

## FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

*Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, **Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.** This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

*Matthew 22:35-40*

Steve had a real good word today about separating ourselves from *everything* that would hinder us from coming forth in the fulness of Christ. After the message was over, when he opened up the room, sister Karen got on the mic and shared the situation she was facing with her unsaved son; whether or not she should share a Mother's Day meal with him or not. After much prayer and a lot of *inner struggle*, she felt the Lord may have been telling her not to have that meal. Then, when she heard Steve's word, she felt that was a confirmation to what she felt God was saying to her.

What Karen did took a lot of courage and loyalty to God. And sharing it over the mic also took a lot of courage. She deserved better than she received from the brethren in that room. She deserved our support. Even if we felt her decision might have been wrong, we should still have been able to acknowledge that she was at least *trying* to put God first in her life. Instead, there was a lot of quick judgment of the situation and that judgment was totally wrong. But more importantly, it revealed that those of us *outside* the System have just as big a problem with putting God before their family as those who are still inside the System. That problem is *family idolatry*.

You know, Satan is very skilled at using our weaknesses to ruin us—and the area we are weakest is our family relationships. God designed man for relationship, first with Himself, then with each other. So no matter how much wealth, or power, or fame, or glory people acquire, they are never satisfied until they find a relationship with someone. To be in a relationship is our most fundamental need because that is what we were created for. When our relationship with God does not hold top priority, our relationships with other people automatically become the most important things in our lives.

This is why at Mt. Sinai the first commandment God gave Israel was, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" [Ex. 20:3]. God was to remain first in the lives of the Hebrews. Jesus made it clear that under the New Covenant nothing has changed, for He said that the greatest commandment was to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, minds, and souls.

Of course, all Christians give lip service to this commandment but few really live it. The sad reality is that today, many believers are involved in all kinds of relationships that are just as important to them as their relationship with God. Some are involved in relationships that are more important than their relationship with God. Idolatry in the realm of relationships is common.

*While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, **Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?** And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, **Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.***

*Matthew 12:46-50*

Bible commentators have speculated as to exactly who came to see Jesus and why they came. Was it really his actual sisters and brothers? Did they come to distract Him in some way? But the important lesson here is not so much who came or why they came because the Lord's words were not directed to them, and quite probably they never even heard His response. Rather, His words were directed to the one who interrupted Him.

That individual was saying family relationships are *more important* than obedience to God. He was telling Jesus to stop teaching, to stop obeying the Father's will at that moment and give place to the demand of natural relationships. Jesus saw that in his mind, family *took precedence* over the work of the kingdom. So He went right for the root of this man's problem and asked him the question: "...*who is my mother? and who are my brethren?*" Then He pointed to His disciples—not to the crowd, but to the disciples—and said, "*Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.*" Jesus was telling this person that all natural relationships, even the most precious, must be subservient to our relationship with God.

Was the Lord denying His natural relationship with His mother? No. But He was putting it in its *proper place* and Kingdom perspective. Obedience to God *first*, loyalty to God *first*, love for God *first*, family duties and relationships *second*.

In addition, said Jesus, anyone who is doing the will of the Father, though they be not my natural family, are just as important to me as my natural family. Keep in mind that He was referring to His mother, who we know was a believer, a godly woman. It is not as if Jesus said those who do the will of His Father were just as important to Him as those members of the family who were unbelievers. They were just as important to Him as His redeemed family members.

For the natural man, this is an inconceivable way to view life and family. It is doubtful that very many Christians will ever understand what the Lord actually said here. Fewer still will ever be able to walk with Him in this kind of Kingdom life. His words reflect a reality that is foreign to everything around us, both in our secular and our church culture. His attitude towards natural relationships was certainly holy and right, yet it was *so far beyond* anything that is being taught today, we can't even explore it too deeply because at this point, God's people can't handle it. Our minds and our emotions find it extremely offensive and recoil from it. Still, Jesus said it and He was living it. All we can do is encourage the brethren to consider what He said.

*And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, **Let the dead bury their dead:** but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but **let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.** And Jesus said unto him, **No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.***

*Luke 9: 59-62*

Here we have two would-be disciples of Jesus. The first one is called by the Lord, the second one volunteers his service. Both have a similar problem: family relationships and responsibilities are top priority in their lives. The first man wants to fulfil his duty as a son and display his loyalty to his parents by burying his father before joining the disciples.

Carrying out a family duty like burying a father is certainly not wrong, yet in this instance the Lord knew that fulfilling a proper family duty, even one as necessary as that, would have kept this man from following Him. So He told him to let the (spiritually) dead bury the (physically) dead and follow Him. This might seem harsh to us but it was a manifestation of God's love for the man. What would have been harsh, is if the Lord would have let him return home without saying what He did, knowing that if he went back he would miss the Kingdom of God.

The second man wanted to go back home, put his house in order, and say farewell to the family. Again, this would be the right thing to do under normal circumstances. Surely it is irresponsible for a family member to just up and disappear without a word. Yet Jesus must have known that if he went and did the proper thing, he too would miss the kingdom. It is not hard to imagine his family telling him that God would never tell him to forsake them. It is easy to imagine them begging and pleading with him not to do such a thing, putting him on a guilt trip. It is also easy to imagine him caving into the pressure and staying. So Jesus tells him not to even go back and say farewell. What seems cruel to us is actually the love of God many times. We must learn to see things as God sees them.

Now it was in the *context* of family relationships that Jesus said those who look back are not fit for the kingdom. He was not referring to backsliding or apostasy in general. He was talking about allowing our natural relationships to *interfere* with our spiritual walk. God has instituted family relationships and duties. They are not to be ignored or despised. But they must be kept in their proper place. They must remain subservient to our relationship to God as His sons and daughters. Jesus was saying that once we make a decision to follow Him we must never allow any family relationship, any family duty, any family responsibility, regardless of how right and proper they may be, to interfere with our complete obedience to His will. If we allow them to interfere we simply are not fit for the Kingdom.

*He that loveth father or mother **more** than me is **not worthy of me:** and he that loveth son or daughter **more** than me is **not worthy of me.***

*Matthew 10:37*

*If any man come to me, **and hate not** his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, **he cannot be my disciple.***

*Luke 14:26*

No true disciple of Messiah can love family more than God. Indeed, Jesus stated that we must "hate" them—comparatively. In other words, when family duties and relationships begin to *interfere with our obedience* to God we must deal with those relationships as our enemies. When they begin to *replace our love* for Him we must deal with those relationships as our enemies. When they begin to *steal our time* with Him we must deal with those relationships as our enemies. In short, when duties and affection for family come in competition with our Savior we must choose Him, regardless of the consequences.

The only way we will ever be able to love others the way we should, the only way we can keep all our relationships in their proper place, is if we are loving God above everyone else in this world. The *reason* there are so many messed-up relationships among God's people, the *reason* Christian bookstores are full of books on how to fix bad relationships, the *reason* Christian family counseling has become a multi-million dollar industry, is simply because God's people are breaking the first commandment. They are involved in idolatry and God is judging those relationships.