

Does Luke 9:50 Contradict Luke 11:23?

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In Luke 9:50, Jesus Christ declares to His disciples, "He that is not against us is on our side." Two chapters later, in Luke 11:23, Christ exclaims "He who is not with Me is against Me."

A superficial reading of these two scriptures, both of which reference the casting out of a demon, has led some to conclude that Jesus made conflicting statements. In fact, many who argue against the authenticity of the Bible or the harmony of Scripture point out this supposed scriptural discrepancy. Even those less inclined to doubt the veracity and consistency of the Word of God still struggle to reconcile the two statements. However, when we establish the audience and the context of each account, we remove any conflict.

We will take a closer look at these two statements of Jesus Christ to determine their contexts and discover the harmony that always exists within the Word of God.

1. Who comprises Christ's audience in each of these verses?

Comment: In both scriptures, we are better able to establish the respective settings by referencing parallel narratives. For the first account, in Luke 9:49-50, we look to Mark 9:33-41. Here, Mark reveals that Christ and His disciples arrive at a house in Capernaum, presumably Peter's home, where He gathers them together in an intimate and friendly setting.

For the second account, in Luke 11:14-23, we look to Matthew 12:22-30 to establish the backdrop. As opposed to the cordial environs of Peter's home, we find that Jesus and His disciples are surrounded by a far more challenging crowd, including a hostile contingency of outspoken Pharisees.

2. To what is Christ responding in each account?

Comment: In the first account, He responds to the statement from John: "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow with us" (Luke 9:49).

In the second account, having just cast out a demon from a man, Christ responds to the Pharisees' accusation in Luke 11:15: "But some of them said, 'He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.'"

3. What is the essential meaning of Christ's answers in both accounts?

Comment: In Luke 9:49, within the first account, John implies that since the person casting out demons in Christ's name was outside of their fellowship, he should not be trusted or empowered to invoke Christ's name, even if for the performance of a good work. But in Mark 9:39, Jesus corrects John: "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me."

In essence, Jesus cautions John and all of His disciples to avoid interfering in the works that others are doing in support of the overall work. There is no good reason to discourage or make enemies out of those who are not working *against us*, including those whose level of belief and understanding we might judge as lacking. God can and does work with any and all persons as He sees fit, even compelling them to work *for us*.

In the second account, the Pharisees had charged Jesus with using the power of Satan, the ruler of demons, to cast out a demon. Beginning in Luke 11:17, He begins to deconstruct the accusation as being preposterous. In essence, He shows how, in the two-sided fight between the Kingdom of God and Satan, neither side can gain—or continue to stand—by assisting the opposition. Since there is no neutral ground between God and Satan, why would Satan help Jesus cast out his demons? By applying simple logic, Christ uses the Pharisees’ own words against them, easily concluding, “He that is not with Me is against Me.”

Jesus’ words in these two accounts are not at all in conflict. In fact, by combining them, we discover a unique harmony that exists between them. Though there is no neutral ground in our battle with the satanic forces arrayed against us, we should proceed with circumspection when we judge the actions of others, to be sure we understand the spirit that motivates them.