

## A Family of Peace

### Matthew 10:34-42 (NIV)

<sup>34</sup> "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup> For I have come to turn " 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law— <sup>36</sup> a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.' <sup>37</sup> "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. <sup>38</sup> Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. <sup>39</sup> Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. <sup>40</sup> "Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. <sup>41</sup> Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. <sup>42</sup> And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward."

Judge me as you deem appropriate, but I like the Fast and the Furious movies. Going from a quasi-remake of Point Break but with cars to the over-the-top heist and black ops movies has been quite the ride. And they actually have a theme among all the action, a theme that gets stronger with each sequel. So, imagine a gravely Vin Diesel voice expositing the overarching theme: "I don't have friends; I've got family." "What's real is family." "Without family, you've got nothing." "The most important thing will always be the people in this room... Mi familia!"

Family being everything is not limited to car movies with Vin Diesel. Maybe you have uttered that very sentiment. And why shouldn't family be so important? They love and support you unconditionally, have your back when other people let you down. They get you. They bring out the best in you. They bring you joy and meaning and purpose as you love them, care for them, support them.

Family has been around as long as people have been around. God made family back on Day 6 of creation. He declared that it was not good for the man to be alone. So, he made the very first woman. He joined the man and the woman together, made them husband and wife, created marriage, blessed them with the ability to have children. Family was created by God as a good gift to us.

That fact makes Jesus' words in our Gospel reading so jarring. He told his disciples, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law — a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.' Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." (verses 34-37)

Jesus breaks up families? But he made families. Why would he divide them? Why demand that we love him more than we love our families, which he gave us? Do I really even want to follow a God who both makes families and then divides them? Will God really cast me aside if I don't love him more than I love my family, my family who has loved me unconditionally, had my back, gives me reason to get up each day? If Jesus is going to divide my family, bring conflict between me and the people I love, then I think we should avoid him. We want a family of peace. We want to all get along. If Jesus is going to get in the way of that, then maybe I don't need Jesus. Maybe I buy into what Dom Toretto says is right and what's real is family, not what Jesus is offering. Maybe what is most important is to always put family first.

Would we have a family of peace if we took Jesus out of the equation? Let's be honest as we think about our family relationships. Have you ever fought with your family on something that wasn't about God, been divided in your family on something other than following Jesus? Haven't you experienced division in your family because of how family members treated each other, because of differing political idea, over how to raise the kids, over medical and health care, over decisions to move, job changes, where to go to school, retirement, and the list goes on. Let's not kid ourselves that our families very much experience division even when it's not about Jesus. Ditching Jesus won't spare you divisions among your family and give us a family of peace.

If it's already so hard to keep families united in peace, then why does Jesus divide them? He's supposed to be the Prince of Peace, but here he says he's brought a sword. It's not Jesus' goal to divide families. He did actually come to establish peace — peace between us and God. This sword that he brings is the Sword of the Spirit. Jesus came to cut down sin. One of those sins is loving the created more than the Creator, loving family more than God, making family the most important thing, making family everything, making family our god. We don't need a golden calf to be idol worshipers; we can take this good gift of family and make it more important and more loved than God who gave it.

Jesus, the Prince of Peace, not only cuts down that sin of how we make family an idol, but he also came to establish peace for us by loving God and family in the right ways. He took on flesh and blood to live under God's law, to become our brother, to be a son who had parents, to live under that same fourth commandment we do where we are to honor family. At the same time, he also lived under the same first commandment and loved God above all others, including family. He was perfectly obedient and submissive and respected Mary and Joseph, his earthly parents, who were not perfect. At the same time, he always made the will of his Father in heaven his top priority - being in temple, worshiping in the synagogue on the Sabbath, ultimately going to the cross according to the Father's will, knowing that it would pierce Mary's, his mother's, heart, but it also would pay for her sins and purify her before God. Jesus' perfect living and his sacrifice would make her a part of his family, a family at peace with God.

Jesus did what we have not done by loving God even above his earthly family. He did the most important thing to remove our sins and to cover us with his perfection. By this, we are reconciled to God, just as Mary his mother was and Joseph his father was, as well as his brothers and sisters. The dividing barrier of our sin, our love of family over God, is removed. Instead, we are made worthy and brought into a different kind of family, a family that is united by the peace with God Christ won for us. This is our family of peace.

The Fast and Furious family are not blood related. They are people who have been united together through experiences, through causes, through choices. Others have family that are not blood related as they were brought in through a foster program or adoption. They were made family not by birth, but by choice.

God chose you and me. Jesus chose to love God the Father above all others and to honor his family here on earth, and he did it all perfectly for us. We are brought into the family of God by his choice, his work, his effort. He brought us peace with God. He brought us into his family of peace. This is where we find life!

Sadly, when people want to establish peace other than the way Christ has established it for us, we are divided from God, from his family of peace. This is the division that Jesus warned his disciples would happen. They experienced it, and so do we. We experience it in our families, with a spouse who does not share our faith, with a child who walked away from the faith. It is sad. It feels defeating. It feels like this should not be. This is the how Jesus divides.

The good news for the disciples as Jesus was sending them out was that even as they proclaimed him and some families would be divided because they would seek to establish their own peace with God, at the same time others would join God's family of peace. People would receive the disciples. They would welcome the message of the peace that God established for them. They would want to live for God above earthly families. And so God's family of peace is established. As Jesus said, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (Matthew 12:48-50)

It is a terrible thing that family members get divided when it comes to God. But we do not save them by clinging to our earthly families over the family of peace that God established and invited us into. Our earthly families are only saved by knowing the peace that Jesus established for them – his perfect life lived for them, loving God above all others while also honoring his earthly family, his life sacrificed to remove all their sins, his resurrection to show that his mission for us is accomplished, that he has indeed reconciled us to God so that we have peace with him.

Earthly families are important. They are a gift from God. But it's the family of peace that God establishes for us that's more important. The people in this room, regardless of what you think of them, regardless of how well you know them, regardless of how much time you have spent with them, these people are part of a bigger family, a greater family. We know the peace that Christ has established for us. This is a room of people who have welcomed God, just as Jesus said would happen when people shared the message of what he had done for them. This is our family of peace, a family that connects beyond these walls to Christians all over. This is our family of peace that God has established for us and made us a part of. Amen.