

“You Can’t Have it Both Ways”

Luke 11:14-28

Most of us, at some time or another, have found ourselves in a group setting where we were forced to make a decision? When that happened to you, did the pressure to make a decision make you feel comfortable or uncomfortable? Did you wonder about the decision others would make, and how they’d feel about your choice?

I’ve been in settings where, when the participants were asked to take a position on a particular question, many of them chose not to respond. I myself have done that because I was afraid I’d make the wrong choice! I don’t like to be wrong as an individual and I don’t like to be part of a group that is wrong either. I suspect you’ve had similar experiences.

Now, in cases like I just mentioned, the refusal to take a position usually doesn’t lead to negative consequences or a bad outcome. It can yield some embarrassment when you’re called out for your lack of response. But part of our problem is we often have the desire to identify with both sides of the issue. In other words, we want to have it both ways. We want to be accepted by those who agree with us, but we also want acceptance from those who disagree. So we try to take the middle of the road and often end up with the muddle of the road.

But some questions in life cannot be avoided; a choice must be made! As we continue our study in Luke’s Gospel, we come to chapter eleven, and verses fourteen to twenty-eight. As we examine this text we are faced with a question that requires a clear decision. From Jesus’ teaching we will see clearly there are times in life when “You Can’t Have it Both Ways.”

Listen carefully now as I read the text, **Luke 11:14-28**. Here is the Word of God.

Luke, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, records this event in several STAGES that help us to clearly understand “You Can’t Have it Both Ways.”

The First STAGE is,

The Miraculous Action

Luke records Jesus casting out a demon. This was nothing new. Jesus had done this often – before and after this incident. And, He had empowered His disciples, both the Twelve and the Seventy, to cast out demons too. As you may recall the Seventy came back filled with joy

because the demons were subject to them (Luke 10:17). Jesus affirmed their power over evil spirits, but encouraged them to rejoice more in the fact that their names were written in heaven.

Some modern scholars question the whole concept of demon possession or oppression as it's recorded in the New Testament. They say that those who exhibited certain symptoms had physical or mental illnesses which were incorrectly diagnosed. So, because the people of that day didn't know how to diagnose or treat the problem, they just attributed it to demons. Those same scholars further conclude that Jesus, though He knew better, simply went along with their understanding so as not to confuse them. Knowing what we know about Jesus and His ministry, that's absurd! Jesus was God in the flesh; He knew all things.

Unfortunately these wrong ideas have found acceptance with many professing Believers today. George Barna's research among born-again Christians in North America reveals how deeply this error has penetrated. In a national survey he made this statement, "The Devil, or Satan, is NOT a living being but is a symbol of evil." Then asking that segment of his survey respondents who have identified themselves as being Born Again, he states, "Do you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with that statement?"

The Born Again population replied with 32 percent agreeing strongly that Satan is only a symbol of evil; 11 percent agreed somewhat and 5 percent did not know. So, out of the total number responding, 48 percent either agreed that Satan is only symbolic or did not know!

But who should we believe - those who are held up as scholars, or Jesus Himself? If demon oppression or possession is not real, if it's only a figment of people's imagination, then this text is nonsense! And you know what? Jesus doesn't talk nonsense. He is the Living Word. No offense to the scholars, but I'll take Jesus' word over theirs every time.

In this particular case the man in whom the demon was residing was mute. He could not speak. (Matthew records that the man was also blind – Matthew 12:22.) Why the demon chose to control the man this way we don't know.

What we do know is when Jesus drove the demon out of this man, he began to speak. Evidently he had been in this condition for some time, because when the people saw what happened they were dumbfounded. Here was a miraculous action! In their minds the condition of this man was irreversible. But Jesus, with apparent ease, cast the demon out.

We learn later in the text and from Jewish literature and history, that exorcism was not something unknown in that time. The Jews used elaborate incantations and the power of the demonic spirit's own name to "overpower" it, by round after round of scripted ritual actions. Those rituals involved threats and rebukes, getting more intense and invasive with each effort. A few ceremonies on record reached the point of actually "beating" the demon out, but most simply involved verbal coercion. Jesus did not need such rituals; His simple command was sufficient.

This casting out of the demon was the initial STAGE that laid the foundation for Jesus' teaching that "You Can't Have it Both Ways." The reaction of the crowd provides the second STAGE for us.

The Second STAGE is,

A Curious Accusation

Sometimes when people are confronted with irrefutable evidence they attack the messenger. That's what happened here. Some of the onlookers (Matthew says Pharisees) made the curious accusation that Jesus was casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub.

The identity of Beelzebub is first revealed in the Old Testament, in II Kings chapter 1. There, the Canaanite fertility deity, Ba-al, is named and worshipped as Baal-zebub. The name Beelzebub, depending on just a slight variation of spelling or pronunciation, can mean anything from "Lord of the House," to "Lord of the Flies," or "Lord of Manure." In any case, Beelzebub is another name for Satan. The Jews regarded him as the personification of all that was evil and satanic.

This exorcism and restoration of speech to this demon-possessed man was a miraculous, divine action by Jesus. It was exhibit A in the case He was making that He was in fact the long awaited and anticipated Jewish Messiah - and also the very Son of God. But the jury is extremely biased. We know that because the crowds witnessing such events, made up of the poor, the sick, the common and the sinner, respond with amazement and belief. The scribes and Pharisees respond to this miraculous action with an accusation that this miracle was wrought by the power of Satan and with a request for more miracles.

So, they accuse Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan; and then others in the crowd promptly ask Him, in verse 16, to perform more miracles! If they didn't believe the

miraculous sign they had just seen, what would induce them to believe? Nothing! Their minds were closed to the truth.

We have people like this today. They can be exposed to truth that is undeniable, but still refuse to believe. My mentor, Dr. J. Otis Yoder stated it this way; “To convince a skeptic against his will, he remains a skeptic still.” When a person’s mind is made up, the facts, to them, are irrelevant.

That Jesus had performed a notable miracle they couldn’t deny; the evidence was right in front of them. But, because of their unbelief, they could not acknowledge that reality. And so they made this curious accusation; “he casts out demons by the prince of demons.” Jesus’ response provides for us the next STAGE in understanding “You Can’t Have it Both Ways.”

The Final STAGE is,

The Comprehensive Answer

Our text tells us in verses 16 and 17 that Jesus knew they were trying to trap Him. He even knew what they were thinking. Arguing with deity is a losing proposition – every time!

The remaining verses of our text contain Jesus’ comprehensive answer to their accusations and the thoughts they hadn’t even expressed. In order to understand Jesus’ answer better, I’ll break it into several parts.

First, Jesus explains the fallacy of His opponent’s charge. This part is pretty simple. The accusation they made, when you really think about it, makes no sense. In verses 17 to 20 Jesus uses simple **reasoning and logic** to remind them that every kingdom that is divided against itself is brought to desolation, it is laid waste. The history of mankind has confirmed the reality of this truth again, and again, and again.

He argued that the head of an army would hardly work with his enemy against his own troops. If Satan was behind Jesus’ exorcisms, it was logical to assume that he was behind the exorcisms that some recognized Jewish exorcists performed (like Acts 19:13-14). Jesus’ antagonists were unwilling to concede that. They wanted to maintain a double standard believing that their approved exorcists operated with God’s power, but Jesus used Satan’s. God gave the Jewish exorcists their power too. Jesus believed in a real devil who heads a kingdom that is strong and united.

Jesus also said that a house that is divided collapses. This may be the result of division in the kingdom. A.T. Robertson writes “It may mean, *and house falls upon house*, “one tumbling house knocking down its neighbor, a graphic picture of what happens when a kingdom is divided against itself.” Both Wycliffe and Tyndale translated this phrase in that way. So then, since that is true, how can Satan’s kingdom survive if he and his demons are divided; if they’re pursuing different goals? It is not possible.

Furthermore, Jesus said, “If I am casting out demons by the power of the prince of demons, by whom do your followers cast them out?” In other words, if you apply this reasoning to me, it must logically be applied to your followers as well. If your argument is true, that a man must be in league with the devil to cast out demons, then your disciples have made a covenant with him too!

So, either you must give up your argument, or admit that the working of miracles is proof of God’s assistance. The fact that your disciples cast out demons condemns you and your argument. They are your judges; conclusive witnesses against the force of your reasoning.

At this point in the text Jesus introduces an interesting word picture into this discussion. “If, contrary to your accusation, I with ‘the finger of God’ cast out demons, then no doubt the kingdom of God has come among you.” As I noted earlier, the Jews had elaborate rituals and incantations they used in exorcism. Jesus, as sovereign over all spirits, good or evil, usually just gave the command to “Go.”

This imagery of the finger of God is mentioned in Exodus 8:19, in connection with the plagues God sent on Egypt. When the Egyptian magicians could not duplicate the plagues God sent they recognized they were dealing with a power greater than anything they knew. Jesus didn’t say the hand of God or the arm of God; although those terms are biblical. No, He just said “the finger of God.” We often think of a single finger as being quite powerless; but not so with God’s finger. That’s all it takes to cast out a demon. Jesus knew the Pharisees were familiar with the terminology Moses used and He was claiming that same source of divine power.

Jesus said that this miraculous power He displayed was proof that the kingdom of God had come among them. The kingdom was present in the person of the Son! Satan’s kingdom and God’s kingdom are at odds. If God is able to expel Satan from his place, his area of dominion, then the reign of God has come.

In verses 21 and 22 Jesus' answer progresses from **reason to revelation**. He illustrates the power of Satan as the "strong man" who is fully armed and protecting his possessions, his place of jurisdiction. Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians warns us about giving "place" or an area of jurisdiction to Satan. You'll find that in Ephesians 4:27. I'll comment on this in greater detail later in this teaching. Remember, as Jesus is giving this teaching, the man who was delivered from the demon is standing in the crowd.

Jesus goes on to say that when a stronger man comes (in this case, Jesus), he overcomes the guard, takes away all the armor which made him feel invincible, and divides the spoils. That is what Jesus did for this demon-possessed man. He came in, broke through Satan's armor, his defenses, and took his goods. He took this man out of Satan's bondage and set him free. You know something? Jesus did the same for you, and for me.

Paul speaks of this same power in Colossians 2:13 to 15 Paul writes; "*And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. [Now listen carefully]. **Having disarmed [demonic] principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.***" In other words, Christ, the victor, takes ALL!

The meaning and purpose of this illustration is clear. Since Jesus is spoiling the devil's kingdom, He can't be Satan's equal or a lesser minion; He must be stronger than the devil. These arguments are rational, cogent, and compelling.

Jesus is building a comprehensive answer. Up to this point, He has shown them their faulty logic by sound reasoning; Satan doesn't work against himself. He has shown them by revelation, and by the miracle, that He is more powerful than Satan. Therefore He must be divine. Now He puts the weight of belief or unbelief squarely on their shoulders.

He says in verse 23; "*He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who gathers not with Me, scatters.*" To be with Him conveys the idea of close proximity, of nearness. That implies fellowship and fellowship happens among those who have much in common.

Here, Jesus uses the imagery of field and flock. Those who did not gather people as sheaves and sheep into the fold of the kingdom with Jesus scattered them abroad. There was no

neutral ground. People were either united in support of Jesus or they opposed Him. This is the answer of responsibility; personal **responsibility!** With this statement Jesus makes it crystal clear, “You Can’t Have it Both Ways.” YOU must choose which side you’re on!

This part of Jesus’ answer is so important for us today. There are only two kingdoms; the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Yet many people, even many professing followers of Christ, teach and practice the fallacy that there are several ways to God. But Jesus said “*You’re either with Me or against Me.*” You can’t be partially for Jesus and partially against Him.

Jesus follows up this clear statement with a warning to His listeners and to us. In making this statement, Jesus implies that the Jewish leaders had, in the past, exorcised demons from people. But getting the demon cast out is only half the issue. Nature abhors a vacuum. That vacancy left by the demon’s exit must be filled with something.

If the person who had been delivered from demon possession did not fill that void with the life-giving power of belief in Jesus, he or she was left defenseless against the return of the demon. The demon would wander through dry places, waterless places, seeking a dwelling place. It was the understanding of the Jewish people that demons inhabited the desolate, desert areas. Scripture supports that view in places like Revelation 18:2 and Isaiah 13:21. Not finding a home in those dry places, he decides to return to his original dwelling.

Think back to Jesus’ comments earlier about the strong man guarding his goods. If Jesus is not invited to become the “strong man” and to defend His goods, then the void left by the demon’s departure will be filled by something or someone else. Not only was it bad to oppose Jesus and attribute His works to Satan, but it was worse to exercise God’s expulsive power without also preaching the gospel to people.

This is what happens when the Gospel is reduced to moralism. People are encouraged to “try God” and receive a better life. But God doesn’t give samples or taste tests. Only those who cast themselves at the foot of the Cross for forgiveness and cleansing are truly His children. Many people seek reformation without transformation. They attempt to give up certain habits by their own willpower. But that is not the message of the Gospel. Many of their attempts end in failure and in additional bondage; just like Jesus talked about in these verses.

Jesus warned that the empty place would be filled by the demon that had been cast out, accompanied by seven other demons more wicked than he. After all, Jesus, speaking of Satan,

said that “the thief comes to steal, to kill, and to destroy.” That is the *modus operandi* of demonic spirits as they do the bidding of their evil master. These would take up residence in the person and the final condition of such a one is far worse than the original possession.

Often times, those most hardened to the message of the Gospel are those who once embraced the truth, but failed to continue on with the Lord. Hebrews chapter six speaks of them with these words. *“Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits. For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying [present tense] once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.”*

As Jesus was concluding His teaching, a woman from the crowd spoke up. *“Blessed is the womb that bore You and the breasts at which You nursed.”* This woman was fulfilling Mary’s prophecy recorded for us in Luke 1:48; *“Behold, from now on, all generations will call me blessed.”* She evidently was impressed with Jesus and chose her words as a compliment.

Notice Jesus’ response. He agreed with her statement; but then added more. He said, “Yes – but.” Your statement is true, *“but I say to you that blessed are those who hear the Word of God and obey it.”* Jesus acknowledged that His mother, Mary, held a special place in God’s plan. But He also pointed out that the humblest real saint of God has an even greater position than Mary and is deserving of just as much honor. These words are a vivid reminder to us that pious statements are no substitution for obedience!

Earlier in His ministry Jesus had asked His hearers, *“Why do you call me Lord and refuse to do the things I say?”* Here in this text He was once again equating obedience with identification. To call Jesus, Lord, yet to refuse to obey Him, opens our lives to the realm and power of Satan.

Now, what does all this mean for us today? Do we still have to deal with demon possession and its effects? Some would scoff even at that question. They would wonder how someone living in our ‘enlightened’ times could still believe in something so ignorant, so out-of-touch with modern sensibilities? But they would be wrong to ignore the very real power of demonic spirits. Refusing to believe in what is real doesn’t make something nonexistent.

I want to go back to a Scripture I mentioned earlier from Ephesians chapter four. In verses 26 and 27 of that chapter, Paul writes; *“Be angry, but do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your wrath; and give no opportunity for the devil.”* I wonder if Paul was thinking about the words of Jesus here in Luke eleven.

The word, place, is translated from the Greek word *topos*. It means, an inhabited space; as a city, village, or district. Metaphorically, it can mean an opportunity or an occasion for acting. So, just what does it mean to “give place to the devil?” The English Standard Version says, “Give no opportunity to the devil.” That leads us to the question, “opportunity for what?”

If we take the literal meaning of the word, *topos*, (which is a noun), we find that a city, a village, or a district all have at least one thing in common. They are areas of jurisdiction. They have clearly defined boundaries and there is a designated authority within those boundaries. So, if we refuse to deal with our anger, we give to Satan an area of jurisdiction, a place of authority or control within our soul; our mind, will, and emotions. He can’t take this on his own because we are protected by the ‘strong man’ Christ. But we can give it to him as this verse clearly states.

What does he do with this “place” we give to him? Jesus addressed this in Matthew 18:34 and 35. Jesus said of the unmerciful, angry, servant, *“His lord was angry, and delivered him to the TORMENTORS, till he should pay all that was due unto him. Now listen! So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses.”* Satan uses the “place” we give him to send out his tormentors.

And what are those tormentors? Anxiety, fear, worry, lust, and anger are just a few. What do we do when we find ourselves being overcome by these things? We pray and ask God to forgive us for the sin of lust, or worry, or anger. And does He forgive us? Certainly! But we are quickly overcome by the same things again and again and we can’t understand, why? We have not eliminated the source of the tormentors; the area of control in our soul that we’ve given to Satan.

But, praise God, there is hope. Jesus said in our text, “...*how can one enter into a strong man’s house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.*” Therefore, in order to regain that area of our soul we’ve surrendered to Satan, we must, in Jesus’ words, “first bind the strong man.”

Can you and I do that in our own strength? Hardly! But there is power in the name of Jesus, and there is power in His blood. Satan cannot stand against these; he must give way.

There are many people who can testify that their anger and bitterness led to bizarre behavior. Some of them were confined in psychiatric wards or mental institutions because they heard voices urging them to engage in all kinds of destructive behavior. But when they confessed their anger and bitterness, and accepted the grace of God and the cleansing power of His blood, the voices they’d been hearing, stopped. The urges to destroy and injure vanished. The tormentors that had robbed them of a fulfilling life were gone. Praise God!

There are many others who have never reached the condition of those I just mentioned, but they too were unable to live a godly, joyful life. They applied these principles of God’s Word and found healing and wholeness.

Let me share with you the process I’ve found to be extremely helpful. First, I acknowledge that my holding on to anger is a violation of Christ’s command to forgive. I ask God to forgive me for my disobedience. Then, I ask Him, in the name of Jesus, and through the power of Jesus’ blood to “take back” the area of control that I’ve yielded to Satan. And finally, based on Jesus’ warning in our text, about filling that empty place, I ask Him to take that cleansed area and fill it with His truth and His presence. I can testify to you that I have found amazing power for victory in this process! And you know something, my friend, you can too.

Who is the strong man in your life? Is the “finger of God” present in your life? Are you experiencing the daily power of Christ to live and walk in victory? I’m not talking about perfection, but about righteous, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Or do you live in constant defeat, unable to overcome the lusts of your flesh? Do you ask God’s forgiveness yet find yourself bound by destructive habits and behaviors? Are you bound by the inner demons of anger, bitterness, and an unforgiving spirit? Jesus died on the cross to disarm these demonic powers in your life, IF, you will only let Him. He wants to be the ‘strong

man' in your life; and He will be if you surrender to Him in complete obedience. The choice is yours. What will it be?

Whatever your choice remember this important truth; "You Can't Have it Both Ways."