

# Why do only Catholics perform exorcisms?

Several movies have been shown and segments of television shows that involve the practice of “exorcism”. Pretty much without exception the one performing the exorcism is readily identifiable as a Roman Catholic Priest.

1. What is an exorcism?

## Acts 19:11-15

The Greek word that is translated “exorcists” only occurs 3 times in the entire Bible. Once in the Old Testament and twice in the New. Only one of those has to do with what we refer to today as an exorcism. As we take a look at this one occurrence we can try to learn more about the practice. In verse 12, the people of the various towns and villages were seeking out Paul to touch some cloth belonging to someone that was infected by a disease or infested with an evil spirit. In an indirect fashion then Paul was being used by God to make the evil spirits 'go out' (exerchesthai) of the people. Some Jewish 'vagabonds' or 'wanderers' took it upon themselves to try to do what Paul was doing. These Jewish wanderers were called 'exorcists' (exorkiston) and they were NOT Christian. When they attempted to make the evil spirits leave the affected man, they tried to force an oath (orkidzo) upon the evil spirits using a specific ritual or specific formulaic word phrase. They recognized that they did not actually have the power to remove the evil spirits so they invoked the name of “Jesus whom Paul preaches”. The actual results of this exorcism were very bad indeed. It was the exorcists where went out, not the evil spirits.

There are a couple things that we can learn from this. First, it is an attempt by non-believers to invoke ritual and special phrases to accomplish the work that a faithful servant of God is capable of accomplishing. It is an attempt at imitating the real power.

2. What are the other uses of the “exorcist” word?

## Genesis 24:1-3

## Matthew 26:61-63

(similar English word Joshua 6:26; 1 Kings 22:16; 2 Chronicles 18:15; **Mark 5:7**)

The general use for 'exorkiston' (exorcist) is to adjure or to place under an oath. The concept then is to place another under an oath to accomplish the desires of the one placing the oath upon his fellow man.

### 3. Did Jesus or the Apostles perform exorcisms?

Matthew 7:22; **8:16-17; 8:28-32**; 9:32-33; **10:7-8**; 12:22, 28; **17:14-21**

Mark 1:32-34, 39; **3:14-15; 5:1-10**; 6:12-13; **9:38-39**

## Luke 10:17-20

## Acts 16:16-19

At a very technical level, neither Jesus nor the Apostles performed exorcisms. What they did is 'cast out' (exballo) demons. The scriptures do not give any more information about what was done to cast out demons other than they did so. The closest we have is Pall stating “I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her”. One difference between the exorcist of Acts 19:13 and the casting out that Paul did in Acts 16:16-19 is that the exorcists tried to force an oath on the demons while Paul cast the demons out by command. The authority is different. With casting out there does not appear to be any specific ritual or formula while an exorcism has both.

4. What harm could be done by using the rituals or special phrases?

Matthew 15:2-6

Colossians **2:8**

Jeremiah **44:15-19**

Mark **7:1-13**

2 Kings **18:4**

Matthew **12:43-45**

The concern with using ritual or special phrases to accomplish a task like casting out demons from a person is that the ritual or phrase becomes the focus of the attention and the God of all power is diminished in the ritual. Just as the Hebrews worshiped Nehushtan (the bronze serpent) people cease pursuing after and living after the living God and pursue the ritual or tradition. A similar danger is in seeing the spiritual power that may be present and seek to deal with the spirits (animism) rather than the one true living God. Furthermore, it does no good to cast demons out of a person and not replace it with the spirit of the living God. Without the spirit of God dwelling in the person, his condition will become worse not better.

5. How do Christians, especially Protestants, cast out demons today?

2 Corinthians 10:2-5

Titus **2:11-15**

2 Timothy **4:2-4**

Ephesians 2:1-3

The primary to cast out demons today is through the preaching of God's word. Only it has power over evil spirits. By bringing the infected under the power of the Spirit of God, then God will cleanse them and purge the evil (spirits, attitudes, behaviors) from among them.