

Matthew 12:24-28 (NKJV):

24 Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, “This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.”

25 But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.

26 If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?

27 And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges.

28 But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

When Jesus was accused by the Pharisees of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub (also known as Baal-Zebul, a Philistine deity later associated with Satan), He responded with a rational and theologically grounded defense:

1. A Divided Kingdom Cannot Stand (v. 25–26)

Jesus points out that if Satan is casting out his own demons, then his kingdom is collapsing from within—a contradiction. This argument dismantles the logic of the Pharisees' accusation. A divided demonic kingdom would self-destruct, which clearly is not Satan's strategy.

2. “By Whom Do Your Sons Cast Them Out?” (v. 27)

In this rhetorical question, “your sons” refers either to Jewish exorcists or disciples who were part of the Pharisaic religious system. Historically, Jews practiced exorcism through prayer, fasting, or invoking the name of God (see Acts 19:13–16 for a New Testament reference to Jewish exorcists). Jesus challenges the Pharisees' inconsistency: If they accept Jewish exorcists as operating under God's power, why reject Him—who casts out demons with greater authority and purity?

3. Authority by the Spirit of God (v. 28)

Jesus asserts that He casts out demons “by the Spirit of God,” a clear reference to divine authority. This implies the

manifestation of the Kingdom of God, as foretold in the Old Testament (Isaiah 61:1, Daniel 2:44). Jesus ties His exorcisms directly to messianic fulfillment and the arrival of God's rule on earth.

Exorcism in Jewish Tradition

Jewish tradition included various practices of exorcism:

- In John 5:1–9, the Pool of Bethesda is described, where an angel would stir the waters and the first person to enter would be healed. This may be viewed as divine intervention, possibly addressing both physical and spiritual afflictions.
- In Acts 19:13–16, Jewish exorcists (including the seven sons of Sceva) attempt to use the name of Jesus without spiritual authority and are overpowered by a demon, illustrating that spiritual authority matters more than method.

Jesus, however, did not rely on rituals or water but commanded with divine authority, fulfilling Isaiah 61:1 (NKJV):

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound.”

Application and Warning: Blasphemy Against the Holy Spirit

The Pharisees' accusation bordered on the unpardonable sin—blasphemy against the Holy Spirit:

Matthew 12:31-32 (NKJV):

“Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men.”

This occurs when someone knowingly attributes the work of the Holy Spirit to Satan, rejecting the obvious work of God in full awareness. It reflects a hardened heart and spiritual blindness.

Contemporary Reflection: Discernment and Reverence

Today, we must be careful not to hastily judge when we see the power of God at work—whether in healing, deliverance, or prophecy. Not all supernatural manifestations are demonic. We must test the spirits (1 John 4:1), but also avoid slandering the

Holy Spirit's work out of ignorance or jealousy.

Ecclesiastes 5:2 (NKJV):

“Do not be rash with your mouth, And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God.”

Conclusion

Jesus' question, “By whom do your sons cast them out?”, was not merely rhetorical—it exposed hypocrisy and forced the Pharisees to confront their double standards. It remains a reminder for us today to use spiritual discernment, not suspicion, when assessing spiritual activity.

May the Lord give us humility, wisdom, and reverence for the things of the Spirit.

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