

## Week Seven: Demons: Unclean Spirits (Part 3 of 3)

WHAT DO DEMONS DO? We have all seen or at least been made aware of Hollywood's interpretation and fascination with demons, death, zombies and the like. It seems to be that America (maybe the world has a fascination with the powers of evil and darkness. Why? Why is there such an interest? In part it may be true because we are spiritual beings and as such we perceive that there is more going on than what we can experience with the 5 physical senses.

Look at the general statement of Ephesians 6 which simply makes a declaration about the source of our conflicts. *Eph 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

But let's look at the Bible and see specific cases of demon activity and influence. We will do so in various categories.

- I. They **interact** with Satan. In general demons act as Satan's **missionaries** to promote his purpose to oppose God's plan and work. Though Satan is not omnipresent through demons he extends **his power** and activities exponentially. Demons extend Satan's activities so much that one might think Satan himself is doing it all. We are going to need special protection against such an evil and ubiquitous network. *Eph 6:11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*
- II. They **resist and oppose** God
  - a. They have opposed the plan of God ever since they decided to rebel against God and side with Satan, demons continue to oppose the purposes of God in this world (Dan. 10:10–14; Rev. 16:13–16).
  - b. They May Be **Used by God** to Carry Out His Purposes. He sent an evil spirit to stir up the people of Shechem against Abimelech (Judg. 9:23). He used an evil spirit to punish Saul with a mental disturbance that bordered on madness (1 Sam. 16:14). He sent a deceiving spirit to control the prophets and to give Ahab the wrong advice (1 Kings 22:22). He used one to afflict Paul so that he would not become overly proud (2 Cor. 12:7). Because they are creatures,

demons are accountable to God and thus can be used by Him as He may desire.

- III. They **infiltrate** and **manipulate** religion
- a. They Promote **Idolatry**. In carrying out their opposition to God, demons actively try to turn men to the worship of idols. This was true in Old Testament times (Lev. 17:7; Deut. 32:17; Ps. 106:36–38). It is true now (1 Cor. 10:20), and demon worship will apparently be widespread during the coming Tribulation days (Rev. 9:20 Look at this one).
  - b. They Promote **False Religion**
    - i. They teach a **worthless savior**.
      1. John warned his readers to test the spirits, for demons influence false (human) prophets (**1 John 4:1–4**). A major test of orthodoxy (though not the only one) was the affirmation of the reality of the Incarnation; for if Christ had not taken on Himself a human body He could not have died and been our Savior.
      2. Paul also warned of this attack on the Incarnation in the teachings of demons (**1 Tim. 3:16–4:3**). If 3:16 is a summary of truth contained in what was likely part of an early Christian hymn, then we may assume that demons attack not only the Incarnation, but also the historical resurrection and ascension of the Lord.
    - ii. They teach a **works** salvation. This seems to be the point of **1 Timothy 4:3–4**. By promoting asceticism as a good work, they replace the grace of God with a works program for salvation.
    - iii. They teach a **libertine** ethic. The “deep things of Satan,” undoubtedly promoted by his demons, attempt to teach people that wrong is right (**Rev. 2:20–24**).
- IV. They influence events on the **international** scale. **Daniel 10:13** relates that the prince of the kingdom of Persia resisted the coming of a good angel to bring Daniel a message. That prince was in turn resisted by Michael the archangel, indicating that the prince must have been a powerful demon. Just before Armageddon demons will be involved in moving the leaders of the nations to prepare for that military campaign

**(Rev. 16:13–16)**. Apparently there is warfare between the angels and demons that involves the affairs of nations of this earth. To deceive the nations is part of Satan’s master plan, and he uses demons in carrying it out. What this may mean in international politics staggers the imagination, for there is no reason not to believe that it is still going on today.

- V. They primarily target **Individual people**.
- a. They can bring **Physical affliction** - Demons are able to inflict physical diseases (Matt. 9:33, muteness; 12:22, blindness and muteness; 17:15–18, seizures). They can also cause mental disorders (Mark 5:4–5; 9:22; Luke 8:27–29; 9:37–42). They can be involved in bringing death to people (Rev. 9:14–19). Of course, not all physical or mental problems result from demonic activity; actually the Bible distinguishes natural illnesses from demonic ones (**Matt. 4:24; Mark 1:32, 34; Luke 7:21; 9:1**).
  - b. They can introduce **perversion** – Make no mistake – neither Satan nor demons can create; they can pervert. The fact that demons are also called unclean spirits shows that whatever they do perverts what is clean, noble, and right. Demons want to pervert people by having them turn aside from the plan of God to Satan’s plan. Sometimes they do this by promoting a perverted system of doctrine and lifestyle that may seem good to human beings (**1 Tim. 4:1–3**). Sometimes they do this by promoting evil and unclean activities (Deut. 32:17 ‘they sacrificed to demons and not to God; Ps. 106:37–39) The immorality of the Canaanites seems to be traceable to demon activity (Lev. 18:6–30; Deut. 18:9–14). Impressive passages on what demons have influenced people to do.
  - c. They can take **possession**
    - i. Definition. Demon possession is the **direct control** by demon(s) of an individual by residing in him. All people, believers and unbelievers, are influenced and affected by demon activity, but not all are possessed.
      1. Possessed individuals are **not capable** of severing themselves from the control of the demon(s). The term “to be possessed by a demon” or “to be demonized” occurs thirteen times in the New Testament, all in the

Gospels (e.g., Matt. 4:24; 12:22; Mark 5:15–18; Luke 8:36; John 10:21). The same phenomenon is described by terms like “cast out” or “come out” (Mark 1:25–26; 9:25).

2. After the Day of Pentecost demon possession and exorcism are mentioned only in Acts 5:16; 8:7; 16:16–18; 19:12.
3. The spiritual gift of discerning spirits (1 Cor. 12:10) most likely refers to the ability to distinguish between **true and false** sources of supernatural revelation when that revelation was being given in oral form, and not to the ability to cast out demons from people.

ii. Characteristics.

1. Symptoms - Not too many specific symptoms of demon possession are described in the accounts, but they include the following: **physical** abnormalities like muteness, blindness, and convulsions (Matt. 9:32; 12:22; Luke 9:39); tendencies to **self-destruction** (Mark 5:5; Luke 9:42); **insanity** (at least the people believed demons could produce this, John 10:20); superhuman strength (Mark 5:3–4); and occult powers (Acts 16:16–18). Though demons can do these things in people, this does not mean that all illness, for example, comes from demon activity. Dr. Luke clearly distinguished demon-induced diseases from illnesses due to other, more natural, causes (Acts 5:16).
2. Modern example - Here is a description of voodoo possession in the country of Haiti: The subject enters a trancelike state (usually after undergoing convulsions), during which one of the loas (spirit entities of Hatian voodoo) enters his or her body and “rides” it. The human personality is displaced by the superhuman, the human features take on the characteristics of the spirit’s (masculine or feminine, good or evil, old or young, crafty or honest), and the human throat utters the loa’s words, some of them in wholly unintelligible “tongues.”

The possession may last minutes or hours or sometimes days, during which time the person invaded by the spirit is fed the spirit's favorite food and drink (often quite impossible for unpossessed humans to consume) and offered his favorite diversions. Afterward, the human may remember nothing of his behavior.

- iii. Human Responsibility in demon activity. The Scripture says very little explicitly on this point. The warnings to be on guard against and to resist the attacks of the devil imply that failure to do so exposes one to the possibility of control by Satan and his demons. So, an individual may bear the responsibility for what happens while demon possessed; especially if he did not **resist** or even **invited** the activity. Yet the case of the lad who was demonized from childhood seems to indicate this was a condition over which he had no control (Mark 9:21). And certainly Paul's thorn in the flesh was not something he brought on himself, but was God using a demon to inflict the problem (2 Cor. 12:7).
- iv. To what extent can a Demon possess? Can a Christian be demon possessed today?
  1. The argument against a believer's being able to be demon possessed is often based on the fact of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer's heart. In other words, since the Spirit indwells the believer, it is impossible for Satan or demons also to indwell and thus possess the believer at the same time.
  2. But do not the Spirit and the flesh war within the believer? (Gal. 5:16–17). If it be argued that the old man has been judged (Rom. 6:6), it may also be pointed out that Satan has been judged too (John 12:31). So if Spirit and flesh, the new and the old, can be present within the believer at the same time, why cannot the Spirit and Satan (or demons)? Verses cited to support the view that believers can be possessed by demons are usually these: 1 Samuel 16:14; Luke 13:11–16; Acts 5:3; 1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians

- 11:4; and 12:7. When these verses are examined, they **do not prove** that believers can be demon possessed.
3. Perhaps the question should be restated. Instead of asking whether a believer can be demon possessed, we should ask whether or not Satan or demons can work from **within** a believer as well as from **outside**.
- a. Can Satan or demons set up a **beachhead** in the body and life of a believer? In other words, can the base of operation for Satan or demons be inside as well as outside a believer?
    - i. The reference in 1 Samuel says that an evil spirit tormented Saul, but the base of operation is not stated. Nor do we know definitely Saul's spiritual condition before God.
    - ii. Luke attributes the woman's deformity to a demon, and the Lord calls her "a daughter of Abraham." Some understand this to be a clear case of a demon working within a believer. However, it is unclear whether "daughter of Abraham" indicated a believer or only that she was one of God's chosen people, Israel. Clearly she was not a Christian in the post-Pentecost sense of the word.
    - iii. The punishment on the sinning brother in 1 Corinthians 5 involved delivering him over to Satan (see also 1 Tim. 1:20). But whether this meant that Satan and or demons would work from within his life or simply that he was now being put out of the fellowship and protection of the church into the domain of Satan, the world, is debatable.
    - iv. The "different spirit" of 2 Corinthians 11:4 is not a demon any more than "another

Jesus” in the verse is. It is another gospel that brings bondage.

- v. The base of operation of the messenger of Satan (a demon) that God sent to afflict Paul is unstated in 12:7. Though the result was a thorn in the flesh, this did not mean that the demon had to reside in Paul.
  - vi. Acts 5:3 clearly states that Satan filled the heart of Ananias to cause him to lie to the Spirit. The word “fill” is the same as used in Ephesians 5:18 of the filling of the Spirit. Since there is no reason not to believe that Ananias was a believer, here is a clear statement that Satan did fill the heart of a believer. Nothing is said about demons here, though presumably if Satan filled his heart, demons could have also. At the minimum it was Satan’s wicked influence that led Ananias to lie.
- d. How can this evidence be evaluated? Here are two suggestions.
- i. First, we should **avoid and discard** phrases like “demon possession” and “demon indwelling” when referring these concepts to believers, because we tend to read into these terms the same idea we have about Spirit indwelling that is – it is **permanent**.
    1. Neither Satan nor demons can permanently **indwell** a believer or ultimately have victory over him, even though they may dominate or control a believer’s life for some time.
    2. A believer may be delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, but the **spirit** will be saved in the Day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 5:5).
    3. Whatever Satan or demons can do to a believer, and whether from without or within as their base of operation, their **control** cannot be permanent and eternal.

4. John clearly declares that the evil one cannot “touch” the one who is born of God (1 John 5:18). The word “touch” here involves the purpose of **harming**—Satan cannot harm the believer. John uses the word in only one other place, John 20:17, and it means not a superficial touching but a grasping, clinging to, or holding on to someone.
  5. Satan can never **hang on** to the believer with the purpose of harming him, for that believer belongs eternally and irrevocably to God. Satan (or demons) may afflict and even control for a time, but never permanently or eternally.
- ii. Second, the indefinite treatment of the New Testament concerning the base of operation of demons in relation to Christians coupled with the lack of **direct commands** (after Pentecost) to exorcise demons give us a clue as to how to fight the enemy.
1. Normally one should not look to **exorcism** as the way to attack demons, but rather one must use the normal weapons of our warfare against Satan and his demons. The Christian should treat demon molestation as he would resist temptation or fight against the activities of his flesh. He should **examine** himself to see if there are any areas of rebellion against the law or will of God, confess any and all known sin, **rely** on the power of the indwelling Spirit who is greater than Satan (1 John 4:4), and use all the armor of God (Eph. 6:13–18).
  2. Even if exorcism may be called for in some extreme instances, the exorcist cannot prevent demons from attacking the same person again, for no human being can guarantee to bind demons or send them into the abyss.
  3. Paul reminds us that we struggle against the powers of darkness all our lives. Therefore, the Christian must be alert (1 Pet. 5:8), be clothed in God’s armor, and use all



the things that contribute to healthy spirituality (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 10:5; Phil. 4:8).

4. A note of caution: Not all **problems** are initiated by demons, not all physical illnesses, not all emotional problems, not all sins. Some arise from natural causes, some from the flesh. Casting out demons would do no good in such instances, but fighting the good fight of faith will benefit in all things.