



Questioned

Jesus has authority over all creation, including Satan.

MARK 3:20-30

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.

- **To what authority do you answer in your daily life?
What impact does that make on your life?**

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

MARK 3:7-5:43

Jesus demonstrated His authority in many different areas. After a series of conflicts with religious leaders, Jesus left to expand His work in other places where His authority over unclean spirits was witnessed (Mark 3:11-12). Silencing a demon is a powerful action, but so is calling a human life to a noble task. We shouldn't overlook Jesus's exercise of authority in calling His disciples (3:13-19). His compelling presence drew the Twelve and they surrendered their lives to His mission. Answering the call of Jesus to follow Him supersedes all other allegiances, and we see Him asserting His supremacy even over family relationships (3:31-35).

Beginning with chapter 4, Jesus began to exercise His authority in teaching truth to the crowds through the parable of the sower. Mark tended to feature the actions of Jesus more prominently than His teachings. However, when he did, he didn't usually give detailed specifics of what was said. However, 4:1-34 is an exception to that, for through that parable Jesus gave a thorough discourse and extended explanation on the intrinsic power of the word of God.

Immediately following Jesus's teaching, He and His disciples traveled across the Sea of Galilee by boat. His calming of a powerful storm showed His authority over nature (4:35-41). A different type of difficulty awaited on the opposite shore when they arrived. They encountered a demon-possessed man in all of his unshackled evil and brokenness. In a dramatic episode, Jesus cast out his demons and demonstrated His authority over powerful evil (5:1-20). As a result, the once-afflicted man became a picture of mental soundness and gave a powerful witness to Jesus.

Finally, Jesus showed that even illness and disease was subject to His command. He possessed the authority to bring healing and resurrection (5:21-43). Interestingly, He dealt first with a case that was long-standing, and not with the urgent situation of a child on her death bed. Regarding Jesus's timing and work, will we recognize His authority there also?



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

EXPLORE THE TEXT

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.”

VERSE 20


At times we see Jesus being swarmed by the masses in such a way that normal activities were hindered. On this occasion, Jesus and His companions were *not even able to eat*.

As believers, we must be careful in our evaluation of crowds. We tend to measure the viability and even spirituality of an event by how many people show up. What we see here is that the crowds frequently hindered the ministry of Jesus. This isn’t to say that large turnouts are bad or that small numbers indicate greater holiness. Rather, we must remember that submission to the authority of Christ is more important than satisfying the desires of the majority.

VERSE 21

The value of family is virtually unquestioned. Spiritual and secular people alike can be heard extolling the importance of relationships within families. Because of the priority of the family, we might be prone to accepting it as our highest authority.

If Jesus had allowed His family *to restrain him*, we wouldn’t enjoy the salvation provided through Him. The word translated *restrain* is a strong one, sometimes used in the sense of “arrest” or “take by force.” Jesus’s own brothers believed He was *out of his mind*. They did not accept His claims about who He was (John 7:5).

 How would you encourage a new believer whose faith in Jesus was being challenged or mocked by his or her family?

VERSE 22

While His family's attempt to restrain Him was likely accompanied with good intentions, the same could not be said of the ***scribes who had come down from Jerusalem***. Their accusations of Jesus were scathing. First, they slandered Him as being in consort with Satan. These religious leaders alleged that Jesus's power to cast out demons was because He Himself was demon-possessed.

- How do the attitudes of Jesus's family and the religious leaders compare to attitudes about Jesus today?
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DID YOU KNOW?

Beelzebul is the Greek form of the Hebrew word *Baal-zebul*, meaning "lord of the flies" or "lord of the manure pile"—a term of mockery for a Canaanite deity. In 2 Kings 1:2, the king of Israel called on Baal-zebul to discern whether he would die after he suffered an injury. The Lord sent Elijah to reprimand the king for calling on a worthless pagan idol. By the first century, the Jews used Beelzebul as a name for Satan.

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."

VERSE 23

Evidently the accusations by the scribes were not made in the presence of Jesus but found their way back to Him. Therefore, ***he summoned them and spoke to them in parables***. We often see the parables as purely educational in nature, but a closer examination reveals that Jesus used parables to confront and expose those who heard them (Mark 4:12). After they were confronted by Jesus through the parable, they would either

progress by repentance or regress in unbelief. In this particular parable, He confronted the religious leaders. There is no evidence they repented and believed in Jesus.

“Arguments raised against the authority of Jesus are always foolish and dismissive of the evidence.”

Jesus posed this question to the scribes: **How can Satan drive out Satan?** To attribute His power of exorcism to Satan was illogical and absurd. The scenario presented by the religious leaders would have the devil working against himself. This reminds us that the arguments raised against the authority of Jesus are always foolish and dismissive of the evidence.

VERSES 24-25

Jesus told a parable that was two-fold in nature, about a kingdom and a house. Both were pictured as being divided against themselves. In both cases the result of division was defeat. The reference to a kingdom seems to anticipate what the New Testament says about the realm of Satan’s activity (Col. 1:13). He is the ruler of this age (Eph. 2:2), but Jesus triumphed over him (Col. 2:15).

The reference to **a house** that is **divided against itself** may have been Jesus’s sideways glance at His own family. Division was the result of their failure to truly grasp His identity. Whether involving a family or a church or a nation, the same is true today.

- What are some ways in which Satan takes people captive?
How does Jesus break those strongholds?

VERSES 26-27

Jesus drove home the point of the dual-faceted parable: driving out demons is a matter of strength. Satan is a **strong man** and able to take people captive, but Jesus is stronger. His deity and miracles freed people from the devil’s power. Because Jesus has authority over all things, including Satan, our victory in Him is certain.

Jesus’s strength comes not merely in education but in transformation. One of the inadvertent ways in which we diminish the authority of Jesus

is by seeing His identity exclusively as a teacher. Indeed, He is that, but He is more than an educator. He came to defeat the power of evil and rescue humanity from the enemy. Christ is first a Savior and then to those He saves He is a teacher. Before we can truly follow His teachings, we must first be saved and given freedom from the power of the *strong man*.

● **How does the authority of Jesus bring peace and disruption at the same time?**

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.”

VERSE 28

Jesus began His statement with the adverb *truly* (the Greek word is “amen”), and He did it for two reasons. First, this was a way to let His hearers know that He was about to say something important. It was the oral equivalent to underlining or italicizing written text. Second, He was asserting His own authority. Jesus was in effect saying, “Whether you agree or not with Me doesn’t really matter. I ‘amen’ myself. I affirm my own words because I have the authority to do so.”

Specifically what Jesus wanted to emphasize and tell His hearers was the offer of forgiveness. He affirmed that *people will be forgiven for all sins and whatever blasphemies they utter*. While the verses to follow are difficult and perhaps hard to hear, let’s make sure that we don’t overlook this special promise. Jesus had previously taught that He had the authority on earth to forgive sins (Mark 2:10), and so He confidently made this promise. Jesus offers us the precious gift of forgiveness.

KEY DOCTRINE: *Salvation*

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

VERSES 29-30

While forgiveness is available for all sins, there is one exception: blasphemy **against the Holy Spirit**. To gain clarity on what is meant here, three questions will help. First of all, what is blasphemy? When we look at the parallel passage in Luke's Gospel, we see a helpful elaboration. There "blasphemes" is used synonymously with "speaks a word against" (Luke 12:10). So, when a person **blasphemes**, they are speaking against God, committing a verbal sin. We are commanded in Scripture to praise God, but this is the opposite of that.

Second, against whom is this blasphemy directed? Interestingly, Jesus said in the previously mentioned Luke passage that even speaking against Him, the Son of Man, can be forgiven. Immediately prior to His crucifixion, Roman soldiers mocked and ridiculed Christ (Mark 15:16-20). But even these irreverent insults could have been forgiven through a belief in what Christ was about to perform, an atoning sacrifice for sin. Jesus emphasized that it is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit that cannot be forgiven.

Third, why is this sin unforgivable? Remember that Jesus's critics had accused Him of doing miracles in the power of the devil rather than the power of the Holy Spirit. The sin against which Jesus warned was not a single act but a continued refusal to identify Jesus as the Christ and attributing works done by the Messiah to Satan. The verb phrase **they were saying** is in the imperfect tense, which indicates ongoing action.

“There was no forgiveness for these religious leaders because they would not seek forgiveness where it could be found.”

There was no forgiveness for these religious leaders because they would not seek forgiveness where it could be found, in submission to the authority of Jesus as the Messiah. Because it is not a one-time event but a continual attitude, it is **an eternal sin**. They adamantly refused to recognize that Jesus did miracles because He was the Christ and worked through the power of God. Therefore, He warned them they were very close to stepping over a line from which there was no return. We can safely imagine there was sorrow in the voice and eyes of Jesus as He spoke these words.

Additional clarification on this important question is provided for us in 1 John 5:16-17 where the apostle John wrote to believers contending with a heresy that refused to identify the divine Christ with the human Jesus. John differentiated between sin that does and doesn't lead to death. He taught that it is appropriate to pray for someone who has committed the former but gives no assurance regarding the latter.

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.

For believers who have trusted in Christ as their Savior, this warning must be applied in the correct fashion. It should not be used to create self-doubt as to whether one has committed the unpardonable sin. This is impossible for anyone who is a follower of Jesus. Rather, it can serve as a stimulant to a flagging commitment to be a witness to Christ's salvation. The fact that any person might enter a spiritual condition of no return should prompt every believer to pursue an evangelistic lifestyle.

● Why might a person refuse to accept the truth about Jesus?

● How would you counsel someone who feared they were no longer a candidate to receive God's forgiveness?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + 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 whether your group is submitting to the authority of Jesus. How does a group or an organization determine what authority it acknowledges? If a change is needed, how does a community find a new authority to follow?**

○ **Review the lesson passage and all the areas over which Jesus exercises authority. 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?**

PRAYER NEEDS
