Do you remember the flaming sword barring reentry to the Garden of Eden, which fell on Christ and which will fall on those who are not saved through Him? Christ alone went under that sword to eat of the Tree of Life, that we may drink freely of the water of life through faith in Him.

-

But when the Son of Man came the first time not all had faith. John the Baptist warned God's people that "the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." (Matt. 3:10)

-

Prophesying the personal anguish Christ's mother Mary would suffer when her son and Savior would be crucified by the hands of sinful men, Simeon warned her "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed, and a sword will pierce through your own soul also.

" (

Luke 2:34-35

)

-

In the church today the sword of the Spirit is the word of God. It is sharper than any double-edged sword, dividing even joints and marrow; its gospel is the keys of the kingdom by which men are either let into or shut out of heaven.

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The sword of man. Man also wields a sword, whether responsibly or irresponsibly.

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The civil magistrate "is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. " (Rom. 13:4) That is man's responsible use of the sword.

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But this power over men's bodies and lives which God has committed to men is wrongfully used when unbelievers persecute Christians for their faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ.

-

Christ Breaks the Closest Earthly Ties vv. 35-36. In vv. 35-36 Jesus tells you how this persecution works out in practice. Just as God's judgment began in the household of God, when John the Baptist, Christ, Paul and the apostles called hypocrites within the church to repentance and were betrayed and put to death even by their closest companions, so today as well Christ breaks the closest earthly ties

1.

Text

1.

35 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.

2.

36 And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.

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3.

When you walk on the road that leads to life, and your family member walks on the road that leads to destruction, you may walk together for a time, but in the end, and many times before then, your paths will part. You will have to decide to part ways, and they will be "surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they [will] malign you.

" (

1 Pet. 4:4

) But for you the time is past "

for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.

" (

1 Pet. 4:3

) Your commitment "

to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God

" (

1 Pet. 4:2

) will divide you from father, from son, from mother, from daughter. If Christ has not separated you from

someone

in your life, I question whether you truly follow Him!

4.

Notice Christ says plainly that it is His purpose to create this enmity. The words "I have come to" indicates His intentional purpose. Here is where the rubber of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility meets the road of life. Though God sovereignly works this division, you are responsible not to promote the division, but to be ministers of reconciliation. (

2 Cor. 5:18

) "

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

" (

Rom. 12:18

) Let it be the unbeliever's sin, and not yours, which breaks your family ties. Christ came to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers.

" (

Mal. 4:6; Luke 1:17

) "

Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath!

" Your goal must never be to break the ties of your family. But when they do not obey the gospel

" call to repent and believe (

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2 Thess. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:17

), you must not be an accomplice to their crime, and if they oppose you because you obey God, you must obey God rather than men. If they must be excommunicated from the church, even there your purpose must be redemptive in the end—we turn them over to Satan but pray thereby God may grant them repentance.

5.

Christians have misused Christ's teaching here in a way that reveals the limits of what He means. One of my friend's brothers who grew up in the Reformed faith just became a monk by joining a monastery near Tulsa. My friend says "it is as if my brother has died or gone to jail." To a great extent he renounced his earthly possessions, and his family ties. Are monks who have taken a vow of poverty still obligated to provide for their parents and family? Yes, they are! Christ condemned those who say to their father or mother, "'Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban' (that is, given to God).

" (

Mark 7:11

) Your Christianity is not an excuse for not loving and providing for your family. But it is the reason why they may oppose you.

6.

Choose Christ Before Family and Life! vv. 37-38. To help you in the midst of this reality, Christ gives you a choice and a promise. He calls you to choose Christ before family and life

1.

Text

1.

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.

2.

38 And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

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3.

Choose Christ before family. First, choose Christ before family. Today is Father's Day. God commands you to " Ho

nor your father and mother

" (

Ex. 20:12

) as part of the way you should "

love your neighbor as yourself.

" (

Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:39

) Christ gives you no excuse for dishonoring your parents, or for not loving your children.

Rather, He calls you to

fix your priorities

. Love Christ more than you love your family. I'm sure most of you order your priorities this way—God, family, country. Family is more important than country. Here Christ tells you that He is more important than your family. God comes first. This means you should never consider marrying an unbeliever. Their unbelief completely disqualifies them from being a potential marriage partner. "

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness?

" (

2 Cor. 6:14

) Christ comes before family. I believe this also applies to Christ's body, the church, because of the promise Christ gives in

Mark 10:29-30

: "

Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.

" The brothers and sisters and children you receive "

now in this time

"—in this age—are the members of the church, which is the family of God. I tell you, you have treated my wife and I as family for this reason, and I pray we will treat you as family as well, because our union with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ gives us a bond with one another even deeper than that of our families. Now because Christ says if you must forsake your family to follow Christ, you receive the

church

in return, when He says "

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me,

" He implies you must choose not only

Christ

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before your family, but also Christ's church

before your family. Again, this doesn't mean you should not provide for and love your family. But when you have to choose Christ's church or your family, which will you choose? I believe this means a family reunion or a family outing should not prevent you from attending church. Now there is a discussion topic sure to rile up some family reunions! But when Christ says "

Follow me

" and you reply "

Let me first go and bury my father...let me first say farewell to those at my home,

" Christ replies "

No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.

" (

Luke 9:59-62

) Take your family to church with you; set an example for them! Spouses and even children who attend church without their family bring honor to the name of Jesus Christ, even if their family does not approve. My own grandmother is lovingly cared for by two family members who do not go to church, so Grandma rarely goes to church, and that is a travesty of true religion! If you move to be closer to family, do not move if you cannot find a church. Christ says, "

Whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

" Though we may sinfully rationalize away the value of Christ's church, we cannot escape the power and finality of Christ's words, "

not worthy of me.

" May those words never apply to you!

4.

Choose Christ before life. Not only does Christ come before family, but you must choose Christ before life

itself, knowing it is He alone who will preserve your life. Christ's cross was an implement of execution. It was like our electric chair. Christ calls you to take up your electric chair and follow Him. It is illegal to evangelize in North Korea, Iran, and a number of other countries. Christians must obey the law so far as they can—be innocent as doves!—but Christ commands the church to preach the gospel to Christians and non-Christians alike, and no law may outlaw the almighty God! We must not aim to offend nor may we seek martyrdom, but Christ warns you "

whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

"

5.

Ultimately You Will Lose, or Find, Eternal Life v. 39. Terrible though Christ's warnings may be, they never come without the sweet and precious promises of salvation. We see both in v. 39,

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1.

Text

1.

39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

2.

Ultimately you will lose, or find, eternal life. This is the end of the matter. When you bring the gospel to others, when they persecute you, will you hold fast to your Savior Jesus Christ? If instead you seek to save your life by giving in to sin and self, persecution and the ways of the world, Jesus says though you found your life in this world, you will lose it in the next. But if you remain devoted to Jesus Christ, if you count all things a loss for the sake of knowing Christ, and being found in Him, though you lose your life in this world, you will find it in the next. "

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

" (

Rom. 8:35

) No, "

neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

" (

Rom. 8:35, 38-39

)

3.

By saving some but not all of those who hate Him, Christ creates a division among men. That division leads to death for all who stubbornly refuse to come to Him that they may have life (**Joh**

n 5:40

), but "

whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

" (

John 3:16

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4.

Conclusion

1.

Christ Brings Not Peace But A Sword v. 34

2.

And Breaks the Closest Earthly Ties vv. 35-36

3.

So Choose Christ Before Family and Life! vv. 37-38

4.

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