

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 οὗτοί 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.