

Demon Possession and How We Should Approach It

News in Focus

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What is demon possession and how should we deal with it?

There is a lot of talk in the church today about Satanism and satanic work. We have to distinguish, first of all, between satanic possession or being possessed by the devil and the ordinary common and perpetual work of the devil.

The devil is the great foe, the accuser of the brethren. He roams to and forth across the whole earth seeking whom he may devour as Peter tells us. But the work of the devil, the common work of the devil in the world is not necessarily and not always demon possession.

In the Evangelical Church today there is a lot of talk about the work of Satan. Many individuals blame every little sin or every little temptation on Satan or they say, "That was Satan working in me."

Well, we can't blame everything on Satan. If we were to do that, then we would negate the doctrine of total depravity. We negate the doctrine of original sin. We negate the teaching of the Scripture on the fact that the believer has a remnant of sin and the baggage of sin he still carries about. Everything is not blamed upon Satan.

Of course, he is the ultimate cause of sin. He is the originator of sin. He is the accuser of the brethren, but we have accountability in ourselves as Christians. We are accountable for our own actions and it is not satanic possession that causes us to sin or that causes us to be tempted to sin.

The Christian needs to be aware of what Satan possession actually is and how should we deal with it.

In the Charismatic movement there is a lot of talk and a lot of action surrounding the exorcism of demons and the casting out of demons. And we hear of Charismatic leaders casting out demons in the name of Jesus.

Strictly speaking exorcism means to expel by a conjuration or an incantation or a religious ceremony. This is diametrically opposed to anything that the Lord did or his disciples and apostles did in the New Testament.

There are some general points that we need to remember when we think of demon possession. We need to remember, first of all, that since the time of Christ the powers of Satan to possess individuals has been curtailed and Satan is a defeated foe. Satan is today a defeated foe. The work of Christ on the cross has defeated death and hell and Satan.

In John chapter 12 verse 31 we read, “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.”¹ And that is Christ speaking prior to the cross.

Another general point that we need to keep in mind is in the case of a supposed demon possessed individual, the assumption should be, first, that the individual is natural, i.e., he is in his natural sinful condition. He is totally depraved and he possesses what the Bible speaks of as original sin, that Adamic sin. We are sinners in Adam. And while Satan is the originator of sin, the ultimate cause of sin, he is not always a direct cause of sin. We have been tempted by him in Adam. We sin in Adam and we are accountable for that sin in ourselves.

Thirdly, the third general point is that demon possession in the Bible was always apparent. It was not an investigated concept, i.e., the disciples did not have to go around and investigate or search who was demon possessed. It was always an apparent thing. It was evident that the individual was demon possessed. There was always a change in personality or a change in behavior. In the case of the sick, generally speaking, the symptoms were not normal for any particular disease. There was an unusual knowledge and information.

The demons came to Christ and said, “Are you come to tempt us before our time?”

So there is this unusual knowledge and information.

There was always also a debased or an unclean element. In Matthew chapter 10 we read verse one, “And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.”²

Also apart from those unclean spirits there was always this debased element. They were dwelling in caves. They were dwelling in cemeteries. They were dwelling among the dead.

Another thing when we come, having concluded with our general points we need to understand that Christ had a specific method for casting out demons. The first method that Christ had for casting out demons was his Word.

¹ John 12:31.

² Matthew 10:1.

In Matthew chapter eight verse 16, “When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word.”³ He cast out the spirits with his Word. Christ used his Word to cast out demons.

In Matthew chapter 12 verse 28 we read also that he, “cast out devils by the Spirit of God.”⁴

And in Matthew chapter 17 verse 21 he tells his disciples, “This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.”⁵

The fact that he appended fasting on to prayer indicates that there was another element beyond normal every day prayer. This was something out of the ordinary. It was extraordinary work. This kind cometh not out but by prayer and fasting.

Let us note, also that Christ has dealt with Satan. When we speak of demon possession and when we speak of exorcising demons we have to understand that Christ has already dealt with Satan and if an individual who we may think is demon possessed or an individual who has a demonic personality or activity, we have to understand that Christ has dealt with Satan. It is not for us to take to ourselves the work of Christ. The gospel of Christ will deal with Satan.

Paul said in Romans 1:16, for instance, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation.”⁶

In John chapter eight verse 32 he says, “And ye shall know the truth,”⁷ that is the truth of the gospel. That is the faith, the objective faith, the compendium of truth.

“Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”⁸

In 1 John chapter four verse four we read, “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them.”⁹ That is, the spirit of this age, that is the false prophets. You have overcome them. Why? “Because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.”¹⁰

The Spirit of God is the one who will deal with Satan in the individual by the Word of God, by the truth of God as John chapter eight verse 32 has already indicated.

³ Matthew 8:16.

⁴ Mathew 12:28.

⁵ Matthew 17:21.

⁶ Romans 1:16.

⁷ John 8:32.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ 1 John 4:4.

¹⁰ Ibid.

And we come to the question: Can we cast out demons in the name of Jesus as the Charismatic leaders do? Can they cast out demons in the name of Jesus?

And we have to say no. Christ alone has the power to deal with Satan. Christ alone has the power to liberate the soul from the power of Satan who has taken men captive at his will, 2 Timothy chapter two tells us. Christ has the power and it is by the acknowledging of the truth and the repentance that is given them by the Lord, as Paul said to Timothy at that time.

And so we can't take this idea. We can't take this work of Christ upon ourselves and cast out demons, quote, "in the name of Jesus," unquote. Christ has finished the work and Christ will complete the work. And if we are going to fight with Satan, we are going to do it indirectly with the weapons that the Lord has given us.

Ephesians chapter six verse 10 speaks of the weapons that the Lord has given us: the helmet of salvation, the Word of truth, your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace and so forth. These are the weapons that the Lord has given to us to fight with Satan, to make this warfare against Satan in this world and in ourselves. We have been given weapons. We do not take to ourselves this idea of direct conflict with Satan.

In Deuteronomy chapter 18 and the verse 10, the law against any direct contact with the demonic world was given to Israel. In verse 10 of chapter 18 of Deuteronomy:

here shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee. ¹¹

The Canaanites, the ungodly nations, the ungodly world were given to these demonic works. The Lord said to his people that you are not to make this direct contact with Satan. Christ has completed the work. Christ will continue his work in defeating Satan and every knee shall bow and the devils also shall recognize that he is King of kings and Lord of lords when he gives him over to eternal damnation.

It is a work of Christ, not the work of man. And any work that we do on earth is through Christ and through Christ alone.

¹¹ Deuteronomy 18:10-12.

DEALING WITH DEMONS

There is a lot of talk in the church today about Satan and the power of Satan. Many charge Satan for every sin committed, every temptation experienced and every little wrong in the world. This approach to sin is skewed and is in essence an attempt to acquit the individual of the sin of sinning; "if Satan made me so it then I am not accountable."

The Christian needs to be aware of what Satan Possession actually is and how to deal with it. Are we to exorcise the spirit as we see in the Charismatic Movement? Strictly speaking the word 'exorcise' means to expel by a conjuration, incantation or a religious ceremony. This is diametrically opposed to anything the Lord did or his disciples.

General points:

- Since the time of Christ there powers of Satan to possess individuals have been curtailed, he is defeated (John 12:31).
- In the case of a supposed demon possessed individual, the assumption should be first that it is the natural man, total depravity and original sin.

Demon possession in the Bible was always apparent rather than investigated.

- There was always a change in their personality
- The symptoms were not normal for any particular disease.
- There was an unusual knowledge and information
- There was always a debased and unclean element, (Matthew 10:1).

Christ had a specific method for Casting out demons

1. By His Word (Matthew 8:16)
2. By His Spirit (Matthew 12:28)
3. By Prayer (Matthew 17:21)

Christ has dealt with Satan, point to Christ as the liberator of the soul. See Romans 1:16; John 8:32; II Timothy 2:26, I John 4:4.

Can we cast demons out in the name of Jesus?

No. Christ alone has the power to liberate the soul, in his priestly office, and man cannot arrogate to himself Christ's Priestly powers. Our fight with Satan is an indirect conflict with the weapons the Lord has provided (Ephesians 6:10-18), and we are not to directly engage Satan (Deuteronomy 18:10-12).