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Conducted by  
Alf Marsden

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**"In Luke 9:49 John informs Jesus that he had forbidden a man from casting out devils because he followed not the disciples and Jesus. Jesus said, "Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us"**

- (1) Does this not contradict Luke 11:23?
- (2) Does this mean that there are men preaching the Gospel today who do God's will albeit they are not with us (Churches of Christ)?"

Obviously, the key to (1) lies in the degree of agreement between the statements made by both John and Jesus. Does John's "he followeth not with us" mean the same as Jesus' "He that it not with me?" I think we must work from the premise that Jesus *would not* contradict Himself, and so progressing from that fact we must examine each situation separately in order to understand the context in which each statement was made.

#### **The Statement of John**

When we read from the Gospels we are immediately struck by the realisation that on some occasions Jesus was frustrated by the attitude of His disciples towards some of the truths He was trying to teach. On such occasions He sometimes felt it necessary to rebuke them for their lack of understanding. So we take the point that the disciples were not infallible in their interpretation of events, nor were their reactions always in harmony with the main thrust of the mission and teaching of the Saviour.

In the particular passage under consideration, Luke 9:49, we see in the context that Jesus had to respond to the possessiveness of the disciples. They were reasoning among themselves who should be greatest (v46). This was after the revelation of Jesus to them of His own future humiliation, "Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men" (9:44). This statement the disciples didn't understand. How could they understand the humiliation of Christ at the hands of men when their own possessiveness was leading them into aspirations of greatness and glory which had nothing whatever to do with the mission of Jesus? Later on, they wanted to command fire from heaven to consume a village of the Samaritans because they would not receive Jesus, but He rebuked them, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (9:51-56).

This spirit of possessiveness I believe to be the key to the words of the Lord in 9:50. They ought to have understood that the casting out of demons was not the sole prerogative of themselves, nor even of Jesus Himself, as He pointed out to those who tempted Him, "And if I by Beelzibub cast out devils, by whom do *your* sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges" (11:19). You will recall that Jesus sent out the seventy and gave them special powers. They returned jubilant saying, "Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name

(10:17). Jesus then bestowed other powers on them, but rather significantly He said to them, "Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven". So what the Lord is emphasising is that they should rejoice in salvation, not in power and position.

Mark records the same incident and probably gives a little more light. He records the same words of John to Jesus (Mark 9:38) and then goes on to record Jesus as saying, "Forbid him not: there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is on our part. For whosoever shall give a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward" (vv39-41). Jesus here seems to be saying that *anyone* who worked a miracle in His name, whether a follower or not, would find it extremely difficult to malign the name of Jesus in so doing. We must understand that the point at issue was the casting out of *demons*, and Jesus saw that whether *He* did it, or His disciples, or anyone using His name, it was indicating to the world the conquest of evil by the power of the Lord. In *that* sense Jesus knew that His name would not be misused.

#### The Statement by Jesus

"He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth" (Luke 11:23). The context here indicates to me the contrast between two kingdoms; the Kingdom of Darkness and the Kingdom of Light. The verdict of some of the people, after Jesus had cast out a demon from a dumb man, was "He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils" (11:14,15). Jesus takes up this argument and demonstrates just how ridiculous their observations were. Mark, in his record, puts the point quite simply and leaves it for the people to answer, "How can Satan cast out Satan?" And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand" (Mark 3:23,24).

Both Mark and Luke make it plain that Jesus saw His mission as the heralding in of the Kingdom of God. The real point so far as Jesus was concerned had a twofold application: in the casting out of demons by Jesus, the people must see 'the finger of God', and they must also see in Him the stronger power which can overcome the strong man of sin (Luke 11:20-23). By His reference to the 'finger of God', Jesus is evidently referring back to Exodus 8:17-19. When the magicians of Pharaoh saw the plague of gnats, which they themselves could not produce, they said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God". But Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not listen, just as the Lord had said". Jesus seems to be saying to the people of His day that they were as imperceptive as Pharaoh in not realising the power of God as demonstrated by Jesus. As regards the binding of the strong man of sin, Satan, Jesus is indicating to the people that it is *He* who will accomplish this, "But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you" (11:20). There can be no compromise in attributing ultimate evil to ultimate Goodness, and so Jesus says, "He that is not with me is against me: and he that gathereth not with me scattereth" (11:23).

Are the two passages of scripture, then, contradictory as the questioner asks? I think not. Rather, I believe them to be complementary. In Luke 9:49 Jesus is saying that His name can never be misused by anyone when the power of that name indicates the conquest of evil. In 11:23 He is indicating to the people the ultimate triumph of the Kingdom of God over the kingdom of Satan, and stressing to the ones who will see and hear that this victory will be achieved in Himself.

All, then, who come into that Kingdom will be *for* Him, but those who choose to remain in the Kingdom of Satan will be against Him. What common ground does darkness have with light?

### Those not with us

The questioner asks further, "Are there men preaching the Gospel today, who do God's will albeit they are not with us (i.e., not in the Church of Christ)". Who can define the membership boundaries of the Church of Christ? There may be communities of Christians *of whom we are unaware* who practice and teach from the word as we do; ostensibly, they would be 'with us'. On the other hand, there are undoubtedly some who only partially speak the truth. Take, for example, the statement, "Jesus is the Son of God"; nothing would alter *that* truth no matter who stated it. So we could have, as we do, men preaching truth interspersed with error. The truth they spoke would still be truth, but if the error they taught kept people out of the Kingdom of God then they would be against us, and against Christ. Truth will always be truth irrespective of who preaches it, believes it, or disbelieves it; similarly with error.

You will notice that I have refrained from saying anything about the doing of God's will. I suppose that if the preacher when preaching, did God's will, then he would proclaim nothing but the truth. As we remarked earlier, the uncompromising reply of Jesus was very necessary on this occasion because the preaching of error can never be consistent with the pure nature of the teaching of Jesus regarding the Kingdom of God.

Of course, there will always be preachers of any religious group who, referring themselves to the supreme authority, God's Word, will inevitably speak *some* truth from it; to that extent, and *that extent alone*, they will be truthful. It is a fact which we must acknowledge that the Word of God has free course in the world; anyone can preach and teach from it. But like the Bereans of old, we must search the scriptures in order to see if the things spoken are true. If they are not, then they must be rejected. If such preachers persist in proclaiming things for which there is no scriptural warrant, even though they may say some things for which *there is*, then they are in error, and in no way can we say that they are for God, Christ, or the Gospel.

*(All questions, please, to Alf Marsden, 377 Billinge Road, Hayfield, Wigan, Lancs.)*

## WHAT KIND OF GIVER AM I?

If I give nothing, I have cast my vote in favour of closing my church.  
If I give only a little, I am telling the world that the Gospel means little,  
and that I am not the sort of person who keeps my promises.

If I give grudgingly, I shall find no joy, nor receive the blessing of the Lord.  
If I say, 'I give more than others', I have forgotten that Jesus gave His ALL for me.

### BUT

If I give proportionately then I will be honouring my promises to God and my commitment to Him.

If I give regularly and systematically, I make it easier for the Church to plan in advance.

If I give sacrificially, I testify that Christ and His Church are of first importance in meeting the physical and spiritual needs of the world.

NOW, WHAT KIND OF GIVER AM I?