

Article of the Month
January, 2020

Satan's Casting Out of Satan

(Mark 3:22-30; Matthew 12:22-37; Luke 11:14ff)

When the subject arises regarding Satan's casting out of Satan, the discussion frequently becomes an exercise in finding out HOW Satan does this, and what this means. However, a different perspective seems implied in the texts (above) which deal with this question. Looking with care at the contexts and the subtleties of the texts at hand, it is quite possible to come to the conclusion that what Jesus is saying is that ***Satan Does Not Cast Out Satan.***

The Mark account is considerably shorter than the Matthew account. (The Luke account may not enhance our understanding significantly beyond Mark and Matthew.) Looking at the shorter account first allows us to grasp better the meaning of Jesus' words. The Matthew account will then supply additional details for our benefit.

THE SETTING

Jesus healed a possessed man. The jealous Jewish leaders decided to suggest that Jesus did this by the power of the prince of devils — Satan. It is in response to this accusation that Jesus gives a very instructive response.

THE MARK ACCOUNT

Jesus' very first words in his response are quite revealing: "How can Satan cast out Satan?" If, indeed, Jesus thought that Satan COULD cast out Satan, his following words would have answered this question by giving examples of how Satan can cast out Satan. But that is not what happened. On the contrary, Jesus' question seems to be a rhetorical question. It has the *implied* answer that Satan cannot cast out Satan. The meaning of Jesus' first words seems to be (paraphrased in graphic phraseology):

What ARE you saying? Do you not realize the basic fallacy of your thinking? Satan CANNOT cast out Satan! There is something seriously wrong with your thinking! You are, if you think about it, proposing the PREPOSTEROUS!

Then Jesus shows WHY their thinking was so preposterous.

Point #1: You should know that a kingdom which fights within itself is doomed! Do you really think that Satan is out to doom his own domain?

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Point #2: You should know, even on a smaller, more domestic level, that if a household is full of disagreements, that household will dissolve. Do you really think that Satan is out to dissolve his own household?

Point #3: Do you not understand the basic error in your thinking? If Satan is against himself, he is functionally destroyed. That would be GOOD! But YOUR insinuations against me imply that it would be BAD!

Then Jesus (verse 27) shows how Satan will REALLY fall. It will NOT be because he is casting out parts of his kingdom or of his house. It will NOT be because he's fighting himself. It will be because someone will ENTER SATAN'S HOUSE and bind him — thus insuring that he can no longer control his house.

Jesus points to the REASON that his would happen. Satan HAS something valuable. He has the entire human race under his command. THAT is of great value! And the only way of taking that valued possession out of his control is to bind him so that his valuables can be freed from his control. He will NEVER destroy his own house! How weak and foolish was the argument of the Jews! It was a contrived argument — a thoughtless argument designed only because of their hatred of Jesus.

This 27th verse has given us the true meaning of Jesus' diatribe against the Jewish leaders. Their concept that Jesus was Satan's servant by casting out Satan's servants was nothing short of absurd! Jesus concluded that Satan will NEVER cast out any of his own powers or supporters. Satan will be conquered ONLY by having Jesus BIND him. Then Jesus will release those who were the valuables under Satan's control.

The next two verses seem so disconnected from the context. But they are in perfect harmony with Jesus' teachings here. In verses 28 and 29 Jesus is pointing out that the work of the Holy Spirit (as manifested in Jesus' GOOD DEED) was so obviously NOT a work of Satan that it showed how the Pharisaical thinking was bordering on sinning against the Holy Spirit — something which NEVER will find forgiveness. Jesus was giving the Jews warning that their thinking was SO CORRUPT that they were inventing excuses totally inconsistent with rationality! To conclude that Satan was fighting Satan was clearly the attempt of reprobate minds which hated righteousness but which could find no other way to indict Jesus! This concept of the Pharisees is a CERTAIN proof that Satan does not cast out Satan. Their very thought, according to Jesus, was a thought which could only occur to those who are fighting the Holy Spirit!

The 30th verse EXPLAINS why verses 28 and 29 are there: "BECAUSE THEY (the Jews) WERE SAYING THAT HE (Jesus) HAS AN UNCLEAN SPIRIT."

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Mark has given us the whole, but abbreviated, story. In short, Satan CANNOT cast out Satan. Instead, Jesus will BIND Satan and thus rescue the treasure (humanity) which has been under Satan's control for millennia.

THE MATTHEW ACCOUNT

From Matthew's account we can add some detail and some substantiation. In Matthew 12: 27, Jesus catches the Pharisees in their own fallacious reasoning. He points out that their own people cast out devils. Why is THEIR power to do so not also from Satan? This places a judgment squarely on the Pharisees.

In the 28th verse Jesus attempts to tell them that, since Satan CAN'T cast out Satan, then the Pharisees SHOULD clearly see that a power from on high is present. Jesus attributes his own work to "the Spirit of God." Thus he will, in verses 31 and 32, be able to show them the dangerous ground upon which they are functioning.

When the 29th verse shows the TRUE way that Satan's powers will fail, Jesus adds (verse 30) that if anyone is not in harmony with the Holy Spirit, he is against it. The 31st and 32nd verses then show the dangerous position in which the Pharisees have placed themselves — all because they hated Jesus and his threat to their own power.

The 33rd verse condemns the Pharisees for not seeing and acknowledging the GOOD FRUIT they saw in the healing of the blind and dumb man. The Pharisees were, indeed, double-minded men, unstable in all their ways. They saw works of great good coming out of Jesus; and, yet, they condemned him as being a devil! (This is not to say that the Devil cannot counterfeit good works to bolster his image. But Satan's "good works" will be clearly marked by their temporary or incomplete nature and their contradiction of Scriptural principles.)

When Jesus refers to the Pharisees as "vipers," he seems to be making reference to the first liar — the serpent in Eden. As he elsewhere states, they are "of their father, the devil." They were continuing the adversary's promotion of lies and half-truths in order to hold onto their power. Jesus pinpoints the problem: They cannot speak truth because they are evil. The 35th verse contrasts Jesus' good works to the Pharisee's evil response.

Verses 36 and 37, in context, show the true meaning of careless, useless, or "idle words." Jesus is not speaking of casual mis-use of words or even of flippant remarks. He is referring to a PRACTICE of WRONG TEACHING. "Idle words" is a reference to the practice of putting forth concepts which are known (if considered) to be faulty — to be fruitless in the end, and to be deceptive for the purpose of holding ill-gotten power. By these words teachers will be judged. The Pharisees were guilty of doing this with their claim that Satan could cast out Satan.

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