Why a Christian Can Have a Demon

There was a time when we taught in our church that Christians could not have demons. I preached long sermons stating that Christians could be oppressed, regressed, digressed, obsessed and suppressed, but never possessed. We believed that a demon could be outside a Christian oppressing him but that it could not be inside him. The reasoning I used to defend this position was that Jesus and the Holy Spirit could not live inside the same body in which demons reside.

The problem was, our experience did not match our theology. When we ministered deliverance, we frequently prayed for people we knew were born-again, Spirit-filled believers—and they manifested demons! We had to face the fact that either our experience was wrong or our doctrine was wrong.

We couldn't question our experience because we knew what we were seeing. So we began to question our theology.

In our search for truth, we realized that in the Bible, Jesus tells us to cast devils out, not to cast devils off. Obviously, for something to come out, it must be in. We finally came to the conclusion that our interpretation of the Bible had been wrong.

Now I am convinced not only that a Christian can have demons but also that there are demons that operate in the realm of theology, encouraging us to argue and debate endlessly over doctrine rather than meeting the needs of people who are hurting. Demons actually help promote the teaching that a Christian cannot have a demon, because they gain strength from staying hidden. They can operate in their destructive ways without being challenged!

Some may argue that a believer cannot be possessed. But the

dismaying fact remains that born-again Christians, including leaders, are experiencing difficulties that can find no solution in natural infirmities or the endless conflict between the flesh and the Spirit.

It's time to acknowledge that we are dealing with real people who have real problems and that God did not save and commission us so we could argue over doctrine. He called us into ministry so we can help people who are hurting, wounded and bruised.

When you come into contact with someone who is controlled by demons, the answer is to cast the devils out, not to argue about whether or not the person is a Christian. The answer is to bring help to that person.

Possessed or Not Possessed?

I realize I'm not the only believer who has ever had an erroneous idea about Christians being possessed. And the sensationalized picture Hollywood has painted of demon possession has not helped. It has led us to believe that if we say a Christian can be possessed, we are saying he can be fully owned and controlled by the devil and will manifest, Hollywood-style, with head spinning and eyes popping out.

The word "possessed" is an unfortunate translation because it connotes ownership, and we know that the devil cannot own a Christian—that is, have complete control of him. But in the Bible, there is no real distinction between being possessed and being oppressed, digressed, suppressed, obsessed and so forth. All these terms mean that a person is, to some degree, under the influence of a demon.

Personally, I do not have as much of a problem with the word "possessed" as other Christians do. In fact, to me the word "demonized" sounds worse.

When I looked up "possess" in the dictionary, I discovered

that one definition of the word is “to occupy.” My contention is that if a demon occupies your big toe, he possesses that part of you. It doesn’t mean he possesses your spirit, soul and body. But if he occupies even a small portion, such as a physical organ in your body—as a spirit of infirmity does—then there is possession to some degree.

I often ask those who are skeptical of demon possession whether or not cancer is demonic. Most will agree that sickness is of the devil.

So then, I continue, is cancer inside the body, or is there something on the outside that’s the problem? If it isn’t on the inside, doctors probably wouldn’t cut people open trying to remove it. Evidently, as a Christian, you can have something in you that is possessing a certain organ of your body and is not of God.

Knowing that a Christian can be possessed (or demonized) in some part of his being raises the question: Is any part off-limits to demons? Here is where we can reconcile the issue of Jesus and the Holy Spirit residing simultaneously within someone who needs deliverance.

One thing that has helped us in our understanding is the realization that every person is made up of three parts: spirit, soul and body. When Jesus comes into a believer’s life, He comes into that person’s spirit. John 3:6 tells us clearly, “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (NKJV). A demon cannot dwell in a Christian’s spirit because that is where Jesus and the Holy Spirit dwell.

It is the other components that make up a human being—the soul (mind, will and emotions) and the body—that are the targets of demonic attack. Demons can dwell in those areas of a Christian’s life. So when we say that a Christian is demonized or possessed, we are not saying he has a demon in his spirit but in some part of his soul or body.

To illustrate this truth, the Lord reminded us of the biblical account of Jesus' going into the temple and cleansing it of thieves and moneychangers. The Greek word used for "drove out" in this account is ekballo, which means "to expel or drive out." It is the same word that is used in Mark 16:17: "In My [Jesus'] name they will cast out demons."

We know that according to the Bible God's children are the temple of the Spirit of God (see 1 Cor. 3:16). In the Old Testament the temple had three parts: the holy of holies, the holy place and the outer court. This picture is a type or representation of who we are as His temple today.

The shekinah glory of God, or God's "presence," was in the holy of holies. This part of the temple represents our spirits.

But when Jesus went into the temple to drive out the thieves and moneychangers, He did not go into the holy of holies. He went into the outer court, where these evildoers were carrying on their business transactions.

The whole account is a picture of deliverance—of what Jesus wants to do in our temples. There may be demonic thieves in our lives that are operating in our outer courts (bodies or souls). Even though they cannot enter the holy of holies (our spirits), Jesus wants them expelled because the temple of God was never intended to be a place for thieves to operate. It is meant to be a place of worship and a place of prayer.

A Covenant Right

Those who believe that the ministry of deliverance is not for believers need to reconsider their position. The truth is, rather, that deliverance is not for the unbeliever.

What good would it do to cast demons out of an unbeliever, unless he is planning to get saved? Unbelievers cannot maintain their deliverance. In fact, according to Luke

11:24-26, after undergoing deliverance, the unsaved person is subject to receiving seven times as many demons as he had before.

The ministry of deliverance is the covenant right of believers. Like every other blessing from God—healing, prosperity, miracles and so on—it is promised only to His covenant people, those who believe in Jesus and come to God through Christ's blood. God, in His mercy, will bless people outside the covenant because He is merciful. But primarily, His blessings are based on covenant.

The story of the Syrophoenician woman in Mark 7:25-30 makes this clear. The woman sought out Jesus so He would deliver her daughter from an unclean spirit. But Jesus told her, "'Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs'" (v. 27).

In this verse, the phrase "the children's bread" refers specifically to deliverance, and Jesus is saying it belongs to His covenant people. Those outside the covenant may receive a miracle based on God's mercy, but deliverance is meant for those who have a covenant with God.

Luke 1:71-73 says Jesus came "that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham." He brought salvation from our enemies—devils and demons—based on a promise, of which we are heirs (see Gal. 3:29), that He made to Abraham.

The purpose of this salvation is stated in subsequent verses of Luke 1: "To grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life" (vv. 74-75). God provides the benefit so that we may serve Him without fear, in holiness and in righteousness all the days of

our lives. It is very difficult to live this way without being delivered. In fact, it is practically impossible.

One of the reasons it is so difficult is that demons are not always a result of sin in a person's life. There are many different kinds of evil spirits, and not all of them are what I refer to as "spirits of sin."

That is not to say that sin is not a huge entry point for demonic influence. For every sin in the Bible there is a corresponding demon. I maintain that if a Christian is living in sin or living in the flesh, there's no way he can escape demons.

However, it is also possible for a Christian to be demonized as a result of someone else's sin. For instance, a spirit of rejection or trauma can come upon a person because he is abused. Or demons may be inherited from a previous generation through a person's bloodline.

We have come a long way in our church since the early days when we believed Christians could not have demons. Now whenever a person gets saved, we automatically assume he needs some level of deliverance, and we lead him through the process. We don't question if the new believer has a demon, only how many he has.

That may sound hard. But remember, demonization is not always the person's own fault. Generational issues are a major entry point.

If we can be subjected to the consequences of sin to the fourth generation, as Exodus 20:5 says, and a biblical generation is 40 years, then we are subject to the demonic influence of what people in our family lines were doing 160 years before us. This means that, taking the year 2000 as a starting point, we are affected by what those in our bloodlines were doing as far back as the year 1840.

Think about it. Even if a person has a great genealogy, he can't know everything his ancestors were doing in secret that long ago. And if, in addition to generational sin, he has committed personal sin or has been traumatized or victimized in any way, by the time he comes to the Lord, he is going to need deliverance on some level. There is just too much defilement and contamination on Earth to escape it.

We must accept the reality that we have been commissioned to minister to God's covenant people, and part of our responsibility is to provide them with their covenant right of deliverance. If we deprive them of it based on some erroneous theological doctrine, then we are denying them what is rightfully theirs, and we cannot call ourselves able ministers of the New Covenant. Let's do as Jesus did, and serve the children's bread to those who need it!

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