

Matthew 12:24

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.

Analysis

'But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.' The Pharisees' response contrasts starkly with the crowds': rather than considering messianic identity, they attributed Jesus's power to 'Beelzebub' (Βεελζεβούλ/Beelzeboul), prince of demons (Satan). The word 'fellow' (οὗτος/houtos) is dismissive—refusing to name Jesus respectfully. Their accusation: Jesus casts out demons through demonic power—a satanic civil war. The charge is absurd (Jesus demonstrates in v.25-29), yet it reveals their spiritual blindness. Confronted with undeniable supernatural power, they couldn't deny it but refused to acknowledge divine source. Reformed theology sees this as example of judicial hardening: persistently rejecting clear truth, they reached state where obvious evidence produced perverse interpretation. This introduces Jesus's teaching on blasphemy against Holy Spirit (v.31-32)—attributing to Satan what Holy Spirit clearly accomplishes through Christ. Such willful inversion of truth demonstrates complete spiritual corruption.

Historical Context

Beelzebub (Βεελζεβούλ/Beelzeboul) derives from Hebrew בָּעֵל זְבֻב (Ba'al Zevuv, 'lord of flies'), mockingly referring to Philistine god Baal-zebub (2 Kings 1:2). By Jesus's time, it became title for Satan, prince of demons. The Pharisees' accusation was calculated: they couldn't deny Jesus's miracles—too many witnesses, too dramatic—so they explained them through satanic power. This accusation appeared earlier (Matthew 9:34) and recurs (Mark 3:22, Luke 11:15, John 7:20,

8:48-52). It demonstrates progression: initial skepticism hardened into systematic rejection and ultimately demonization of Jesus. The charge was particularly wicked because these religious experts knew Scripture, recognized genuine spiritual power, yet deliberately misattributed it. Jesus's response (v.25-37) exposes their illogic and pronounces severe warning. Early church faced similar accusations: persecutors attributed Christian miracles to magic or demons. Throughout history, genuine spiritual movements have been demonized by religious establishments feeling threatened. The pattern warns: religious knowledge doesn't prevent spiritual blindness; it can even intensify it.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How can religious people become so hardened that they attribute obvious works of God to Satan—what spiritual dynamics produce this perversion?
2. What's the difference between honest doubt or questions about Jesus versus the willful rejection demonstrated by Pharisees?
3. How do you recognize when you're rationalizing away clear evidence of God's work rather than submitting to it?

Interlinear Text

οἱ	δὲ	Φαρισαῖοι	ἀκούσαντες	εἶπον	Οὗτος	οὐκ	
G3588	But	when the Pharisees	heard	it they said	This	not	
G1161		G5330	G191	G2036	G3778	G3756	
ἐκβάλλει	τὰ	δαιμονίων	εἰ	μὴ	ἐν	τῷ	Βεελζεβοὺλ
cast out	G3588	devils	G1487	G3361	by	G3588	Beelzebub
G1544		G1140			G1722		G954
ἄρχοντι	τῶν	δαιμονίων					
the prince	G3588	devils					
G758		G1140					

Additional Cross-References

Mark 3:22 (Evil): And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils.

Matthew 9:34 (Resurrection): But the Pharisees said, He casteth out devils through the prince of the devils.

Luke 11:15 (Evil): But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils.