

# For us? Against Us?

Michael J. Nielsen / General

Sin; Temptation; A Disciple / Mark 9:38–50

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- › Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Introduction - Charles baseball

Charles simply figured there must be something wrong with his baseball glove. That was the fifth pop-fly in a row that fell straight out of the sky, right into the pocket of his mitt, and sprang out almost as high, landing on a the green summer turf. It was a tough day to be an outfielder. Things started to look up, though, at the top of the next inning. Charles batted second and struck the ball with moderate force right between the shortstop and second baseman. Only a single, but to Charles it gave the utmost sense of victory. He got a little lost in the sense of victory.

As he stood firmly planted on the white square bag, he began to daydream himself into the major. He heard the announced almost as clearly as reality, "That was some hit hammered into center by Charles P. Smitzhoff. He's new to the majors, but he is going to go far!" Unfortunately, getting lost in the daydream while on first base at the top of the seventh does not win many little league game, especially when one gets lost in their daydream that they fail to run to the next base when the ball is hit. Two runners standing on the same base just does not work in baseball. Needless to say, it was an easy out.

Charles slowly made his way back to the dugout. His teammates greeted him with silence. Finally, William Ireland spoke up. William "Bud" Ireland always knew what to say, especially at difficult and awkward moments like this one. Bud turned slowly to Charles, and with gentleness and understanding said to Charles, "Charles, there is one thing I don't understand." Charles was not in the mood for conversation, but wanted to be polite. "Yeah, Bud, What is it?" "Charles, the one thing I have not been able to figure out is why it seems like you are trying so hard to get us to lose. I guess what I am trying to ask is this...whose side are you on, anyways?"

## For Us? Against Us?

John must have missed the previous teaching about the greatest. John tells Jesus “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him because he was following us.”

John must have thought at this point that the 12 were only ones who were given this authority, casting out demons. He was probably thinking that I have all the rights and privileges of being a disciple. But this someone does not! Yet, this someone was casting demons in the name of Jesus. What is wrong about that? And Jesus comes back to John and says:

**English Standard Version Chapter 9**

“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.

The one who is not against us is for us, John. There are times though that it is very hard to tell which side someone is on. Unless that is when it comes to rivalries of sports teams. In life, though, in this Christian walk, it is hard to tell whose side someone is on. It’s hard to tell who a true disciple is!

Let’s try this out! How do you use your words? God gives us two commandments about speaking. One is how we use God’s name and really the other one is how we use someone else’s name. First, how does the Lord’s name flow from your lips? In prayer, praise, and giving thanks? Do you use His Name when you offer someone a “cup of water to drink”? Do you use His name to bless others?

Or do you use His name when you really want people to listen to you and His name comes out of your mouth in frustration. And maybe you inadvertently damn someone or even some inanimate object to hell. Is using the Name of God something that causes one to question whose side you really are on?

Or what about how you use someone else’s name. Are you working at defending your neighbor, speaking well of us and explaining everything to him in the kindest way? Or are you dragging your neighbor’s name through mud or even through a pile of stinky manure? Do you try to harm the reputation of someone? Do you slander someone? Do you tell lies about someone or spread rumors whether they might be true or not?

Whose side are you on anyways? Sometimes it is very hard to tell isn’t it! So really what is wrong with flinging around God’s name or even the name of someone else in “those” way? The answer is simple, you are not using either God’s name to bless others, but rather to curse. You are not using the name of the other for their benefit. You either cast them around as some meaningless word or worse...to actually bring harm to someone. And the thing is...you might

actually be causing one of the little ones who believe in Jesus to sin. You might cause one of the Lord's disciples to stumble.

And Jesus has sharp words for that!

**English Standard Version Chapter 9**

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.

When you use your voice, that's sin and it has serious consequences. Now if you cause someone else to sin, whether it's a child or an adult...another disciple of Jesus...that seems to be worse. Jesus presumably still has the child in their midst as he's teaching and he's blunt. If you cause one of these great ones to sin...hell will unleash fury on you. It would be better for you drown than to burn!

Whose side are you on? Oftentimes that's hard to tell.

## Standing on the Lord's Side!

But , and this is is a big one! When the name of Jesus is used, seen, and received rightly, there is joy! Just look at His name...by His name...demons are cast out! And the one who bears his name is

**English Standard Version Chapter 2**

found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

This is the purpose of his name: to forgive sins...your sins and mine; to give you life, your life and mine; and to give you salvation...yours and mine! And it comes to you by the work on the cross...and then...

**English Standard Version Chapter 2**

9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

God gave him the Name! And God Gives you a name by way of scandal. If we go back and look at the word for "cause to sin", that in Greek is *scandalon*. It is a scandal to cause someone to sin! Yet at the cross Jesus gives you a new scandal, a better one. A perfect scandal. This scandal is the scandal of the cross! Christ crucified...a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. At the same time, this scandal takes away the penalties for your scandals! He forgives your scandals! At the cross Jesus forgives the times you use his name for an ungodly

reason. He forgives the times that you use someone else's name for an ungodly reason, the times you take their name and smear it with mud and manure.

Because of Jesus and his powerful work on the Cross and the Empty Tomb...you know whose side you are standing on. You have been given a new name...a name for the victorious team...you've been given the name Christian at your baptism. You've been joined to Jesus and his scandal by way of water and the Word and in the NAME of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Dear People of God, because of Jesus you know which side you stand on. You stand on the side of the victor.

As the song that I learned at camp, that is call and response:

Whose side are you standing on? Standing on the Lord's Side.

Whose side are you standing on? Standing on the Lord's Side?

I'll stand! I'll Stand! I'll Stand! I'll Stand! I'll Stand! Standing on the Lord's Side!

You can add your own verses! Farming on the Lord's Side. Teaching on the Lord's Side! Caring on the Lord's Side! Speaking on the Lord's Side.

When you are standing on the Lord's Side, people can see it! It looks like you serving your neighbor as you "Give you a cup of water to another" and having salt in your life and being at peace with one another!

Standing on the Lord's side looks like being who you are called to be as a Child of God as you pray that you will not cause a fellow Child of God to stumble...and if you do, repent for your sin to God and one another so that you can be at peace!

Are there times that you will drop the ball or be stand on first base caught in a daydream and have people question: "Whose Side are you on? Are you for us or against us?" Absolutely! Yet, Jesus Christ and His name bestowed on your Baptism, gives to the peace and comfort knowing that you are indeed on the Lord's Side!

And maybe Charles with a little bit of practice and learning of the game...will clearly show which side he is on! And you can too, for the life of a disciple is all about a life of learning. A life of being in the Word, a life of catechesis, continually studying the Word given to us!

As you grow and as you know whose side you are on. You have the good news of Jesus Christ...you have the salt...now go and bring that salt and show your neighbor whose side you are on...by word and action!

In Jesus Name. Amen.

- › Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.