

Our Lord's Teaching about Family Relationships

Mark 3:31-35

Mark 3:31-35 – *“Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him. ³² And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, “Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You.” ³³ But He answered them, saying, “Who is My mother, or My brothers?” ³⁴ And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, “Here are My mother and My brothers! ³⁵ For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.””*

Background Notes

Verse 31: *“Then his brothers and His mother came.”* This verse connects naturally with Mark 3:21 - *“But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of him, for they said, He is out of His mind.”* So the Lord's family had traveled the 30 or so miles from Nazareth to Capernaum. By the way, this is the only mention of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in the Gospel of Mark. When the Lord's family arrived, they wanted to talk to the Lord privately, but they found it hard to do so because of the crowds. Their purpose was to restrain His activity. They thought He had taken on too much - that He was way outside His limits, and that He didn't have the ability to deal with so many people and meet all their needs. In fact, His family thought He was out of His mind.

Remember - at this point His brothers had not yet accepted Him as the Messiah. *“For even His brothers did not believe in Him” (John 7:5).* Who were these unbelieving brothers who are mentioned in verse 31? Were they cousins of Jesus? Were they Joseph's children from a previous marriage? Although those suggestions have been made, there is absolutely no evidence for either of these positions. The most likely answer is that these brothers were children who were born to Mary and Joseph after the Virgin Birth of Christ.

Matthew 1:25 tells us that Joseph kept Mary a virgin until after the birth of Jesus. The implication is that after Jesus was born, they slept together as a normal husband and wife, had more children, and raised a family. The idea of the “perpetual virginity of Mary” is not supported anywhere in Scripture. In Psalm 69, a Messianic Psalm, we read in verse 8: *“I have become a stranger to my brothers and an alien to my mother's children.”* This would indicate that Mary had other children. The names of some of these children are given in Mark 6:3 – in fact, two of these brothers, James and Jude, are named there. These two half-brothers of our Lord later became believers and wrote the epistles of James and Jude.

Notice, by the way, that Joseph was not mentioned here, nor is he mentioned anywhere in the biblical record as being present during our Lord's three years of ministry. Most likely Joseph had already died, making Mary a relatively young

widow. Look again at Psalm 69 - a great Messianic Psalm - and notice verse 9, which follows the verse we read: Verse 8 - *"I have become a stranger to my brothers and an alien to my mother's children"* and then verse 9 - *"because zeal for your house has consumed me."* That's exactly what was going on in Mark 3, in fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy of Psalm 69. The brothers were estranged from the Lord because of His zeal for the work of the Lord.

Doctrinal Points

1. Spiritual ties are stronger than natural ties.

Verses 33-34: *"The Lord answered them saying, 'Who is my mother or my brothers?' And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers.'" You've heard the expression, "Blood is thicker than water" - meaning that family ties are stronger than non-family relationships. Well, our Lord taught here that there is a relationship that is stronger than earthly family relationships. Spiritual ties are stronger than biological ties. Membership in the family of God takes a higher priority than membership in an earthly family.*

Now the Lord was not repudiating the importance of earthly family relationships. Look at Mark 7:9-13, for example, where our Lord rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for neglecting family responsibilities: *"He said to them, 'All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban'—' (that is, a gift to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.'" These verses demonstrate that the Lord was certainly not against earthly family relationships. Clearly He was rebuking the scribes and Pharisees for neglecting earthly family responsibilities.*

God has ordained the earthly family, and in Mark 3 the Lord was certainly not putting down the family relationships, but He was teaching that being part of the family of God is far more important than being part of any earthly family. After all, spiritual ties in the family of God determine whether you're going to heaven or not. If you have not accepted Christ as your personal Savior, you are not in the family of God. Without these spiritual ties, you're still in your sins and lost. And it's important to realize that you're not automatically a Christian if your parents were Christians. Your salvation is *not* determined by your earthly family connections.

Furthermore, spiritual ties are stronger than biological ties because spiritual ties are eternal. Our earthly family ties end at death, if our family members don't know Christ, but our spiritual family ties will never end. We are brothers and sisters in the Lord forever!

2. Obedience is the evidence of membership in God's family.

In verse 35 the Lord said, *"For whoever does the will of God is my brother and my sister and mother."* How do you know whether you're in God's family or not? How do you know you have truly trusted Christ as your Savior? You may say, "I think so - but how do I know if it was a REAL confession of faith, or if I was merely "saying the right words" – and it was merely a 'profession' of faith?" Well, obedience to the will of God is evidence of membership in God's family! Do you obey the Lord? Do you *want* to obey the Lord? Obedience is the evidence of membership in God's family.

What about your obedience to the Lord in your marriage? What about your obedience to the Lord in your lifestyle?

Obedience to the will of God is the evidence of membership in God's family! 1 John 2:17 says, *"He who does the will of God abides forever."* My father-in-law, the late president of Emmaus Bible College, had that text on his desk. He saw it every day as he sat at his desk. He had adopted it as the motto for his life: *"He who does the will of God abides forever."* Obedience is the evidence of membership in God's family.

Practical Applications

1. Remember that you are a member of a spiritual family.

If you're a Christian, this truth is a great practical application. You're not just a forgiven sinner on your way to heaven – you're *now* in the family of God. NOW! You have a heavenly Father who loves you and cares for you!

Are you feeling lonely? Turn to the Lord for comfort. He's there with you, and the comfort of God is available because you're in God's family. Furthermore, because you're a member of God's family, you have brothers and sisters to whom you can turn in times of joy and times of sorrow.

Are you happy in the Lord right now? Has the Lord blessed you in a special way lately? Share that blessing with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Are you hurting right now? God has provided spiritual family members to turn to in times of hurt. When my Dad went to be with the Lord two months ago, it was great to experience our spiritual family reaching out in many ways to support us. As God's family members, we need to reach out to brothers and sisters who are hurting and need help. Remember that you are a member of a spiritual family.

2. You can expect some conflict between your spiritual and earthly families.

It's great if your earthly family is composed entirely of Christians - then they are all part of your spiritual family as well. But many times this is not the case. Christian parents may have non-Christian children. Christian children may have non-

Christian parents. And every brother or sister in a mostly-Christian family may not be saved. Maybe only one parent is a Christian. And if you're married, there's bound to be some conflict if you have non-Christian in-laws - or maybe there are non-Christians on both sides of the family!

So there's bound to be some conflict, and that's exactly what we see in Mark 3. The Lord's earthly brothers did not yet believe in Him - they were not yet saved. There was a division here, and as a result there was conflict and negative opinions. It was not "one big happy family" in the Lord. You can expect the same problem if all your earthly family members are not believers. There's bound to be some conflict, with disagreement and at least some degree of negativity from the unbelievers. You can be sure that God will give you the grace to live in that situation as you pray for your unsaved family members. But remember, if some family members are unbelievers, you can expect some conflict between your earthly family and your spiritual family.