

Mark 3:20-35^{vii} ^{viii}

The crowd came together again, so that Jesus and his disciples could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

"Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" -- for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit."

Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

^{vii} **About Mark 3:20-35**

Today's reading recounts the further build up of opposition to Jesus' ministry. The issue is now not questions of religious observance, but the very source and nature of Jesus' authority and power. Jesus is judged (psychologically) as "beside himself" by his friends. This is tantamount to a charge of demon-possession (John

10:20). He is accused (theologically) as “beside himself” by the scribes. Their charge against him may be two-fold: possession by a particular demon, Beelzebul (2 Kings 1:2), and use of Satan’s power to cast out demons.

In response to the blindness of family and authorities, Jesus uses a parable to draw his listeners toward a decision. He refutes the charge of collusion with Satan and shows that instead, through him, Satan himself is bound by a stronger power (Isaiah 49:24-25; Revelation 20:2-3), the sign of the coming of the kingdom. He then turns the charge against the scribes—all sins and blasphemies will be forgiven, except setting one’s self against the very source of forgiveness by believing that the Spirit active in Jesus is satanic. Doing the will of God, on the other hand, brings one into intimate familial relationship with Jesus (Matthew 25:40; John 15:14; Hebrews 2:11-13).

^{viii} **Reflection and Response**

Sometimes we hear an unfortunate and strange maligning of God’s character as revealed in the Old Testament, often pictured there as a God of wrath and judgment. God’s judgment was never punitive in a vindictive sense. In the story of the fall, God is revealed as the loving, patient and forgiving Creator of human creatures whom God has endowed with the free will to obey or disobey.

The serpent subtly ascribed a perverted motive to God’s command by suggesting that God would be envious of Adam and Eve, who would be like God, knowing good and evil. However, such divine envy would be contrary to the spirit of all scripture. Unless Adam and Eve, made in the image of God, already had the faculty for discerning good from evil, there would be no moral significance to their obedience or disobedience to any command. What, then, was the knowledge gained from eating the forbidden fruit?

“Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked.” Shame, fear and a cowardly attempt to hide followed. The knowledge attained was the consciousness of sin against the will of God. They knew they were naked of all sense of gratitude, love and obedience to God.

Following this disobedience, God mercifully seeks Adam and Eve in the cool of the evening. “Where are you?”, asks God, giving them a chance to confess their sin and repent. God’s sentence—expulsion from the garden and the necessity for hard labor—proved to be a great blessing. God’s punishment is at the same time God’s salvation, for henceforth suffering and death will be an integral part of spiritual purification and the attainment of eternal life, as Paul states in his second letter to the Corinthians. In simple compassion, God even clothes Adam and Eve.

Divine grace covers all truly penitent people. When scribes call Jesus’ healing ministry the work of Satan, Jesus points out that the one thing God’s healing grace cannot penetrate is the perversity and moral blindness that calls good evil and evil good. This perverse state of mind will drive us out of God’s presence, into the exile of eternal damnation.

Jesus’ true family members are those who are related to him by faith in God and God’s goodness. Obedience to God is fundamental to such a kinship, and commitment to God in Christ creates a family of relationships that transcends natural bonds.