

What Did Jesus Do About Family Problems?

by [John T Polk II](#)

*All Scriptures and comments are based on the **New King James Version**, unless otherwise noted.*

Then one from the crowd said to Him, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.' But He said to him, 'Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?' And He said to them, 'Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.' (**Luke 12:13-15**)

Jesus then proceeded to give a parable and a detailed discourse about the danger of allowing possessions to possess us and thereby perverting the genuine meaning of life (**cf Luke 12:15-34**). The word "judge" carried with it the meaning of "umpire" as in **Acts 7:27, 35** (from **Exodus 2:14**). The original word for "arbitrator" occurs only here in the New Testament, and is being used of settling legal, personal matters. In other words, Jesus refused to settle personal and legal matters while He was on the earth, but instead He assessed the problem to be individual "covetousness," an issue He promptly addressed to the crowd ("them")!

The late G. K. Wallace, in teaching a class of preacher students at Freed-Hardeman College (circa 1965), Henderson, Tennessee, told us, "Young men, when you go out of here, remember you're not 'Counselors' but you're 'Teachers!'" His experienced sentiment is truly borne out by respected commentators on this passage.

Robertson's N.T. Word Pictures says:

Jesus repudiates the position of judge or arbiter in this family fuss. The language reminds one of **Exodus 2:14**. Jesus is rendering unto Caesar the things of Caesar (**Luke 20:25**) and shows that his kingdom is not of this world (**John 18:36**).

The late and scholarly brother in Christ, James Burton Coffman wrote:

Jesus did not approach the problems of social injustice by an assault upon the established institutions. He did not take the man's part against those who had wronged him. Just as Jesus refused to accept criminal jurisdiction in the case of the woman taken in adultery (**John 8:3-11**), or take sides in a political problem, as in the question regarding the tribute money (**Matthew 22:17**), he carefully avoided the snare and the rock upon which so many religious reformers have made shipwreck (**Burton Coffman's Commentary**).

Those who came to Jesus with personal questions were given the truth they needed to apply, but one is hard pressed to find the example of Jesus settling those personal matters for them. Rather, He believed in the ability and desire of each person to improve their own lives with the truth(s) they had been taught! He was

not their constable who would enforce these matters upon them, but as the inquirer addressed Him, "Teacher" (**Luke 12:13**).

Men who teach and preach the name of Christ must learn from our Lord, for "a servant is not greater than his master" (**John 15:20**)! Many Gospel Preachers are so involved in settling disputes between families and family members, that some preachers have even hung out a "Family Counselor" shingle, while others have simply taken down their "Gospel Preacher" acknowledgement. They are so busy putting out family "grass fires" that they have little time or inclination to educate all the families in "fire prevention." The only "work of an evangelist" (**2 Timothy 4:5**) Paul gave Timothy was specifically to center around the command to: "Preach the word" (**2 Timothy 4:1-4**). Christ did not even send Paul to baptize, "but to preach the gospel" (**I Corinthians 1:17**).

The first time an issue arose in the church of Christ, it involved the family matter of some widows missing their portion of what the church offered, the inspired apostles said:

It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables (**Acts 6:2**).

They preached to the church the qualifications for men who should see after the widows, and then said,

"But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (**Acts 6:4**).

The details of carrying out the commands of Christ did not (nor do they today!) require the services of a Gospel Preacher. A tragedy of our day seems to be that Preachers are expected to solve family problems, be custodians of widows and orphans, and see that members attend, but when worship time comes, they do not know the Word of God nor can they preach it, for they haven't reserved for themselves time for prayer and preparation.. And then churches don't seem to know why they dwindle down to a precious few.

Preachers, like Jesus, should identify the problems members are having, and then "preach the Word" on that subject that all may learn. But if and when personal problems become an evil influence upon the rest of the church because of an unrepentant member, then it should be exposed to the church (**Matthew 18:15-17**; **I Corinthians 5:1-13**).

It is this "ministry of the word" that has been sadly lacking in far too many pulpits in our brotherhood. Instead of preaching to attract a crowd, we should be preaching to strengthen the body of Christ (**Acts 20:32**); instead of simply entertaining, we should be energizing (**Titus 2:11-15**); instead of counseling, we should be introducing them to the "Counselor" (**Isaiah 9:6-7**); instead of stepping into open family divisions, we should be preaching the word that will split open their hearts to family discussions (**Hebrews 4:12**)! Let's be more like Jesus: Preach the truth that is needed to those that will heed it, then say:

"If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear" (**Mark 4:23**).

—John T. Polk II *published on fellowshiproom.org on February 22, 2012*