

Spirit Warfare: Why Could We Not Cast It Out?

Dr. John Carmichael

[Mat 17:14-21 NASB95] 14 When they came to the crowd, a man came up to Jesus, falling on his knees before Him and saying, 15 "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. 16 "I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him." 17 And Jesus answered and said, "You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me." 18 And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once. 19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not drive it out?" 20 And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. 21 ["But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."]

[Mar 9:14-29 NASB95] 14 When they came [back] to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and [some] scribes arguing with them. 15 Immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed and [began] running up to greet Him. 16 And He asked them, "What are you discussing with them?" 17 And one of the crowd answered Him, "Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute; 18 and whenever it seizes him, it slams him [to the ground] and he foams [at the mouth,] and grinds his teeth and stiffens out. I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not [do it.]" 19 And He answered them and said, "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!" 20 They brought the boy to Him. When he saw Him, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground, he [began] rolling around and foaming [at the mouth.] 21 And He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. 22 "It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" 23 And Jesus said to him, " 'If You can?' All things are possible to him who believes." 24 Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, "I do believe; help my unbelief." 25 When Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again." 26 After crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came out; and [the boy] became so much like a corpse that most [of them] said, "He is dead!" 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up. 28 When He came into [the] house, His disciples [began] questioning Him privately, "Why could we not drive it out?" 29 And He said to them, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer."

- The disciples were confused. This was not their first encounter with demons.
- Jesus had already given them authority over unclean spirits. ([Mat 10:1 NASB95] 1 Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.)
- Earlier, they had experienced success.
- Yet in Matthew 17 and Mark 9 they faced a boy whom they could not help.
- After Jesus delivered the boy, the disciples asked the question many believers still ask today: [Mat 17:19 NASB95] 19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not drive it out?"
- That question is still being asked. "Why am I still struggling?" "Why do I keep falling into the same bondage?" "Why have I prayed and not seen breakthrough?" "Why do I seem powerless against something that keeps controlling my life?"
- Jesus' answer provides both diagnosis and hope.

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What does Jesus teach us about why spiritual victory sometimes seems absent and how can believers begin walking in lasting freedom?

As Jesus explains the disciples' failure, He reveals several barriers to victory and several keys that unlock freedom.

I. Victory Is Lost When Faith Becomes Weak

- a. [Mat 17:20 NASB95] 20 And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.
- b. [Mar 9:19 NASB95] 19 And He answered them and said, "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!"
- c. Notice Jesus did not say: You lacked authority. You lacked a formula. You lacked experience. They already possessed authority.
- d. The issue was faith. The problem was not the absence of power but the failure to depend upon the One who gives power.
- e. Faith is not confidence in ourselves. Faith is confidence in God.
- f. The issue is not how much faith we have but where our faith is placed.
- g. A mustard seed is tiny, yet Jesus said it is enough when directed toward God.
- h. [Mar 11:22 NASB95] 22 And Jesus answered saying to them, "Have faith in God.
- i. [Rom 10:17 NASB95] 17 So faith [comes] from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.
- j. Many believers focus on: their feelings, their failures, their past disappointments, instead of focusing on Christ.
- k. Freedom begins when we stop measuring our weakness and start trusting His strength.
- l. Ask: "Am I trusting God or am I trusting my own ability to get free?"

II. Victory Is Lost When We Attempt Spiritual Warfare Without Spiritual Dependence

- a. [Mar 9:29 NASB95] 29 And He said to them, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer."
- b. Whether or not the phrase "and fasting" belongs in the original text of Matthew 17:21, the principle remains clear throughout Scripture.
- c. Prayer is not a technique. Prayer is dependence. Prayer is relationship. Prayer is communion with God.
- d. Jesus was teaching that spiritual authority flows from ongoing fellowship with the Father. The disciples had authority, but authority must remain connected to intimacy.
- e. [Jhn 15:5 NASB95] 5 "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.
- f. Daniel's season of prayer and fasting was connected to activity in the spiritual realm. [Dan 10:12-13 NASB95] 12 Then he said to me, "Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding [this] and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words. 13 "But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia.
- g. Many people want victory without cultivating a life with God. Freedom is rarely the result of a single emotional moment. Freedom is often the fruit of daily surrender.
- h. Prayer develops sensitivity to God's voice and resistance to Satan's influence.

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III. Victory Is Lost When We Depend on Past Experiences Instead of Present Relationship

- a. [Mat 10:1 NASB95] 1 Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.
- b. The disciples had previously cast out demons successfully.
- c. [Mat 17:16 NASB95] 16 "I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him."
- d. Now they could not.
- e. The disciples may have been tempted to rely on yesterday's success. The danger of spiritual success is spiritual complacency. Notice where this event occurs. Immediately after the Mount of Transfiguration. Peter, James, and John had witnessed one of the greatest revelations in Scripture. Yet the next scene is failure against the demonic.
- f. Great experiences do not automatically produce lasting victory. Every generation must continue pursuing God.
- g. [Phl 3:10 NASB95] 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;
- h. You cannot live today on yesterday's encounter. Yesterday's testimony is wonderful. Today's relationship is essential.
- i. Many people say: "I used to pray." "I used to seek God." "I used to walk in victory."
- j. The question is: "What is your relationship with God today?"

IV. Victory Is Lost When We Give Satan Areas of Agreement

- a. [Mat 12:25-26 NASB95] 25 And knowing their thoughts Jesus said to them, "Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand. 26 "If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand?"
- b. Jesus taught that Satan does not work against his own kingdom.
- c. If we are partnering with pride, rebellion, unforgiveness, occult involvement, habitual sin, or disobedience, we are giving the enemy legal and relational access into our lives.
- d. A divided life weakens spiritual authority. We cannot consistently cooperate with darkness while expecting complete victory over darkness.
- e. [Eph 4:27 NASB95] 27 and do not give the devil an opportunity.
- f. [Jas 4:7 NASB95] 7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.
- g. Some battles are not won by rebuking demons. Some battles are won by repentance.
- h. Ask God: "Is there any area where I am agreeing with the enemy instead of agreeing with You?"

V. Victory Comes Through an Authentic Relationship with Jesus

- a. [Act 19:13-16 NASB95] 13 But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." 14 Seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. 15 And the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" 16 And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.
- b. The seven sons of Sceva attempted spiritual warfare without authentic spiritual authority.
- c. The demon answered: "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?"
- d. The issue was not methodology. The issue was relationship. The demon recognized genuine authority because genuine authority comes from genuine connection to Christ.
- e. [Luk 10:19 NASB95] 19 "Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you.

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- f. [Jhn 1:12 NASB95] 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, [even] to those who believe in His name,
- g. Freedom does not come from copying someone else's experience.
- h. You cannot borrow another person's prayer life. You cannot borrow another person's authority. You must know Jesus personally.
- i. Victory belongs to sons and daughters, not spiritual spectators.

VI. Victory Comes Through Persistent Faith in God's Promise

- a. [Mat 17:20 NASB95] 20 And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.
- b. Jesus was not teaching positive thinking.
- c. He was teaching God-centered faith.
- d. Faith is both: a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8); strengthened through God's Word (Romans 10:17)
- e. The father of the boy understood this tension. "I do believe; help my unbelief." (Mark 9:24)
- f. Jesus honored imperfect faith that was honestly reaching toward Him.
- g. [Heb 11:6 NASB95] 6 And without faith it is impossible to please [Him,] for he who comes to God must believe that He is and [that] He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.
- h. [Rom 4:20-21 NASB95] 20 yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, 21 and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.
- i. Abraham did not waver because he was convinced God could do what He promised.
- j. You may not feel strong. You may still have questions. You may still be fighting. But keep believing. Keep praying. Keep submitting. Keep standing on God's Word. Faith grows as we keep looking at Christ.

- **When believers stop relying on themselves and begin living in faith-filled dependence upon Christ, the power that once seemed absent becomes active and effective.**
- The disciples asked: "Why could we not cast it out?" Jesus did not leave them in failure.
- He taught them. Corrected them. Strengthened them. Prepared them.
- And eventually those same disciples became mighty instruments of God's power.
- The good news is that your current struggle does not have to be your permanent condition.
- Your inability is not your identity. Your failure is not your future.
- The same Jesus who delivered the boy is still delivering people today.
- The same authority He gave the disciples He has entrusted to His church.
- The same Holy Spirit who empowered the early church is available to believers now.
- The days of defeat can end.
- The days of freedom can begin.