

BIBLE STUDY HELPS

TITLE: Questioned

TEXT: Mark 3:20-30

TARGET: SESSION IN A SENTENCE

Jesus has authority over all creation, including Satan.

LOOK UP: FOCUSING THE GROUP

Display: “Who died and made you the boss?”

Guide: Has anyone ever had the thought expressed in the question above? Or have you ever actually said it to someone? What circumstances caused you to respond this way? In what recent situations have you heard someone question the authority someone else might have to make decisions?

It seems that we are hearing more and more people bring up questions regarding the authority others have over them. We have heard questions arise in education, politics, law enforcement, and other arenas regarding the decision-making authority of others.

Mark 3:20-30 raises questions about the extent of Jesus’s authority. Jesus had demonstrated his authority over sickness and the Sabbath by healing a man with a paralyzed hand on the Sabbath. This brought out the critics who questioned where He derived such power. You will discover that even His own family believed He had lost His mind.

Consider the role Jesus’s authority plays in your life as you examine the passages in this session.

LOOK IN: UPACKING THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Jesus’s Authority and the Skeptics Response—Mark 3:20-22

²⁰ Jesus entered a house, and the crowd gathered again so that they were not even able to eat. ²¹ When his family heard this, they set out to restrain him, because they said, “He’s out of his mind.” ²² The scribes who had come down from Jerusalem said, “He is possessed by Beelzebul,” and, “He drives out demons by the ruler of the demons.”

Imagine you were in the house that Jesus had entered. This could have been the home of Peter and Andrew in Capernaum, but the Scriptures don’t tell us this exactly. There is such a large crowd that the mealtime was disrupted to the extent that people weren’t even able to eat.

Mark first tells us that His family was skeptical of His authority.

Identify: How did Jesus’s family express their skepticism?

Discuss: When you read Mark’s account regarding the family setting out to restrain Him, what do you imagine? Do you find it difficult to believe that Jesus’s family responded as they did?

The root of the Greek for the word “restrain” (*krateo*) implies physical control. Jesus’s family apparently believed that He was a danger to Himself and others. They were so concerned for His mental health that they were willing to restrain Him and take Him away with physical force if necessary. One can’t examine just this passage regarding Jesus’s family response without looking at verses 31-35 as well.

In Mark 3:31-35, Jesus reveals His authority as the Son of God, thus making His works greater than just simply fulfilling the wishes of His birth family: “His mother and his brothers came, and standing outside, they sent word to him and called him. ³² A crowd was sitting around him and told him, “Look, your mother, your brothers, and your sisters are outside asking for you.” ³³ He replied to them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” ³⁴ Looking at those sitting in a circle around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers!” ³⁵ Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mark 3:31-35)

Then, between Mark 3:20-22 and Mark 3:31-35, Mark sandwiches the actions of another group that was skeptical of His authority—the scribes from Jerusalem.

Identify: How did the scribes demonstrate their skepticism?

These skeptics were so concerned that they came all the way “down” from Jerusalem to see if His authority needed to be challenged. They challenged and questioned His authority by associating His good works with Beelzebul. They accused Jesus of being possessed by Beelzebul, therefore acting as a raving madman. Beelzebul was a reference to a false Canaanite god associated with demons. By the first century, the Jews used it as a name for Satan.

Their logic didn’t make sense. They didn’t deny that Jesus freed people from evil spirits, but they believed He did it by using demonic powers. They went even further and stated that he drove out demons by the authority of Satan Himself.

Discuss: How do people express skepticism regarding Jesus Christ today? How do they attempt to associate the works of Jesus, especially the gospel, with something evil? Why do people have so much trouble acknowledging Jesus’s authority?

So, we see that Jesus is called “crazy” by his family and “demon possessed” by the religious leaders. Both completely reject him and demean him.¹ However, Jesus did not try to run or hide. He confronted their skepticism regarding His authority head on by summoning them and telling a parable.

The Source of Jesus’s Authority Revealed – Mark 3:23-27

²³ So he summoned them and spoke to them in parables: “How can Satan drive out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. ²⁶ And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand but is finished. ²⁷ But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can plunder his house.”

Jesus describes two situations in His parable—a kingdom and a house. Neither can stand if it is divided. Both situations are then related back to Satan’s domain. Satan, the chief of the fallen angels, rebelled against God’s authority, was cast out of heaven, and was the origin of evil—including the temptation that led to humanity’s sin and fall. He remains limited by the hand of God, though He did tempt Jesus during His earthly ministry (Matthew 4:1) and continues to tempt humanity.

The New Testament teaches that the world and culture are the temporary domain (kingdom/house) of Satan; however, one day Jesus will return with all power and authority, fulfilling the eternal judgment of Satan and his followers.

The scribe’s argument was completely illogical. If Jesus was working alongside Satan to cast out the demons, the enemy would be destroying his own kingdom. It would mean civil war in the kingdom of evil. “In the same way, a home, with people working against one another, is doomed.”²

Jesus declared that He was working to advance a much different kingdom. The source of His authority was not from Satan but from God the Father.

Ask: Who was the strong man in Jesus’s parable?

“Jesus’s parable reflects a situation in the ancient world where wealthy people’s homes were virtual fortresses, and their servants could form a small army. Jesus pictured Satan as the wealthy man (strong man) and his demons as his servants and possessions. The only way those possessions could be carried off would be for someone to first tie up the strong man.

Jesus, as God, has “tied up” Satan. Jesus was not in league with Satan, as the teachers of the law tried to claim; rather, he had overpowered Satan by refusing his temptations and by constantly freeing people held in Satan’s grasp.”³

Consider: In what ways might you attribute Satan with more authority than he really has? Are you more afraid of the authority of Satan or more confident in the authority of Jesus? What might your answer reveal about your view of Jesus’s authority versus Satan’s authority?

¹ Bruce B. Barton, [Mark](#), Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), 84–86.

² Bruce Barton et al., [Life Application New Testament Commentary](#) (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2001), 154.

³ Bruce Barton et al., [Life Application New Testament Commentary](#) (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2001), 154–155.

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Jesus demonstrated His superior power by dismantling Satan's work. The fact that He could cast out demons and defeat evil spirits provided evidence that He was an agent of righteousness, sent by God to do God's work. However, the greatest demonstration of Jesus's authority is revealed in Jesus's next words.

The Scope of Jesus's Authority – Mark 3:28-30

²⁸ *"Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for all sins and whatever blasphemies they utter. ²⁹ But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" — ³⁰ because they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit."*

Jesus's greatest demonstration of authority is through His power to forgive and free people from "all sins and whatever blasphemies they utter." Yet, this passage has led to a lot of discussions regarding the subject of the unpardonable sin—blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

Discuss: Do you struggle with believing that people can be forgiven by Jesus for all sins and even blasphemies they utter? What sins might you struggle with believing Jesus could forgive? What are some of your thoughts, opinions, or insight you have regarding when someone has blasphemed the Holy Spirit?

Too often people miss the promise found in verse 28 and worry more about the warning in verse 29. Those who believe in Jesus will be forgiven of all sins (evil acts, wrong actions, good actions not done, evil thoughts, evil motives, etc.) and of all blasphemies (evil words said against God). When there is confession and repentance, no sin is beyond God's forgiveness.

However, we can't ignore the one sin that cannot be forgiven. One must ask then when does someone cross over to the point of no return? Mark called blasphemy of the Holy Spirit an eternal sin because it involves rejecting Jesus's identity as the Messiah sent from God and refusing the salvation and forgiveness only He provides. When exactly is this determined?

The Life Application New Testament Commentary provides a good explanation: "Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit refers not so much to a single action or word as to an attitude. Those who defiantly deny Jesus' divine power and instead attribute it to Satan are blaspheming the Holy Spirit (see also Matthew 12:32). Jesus was not talking about rejecting him, but of rejecting the power behind him."⁴

In the case of the scribes, their failure to recognize the Spirit, under whose influence Jesus was actually operating, indicated that they were dangerously close to committing the unforgivable sin. Verse 30 reveals why Jesus warned them of this when Mark tells us it was "*because they were saying, 'He has an unclean spirit.'*" By identifying the Holy Spirit as Satan in Jesus's life, the religious leaders were committing unspeakable blasphemy. They were rejecting the authority of Christ the Messiah and attributing it to Satan, thereby blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

We must realize that this is not for us to determine. God is the only one who possesses the knowledge to know when one crosses this threshold. The only time we can be most sure is if someone dies completely and blatantly rejecting Christ. Additionally, if you are worried that you have committed this sin, then you most likely haven't. Someone who has won't worry about it!

This criteria is also one of many and most certainly one of the major ways of identifying religious groups as cults. If they deny the authority of Christ as the Son of God and/or reject the work and power of the Holy Spirit, then they are blaspheming God.

LOOK OUT: LIVING OUT THE TARGET

Consider: Do you believe Jesus has just as much authority to heal someone physically as He does to forgive sins? How should your prayer life reflect that belief? How should your conversations with people reflect that belief?

Consider the areas in which you might be denying or questioning Christ's authority. Spend some time talking with Jesus about your struggles and about surrendering to Him once again.

⁴ Bruce Barton et al., *Life Application New Testament Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2001), 155.