

Session 3

Unites

Jesus calls believers to be marked by doing God's will.

Mark 3:23-35



**What are some physical characteristics you share with your human family?
What are some ways you try to reflect your relationship with Christ?**

It happens every time a baby is born. Friends and relatives try to decide if the new arrival has his mother's eyes or her father's chin. It's only natural to look for the physical features that identify a child as a proud member of his or her family. The same principle works for our spiritual family. Jesus said and did things that reflected His relationship with His heavenly Father. Likewise, we need to reflect the "family resemblance."

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

The tensions between Jesus and the religious elite continued to escalate. Some of the leaders had accused Him of blasphemy—claiming equality with God. They also had serious concerns about His attempts to define the Sabbath in ways that ran contrary to their accepted traditions.

Chapter 3 begins with another Sabbath showdown. When a man with a paralyzed hand came to Jesus in the synagogue on the Sabbath, Jesus raised a theological question related to the spirit of the law and the letter of the law. He chose to follow the spirit of the Sabbath by showing mercy and healing the man. Mark gave two examples of the religious leaders' growing animosity toward Jesus. They were actively looking for reasons to bring Him into dispute (3:2), and they started plotting how to kill him (3:6).

Jesus continued fulfilling the Father's plan by preaching about the kingdom, healing diseases, and exorcising demons (3:7-12). He also handpicked twelve apostles who would learn from Him and spread His message to others.

As His ministry grew, Jesus began experiencing opposition on multiple fronts. 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). Jesus dealt with the charge of blasphemy 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.

Mark 4 represents a shift of sorts in Jesus' methods. He began teaching in parables—stories that conveyed spiritual truths. The stories revealed truth to those who would accept them with an open heart but meant little to those who would not (4:10-12).

MARK 3:23-35

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. **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.” **31** 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** **ⓓ**.”

Passage Outline

Undivided House
(Mark 3:23-30)

Misunderstood By Family
(Mark 3:31-32)

United By Purpose
(Mark 3:33-35)

Keywords

- a. The fallen angel known as “Lucifer” (Isa. 14:12, KJV), who sinned against God and fell from heaven (Ezek. 28:13-19), deceived Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3), and who opposes the plans and purposes of God. He’s also called “the devil,” “the ancient serpent,” and “the dragon” (Rev. 12:7-9).
- b. Jesus was rejecting the logic of the scribes in Mark 3:22 that He was akin to Beelzebul, or the devil. Internal divisions weaken a house or a kingdom.
- c. A person must be stronger than Satan to bind him and “plunder his house” (ESV).
- d. Jesus redefined His family as those who willingly enter into a relationship with Him and obey God’s will.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

Jesus summoned His opponents together to confront their accusations. Jesus understood that Satan was actually wiser than His opponents. While they saw no contradiction in their statements, the prince of the demons would hold a different opinion. He would understand that such divisions would not further his cause. If he opposed himself, he could not stand and would be finished. Just as a king would never expel his own soldiers from the kingdom, Satan would not let his kingdom collapse by actively working against it.

The passage relates to what many have labeled “the unforgivable sin.” However, that was not the main point Jesus was making. He affirmed that all sins are forgivable as long as one comes to God in repentance. Believers sometimes worry that they will fall into an unforgivable sin, but Jesus wanted people to know that if they are genuinely concerned about it, they are not committing it.

How would you explain the unpardonable sin to others? What ramification does this teaching have for believers today?

As He was teaching a crowd, Jesus learned that His family members wanted to talk with Him. As noted, they were probably seeking an opportunity to pull Him away from the multitude. Even though the family’s attitude was rooted in genuine concern, Jesus could not deviate from the plan God had for His life—even if it meant putting those closest to Him on hold.

How might a person respond if their family did not understand they followed Jesus?

Jesus again used a question to spur people to think in a new way. He was preparing their hearts and minds to receive a truth that they had never considered. This would require a monumental shift in thinking for those listening to His words. Jews (who were on the scene) and Greeks (who constituted Mark’s audience) would have been rocked by the radical idea that a spiritual relationship could supersede one’s family of origin.

This break from convention pointed to a spiritual truth that helps define the church. We are familiar today with the idea of “the family of God” and “brothers and sisters in Christ.” Such concepts are rooted in passages like this, where Jesus affirmed the unique connection between Himself and His people.

How does being a member of God’s family affect one’s daily life? What can believers do to truly live out their relationships as children of the King?

BIBLE SKILL: Memorize a verse and apply it to a real-life situation. –

Memorize Mark 3:35 in your preferred Bible translation. Then write the verse in your own words. Finally, write a couple of sentences here or in a journal, stating how the verse can help you make a tough decision or face a difficult situation today.

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers should confidently affirm God's power.
- Believers should not expect everyone, including those closest to them, to understand following Jesus.
- Believers are to make doing God's will their priority.

Describe a time when you saw God's power at work over the enemy. How does that experience encourage you to trust Him more today?

When has your commitment to Jesus put you at odds with members of your family? How did that experience draw you closer to Him? How did it help you minister to your family more effectively?

How can the members of your Bible study group strengthen the relationships with one another? In your church? In your community?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Jesus has authority over Satan.

Read Mark 3:23-27, noting the two examples Jesus shared.

Unsettled by Jesus' ministry and message, His opponents started openly questioning His validity as God's mouthpiece. To their way of thinking, Jesus represented not the holiness of the Father's servant, but the darkness of demonic activity. Though He cast out demons, they claimed that Jesus did so by the power of Beelzebul, the leader of demons (v. 22). The leaders' argument was built on a serious flaw. Using the familiar images of a kingdom and a house, Jesus noted that any nation or family fighting against itself was setting itself up for a fall.

To further illustrate His point, Jesus turned to the image of a wealthy person's home. In that situation, the first step toward looting a rich person's home would be to take the rich person out of the picture. The wealthy man—and probably his servants—would need to be captured and bound. Jesus was implying that He was actually tying up Satan, rather than working in partnership with him. While Satan is a strong man, Jesus is stronger and uses His power and authority over Satan.

Some said Jesus' power came from Satan. Why? What actions of Jesus proved this could not be so?

Day 2: There is only one sin that cannot be forgiven.

Read Mark 3:28-30, underlining verse 28.

The leaders were worried about blasphemy; Jesus let them know that even blasphemy—while serious—was not beyond God's forgiving reach. The only exception was blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. This is an incredible promise—to know that nothing can separate us from God's love and relationship (Rom. 8:37-39). The only sin that will never be forgiven is rejecting Christ. Jesus will accept anyone at anytime as long as he or she still has breath. But when one continues to reject Christ over time and dies in sin, there is no longer any hope of forgiveness.

Sin holds us captive, and we cannot rescue ourselves. God has graciously provided salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Refusing His grace and rejecting His offer has eternal consequences. The religious leaders were heading in that direction by attributing the work of the Spirit to demonic powers. Despite their years of study and expectation, they were missing the Messiah who stood right in front of them. Even worse, their hearts were hardening against Him.

How would you explain the unpardonable sin to others?

Day 3: Jesus faced opposition from many.

Read Mark 3:31-32, identifying who was asking for Jesus.

Jesus not only wrestled with opposition from the religious leaders, He also faced opposition from His own family members. We are not told whether this encounter with His family came immediately following the argument with the leaders, but Mark placed the two events together to show that Jesus was dealing with unbelief from every side.

While Jesus was teaching a crowd, members of His family arrived, presumably to take Him away. Mark specifically identified Mary, Jesus' mother, as part of the delegation. Readers who are familiar with the other Gospel accounts might find her response surprising. After all, she had received word about Jesus' true identity from an angel (Luke 1:26-38) and from the prophet Simeon (Luke 2:22-35). Jesus also reminded her of His mission during the only account we have from His childhood (Luke 2:41-50).

Jesus felt a responsibility for the crowd around Him. Mark painted a contrast between His response to those gathered around Him and to those waiting for Him outside. As Jesus later told Martha, it is always important to focus on what's most important instead of getting lost in what seems vital in the moment (Luke 10:41-42). In this case, teaching the good news of the kingdom took precedence over meeting with His family members.

How would you respond if your family did not understand your following Jesus?

Day 4: Family isn't always biological.

Read Mark 3:33-35, noting who Jesus considered His family to be.

While members of Jesus' family doubted His claims and His ministry, He still had plenty of support. He was surrounded by disciples who didn't have it all together, but they were learning what it meant to be His people—His family.

While Jesus never diminished the importance of family, He knew that some relationships ran even deeper than blood relations. As Jesus looked around at those who had surrendered so much to follow Him, He didn't just see faces in the crowd; He saw brothers and sisters. "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother," He said. He saw individuals related to Him in a way that His physical family was not—at least for the moment.

How can we respond when there's a conflict between what we believe God wants for us and what a family member expects?

KEY DOCTRINE: The Church – A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel (Acts 2:41-42).

Day 5: Believers are part of God's family.

Read Mark 3:33-35, highlighting verse 35.

True brothers and sisters of Christ are unified by a shared cause—a passion and purpose that moves them forward. Jesus stated that those who do the will of God share that purpose and, as a result, share in this new family relationship.

Again, Jesus was not diminishing the significance of blood relationships. On the cross, He gave the responsibility of His mother's care to the apostle John (John 19:25-27). Later, Paul wrote that anyone who shirked family responsibilities should be seen as worse than an unbeliever (1 Tim. 5:8). Instead, Jesus was elevating the importance of spiritual relationships—the connections that believers share with one another. Persecutions of believers through the ages have made deep relationships of faith necessary for anyone who chooses to follow Christ. In some cases, those spiritual relationships have proven stronger than even flesh and blood.

How does being a member of God's family affect your daily life?

TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in Mark 3, sharing with two other members of your Bible study group.

How can knowing the real unpardonable sin help us accept God's power to stop other sins in our lives?

How do we make it harder for those closest to us to follow Jesus?
What can we do to make it easier?

In what ways can we show we're doing God's will as family members—whether to the people we live with or to the people at church?



For additional context, read “Idumea in the First Century” in the Spring 2019 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.