

Demonization and Deliverance

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Over the last fifty years, we have witnessed an erosion of faith that matches any seen in the past. Heresies are as abundant as they were in its first three hundred years of the existence of the Christian church. Even where belief is said to be orthodox, authority of the scriptures is questioned, the doctrines of the church are challenged, and spiritual warfare is not waged. The church is in decline as a moral force, and people are exchanging the truth about God for a lie, worshiping and serving created things rather than the creator (Rom. 1:25). The church does not believe it battles against the rulers, authorities, the power of this dark world, and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Eph. 6:12). This has come about because we have compromised the authority of the Bible and ceased to believe in an evil supernatural kingdom. This is reflected by many mainline denominational leaders who do not believe in a personal Satan, not to mention his subordinates, what the Bible calls demons (Gallup, 1980). Kelly (1968) has summarized the theological arguments for this position.

Whether Christians believe in his existence or not, evil still exists and modern man wishes to control it. But how do you fight against evil if you do not know there are weapons available to fight with. The only other way to achieve control is to join forces with the evil. Thus, we see the rise of Satanism, witchcraft, astrology, the drive to decriminalize drug taking and selling, abortion as a means of birth control, and the

failure of the courts and society to adequately punish wrongdoing. We have joined forces with evil or, at best, only half-heartedly tried to control it.

The fact that modern Christendom does not generally believe in a personification of evil, or has blindly joined forces with it, creates a problem expressed in a paper entitled "Exorcism Today?" The author has reviewed the literature both secular and theological, has presented the pros and cons of the argument for and against the existence of evil supernatural beings and their exorcism, but he himself does not take a firm stand as to the reality of Satan and his works.

I do not believe that we can equivocate. Christian mental health workers have to believe that there is personification of evil, and must be ready to do battle with it. When we sit day after day and see and hear how the enemy has worked in cases of child abuse, incest, rape, broken homes, separation and divorce, alcoholism, drug addiction and sexual perversions, how can we question his existence? Our Lord did not give us the weapons to fight evil with for nothing. We cannot join those who refuse to believe in his existence; the lives of too many persons are at stake.

Barnhouse (1965, p. 156) quoted Baudelaire as saying, "The devil's cleverest ruse is to make men believe that he does not exist." He also quoted Denis de Rougemont (p. 156) who wrote: "Recognize immediately that this stratagem of spreading the idea of his own non-existence has never been more successful than at the present time. Even

those who 'still' believe in God believe so little in the devil that I shall certainly be accused of obscurantism, or simply the lack of seriousness, if I persist in my project of writing a whole book on the subject. The first trick of the devil is his incognito. God says, 'I am He who is,' but the devil, who is possessed of the desire to imitate truth in twisting it says to us, like Ulysses to the Cyclops, 'I am nobody.' What are you afraid of? Are you going to tremble before the non-existent?" We cannot let ourselves be lured into this trap, we must accept the fact that the devil is, and that the Bible speaks clearly of him, his kingdom and his subjects. To say that it does not is error.

Barnhouse, Unger (1952) and Kock (1972) note that the Bible speaks about him and his works in many places. There is no doubt that the writers of the Old and New Testaments were acutely aware of his existence and his works. To deny them is to deny the revelation of God's Word, for it is explicit about God and the devil.

Pentecost, in his excellent book, *Your Adversary the Devil* (1969), has described the character of Satan, as well as his strategies; all his descriptions are based on scripture from the Old Testament, the Gospels, and the epistles of Paul, Peter and John. Unger, in his book, *Demons in the World Today* (1971), has done the same thing for demons. Both of these books carefully explain the biblical basis for their conclusions. In their writings, there is abundant evidence that the Holy Spirit had revealed to all biblical writers the danger of the evil supernatural world. The argument that Paul does not speak of demons or Satan except on rare occasions is refuted by a careful examination

of the works of Pentecost and Unger. They make it clear that there is an ever-present awareness of the prince of this world in Paul's letters.

Equivocation by the author of the paper and other writers in the field of behavioral science is understandable because the philosophy of science is fundamentally deterministic (Furlong, 1981). We are so steeped in determinism that it even influences the thinking of those of us who are believers. C. S. Lewis wrote with insight about this in his book, *Miracles* (1969, p. 43). "And since the Sixteenth Century, when Science was born, the minds of men have been increasingly engaged in those specialized inquiries for which truncated thought is the correct method. It is, therefore, not in the least astonishing that they should have forgotten the evidence for the supernatural. The deeply ingrained habit of truncated thought – what we call the scientific habit of mind – was indeed certain to lead to Naturalism, unless this tendency were continually corrected from some other source. But no other source was at hand, for during the same period men of science were coming to be metaphysically and theologically uneducated."

It is because our education is dominated by a deterministic cosmology that those of us in behavioral science tend to weasel out of saying, "Yes, there are demons, and yes, they need to be dealt with!" The problem we face is summed up in Jesus' story of the Pharisee who prayed on the street with his fancy robes and phylacteries. He implied in this story that the Pharisee was seeking the approval of men (Matt. 6:5). We Christians

may believe in our hearts that we have to accept His teachings about the enemy, but we also want the approval of the secular world, and not its derision, so we equivocate. Unfortunately, we cannot be in the world and of it at the same time (John 15:19).

But those willing to accept the criticism and to admit the existence of Satan and his demons still have to know how to diagnose demon possession, oppression and obsession (Phillips, 1970, p 169). Once we have a proper diagnosis, we also have to know what techniques we need to deal with the demons without compounding the problem we started with. John White (1976, p. 253) has said that he could “conceive of no demonic state that cannot be explained by a non-demonic hypothesis.” I agree with him, but only if we are speaking of observers who are non-Christians or Christians who are basing their explanation only on scientific criteria. It is a fact that spiritual things are revealed only by the Holy Spirit. Non-Christians are not able to understand the supernatural because they do not have spiritual discernment (1 Cor. 2:14).

Although the author of *Exorcism Today?* Has trouble being definitive in his answers, other authors have no such trouble. Unger (1952, 1971), Koch (1972), Davies (1898), as well as several of the essayists in *Demon Possession* (ed. J. W. Montgomery, 1976), have recognized the need for criteria that would allow health professionals and pastors to differentiate demon possession from biologically and psychologically determined diseases. The standard criteria that are accepted by many authors who have had experience with demons are those of Nevius (1894).

Because he worked in China before the turn of the century, one cannot cavalierly dismiss his observations recorded in *Demon Possessions and Allied Themes* (1894). This book was republished and the title shortened to *Demon Possession* (1968). Since the Bible makes it clear that not all sick persons were demon possessed, Nevius was fully aware of the need to differentiate demon possession from disease. Therefore, he determined his criteria with a full understanding of the importance of ascertaining what evidence was clearly of supernatural origin. The distinguishing marks of demon possession that he thought differentiated possession from other kinds of illness were:

1. The automatic projection of a new personality in the victim. The new personality reveals itself in a different voice, and sometimes in a different dialect or language on a completely different educational and cultural level. The new personality refers to itself in the first person and the possessed in the third person. Bystanders are addressed in the second person.
2. The personality possesses supernatural knowledge and intellectual power that the possessed could not possibly have acquired through other means. Even in a purely pagan culture, the demon knows of Christ and his realm.
3. The possessed has supernatural strength. Although persons who have mental disease seem to have supernatural strength, it is nothing when compared to that of the possessed.
4. The manifestation of the personality of the demon is frequently characterized by a complete change of moral character of the victim.

Unger (1952) has observed that demons are not always immoral or unclean, but the one common characteristic of their personality is opposition to Jesus Christ (1 John 4:1-3). In our society, they often come disguised as angels of light. But whether their character is immoral or not, they are God-defying and Christ-resisting. The criteria of Nevius, with some minor modifications, are scripturally defined and documented by the experiences of persons who have encountered demons in western and third world countries where possession is more common.

Many who have written authoritatively with spiritual insight on the subject agree with Nevius that demon possession is a recognizable condition. These criteria include not only symptoms, but also signs of possession. Physicians are fully aware of the risks in treating patients on the basis of symptoms alone. To treat any disease correctly we have to determine what symptoms and signs allow us to predict with a high degree of certainty the possible etiologies of the symptoms. If the worker encountering a potentially demonized person lacks either theological or psychological understanding, he will not always be able to determine the etiology of the patient's problems. If he is looking for demons, he will find them behind every bush because some of the symptomatic manifestations of possession will be found. On the basis of this evidence, he will immediately draw the conclusion that the person is possessed. For this reason some have assigned too many of mankind's ills to demon possession, simply because they lack knowledge of the medical and psychological factors that have to be considered before a diagnosis of demon possession can be made.

It is unfortunate that much of the popular literature on demon possession is based on such inadequate reasoning. The Hammonds in their widely distributed book, *Pigs in the Parlor* (1973), list seven general areas of dysfunction that they think are manifestations of demons. These include (1) emotional problems, (2) mental problems, (3) speech problems, (4) sex problems, (5) addictions, (6) physical infirmities and (7) religious error.

One can, in reading their book, recognize that a host of conditions are included under these general headings. As a Christian physician who has dealt with medical and psychiatric illnesses for many years, I cannot accept the sweeping generalizations I find in their book. It is unfortunate that without qualification they listed these symptoms as manifestations of demon possession. In teachings that I have heard, others have listed over two hundred demons causing anything from ingrown toenails to hair loss. Persons who assert that almost everything is due to demon possession do the enemy a great service. Their claims, which they make with great surety, make the whole subject of demon possession appear to be a ludicrous flight of fancy.

On the other hand, as one reads Don Basham's book, *Deliver Us From Evil* (1972), such sweeping generalizations are not as apparent and the symptomatic manifestations of his cases are more characteristic of what one would find in the Bible. Francis MacNutt (1974) is even more conservative than are the Hammonds (1973) and Basham (1972) in diagnosing demon possession. He believes that true demon possession occurs rarely, but oppression and obsession occur frequently. Unger (1969) and Koch

(1972) all take this same view. I personally, am in accord with the view of MacNutt.

Discernment also enters into the diagnosing of demonic activity. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit that provides the believer with a sense of the presence of evil (1 Cor. 12:10). Excluding popular literature, only Unger and Koch emphasize this gift. The author has on many occasions been aware of evil when in the presence of persons who later proved to be anti-Christ (Wilson, 1976).

This is not, however, a trustworthy way to diagnose demon possession, for it is just as readily experienced when one encounters spirit oppressed or obsessed persons. Its usefulness lies in the fact that it arouses the suspicion of the observer that some supernatural force is at work, and that one should be careful in how they evaluate and treat that person. To say that this discernment does not exist, or that it is of doubtful relevance, is equal to denying an awareness of the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives or the lives of others.

In addition, one cannot explain away the scriptural references in 1 Cor. 12:10 and 1 John 4:1 by saying that Paul and John were talking about doctrinal matters rather than evil spirits. Many highly competent biblical scholars interpret these scriptures as applying to the discernment of evil spirits. This is an extremely important point since the ability to discern evil spirits was manifested in Christ's ministry to people possessed by evil spirits. It follows that if we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16), we also can have

the gift of discerning evil spirits if the Holy Spirit chooses to give it to us (1 Cor. 12:11).

Finally, I want to say that we have power over Satan and his minions. Jesus gave this power not only to The Twelve, but also to all those who believe in him. It is usually a simple matter to diagnose demon possession and to deliver those who are possessed. One does, though, have to be a mature born again Christian with a strong faith. Anyone who is going to do deliverance must recognize that the occupation is hazardous for at times demonized persons will attack the person doing the deliverance. One must always command the demons to leave in the name of Jesus, telling them to leave with no fuss or bother. Sometimes they resist, but persistent prayer will eventually rid the infested person of them. It is also desirable to have a team of persons praying for the person doing the deliverance while they are at work. When persons are obsessed or oppressed the demons can be bound and a request made to dispense with them as the Lord sees fit.

CONCLUSIONS

One cannot equivocate about the existence of an enemy who is out to devour whomever he may (1 Peter 5:8). There is a Satan and he does have minions who possess, oppress and obsess believers and unbelievers alike. Christians have been given the weapons to participate in the invisible war that continuously rages around us.

The Bible is explicit about the existence of this enemy and the need to engage in battle against him and his forces of evil.

Satan's greatest weapon has been to convince mankind that he does not exist; or if unable to do that, to make his activities seem so ludicrous that those who could do battle with him do not pay him any mind. We have been given a gift of the Holy Spirit and the criteria to diagnose demon possession.

Christian counselors must be prepared to discern, diagnose, and deliver afflicted persons from the grip of the enemy. If they do not wish to do it themselves, they should have available to them persons who are willing to do so. We cannot allow our deterministic education and the uncertainty or unbelief that exists in the theological world to influence our position. The lives of too many people are at stake.

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