

A great company of the heavenly hosts sang at the birth of Jesus, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." At the Temple, Simeon held the forty day old Savior in his arms and praised God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation..." Jesus, after he rose from the dead, stood among his disciples and said to them, "Peace be with you." And Jesus also said, "Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division."

Many see this as a contradiction, as a problem with Jesus that needs to be explained away. Some may simply ignore the things they can't understand while others may even try to change the words of Jesus. But this is not a contradiction. This is not a problem that needs fixing. This is truth. Do not fall into the very dangerous mistake of trying to ignore or change the truth because it makes you uncomfortable. Instead it should be your burning desire as a Christian to be changed by the truth.

There is this great lie out there that if God loves you he won't let anything bad happen to you. Do not believe it. "Do you think I came to bring peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but division...five in one family divided against each other...father against son...mother against daughter." This is the true Jesus. Do not ignore him. Do not think of this as a problem. Instead rejoice that he is this way.

Stay away from those who change Jesus. There are people who will preach a Jesus who does not say that he has come to bring division. Run away from them. They do not preach the true Jesus. They preach a sterile Jesus, sanitized, and safe for this modern world, tolerant and accepting of all. They turn Jesus into nothing more than a smiling picture on the wall. But Jesus came to bring division and this is good.

The kinds of division that Jesus brings are not division for division's sake. He is not a mischievous trouble-maker. The division he brings is necessary. There are divisions in the Christian life. There are divisions that God will allow so that you can grow and this is good.

It is a painful thing for the Lord to save you from this world. He has to tear you away from things that you love. He has to break you down, to destroy your love for the world, to make clear to you that this is not your home, this is not heaven. And that is painful—physically, financially, emotionally painful. But that is why Jesus has come—to bring division and this is good.

Jesus wants you to be in heaven and have unity with the Father. But the Father is perfect and you are not and you love things that are not. So in order to be united with the Father in heaven you have to be divided from those things which have no business being in the presence of the Father. This begins with you yourself. You have to be divided from yourself. Your *self*, your sinful *self*, cannot be with God. You have to be divided from your self-loving sinful self. Jesus has done this for you in your baptism, when your sinful nature was put to death. Baptism is good. Division is good.

When Jesus brings you to be with the Father, he tears you away from most of what this world has to offer. You struggle with that because you want things to go well in your life. You want to have a peaceful life. The danger behind that desire though can be a misunderstanding of this life and the next life. It can be a confusion of the two. This is not heaven. This will be difficult. There will be division and this is good as you learn to rely on him more and more.

This is part of the fire that he has thrown onto this world. It is a fire that came out of the mouths of apostles while the flames flickered above their heads. This fire of the gospel has spread over the world and come to you so that you can know the truth. Jesus has come to bring division and this division is good and necessary.

The source of this division is the baptism that Jesus had to undergo. "How distressed I am until it is completed!" Jesus said. The baptism he was speaking about was his bloody baptism on the cross. The pain he would take to remove sin was an unthinkable amount. But it had to be done, because Jesus came to bring division, to divide you from your sin and from death and so he had to be divided from his Father. Jesus' bloody baptism is good. Division is good.

Jesus was baptized in blood on the cross for your forgiveness. You have been divided from your sin. Thank God that he came to bring division. Thank God that he came to be baptized in water by John and in blood on the cross. He who came by water and blood has in that way completed your salvation. Thank God that he brings division; that he cared so much to tear you away from this world and keep you out of hell. Division is good.

Jesus brings you into his kingdom kicking and screaming for it is painful to be separated from the world. It is painful to meet people who will reject the bloody baptism of Christ. It is especially painful to see that among a family. But it is necessary that Jesus divide the sheep from the goats. Jesus has made you part of his family. It is good to be separated from the world. It is good to remember that this is not heaven.

In order for you to have fellowship with the Father the Son has to cut you off from this world. And so you will suffer, you will be broke, you will lose friends, and your family may be torn apart. But the division is part of the peace that the angels sang about. You are at peace with the Father through the bloody baptism of the Son as a result you are divided from the world. So you can say that you are in the world but not of the world and this is good. For this is not your home. Heaven is. May the Spirit's fire grow in you and spread throughout the world.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.