

WHO'S IN? WHO'S OUT?

Mark 9:38-50

When I was in 5th grade I begged my mom to let me go to school a half hour early to play basketball. Every morning the 6th graders would play full court basketball and they would pick a few 5th graders to play as well. I wanted to get picked in the worst way because getting picked by a 6th grader meant you were “in”; everybody else was “out”. Whenever I was picked I felt great. Whenever I wasn’t picked, I felt terrible.

We long to belong. It is our very nature and it begins at birth with our need to especially bond to our mothers. If there is failure to bond, if rejection happens in infancy, that person is scarred for life. Our need to belong and to be accepted runs deep and is undeniable. Rejection is devastating. It is the devastating hurt of rejection that is driving much of the racial violence in our country today. Rejection in the church is particularly damaging because there is a general expectation that the church is a place of love and acceptance.

When Jesus discovered that His disciples had excluded a man of genuine faith because he was not part of their group, Jesus sternly corrected them.

THE DISCIPLES ATTEMPTED TO STOP A MAN CASTING OUT DEMONS IN JESUS’ NAME (9:38-41)

Mark 9:38 (ESV)

³⁸ John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.”

Prompted by Jesus’ instruction to receive others like children (9:37), John reported how the disciples had responded to a man casting out demons in Jesus’ name. In their thinking, it was not appropriate for this man to be exorcising demons because he was not a member of the group of disciples and he had not been authorized to cast out demons as they had been (6:7-13).

But let’s think about this man; he was successfully casting out demons in Jesus’ name! That was possible only if the man had genuine faith in the spiritual authority of Jesus. If he had been using Jesus’ name as some sort of magical incantation God’s power would not have been released to cast the demons out (the Seven Sons of Sceva would find this out the hard way [Acts 19:11-20]). God the Father honored this man’s faith in Jesus and empowered him to join the fight against Satan.

But instead of encouraging this brother, the disciples thought they were correct in trying to stop him.

Jesus did not agree.

Mark 9:39-41 (ESV)

³⁹ But Jesus said, “Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. ⁴⁰ For the one who is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.

How does Jesus want His disciples to think through situations like this? Jesus' corrective is that wherever and in whomever they find faith they are to encourage it. Whether it be great faith to cast out demons or just enough faith to give them a cup of water because they are disciples of Christ, they are to encourage that faith.

A disciple encourages the faith of others.

We are to be encouragers of anyone and everyone who exercises faith in Jesus. They may be from a different church, denomination or theology, but if they are sincerely seeking to follow Jesus we need to encourage them and build them up.

How practically can we encourage the faith of others, particularly those who are not part of our church family?

First, if you have the time, draw out their story and testimony by asking them open ended questions. It is very encouraging to meet someone who takes a genuine interest in us. As they share their faith in Christ, celebrate that with them and encourage them to keep following Him. Second, find out if they have a church family and encourage them to plug in to their church. If they don't yet have a church home and they live in Ramona, invite them to Grace. Third, offer a quick prayer for them or encourage them that you will be praying for them in the days to come.

There are many other ways to encourage the faith we find in others. Bottom line, Jesus does not want us to exclude, but to encourage faith wherever and in whomever we find it.

This doesn't mean that Jesus is calling us to ecumenicalism wherein for the sake of inclusivity we compromise the truth of God's Word. We must not and will not do that and quite frankly truth does divide. But we must not be a people who exclude others on the basis of church affiliation. Wherever and in whomever we find genuine faith in Jesus Christ, we will encourage them in their relationships with Jesus.

Exclusivism is hurtful and discouraging to those who are shut out by it. Jesus warned His disciples to live in a manner that does not discourage the faith of others.

JESUS SEVERELY WARNED AGAINST HARMING THE FAITH OF OTHERS (9:42-50)

Mark 9:42-48 (ESV)

⁴² "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.

Jesus used the most graphic terms to make the point that it would be better to be drowned than to cause humble believers ("little ones") who believe in Him to fall into sin! One of the primary ways a disciple safeguards the faith of others is by living a life of spiritual integrity.

⁴³ And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the

kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸ 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.'

Hypocrisy in the home and church have driven many from the faith. We need constantly to be reminded that our lives influence those around us. Jesus is not calling for self-mutilation for it is *from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality...* (7:14-23). Using hyperbole, Jesus is calling us to deal decisively with sin so that our conduct does not influence others to sin or discourage others in their Christian faith.

There is a way of speaking of sin that I would encourage us to change. Quite often I hear us say, "We're going to sin; we sin all the time, everyday..." Now, while this may have some truth to it, is this declaration helpful in our fight against sin? Is it helpful for a running back to say "I'm going to fumble the football; in fact I'm going to fumble the football several times this season."? No coach worth his pay would let his player get away with saying that.

God has made provision for our victory over sin. We are no longer slaves to sin having been set free by the blood of Jesus Christ. Further, the Holy Spirit indwelling us supplies the power we need to resist and overcome sin. Our part is to abide in Christ by letting His Word dwell in us richly and obeying His Word.

Our fight against sin is active and must include our minds and our bodies. I once disciplined a man who recognized his language on the job did not honor Christ. It wasn't enough for him to regret the habit he had fallen into; he needed to take some practical steps to replace the sinful habit with a godly habit. So, in addition to praying for the Spirit's help, he committed to memorizing and repeating Ephesians 4:29 in order to renew his mind.

Ephesians 4:29 (ESV)

²⁹ Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Then, he took a jar to work and made a deal with his co-workers: for every time they caught him dropping an F-bomb, he would put a quarter in the jar. If it got full, he would take them all out for a steak dinner. They were motivated to hold him accountable; he was motivated to clean up his mouth.

This may sound corny to you, but God used this practical strategy to help my brother clean up his language to honor Christ. He was doing what Jesus calls us to do and that is deal seriously with sin in our lives.

Jesus is also teaching us that how we live our lives affects others. This is especially true in the home. Hypocrisy in the home is one of the top reasons why our children drift away from the faith. Moms and Dads, our children are not looking for sinless perfection, but they are looking for humble sincerity and genuineness in your walk with Jesus. If they see you growing and changing in Christ, they will be encouraged spiritually. But if yours is a "Sunday only" Christianity your kids know it and will be influenced in that direction. Jesus calls us to safeguard the faith of others by prusing a life of spiritual integrity.

A disciple safeguards the faith of others by pursuing a life of spiritual integrity.

Jesus' final word on this subject is a bit hard to understand. He uses the illustration of salt in at least two different ways in the space of these last two verses in this section.

⁴⁹ **For everyone will be salted with fire.**

Here, Jesus uses salt as a verb and says everyone will be salted with fire. In the preceding verses the fire in view is the fire of God's judgment in Gehenna. Perhaps what He means by saying everyone will be salted by fire is that everyone will experience God's judgment whether in this life by dealing drastically with sin in obedience to God's righteous standard or by suffering in Gehenna because they failed to obey God's righteous standard.

Then in verse 50 He uses salt as a spiritual metaphor for preserving and purity.

⁵⁰ **Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."**

The salt used by the Israelites came from the Dead Sea and was a mixture of sodium chloride and other minerals. The salt could leech out and the granules left behind were saltless. In that case, the granules neither preserved food nor enhanced the food's flavor. Applied to the disciples, Jesus was saying that if they allow sin to remain in their lives by not dealing with it decisively, they would become saltless, without integrity and good influence on others. Instead, He admonished them to have salt in themselves, that is, spiritual integrity and purity, so that they will not harm the faith of others but be encourages. And so that they will be at peace with one another.

The two lessons we are to learn as disciples of Jesus from this passage are:

A disciple encourages the faith of others.

A disciple safeguards the faith of others by pursuing a life of spiritual integrity.