

Explanatory Notes:**GOD OR FAMILY: WHO COMES FIRST?**

Message Title: God or Family: Who Comes First?

Topic: Decision making: Family pressures versus the truth and authority of God.

Bible Verses: 1 Samuel 3:1-21

Introduction:

Pascual was the an important leader in his congregation. He was the second son in his father's family. Pascual was a rancher with a few cattle on his small farm. He was highly respected for his work and his leadership by people along the river valley where he lived.

But one day a dispute developed about a land boundary. Pascual's older brother Pedro claimed that the land belonged to him, but it really belonged to another Christian. As is customary among their people, Pedro pressed his family to support his claim to the land even though they knew he was cheating.

So, how did Pascual, the younger brother, respond? He listened carefully to the arguments and the hot dispute. He talked with members of the church who were neighbors to Pedro. He learned that Pedro was wrong. The church told Pedro that he was wrong. But Pedro did not change or accept the decision of the Christians even though he is a believer and a member of the church. Everyone watched to see how their elder and leader Pascual would respond.

Everyone knew the pressure Pascual faced. Custom required that he support his older brother even though he was wrong. Family loyalty was expected above everything else. But now that Pascual had declared himself to be a dedicated follower of Jesus, would he support the false claims of his older brother or hold to the truth and be honest about the land dispute?

Other important verses about the importance of following God rather than people:

Matthew 10:32-39.

Faith in Jesus and loyalty to him as Lord often causes a division among family members. The Holy Spirit gives a new understanding of truth and conscience to believers. So they make decisions in life based on God's Word, truth, right, fairness, love and goodness, not on the basis of blind loyalty to family interests and preferences.

Acts 5:29:

When the religious authorities pressured the apostles to stop preaching about Jesus, the apostles boldly proclaimed, "We don't obey people. We obey God."

Pascual's fellow believers watched and prayed as he struggled with his decision. They hoped he would do what was right and put his loyalty to Jesus before his loyalty to family.

But Pascual gave in to family pressure. By tradition Pedro had the authority of a father over Pascual because he was the oldest brother. And no one ever disobeyed the decision of their father in their tribe. Pedro ordered Pascual to support him even though Pascual was an adult--42 years of age! Pascual's fellow believers were disappointed to see him put his family before his faith. He did not succeed in the test he faced.

Now, I want to tell you a story with a happier ending. It is a story about a boy named Samuel. When Samuel was still a baby his parents dedicated him to God. They delivered him to Eli, the priest, to serve God in the tent of worship in the town of Shiloh. Eli became the person responsible for young Samuel. He was a father to him. Here is the exciting story from the Bible*:

Samuel served the LORD by helping Eli the priest, who was by that time almost blind. In those days, the LORD hardly ever spoke directly to people, and he did not appear to them in dreams very often. But one night, Eli was asleep in his room, and Samuel was sleeping on a mat near the sacred chest in the LORD's house. They had not been asleep very long when the LORD called out Samuel's name.

"Here I am!" Samuel answered. Then he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am. What do you want?"

"I didn't call you," Eli answered. "Go back to bed."

Samuel went back.

Again the LORD called out Samuel's name. Samuel got up and went to Eli. "Here I am," he said.

"What do you want?"

Eli told him, "Son, I didn't call you. Go back to sleep."

The LORD had not spoken to Samuel before, and Samuel did not recognize the voice. When the LORD

*(Note: if you do not have this story in your language, translate it from this CEV version. Then read it or tell it to your audience.)

called out his name for the third time, Samuel went to Eli again and said, "Here I am. What do you want?"

Eli finally realized that it was the LORD who was speaking to Samuel. So he said, "Go back and lie down! If someone speaks to you again, answer, 'I'm listening, LORD. What do you want me to do?'"

Once again Samuel went back and lay down.

The LORD then stood beside Samuel and called out as he had done before, "Samuel! Samuel!"

"I'm listening," Samuel answered. "What do you want me to do?"

The LORD said:

Samuel, I am going to do something in Israel that will shock everyone who hears about it! I will punish Eli and his family, just as I promised. He knew that his sons refused to respect me, and he let them get away with it, even though I said I would punish his family forever. I warned Eli that sacrifices or offerings could never make things right! His family has done too many disgusting things.

The next morning, Samuel got up and opened the doors to the LORD's house. He was afraid to tell Eli what the LORD had said. But Eli told him, "Samuel, my boy, come here!"

"Here I am," Samuel answered.

Eli said, "What did God say to you? Tell me everything. I pray that God will punish you terribly if you don't tell me every word he said!"

Samuel told Eli everything. Then Eli said, "He is the LORD, and he will do what's right."

As Samuel grew up, the LORD helped him and made everything Samuel said come true. From the town of Dan in the north to the town of Beersheba in the south, everyone in the country knew that Samuel was truly the LORD's prophet. The LORD often appeared to Samuel at Shiloh and told him what to say.

1 Samuel 3:1-21, CEV

What can we learn from this wonderful story? Here are a

few important points:

1. Samuel was an obedient child. Children should always respect their parents and elders. Samuel went to Eli when he had a question and he obeyed him. “Samuel told Eli everything.” (v. 18)

2. Eli wisely gave God control of young Samuel. It is not easy for older people and parents to give up the control of their children especially if the customs of the people support such control. But Eli quickly recognized that God was taking over the direction of Samuel’s life. Eli did not feel threatened. He told very young Samuel to answer to God now and not to him. He said to Samuel. “He is the Lord, and he will do what is right.” (v. 18)

3. God is the Lord. He has authority over our lives. We must respond to him as Samuel did: “I’m listening, LORD. What do you want me to do?: (v. 9).

Every decision believers make should be submitted to the Lord and approved by him. The authority of other people (family members, teachers, leaders) should not be ignored, but Jesus is Lord of all things and people. When there is a disagreement between what God tells us and what family and traditions say, we should obey God.

Family members may experience divisions and deep differences when they decide to follow and obey Jesus as Lord. But there is no question: Jesus is Lord. He is number one. Every decision deserves his approval. Even though some trouble and loss may come, it is always best to obey Jesus as Lord. He will give us an eternal reward.

Invitation:

Pascual gave in to what his family wanted, even though it was wrong. Samuel listened to God, even though God’s message was not favorable to his adoptive father, Eli. Do you face a difficult decision like the one Pascual and Samuel faced? Are there traditions or decisions in your family that contradict God’s words in the Bible and dishonor him? If so, I urge you to trust in God and put his

will first. Ask God what he wants. Then do it. I am going to pray to God. I encourage you to speak these words to God in your heart as I say them:

“Lord, I love my family and people. I want to respect their traditions. But I also know that I must listen to you and obey your Word. Help me to follow you. Give me the strength to stand firm for what I know is right, even if others oppose me. Amen.”