

The Sons of Sceva. Here is the complete sermon.

Acts 19:13–16: Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded

There is a kind of religion that looks powerful from the outside but is empty on the inside. It knows the right words, quotes the right verses, and even attempts the right miracles—but it has no relationship with the One who gives the power. In Acts chapter nineteen, we meet seven brothers who thought they could use the name of Jesus like a magic spell. They had heard that Paul cast out devils in that name. They had seen the power. And they wanted it—without wanting the Saviour.

Their story is one of the most humiliating moments in the New Testament. Seven professional exorcists, the sons of a man named Sceva, a Jewish chief priest—men who should have known better—ended up running out of a house naked, bleeding, and defeated. And the lesson for us today is terrifying and glorious at the same time: The name of Jesus is not a formula; it is a relationship. And if you do not belong to Him, that name will not protect you—it will expose you.

I. The Counterfeiters: Who Were the Sons of Sceva?

Acts 19:13 calls them "certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists." The word "vagabond" means wanderers, itinerants—men who traveled from town to town performing religious tricks for money. They were not followers of Jesus. They were professional enchanters, using a mixture of Jewish traditions, pagan incantations, and whatever worked on a desperate crowd.

Their father, Sceva, is described as "a Jew, and chief of the priests." That sounds impressive, but it was likely a self-appointed title or a minor priestly role. The point is: these men had religious pedigree, religious knowledge, and religious activity—but no personal faith in the risen Christ. Notice what they said: "We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth." They did not say, "We adjure you by Jesus whom we know." They said, "whom Paul preacheth." That is secondhand faith. That is borrowed religion. They were trying to trade on Paul's reputation with God instead of having their own.

There are many people in churches today exactly like the sons of Sceva. They can name the pastor, quote the sermons, sing the hymns, and even pray in public. But when the demon of real trial comes, they have no personal relationship with Jesus. They know about Him—but they do not know Him. And that distinction is the difference between victory and a bloody retreat.

II. The Demon's Response: Jesus I Know, and Paul I Know—But Who Are Ye?

Look at verse 15: "And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?"

This is one of the most shocking verses in all of Scripture. A demon—a fallen, filthy, damned spirit—acknowledges Jesus. He does not say "I respect Jesus." He says "I know Him." The Greek word is *ginosko*—to know by personal experience. The demon knew Jesus as his Judge. He also knew Paul as the apostle of the living God. But when he looked at the seven sons of Sceva, he said, "Who are you?"

Imagine that. Seven religious professionals, sons of a priest, standing in the name of Jesus—and a demon does not recognize them. He does not fear them. He does not even respect them enough to leave quietly. Instead, he challenges them. The evil spirit says in effect: "I am a subject of the kingdom of darkness. I know the King—Jesus. I know His authorized representative—Paul. But you? You have no commission. You have no authority. You are impostors." And then he attacks.

Beloved, here is the question of the hour for every person in this room: When the enemy looks at your life, does he recognize the authority of Christ in you? Or does he laugh? Demons are not impressed by your church attendance. They are not frightened by your Bible on the coffee table. They tremble only at the name of Jesus when it is spoken from a life that belongs to Him. If you are playing games with God, the devil knows it. And one day, you may find yourself like these seven brothers—fleeing naked and wounded.

III. The Wounds of a Counterfeit Faith

Verse 16: "And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded."

Notice the progression: the demon leaped on them—singular. One demon against seven religious men. And one demon won. He overcame them. He prevailed against them. They did not just lose; they were humiliated. Their clothes were torn off—stripped of every false covering of dignity and reputation. They ran out into the street naked, bleeding, and exposed for all the world to see. What a picture of what happens when we try to operate in spiritual power without spiritual surrender. The wounds they received were not just physical. They were wounds of shame, exposure, and utter defeat. The name of Jesus, when misused, does not bless you—it burns you.

There is a severe warning here for anyone who thinks that the Christian life is a toolkit of formulas. Some of you are trying to cast out your own demons—addiction, anger, lust, fear—by quoting verses you have not hidden in your heart. You say, "I rebuke this in Jesus' name!" but you have never surrendered to Jesus' lordship. And the demon stays. Worse, it may leap on you and wound you. You cannot wield a sword that you have not taken up by faith. You cannot command a King you have not obeyed.

IV. The Genuine Power of the Name: What the Sons of Sceva Missed

Now, why did Paul have authority when these seven men did not? The answer is not in a technique. The answer is in a relationship. Paul did not say, "I adjure you by Jesus whom someone else preaches." Paul said, "In the name of Jesus Christ, come out of her" (Acts 16:18) because Jesus Christ was his Lord. Paul had met Jesus on the Damascus road. Paul had been filled with the Holy Ghost. Paul walked in daily obedience, even unto death. His authority was not borrowed—it was bestowed by the One who sent him.

Listen carefully: the name of Jesus is the most powerful name in heaven, on earth, and under the earth (Philippians 2:10). But that name works in the mouth of a believer who is in Christ. Jesus said in Mark 16:17, "These signs shall follow them that believe; in my name shall they cast out devils." Not "them that say the name." Not "them that go to church." Them that believe—that is, them that trust, obey, and abide in Him.

The sons of Sceva did not believe. They performed. And the demon saw right through them.

V. What This Means for You Today

First, stop borrowing your parents' faith. You cannot get to heaven on your mother's prayers or your father's testimony. You must know Jesus for yourself. Have you been born again? Not raised in church—born again. Not baptized as an infant—born again. Not a member of a denomination—born again. Jesus said, "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7). If you are not, then the demons know it, even if you hide it well.

Second, examine your spiritual weapons. Are you trying to fight sin in your own strength? Are you speaking the name of Jesus over your circumstances while living in willful disobedience? Repent. The name of Jesus is not a lucky charm. It is the authority of a holy King, and that authority flows through clean hands and a pure heart (Psalm 24:3–4).

Third, do not be afraid—be real. The good news is that the same Jesus whom the demons know as Judge is available to you as Savior. You do not have to run naked and wounded. You can come to the cross, admit that you have been pretending, and receive genuine power. The sons of Sceva ran away from the house. But you can run to the Father. He will clothe you with righteousness and give you His name to use in faith.

VI. A Final Warning and a Final Hope

The story of the seven sons of Sceva spread like wildfire through Ephesus. Acts 19:17 says, "And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified." Even their humiliation brought glory to God because it showed the difference between a pretender and a true disciple.

What about you? If the demon in your life were to speak today, would he say, "Jesus I know, Paul I know—but who are you?" Or would he say, "I know you—you belong to Jesus"? The answer is found in one place: the cross of Calvary. Jesus died for impostors, frauds, and pretenders just like you and me. He did not die to give us a magic name. He died to give us a new nature. When you put your faith in Him, you are no longer a son of Sceva. You become a child of God. And the demons will flee—not because of your technique, but because of your Father.

I close with this: do not try to cast out your demons with borrowed power. Do not stand before the enemy wearing a costume of Christianity while your heart is naked and empty. Come to Jesus. Surrender to Jesus. Be filled with Jesus. Then, and only then, will the name that is above every name work through you.

Lord Jesus, we confess that too often we have acted like the sons of Sceva—using Your name without knowing Your heart. Forgive us. Cleanse us. Give us a genuine faith, not a borrowed one. We renounce every counterfeit. We surrender to Your lordship. Now, fill us with the Holy Ghost, that when we speak Your name, demons will flee and Your name will be magnified. Amen.