

Can a Christian Be Demon Possessed?

A penetrating Contribution to the Continuing Debate

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There is one major personal problem I come across when talking to Christians who practise demonology ministry on other Christians. They are unable to give a New Testament, post-Pentecost Scriptural basis for their ministry. It is the Old Testament and the Gospels they use to base their doctrine on. They concentrate on Old Testament events going back thousands of years ago, while ignoring either the Book of Acts or the Epistles. The reason, of course, is that very little activity is recorded in these books. Yet, the Book of Acts is the history of the Holy Spirit at work in the early Church.

Many in the demon deliverance business deny in practice, the Scriptural basis of salvation, although they would be horrified if they realised it. For instance, it must be difficult for them to fully believe that the Blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin (Ephesians 1 :7), and that once a person is "In Christ" he is a new creation. "The old life is gone, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). There is also very little understanding of the changes God instigated on the day of Pentecost, when the New Testament Church was born. For the first time in human experience, the Holy Spirit was to take up permanent residence in all who would believe. Until that time the Holy Spirit • came upon men and at certain times. We therefore, ask with confidence, "Can light and darkness live together in the person?" (See Ephesians 5:8; Colossians 1:13, Thessalonians 5:4-5. The answer from those who practice demonology with Christians, has to be "yes". The doctrine of Christian demon possession, or oppression, is sometimes made by using isolated texts and interpreting them to fit into the new theology. For instance, Jesus spoke of a demon being driven from a house and he returned later with other demons to the house that had been swept clean. (Matthew 12:43-45.) From that text, an argument is made that a house contains rooms and, therefore, you can have clean rooms and dirty rooms. Holy Spirit in one and a demon in another! The text, of course, does not say anything like it. It is dangerous to make doctrine out of solitary texts. Jesus was teaching a principle about making sure that the house is not left empty once having been delivered. The house was an illustration not to be taken to extremes of interpretation.

Let us look at the Church after the Holy Spirit had been given to all believers. How many times do we see the Apostles casting out demons? Very few. It was not a major pre - occupation in the early Church. We read in Acts 5: 14-16 about Peter healing those with unclean spirits

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How many times do we see the Apostles casting out demons? Very few." (AV). In Acts 19:11-20 we also read of demon activity dealt with by Paul. Very little else is found after the day of Pentecost and certainly no record at all of Christians being delivered. A sound principle to follow is this: "Where little is mentioned in Scripture, give it little space in the ministry. Where much is said, give it a priority in the ministry." The incident in Acts 8:9-25 is important. Simon had previously practised magic and had impressed a large number of people. He had had a large following. However, when he saw the power of God releasing people he also believed. An ideal candidate for deliverance ministry if he goes off the rails! Simon then saw the Apostles, Peter and John laying hands on believers and commanding the Holy Spirit upon believers. He saw a chance to get back

some of the influence he had lost by asking for this power himself and he was willing to buy it. Notice what actually happened. Observe no deliverance ministry. Simon is first strongly reprov'd. He is told he cannot have any part of this ministry because his heart is not right with God. It was a heart problem not a spirit problem. The solution offered was this, "Repent of this wickedness and pray ..." It has always been so. The bases for Christian deliverance are, repent and pray. David fell into lust and murder but when challenged by the prophet he repented and prayed. (See Psalm 51.) Let us call wickedness, wickedness. It is a sin question not demons. Notice that in the Bible, it is not once recorded that a Christian was delivered from a demon. There is not even one. Why? Because a Christian has all the necessary power to turn away from sin and serve God in righteousness. Anything less is to deny the power of the risen Christ given to everyone at conversion whereby we call Him Lord.

Can people be possessed? Yes, we know it by the authority of Scripture. Where we can become confused is when people respond to the preaching of the modern so called Gospel and believe they are Christians. Such as the, "Come to Jesus and give Him your Heart" approach. The only Scriptural way a person can come into the new life in Jesus is recorded in the Book of Acts 20:21 " ... repentance towards God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." The message on the day of Pentecost was "repent and be baptised ... " (Acts 2:38.) We do not always allow potential new converts time to repent. The Holy Spirit is sent to convict us of sin. A person needs time to come before God and allow the Holy Spirit to indicate a specific sin so that it can be dealt with. Maybe the real problem is that preachers are only too happy with a hand count, rather than real conversions.

Peter reinforces the Gospel in Acts 3: 19. Having seen the miracle of healing of a lame man, Peter preaches powerfully about the lost condition of his hearers then does not say "come to Jesus" as a first step, but demands repentance and conversion that their sins may be blotted out. He was only repeating the message of Jesus. I believe that many of the Christians who are "delivered" today are not Christians at all! When someone seeks counsel, the counsellor should, early on in the conversation, allow the person to explain their conversion. The result is often a mind-blowing experience. The Gospel they responded to is certainly not found in the Scriptures. There is no evidence in their personal life of turning away from the old life. No evidence of assurance of sins forgiven. None of the new life of Christ being received through the power of the Holy Spirit. In fact, this type of language is totally foreign to so many. To make the Gospel easy to understand we often sacrifice truth. A minister in the 18th Century was once asked why he did not modernise his Gospel preaching. His reply was, "How can you modernise truth?" It is often true that the demon possession problem has to be dealt with before that person can genuinely become a "born from above", Spirit -filled Christian. That is a totally different matter from delivering a person from possession, or oppression, who, according to Scripture, has a new life in Christ.

We must also have concern for those who use possession, or oppression, of demons to opt out of living a righteous life. Say, for instance, a young Christian man is diagnosed as having a spirit of lust. The diagnosis can take away his responsibility to live a righteous life because every time he has this problem he can blame the demon. What does Paul say? He demands that a sexually immoral man is removed from the Church. He offers no deliverance ministry; only deliver the man to Satan for destruction. (1 Corinthians 5:1-5.) He commands men to flee fornication in 1 Corinthians 6:18. Finally, in 2 Corinthians 12:21 he mourns that many who have sinned before have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication and lewdness that they have practised. As Christians we have to learn, and be taught how, to repent and live a new life in Christ. Much harder for us than blaming demons.

Several people having received deliverance ministry have had to be loved and cared for and rehabilitated before the pain of this ministry is left behind. Declaring personal details to the deliverer can also leave permanent damage in the emotional life of an individual.

Why do some who practise this ministry need so much detail from their victim? Surely, if his ministry were born of the Holy Spirit, the word of knowledge, if necessary, would be given them.

Paul said to Timothy, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Timothy 4:1-4). And again, "The Spirit clearly says that in latter times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons ..." (1 Timothy 4:1). Several of these people who minister in this way eventually suffer from fears themselves and seem to become almost totally obsessed with this ministry.

Let us, however, preach the pure Word of God. A man or woman must first turn away from sin in sorrow and repentance and then have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. He, or she, must not leave pursuing the Saviour until he, or she, knows the power of the cleansing Blood of Christ. Knowing that all sin has been dealt with, let them be baptised in water, and receive the power of the Holy Spirit against which there is no law.