

MATTHEW 12:22-30
FOR HIM, AGAINST HIM, OR NEUTRAL ?

Then one was brought to Him [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 the demons.

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. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom 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. 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. He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.

If a youngster is learning to drive, “neutral” sounds like a safe place to be. But the child and you, the teacher, won't get anywhere.

This text begins with demon possession. A man was brought to Jesus, who was possessed by a demon, was blind, and could not talk. Jesus cast the demon out of the man, and the man could see and speak again. The people were astounded! They began to say to one another, *Could this be the Son of David?*—that is, the Promised One? The miracle certainly showed that Jesus was not an ordinary man. He was God and man—the promised Rescuer from King David's royal line. The Messiah!

This “talk” was picked up by the Pharisees. It irked them extremely. They made a statement of their own. *This one does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons!* Beelzebub is a derogatory name for Satan, meaning “lord of the flies”—and garbage is where flies hang out—or “god of dung.” Neither is desirable. The Pharisees were saying that the devil himself was really behind this miracle; that Jesus was being used by Satan to further Satan's kingdom. “Stay away from Jesus.”

Jesus knew their thoughts. It is impossible to outmaneuver Jesus. He is true God. He knows all thoughts—a fact that is fearful for the lawbreaker, but comforting for to the child of God. Jesus answered. *Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?* The foolish logic of the Pharisees! The fact is, if a nation, a city, or a house opposes itself, it will fall. Consider the parsonage. It is a double-wide. It was built in two halves. The two halves have been anchored together. If they remained separate, even six inches apart, how durable would the house be in snow, rain, and wind? Not very.

If I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore, they shall be your judges. Jesus is saying, Do you men realize how foolishly you are speaking. Tell Me, by whom do your own people cast out demons? In the Book of Acts, we learn of certain Jewish exorcists—that is, “demon caster-outers”—and of the seven sons of a Jewish priest named Sceva, who were seeking to drive out demons (Acts 19:14-17). Jesus is asking the Pharisees, Are your own people, who drive out demons or attempt to, led by Satan too? They wouldn't say that.

If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. 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. A robber, who breaks into a tough guy's house, has to subdue the tough guy before he can successfully plunder the house. Jesus—God—can cast out demons, because Jesus is stronger than Satan! *But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you!* “Wake up as to who I am and why I have come, or you will be on the wrong side of God. I am indeed the promised son of David, the Son of God, the anointed Rescuer of God's people forever!”

Do you ever try to outmaneuver God or put your own spin on what God says, using your own faulty logic? “I know the Bible says such and such, but that can't be right.” “The world could not have come to exist in six days; it took millions of years. We have proof.” Oh, really? Or, “I know God says Life is a gift from Him, and He will end it when He knows best. But Herb Mueller is lying there suffering. Give him a shot to end his life. Let him die with dignity.” Dignity?—to be shot like a horse with a broken leg?

He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad. Reverse? Forward? Neutral? There is no neutral! Someone may say, “I’m neither for Christ nor against Him; if you want to be a Christian, fine with me; if not, fine with me too; I’m neutral.” Neutral is not a workable option. *He who is not with Me is against Me.* Suppose we had had heavy rains at the snowmelt this spring, and the “bottom” went out of the gravel parking lot. If someone got stuck, would you help? Or would you say, “I’m neutral on this one”? Neutral is not helping! Why not push them deeper? *He who is not with Me is against Me. He who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.* Or, suppose I was walking to church this morning with bulletins, bulletin inserts, sermon sheets, sheets for Sunday School—just as you also were walking from the car. If I had tripped and the wind caught my papers, how helpful would it be to stay neutral? You may as well scatter them yourself.

The same is true regarding Bible teachings, doctrines, and Truth. A person challenges the concept of hell and says, “Would God really damn rejectors to hell? That is not right.” Yet, God says it is so. If someone teaches against hell in my presence, shall I stand neutral? No. **Or**, if friends or family want to live morally like animals (actually immorally), does one say, “Who am I to judge? I’ll stay neutral; I won’t get involved.” Does a congregation teach that God has chosen some for hell no matter what? If so, and someone close to me wants to go to / join that church, do I say nothing and remain neutral? Does another congregation teach that a person has to make a conscious, willful decision to believe in Christ, though the Bible does not say that, then “It’s still fine; I’ll not object”? If a group teaches that many of the factual things in the Bible are myths and legends, and if our own people want to go there, “I won’t object, I’m neutral”? If our people want to be part of a church that teaches that Christ will reign 1000 years on earth, although the Bible never says that either, “I’ll stay neutral. It’s all ok”? No. Scripture has some strong words, **1) He who is not with Me is against Me. He who does not gather with Me scatters abroad. 2) Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves (Matthew 7:16). 3) If you continue in My Word, then are you My disciples indeed, and you shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall set you free (John 8:31-32). 4) Mark them who cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which you have learned; and avoid them (Romans 16:17). 5) For I know this, that after my departing, shall grievous wolves enter in among you [from outside], not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves [from the inside] shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch! (Acts 20:29-31).**

Not being neutral toward Jesus and His Truth, is what lies beneath our church’s doctrine of church fellowship. We do not exchange pulpits with pastors of other denominations, faiths or synods, lest we support the idea that it doesn’t matter what a Christian church believes or teaches. We do not practice open communion, nor do we give our members the nod to go ahead and commune at congregations which hold to confessions, teachings, and beliefs contrary to Scripture. Nor do we have a joint VBS with our different community churches. We do not join with them, because we do not stand neutral. We stay apart. Why? It is a matter of caution for our own faith, it is a matter of admonishing others, it is a matter of glory to God and His Truth. It is **not** our conviction that all other churches and church people are on the way to hell! Only God looks in the heart and sees faith in Christ or not. The point is, wherever the devil can foul the waters, or inch his way in, with a little falsehood or a lot, his ultimate goal is to detract from Christ’s Truth and derail people from Christ’s forgiveness and salvation. Nor do we maintain that all our people believe the Bible exactly the same at this moment. People are always growing in their grasp of the Bible. Some progress further and faster, but together we continue to learn the Bible and its teachings in a manner that does not contradict the Savior and His Word. Congregations of our synod hold to a joint confession of Bible Truth and are committed to grow in that. Where others do not stand with us, we do not share church fellowship with them. To do so would mean not standing with Jesus. *He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad*—words from Jesus your Savior.

This is indeed a “hard teaching.” Our sinful nature, our Old Adam, does not like for us to “stick out like a sore thumb” for Christ. The preference is, Let’s all hold hands regardless of what the teachings of a church body are. ---- Have you played the neutral card? Now what? Go back to the early words of our text: *And all the multitudes were amazed and said, Could this be the Son of David?* Indeed, Jesus is the promised Son of David, God and man, your Savior. He went to the cross to get punished for you. In Him you have forgiveness and a right standing before the Father. You are rescued from sin, Satan, and hell. The Resurrection to life awaits you; the mansions of heaven expect you. Don’t be “against” Jesus (“Reverse”); don’t idly stand by as if the Truth’s of Christ don’t matter as long as we all get along (“Neutral”). Rather walk with Him, clinging to Him in full unity with His Word (“Forward”)! All Bible Truths center in Christ and His pardon for our sins, His guidance in this life, and His glory shared with us in the life to come. Forward! 100% with Christ!

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---