

Luke 8:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he answered and said unto them, My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it.

Analysis

And he answered and said unto them, My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it. Jesus redefines family with stunning simplicity. **My mother and my brethren are these** (mētēr mou kai adelphoi mou houtoi eisin, μήτηρ μου καὶ ἀδελφοί μου οὗτοί εἰσιν)—indicating those surrounding Him—**which hear the word of God, and do it** (hoi ton logon tou theou akouontes kai poiountes, οἱ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ ἀκούοντες καὶ ποιοῦντες). Two participles define true family: hearing (akouontes) and doing (poiountes). Neither alone suffices—both active listening and obedient action are required.

This directly applies the parable of the soils (vv. 4-15) and the exhortation about hearing (v. 18). True family members are good-soil hearers who receive, retain, and obey God's word. Jesus doesn't dishonor Mary—elsewhere He cared for her (John 19:26-27)—but establishes that spiritual kinship transcends biological relationship. The church becomes God's family (oikos theou, household of God, Ephesians 2:19; 1 Timothy 3:15), bound by shared obedience to the Father rather than shared genetics. This was revolutionary—family identity based on faith and obedience, not ethnicity or ancestry, opening God's family to all nations.

Historical Context

In first-century Judaism, ethnic identity as Abraham's descendants was central (John 8:33, 39). Family lineage determined covenant membership, temple access,

and social standing. Jesus's redefinition challenged this fundamentally—obedience to God's word, not Abrahamic descent, constitutes God's family. This anticipates Paul's teaching that true children of Abraham are those of faith, not flesh (Romans 4:16, 9:6-8; Galatians 3:7, 29). For early Gentile converts, this was liberating—they could be fully part of God's family without Jewish ancestry. For Jewish believers, it was challenging—ethnic privilege didn't guarantee spiritual family membership. Luke, writing for a largely Gentile audience, emphasizes this theme: God's people are defined by response to His word. The early church's practice of calling believers 'brothers' and 'sisters' (adelphoi) enacted this teaching—creating new family structures transcending biological and ethnic boundaries, with profound social implications in the ancient world.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus's definition of family as 'those who hear the word of God and do it' challenge both ancient honor-shame culture and modern individualism?
2. What does the pairing of 'hear' and 'do' teach about genuine faith versus mere intellectual assent to biblical truth?
3. In what practical ways should the church function as spiritual family, and how does this redefine our primary loyalty and identity?

Interlinear Text

τοῦ	δὲ	ἀποκριθεὶς	εἶπεν	πρὸς	αὐτὸν	Μήτηρ	μου	καὶ
which	And	he answered	and said	unto	it	mother	My	and
G3588	G1161	G611	G2036	G4314	G846	G3384	G3450	G2532
ἀδελφοί	μου	οὗτοι	εἰσιν	τοῦ	τοῦ	λόγον	τοῦ	θεοῦ
brethren	My	these	are	which	which	the word	which	of God
G80	G3450	G3778	G1526	G3588	G3588	G3056	G3588	G2316
ἀκούοντες	καὶ	ποιοῦντες	αὐτὸν					
hear	and	do	it					
G191	G2532	G4160	G846					

Additional Cross-References

James 1:22 (Word): But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

John 13:17 (Parallel theme): If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

1 John 2:29 (Parallel theme): If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.

3 John 1:11 (References God): Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.

2 Corinthians 6:18 (Parallel theme): And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

Luke 8:15 (Word): But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.