

Most of us will be at least somewhat startled to read verse 51: *“Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.”* The parallel passage in Matthew is even more jarring; *“I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”* How do we reconcile this picture with the meek and gentle Jesus we know?

The answer is that the sword here is not a weapon but a scalpel. Like the two-edged sword in Hebrews 4:12, it is not meant to attack an adversaries but to divide something into pieces. In this case, the division is between believers and unbelievers. The cut is so fine but clear that it can run right through families. It does not make fathers and sons, etc., enemies of each but makes a sharp distinction that will last through eternity.

Scripture says of marriage, *“What therefore God has*

joined together, let not man separate.” We should be careful in forming corollaries from scripture but we can state in regard to believers and unbelievers, *“What God has divided, let not man join together.”*

Supporting verses include:

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.
(2 Corinthians 6:14).

Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? (James 4:4).

In speaking of Christ as bringing division we must never overlook His wonderful work of uniting those who believe into His body: *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus* (Galatians 3:28).

Questions:

1. What do you think “fire” symbolizes in verse 12:49?
2. Of what baptism is the Lord speaking in 12:50? How does it compare to other baptisms of scripture?
3. What are the people failing to understand in 12:56?

4. Does 12:58 give literal advice? If not, what does it mean?

5. There are no surviving historical records to corroborate the tragic events of 13:1-4 but we can assume they actually happened with the memory of those in the Lord's audience. What lesson does He derive from them?

6. In verses 13:6-9 what is symbolized by:

The vineyard:

The fig tree:

The owner:

The vinedresser:

The manure or fertilizer: