

Mark 3:20-35 ~ Scripture Verses

Jesus Accused by His Family and by Teachers of the Law

²⁰ Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. ²¹ When his family [or his associates] heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, “He is out of his mind.”

²² And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, “He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.”

²³ So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak 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; his end has come. ²⁷ In fact, no one can enter a strong man’s house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man’s house.

The Unforgivable, Eternal Sin

²⁸ Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.”

³⁰ He said this because they were saying, “He has an evil spirit.”

Jesus Defines His True Family

³¹ Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. ³² A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, “Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.”

³³ “Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked.

³⁴ Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”

Mark 3:20-35 ~ Discussion Questions

1. What was the problem at the onset of the story? (3:20) Who tried to solve it? (3:21)
2. What did Jesus' family think of him? Why might they have thought what they did? Do we do this today? How? Why? What did the teachers of the law think of Jesus?
3. Who was "Beelzebub" that the Pharisees said possessed Jesus?
4. How did Jesus refute the accusations that he was possessed by a devil?
5. Mark 3:28-29 is a tough passage. We don't *want* there to be a sin that God won't forgive. We don't want to think that there is a line that cannot be crossed.
 - A. Was/is there an unforgivable sin in the Old Testament? (Deuteronomy 29:17-21) Summarize this in your own words.
 - B. Jesus' death on the cross brought believers forgiveness from all sins, didn't it? So are there any unforgivable sins in the New Testament? What sin is described in each of these passages? Summarize each one.
 - I. Hebrews 10:26-29
 - II. Mark 16:16 and Revelation 21:8
 - III. Mark 3:28-29 (What exactly does "blasphemy of the Holy Spirit" mean?)
 - C. If you committed an unforgivable sin, can you recover from it? How? Who has the power to grant you forgiveness? (This was a *major* point of debate in the early church that has *never* been resolved.) (John 3:18, 3:36, Luke 6:37)
 - D. What can you do to avoid committing an unforgivable sin?
6. When Jesus mother and brothers arrived, how did they summon Jesus? (3:31-32) What did they want to do for him? Who were these brothers?
7. What rhetorical question did Jesus ask? (3:33) Why?
8. How did Jesus answer his rhetorical question? Who did he say was his family? (3:34)
9. What unique name is given to "whoever does God's will?" (3:35)
10. How do you interpret Jesus' actions towards his flesh-and-blood family? What does this account tell you about his priorities?
11. How has your commitment to Christ affected your relationships with members of your family? Has this commitment ever caused conflict? How did you resolve it? How should you relate to members of your family who are not Christians?

Mark 3:20-35 ~ Leader's Guide

1. What was the problem at the onset of the story? (3:20) Who tried to solve it? (3:21)

It's a similar problem to that in Mark 3:7, i.e., large crowds were following Jesus in order to see his miracles and seek healing. We don't know for certain where he is. After going into the mountains to select his apostles, they may have come back down into Capernaum or they may have gone southwest to Jesus' home in Nazareth. (The two are about 30 miles apart.) Wherever he was, some members of his family (or old associates) said they would "take charge of him." It's kind of a weird thing to say, except that they seem to think that he's off his rocker.

2. What did Jesus' family think of him? Why might they have thought what they did? Do we do this today? How? Why? What did the teachers of the law think of Jesus?

Warren Kelly on the Pewview web site says, "Now, under normal circumstances, I could understand his family saying that he's nuts. If I had a brother, and all the sudden he started running around tapping people on the head and forgiving their sins, I'd probably wonder about the state of his mental health. We have to consider, though, one important thing.

They've been living with Jesus and Mary their whole lives. Mary has told them all about Jesus, and the angel's visit, and the wise men and shepherds, and everything. She's talked about when they found Jesus in the temple, and the things He said there. So they know the story. They know who Mary and Joseph say that Jesus is supposed to be. And they *still* think that their brother Jesus is crazy. They are ignoring the obvious truth of who Christ is, choosing to believe something much easier.

People did that a lot back then. Elsewhere, we learn that there were people who believed that Jesus was John the Baptist reincarnated (Matthew 16:14). Since many people saw Jesus baptized by John the Baptist, that couldn't possibly be true. But they chose to believe that, though, rather than accept what He told them about who He was.

People still do that today. Jesus seems to be whatever the latest writer or scholar thinks He should be—everything from a rebel priest to a social reformer to a revolutionary leader. We tend to see Jesus as who we want Him to be, rather than who He really is. Some people believe that there are no absolutes when it comes to the Biblical texts, that we can pick and choose which passages we want to believe. Popular novelists like Dan Brown in the DaVinci Code talk about Jesus in other ways. If we read a book that talks about Jesus in a way we like, we believe it. Pretty soon, we have our own, personal Jesus, who doesn't make us stop doing what we want to do, who just sits there and tells us what great people we are, and never requires anything from us as far as worship or devotion.

We are a people driven by convenience and our own desires. We want to

believe in God, but we don't want all the "baggage." We don't want to have to obey God, obey His commandments, or read something that tells us that our way might not be right.

That's what Jesus was doing. He was saying that the things that the Pharisees had been teaching them weren't the right path to God. He was teaching them things about the Messiah that they hadn't been taught. And when they asked who He was to teach them things like that, what authority did He have -- He showed them. Who has the kind of authority that Jesus showed over sickness? Who has the authority that He claimed when He forgave sin? Only God—and the Jewish leaders knew that. They had two choices— believe that He was who He said He was, and have to change centuries of beliefs, or they could believe that He was wrong, that He was guilty of blasphemy and had to be stoned. They chose the latter.

We need to think about what Jesus we believe in. Our own, personal, be whatever we want Him to be and never inconvenience us Jesus? Or the Messiah, the Son of God, the Word who, in the beginning, was with God and was God, by whom all things were created?

3. Who was Beelzebub that the Pharisees said possessed Jesus?

Beelzebub (Bee-el-ze-bub) translates literally as the Prince of Demons. It is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Baal-Zebub ("lord of the flies"), a parody of and mockery of the actual epithet, Baal-Zebul ("Exalted Baal" or "Baal the Prince"). The name later came to be used for Satan.

4. How did Jesus refute the accusations that he was possessed by a devil?

I'm not fond of quoting Cyril of Alexandria (378-444), a somewhat unscrupulous and unpleasant Bishop, but he had a good explanation on this point. He said, "Kingdoms are established by the fidelity of subjects and the obedience of those under the royal scepter. Houses are established when those who belong to them in no way whatsoever thwart one another but, on the contrary, agree in will and deed....How does Satan cast out Satan? Devils do not depart from people on their own accord but retire unwillingly. "Satan," Jesus says, "does not fight with himself." He does not rebuke his own servants. He does not permit himself to injure his own armorbearers. On the contrary, he helps his kingdom. "It remains for you to understand that I crush Satan by divine power."

To further illustrate his point, Jesus gave a short comparison. Mark calls it a parable, but in fact, this is not normally considered one of the 46 parables of Jesus. His example was that the only way to carry off the possessions (demons) of a strong man (Satan) was to first bind up the strong man. This is what Jesus implied he was doing when he cast out demons from a human.

5. Mark 3:28-29 is a tough passage. We don't *want* there to be a sin that God won't forgive. We don't want to think that there is a line that cannot be crossed.

A. Was/is there an unforgivable sin in the Old Testament? (Deuteronomy 29:17-21) Summarize this in your own words.

Deuteronomy 29:17-21 – ¹⁷ You saw among them their detestable images and idols of wood and stone, of silver and gold. ¹⁸ Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the LORD our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison.

¹⁹ When such a person hears the words of this oath and they invoke a blessing on themselves, thinking, “I will be safe, even though I persist in going my own way,” they will bring disaster on the watered land as well as the dry. ²⁰ The LORD will never be willing to forgive them; his wrath and zeal will burn against them. All the curses written in this book will fall on them, and the LORD will blot out their names from under heaven. ²¹ The LORD will single them out from all the tribes of Israel for disaster, according to all the curses of the covenant written in this Book of the Law.

So what the LORD is saying here is that there is no forgiveness for knowingly worshipping a false god or idol, or for knowingly turning away from the LORD.

B. Jesus’ death on the cross brought believers forgiveness from all sins, didn’t it? So are there any unforgivable sins in the New Testament? What sin is described in each of these passages?

I. Hebrews 10:26-29

Hebrews 10:26-29 – ²⁶ If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, ²⁷ but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. ²⁸ Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?

Knowing the gospel (the good news) and turning your back on it is unforgivable. If disregard for the law in the OT brought certain punishment, disregard for the gospel will bring even greater punishment.

II. Mark 16:16 and Revelation 21:8

Mark 16:16 – Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but *whoever does not believe* will be condemned.

Revelation 21:8 – But the cowardly, *the unbelieving*, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.

III. Mark 3:28-29 (What exactly does “blasphemy of the Holy Spirit” mean?)

Mark 3:28-29 – ²⁸Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, ²⁹but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.”

Jesus knows that his disciples will be tested and he assures them that the Holy Spirit will give them whatever grace and help they need in their time of adversity. He warns them, however, that it’s possible to spurn the grace of God and to give up the faith out of cowardice or disbelief. Why is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit reprehensible? Blasphemy consists in uttering against God, inwardly or outwardly, words of hatred, reproach, or defiance. It’s contrary to the respect due God and his holy name. Jesus speaks of blaspheming against the Holy Spirit as the unforgivable sin. Jesus spoke about this sin right after the Pharisees had attributed his miracles to the work of the devil instead of to God.

A sin can only be unforgivable if repentance is impossible. If someone repeatedly closes their eyes to God, shuts their ears to his voice, and reject his word, they bring themselves to a point where they can no longer recognize God when he can be seen and heard. They become spiritually blind-sighted and speak of “evil as good and good as evil” (Isaiah 5:20).

C. If you committed an unforgivable sin, can you recover from it? How? Who has the power to grant you forgiveness? (This was a *major* point of debate in the early church that has *never* been resolved.) (John 3:18, 3:36, Luke 6:37)

John 3:18 – Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.

John 3:36 – Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them.

Luke 6:37 – “Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”

In the early years (200-350) a major debate grew up around forgiveness and who could grant it. Some bishops, anxious to solidify their position, put forth the view that only bishops were able to forgive. This view persists to this day with the Roman Catholic church coming down on the side of forgiveness being granted only by bishops and church leaders with most protestant churches believing that God will forgive a believer who prays for forgiveness.

D. What can you do to avoid committing an unforgivable sin?

The unforgivable sins in both the OT and NT can be summarized as *knowingly* turning your back on God, turning away from his word, not believing in God or his word, speaking against God and the Holy Spirit, or worshiping another god. How do you avoid doing this? As Nancy Reagan said, “Just say no.”

6. When Jesus mother and brothers arrived, how did they summon Jesus? (3:31-32) What did they want to do for him? Who were these brothers?

They didn't want to fight the crowd, so they asked someone to go in and call him. One could put a benign interpretation on the earlier statement “he is out of his mind “ (3:21) that they did not think he was crazy but rather he must be having trouble dealing with all the pressure of the crowds and demands on him and they simply wanted to get him away from his heavy schedule.

There have been several explanations offered about Jesus' brothers. When the Catholic Church leaders decided that Mary was a virgin forever, they were forced to come up with an explanation for these brothers and decided they were either cousins or sons of Joseph by a previous marriage. The most natural conclusion is that they are younger sons by Mary and Joseph and are half-brothers. They are named in Mark 6:3: James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon. Although they grew up with him and their mother, Mary, and probably heard some stories about Jesus from her, they saw no reason to believe that he was any different from them, much less that he was specially anointed by God. (Mark 6:3)

7. What rhetorical question did Jesus ask? (3:33) Why?

A rhetorical question is a device to get the attention of your listeners in a way that gets them thinking. He asked, “Who are my mother and my brothers?”

8. How did Jesus answer his rhetorical question? Who did he say was his family? (3:34)

9. What unique name is given to “whoever does God's will?” (3:35)

Whoever does God's will, Jesus said was his mother, sister, and brother.

10. How do you interpret Jesus' actions towards his flesh-and-blood family? What does this account tell you about his priorities?

11. How has your commitment to Christ affected your relationships with members of your family? Has this commitment ever caused conflict? How did you resolve it? How should you relate to members of your family who are not Christians?