

There were those in Jesus' day who hated and criticized Him despite all the good that He did. On one occasion His critics claimed that His ability to cast demonic spirits out of people originated with Beelzebub (Satan). Jesus responded by declaring that such a claim was absurd and illogical and that in reality He was able to cast out demonic spirits because He was stronger than Satan.

17 But he, knowing their thoughts, said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house *divided* against a house falleth.

“But he, knowing their thoughts, said unto them” – Jesus had just finished casting a demonic spirit out of a man who had been unable to speak. The people were surprised and amazed when the man was able to speak again after the demon left. However, those who wanted to discredit Jesus claimed that He was only able to cast out demons through the power of “Beelzebub, the chief of the devils” (vs. 14-16). They could not deny the supernatural power that Jesus was demonstrating but, rather than attributing Jesus' deeds to God, they claimed that Jesus' power came from another supernatural source. Beelzebub was another name for Satan, implying that the demons were compelled by Satan to leave the people that they were possessing. Jesus knew what these critics were thinking and decided to expose the folly of their claims.

“Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and a house *divided* against a house falleth” – Jesus points out the fact that any organization, whether it be a kingdom or a household, that fights against itself from within will not survive long. If there are factions within that are at cross-purposes with one another, it will be only a matter of time before it destroys itself or crumbles into ruin.

18 If Satan also be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub.

Jesus recognizes that they claim that He is using Satan's power and authority over demons to cast them out so He points out how illogical that it would be for Satan to do so. If Satan was operating through Jesus to restrain demonic activity then he would be defeating the goals of his own kingdom.

19 And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? therefore shall they be your judges.

The “sons” Jesus is referring to were the Jewish exorcists that claimed to be able to cast out devils. The seven sons of Sceva in Acts 19:13-16 are examples of such charlatans. If Satan was the power behind Jesus' ability to cast out demons, then it was reasonable to conclude that Satan was also behind the work of these Jewish exorcists as well. These Jewish exorcists would obviously contest the idea that they used the power of Satan and condemn (judge) those who made such claims. Thus Jesus' critics couldn't claim that He used the power of Satan to cast out demons without implicating these Jewish exorcists as well.

20 But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you.

On the other hand, if it was the power of God working through Jesus that cast out devils then that would be proof that the kingdom of God had arrived in the person of Jesus Christ. This conclusion was something that these critics did not want to admit.

21 When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: 22 But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils.

“When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace” – A strong man who is well armed is able to protect his possessions from being stolen by thieves or enemies. Satan was such a “strong man” with the means of protecting what was his.

“But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him” – The possessions of a strong and well armed man are safe...until someone stronger than him comes along and overcomes him. Jesus did not cast out devils using the power of Satan because He is the One Who is stronger than Satan and could overcome him. Satan is defenseless before Christ and must bow to His power and authority.

“he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils” – The strong man trusted that his armor would protect him from his enemies and enable him to keep his possessions safe. However, the stronger man is able to take away the very armor that the strong man was using to protect himself. This stronger man is then able to take away all of the strong man's possessions and give them to whoever he wants. This picture illustrates the complete power, authority and victory that Christ has over Satan and that He is able to give the benefits of that victory to His children.

23 He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.

“He that is not with me is against me” – There is no neutral ground when it comes to Jesus Christ because there are only two kinds of people in the world: 1) those who have trusted in Christ for salvation, and 2) those who have not. Those who do not have salvation through Christ are operating under the influence of the world and Satan. They are inherently hostile toward Christ, whether they realize it or not. They are either in Christ's kingdom or they are in Satan's.

“and he that gathereth not with me scattereth” – Believers in Christ will be used by the Holy Spirit to reach the lost. Everyone else may attempt to “gather” in Christ's name but are in reality they are “scattering” because they do not understand the things of God and will to use human methods to attract followers, a strategy which will never produce legitimate results.

24 When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. 25 And when he cometh, he findeth *it* swept and garnished.

Some commentators believe these verses shed light on v. 23, giving a reason that remaining neutral toward Jesus is impossible. Jesus describes a demonic spirit that has been cast out of a man. This spirit wanders around “dry places,” looking for another person in which to dwell. Being unable to find a new host, the spirit decides to return to the man that he was previously cast out of. There he finds the man’s life (“the house”) cleaned up and vacant. The picture is of someone who has attempted to remain neutral toward Jesus even after being delivered from the demonic spirit. After the demonic spirit has been cast out, the man may have made personal reforms but he has not been filled with the Holy Spirit. Thus, there is nothing to prevent that demonic spirit from returning.

26 Then goeth he, and taketh *to him* seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first.

“Then goeth he, and taketh *to him* seven other spirits more wicked than himself” – Perhaps this demonic spirit wanted to have the help of other spirits, who are even more wicked than himself, to prevent being cast out again. The number “7” in Bible numerology represents “completion.” Thus, the idea is that this demonic spirit has brought in reinforcements to make a complete defense against anyone who would cast him out or against any attempts by the man at personal reformation.

“and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first” – Once these demonic spirits have made themselves at home within this man, he is now in worse shape than he was before. Jesus’ point is that having a spirit cast out of a man may only be a temporary solution if the spirit is not replaced with Jesus Christ. It’s not possible to remain neutral between Christ and Satan. If you are not with Christ then you are affiliated with Satan.

27 And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed *is* the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.

“And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him” – Apparently this woman has been in the crowd watching Jesus casting a devil out of the person who couldn’t speak (v. 14) and listening to what He said in response to His critics. She was so impressed that she had to speak up and say something.

“Blessed [*happy*] *is* the womb that bare thee, and the *paps* [*breasts*] which thou hast sucked” – This statement is not so much of a compliment to Mary as it was to Jesus. The woman was saying that it must please His mother to have such a Son as Jesus and that she must be extremely proud of Him.

28 But he said, Yea rather, blessed *are* they that hear the word of God, and keep it.

The Catholics venerate Mary and exalt her above all other women, claiming that she is the mother of God, as if there were something divine within her that produced Jesus. However, Jesus does not exalt Mary here. While not disagreeing with this woman on the point that His mother must be pleased with her Son, Jesus makes the point that there was a segment of humanity that are more “blessed” (happy) than His mother. It is those who hear the word of God and respond to it with obedience. They will be more happy for doing so and God will bless them for their obedience. This blessing does not exclude Mary, for she would receive blessings from her obedience as well. However, merely giving birth to Jesus and nursing Him did not put Mary in any better position than those who have heard the word of God and obeyed it.