

Help! I Think I'm Possessed!

Demons are real—and Christians aren't immune from their  influence. But thanks to Christ's work on the cross, we are guaranteed victory over Satan and his minions.

One of the most popular television series in recent years is *Survivor*. A group of people are left in a desolate location and must survive on what is at hand. As part of the intrigue, only one can win the large cash prize when the contest ends. As the show progresses, the contestants never know their friends from their enemies.

We live in a beautiful world, yet to survive we, too, must know our enemies. Our worst adversaries are not people but invisible forces of darkness. These forces carry out the orders of a former ally who turned against God. Satan and his evil minions are very near and ready to take out God's soldiers. Yet God has given us the resources to survive and thrive.

To defeat our enemy, we must know him and be fully aware of the weapons at our disposal. Revelation 12:9 reaches back before time: "So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast out to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him" (NKJV). These fallen angels are given several different names in Scripture—demons, principalities, powers, ruler(s) of darkness, wicked spirits, unclean spirits, among other descriptions—and there are many of them. According to Revelation 12:4, one-third of the innumerable hosts of angels fell. The "stars of heaven" refer symbolically to the angels.

Jesus Christ regularly confronted demons as an integral part of His ministry. Luke 4:18 records how He launched His public ministry by quoting Isaiah 61:1-2: "The Spirit of the Lord is

upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor ... to set at liberty those who are oppressed." Obviously Jesus knew His purpose was to rescue humanity from the bondage and oppression of the enemy.

Jesus confronts demons at least nine times in the New Testament, notably in Luke 8:26-39 when He cast a legion of demons out of a man and into a herd of pigs. The demons had the power to torment and create mental disorders. Yet the glorious truth is that they had to obey the commands of Jesus Christ.

Can people still be demon-possessed? The short answer is yes. The Greek word describing the condition of a person affected by a demon is "*daimonizomai*," which was translated as "demon-possessed" in the King James Version. According to Bible scholars, the word is in present tense with an active voice and a passive ending. A person in this condition can be described as in "a demon-controlled passivity." He or she is being controlled to the a point of passivity by a demon.

Because Christians have the Holy Spirit living in them, the degree of demonization is limited in believers. A Christian can be controlled by the enemy, but not owned. This is important to remember because one of Satan's great strategies is to get Christians to believe that they are immune to demonic influence. A Spirit-filled believer walking in obedience to Christ is absolutely protected from the enemy. However, while a disobedient Christian's spirit is protected from the enemy, his mind and body can be subject to attack.

A Christian can "give place to the devil" (Eph. 4:27). When a Christian lives with unconfessed, habitual sin the enemy moves in to that place in the believer's life. The enemy constructs a thought pattern around that sin or attitude. Second Corinthians 10:4-5 describes that house of thoughts as a stronghold. Demons can take up residence in that stronghold in the believer's life. These demons don't possess the Christian

anymore than a cockroach can possess a house. Cockroaches are dirty and troublesome, but they don't own the house. In the same way, demons can harass, oppress and depress the believer, but they can't damn him or her.

Symptoms of a Bound Life

After spending a decade doing hand-to-hand combat with satanic forces, I have discovered several symptoms of demonic operation. Some of these indicators can be signs of mental illness, which isn't always the result of demonic attack. But when good psychological care from Christian professionals doesn't result in a cure, it is often possible that the person's symptoms could point to demonic operation.

Drawn from the account of the demoniac of Gadara in Mark 5, the first six symptoms are extreme. The man in that passage was controlled by a legion of demons and had been chained in a cemetery because of his erratic and violent behavior. Other signs of demonic activity may be subtler, but they are no less dangerous and shouldn't be ignored.

1. Incapacity for normal living (see Mark 5:1-5). The actions of legion made him unsuitable for normal social interaction with friends and family. An unusual desire for solitude, accompanied by a deep loneliness, will often set in. The person will often become very passive with no desire to change.

2. Extreme behavior (see Mark 5:4). An explosive temper and extreme uncontrollable anger could be signs of demonic activity. These are dangerous behaviors that control the individual and affect surrounding loved ones.

3. Personality changes (see Mark 5:9,12). Changes in personality, extreme or mild, may be evidence of demonic activity. And though all cases of multiple personality may not be demonic, in most cases demon activity is involved.

4. Restlessness and insomnia (see Mark 5:5). The demoniac cried in the tombs “night and day.” He couldn’t sleep. Insomnia can be a sign of a physical or spiritual problem. God has gifted His children with sleep (see Ps. 127:2). So when you can’t sleep night after night and there is no medical reason, the devil may be tormenting you.

5. A terrible inner anguish (see Mark 5:5). Grief and anguish are normal emotions. Yet persistent unresolved anguish that won’t leave after normal therapies of counseling, encouragement and prayer could well be demonic.

6. Self-inflicted injury and suicide. In Mark 5:5, the demonized man was cutting himself. And in Mark 9:14-29, a man’s son was both deaf and mute because of a demon, and the evil spirit would often throw the boy into fire and water to destroy him. Demons can cause people to injure themselves and even incite suicide.

7. Unexplained illness. When medical testing produces no physical cause for an illness, then we should look to the mind and spirit for answers. Sometimes illnesses are psychological, and good counseling can result in a cure. Other times the battle is with demons. Luke 13:11-16 tells the story of a “daughter of Abraham” who was afflicted by a “spirit of infirmity.” Although she was a child of God, she was tormented by illnesses caused by this class of demons.

8. Addictive behavior. Addiction to alcohol, drugs, sex, food, gambling and other things opens the door to demonic influence and control. I’m not saying demons cause all of these problems. But anything that causes one to be out of control opens that person to infernal control.

9. Abnormal sexual behavior. The spirit of harlotry is mentioned several times in Ezekiel 16:20-51. This spirit infected the nation of Israel with the sins of Sodom and even motivated the people to sacrifice their own children.

Homosexuality, adultery, fornication and even infanticide were all inspired by the spirit of harlotry (see Hos. 4:12). And nations and families are sold into spiritual bondage by the witchcraft of this spirit (see Nah. 3:4). When we play around with sexual sin, we open ourselves to this demonic spirit. We must battle this principality that dominates our nation.

10. Defeat, failure and depression in the Christian life. It is Satan's purpose to rob us of the victorious life that is ours in Christ (see 2 Cor. 2:10-14). This symptom is often manifested by an inability to praise and worship, which is a weapon of warfare. In Psalm 106:47, David asks God for salvation so he could "triumph in [God's] praise."

11. Occult involvement and behavior. Occult involvement is clearly a symptom of demonic control. Deuteronomy 18:9-12 catalogs the works of the occult, including child sacrifice, fortune-telling, sorcery and calling up the dead.

12. Speech difficulties. In Matthew 9:32-33, Jesus rebuked a demon, and the mute man was able to speak. Speech difficulties may be physical, emotional or mental, but in some cases they are demonic. Extreme language and cursing also may be prompted by the enemy.

13. Doctrinal error. First Timothy 4:1 warns that in the last days deceiving spirits will teach the doctrines of demons. Today religious cults and charlatans abound. The reason these deceivers draw many people is the power of the demonic that teaches them.

14. Religious legalism. In Galatians 3, the church at Galatia had forsaken a faith ministry that resulted in the miraculous for a law ministry of rules and regulations. Paul classified this error as witchcraft. Some deeply religious people are under the bondage of tradition, man-made rules and outward appearances. Demons thrive in this kind of environment, especially demons of control. Whenever something is

substituted for faith in the finished work of Christ, it is a doctrine of demons.

The Liberating Truth

Ignoring the truth about demonic forces is frivolous and perilous, but at the heart of spiritual warfare is this truth: The battle has already been won! Satan and the forces of hell are on a short leash because of what Christ did at Calvary. We are not fighting *for* victory, but rather *from* victory. The powers of darkness were conquered at the cross. Colossians 2:15 says, "Having disarmed principalities and powers, [Christ] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it."

The blood of Jesus wiped out our sin and left Satan powerless. Every blow that drove the nails into His holy hands was also a nail in the coffin of Satan. The glorious truth is that you and I can enforce that victory. We can see Satan in rapid retreat, and the steps to victory are simple.

Submit to the authority of Christ. Before a believer can effectively put Satan to flight, he must be under authority himself. James 4:6 says, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." The word *proud* in that verse describes a self-sufficient person who runs his own life. The word *resist* means "to arrange an army against." God has placed an army against the self-sufficient.

A rebellious, sinning Christian cannot put Satan to flight. The Christian who lives in obedience under God-given authority can send the enemy fleeing. The secret to Jesus' power was that He lived under the will of the Father. He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death (see Phil. 2:8). After His submission came His exaltation. Philippians 2:10 declares that every realm is now under Christ's authority—the spiritual realm, the natural realm and the demonic realm. Before we can stand in authority, we must submit ourselves to

God completely.

Resist Satan. James 4:7 says: "Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." We must learn that we can't hide from Satan. We can't outrun him, and we can't get away from him on this planet. How, then, do we resist the enemy?

-
- Live, under authority, an obedient and clean life.
- Stand against Satan in the authority of Christ.
- Remain steadfast in faith, believing God for the victory.
- Verbally attack Satan with the Word of God and the work of Christ.
- Give no place to Satan; give up no ground whatever.
- Demand in the authority of Christ that he leave.
- Give thanks and praise to God and watch the devil run.

When believers are set free from bondage, it releases the flow of God's life into the church. The dry places are where demons live, according to Luke 11:24. When believers experience the liberating power of the truth of the good news of Christ, then the power of God is released through them. God promises revival and a harvest to those who come home from bondage.

Satan and his minions are defeated foes. The victory has been won at the cross. The battle rages on earth, but we don't have to live in bondage and defeat. We can know the joy of victory and release.

Ron Phillips is pastor of *Abba's House* in Hixson, Tenn., and author of *Everyone's Guide to Demons and Spiritual Warfare*, which releases in September.

Find out how to recognize and defeat the seven demons that attack the church at