

Questioned

SESSION 3

Mark 3:20-30

Memory Verse: Mark 3:24

Jesus has authority over all creation, including Satan.

Questions about authority come up in families, as parents guide their children from infancy to maturity. Property owners also find themselves dealing with questions about authority. Property lines can be questioned when trees need to be planted or fences need to be constructed. Important questions about authority come up in the world of law and order. Ordinary citizens have to choose whether or not they will honor and obey police officers or judges.

The passage in Mark's Gospel for this session raises questions about the extent of Jesus's authority. He had already demonstrated power over sickness, but critics wondered where He derived such power. As you study this session, consider the role Jesus's authority plays in your life. Identify areas where you might be denying His authority and talk with Him about surrendering to Him once again.



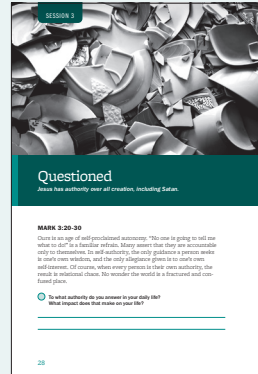
Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training

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Ours is an age of self-proclaimed autonomy. “No one is going to tell me what to do!” is a familiar refrain. Many assert that they are accountable only to themselves. In self-authority, the only guidance a person seeks is one’s own wisdom, and the only allegiance given is to one’s own self-interest. Of course, when every person is their own authority, the result is relational chaos. No wonder the world is a fractured and confused place. (PSG, p. 28)

To what authority do you answer in your daily life? Why?



Understand the Context (Mark 3:7–5:43)

Despite all of Jesus’s miracles and ministry, His tensions with the religious elite continued to escalate. As noted in Mark 2, some of the leaders had accused Him of blasphemy—claiming equality with God. They also had serious concerns about His attempts to redefine the Sabbath in ways that ran contrary to their accepted traditions.

Mark 3 begins with another Sabbath showdown. When a man with a paralyzed hand came to Jesus in the synagogue, Jesus raised a theological question about the spirit of the law and the letter of the law. Jesus chose to follow the spirit of the Sabbath by showing mercy and healing the man.

In this account, Mark shared two examples of the religious leaders’ growing animosity toward Jesus. First, they began watching Him closely, looking for a reason to accuse Him (3:2). Second, they initiated a plot to kill Him (3:6). This is the first indication readers have that leaders were planning behind the scenes to execute Jesus.

For His part, Jesus never let His conflicts with the religious establishment hinder His work. He continued fulfilling the Father’s plan by pointing people toward the kingdom, healing diseases, and exorcising demons (3:7-12). He also handpicked twelve men who would learn from Him and spread His message to others. This example of personal multiplication has served as the foundation of Christian discipleship for more than two thousand years.

As His ministry grew and the crowds around Him increased, Jesus began experiencing opposition on multiple fronts. Mark pointed out that members of His own family believed He had lost His mind (3:20-21), while the religious leaders continued to accuse Him of blasphemy (3:22). They said that He cast out demons in the name of Satan (or Beelzebul).

Jesus again dealt with the charges by using the leaders’ own faulty logic against them. No ruler can find victory by destroying his own strongholds. Likewise, Satan had nothing to gain by giving Jesus the authority to cast out demons. So, Jesus had to be relying on an authority higher and stronger than Satan—His heavenly Father.

Jesus also clarified the family issues by redefining what it means to be a member of His family. While Jesus would never deny His earthly family, He also knew that membership in the kingdom was what really mattered.

Mark 4 represents a shift in Jesus’s methods. While He still preached about the kingdom, He began using parables—stories that conveyed spiritual truths—to teach the crowds. The stories illuminated those who accepted them with an open heart and meant little to those who did not (4:10-12). Jesus made sure to explain the true message of each parable to His disciples so they would be equipped when their time to share the message came (4:33-34).

As you read Mark 3:20-30, identify the questions asked by Jesus. What do each of them reveal about His authority?



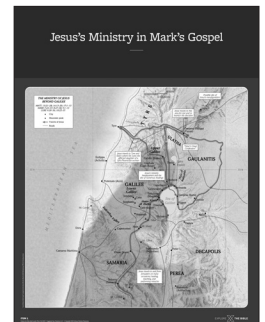
PRIOR TO THE SESSION: Conduct an online search for a video clip or GIF of a child saying, “You’re not the boss of me.” Also conduct an online search for a video of a basketball player making a shot for the wrong team. Prepare to display these to the group.

SUMMARIZE: Show the video clip/GIF of a child saying, “You’re not the boss of me” to the group. Ask: **How many of you have ever heard this from a child?** Enlist a volunteer to read the introductory paragraph in First Thoughts (PSG, p. 28).

DISCUSS: Talk about how everyone answers to some authority. Ask: **To what authorities do you answer in your daily life? What impact does that make on your life?** (PSG, p. 28)

CONTEXTUALIZE: Use **Pack Item 1** (*Map: Jesus’s Ministry in Mark’s Gospel*) to review the location of Jesus’s Galilean ministry. Remind the group about the various places in which Jesus ministered around the Sea of Galilee.

TRANSITION: *In today’s session, we’re going to look at the nature of Jesus’s authority and how people responded to it.*



NOTES

Group Activity Option

Music

Encourage adults to find hymn #541 in the *Baptist Hymnal* (2008), “Take My Life and Let It Be” by Frances Havergal. Direct a volunteer to lead a responsive reading of the song. Instruct the volunteer to read the first sentence of each verse, while the group reads the second sentence of each verse. Encourage everyone to read the chorus at the end. Talk about how this hymn relates to acknowledging Jesus’s authority over all creation, which is the key point of this session.

Skeptics (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.”

(v. 20) Crowd: Jesus had entered someone’s house to eat, but the crowd even followed Him there and disrupted the meal. Many scholars believe this house was probably the home of Peter and Andrew in Capernaum. Whatever the case, the audience was interrupting Jesus’s personal time.

(v. 21) Family: The Greek wording is unclear as to who exactly came to the home to confront Jesus. The actual subject in Greek is vague and means “those with Him” or “His own people.” This could also mean friends. Since Mark referred to Jesus’s family later in the passage (vv. 21,31-35), some scholars believe that is who Mark meant here. But either rendering could be correct.

(v. 21) Restrain: The root of the Greek word chosen by Mark (*krateo*) implies physical control. It emphasizes strength and mastery over someone. Those close to Jesus apparently believed that He was a danger to Himself and others, and they were willing to use force to stop Him. In general, Jesus’s family genuinely cared for His physical and mental well-being, and they believed the situation required an intervention.

(v. 21) Out of his mind: This is the first of two times that Jesus’s family is introduced in Mark (see chapter 6). Their specific concern was that His growing popularity was affecting His mental health. He was too entrenched in His work and unable to even take care of Himself. As noted, they were willing to restrain Him and take Him away with physical force if necessary. This was their plan for eliminating the stress and strain created by crowds of people constantly seeking to have their physical and spiritual needs met.

(v. 22) Scribes: The scribes were the teachers of the law. The reference to them coming from Jerusalem would imply that they were a delegated group of leaders assigned to evaluate Jesus and His teaching. They would have been charged with finding facts that would confirm or deny rumors about His ministry.

These scribes would have a great influence on those who lived outside of Jerusalem. Word of Jesus was spreading quickly through the region and had

created some concerns to those who saw themselves as guardians of the law. They had to go and hear what was being taught themselves in case they needed to act quickly and squelch the ministry of Jesus.

On an interesting note, if they came from Jerusalem to Capernaum, they would travel north, but they also would come “down” from a higher elevation to a lower elevation.

(v. 22) Possessed by Beelzebul: As the Jewish leaders observed Jesus in action, they concluded that he was possessed by an evil force and was simply a raving madman. They used the term ●**Beelzebul**, which was a reference to a false Canaanite god associated with demons. By the first century, the Jews used it as a name for Satan. They did not deny the fact that Jesus was able to free people from evil spirits, but they believed he was using demonic powers to do so.

(v. 22) Ruler of the demons: This term is a direct reference to the chief demon, Satan himself. While they didn’t refer to Jesus as Satan, they implied that he was working with the power of Satan to cast out the demons and evil spirits.

Key Cross Reference

Beelzebul in the Old Testament

In 2 Kings 1:1-17, Ahaziah, the ruler of Israel’s Northern Kingdom, sent some of his servants to call on Baal-zebub (the Hebrew equivalent to Beelzebul). He had been critically injured in a fall and wanted to discern whether he would live or die by consulting the false god. In response, the Lord sent Elijah the prophet to reprimand the king for calling on a worthless pagan idol. He also told Ahaziah that he would not survive. While the king tried to arrest Elijah for the prophecy, Ahaziah died just as the prophet had said.

For more on the background of Beelzebul, see **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Who is Beelzebub?*).



APPLICATION POINT: Believers should not be surprised when others are skeptical about Jesus.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Mark 3:20-22.

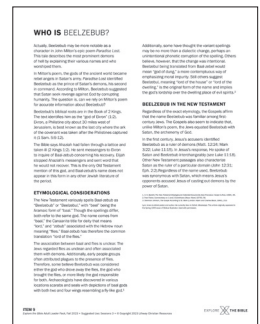
DISCUSS: Use the commentary on verse 20 in (PSG, p. 30) to talk about the reaction of the crowd. Note that Jesus did not go seeking crowds to follow him. Ask: **Why were crowds beginning to search for Him?** Share that after hearing about His healing power, crowds began to naturally seek Him out.

LIST: Write the words *Family* and *Scribes* on the board. Instruct the group to list the reactions of Jesus’s family and the scribes. Discuss similarities and differences. Ask: **What motivated these reactions from Jesus’s family and the scribes?**

DISCUSS: Pass out copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Who is Beelzebub?*). Review the background and why the scribes included that name in their comments about Jesus. Talk about why the scribes may have believed Jesus was working with demonic power.

ASK: **How do the attitudes of Jesus’s family and the religious leaders compare to the attitudes some people have about Jesus today?** (PSG, p. 31)

TRANSITION: *The religious leaders were quick to share their thoughts on Jesus and the source of His authority. Let’s see how Jesus handled the criticism He received.*



NOTES

Group Activity Option

Art

Give each adult a sheet of paper and a pencil. Direct them to review the content for Mark 3:20-22 (PSG, pp. 30-31) and to sketch an image that comes to mind as they think about those verses. After a few minutes, allow a few volunteers to share their work and to explain how their drawings illustrate the events in those verses. Highlight information about Beelzebub in “Did You Know?” on page 31 of the PSG.

Strong Man? (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.”

(v. 23) Parables: This is the first time that Mark used this term, although Jesus had already taught using **parables** in chapter 2. A parable is a form of wisdom teaching that uses an analogy or comparison. A parable could take many forms, including proverbs, allegories, or stories.

While Jesus was known for His parables, they were actually an ancient form of teaching. The Greek word *parabole* is equivalent to the Hebrew word *mishal*, which described a proverb or prophetic word or a saying that was difficult to understand. In the New Testament, Jesus often used parables to compare earthly things with heavenly truths.

(v. 23) Drive out Satan: Jesus responded to the scribes’ accusations by using a parable. In addition, by calling out **Satan**, Jesus identified Satan as a real being and affirmed that his kingdom of evil is real. His words also revealed the hypocrisy and contradictions behind the religious leaders’ comments. If He was driving out demons with demonic power, Satan would literally be working against himself. The idea was ridiculous, and Mark used this situation to affirm Jesus as God’s Son, the Messiah.

(vv. 24-25) Divided against itself: In an effort to bring even more clarification, Jesus further explained that **a kingdom** or **a house** cannot survive if it is **divided against itself**. If Jesus was working alongside Satan to cast out the demons, the enemy would be destroying his own work and kingdom. Satan could not advance his evil agenda by removing evil from a particular situation. Jesus declared that He was working to advance a much different kingdom. Satan was actually His enemy rather than His ally.

(v. 27) Strong man’s house: Jesus emphasized that the only way a person could go in and take something from a stronger person would be to bind that person. In this case, Satan was **the strong man**, but 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. He had the power and authority to free people from the oppression of sin that had been holding them in bondage.

(v. 27) Plunder: The Greek root word used here (*diaparzo*) indicates a forceful seizing of someone else’s property. The term was often used to describe the loot armies captured during a battle. In this case, the strong man would be bound and all that once belonged to Him would be captured and taken away. The implication is that the supposedly strong man would have nothing left to claim for his own. In the New Testament, this Greek word is used only here and in Matthew’s parallel passage (Matt. 12:29).

Key Word

Satan

Derived as a transliteration of the Hebrew word for “adversary,” the term appears in the Old Testament as both a verb or a noun. When used as a noun, it is used as both a general term (2 Sam. 19:22; Ps. 109:6) and as a proper name (Job 1-2; Zech. 3:2). It can also be understood as “one who makes accusations.”

While it could be used to refer to a human opponent, Satan had come to identify the chief of the fallen angels by the first century. He 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 (Matt. 4:1) and continues to tempt humanity.

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

EXPLORE Mark 3:23-27



APPLICATION POINT: Believers can trust that Jesus has authority over all creation.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Mark 3:23-27.

OBSERVE: Show the basketball video to the group. Ask: **Why would it not make sense for a player to score baskets for the opposing team?**

COMPARE: Emphasize that for a team to be effective, the players must work together. Point out that just as helping the opposing team would harm your team, fighting within the team will cause problems. Discuss the similarities of Jesus's discussion to working together on any type of team, especially a sports team.

ASK: **How is giving in to temptation similar to working for the opposing team? In what ways do people live in a divided kingdom when they allow Satan to develop strongholds in their lives? How does Jesus break those strongholds?**

TRANSITION: *In this last section, Jesus explained what it looks like for someone to work for the opposing team in His kingdom. He tackled a difficult subject, so let's look at what He means by opposing the Holy Spirit.*

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Scripture Memory

Review the memory verse for this session, Mark 3:24. Write the verse on a white board or a large sheet of paper. Lead the group to recite the verse aloud several times. Erase or cover the verse and encourage the group to quote it from memory. Encourage adults to continue memorizing the verse and reflecting on it throughout the week.

Warning (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.”

(v. 28) Will be forgiven: Jesus never hesitated to say that God forgives any and all sins with the exception of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. However, Jesus also issued a harsh warning to the religious leaders about their accusations. They were putting themselves in a dangerous situation by attributing the works of God to Satan. Jesus was cooperating with the Holy Spirit to cast out demons, but the scribes failed to distinguish between the works of Satan and what Jesus had done.

Jesus called out the scribes because of their attitude and hostility toward the work of the Holy Spirit through Him. They were denying the redemptive power that Jesus had through the Spirit.

(v. 28) Blasphemies: The Bible reveals various applications and definitions of “blasphemy.” In general, this sin involves speaking evil against God (Ps. 74:18; Isa. 52:5). We also find in the Bible where it is referring to defaming God’s character or lying about Him (1 Kings 21:10; Acts 13:45; 18:6). That would include what was happening here, as the religious leaders were attributing His works to demonic activity. Those who deny Jesus as the Messiah are also considered blasphemous (Luke 22:65; John 10:36).

Bible Skill

Use a Bible dictionary to gain deeper insight into a key word.

Look up the word *blasphemy* in a Bible dictionary to discover its meaning and usage. Write a summary of your findings. Based on your findings and Mark 3:28-30, is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit a one-time act or a disposition? Explain.

(v. 29) Against the Holy Spirit: Mark noted that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is an unforgivable (or eternal) sin. In this, he was referring to an attitude of hostility that ultimately rejects the saving power of God. This ongoing posture of unbelief ultimately hardens people’s hearts toward God.

At some point, the hearts of such rebels become so hard that they no longer have the desire to seek

repentance. And, without repentance, forgiveness becomes impossible.

(v. 29) Eternal sin: 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. Of course, God never withdraws His offer of salvation. Instead, the individual stubbornly refuses to accept His grace—and rejects God in the process.

While it is certainly a serious violation, it rarely appears in Scripture. Aside from this passage and the parallel passages in Matthew (Matt. 12:31-32) and Luke (Luke 12:10), John referred to a sin that leads to death in his first epistle (1 John 5:16-17). In this context, heretics were refusing to acknowledge the deity of Christ—much like the religious leaders were refusing to accept God’s work through Jesus in Mark. The writer of Hebrews also referred to a sin for which there was no sacrifice (Heb. 10:26-32) in discussing continued, willful rejection of God’s offer of salvation.

Key Doctrine

Salvation

Justification brings the believer into a relationship of peace and favor with God. (See Romans 5:8-10; Colossians 1:14.)

(v. 30) They were saying: The Greek wording could also be rendered “kept on saying.” The religious leaders were continuing to stand by their accusations and assumptions, again revealing their stubbornness and rebellion. In addition, these accusations were not being made by laypeople. They were being leveled by experts in the law who should have known better and should have had more insight into the person and work of the Messiah.



APPLICATION POINT: Believers should be heartbroken when people reject Jesus.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Mark 3:28-30.

EXPLAIN: Using the commentary for verses 29-30 (PSG, pp. 34-35), discuss the background surrounding the topic of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Discuss that Jesus is referring to someone who continually and persistently chooses to reject Christ. Remind the group that as long as someone is living, they still have the opportunity to repent and turn from their sins (1 John 1:9). Yet *once they die, they no longer have that opportunity. Jesus was providing a strong warning to the scribes that they needed to repent while they still had opportunity to do so.* Emphasize that He also admonished them to recognize His authority to forgive sins.

ASK: **Why might a person refuse to accept the truth about Jesus? How would you counsel someone who was afraid they had gone too far to find God’s forgiveness?** (PSG, p. 35)

NOTES

Group Activity Option

Bible Skill

Lead the group to complete the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 35). Invite three or four volunteers to read Mark 3:28-29 in different translations. Then, direct another volunteer to read the definition of “blasphemy” from a Bible dictionary. Discuss the questions listed in the activity. Provide an index card or paper for the group to record their responses.

CHALLENGE

- SUMMARIZE:** Review these points from Apply the Text on page 36 of the Personal Study Guide:
- *Believers should not be surprised when others are skeptical about Jesus.*
 - *Believers can trust that Jesus has authority over all creation.*
 - *Believers should be heartbroken when people reject Jesus.*
- DISCUSS:** Review the lesson passage and all the areas over which Jesus exercises authority.
- ASK:** **In which of these areas (your mind, your body, your understanding of nature, and your mission in life) does Jesus now exercise authority? In which of them did you once recognize His authority but no longer are doing so?**
- CHALLENGE:** Give each adult an index card and a pen. Direct them to write down one area in which they once recognized Jesus's authority but have reclaimed from Him at some point.
- PRAY:** On the back of the index card, instruct the group to write a prayer asking God to help them submit this area of their lives to Him. Encourage them to use this card as a prayer prompt throughout the coming week.

After the Session

Reinforce the session by contacting the group through email or text. Encourage adults to consider Jesus's authority over their daily lives.

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