

Matt 10:35-37

34"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35For I have come to turn
" 'a man against his father,
a daughter against her mother,
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—
36a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'
37"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;

Luke 12:52-53

52From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. 53They 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."

Mark 10:28-30

28Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!"
29"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel 30will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life.

Excerpt from the Intervarsity Press New Testament Commentary on Mark

Evangelist has presented us with a picture of someone whose personal charisma and sense of authority have provoked both a plot and an actual attempt to destroy him. He seems, though, to be writing for a different purpose, for he now introduces a new and unexpected point of conflict—the family. As Jesus' mother and brothers stood outside the house where he was teaching, they expected him to honor his obligations to the family and come out to them. He refused and sent a vexing answer back.

The obligations of a son in a Jewish family were considerable. It was a son's duty to honor his father and mother. In the Wisdom Literature it is clear that honoring parents means obeying what they teach and respecting their authority, even as an adult. We do not know what concerns Jesus' family carried with them that day or what plans they may have had other than to talk with him. If we look back over Mark 1–3, however, we might suspect that the following items would have been on the agenda. In the first place Jesus was not pursuing a career and did not have a stable income (1:39). Therefore he may not have been contributing sufficiently to the family's finances. Second, Jesus kept bad company (2:15). Even worse, he had offended the leading religious authorities (2:23–27; 3:1–6, 22). It could be said that his recent activities border on the irresponsible, and some members of his family had already tried to restrain him. There were no signs of improvement. All indications pointed to the probability that things were going to get worse.

With these or similar concerns the responsible members of the family, his mother and brothers, stood outside the house where he was and sent word for him to come out. Jesus replied, *Who are my mother and my brothers?* Then he looked at the people sitting with him and said, *Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.*

That was a radical assertion. Jesus rejected both the traditional authority and structure of the family and then provided his own definition of the family. The new family is a company of people not bound by ties of blood, but by a commitment to doing God's will. This statement recalls the harsh language of Matthew 10:35–37: "For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother.' ... Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me." Rejecting the expected role of your parents may even look like hatred (Lk 14:26). Jesus held out for a higher responsibility, a more pressing claim. For him, doing the will of God superseded any other obligation. And this, of course, leads us to wonder where his natural family stood in the escalating confrontation between the new and the old.

Once again we see the impact of the new upon the world. What God was doing through Jesus could not be contained in the old structures of life. It was no longer possible to assume that what God expects of people would necessarily be mediated through the structures of family, nation or even ethnic group. It is quite possible that Mark was writing to Christians in Rome who faced enormous pressure from their families because of their faith in Jesus. This passage is a reminder of the absolute claim on us that God has.

It is also a call to think of ourselves first as part of a new family, a new people, a new set of relationships that have come into being because of the good news about the kingdom of God. This is what we might call a spiritual truth that took concrete form in the life of the early church. Jesus' declaration in Mark 3:35 is the reason there is so much talk about brothers and sisters and children in the Pauline and Johannine Epistles. This new reality proved to be more compelling than the natural sociology of the early Christians in cities like Colossae. Jesus did not come to bring a kind of spirituality that was celebrated only on Sunday mornings inside the walls of a building where it could never affect anything else. Jesus brought something new into the world that transforms all of our relationships.¹

