

**Mark 9: 38-42; “For Us or Against Us” Sermon # 78 in the series –  
“Astonished at His Teaching”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall  
on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016, in the Morning Worship Service.**

The question that John asked our Lord about is a good question for us to consider this morning as well. Since we believe that we have come to a true understanding of the Bible, should we attempt to hinder or to stop the work of other Christians if they are people who do not follow after Christ in the way that we follow after Christ? The answer of our Lord Jesus to John was that we should not. But the answer needs to be probed further, and it needs to be qualified so that we may truly understand what we should do in light of the many churches of Christians who differ with us in doctrine, and the many parachurch ministries that exist in the world today. Why did our Lord Jesus tell His beloved disciple John not to forbid this man’s casting out of demons, even though he did not follow after them? 3 reasons are given to us. 1<sup>st</sup> – Because he was not speaking evil against them. 2<sup>nd</sup> – Because he was really on their side. And 3<sup>rd</sup> – Because they might cause him, (one of the little ones) to stumble. I am hoping that each of us here today will perhaps learn something new about Christian unity by your considering these truths which Jesus gave to John.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – Our Lord told John not to forbid this man’s casting out demons because he was not speaking evil against them.** (Verses 38 and 39)

At first sight this passage seems disconnected from the verses which come before it, and which follow it. But it is not so. John had just heard His Lord and Master speaking about receiving little children in His name. Verse 37 says, “Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me.” He also had heard the words of Matthew 18: 1 – “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.” “Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” He rightly understood that when Jesus was talking about “little children” here, that Jesus was not only referring to receiving physical little children in this passage; He is also referring to “little ones who believe in Him”; that is Christians of all ages. Verse 42 of our text proves this. “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.” Also verse 41, where it says, “For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ” will not lose his reward. In Matthew 10: 42 it is the little one who is given the cup of cold water.

What John is doing in verse 38, is asking a question so that the Lord would answer this question for all Christians – How far does this principle of co-operation with others who profess to know Christ go? Should we be “receiving them” as true Christians who are doing a legitimate work, if they do not follow Christ in the same church that we attend, if they are doing things for Christ which are not under our church authority? He thought that they should not be received, and that, indeed, he believed that their work ought to be forbidden. And so he brings up this example from his own recent experience with a man who was casting out demons; a man who was possibly one of the disciples of John the Baptist. And he sets it before Jesus, hoping that Jesus would justify him in the way that he handled it. Jesus did not justify him in his forbidding of this man’s casting out demons. And so we must ask the reasons why; and then attempt to apply Jesus’ reasons to our own day and to the whole subject of Christian unity.

I think that the Apostle John had very reasonably concluded that the working of miracles in Jesus’ name should require permission and a grant of authority from Jesus. He remembered being given authority himself, to do miracles and being sent out to minister in Jesus’ name.

(Recorded in Mark 3, verses 14 and 15) John probably thought to himself that if that person who wanted to do miracles, or who had already obtained the power to do such miracles, doesn't follow along with the original authority granted by Jesus to do them, they might be misrepresenting the Lord Jesus. They might be mis-representing His person or His kingdom, and they might even be preaching a false gospel along with the miracles that were performed. After all, John knew that His Lord had preached that such a thing was possible. In Matthew chapter 7 and verse 21 and 22, Jesus said: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.'" "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me you who practice lawlessness!"

I think that John reasoned this way: If it is possible to prophesy in Jesus' name, to cast out demons in Jesus' name, and to do many wonders in His name; and still end up not being able to enter heaven because of lawlessness, then surely it must be true that authority must be obtained from Jesus, or from His apostles, for the doing of these miracles. And the authority being granted, therefore, should only be given if that person was willing to submit to following with them as a group; not to be an independent agent in dispensing these blessings. There might be a lawless spirit in the heart of the person who would not follow after them, and stay in their group; or, in those who would refuse to wait to be sent out by their group. That is why John and the other Apostles who were with this man, on that occasion, forbade him to cast out demons.

But Jesus does not agree with this reasoning. And He is not very complicated or intricate about the answer that He gives. "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me." He is saying that John did not need to spend large amounts of time and energy trying to judge the motives and the heart of a person who "works a miracle in His name". The miracle that is done is done by the power of God. The authority by which this man did this miracle was God's authority; the authority which resides in the name of Jesus Christ. The intention of God in a general sense is to do good to all men; especially in releasing them from their bondage to Satan; to free them from his dread kingdom. When the demons are cast out, God is glorified and Christ's name is well spoken of. This is the object of all such miracles; that God and Christ would be praised, and that thereby the gospel and the Word of God might be more carefully considered, and even received.

Jesus is saying; There is something much bigger, much greater than the issue of this man's following after us as a group. He may come to join us, or he may not. But that is not the issue. The first and foremost issue to focus on is God's character and His power to save. The greatest issue to be focused on, in regard to ministry, is God's bringing people out of darkness and into His marvelous light. Our greatest responsibility in regard to a ministry of helping people is not to bind them up under our authority, or our church's authority; it is to see them come to understand the freeness and fullness of grace that there is in God the Father and Christ His Son. Then these people will, in time and as God leads, freely choose which group of believers they will follow with; which expression of Christ's people they believe that God would have them to join, within His larger Universal Church. God will convince them of that as well. If they are lawless, this will be borne out in time. But someone who did not follow with them, was not to be disqualified in their ministry of helping demon-oppressed people, or even in the ministry of sharing the gospel which God had given to them independently of the apostles.

The one who was able to work a miracle, Jesus is saying, cannot soon afterward speak evil of Christ. It is Christ and the furtherance of His glorious kingdom that we should seek. I hope that you see how clear this is. I hope that you will not muddy the waters with all kinds of thoughts and words of protest. The ministry of the Lord Jesus, while He was here upon the earth, did not consist of going around trying to get people to join His group. He did choose His Apostles and

appoint them to their work. He does choose and appoint people to eternal life. But He did not insist that all people who were trying to do good in His name would be in the inner circle of His followers. He went around doing good to people, and then they considered what He taught as something that they wanted to hear, if the Spirit was working in their heart. Then they followed Him willingly. They were wanting to learn from Him, having seen His miracles and His having had good done unto them. Those who became His disciples, submitted to Him then on the basis of their receiving His Word. But there surely must have been some, if not many, who received good from Him, and yet did not follow along with Him, and yet they still did think very highly of Him.

In applying this truth that Jesus is teaching to John I would like us to consider how we should view the Charismatic churches of our own day. Since we believe that the Scriptures teach that the revelatory gifts and the signs that accompanied the Apostles have ceased, we believe that we are not required to approve of the supposed ministry which a person might claim to have, in casting out demons or healing. That God does heal and cast out demons today through the name of Jesus; I personally have no doubt. The principle of truth I am trying to inculcate with you this morning is the idea that we do not have to go about to deliberately trying to hinder or forbid the ministry of someone outside of our church who is trying to minister in Jesus' name, using the gifts which they believe have been given to them as an individual Christian, but not going to our church. We who are Reformed Baptists are members of a local church and we believe in the authority of that local church through her ministers in relation to the preaching of the Word of God. We believe that it is a great mistake, exegetically and theologically, to believe that the gifts of tongues, prophecy, and the ministries of the working of miracles such as casting out demons and healing people, still exists today.

We believe that since the apostles left the scene, that the sign gifts have ceased. The gifts of miracles like this one of having a ministry of casting out demons, have ceased. But the ministry of the other gifts of the Spirit continues on, to be used in the churches that we are members of. We believe that we should teach and we should warn against believing in something which does not really exist as a ministry of the Christian Church today. But even though we do not believe that the use of charismatic gifts is a ministry true to the reality of things today, still, we need to have a charitable spirit; not towards errors that we see, but towards the people who we believe are true Christians and who do not understand. We are to understand that there are Christian people who are members of Charismatic churches. And in terms of the gospel, they may be people who are ministering and having good success in their ministry of preaching the gospel and doing good. And yet they are not members of our church, neither do they recognize our authority. We should not forbid the exercise of their legitimate normative gifts (the gifts that do exist all through this Church age) that God has given to them. And those persons who we see are attempting to do good for Christ and His kingdom, we should not forbid them ministering in Jesus' name. And this leads us to the second reason why Jesus told John that he should not forbid those to cast out demons who did not follow with them.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – Because he who is not against you is really on your side.**

(Verse 40)

“For he who is not against us is on our side.” You see from these words, can't you, that there are sides to take in relation to the battle which is going on for the advancement of Christ's truth in the world today. You are either on Christ's side; the side of truth and meekness and righteousness; or you are on the side of Satan, darkness, and unrighteousness. Not everyone can clearly see which kingdom they are in. Jesus is saying that this man who was casting out demons in His name was on His side, and therefore his labors ought not to be forbidden. Turn with me to Matthew 12: 22 and you will see this. It says, “Then one was brought to Jesus who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both

spoke and saw.” “And all the multitudes were amazed and said, ‘Could this be the Son of David?’” “Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, ‘This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of demons.’” (And that is the work of Satan working to influence these religious, but unsaved men’s minds and hearts against Jesus’ being the Christ) “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.’” “And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out?” “Therefore they shall be your judges.” “But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

So Jesus cast the demons out of this man. And he healed the man so that he spoke and saw. The conclusion of the multitudes was great amazement. And a question arises in the hearts of many, and it comes out on their lips: “Could this be the Son of David?” Could this be the promised Messiah; the fulfillment of all the promises of God given to Israel? Is He the promised descendant of David who would come bringing not only the power to heal men of their sicknesses, diseases, and infirmities; but the One who would take away their sins? That was the right conclusion, and these people were for Jesus. They were with Him in the good things that He came to do and bring to them. They knew that they were being helped by Him. They may not have all believed in Jesus for salvation, but they were kindly disposed to think about it.

But the conclusion of the Pharisees was exactly the opposite. “This fellow does not cast out demons except by the Beelzebub the ruler of the demons.” They do not understand that they are being duped by Satan to think and to say such things. They were on the wrong side. They thought that they were in God’s kingdom, when all the while they were promoting Satan’s interests. Satan is interested in promoting self-righteousness and in promoting a persecuting spirit among men. He is interested in turning people against Christ. He is interested in trying to undermine the true unity of spirit which Christ brings to all who believe in Him. But Jesus refutes this false notion that He and Satan are somehow on the same side. It is impossible, He says, because then Satan’s kingdom would be divided. He is saying that the healing of the very people that Satan had helped to make so very miserable and helpless, who he had held in darkness and bondage, would be a real conflict of interest. Satan would be fighting against himself and his kingdom could not stand. And Jesus also mentions the fact that “their sons” were casting out demons as well; probably those who did not follow with Jesus and His disciples.

So this is what I would have you see from this passage. You are either on Christ’s side or you are on Satan’s side, and you need to discover which it is. If you say that you like all the good things that Christ does and brings to you, and to other people, then publicly declare yourself. Do not be ashamed to openly and publicly own Him to be your Savior and your Lord. If you are in bondage to some addiction or have some affliction or disease or condition which hinders you greatly, bring it to Him and ask Him to heal you. Even if He does not take it away, He can and He will give you grace to bear it for His name’s sake and for His glory.

But I hope that you will take sides with Jesus and not fight against His kingdom and cause. Instead, if you are not a member here, will you not consider joining with us in promoting His glory? Let every Christian remember that the person who is really trying to promote Christ’s glory will want to submit to His word in everything; even to the Biblical doctrine of the authority of the local church. When you are willing to submit to the properly constituted Biblical authority in the church in this place, if you want to use your gift, and to promote Christ’s kingdom, you will not be forbidden if your highest motive is the glory of Christ. It is only when a person wants to promote themselves and wants to have the power of authority themselves, to control others, and to force others to their own will and ideas of what should be believed and how things should be done; then, we should all understand, it is only right to forbid that person from exercising their gift in this local church.

The use of your gifts in the local church is not the ultimate thing to strive for, after all. It is to have the grace to use those gifts rightly so that God is glorified and others are built up by it. Satan would divide Christians and tempt them to cause divisions and dissensions in the local church. This is really unnecessary when you are walking in the Spirit and seeking the glory of Christ. In verse 29 of Matthew 12, Jesus says, “Or how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man?” “And then he will plunder his house.” Jesus has overcome Satan and taken away the prey from the strong man.” Because He is the Son of God, and because He went to the cross, because He took the side of righteousness and lived perfectly to the glory of God, He will save you from Satan and sin when you believe in Him, and you will then work together with Him for the furtherance of His glory. You will willingly take sides with Him against Satan and His kingdom.

Verse 30 is the very same thought as the words of our text in Mark 9, verse 40. In Mark 9 it says, “For he who is not against us is on our side.” Verse 30 of Matthew 12 says, “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.” If you are with Christ you will be gathering with Him. You will be gathering with Christ when you are promoting His kingdom and His glory through the gift or gifts that He has given to you. And, you may also conclude that if you are not against Christ’s little ones, you are on their side, whether you attend the same church or not. Really, this is a very freeing concept. It promotes the love of the brethren beyond our own local church. This does not mean that we should not care if people join our church or not. We do want people to join our church and to come to believe what we believe about the word of God and the worship of God. But, if we have learned anything today, it is that you and I do not have to hinder other Christians using their gifts to minister for Christ, just because they do not attend our church.

Let me ask you whether you can affirm the ministry and gifts of people in other Bible-believing churches and groups? You will no doubt, as a Reformed Christian, not be able to agree with a number of areas of their doctrine and practice, but let me ask you whether you can pray for them and ask the Lord to bless them in their ministries, even so? I am not at all saying that you should give up the truth of the Reformed Faith or compromise it. Cling to it with all your heart, and propagate it with all your might. But realize that there may be many people who are Christians, who have not yet come to all the truth that you have come to; and do not hinder the ministry which the Lord may have given to them. This also does not mean that you somehow have to affirm all of the doctrines that other denominations and churches teach and hold to. No, you are to hold fast the truth as it is in Jesus, and as it is found in His Word. You are to abide in all of that truth, and pray to bear fruit to God in every good work and word, by using the gift or gifts that God has given to you in particular, in the context of the local church. That is the Biblical pattern for the Christian. That is what glorifies God the most. That is the kind of faithfulness which the Lord will reward. And this leads us finally to the 3<sup>rd</sup> reason why Jesus told John that he should not forbid this man’s casting out demons in His name:

**3<sup>rd</sup> - Because they might cause one of the little ones to stumble.**

(verses 41 and 42)

“For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.” “But whoever causes one of these little ones to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea.” Do you see how Jesus so quickly went from talking about not hindering the ministry of a man casting out demons in His name, to talk about a person giving you a cup of water to drink in His name, because you belong to Christ? You see what He was aiming at, don’t you? If John would not allow this man’s ministry of casting out demons to take place because he knew that this man was not following with them; how would he and the others with him be able to approve of even the smallest and simplest acts of kindness done in Jesus’

name, unless that person who was ministering them, was first formally recognized by them. No, Jesus did not, and does not, want all ministry in His name to be bound up exclusively under the authority of men and churches because He knows that that authority could in some hands actually prevent good from being done in His name. He also knew that those who were thus prevented from being able to minister encouragement and comfort in the most simple ways might be stumbled, and thereby come to have trouble joining or staying in any church.

Does any sincere Christian really believe that they could stay in a church where their faith is being lorded over by those in the leadership? Would they not be stumbled by those in authority in the local church if those in authority tried to exercise control over everything good thing that they would like to do for others in the name of Christ? This is what Jesus was intending to prevent by talking in this strong way. And His words become even stronger in verse 42 against those who would act in such a way. “Better that a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown in to the sea.” It is a very serious thing to cause one of these little ones who believe in Christ to stumble. To cause them to “stumble” in the context is to try to keep the little ones who believe in Jesus from doing what they know to be right, or leading them into some sin or error in doctrine. James Chapter 4 and verse 17 says, “Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.”

I hope that you do not think, by the way that I am speaking, that I am in any way denying the authority of pastors in the local church. They have been ordained to the ministry in their local church; to preach authoritatively from the Bible, and to watch for the souls under their charge; to help them to walk in the paths of righteousness and truth. They know that they must give an account to God for them. But their authority to oversee ministry is in the context of the church that they pastor. It does not extend to those outside except to declare to them the Word of God, calling people to obey it. What we are speaking about now is those who are in the church, whether elders or deacons or others, hindering the work of Christians who are outside of their church because those people do not walk with them and do not submit to their authority. The lesson from the lips of Jesus is simply this: Do not forbid him; He who is not against us is on our side. Let us not disqualify their faith or their ministry of service to Christ by insisting that they must follow us. If we ourselves are following Christ, we can certainly urge them to follow us as we follow Christ. But let us not hinder them in the good works which the Lord has led them to do. Who knows? They may want to join with us when they see that we are endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. May the Lord help us to have good discernment in this important area of our walk with Christ and with brothers and sisters outside of our church.