

Who are Jesus' Family?

Luke 8:19-21

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There can be no greater joy and consolation in this life than to know one is rightly related to the triune God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In these verses, Jesus defines the leading characteristic of those who are members of his true family: they hear the word of God and do it. It is a simple and clear standard for knowing one is a member of Christ's spiritual family:

*Those in spiritual kinship with Jesus Christ
not only hear the word of God, they put it into practice.*

Still, many today would set the standard elsewhere. For instance, some would say we become Christ's family member at baptism. Others would argue that to be rightly related to Christ means you attend church regularly, while yet others would insist those in Christ's family hold to a weekly Sabbath day or tithe their gross income. Some would go so far as to say whether one is rightly related to Christ is defined by how you vote.

But here Jesus says it is those who hear the word of God and do it who are his true family.

Let's look closer.

“He's Out of His Mind.”

This section of Luke concludes with a visit to Jesus by his mother and brothers. Luke does not tell us what brought about this visit. But we gain some insight by looking to a parallel account in Mark. Mark records two visits by Jesus' family members. This visit by his mother and brothers was preceded by another visit by close friends or kinsmen of Jesus who we are told “And when his own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold on Him, for they said, ‘He is out of His mind’” (Mark 3:21). What was it that Jesus was doing that would lead them to conclude he was out of his mind? Could it be that someone who actually heard the word of God and acted upon it, as our Lord was doing, was considered out of their mind? We must concede the fact that love for God and obedience to his word is far from the norm in this present evil age. It is what psychologists call “deviant” behavior only because it is not the what the majority do. If that is the case, then call me out of my mind. Amen?

Now, given Mark's account, it is safe to conclude that this visit by Mary and his brothers was also intended to take hold of Jesus and take him home. This was no casual visit. They were not bringing Jesus his sack lunch. Indeed, maybe the family was bringing Mary to appeal to Jesus to tone down his ministry. This reminds us there is a social cost for walking in faithfulness to the will of God. To hear the word of God and do it may draw social disdain. Family members may fear for your sanity. Here Jesus is ministering in the power of the Spirit, he is doing the Father's will, and it is very likely Mary and his brothers think it is time to reign him in.

If you are a follower of Christ, there is a lesson here for you, as well. If you hear the word of God and act upon it, you will stand apart from people, and perhaps especially those in your natural family. They may wonder what has happened to you. They may even try to reign you in. Further on in this Gospel narrative, Jesus warns of a day in which family members of believers will turn against them in persecution:

⁵¹ Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division; ⁵² for from now on five *members* in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three. ⁵³ They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law (Luke 12:51-53).

This conflict with family can be heartbreaking. But your supreme loyalty must remain with the Lord Jesus. We are to be kind to all. We are to be gentle with those in opposition. Never combative. But we are to stand firm. Following Jesus comes with a cost, sometimes, a very dear cost. There is a reason why Matthew records the following exhortation by Jesus to his disciples,

³⁷ "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁸ And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁹ He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it (Matthew 10:37-39).

We should note here also the additional response to Jesus by the religious authorities to our Lord. Immediately following the visit by friends of kinsmen to take Jesus into custody, Mark adds that the scribes came down from Jerusalem, apparently to look over the situation, and these respected religious authorities concluded, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons" (Mark 3:22).

Now, consider the human impact of what it is occurring. Your family members think you have lost your mind; then the official religious authorities from Jerusalem come down to Galilee and declare you demon possessed. Your mother, your brothers, and the leading religious authorities in the land think it is time to lock you up. But Jesus will not be taken into custody by his family, nor will he allow the verdict by the religious experts to deter his doing the will of God.

A New Humanity

Let's note carefully what Jesus says in response to this visit by his mother and brothers:

“My mother and my brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it.”

Here we have the standard of redemption set forth in the simplest terms: hear the word of God and do it. Adam had heard the word of God and rebelled. Jesus, the new Adam, heard the word of God and did it. Therefore, when Jesus refers to “these” in this verse, he is no doubt referring to his disciples, and more specifically, those who hear and do what he teaches, prove themselves to be in right relationship with him. They share his spiritual parentage with the Father. This means every Christian is a child of God, which means you share the Father's nature — believers are “partakers in the divine nature” (II Peter 1:4). No wonder John declares,

See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called the children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him (I John 3:1).

To be someone's child means you share a common nature. There is a family resemblance. So, what is the family resemblance among those of Christ's family? *Obedience*. They hear the word of God and do it. They hear it. They believe it. They do it. Hearing God's word and doing it is the biblical standard for those within the household of God the Father.

The reverse implication is also clear: those who hear the word of God, and do *not* do it, do not share in Christ regardless of what they may confess. Please hear me: regardless of one's personal religious heritage, regardless of one's personal claim to know God, if one does not desire to do the will of God as Jesus did the will of God, they are not members of his spiritual family.

Let's examine this principle as it is found elsewhere within Scripture.

Later in this Gospel, Luke records another incident in which Jesus responds in a similar manner to today's text.

- Luke 11:27-28: "While Jesus was saying these things, one of the women in the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, 'Blessed is the womb that bore You and the breasts at which You nursed.' But He said, 'On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.'"

Those today who are caught up in Marian devotion would not like to hear that Jesus elevated hearing and obeying the word of God above seeking merit by long, repetitious prayers focused on the blessedness of his mother. The priority for Jesus is obedience, not religious sentimentality, rituals, or daily rites. It is obedience to the word of God that defines Christ's siblings, and not blessing his mother.

Here is another witness: The apostle John tells us,

- I John 2:4-6: By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, 'I have come to know Him' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked (I John 2:4-6).

John could not be clearer: If you are in Christ, your daily walk, that is to say, your lifestyle will reflect Christ's character and way of living. The foundation of a life worth living is that you hear the word of God and do it. Indeed, you delight to do so!

- Sacrifice and meal offering You have not desired;
My ears You have opened;
Burnt offering and sin offering You have not required.
⁷ Then I said, "Behold, I come;
In the scroll of the book it is written of me.
⁸ I delight to do Your will, O my God;
Your Law is within my heart (Psalm 40:6-8).

This delight to do the will of God is the essence of the new covenant promise found in Jeremiah 31:33 and Ezekiel 36:27. Those born of the Spirit delight to do God's will because God

has written his law on their minds and hearts! In this present “now and not yet” time they may stumble, and certainly fall short of sinless perfection, but whereas once it was only their desire to sin and do their own will, that has now changed, those in Christ possess a new nature in accord with the love of God and neighbor. The new covenant is the covenant of the Spirit, not the letter, and the transformation of the sinner into a child of God who loves to do the Father’s will (II Corinthians 3:4-18).

The Issue is that of Nature

In his Gospel, John writes of how Jesus once told a group who professed to believe in him, “If you continue in My word, then you are disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31-32). There it is again, Christ’s standard: not just hearing His words, but continuing in them, which implies, of course, doing it. This would be good news to those who genuinely believe. Genuine believers want to be freed from sin. And as we walk in unconditional obedience, we show ourselves to be no longer slaves to sin, but slaves to righteousness (See Romans 6:16-17). We are freed to walk in righteousness.

But the people to whom Jesus spoke these words reacted instead with outrage (John 8:33). They had a religious heritage that assured them of acceptance with God, and they were deeply offended to be told they needed freedom from sin. But Jesus tells them they must not only believe in him, they must continue in his word in order to be free from sin. He tells then only the Son can set one free from sin, and not one’s religious heritage. After Jesus made many appeals and attempts to teach them, they ended up trying to kill him (8:59). They had heard. They even professed belief. But clearly did not share in Jesus’ spiritual nature. Instead, by their actions Jesus told them they proved their spiritual parentage to be that of the devil: “You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father” (8:44).

There is the essence: What is your spiritual parentage? Where is your desire? What drives you? Do you long to do God’s will, or do you, like the devil, live for your own pleasures and self-willed ways. Listen please, it matters little if you call yourself a Christian if in fact you live to fulfill your fleshly lusts and desires. The precious gift our Lord provides us in today’s text is the assurance of knowing we are in the family of God because we hear the word of God and do it.

Religious Delusion

We have firmly established that those who are members of Christ's spiritual family, hear the word of God and do it. But modern Christianity looks far more like first-century Judaism than it does like Christ's family: There is a lot of tradition and heritage, a lot of buildings, and church activity, but little or no life. To name the name of Christ, and not walk in love and obedience is religious delusion. James admonishes his readers to "receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. But prove yourselves to be doers of the word, and not merely hearers only who delude themselves" (James 1:21-22). This delusion is by far the worst state within which a person can reside: to hear the word and fail to act upon it is symptomatic of a deluded state of mind and heart. Nonetheless, there are actually those still who teach a sinner can receive Jesus, but not obey Him as Lord, and still go to heaven. It is heresy. Flee from such teaching.

Such teaching was popular even in the apostolic era. Paul writes of those who "profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed" (Titus 1:16). Think of it. People who profess to know God, but whom Paul describes as detestable, disobedient, and worthless for any good deed. It's in them to be very religious, but it is not in them to be godly. They may have professed Christ, but they were not Christ's family.

In our day, after decades of so-called "Seeker Sensitive" evangelism, and consumer-driven approaches to worship, the common character within modern Christianity is that of a form of godliness which has no power, and cannot therefore be legitimately called Christianity. This is a strong statement, but it is not without warrant. Beloved, the state of evangelical Christianity today is as Paul said it would be in the last days:

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: ² For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, ³ unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, ⁴ traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! (II Timothy 3:1-5 NKJV).

"Having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away." I fear we are too hungry for new church members to discern and turn away people who seek to

name the name of Christ and yet who live in full-scale self-will and moral decadence. American evangelicalism has redefined what it means to be a Christian in order to gain numbers, and that definition is far outside our Lord's standard. The result is a loss of the true image of Christ within the larger community. People see the church, but they do not see Christ. This should cause us to tremble. This should cause to reconsider our standard of fellowship and then avoid those who abuse the worthy name of Christ by living only for their own pleasures. Instead, we should stick with caring for vile sinners who know they need the gospel, those who are willing to hear the word of God and do it, and be transformed. Don't waste your time trying to find meaningful fellowship with people who share no desire to hear the word of God and do it.

An Issue of Nature not Works of Merit

Once again, the issue is one of nature. Those in Adam still operate out of a sinful nature, they love evil, they resist the love of God and neighbor, for life is all about them all the time. Those in Christ have a new nature, they have been born of God, and this spiritual life is evidenced in unconditional obedience.

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:5-8).

Here Paul is not prescribing a works-based system wherein one is obedient in order to earn peace with God. Never! The child of God is justified by faith in the finished work of Christ alone. No, Paul is saying it is because we are accepted in the beloved, because we are justified by faith, we are now to work out the Christ-like mind and nature we possess by virtue of the regenerating work of the Spirit. In short, we are to become who we already are, in Christ. This is the witness of the New Testament: "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; old things have passed away; behold, new things have come" (II Corinthians 5:17). You are now, in fact, unleavened (I Corinthians 5:6-7); you are now made perfect before God due solely to the perfect work of Christ on your behalf (Hebrews 10:14). "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the first born among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). Did you catch that? The firstborn among many brethren — you who are born of the Spirit are Christ's spiritual siblings. You are His family. And you

know you are born of the Spirit because you long to do the will of God—to hear his word and do it.

Concluding Thoughts

Let me close as I began: There is no greater joy and consolation in this life than to know one is rightly related to the triune God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This means the Christian life is a familial participation in the life of Christ, and not just his benefits. Therefore, if you are in Christ, you ought to walk as Jesus walked, that is, in loving obedience to the word of his Father. Come to know the joy of familial intimacy with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus is not ashamed to call you his family, do not ever be ashamed to bear the family resemblance in all you think, say, and do. And what is that family resemblance? That’s right: obedience. Christ’s family do as he did: they hear the word of God and do it. Therefore, don’t seek to find meaningful fellowship with those who name the name of Christ and yet love iniquity. They are building on sand, and you have nothing in common. Don’t even eat with them. You may be considered senseless by some, perhaps by your family. You may even be demonized by religious authorities. But who is it you seek to please, if not Christ alone? We love people. We pray for people. We serve only one Lord.

AMEN.

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