

## UNITES Mark 3:23-35

Life is about relationships. If we were to try to list all the different relationships we have, it would very difficult to come up a really complete list. Where would we start in such a process of identifying the relationships in our lives? We could start with family and that would lead to subdivisions of close family, extended family, in-laws, local family, remote family, etc. There are relationships that may have a job or career focus. Some relationships that people have are based on the schools that attended. Community, fraternal organizations and hobbies can result in other distinctive relationships. The relationships we have in the church are varied and range from denominational groups and the larger church body to Bible study groups, choirs, committees, and any number of various ministry associations.

When we think about the bonds that define such various relationships we will likely discover that these bonds are related to objectives and purposes and agendas. We will be looking at some events in the life and ministry of Jesus as recorded by Mark which may help us gain some insight on how we should interact with each other in our relationships and what priorities we need to place on the relationships we have.

It may be helpful to consider the background of what had been happening in the ministry of Jesus that led to the parables that he spoke to the people regarding a divided house. Jesus had been dealing with evil spirits and demon possession issues as well as healing people with physical problems. As a result of Jesus' ministry people were drawn to Him and there was such a demand for Him to help people that Jesus and His disciples literally did not have time to eat.

Following the healing of the man with the withered hand and the healing of the demon-possessed man, people in that area began to wonder if Jesus was the Messiah (the Son of David). They expected the Messiah to have authority over the physical and the spiritual or the supernatural.

Such speculations caused those who came from Jerusalem to investigate what was occurring to look for evidence that would allow them to argue that Jesus was not the Messiah. Some of the encounters they had with Jesus resulted in religion-based criticisms regarding legalisms. They found fault that Jesus and His disciples did not fast, people were healed on the Sabbath, and Jesus ate meals with known sinners. To their way of thinking, these things were "religiously incorrect."

The critics of Jesus could not deny that supernatural power was at work in the things that Jesus did in casting out demons and healing people. However, they would not allow themselves to approve what He was doing as being God's will; that is, something good. Their only possible explanation was that the supernatural power that Jesus was using was from Satan. Therefore, they claimed that seemingly good results were actually evil.

It was immediately after some of the scribes publically accused Jesus of being possessed by Beelzebub and using demonic power to cast our demons that Jesus addressed them directly.

### Undivided House – 3:23-30

<sup>23</sup> And He called them to Himself and began speaking 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> "If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. <sup>26</sup> "If Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but he is finished! <sup>27</sup> "But no one can enter the strong man's house and plunder his property unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house. <sup>28</sup> "Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; <sup>29</sup> but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"— <sup>30</sup> because they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit." Mark 3:23–30 (NASB95)

In today's national political environment if someone puts forth an argument that is blatantly illogical in order to advance a particular agenda, then we find two basic responses. One response would be support for the idea by those who agree with the agenda and the other response would be to accuse the promoter of the illogical claims as being stupid. Such responses just lead to further division and no one benefits.

Jesus showed us a better approach and it was the same as God had been using in the ancient past with Israel. In Isaiah 1:18 God said through the prophet, "Come let us reason together." The four parables shared with His religious critics were essentially appeals to apply simple reasoning to the questions they had. The first parable used an example of a kingdom; the second, a family; and the third used Satan himself. Regarding the third parable, there is an old English adage that essentially says that the devil is like a donkey but is not so much so as to fight against himself.

The question on everyone's mind regarding the supernatural events that were happening in the things Jesus was doing was "what was the source of His power over demons and sickness?" Since the "scribes" had an agenda of discrediting the work that Jesus was doing and since they could not show that the miracles were fake, they then argued that the power source was from Satan. Jesus' parables silently and simply made the argument that "if they were right, then the devil would be enabling Jesus to destroy the devil's kingdom." Jesus exposed both their bad theology and their faulty logic. If it was by the power of Satan that He had cast out demons, then Satan was actually fighting against himself! The logical conclusion from such reasoning would be that their claim was without any merit.

The second example of the same reasoning argument that Jesus presented to them was regarding a family unit. They knew that unless a family works together to accomplish the same goal that chaos results and the family becomes fragmented and literally falls apart and no longer functions as a family. This is why we apply the terminology of "broken family relationships" to what happens today with so many divorces that characterizes the culture in which we live.

The fourth parable had a message that made the same arguments of disunity in an organization leading to destruction of that entity but also told the critics exactly what the ministry of Jesus was doing to free the world from the dominion of the devil who was characterized as a strong man or tyrant that controlled his realm. In order to free those who were being oppressed and controlled by the tyrant, then someone who was stronger had to overpower and bind the tyrant so that freedom could happen. Jesus was the stronger One who had come to destroy the reign of the devil and set people free.

Starting in verse 28, Jesus gave a stern warning and addressed the consequences of those who would persist in refusing to recognize that the good work of the Kingdom of God was empowered by the Holy Spirit. By refusing to respond to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, people essentially eliminate the only path or doorway that would allow them to escape the enslavement of the dominion of the devil. The scribes were attributing evil to the good work that God was doing in the miracles that were happening.

In 1 Corinthians 12:3, Paul wrote "For this reason I would have you understand that no one speaking under the influence of The Spirit of God ever says, 'Jesus is accursed,' and that no one is able to say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except under the influence of the Holy Spirit." Unrelenting failure to respond to the convicting influence of the Holy Spirit always eliminates the possibility of being forgiven. We see this phenomenon unfolding in many areas of practical morality in our culture today. Those who claim that "good is evil" and that "evil is good" have essentially said that God's word is "hate speech" and that the works of the devil are "expressions of love."

These are making the same gross mistake that the Jewish religious leaders were making. Their persistence led to their destruction and what is happening in our nation today with rejecting God as revealed through the work of Christ, rejecting common morality in favor of abominations, and rejecting the “tree of life” in favor of the fruit of the “tree of knowledge of good and evil” will lead to the destruction of our nation.

Before leaving the account of the encounter with the religious leaders, let’s ask if these people thought they were doing the right thing. There is a good possibility that (based on what they thought was important regarding keeping the peace and maintaining the status quo), they had convinced themselves that what they were doing in discrediting what Jesus was doing was the best for their nation. In our 20-20 hindsight it is easy to see how misguided and how much in error they were. I may have inadvertently used a phrase that explains how they could have become so misguided: that phrase is “convinced themselves.” When people rely on their own limited thinking and ignore the convincing influence of the Holy Spirit, then the conclusions they reach can be held with religious fervor even though these conclusions are totally in error. When people hold their convictions of what is “truth” with religious fervor, then all who do not agree with them are declared to be evil.

We see the same things happening in today’s religious realms as well as the secular world around us. People will come up with ideas apparently from their own imaginations and become totally convinced that they are absolutely correct and will fervently defend their position in spite of the failure of such position to agree with Scripture (in the case of religious errors) or with centuries of history of what works and does not work (in the case of secular or social errors).

#### Misunderstood by Family – 3:31-32

<sup>31</sup> Then His mother and His brothers arrived, and standing outside they sent word to Him and called Him. <sup>32</sup> A crowd was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, “Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You.” Mark 3:31–32 (NASB95)

A brief mention was made in verse 21 of “friends” (literally people who were close to him) who thought that He was suffering from delusions or something worse. They came to where Jesus was ministering looking for an occasion to physically restrain Him since they had convinced themselves that he was “out of his mind” or behaving irrationally. In verse 31 it appears that Mark came back to this situation after having mentioned the opposition of the religious leaders.

The people mentioned earlier as being “close to Him” are identified as Jesus’ mother and brothers. It is somewhat surprising that Mary would have been with them since she had known for thirty years that Jesus was special and that He had a divine calling on His life. The fact that she was accompanying the rest of her children in coming to “take Jesus back home” was probably an indication that her ideas of what would be involved in God’s calling on the life of Jesus was very different from what He was doing in casting out demons and healing the sick.

Do you think that Mary and Jesus’ brothers thought they were doing what was best for Jesus when they came to get Him and take Him back home? I’m sure they thought they were protecting Him from being arrested and put on trial and possibly being executed. Were they right in their thinking of what might happen? Absolutely. What they thought “might” happen to Jesus is exactly what did happen. What they failed to realize was that what they feared most was actually God’s will and what they wanted to do to “protect” Jesus was misguided since they were following humanly based logic rather than being open to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

If you notice from the account given by Mark that they did not come directly to confront Jesus as He was teaching those who were following Him. Instead, they send a messenger to try

to get Him to come to where they were. Some commentaries have suggested that this was an effort to get him away from the crowd of people who were convinced that what Jesus was doing was supernatural and that He might be the Messiah. It is thought that they were literally going to physically restrain Him and take Him back to Nazareth.

### United by Purpose – 3:33-35

<sup>33</sup> Answering them, He said, “Who are My mother and My brothers?” <sup>34</sup> Looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He said, “Behold My mother and My brothers! <sup>35</sup> “For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother.” Mark 3:33–35 (NASB95)

Jesus’ rhetorical question (V. 33) was not a repudiation of family relationships. He was highlighting the far deeper issue of a person’s relationship to Him. He was essentially asking “Who are the sort of people who are My mother and My brothers?” Then looking at those seated in a circle around Him (His disciples in contrast with those standing outside), Jesus made the claim that their kinship went beyond natural family ties. Jesus broadened the reference beyond those present by stating that whoever does God’s will is a member of His family.

Since life is relationships, how do we respond to and prioritize all the relationships we have in our lives? Have we convinced ourselves that certain things are true without regard to what the word of God states or do we remain open and teachable to be convinced by the Spirit of God as we search for truths? Do we have our own agendas or can we truthfully say as Jesus said, “I do only the will of My Father?”

One of the dangers all of us face is that we can be so thoroughly convinced that certain things are right that we can take on a religious fervor that can drive us to literally destroy ourselves and other around us by doing things and taking positions that are illogical. We see such behaviors in others but fail to recognize it in our own thinking.