

## Did Jesus Really Say That?

“I did not come to bring peace, but a sword”

By [Rev. Kevin Labby](#)

*First Free Evangelical Church, McKeesport, Pennsylvania*

*This text is from a transcription of a recent sermon by Rev. Kevin Labby.*

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Have you ever sat at a family dinner or gathering where someone made a comment that instantly divided the room? Forks paused midair, voices rose, and people stared in disbelief, wondering why anyone would say such a thing in polite company. That kind of moment—the sharp, unsettling word—is exactly the kind of moment Jesus created, not once or twice, but many times throughout His ministry. And that’s the focus of this sermon series: the difficult sayings of Jesus. We’re not glossing over them, but facing them head-on to understand what He meant. Today we’ll look at one of those sayings in Matthew 10:34-39. Let’s turn there together.

### Scripture Reading

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. 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. 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.

This is the Word of the Lord.

### Prayer

*Father, we thank You for the gift of Your Word. Inspired by Your Spirit, it is infallible and inerrant in all that it teaches—the only truth upon which we can rest our souls. By the power of Your Spirit, open our eyes to see Jesus, our*

*ears to understand His teaching, and our hearts to cherish and live in light of its truth. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.*

It's common today to present Jesus as invariably gentle—a compassionate healer, a socially inclusive teacher, a figure who breaks down barriers and rarely confronts. Sometimes He's even imagined as a kind of easygoing, happy-go-lucky figure. But that picture is not biblically accurate. The Gospels show Jesus speaking words that confront, challenge, and even provoke conflict. And here He declares: *"I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."*

That statement jars us, especially if we remember other passages. Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would be the Prince of Peace. At His birth, angels sang "peace on earth." Jesus Himself told His disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you." So what do we make of this? Did Jesus contradict Himself?

### 1. Did Jesus Contradict Himself?

No. Jesus is fully God and fully man, united perfectly in one person. As God, He does not contradict Himself. Scripture tells us there is no shadow of turning in Him, no corruption, no contradiction. So when Jesus speaks of peace in one place and of a sword in another, He is clarifying the kind of peace He came to bring.

Jesus does not delight in strife. He blessed peacemakers (Matthew 5:9). He avoided unnecessary conflict, refusing to be swept into premature confrontations with Rome or the religious leaders. He rebuked Peter for striking the high priest's servant, saying, "Put your sword back in its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword." Yet Jesus also embraced necessary conflict: cleansing the temple, confronting the Pharisees, and ultimately claiming equality with God—knowing it would lead to His crucifixion. Every conflict He accepted served His mission to reconcile us to the Father.

### 2. What Division Should Christians Expect?

The peace Jesus brings reconciles us to God and to one another. But it also places us in inevitable conflict with a world opposed to Him. Paul writes in Romans 5:1: "Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." That is the peace Jesus secures—the peace of reconciliation with God.

Yet once reconciled, we "change teams." We move from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. James reminds us: "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?" To follow Christ is to embrace peace with God, but also to accept division from a world that resists Him.

Jesus is indeed the Prince of Peace—but His peace is not the absence of conflict. It is the presence of reconciliation with God, purchased through His life, death, and resurrection. And that peace inevitably divides us from the world. To follow Him is to take up the cross, to lose our life for His sake, and in so doing, to find it.

The result of coming to the Father is often division and separation. Christ's peace reconciles us to God, yet like a sword, it cuts through our former entanglements with sin, idolatry, and misplaced allegiances. This division does not arise from needless antagonism or militancy, but from the simple reality of Christ's exclusive claim over our lives. Jesus declared that there is only one way to the Father: "No one comes to the Father except through me." No religion, philosophy, or way of life apart from Christ can reconcile us to God. To be reconciled, then, requires cutting away everything that stands in the way.

When Jesus says in Matthew 10:34, "I have not come to bring peace but a sword," he is not calling for physical violence. Rather, he is describing the division of our lives—a separation from the world. Paul echoes this when he urges believers to be distinct from the world in the ways God has revealed. A renewed mind separates us from worldly thinking; a renewed heart clings to values the world does not esteem; a renewed life leads us down paths different from those lived in the flesh.

The writer of Hebrews employs the sword imagery to describe the power of God's Word: "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12). This is why we pray before hearing the Word preached—that by the Spirit, it would be living and active within us. The Word penetrates deeper than any earthly weapon, dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. It exposes even the tension within us—the part that loves the Lord and the part that resists him—so that rebellion might be conquered by Christ.

Jesus makes clear there can be no negotiation with sin, no *détente* with idolatry, no truce with the devil. The war is unmitigated, and though Christ has already won, we continue to fight its rear-guard battles. This division extends even into families. Quoting Micah, Jesus warns that "a man's enemies will be those of his own household" (Micah 7:6). In first-century Israel, family loyalty was the bedrock of identity and security. To lose those ties felt like exile, even death. Thus, Jesus' claim that allegiance to him must surpass family bonds was shocking. Yet it does not contradict God's design for the family, for reconciliation comes only through Christ. Malachi foretold that the Messiah would turn the hearts of fathers to their children and children to their fathers. In Christ, families are healed—not apart from him, but through him.

I once knew a family fractured by conflict. Over time, one by one, its members came to faith in Christ. As they drew closer to the Father, they drew closer to

one another. Healing came through grace, counseling, and the study of God's Word. Yet in many cultures today, following Jesus still means rejection, estrangement, or even violence. In America, it may take subtler forms—ridicule, alienation, or professional setbacks—but the sword still cuts.

Jesus presses further: "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37). He does not reject family bonds—he affirms the command to honor parents—but insists that every relationship must be subordinate to him. Luke renders it starkly: unless one "hates" father and mother, he cannot be Christ's disciple. This "hate" is not animosity but a vast preference for Christ above all else. To follow him is to take up the cross (v. 38), to die to self, former loyalties, and worldly priorities, so that new life may rise. As Paul writes, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

This union with Christ brings peace with God and, when possible, peace with one another. Yet it also brings division. Still, there is promise: "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matthew 10:39). To live is Christ, and to die is gain (Philippians 1:21). Jesus calls us to know what following him truly means—even when it requires uncomfortable divisions—because in losing our lives for his sake, we discover life indeed.

So what is the practical importance of all of this? Let me close with just a couple of thoughts. The first is there are false divisions that we as Christians must be careful to avoid. Jesus is not calling us to be divisive just because there are divisions. When he says, I'm bringing a sword, he's not telling us to be people that are needlessly disagreeable, needlessly divisive. Not every conflict is Christ's conflict. For instance, Paul, the apostle Paul, no stranger to conflict, lowered out of a wall in a basket down to escape people that wanted to harm him. He was whipped and beaten and found himself in all sorts of conflicts for the proclamation of the gospel, but he warns against quarreling over words, and says that quarreling over words, lesser matters, nitpicky things, does no good, and goes on to say it ruins the hearers. In his letter to Timothy, a young pastor says, don't have anything to do with those that quarrel over words does no good, ruins the hearers. He also exhorts believers in Romans, 12, if possible, so much as it depends upon you live peaceably. You shouldn't be the kind of person that's looking for conflict. You shouldn't be the kind of person that's just getting some talking points and looking for somebody to blast them at. We must. We must avoid division for division's sake.

We should never mistake being abrasive for boldness. Sometimes people say, Oh, this is just the way that I am. I'm just being me. No, you're being a jerk. Stop it.

You're sinning. It's not you. Sin is not a personality. It's something to repent from. If you're known for just blasting people, stop it. It's a sin. And let me say I've had

to blast myself with that because that's my nature apart from Christ. My nature apart from Christ is snarky and rude and hyper divisive and and I have people in my life that will tell you that creeps out from time to time. And I have plenty of people in my life that say, Oh, I remember Kevin. I remember the time he ruined Thanksgiving dinner because he got in a battle with a family member over the difference between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. That really happened.

I'll go to my grave regretting that uncharitable, just awful, dreadful portrayal of what it means to follow Jesus.

We must always repent of baptizing our annoyances and using them as a pretext to go after people.

We must speak the truth, but we need to do it in love with the proper sense of priorities. There are false divisions to avoid, but there are faithful divisions that we must expect, faithful divisions we must endure, faithful divisions that we should even embrace. Jesus' word is clear. Division for his sake, is inevitable. If you think coming to faith in Christ is going to lead to an invariably beautiful life with no suffering, nobody ever disliking you. It's going to make you an agreeable person. Really, you need to read the Bible more.

Jesus said, If the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you. Know that I'm right there with you, brother or sister. Paul echoed that reality, he said, and listen carefully this. He said, all who desire to live a godly life in Jesus Christ will be persecuted. Now, you might be persecuted a little. You might be persecuted a lot, but Paul is saying it's the invariable reality of following Jesus. You should expect some opposition, you should expect to endure rejection, and you should expect to embrace Jesus through it all. This isn't failure on your part. First Peter 4:14 if you're insulted for the name of Christ, not insulted because you were needlessly mean, not insulted because you were antagonistic, but if you were genuinely insulted for the name of Christ, Peter says you are blessed. So how do we live this out? We have to examine our loyalties. When our allegiances collide. Christ needs to gain preeminence. We need to learn to distinguish between what faithfulness to the gospel looks like and what quarrels born of pride look like. We're called to be peacemakers wherever it's possible, remembering that Jesus blesses those who make peace.

What could it look like? Well, positively, it could look like a student who chooses to obey Christ, even when it costs them some friendships, choosing to obey Christ even when reputation in school takes a little bit of a hit, or maybe even a big hit. It may look like a professional who refuses to compromise their integrity before the Lord, even when advancement in the company is on, at stake. May look like a believer who bears with the estrangement from their family, born of their faith, with a patient love, continuing to love, to serve, to pray for their family that they might too come to know Christ.

We see that pattern in Scripture. Remember that Daniel, in the Old Testament, we preached through him, within the past year or so, he refused the king's food and wine in Babylon because he would not defile himself against God's law, and that decision set him apart, testified, put everybody around him on notice that his supreme allegiance was to the Lord. Think of Peter and John before the religious leaders in Jerusalem, the Sanhedrin, when they were commanded not to preach, what did they say? We must obey God rather than men?

Those are moments of division, and they did it with courage and with grace.

And there are those negative examples that we must avoid.

Paul describes them in the church at Corinth. He said that the church at Corinth was dividing into camps, some claiming Paul, some claiming Apollos, some claiming Cephas. And Paul rebuked them, saying, Christ is not divided. Their divisions were not for the sake of the gospel, but for pride, for personalities, for party, spirit and divisions. Faithful division means suffering loss for Christ's sake, not creating strife born of our own pride. So in Christ's hands, this sword cuts, but it cuts in order to heal.

It separates us from the sin and the idolatry that would destroy us, so that we might belong wholly to him, and in belonging to him, we learn to love people, even those that oppose us, and so show that we have been transformed by God's grace. With that in mind, let me pray for you as we enter into this new week:

*Father, we thank you for the grace and the privilege of following your Son, Jesus Christ, even knowing its great cost and even knowing that it can result in division for his name. Would you please grant us the grace of Your Holy Spirit to stand firm in our faith, maintaining peace as much as it depends upon us, but not losing heart. Amen.*

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