

A Caution Against Bigotry

by John Wesley

We should not forbid one who casts out devils if he followeth not us, but rather consider the work and believe what we see with our eyes.

Scripture: Mark 9:38

Topics: "Unity in Christ", "Bigotry"

Description

John Wesley warns against the dangers of bigotry in the church, emphasizing that true followers of Christ should not forbid others who perform good works in His name, even if they do not belong to the same group or share the same beliefs. He reflects on the tendency to judge others based on their affiliations or differences in doctrine, urging believers to recognize the work of God in all who cast out devils, regardless of their background. Wesley concludes that to act in a bigoted manner is to oppose God's work and encourages a spirit of unity and acceptance among Christians.

Transcript

"And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy name: and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us. But Jesus said, Forbid him not." Mark 9:38, 39.

1. In the preceding verses we read, that after the Twelve had been disputing "which of them should be the greatest," Jesus took a little child, and set him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, said unto them, "Whosoever shall receive one of these little children in My name, receiveth me; and whosoever receiveth me, receiveth not me" only, "but him that sent me." Then "John answered," that is, said, with reference to what our Lord had spoken just before, "Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy name, and we forbad him, because he followeth not us." As if he had said, "Ought we to have received him? In receiving him, should we have received thee? Ought we not rather to have forbidden him? Did not we do well therein?" "But Jesus said, Forbid him not."

2. The same passage is recited by St. Luke, and almost in the same words. But it may be asked, "What is this to us, seeing no man now casts out devils? Has not the power of doing this been withdrawn from the church, for twelve or fourteen hundred years? How then are we concerned in the case here proposed, or in our Lord's decision of it?"

3. Perhaps more nearly than is commonly imagined; the case proposed being no uncommon case. That we may reap our full advantage from it, I design to show, first, in what sense men may, and do, now cast

out devils: secondly, what we may understand by, "He followeth not us." I shall, thirdly, explain our Lord's direction, "Forbid him not;" and conclude with an inference from the whole.

I. 1. I am, in the first place, to show, in what sense men may, and do, now cast out devils.

In order to have the clearest view of this, we should remember, that (according to the scriptural account) as God dwells and works in the children of light, so the devil dwells and works in the children of darkness. As the Holy Spirit possesses the souls of good men, so the evil spirit possesses the souls of the wicked. Hence it is that the Apostle terms him "the god of this world;" from the uncontrolled power he has over worldly men. Hence our blessed Lord styles him "the prince of this world;" so absolute is his dominion over it. And hence St. John: "We know that we are of God, and" all who are not of God, "the whole world," "_en toI ponErOi_ keitai," --not lieth in wickedness, but "lieth in the wicked one;" lives and moves in him, as they who are not of the world do in God.

2. For the devil is not to be considered only as "a roaring lion going about seeking whom he may devour;" nor barely as a subtle enemy, who cometh unawares upon poor souls, and "leads them captive at his will;" but as he who dwelleth in them, and walketh in them; who ruleth the darkness or wickedness of this world (of worldly men and all their dark designs and actions), by keeping possession of their hearts, setting up his throne there, and bringing every thought into obedience to himself. Thus the "strong one armed keepeth his house;" and if this "unclean spirit" sometimes "go out of a man," yet he often returns with "seven spirits worse than himself, and they enter in and dwell there." Nor can he be idle in his dwelling. He is continually "working in" these "children of disobedience." he works in them with power, with mighty energy, transforming them into his own likeness, effacing all the remains of the image of God, and preparing them for every evil word and work.

3. It is, therefore, an unquestionable truth, that the god and prince of this world still possesses all who know not God. Only the manner wherein he possesses them now differs from that wherein he did it of old time. Then he frequently tormented their bodies as well as souls, and that openly, without any disguise: now he torments their souls only (unless in some rare cases), and that as covertly as possible. The reason of this difference is plain: it was then his aim to drive mankind into superstition; therefore, he wrought as openly as he could. But it is his aim to drive us into infidelity; therefore, he works as privately as he can: for the more secret he is, the more he prevails.

4. Yet, if we may credit historians, there are countries, even now, where he works as openly as aforetime. "But why in savage and barbarous countries only? Why not in Italy, France, or England?" For a very plain reason: he knows his men, and he knows what he hath to do with each. To Laplanders he appears barefaced; because he is to fix them in superstition and gross idolatry. But with you he is pursuing a different point. He is to make you idolize yourselves; to make you wiser in your own eyes than God himself, than all the oracles of God. Now, in order to do this, he must not appear in his own shape: that would frustrate his design. No: He uses all his art to make you deny his being, till he has you safe in his own place.

5. He reigns, therefore, although in a different way, yet as absolute in one land as in the other. He has the gay Italian infidel in his teeth, as sure as the wild Tartar. But he is fast asleep in the mouth of the lion, who is too wise to wake him out of sleep. So he only plays with him for the present, and when he pleases, swallows him up!

The god of this world holds his English worshippers full as fast as those in Lapland. But it is not his business to affright them, lest they should fly to the God of heaven. The prince of darkness, therefore, does not appear, while he rules over these his willing subjects. The conqueror holds his captives so much the safer, because they imagine themselves at liberty. Thus "the strong one armed keepeth his house, and his goods are in peace;" neither the Deist nor nominal Christian suspects he is there: so he and they are perfectly at peace with each other.

6. All this while he works with energy in them. He blinds the eyes of their understanding, so that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ cannot shine upon them. He chains their souls down to earth and hell, with the chains of their own vile affections. He binds them down to the earth, by love of the world, love of money, of pleasure, of praise. And by pride, envy, anger, hate, revenge, he causes their souls to draw nigh unto hell; acting the more secure and uncontrolled, because they know not that he acts at all.

7. But how easily may we know the cause from its effects! These are sometimes gross and palpable. So they were in the most refined of the heathen nations. Go no farther than the admired, the virtuous Romans; and you will find these, when at the height of their learning and glory, "filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, despiteful, proud, boasters, disobedient to parents, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful."

8. The strongest parts of this description are confirmed by one whom some may think a more unexceptionable witness. I mean their brother heathen, Dion Cassius; who observes, that, before Caesar's return from Gaul, not only gluttony and lewdness of every kind were open and barefaced; not only falsehood, injustice, and unmercifulness abounded, in public courts, as well as private families; but the most outrageous robberies, rapine, and murders were so frequent in all parts of Rome, that few men went out of doors without making their wills, as not knowing if they should return alive!

9. As gross and palpable are the works of the devil among many (if not all) the modern heathens. The natural religion of the Creeks, Cherokees, Chickasaws, and all other Indians bordering on our southern settlements (not of a few single men, but of entire nations), is to torture all their prisoners from morning till night, till at length they roast them to death; and upon the slightest undesigned provocation, to come behind and shoot any of their own countrymen! Yea, it is a common thing among them, for the son, if he thinks his father lives too long, to knock out his brains; and for mother, if she is tired of her children, to fasten stones about their necks, and throw three or four of them into the river, one after another!

10. It were to be wished, that none but heathens had practised such gross, palpable works of the devil. But we dare not say so. Even in cruelty and bloodshed, how little have the Christians come behind them! And not the Spaniards or Portuguese alone, butchering thousands in South America: not the Dutch only in the East Indies, or the French in North America, following the Spaniards step by step: our own countrymen, too, have wantoned in blood, and exterminated whole nations; plainly proving thereby what spirit it is that dwells and works in the children of disobedience.

11. These monsters might almost make us overlook the works of the devil that are wrought in our own country. But, alas! we cannot open our eyes even here, without seeing them on every side. Is it a small proof of his power, that common swearers, drunkards, whoremongers, adulterers, thieves, robbers, sodomites, murderers, are still found in every part of our land? How triumphant does the prince of this world reign in all these children of disobedience!

12. He less openly, but no less effectually, works in dissemblers, tale-bearers, liars, slanderers; in oppressors and extortioners, in the perjured, the seller of his friend, his honour, his conscience, his country. And yet these may talk of religion or conscience still; of honour, virtue, and public spirit! But they can no more deceive Satan than they can God. He likewise knows those that are his: and a great multitude they are, out of every nation and people, of whom he has full possession at this day.

13. If you consider this, you cannot but see in what sense men may now also cast out devils: yea, and every Minister of Christ does cast them out, if his Lord's work prosper in his hand.

By the power of God attending his word, he brings these sinners to repentance; an entire inward as well as outward change, from all evil to all good. And this is, in a sound sense, to cast out devils, out of the souls wherein they had hitherto dwelt. The strong one can no longer keep his house. A stronger than he is come upon him, and hath cast him out, and taken possession for himself, and made it an habitation of God through his Spirit. Here, then, the energy of Satan ends, and the Son of God "destroys the works of the devil." The understanding of the sinner is now enlightened, and his heart sweetly drawn to God. His desires are refined, his affections purified; and, being filled with the Holy Ghost, he grows in grace till he is not only holy in heart, but in all manner of conversation.

14. All this is indeed the work of God. It is God alone who can cast out Satan. But he is generally pleased to do this by man as an instrument in his hand: who is then said to cast out devils in his name, by his power and authority. And he sends whom he will send upon this great work; but usually such as man would never have thought of: for "His ways are not as our ways, neither his thoughts as our thoughts." Accordingly, he chooses the weak to confound the mighty; the foolish to confound the wise; for this plain reason, that he may secure the glory to himself; that "no flesh may glory in his sight."

II. 1. But shall we not forbid one who thus "casteth out devils," if "he followeth not us"? This, it seems, was both the judgement and practice of the Apostle, till he referred the case to his Master. "We forbid him," saith he, "because he followeth not us!" which he supposed to be a very sufficient reason. What we may understand by this expression, "He followeth not us," is the next point to be considered.

The lowest circumstance we can understand thereby, is, he has no outward connexion with us. We do not labour in conjunction with each other. He is not our fellow-helper in the gospel. And indeed whensoever our Lord is pleased to send many labourers into his harvest, they cannot all act in subordination to, or connexion with, each other. Nay, they cannot be personal acquaintance with, nor be so much as known to, one another. Many there will necessarily be, in different parts of the harvest, so far from having any mutual intercourse, that they will be as absolute strangers to each other as if they had lived in different ages. And concerning any of these whom we know not, we may doubtless say, "He followeth not us."

2. A Second meaning of this expression may be, --he is not of our party. It has long been matter of melancholy consideration to all who pray for the peace of Jerusalem, that so many several parties are still subsisting among those who are all styled Christians. This has been particularly observable in our own countrymen, who have been continually dividing from each other, upon points of no moment, and many times such as religion had no concern in. The most trifling circumstances have given rise to different parties, which have continued for many generations; and each of these would be ready to object to one who was on the other side, "He followeth not us."

3. That expression may mean, Thirdly, --he differs from us in our religious opinions. There was a time when all Christians were of one mind, as well as of one heart, so great grace was upon them all, when

they were first filled with the Holy Ghost! But how short a space did this blessing continue! How soon was that unanimity lost! and difference of opinion sprang up again, even in the church of Christ, --and that not in nominal but in real Christians; nay, in the very chief of them, the Apostles themselves! Nor does it appear that the difference which then began was ever entirely removed. We do not find that even those pillars in the temple of God, so long as they remained upon the earth, were ever brought to think alike, to be of one mind, particularly with regard to the ceremonial law. It is therefore no way surprising, that infinite varieties of opinion should now be found in the Christian church. A very probable consequence of this is, that whenever we see any "casting out devils," he will be one that, in this sense, "followeth not us" --that is not of our opinion. It is scarce to be imagined he will be of our mind in all points, even of religion. He may very probably think in a different manner from us, even on several subjects of importance; such as the nature and use of the moral law, the eternal decrees of God, the sufficiency and efficacy of his grace, and the perseverance of his children.

4. He may differ from us, Fourthly, not only in opinion, but likewise in some point of practice. He may not approve of that manner of worshipping God which is practised in our congregation; and may judge that to be more profitable for his soul which took its rise from Calvin or Martin Luther. He may have many objections to that Liturgy which we approve of beyond all others; many doubts concerning that form of church government which we esteem both apostolical and scriptural. Perhaps he may go farther from us yet: he may, from a principle of conscience, refrain from several of those which we believe to be the ordinances of Christ. Or, if we both agree that they are ordained of God, there may still remain a difference between us, either as to the manner of administering those ordinances, or the persons to whom they should be administered. Now the unavoidable consequence of any of these differences will be, that he who thus differs from us must separate himself, with regard to those points, from our society. In this respect, therefore, "he followeth not us": he is not (as we phrase it) "of our Church."

5. But in a far stronger sense "he followeth not us," who is not only of a different Church, but of such a Church as we account to be in many respects anti-scriptural and anti-Christian, --a Church which we believe to be utterly false and erroneous in her doctrines, as well as very dangerously wrong in her practice; guilty of gross superstition as well as idolatry, --a Church that has added many articles to the faith which was once delivered to the saints; that has dropped one whole commandment of God, and made void several of the rest by her traditions; and that, pretending the highest veneration for, and strictest conformity to, the ancient Church, has nevertheless brought in numberless innovations, without any warrant either from antiquity or Scripture. Now, most certainly, "he followeth not us," who stands at so great a distance from us.

6. And yet there may be a still wider difference than this. He who differs from us in judgement or practice, may possibly stand at a greater distance from us in affection than in judgement. And this indeed is a very natural and a very common effect of the other. The differences which begin in points of opinion seldom terminate there. They generally spread into the affections, and then separate chief friends. Nor are any animosities so deep and irreconcilable as those that spring from disagreement in religion. For this cause the bitterest enemies of a man are those of his own household. For this the father rises against his own children, and the children against the father; and perhaps persecute each other even to the death, thinking all the time they are doing God service. It is therefore nothing more than we may expect, if those who differ from us, either in religious opinions or practice, soon contract a sharpness, yea, bitterness towards us; if they are more and more prejudiced against us, till they conceive as ill an opinion of our persons as of our principles. An almost necessary consequence of this will be, they will speak in the same manner as they

think of us. They will set themselves in opposition to us, and, as far as they are able, hinder our work; seeing it does not appear to them to be the work of God, but either of man or of the devil. He that thinks, speaks, and acts in such a manner as this, in the highest sense, "followeth not us."

7. I do not indeed conceive, that the person of whom the Apostle speaks in the text (although we have no particular account of him, either in the context, or in any other part of holy writ) went so far as this. We have no ground to suppose that there was any material difference between him and the Apostles, much less that he had any prejudice either against them or their Master. It seems we may gather thus much from our Lord's own words, which immediately follow the text: "There is no man which shall do a miracle in My name, that can lightly speak evil of me." But I purposely put the case in the strongest light, adding all the circumstances which can well be conceived, that, being forewarned of the temptation in its full strength, we may in no case yield to it, and fight against God.

III. 1. Suppose, then, a man have no intercourse with us, suppose he be not of our party, suppose he separate from our Church, yea, and widely differ from us, both in judgement, practice, and affection; yet if we see even this man "casting out devils," Jesus saith, "Forbid him not." This important direction of our Lord I am, in the Third place, to explain.

2. If we see this man casting out devils: But it is well if, in such a case, we would believe even what we saw with our eyes, if we did not give the lie to our own senses. He must be little acquainted with human nature who does not immediately perceive how extremely unready we should be to believe that any man does cast out devils who "followeth not us" in all or most of the senses above recited: I had almost said, in any of them, seeing we may easily learn even from what passes in our own breasts, how unwilling men are to allow anything good in those who do not in all things agree with themselves.

3. "But what is a sufficient, reasonable proof, that a man does (in the sense above) cast out devils?" The answer is easy. Is there full proof, (1) That a person before us was a gross, open sinner? (2) That he is not so now? that he has broke off his sins, and lives a Christian life? And (3) That this change was wrought by his hearing this man preach? If these three points be plain and undeniable, then you have sufficient, reasonable proof, such as you cannot resist without wilful sin, that this man casts out devils.

4. Then "forbid him not." Beware how you attempt to hinder him, either by your authority, or arguments, or persuasions. Do not in any wise strive to prevent his using all the power which God has given him. If you have authority with him, do not use that authority to stop the work of God. Do not furnish him with reasons why he ought not any more to speak in the name of Jesus. Satan will not fail to supply him with these, if you do not second him therein. Persuade him not to depart from the work. If he should give place to the devil and you, many souls might perish in their iniquity, but their blood would God require at your hands.

5. "But what, if he be only a layman, who casts out devils! Ought I not to forbid him then?"

Is the fact allowed? Is there reasonable proof that this man has or does cast out devils? If there is, forbid him not; no, not at the peril of your soul. Shall not God work by whom he will work? No man can do these works unless God is with him; unless God hath sent him for this very thing. But if God hath sent him, will you call him back? Will you forbid him to go?

6. "But I do not know that he is sent of God." "Now herein is a marvellous thing" (may any of the seals of his mission say, any whom he hath brought from Satan to God), "that ye know not whence this man is, and, behold, he hath opened mine eyes! If this man were not of God, he could do nothing." If you doubt

the fact, send for the parents of the man: send for his brethren, friends, acquaintance. But if you cannot doubt this, if you must needs acknowledge "that a notable miracle hath been wrought" then with what conscience, with what face, can you charge him whom God hath sent, "not to speak any more in his name"?

7. I allow, that it is highly expedient, whoever preaches in his name should have an outward as well as an inward call, but that it is absolutely necessary, I deny.

"Nay, is not the Scripture express? 'No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron'" (Heb. 5:4).

Numberless times has this text been quoted on the occasion, as containing the very strength of the cause; but surely never was so unhappy a quotation. For, First, Aaron was not called to preach at all: he was called "to offer gifts and sacrifice for sin." That was his peculiar employment. Secondly, these men do not offer sacrifice at all, but only preach; which Aaron did not. Therefore it is not possible to find one text in all the Bible which is more wide of the point than this.

8. "But what was the practice of the apostolic age?" You may easily see in the Acts of the Apostles. In the eighth chapter we read, "There was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the Apostles" (verse 1). "Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word" (verse 4). Now, were all these outwardly called to preach? No man in his senses can think so. Here, then, is an undeniable proof, what was the practice of the apostolic age. Here you see not one, but a multitude of lay preachers, men that were only sent of God.

9. Indeed, so far is the practice of the apostolic age from inclining us to think it was unlawful for a man to preach before he was ordained, that we have reason to think it was then accounted necessary. Certainly the practice and the direction of the Apostle Paul was, to prove a man before he was ordained at all. "Let these" (the deacons), says he, "first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon" (1 Tim. 3:10). Proved, how? By setting them to construe a sentence of Greek and asking them a few commonplace questions? O amazing proof of a Minister of Christ! Nay; but by making a clear, open trial (as is still done by most of the Protestant Churches of Europe) not only whether their lives be holy and unblamable, but whether they have such gifts as are absolutely and indispensably necessary in order to edify the church of Christ.

10. But what if a man has these, and has brought sinners to repentance, and yet the Bishop will not ordain him? Then the Bishop does forbid him to cast out devils. But I dare not forbid him: I have published my reasons to all the world. Yet it is still insisted I ought to do it. You who insist upon it answer those reasons. I know not that any have done this yet, or even made an attempt of doing it. Only some have spoken of them as very weak and trifling: and this was prudent enough; for it is far easier to despise, at least seem to despise, an argument, than to answer it. Yet till this is done I must say, when I have reasonable proof that any man does cast out devils, whatever others do, I dare not forbid him, lest I be found even to fight against God.

11. And whosoever thou art that fearest God, "forbid him not, either directly or indirectly. There are many ways of doing this. You indirectly forbid him, if you either wholly deny, or despise and make little account of, the work which God has wrought by his hands. You indirectly forbid him, when you discourage him in his work, by drawing him into disputes concerning it, by raising objections against it, or frightening him with

consequences which very possibly will never be. You forbid him when you show any unkindness toward him either in language or behaviour; and much more when you speak of him to others either in an unkind or a contemptuous manner; when you endeavour to represent him to any either in an odious or a despicable light. You are forbidding him all the time you are speaking evil of him, or making no account of his labours. O forbid him not in any of these ways; nor by forbidding others to hear him, --by discouraging sinners from hearing that word which is able to save their souls!

12. Yea, if you would observe our Lord's direction in its full meaning and extent, then remember his word: "He that is not for us is against us; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth": he that gathereth not men into the kingdom of God, assuredly scatters them from it. For there can be no neuter in this war. Every one is either on God's side, or on Satan's. Are you on God's side? Then you will not only not forbid any man that casts out devils, but you will labour, to the uttermost of your power, to forward him in the work. You will readily acknowledge the work of God, and confess the greatness of it. You will remove all difficulties and objections, as far as may be, out of his way. You will strengthen his hands by speaking honourably of him before all men, and avowing the things which you have seen and heard. You will encourage others to attend upon his word, to hear him whom God hath sent. And you will omit no actual proof of tender love, which God gives you an opportunity of showing him.

IV. 1. If we willingly fail in any of these points, if we either directly or indirectly forbid him, "because he followeth not us," then we are bigots. This is the inference I draw from what has been said. But the term "bigotry," I fear, as frequently as it is used, is almost as little understood as "enthusiasm." It is too strong an attachment to, or fondness for, our own party. opinion, church, and religion. Therefore he is a bigot who is so fond of any of these, so strongly attached to them, as to forbid any who casts out devils because he differs from himself in any or all these particulars.

2, Do you beware of this. Take care (1) That you do not convict yourself of bigotry, by your unreadiness to believe that any man does cast out devils, who differs from you. And if you are clear thus far, if you acknowledge the fact, then examine yourself, (2) Am I not convicted of bigotry in this, in forbidding him directly or indirectly? Do I not directly forbid him on this ground, because he is not of my party, because he does not fall in with my opinions, or because he does not worship God according to that scheme of religion which I have received from my fathers?

3. Examine yourself, Do I not indirectly at least forbid him, on any of these grounds? Am I not sorry that God should thus own and bless a man that holds such erroneous opinions? Do I not discourage him, because he is not of my Church, by disputing with him concerning it, by raising objections, and by perplexing his mind with distant consequences? Do I show no anger, contempt, or unkindness of any sort, either in my words or actions? Do I not mention behind his back, his (real or supposed) faults --his defects or infirmities? Do not I hinder sinners from hearing his word? If you do any of these things, you are a bigot to this day.

4. "Search me, O Lord, and prove me. Try out my reins and my heart! Look well if there be any way of" bigotry "in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." In order to examine ourselves thoroughly, let the case be proposed in the strongest manner. What, if I were to see a Papist, an Arian, a Socinian casting out devils? If I did, I could not forbid even him, without convicting myself of bigotry. Yea, if it could be supposed that I should see a Jew, a Deist, or a Turk, doing the same, were I to forbid him either directly or indirectly, I should be no better than a bigot still.

5. O stand clear of this! But be not content with not forbidding any that casts out devils. It is well to go thus far; but do not stop here. If you will avoid all bigotry, go on. In every instance of this kind, whatever the instrument be, acknowledge the finger of God. And not only acknowledge, but rejoice in his work, and praise his name with thanksgiving. Encourage whomsoever God is pleased to employ, to give himself wholly up thereto. Speak well of him wheresoever you are; defend his character and his mission. Enlarge, as far as you can, his sphere of action; show him all kindness in word and deed; and cease not to cry to God in his behalf, that he may save both himself and them that hear him.

6. I need add but one caution: Think not the bigotry of another is any excuse for your own. It is not impossible, that one who casts out devils himself, may yet forbid you so to do. You may observe, this is the very case mentioned in the text. The Apostles forbade another to do what they did themselves. But beware of retorting. It is not your part to return evil for evil. Another's not observing the direction of our Lord, is no reason why you should neglect it. Nay, but let him have all the bigotry to himself. If he forbid you, do not you forbid him. Rather labour, and watch, and pray the more, to confirm your love toward him. If he speak all manner of evil of you, speak all manner of good (that is true) of him. Imitate herein that glorious saying of a great man (O that he had always breathed the same spirit!), "Let Luther call me a hundred devils; I will still reverence him as a messenger of God."

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