

# Holy Spirit Enlightened Adversaries of Christ

Mark 3:20-30

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## Introduction

Today in Mark's gospel we will look at another response to Jesus and His response to that response.

- So far we have seen our Lord interacting:
  - with *the Pharisees at the synagogue* when He healed a man,
  - with *His disciples, the multitudes, and the demons* when He withdrew from the city to preach on the shore,
  - And last week, with *the twelve* He appointed to be His closest disciples and apostles.
- Today, we are going to look at how He interacts with *the experts who came down from Jerusalem* to investigate Him.
  - You will remember that His ministry was gaining much attention not only in Galilee, but in all Judea and Jerusalem, and even across the Jordan, down to Idumea, and up as far as Tyre and Sidon.
  - So here come the experts in the law, the scribes and the Pharisees, the big guns from Jerusalem—what will they say about Jesus?

Our text is Mark 3:20-30.

- But before I read it, let me mention that before we are told of these experts, we are told another group that encounters Jesus—His own people—His family and such.
  - We will not consider them in any detail until next week, because although Mark introduces them to us in verse 21—telling us how they thought Jesus was deranged and how they come to rescue Him from Himself...
  - Mark does not finish what he has to say about them until you get to verse 31-35.
- Mark likes to use a literary device that is called *sandwiching* where you introduce a story—and then suspend it to talk about another story—and then return to the first story again.
  - It is a method that is used to bring out a similarity or to make a comparison.
    - In this case, the parallel is between the misrepresentation of Jesus by His family and by His enemies.
      - You can see parallel statements from each story about what they thought of Jesus:
        - Verse 21 says of His family: **for they said, “He is out of His mind.”**
        - And verse 31 says of His enemy experts: **because they said, “He has an unclean spirit.”**
      - Both of them came to very ridiculous conclusions about Him.
    - Next week, we will look at the family and this week we will look at the experts and what we can learn from Jesus' interaction with them.

Listen now as I read the passage to you... Mark 3:20-30.

**Mark 3:20-30:** Then the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. <sup>21</sup> But when His own people heard *about this*, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, “He is out of His mind.” <sup>22</sup> And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebub,” and, “By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons.” <sup>23</sup> So He called them to *Himself* and said to them in parables: “How can Satan cast out Satan? <sup>24</sup> If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. <sup>25</sup> And if a house is divided against

itself, that house cannot stand. <sup>26</sup> And if Satan has risen up against himself, and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end. <sup>27</sup> No one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house. <sup>28</sup> Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; <sup>29</sup> but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation” — <sup>30</sup> because they said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

May the Lord bless the reading of His holy word.

- And now by His grace, let us look at some of the ways that this passage is helpful for us when we read it today.
- We will look at six things that we have here.

### **I. First, we learn in our text how absurd opposition to the Lord can be.**

A. The pressure is on this delegation that has come down from Jerusalem to oppose Jesus.

1. These scribes from Jerusalem are the experts in the law.
  - They are the professional theologians who have come out of the great city of Jerusalem to Galilee to deal with this carpenter’s son from Nazareth who is gaining so much attention.
  - They have heard that He is healing hordes of people and casting out one demon after another.
  - These scribes were the men who carried great respect among the people.
    - Some of them may have been among those who sat with Jesus and were amazed at His questions when He was a boy of twelve—but now He is causing some disturbance.
    - The elders in Galilee are not quite sure what to do with Him, but they can breathe easy now because the big guns from Jerusalem will know what to do.
2. In other words, the pressure is on: the stage is set for these experts to show everybody that they are, well, *experts!*
  - That they know what needs to be said and what needs to be done about Jesus.
  - No one is quite sure about what to make of Him, but the sick that have been healed and the demon possessed are quite happy about what He has been doing, at least as far as they are concerned.
    - But the pressure is on... what will these leaders say about Jesus?

B. They do what important respected leaders often do in such situations—to their shame.

1. They come up with a desperate explanation that is patently absurd.
  - You see it there in v. 22: **And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebub,” and, “By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons.”**

- a. Wow! Is that really the best they can do?
    - They are asserting that Jesus is using sorcery to cast out these demons.
      - That Satan is involved in a grand deception in which Jesus is appearing as an angel of light so as to lead the people astray.
        - Now of course Satan does do that sort of thing.
      - Deuteronomy warns about those who perform signs and then call you to worship other gods. It could happen.
        - **Deut 13:1-5: “If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, <sup>2</sup> and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’ —which you have not known—‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. <sup>4</sup> You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. <sup>5</sup> But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn *you* away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst.”**
- b. What is absurd is that anyone who looks at Jesus’ ministry can see clearly that He stands in opposition to Satan.
  - For one thing, the character of Jesus’ work carried with it the testimony of righteousness.
  - He disturbed people, not by saying disturbing things that did not seem true, but by saying things that were quite obviously true and convicted them in their conscience!
    - You know how it is when wrong is exposed in your life—you know that you have done wrong.
    - Maybe you were trying to hide it and make excuses, but once you see it clearly, you know that you have sinned.
      - That was the way it was for those who encountered Jesus.
      - It was not darkness that and confusion that He was spreading, but light that made people feel uncomfortable because—you know—we are all sinners.
- His ministry did not fit the character of collusion with Satan at all.
2. Jesus shows how ridiculous their assertion that He is in league with Satan is with simple analogies—or *parables* as Mark calls them.
- a. In verse 23-26, Mark says: **So He called them to Himself and said to them in parables: “How can Satan cast out Satan? <sup>24</sup> If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. <sup>25</sup> And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. <sup>26</sup> And if Satan has risen up against himself, and is divided, he cannot stand, but has an end.”**

- b. Anyone who saw Jesus ministry could see that Satan's kingdom was unravelling before Him.
    - To assert that He was colluding with Satan would be like saying that Hitler was really in collusion with the Jews during the Holocaust.
    - He was just making it look like he was against them.
- C. It is a fact that is well known among Christians that those who oppose Christ often show themselves desperate to find an argument.
1. You can answer all of their objections, and they will still put forth another argument—and the arguments can be quite absurd.
    - It is utterly preposterous the way intelligent scientists try to account for the world's being without God and call it science...
    - And how they actually take each other seriously—that an eye can evolve over millions years—an eye!—with all of its complexity and with parts that are no good unless they all evolved together.
      - And to make it even more incredible, they believe that eyes formed independently on primitive creatures that had become separate species before their eyes were formed.
        - In other words, you had multiple species of primitive creatures who could no longer reproduce with other, and each of these species independently evolved eyes that were of similar design.
    - It is beyond insane to believe such nonsense—but it is the best the experts can do if they want to deny God as the Creator.
  2. I think it is important to call people out on some of these things.
    - Don't let them get away with saying things that are obviously absurd without exposing how absurd they are.
    - This argument from the experts at Jerusalem teaches us not to be afraid to state the obvious. You will be ridiculed, but not forever—not on the last day when they have to face the obvious—and often in their consciences even now.

TRANS> What else do we have in our text?

## **II. Second, we have here clear evidence that Jesus did real miracles.**

- A. Yes, the experts did not dare to claim that Jesus did not actually heal people and cast out demons.
1. They would have loved it if they could have denied that.
    - When people are faking miracles, it is pretty easy to expose them.
    - If by nothing else, that their supposed miracles are always murky and unclear.
      - You know, someone is relieved of a pain in their back or something.
      - Or people that nobody seems to know in the community get up from a wheelchair and walk.
  2. But Jesus' miracles were such that could not be denied.
    - There were too many people that were witnesses, too many people that were healed, for the leaders to say that the miracles were false.
    - Most people in Galilee probably had friend or acquaintance that had been healed or had a demon expelled.

- Maybe you saw your uncle's withered hands restored before your eyes, or your cousin who had been blind from birth now able to see...
- Or the guy whose legs were twisted up, who you helped to carry around town before Jesus had even been born, now immediately able to walk.

➤ It was just not an option to try to say that these healings were not real.

B. And by all credible historical evidence, Jesus' miracles are shown to be real to us.

1. What is that historical evidence?

- It is that those who opposed Him in His day (and there was a lot of official opposition) never charged Him with not doing real miracles.
- The opposition we have record of from the first century is the same that we have here in our text—that He did his signs by the power of Satan—that He was a sorcerer.

2. This is a good thing to bring up with those who deny that Jesus did signs and wonders...

- If He had only done a few, it would be different, but He did them all the time.

TRANS> Let's move on to the third thing God has for us in this text.

### III. Third, we are given here the assurance that our Lord Jesus has bound Satan.

A. From the time of the fall, the Lord promised to raise up a Son to us, born of woman, who would crush the serpent's head.

1. It was Satan, in the form of a serpent, who deceived the woman and led her and the man with her to rebel against God...

- thereby rejecting Him as our God whom we serve.
- We became followers of Satan and were brought into bondage to him and to death.

2. But the promise was that a Son would come to destroy the works of the devil and set us free.

- In testimony of this promise, God called the people who were to bring forth this son out of the world and preserved them as His own people Israel.
- He delivered them from bondage to Satan, but left the rest of the world to walk in their own ways—He restrained the nations from being as bad as they might have been, but only Israel was redeemed and kept as His people...
- But the promise was that when the son came, not just Israel who bore Him would be blessed, but all the nations would be released from bondage.

B. In verse 27, Jesus testifies that His works of casting out demons show that He is the promised Son who has bound Satan and is able to plunder his house.

- In verse 27 He says: **“No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then he will plunder his house.”**

1. Jesus had already defeated Satan in the wilderness when He did not give way to his temptations.

- It was after that that Jesus came forth endued with power and began to cast out demons everywhere.
- This was a testimony, along with His words and His healing signs, that the kingdom of God had come into the world.

2. Unless He had the power to bind Satan (the strong man), Jesus would not have been able to walk into Satan's house and deliver those who were in bondage to him.
  - But that is what Jesus has been doing by exorcisms...
    - And after He went to the cross and returned to the Father, He did the even greater work of taking people from Satan out of every nation.
      - Revelation 20:2-3 speaks of this binding of Satan: **He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; <sup>3</sup> and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished.**
3. Just think what this means for us!
  - We are those nations!
    - If Jesus had not come and bound Satan, we would still be in bondage to him, serving him, in bondage to death without hope of deliverance.
  - A great turning point came in the world when Jesus came.
    - That is when the kingdom of God began to spread into all the earth and it is continuing to go forth with power today.
    - How grateful we should be for the binding of the strong man by our mighty Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
      - In our text He is announcing this glorious transformation of the whole world that He brought to us when He came into the world.

TRANS> And our Lord Jesus, with His gracious loving heart, adds an additional treasure for us in this text...a fourth thing...

**IV. We have here not only the testimony that He is now plundering Satan's house, but the wonderful testimony from Jesus that every sin except one is forgivable.**

- Look at what He says in verse 28: **Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter...**

A. What a thing this is—the forgiveness of all sins!

1. Of ourselves, we are in a completely unforgiveable state you know.
  - Sins are not **forgivable** at all because they are an attack on God, an affront to His majesty and His glory, a declaration that He is not worthy of our service and love, which is an accursed lie—definitely so.
    - God will not allow such a lie to stand without setting the record straight.
    - That is what His holy justice does.
    - It cannot be set aside—no lie, no wrong, can be allowed to stand.
2. The only thing that can set the record straight is for our sin to be justly punished.
  - But the majesty of God is such that our assault on God's glory demands that we be punished for all eternity in the Lake of Fire.
    - Revelation tells us that that unless our names are written in the Lamb's book of Life, we will indeed be cast into the Lake of Fire to be tormented with the Devil and his angels forever.
  - When God's glory is revealed, we will see that this punishment is not unjust at all, though in our darkened sinful estate, it might seem so to us now.

3. But Jesus declares that all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter.
  - This does not mean that every person's sins will be forgiven.
    - We know that some will be punished for their sins.
  - But it means that there is no sin that is such that it will not be forgiven among the sons of men.
    - In other words,
      - some people will punished for cursing their father and mother, others will be forgiven of that sin;
      - some will be punished for murder, others will be forgiven for murder;
      - some will be punished for their blasphemy against Christ, others will be pardoned for that sin...
      - There will no sin that will condemn all except the one that Jesus mentions in the next verse.

B. That there is forgiveness of all kinds of sin is tremendous news for us!

1. Just think of it—to not be held guilty for all that wrongs that we have done before our God—to be released from everlasting punishment!
2. And the way of that forgiveness is very dear to Jesus (and to us who know it).
  - He came, as I have told you many times, to give His life a ransom for us.
  - He came to set the record straight about God—that it is totally *not* acceptable for us humans to sin against Him as we all have—
  - He did that by being punished in our place.
    - That is why Isaiah 53 says that all our iniquities were laid on Him and that by His stripes we are healed, and that He bore our iniquities.
    - And that is why 2 Cor 5:21 says that He became sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.
  - The Son of God has been punished in our place and that is why through faith in Him, we can have forgiveness of every single sin without exception that we have committed and still commit.
3. Let us spend all our days praising Him and pouring out our lives as an offering of thanksgiving to Him by serving His people.

TRANS> But I mentioned that there is one sin that Jesus says is an exception and now we need to look at that.

**V. In our text today we hear a very serious warning from Jesus about uttering blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.**

- Having said that every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven, Jesus adds in verse 29: **“but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation”—because they said, “He has an unclean spirit.”**

A. Do you know who the Holy Spirit is?

1. He is the third person of the Trinity—
  - there is the Father, and the Son who is begotten of Him, and then there is the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

- The Father decreed that the world should be made, the Son called it into being, and the Spirit energised it.
  - The Father decreed that the Son should come to die for our sins, the Son did come and did die for our sins, and the Holy Spirit joins us to Him for forgiveness and works new life into us by union with Him.
2. But why should the Holy Spirit be given what seems to be more honour here?
- Why can we blaspheme (or speak against—that is what blasphemy is) the Father and the Son and be forgiven, but not the Holy Spirit?
  - Well, let me tell you something else about the three persons when it comes to the revelation of God’s truth to us.
    - The Father decreed that the truth should be revealed, the Son is the One who brought the truth into the world to enlighten us all, and the Spirit is the One who actually opens our understanding so that we believe what has been revealed.
- B. When we look at various scriptures, it seems clear that the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable because a person who blasphemes Him has been fully enlightened.
1. In other words, they have come to a knowledge of the truth about Christ... the Holy Spirit has convinced them that Jesus is the Son of God, that they are sinners, that Jesus is the only one who can save them...
- He has shown them those things that you see if you are a believer... you are convinced of them by the Spirit,
    - and once you saw them and were convinced of them, what else could you do but repent and turn to Jesus with thanksgiving for eternal life?
  - But do you know why you did?
    - It wasn’t only because you understood all of those things.
    - It was because the Holy Spirit also changed your stony sinful heart so that you were able to respond to the truth by receiving Christ and resting upon Him.
  - Those who blaspheme the Spirit have the same illumination as you, they see the truth about sin and about Jesus as Saviour like you did...
    - but instead of turning to Him for salvation, they turn against Him in malice and in their hatred they declare to everyone what they know is not true—that the gospel of Christ is a lie.
      - They tell everyone that the Holy Spirit who convinces the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment is a false and lying Spirit—even though they know that He is actually the Holy Spirit.
2. There are other scriptures that support this interpretation.
- a. In the Old Testament, there was forgiveness for what is called unintentional sins, but there was no provision whatsoever for presumptuous sins.
- 1) We read about this distinction in Numbers 15 today.
- The presumptuous sins were high-handed sins that were done in deliberate opposition to God’s truth—not just doing something you know

is wrong—but setting yourself up as an adversary to the truth of God even though you know it is true.

- That is probably what the man that gathered sticks on the Sabbath day was doing.

2) In Psalm 19:13, there is a prayer to be kept from such sins... it says: Ps 19:13 **Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous [sins]; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression.**

b. And in the New Testament, Jesus is on the cross and He prays for the Jewish leaders who crucified Him saying, **“Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”** (Luke 23:34)

- This prayer excludes those who did know what they were doing.
  - There are those of whom it is said, that they knew who He was but that because of malice and envy, they delivered Him over to be crucified.
  - In other words, there were some to whom the Spirit had revealed the truth that Jesus was the Messiah and they were saying that what the Spirit was revealing was all lies—even though they knew better.

c. Paul expresses in 1 Timothy 1:13 that even though he was a blasphemer of God, he was not a blasphemer of the Holy Spirit.

- He was able to find forgiveness because he did not commit this unpardonable sin: **1Ti 1:13 although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.**

d. Another verse passage that seems to speak of the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is Hebrews 6:4-6: **For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup> and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, <sup>6</sup> if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance...**

C. So here you have a very solemn warning.

1. I think it is very likely that Jesus is giving these corrupt leaders a warning here. He is telling them that they are in danger of doing this.

- It is possible that some of them had, but it is also possible that the truth had not yet fully come to them, but that they were even now beginning to no longer care if it was all true or not—
  - They wanted to retain their honour as those who were righteous and they did not even want true forgiveness of sin.
  - It may well be that Jesus is graciously warning them the way He warned Judas along the way that they needed to beware lest they become hardened beyond repair.

2. In any case, this is a warning for us to use today—a gracious warning given to prevent us from this sin.

- If we see people who are coming to understand the truth, but appear to be hardening their hearts, it is good to warn them of this sin.
- And let me say as well, if you have a tender conscience, you do not need to fear that you have committed this sin.

- Those who fall into this sin are glad to commit it.
- They do not regret their opposition to Christ—they hate Him and they hate the Spirit who enlightens people in the truth and they try to lead people away from receiving the truth by saying it is all lies.
  - It is not a sin that you fall into—it is a sin you gladly live in—
  - It is not just opposing Christ—it is taking a decided stand against the Spirit who has shown you that the gospel of Christ is true.
    - There is no forgiveness for this.

TRANS> And now, one last thing for us in this text...

## **VI. Here we are given assurance that justice will be satisfied against the enemies of Christ our Lord.**

A. Do you know why Jesus has such opposition to those who commit this sin?

1. It is because of His great love for His own glory.
  - The Father is committed to glorifying the Son and the Spirit.
    - The Son is committed to glorifying the Father and the Spirit.
    - And the Spirit is committed to glorifying the Father and the Son.
  - Therefore, when our Lord sees the Devil and the men who blaspheme the Holy Spirit despising the revelation of the glory of God...
    - Seeing something of His glory and opposing it with malice...
    - He takes His stand against these wicked opponents and has appointed a day when He will publically bring them to justice.
      - Appropriate hallelujahs will arise from the church in that day.
2. And Jesus also opposes these blasphemers of the Holy Spirit because of His great love for the people He came to redeem.
  - Here He is dying for them and revealing the truth of salvation and mercy to them while the Devil and these blasphemers, knowing it is true and knowing it has saving power, speak against the truth and do all they can to keep us from believing it and receiving it.
  - Jesus in His zealous love says, “Away with them forever to the Lake of Fire.”
    - There is nothing He wants more than for us to see His true glory and the glory of the Father and the glory of the Holy Spirit.

B. My brothers and sisters, the judgment of God is not something to be ashamed of.

1. It is the ultimate display of God’s justice and love and the vindication of His glory.
  - Obviously not love for these adversaries, but love for Himself and love for His people.
2. Let us rejoice and be glad for the coming judgment, for if there were no such day coming, there would be no end to sin and malice in the world.
  - God’s honour and glory would be hidden from us forever.
  - But according to His promise, we eagerly wait for the full revelation of it to us at the last day.
    - And praise God, it will be seen not only in the ruin of His enemies, but also in our forgiveness by the Lamb.