

The Work of Demons

A. In relation to Satan

Demons are Satan's tool for influencing creation. They extend satanic influence over men (Ephesians 2:1-2), nations (Daniel 10), the world and the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:11-12).

Ephesians 2:1-2, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience."

Ephesians 6:11-12, "Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*."

Demons are behind idolatry, both that which we see today and that which we've seen throughout history. In 1 Corinthians 10 Paul warns the Corinthians to flee from idolatry and to pay attention to the example of Israel in the Old Testament of what should not be done.

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul reminds the Corinthians how they should not confuse their new faith with the rituals of their old religion. People in Corinth were apparently going back to their pagan practices, which included static babbling, or speaking utterances as if possessed by the god or idol (which was really a demon) they worshiped. Now as Christians the Corinthian believers were trying to keep the same practice, and forcing themselves to speak in tongues.

In effect, Paul warned the Corinthians to watch out for how demons introduce false doctrines into the Church. Other examples of how demons enhance false systems of salvation include the deception of legalism (1 Timothy 4:1-8), which makes people feel comfort when they follow their rules, but in effect they are working for their salvation and judging their brothers in the process.

1 Timothy 4:1-8, "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, *men* who forbid marriage *and* advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the Word of God and prayer. In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, *constantly* nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and *also* for the *life* to come."

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B. In relation to man

The work of demons with relation to men goes further than just the establishment of false religions. In Scripture we see that demons have the power to physically afflict men and that they have used this power in various ways. In Matthew 9:32-33 we see that a demon had possessed a man and took away the man's ability to speak while possessed. In Matthew 12:22 the possessed man was not only unable to speak as a result of the demon but he could not see either. In Luke 13:11-17 Jesus healed a woman who was deformed as a result of demon possession. In Matthew 17:15-18 Jesus healed a boy who had been afflicted by a demon with what appears to be epilepsy.

We must be careful not to confuse the point here, people with these physical afflictions are not necessarily possessed and that's why they have those afflictions; rather, we must be aware that demons can affect our health in various ways.

Matthew 9:32-33, "And as they were going out, behold, a dumb man, demon-possessed, was brought to Him. And after the demon was cast out, the dumb man spoke; and the multitudes marveled, saying, "Nothing like this was ever seen in Israel." "

Matthew 12:22, "Then there was brought to Him a demon-possessed man *who was* blind and dumb, and He healed him, so that the dumb man spoke and saw."

Matthew 17:15-18, " "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic, and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire, and often into the water. "And I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him." And Jesus answered and said, "O unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me." And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once."

In addition to affecting people's health, demons can cause the people they possess to do violent things, even to themselves as we see in Luke 8:27-29 and Mark 9:22. However, demons need not possess people in order to cause them harm (Revelation 9:14-19).

Luke 8:27-29, "And when He had come out onto the land, He was met by a certain man from the city who was possessed with demons; and who had not put on any clothing for a long time, and was not living in a house, but in the tombs. And seeing Jesus, he cried out and fell before Him, and said in a loud voice, "What do I have to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me." For He had been commanding the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had seized him many times; and he was bound with chains and shackles and kept under guard; and *yet* he would burst his fetters and be driven by the demon into the desert."

Mark 9:22, "And it has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!"

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C. In relation to believers

We have seen that demons are behind all false religions and that they have the power to afflict people, even the power to possess them; but how does this relate to believers?

Demons actively try to prevent believers from learning God's Word. They do this through the world system and its many tools (laws, culture, customs, etc.) and through the corruption of truth. There are so many religions that claim their descent from Scripture and that are so far from what Scripture teaches. Many believers may fall for these, sometimes subtle, deceptions. Some of the more deceiving religions are those that have a touch of truth (Catholicism, Mormonism, etc.).

If demons fail in preventing believers from learning from Scripture, they try to prevent believers from appropriating what they learn. In other words, demons prevent believers from putting what they have learned into proper use. Demons try to prevent believers from applying what they have learned.

Demons tempt believers into sinning, not just to offend God in their sin, or to have believers suffer the consequences that may be associated with their sins; but also to distance them from their Savior. Unless believers are fully relying on Christ for all they do, especially ministry, they are ineffective.

Demons instigate doubts in the minds of believers. Believers are better aware of their sinfulness than nonbelievers and many often have a hard time accepting that they are forgiven in spite of themselves. This is a demonic tactic to prevent believers from fully enjoying their position in Christ and distracting them from the work for which they were created.

Demons cause believers to confuse the roles and responsibilities that God has given them (Ephesians 6).

Demons affect believers collectively as well. Doctrinal divisions are demon instigated (1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:5). In 1 Timothy 4, Paul addresses legalism and in 2 Peter 2, Peter addresses license, both of which are extreme positions, instigated by demons and with a touch of truth.

1 Timothy 4:1, "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,"

2 Timothy 3:5, "Holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these."

Demons counter the message of the gospel (2 Corinthians 4) as well as the ministry of the gospel (1 Timothy 1:18-20). Demons are also behind the persecution of believers.

1 Timothy 1:18-20, "This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered over to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme."

D. Possessions

1. Demon possession defined

“Demon possession is a condition in which one or more evil spirits or demons inhabit the body of a human being and can take complete control of their victim at will” (Unger).

2. The reality of demon possession

We know that demon possession is real because Scripture tells us that it is.

Matthew 15:22, "And behold, a Canaanite woman came out from that region, and *began* to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly **demon-possessed**." "

Acts 8:7, "For *in the case of* many who **had unclean spirits**, they were coming out *of them* shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed."

In Matthew 12 Jesus asserts the reality of demon possession and uses His authority to cast out demons as evidence of His identity and of His ministry. In the process Jesus also points out that demons can repossess a person and that more than one demon can possess the same person at the same time.

Matthew 12:43-45, "'Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places, seeking rest, and does not find *it*. "Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came'; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order. "Then it goes, and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation." "

3. The characteristics of demon possession

From passages like Mark 5:2-13 we can identify some of the characteristics of demonic possession:

- Great strength (5:3)
- Fits of rage (5:4)
- Split personality (5:6-7)
- Resist spiritual things (5:7)
- Clairvoyance, or exceptional insight (5:7)
- Altered voice (5:9)
- Occult transference (5:13)

4. Believers and demon possession

There is a lot of information regarding demon possession in Scripture, primarily in the Gospels. We need to understand how this applies to believers today in two respects: the possession of believers by demons and the casting out of demons from possessed people by believers.

a. The possession of believers

Believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Believers' identification with Christ prevents them from being possessed by demons—who do not identify with Christ. The fact that believers are

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“possessed” by the Holy Spirit does not mean that we will be unable to sin, but rather that we will be able not to sin. We will continue to sin as a result of our own fallen sinful nature. Satan’s demons may be around us tempting us, but the Holy Spirit is always with us and in us to guide us away from sin. We just need to follow Him.

That demons cannot possess the same person who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit is not an issue of space. Demons are incorporeal and do not occupy space. The issue has to do with the holiness of God.

The Holy Spirit did not indwell Old Testament believers in the same way as Church Age believers are indwelt. The current event is permanent, while in the Old Testament the Holy Spirit would come upon believers periodically. In Saul’s case, a demon came upon him after the Holy Spirit left him (1 Samuel 16:13-14). In fact, the demon that came upon Saul was from the Lord, thus God used this demon as His tool in judging Saul.

1 Samuel 16:13-14, “Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah. Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD terrorized him.”

A strong argument for this point of view is the fact that we don’t see believers in the New Testament being possessed. Some argue that Ananias was possessed by Satan in Acts 5:3. However, all the verse says is that Satan filled Ananias’ heart, which may just refer to Ananias’ greed and Satan tempting of him to act upon this greed. Besides, it is not clear that Ananias’ was a true believer or not.

Acts 5:3, "But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back *some* of the price of the land?"

Demons don’t have to possess people in order to afflict them. Paul himself was afflicted by demonic forces in a constant, physical way, yet he was not possessed. Whenever something like this is allowed by God, it is important for us to notice that God is working something out in our lives. In Paul’s case he understood the demonic affliction was allowed by God to help him not exalt himself.

2 Corinthians 12:7, “And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me —to keep me from exalting myself!”

Any evidence of demonic possession of believers is experienced based and not founded on Scripture.

b. Casting out of demons

The Epistles (not Revelation) make only one reference to the casting out of demons, and it was by God during the times of Noah (2 Peter 2:4). In contrast, the term is used some 51 times in the Gospels and the majority of those references have to do with casting out demons from possessed people. There was a higher than normal amount of supernatural events going on in Israel in the time leading up to and during the First Coming of Christ.

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Though we see demons leaving people in Acts there are not direct references to the Apostles doing this in any special way, or in any different way than they would preach the gospel to any other sinner.

In Acts 19:11-16, we see that the ability to cast out demons was unique to Paul, an Apostle, who was performing other miracles. The Jewish exorcists may or may not have been believers, but they believed enough about Jesus to try to use His name to cast out demons. They must have had some sort of faith in Jesus, but that was not enough to cast out demons.

Many people confuse passages like Matthew 10:1; Mark 6:7-9; and Luke 9:1 as evidence that we as believers in the church age have the authority to go around casting out demons. However, from the context in which these passages take place we can see that this is not the case. Jesus indeed gave His disciples this authority, but the mission for which He gave them this authority was to go to the Jews that they might accept the offer of the Kingdom. This sending of the disciples happened before Christ was crucified and before He had risen from the dead. The message the Lord's disciples spread at this point was not the gospel since there was no gospel message yet.

Matthew 10:1, "And having summoned His twelve disciples, He gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness."

Mark 6:7-9, "And He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs; and He was giving them authority over the unclean spirits; and He instructed them that they should take nothing for *their* journey, except a mere staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belt; but *to* wear sandals; and *He added*, "Do not put on two tunics." "

Luke 9:1, "And He called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons, and to heal diseases."

In thinking of the casting out of demons, we must not ignore the reason why Jesus cast out demons from people whenever He found them. The casting out of demons that Jesus performed, as merciful as these acts were, were done primarily to testify of His identity and of the genuineness of His message. In the same way that the other supernatural or miraculous works He and the Apostles after Him performed.

Casting out of demons is usually grouped with healings. Both supernatural miracles were performed by God to testify of the validity of His messengers. The miraculous activity continued through the Apostles during the early stages of the church. This supernatural activity ceased (along with other attesting miracles like speaking in tongues) at the completion of the New Testament.

Some people justify their continuing practice of casting out demons in the church age with Mark 16:17-18. First of all, the end of the Gospel of Mark, Mark 16:9-20, is not found in the most reliable manuscripts. This should at least warn us about developing doctrine on questionable passages. But even if the passage is accepted as from God, the rest of Scripture speaks to the purpose of the ability to cast out demons only in light of testifying for the message and the messenger. If believers were indeed given this authority in Mark 16, it would have been with that purpose in mind, and would therefore not be an active authority now that there is no more revelation being given by messengers

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who need to be confirmed as being from God.

Mark 16:17-18, “And these signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly *poison*, it shall not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.”

E. The occult

1. Description of the occult

The activities of the occult are found everywhere today, and we see that these activities have been present for a long time as they are referred to in Scripture repeatedly. As early as Deuteronomy we see the worship of the moon and stars, or astrology, being referred to. Divination, or the ability to see the future, “to foresee,” is referred to in Jeremiah 29:8-9. The Egyptians’ religion involved magic, as we see in Exodus 7-11, and magic is the accomplishment of superhuman results through the supernatural agency of demons. Magic can be impersonal as in Exodus, where the Egyptian magicians sought to control the natural laws; or it can also be personal, the attempt to control other people.

Spiritism is the use of mediums (called necromancers) to make contact with the spirits of the deceased. This is prohibited in the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:31; Deuteronomy 18:10-11).

Other forms of occult practices include cartomancy, foretelling the future through tarot cards; palmistry, predicting the future by reading palms; psychometry, a type of clairvoyance for identifying the whereabouts of someone or something; and hypnosis, a sort of trance during which people lose control.

People who find themselves practicing these activities open themselves up for even greater demonic influence. Demons may further deceive people who begin down the path of these practices by causing events to come about that would increase people’s faith in this sort of thing.

2. The church’s responsibility

The responsibility of believers towards the people who find themselves involved in the occult is no different from our responsibility towards other unbelievers who do not involve themselves in the occult. What people need to be freed from the bondage of sin is Christ, and it does not matter what that sin is. This should be our approach even if a person were possessed.