

HE THAT IS NOT WITH ME IS AGAINST ME

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SCRIPTURE: Matthew 12:22-30

Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub, the prince of devils. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then shall his kingdom stand? And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house. He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.

And Jesus said unto him, Forbid not any; for he that is not against us is for us.

Did Jesus contradict himself? In several instances, according to the meager record we have, he did. On one occasion he said "My peace I leave with you," and on another he said, "I come not to bring peace but a sword." On one occasion he said "Love your enemies," and on another he said that a man must hate his father and mother. On one occasion he said "he that is not with me is against me," and on another he said, "He that is not against us is for us." It is these last two contradictory statements which we wish to discuss in this sermon. Perhaps we shall find in the cast of this contradiction, as in the others, that the contradiction is more seeming than real, when one considers the difficulties of translation, and the time and place and conditions under which each statement was made.

"He that is not against us is for us." The background of this statement is that John saw one who was not of the company of apostles casting out devils in the name of Jesus, and forbade him. But Jesus was quick to rebuke John, saying, "Forbid him not, for he that is not against us is for us." Evidently in this case the man who was casting out devils in the name of Jesus was not an enemy. It may very well have been that he was one of the followers of Jesus, although not numbered among the apostolic company. He was not necessarily a usurper of authority, because it is the right and privilege of any man to pray for another in the name of Jesus. It would seem, in the light of Jesus' attitude towards him, that this man was a believer who was exercising his own private faith to pray in the name of Jesus for one who needed help and that in him was fulfilled the promise that the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

The apostles, however, seem to have been a bit jealous of their prerogatives, and eager to rebuke the man. They were concerned over their own status, their own importance, their own authority, their position as the men nearest the Master. They seemed to be afraid to entrust the truth or the saving principles of Jesus to hands other than their own. They seem to have assumed that God could or would work only through them, and only in the way to which they had become accustomed.

We are still apt to make all of these mistakes today. Concern for preserving unity and uncorrupted truth often prompts even the best and most sincerely religious people to erect barriers between themselves and others, rather than roadways over which ideas and concepts and mutually profitable services may be exchanged.

No man who works sincerely in the name and in the Spirit of Jesus, and whose prayers are answered with success in his ministry can speak evil of Jesus. Jesus said: "There is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly (i.e., quickly, or immediately thereafter) speak evil of me. For he that is not against me is on our part." Men are seldom converted by miracles performed by others. But when they themselves pray in the name of Jesus and receive miraculous results, their faith is vindicated, and they are near to conversion, if not converted already. In the incident under consideration, the success of this man's efforts at casting out devils proved the genuineness of his faith, and the sincerity of his belief in the name of Christ. If he was not already a follower of Jesus, he was not far off. An enemy could not have done what he did.

There is another thought suggested by this incident and by Jesus' reply to it. Receiving miraculous answers to prayer, or receiving other miraculous spiritual gifts, is not the exclusive prerogative of the ministry or priesthood of the church. The spiritual gifts which are set in the church for the edification of the body should rightly be diffused among the laity as well as among the ministry, and the ministry should welcome all such gifts without jealousy, when they are properly received. In Old Testament times, when Eldad and Medad prophesied to Israel, Joshua called upon Moses to rebuke them; but Moses replied: "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them."

When Jesus said "He that is not against us is on our part," he didn't mean that just anybody could use his name indiscriminately, without declaring allegiance. In the 29th chapter of Acts there is the story of the seven sons of Sceva, who attempted to exorcise evil spirits in the name of Jesus. One of the evil spirits answered them saying, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?" And then the man in whom the evil Spirit was leaped on them and overcame them, and they fled naked and wounded. These vagabonds were not acting in the Spirit of Jesus, nor as his friends. They were against him, not for him, and they failed to work miracles in his name.

On a quite different occasion the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out devils by the power of Beelzebub, prince of devils. Jesus pointed out the fallacy of that assumption with the saying, "Every kingdom divided against itself shall not stand," meaning that Beelzebub would not work against himself. Then Jesus said, "He that is not with me is against me." The logic is simple and inescapable. Good and evil are mutually exclusive and contradictory. Christ and Satan are enemies. Satan will not work against himself; therefore if he is cast out, it must be done by someone who is his enemy, and who is at cross purposes with him. In spite of a vivid demonstration of Christ's power before their very eyes, the Pharisees refused to believe. In the name of sanctity and piety they rejected that which was good because it was different -- because it did not come through their priestly line. Condemning them therefore in all their stubborn hypocrisy, Jesus said, "He that is not with me is against me."

There are situations, times, and places where even to be neutral is to be an enemy. When your friends take a stand for right, and need help, it is treachery and treason to stand idly by to see whether or not they will win before you take a stand. When a man is convinced that Jesus is the Son of God; when the Spirit bears witness that he is the Savior of mankind; when confirming miracles are done in his name, and still that man teeters on the fence or refuses to side with right, let not that man deceive himself that he is Christ's friend. Only a coward and a weakling waits for someone else to win the battle, and then steps in, declares himself a friend and ally, and expects to share the spoils of battle and the blessings of freedom which the battle brings.

To sum up, then, any righteous man who is sincerely FOR Jesus, or on his side, can achieve miraculous results through effectual, fervent prayer in his name. Good people everywhere should be willing to accept those miraculous results as the works of God. But this is no justification for neutrality, for refusal to declare allegiance to Jesus. Jesus cannot use cowards, or weaklings who vacillate and hesitate and do not know whose side they are on, nor can good works be performed in his name by those who are against him. "He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad."