

Mark 3:20-35 - The Idol of Family

1. Families in the Western world don't imagine that they will live in the same neighbourhood with parents, grandparents, grown up children, grandchildren etc. Consider your family life. How close are you to:
 - Parents
 - Spouse
 - Siblings
 - Children
 - Extended family (Aunts, Uncles, Grandparents etc.)
2. In Jesus day, the family bond was tight and long-lasting. As with many non-Western cultures today, it was normal for children to live close to their parents, maybe even in the same house. The family unit would often be a business unit as well, sharing everything in common. Discuss your observations of family life within other cultures- Middle Eastern, Sri Lankan, Indian etc, with particular reference to what is cultural and what is an extension of religious observance, regarding:
 - Parents
 - Spouse
 - Siblings
 - Children
 - Extended family (Aunts, Uncles, Grandparents etc.)
3. Jesus, God's son, has a different vocation, a different mission, and it involves breaking all the traditions of the past, that have lost sight of the

God they purport to worship. This includes this one of hallowed family ties. Unless you read verses 34-35 as deeply shocking, you haven't got the message. **Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."** God is doing something unthinkable: he is starting a new family, a new holy people, beyond Jewish heritage and tradition; and is doing so without regard for the traditional human family bonds. In what ways is challenging traditional family ties and obligations part of the restructuring what it means to be the people of God, and why is it necessary?

4. Jesus said in John's gospel, John 14:6 **'I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me!'** Any other loyalties, even those that have traditionally been seen as ways to honour the Lord, which become more important than seeing Jesus as the way to the Father, the truth of relationship with God, and the life in God, are idolatry, and family ties that become a higher priority than Jesus, can be seen in this light.
5. Jesus challenged both greed and family loyalty before loyalty to him, as possible idols. (Note the number of times through the gospels that issues of money and family are put as challenges) **Matthew 12:48-50, Luke 14:26-27, Matthew 10:34-37.** Jesus want us to love Him as the highest priority in our lives, including

putting him before our love of our families. In this context, how do you understand his challenge in Mark 3: **'For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.'**

love we can offer them. Consider your love for various family members in the light of this love, and how it may change your response to them:

- Parents
- Spouse
- Children

6. Yet, the family construct is how God set it up from the beginning (**Genesis 1:28**). Jesus also showed deep concern for his mother as he died on the cross; that she would be cared for. (**John 19:26-27.**) Healthy love of family is part of God's plans and purpose. Indeed, we are told very clearly to honour our parents. **The 5th Commandment -Deuteronomy 5:16** And there are a number of passages in the New Testament where the relationships in families are the focus; (**Colossians, and Ephesians 6**). How would you describe the qualities of a healthy family, in the light of these readings?
7. Yet, consider **1 Corinthians 7:32**. It seems clear that family love can get in the way of our devotion to the Lord. Consider your family life. In what ways might your bonds to family members, particularly parents, spouse, and children, put in jeopardy your devotion and loyalty to Jesus:
 - Parents
 - Spouse
 - Children
8. God's understanding of what love entails, and its importance is described in **1 Corinthians 13**. Christian love, loves our families with a love born of God. It is not second best, it is the best