

“Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.” 1. (oops!) Did Jesus really say He came to bring division? This world has enough problems, do we really need more division?

If that wasn't bad enough, we also hear Jesus say, **“I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!”** This is uncharacteristic of such a loving savior. 2. (ugh!) Isn't Jesus the Prince of Peace, not fire and division?

Isaiah prophesies of Jesus **“his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end,”** At the birth of Jesus, the angels said to the shepherds, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” When Simeon held baby Jesus in his arms he sang, **“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word;”**

Instead, what do we get? Jesus promises division rather than peace. We see family strife: parents against children and in-laws fighting among themselves. We see fire rather than soothing water, a heat wave rather than a cooling shower.

What are the two things not to talk about at a family gathering? Religion and politics. Don't ask whether your brother Fred has been to church lately because you know the answer. Don't pester Olivia and her boyfriend about why they haven't gotten their baby baptized yet. Don't you dare ask Lincoln when he's going to gather up the integrity to give Olivia a ring. Don't raise concerns with your niece who was confirmed at your church five years ago and now with a year of college under her belt has started dabbling in neo-paganism and fancies herself a witch. Jesus is the Prince of Peace, and that wouldn't be very peaceful, now, would it?

We suffer these tensions. They keep us up at night. Should I say something to my brother Fred? Should I approach Olivia and Lincoln and encourage them to get married and to raise their son in the church? Should I remind my niece of the promises she made in her confirmation, and how her newfound spiritual path is not going to satisfy her? What if they stop talking to me? What if they reject me? The words of Jesus echo in our heads: **“For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three.”**

We wrestle with these holy, inspired words of Jesus: **“Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.”** How can it be that Jesus is the Prince of Peace, yet He comes bringing division?

A key to understanding all of this lies in verse 50, **“I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!”** This baptism isn't a water baptism, but a baptism in his own blood. This baptism is Jesus' suffering, crucifixion, and death. 3. (Aha!) Peace and division meet in the baptism that is the cross.

The cross is where peace and division meet. The cross is folly and a mockery to those who are the enemies of God, but for us, it is the sign of peace, the sign of hope, and the sign of comfort to a dying and sinful world. Cling to the cross to find peace, even when the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh wants to bring division. **JESUS BRINGS PEACE TO HIS FOLLOWERS DESPITE DIVISION.**

4. (Whee!) This fire of the cross purified our sins. Imagine a stick of dynamite with a long fuse. Jesus' birth was the fire that started the fuse burning. The fuse can travel up, down, around, but it has a place to which it is burning, namely, the stick of dynamite. Jesus' mission led him to Jerusalem to be delivered in the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.

Jesus' act of dying and rising again for the sins of the world was the explosion that changed the whole world. The word dynamite comes from the Greek word for power, δύναμις. In this way we can say with Paul **“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power—the dynamite—of God.”**

Dynamite was invented to be used in mining to clear away all the junk, all the rocks, and all the things in the way of a miner making a tunnel so he could get to the valuable stuff: the coal, the gold, or the diamonds. It was much safer than nitroglycerin which could explode if you dropped it. Dynamite makes a big boom, but the result is an open space much more open than if you used pickaxes and shovels.

This baptism with which Jesus was baptized, the cross, is powerful. It is powerful because it shows us the seriousness of our sins. It gives a diagnosis for the guilty conscience that comes up because our sins and failures. A pickaxe or shovel wouldn't do—a stick of dynamite was what was needed to blast our sins away.

Yet this cross is powerful. Powerful to wipe away our sins. Powerful to remove them as far as the east is from the west. Powerful to give us Christ's own righteousness. Powerful to make us beautiful, spotless, and priceless in the eyes of the God of the Universe.

And this cross of Christ has the power to remove all the junk: all the things that once worried us so much, all the time and energy we spent wondering what others would think of us, and all the worry about trying to make God happy by our own power and strength. All of that is blasted away, burned up, no longer something to worry about.

5. (Yeah!) Jesus uses the fire of division to bring the greatest peace. How is it that the Prince of Peace can also bring division? It's through the power of the cross.

To be a Christian means to identify with Christ. His sufferings are ours, but His comfort is ours, too. As we look at the cross blowing away all of those

unnecessary things in our lives, all that's left is Jesus, and where Jesus is, there is peace.

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” The angel's song is a promise to you precisely because in Christ Jesus, God is pleased with you. You have peace on earth, so remain in Christ, even with the fires of division burning all around.

To be in Christ means to confess Christ boldly, even when division comes. The cross is powerful. It's dynamite. Dynamite blows stuff apart. You will find in confessing Christ: **“They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”**

Even so, lovingly reach out to your brother Fred who has abandoned the church letting him know you miss him sitting in the pew next to you. Warn him that in rejecting the church he is rejecting Jesus. Sit down with Olivia and Lincoln and remind them of the great promises of baptism and the true peace and joy that flows from every Sunday participation in the body of Christ in worship and Sunday school.

Have a heart to heart with Lincoln and explain the wonderful promises of marriage and how the most loving thing he can do for Olivia his girlfriend and Bennett his son is to provide them stability and confidence in his love through the legally binding protections of marriage.

Talk to your niece about the dangers of false teaching and how other religions like neo-paganism may sound appealing, but she may be opening herself up to spirits that mean to do her harm rather than help her. Remind her of the joy and hope she had when she had her first communion at confirmation, and how that reality can still be hers even today in Christ's body and blood delivered in the sacrament of the altar.

I'm sure you can fill in the blanks with other examples from your family, but those kinds of conversations have the potential to be dynamite. Yes, they can cause hurt feelings and may divide families. However, like dynamite, they can also blast away all the junk that gets in the way of people following Jesus.

Because our salvation is sure, and all our sins have been forgiven in the fiery baptism that was the cross of Christ, we have confidence that we have peace with God. Because of this peace, nothing else matters, even if the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh rage against us. We can confess our faith in Christ boldly and without compromise to our family and friends knowing there will be division and rejection. But we do so knowing that this good news alone is dynamite to change lives to bring true peace and unity because it brings them Jesus.

Not everyone may accept the message of Jesus and follow Him, but we can trust that even in family strife and division, we can have peace in Him.