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Why Doesn't Every Bible Version Include Matthew 17:21?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about why some Bible versions include Matthew 17:21 and part of Mark 9:29 and some don't and how Jesus' instruction not to hinder someone casting out demons in his name applies to the situation with the sons of Sceva in Acts.

* Can you explain why some Bible versions include Matthew 17:21 and part of Mark 9:29 and some don't?

* How does Jesus' instruction not to hinder someone casting out demons in his name in Luke 9:49-50 apply to the situation with the sons of Sceva in Acts 19:13-16?

Transcript

Welcome to Stand to Reason' #STRask podcast with Amy Hall and Greg Koukl. I'm Amy Hall and this is Greg Koukl. All right.

So we have a couple Bible questions today, Greg. The first one comes from Samantha. Can you explain why some Bible versions include Matthew 17 21 and Mark 9 29? And then she puts in parentheses and fasting, which is the extra part in those verses.

Oh, okay. So these are parallel passages. Yeah.

So I can just work with the Matthew passage. Sure. And the verse says in brackets here in my New American standard, reason being that it's a questionable, it has questionable textual support.

The verse says, "But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." So there was a demon-possessed person that the disciples were trying to work with unsuccessfully and Jesus comes on the scenes, chastises them for their little faith and then apparently according to what some manuscripts makes this statement. Now, in the margin, it explains why verse 21 is in brackets. Early manuscripts do not contain this verse.

All right. So what this reflects is a difficulty with ancient manuscripts and that is that they're variations that every manuscript just about is going to be a little bit different than other manuscripts. They're not all carbon copies.

Now, it turns out that most of the differences are utterly inconsequential to the task of kind of restoring the original. What did the original say? And the reason is because the vast majority are just spelling differences. And so, or word order.

So one could say the Lord Jesus. The other one says, Jesus Christ or Christ Jesus. Okay.

Or some will have an article say, James or the James. Well, this is inconsequential to restoring the original sense of the passage. So, but there are variations though that are more significant.

Here's an example of one. Now, when we read in the text that the early manuscripts do not contain this, this is reflecting a difference of approach by different schools when it comes to textual criticism. Some will say, let's look at all the manuscripts and see what most of the manuscripts, how most of the manuscripts render this passage.

And in fact, many times you're going to have, like in this passage, verse 21 of Matthew 17, it could be that most of the manuscripts actually include this verse. Okay. Well, then if they most of them include them, why would you not include it in a Bible when most of the available manuscripts have it? And the answer is that in that case, most of the manuscripts are later.

They are younger. Okay. This is characteristically called the majority text or also the Byzantine text.

Remember, Amy, up until the time of Constantine, Christianity was an illegal religion. Constantine didn't make it the religion of the realm. He just made it legal.

The guy before Constantine was a really brutal persecutor of Christians. So the earliest manuscripts were written and distributed in a time when there was lots and lots of persecution of Christians. A couple hundred years later during the Byzantine Empire, there were lots of manuscripts being copied and passed around.

And there wasn't this kind of persecution and consequently more of those manuscripts survived. So the debate then is, do we go with the majority report from the manuscripts that we're drawing from to decide on compilation of an English Bible translation? Or do we go with the more ancient ones that have fewer copies? Now, to me, it makes more sense to go with the more ancient ones because those are likely to be most accurate. And the majority text is just the majority because of an accident of history, because they were written during a time when there was less persecution.

But that is a debate. It actually comes up with the King James Version debate because

the King James Version is drawing from what's called the received text, the text isoreceptus. And a lot of those are majority text renderings that are later.

And when they discovered earlier texts that were different from the majority text, then Bibles began to reflect that. And New American Standard, I think, is an example of that. And so this is why it does include it, but it points out that it is a textual variant and therefore challenged, okay, and therefore in brackets.

And I like the way the NASB does that, and other Bibles do do something similar. They include it, but alert the reader that it's a textual variant. By the way, you know, the verse where Jesus on the cross says, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." That is another variant that doesn't show up in the earliest manuscripts.

And when you think about it, it creates theological problems. So Jesus is asking the Father to forgive people who are not repented for their actions. And he's implying they're not guilty for their actions because they don't realize the gravity of their actions, which is another theological difficulty.

They had sacrifices in the Old Testament for presumptuous sins, sins that didn't, people didn't realize they were committing, but there's a sacrifice for them. So there's some level of culpability involved. And so when a text alerts you to a variant that helps you to know you can make your own decisions about whether you take it seriously or not, but I think it's a good practice.

When they show up, though, that's the reason. You have competing schools of thoughts, schools of thought on whether you go with the majority text, which tends to be more recent or you go with the minority witness, which tends to be earlier. And sometimes isn't there a combination of that depending on, because sometimes you can see where the change happened and then the text that are or the copies that are nearby that you can see them, the families that it came from.

The family that yes, that's right. There are families of text. In other words, this group of texts reflects the same variation, which suggests that they came from the original variant text that got copied a lot.

So that's another thing they see. Sometimes you can also figure out how the mistake actually took place. If you go to Romans 8, for example, my Bible says there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit.

I'm sorry. That's the variant. Mine says therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ, period, full stop.

But the King James says, "For those who walk not by the flesh go by the spirit." Well, that's a phrase that's in what verse 4. And it looks like a scribe when he's copying back

and forth, looked at verse 4 when he's finishing verse 1, and then he puts it in verse 1 by mistake. So there's an example. You can look at the context.

You see, where did this phrase come from in these other texts that have it when earlier manuscripts don't? And you could see, oh, that's what happened. They just glanced at the wrong line, probably. So sometimes these things can be figured out.

And most of the times they're just not even consequential to anything. Although in this particular case, it does seem to be saying something additional about the role of prayer and fasting and casting out demons. And so I'm not exactly sure how to take it.

I tend to go with the earlier texts. That's my impulse for the reasons I just gave. What's interesting though about this passage is that it strikes me that the variant contradicts the verse that comes before it because Jesus says to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith, that's why you could cast it out.

If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to the mountain, move here to there, and it will move, and nothing will be impossible with you." But, by the way, this one only comes out with prayer and fasting. It seems, wait a minute. I thought you said it isn't going to come out because of your littleness of your faith, not because you didn't pray and fast.

So what it appears to me that there's a conflict between those verses sitting side by side, doesn't flow well, and that strengthens my own conviction that the verse in question, verse 21, is added later. I was just looking up the Mark passage because it could be that the person who was copying Matthew was thinking of Mark. So here's what that one says, this kind cannot come out by anything but prayer.

It just leaves out the fasting part. But you're right that the Matthew 1 doesn't have either of those things. Although, I don't think it's impossible that this would go with it.

I mean, I guess it's kind of- You mean that is inconsistent in '21? That is inconsistent. Just because the problem is, if they're trying to do something by maybe using certain words and not actually by appealing to God and using the power of God, then that could have been the problem here, that maybe they were trying to just- The reason why it required prayer is the same reason why it required faith because they weren't trusting God to do something or weren't asking God to do something. That's total speculation.

I don't know, Greg. That's an argument for silence. There is an occasion in the book of Acts where Jewish exorcists are trying to cast out a demon and they're trying to use the language that Paul used.

So they say, "I adore you by Jesus whom Christ that Paul preaches." I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches. So it's almost as if they think- If they get the words right, they're going to get the demon out. The demon says, "I recognize Jesus I know about Paul, but

who are you?" Then he beats them up.

One demon-possessed man sends, I think, seven exorcists out naked and bleeding the text says. So he thrashed those guys pretty bad because there's no magic in the words. So funny, Greg.

I think I actually have a question about this. You know what? Let's just do that question now. Hi, Greg, slash Amy.

How does Jesus' admonishment in Luke 9, 49 and 50 apply to the situation with the sons of Sceva in Acts 19, 13 through 16? Luke, Luke 9, 49 and 50. I think you say nobody could say Jesus is Lord, but I don't know. 49 and 50.

Luke, John answered and said, "Master, we saw one casting out demons in your name. We tried to prevent him because he does not follow along with us." Jesus said, "Do not hinder him, for he who is not against you is for you." Well, it seems to me in this circumstance, what the disciple John is appealing to is that, or concerned about, is that here are people working miracles in your name, like casting on a demon, but they aren't part of our in crowd. He's not saying they're not followers.

They're just not part of our group. He does not follow along with us. Okay? And Jesus is saying, "Hey, they may not follow along with us, but they're part of either my disciples essentially." He says, "Do not hinder them, for he who is not against you is for you." Now, by the way, there's another occasion where he says the opposite thing.

He who is not with me is against me, and he does not stand with me as scatters. But that's a different audience that he's speaking to, because there he is being said that you are casting out demons by the ruler of demons. And this is when Jesus levels almost the exact opposite statement.

But that's because it's a different kind of audience. Those were non-believers. They were hostile.

They were saying you were working your miraculous power by the, by Beelzebub's power, authority, etc. And in this case, no, it was something very different. It was a group of people that were casting out Jesus, I'm sorry, casting out demons in Jesus' name.

All right. And so this, and no, they're not in our little enclave here, but that doesn't mean they're enemies. Okay? And so Jesus uses this phrase and turns it, "He who is not against us is for us." But given that frame of reference, that would be true.

So the second part of his question was, how should we believers interact with false believers? I guess in light of this. Well, it's a fair question. It's a little bit vague though, because the question is, interact with false believers.

Now, Paul talks about false believers. I'm sorry. Jesus does.

He warns about those wolves that are mitched. And what a false believer is, is somebody who looks like a believer, but isn't. That's why they look like sheep, but they're actually wolves, because they look like us.

But when you look more closely, what they are doing is advancing the cause of unrighteousness. That's a little later in Jesus' conversation there. It's, I think it's Matthew 5 or 6 in the Sermon and the Mount.

And so, they look like us, but what do they do? Depart from me, you who work in equity. Now, to me, this is a great description of Matthew Vines or those like them, those who are gay-friendly in the church. And I don't mean just nice to gays.

I mean, they promote homosexuality is morally acceptable. Sometimes within boundaries like if it's a committed relationship, or they're married, or something like that. But in any event, those gay-friendly groups are encouraging iniquity.

They are working iniquity, and so would fall under, but they claim to be just like us. And they might even have doctrines that are similar. So that's why they look like sheep, but they're wolves in sheep's clothing.

So in that case, we are to oppose them. Do not participate in the evil deeds of darkness, but even expose them, we see in one passage. And then in Titus, I think, or maybe its first Timothy, where instructions are being given to elders, these elders are supposed to be people who are able to teach, and therefore silence of those who are teaching false doctrine, because they must be silenced is what Paul says there.

So we're to take a more aggressive attitude regarding people who are teaching falsehood in the body of Christ. And actually, Paul even mentions some. Paul says, "Demos has loved the present world, so he's left me." Demos is one of the guys at the end of the book of Colossians, where Paul says, "Yeah, Demos says, 'Hi.'" And then in 2 Timothy, Demos left me having loved this present world.

He's naming a name. And he talks about, is it Alexander and Hymenes, or whatever, who say that the second coming has already arrived, and blah, blah. And so, when there are people that are teaching error, Paul is not uncomfortable even naming them as a warning to others, and addressing the bad theology or the error that is like a yeast 11 that just penetrates the church and does all kinds of damage.

We're supposed to say no to that. We're supposed to point out the problem. That's what we do here a lot of times.

And you can certainly have people who are believers but are believing false things. I was just reminded of Jude, because Jude talks a lot about people who are, it sounds like

teaching sexual immorality and saying it's okay. At the very end of this, here's what he says, "Have mercy on some who are doubting, save others, snatching them out of the fire, and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh." So, there are those who are being swayed that we need to rescue.

There are those who perhaps are like the sons of Sceva, who are just using Christian language, who aren't believers at all. And all this involves different reactions and different ways of trying to bring them around. By the way, that incident with the sons of Sceva, there is a good lesson against word faith.

It shows that the power is not in the words. It's not abracadabra. You don't just say these words and then things happen.

That's sorcery. It's rather Jesus on whose behalf we speak and we command the demons that makes the difference. And this is why the demons, as I recognize, Jesus, I know about Paul, who are you? I think it's kind of a funny passage.

But the demon had good theology in that particular case. You can say abracadabra, all you want. You can say Jesus, all you want.

He ain't going to do anything to me, because you are not representing him. And therefore, he's not going to touch me through you. This is such a difference between Christianity and pagan religions.

And we talked about this, I think a couple episodes ago, where this idea that you manipulate God with words or you manipulate reality with words or you use God as a tool to get certain things you want, that those are all pagan ideas. And God does not work that way as we see in this story. God actually is powerful.

We look to him to do things for us. And he doesn't just do it just because we ask. He actually has a plan.

He has ideas about what he wants to do. And we submit ourselves to all of that. Well, Greg, I think we're out of time.

Thank you for your questions. Just as a reminder, if you don't have Twitter, you can go to our website. At the top, you'll see podcasts as one of the choices.

You just choose hashtag #SCRask. And there's a link there to click on that says subbin a question. And you can just submit your question.

And we will have it and hopefully we'll use it. We just love having you. Hopefully we'll answer it.

We need your questions. We'll respond. We'll get to the show without you.

And it's always nice to have great questions. And you guys always have great questions. It's amazing because I get the questions here.

I never get on the regular show. And the regular show is, you know, it's got its own character. It's a lot of people listen to it.

There's no Amy. Not, well, she's on the other side of the glass and she's queuing me into things that I need to know. But she's not a participant in the same way she is here.

But if you like this show, I think you'll like the other one. And the other show, I tell people, if you like that show, you definitely like this one because you get Amy in the mix. So, well, thanks Greg.

And thank you for your questions. This is Amy Hall and Greg Kockel for Stand to Reason.

(upbeat music)

(upbeat music)