

Do Some Christians Underestimate Demonic Activity?

As the subject of deliverance and demons has come front and center in recent days, I wanted to state clearly what I do and do not believe, in keeping with the views I have held for decades.

To help simplify the discussion, I'll answer a series of common questions. (For those who don't believe in the spiritual realm at all, this article will strike you as either exceedingly odd, exceedingly irrelevant or exceedingly foolish.

If so, I'd encourage to you check out C. S. Lewis's little book, "Screwtape Letters.")

1) Can a Christian be demon possessed? Certainly not. A Christian (in the true sense of the word, not in the sense of a believer in name only), cannot be owned or fully under the control of the devil, since Jesus owns that person and is their Lord. If that person is possessed by Satan, he or she is not owned by the Lord.

2) Can a Christian be demonized? Yes, meaning that, in a particular area of their lives, they can allow themselves to come under the power of Satan. (Note also that many Greek scholars would argue that the Greek verb *daimonizomai* should be translated "to be demonized" rather than "to be demon possessed.")

3) Can a Christian "have a demon"? Obviously, that depends on what you mean by "having a demon." If you're asking if a demonic spirit can dwell within the born-again, human spirit, the answer is no. If you're asking if a demonic spirit can

enter into a stronghold in a believer's mind or attach itself to a believer's body, the answer is yes.

4) Do Christians ever need deliverance? Yes, in some cases, when they open the door to the devil and are unable to break free, they might need deliverance. By this I mean that they would need to receive ministry from another believer who would help break the power of the devil in their lives. In such cases, we can order that spirit to leave in Jesus' name, recognizing that the demon is somewhere in that person's life where that demon does not belong.

5) Is deliverance only for Christians? Certainly not. Demons can be driven out of non-believers, as is clearly the case in Acts 16:16-18, and presumably was very common in the ministry of Jesus, who was frequently engaged in driving out demons (see, e.g., Matt. 8:16-17; Luke 13:31-33). This is sometimes part of that person's salvation experience. They are set free from satanic dominion and then come to faith in the One who set them free. For a classic example, see Mark 5:1-20.

6) Should deliverance be a normal practice in the life of a believer? Certainly not. Deliverance should be the exception to the rule for many reasons, including: 1) It is certainly not a New Testament emphasis for believers, meaning that very little can be found about deliverance in the letters written to the churches or in the instructions written to leaders. Repentance from sin is emphasized far more than deliverance from demons. 2) We are called to cultivate intimacy with Jesus, crucify our flesh and renew our minds. Doing this will take care of the vast majority of our problems. 3) We are overcomers in the Lord, indwelt by the Holy Spirit and bought with the blood of Jesus. Unless we continue to play games with the enemy (which is a very dangerous practice for a believer), we definitely should not find ourselves needing repeated deliverance.

7) Do some Christians underestimate demonic activity?

Absolutely. Satan and his demonic forces are very real and very active, and we are at war with these forces whether we recognize it or not. (This is most clearly stated in Eph. 6:12.)

8) Do some Christians overestimate demonic activity?

Absolutely. We are to be God conscious, not demon conscious, and our identity should be found in being followers of Jesus, not ministers of deliverance. We should not be looking for demons hiding under every rock, nor should we attribute all (or most) of our problems to demonic infestations. The more we look for demons, the more we open up the door to demonic deception and even to purely emotional (and fleshly) manifestations.

9) Are there common errors in deliverance ministry?

Yes, just as there are common errors in many forms of ministry, especially when they become prominent after being dormant for some time. Some of the errors would be: 1) making deliverance from demons a central issue; 2) being more conscious of demons than of the Lord; 3) attributing too much power to the devil; 4) making deliverance a regular practice for believers; 4) expecting common manifestations and responses (such as the “deliverance churches” which literally have “barf bags” by every seat—or in every pew—to aid all the Christians coughing up demons; this is not an exaggeration).

10) Should deliverance be put on public display?

No, it should not, meaning, to the extent it is our decision, deliverances should not be put on display, which is why Jesus silenced the demons professing that He was the Son of God. And even though there are instances in the New Testament when demons screamed when they left people or caused their victim’s bodies to convulse or collapse, there are no examples of protracted deliverances which became spectacles. In fact, in the lengthy account in Mark 9:14-29, when Jesus saw a crowd running to watch what was happening, He immediately drove the spirit out. Those who engage in mass evangelism meetings where people

under demonic power suddenly begin to act wildly have their teams ready to remove such people from the crowds immediately. They do not want demonic activity to be a distraction, and those under demonic power are brought to a separate, private area to receive ministry.

11) Can we glean spiritual information from demons? Absolutely not. We do not give heed to lying spirits; we do not learn truth from the darkness; we do not gain information about the spiritual realm by listening to Satan's minions. This is a sure path to deception.

12) Can any Christian be engaged in the ministry of deliverance or is this only for Christian leaders? On the one hand, theoretically speaking, any Spirit-empowered believer can drive a demon out of someone, as the longer ending of Mark indicates (see Mark 16:15-18; the signs mentioned here, beginning with driving out demons, were to follow all believers; note also the ministry of Phillip, who was not an apostle, in Acts 8:4-8). On the other hand, we should not approach the subject of deliverance in a cavalier way, nor should we glibly challenge the devil to "bring it on." That is as foolish as it is arrogant (In Catholic circles, of course, exorcism is only to be carried out by qualified clergy.)

Let us then preach the gospel, lift Jesus up in our praises, be people of prayer, renew our minds by the Word, be filled with the Spirit, crucify our flesh and resist the devil. When we need to drive him out from places where he does not belong, we will be ready.

(Those wanting a more in-depth treatment of the subject can listen to my 12-hour, scripturally-based teaching series on "Angels, Demons and Deliverance," recorded more than 30 years ago but still representing my position today.) {eoa}

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