

# **Demon Possession and the Christian**

**by Robert Dean Jr.**

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors...<sup>1</sup>

The question “Can a Christian be demon-possessed?” is not one of mere academic or theological interest but one of profound implications. If the Christian can be demon-possessed, then this opens up a source of problems for the believer which entails its own array of solutions including exorcism, deliverance, and supernatural healings, the mechanics of which are not revealed in Scripture. If any of a believer’s problems or failures can be blamed on Satan or a demon as the source of that problem, then this places the believer in the role of unwitting victim and releases him from responsibility for failure. If, on the other hand, the Christian cannot be demon-possessed, then vast numbers of churches, ministries, counseling practices and spiritual life methodologies are inherently flawed, investigating problems that do not exist, and prescribing solutions, in many cases bizarre and extreme, which may promote problems that are even more dangerous. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the biblical arguments for Christian demon possession against the backdrop of studies since the mid-twentieth century.

## **Historical Developments**

Since the mid-1970s, the increased growth of the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement brought with it a renewed interest in the demonic, and a new focus on spiritual warfare. Films and books presented lurid and frightening accounts of possession, even of believers. Missionaries wrote chilling accounts of demon encounters on the mission field. This, in turn, promoted a host of conferences and seminars on demon possession, healing, and exorcisms. Though some were much more extreme than others were, they shared the belief that Christians can be demon-possessed and that this explains why countless believers are failures in the spiritual life. We will here refer to proponents of this new concept as the advocates of neo-spiritual warfare (NSW).

Historically, Roman Catholic theology maintained the possibility of demonic possession of the believer. This is primarily due to concepts in Roman Catholic soteriology that make it impossible to have certainty of salvation. During the early church and the Middle Ages, this belief spawned numerous accounts of the demonic and of exorcisms, many stories so fantastic it is difficult to discern fable from fact. During the middle ages, hundreds of

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<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: MacMillan, 1982), 3.

thousands were burned at the stake for witchcraft and devil worship.<sup>2</sup> Little was done during this period theologically to distinguish superstition from biblical fact.

In the twentieth century, “deliverance” theology found a home in the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement.<sup>3</sup> By the late 1970s, deliverance teaching became one of several “bridges” which brought traditionally non-Pentecostal-Charismatic believers into the orbit of classic Pentecostal teaching. Historically, segments of classic Pentecostalism practiced deliverance ministries, including exorcisms, and held to the belief that Christians could be demon-possessed.<sup>4</sup> Though some in the Assembly of God rejected the teaching that Christians could be demon-possessed, many did not. In the charismatic movement, also called neo-Pentecostalism or the Second Wave, disagreement arose over this issue. Some leaders of the Christian Growth Movement, such as Derek Prince and Don Basham, held that Christians could be demon-possessed, others that they could not. The teaching of Prince, Basham and others influenced John Wimber and Peter Wagner, the founders of the Third Wave, otherwise known as the Vineyard or Signs and Wonders Movement.

Until the 1960s, noncharismatic churches traditionally held to a theology that rejected the demon possession of the Christian. This was most clearly articulated in Merrill F. Unger’s *Biblical Demonology* where he presented a strong biblical case based on the study of Scripture that Christians could not be demon-possessed.<sup>5</sup>

The response to Unger’s position by some missionaries and pastors was controversial. Many claimed experiences contrary to his position and sent him hundreds of personal experiences alleging demon possession of genuine Christians. Unger reevaluated his position as he traveled on the mission field and investigated some of these claims. He then penned two books, reversing

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<sup>2</sup> During the Middle Ages, hundreds of thousands of alleged witches were executed. The Roman Catholic Church burned at the stake more than 500 condemned witches in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1515; another 975 in Como, Italy, in 1524; and over 100,000 in Germany during the same period. No records were kept of the vast number of burnings in France and Spain. Over 30,000 alleged witches were executed by the Puritan-controlled Anglican Church in the seventeenth century. Leo Confanti, *The Witchcraft Hysteria of 1692*, Vol. 1, (Wakefield, MA.: Pride Publications, 1971), 1–3.

<sup>3</sup> Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1987), 37.

<sup>4</sup> Stanley M. Burgess, Gary B. McGee, Patrick H. Alexander, *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, s.v. “Exorcism.” This view is challenged by Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited* who argues that a large segment of classic Pentecostals rejected the doctrine of Christian demon possession.

<sup>5</sup> Merrill F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology: A Study of the Spiritual Forces Behind the Present World Unrest* (Wheaton: Scripture Press, 1952). This book is the published version of Unger’s Th.D. dissertation presented to Dallas Theological Seminary in 1945.

his earlier beliefs: *Demons in the World Today* (1972) and *What Demons Can Do to Saints* (1977). In the former book he stated:

The claims of these missionaries appear valid, since Christians in enlightened lands where the Word of God and Christian civilization have restrained the baser manifestations of demonism can sometimes become the victims of demon influence and oppression.<sup>6</sup>

At this stage Unger seemed to restrict actual possession to only repossession of those in pagan lands.<sup>7</sup> But by the time he wrote the latter book, he accepts and presents numerous anecdotes of Christian deliverance without critical theological analysis and with no reservations.

During this same time Dr. C. Fred Dickason, professor of Bible and theology at Moody Bible Institute, began to write on the idea of demon possession for Christians in his popular textbook used in numerous noncharismatic Bible institutes, colleges, and seminaries: *Angels—Elect and Evil*. His conclusions were presented somewhat tenuously. Twelve years later (1987) Dickason published a more detailed study, *Demon Possession and the Christian: A New Perspective*, in which he asserted more firmly that Christians could indeed be demon-possessed. This groundbreaking study became the scholarly foundation for subsequent studies published by men who came from traditionally noncharismatic backgrounds, yet through this subject, were walking across the bridge into the charismatic movement.

The following areas need to be analyzed: methodology; determination of the role of experience in reaching theological conclusions; an analysis of the demon-possession accounts in the Scripture along with lexical studies of the key words to determine the biblical definition of demon possession; and theological arguments. In the course of this paper, the arguments and evidence presented on both sides of this question will be analyzed and evaluated. This should not be construed as a personal attack on the individuals or as inordinate polemics, but an attempt to understand and evaluate opposing positions and to compare published conclusions with the evidence of Scripture.

### **Methodology: How Do We Know It's Demon Possession?**

Determining the ultimate criterion for this study is crucial. The popular approach espoused by NSW appears to be based ultimately on experience. Dickason is typical of those who conclude that Christians can be demon-possessed, based on his "clinical studies." Following a lengthy analysis of biblical arguments used to support or deny demon possession, he concludes that the biblical data are inconclusive:

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<sup>6</sup> Merrill F. Unger, *Demons in the World Today* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1971), 117.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

We have considered the major passages and cases from Scripture that have been used or may be used to support the concept that genuine believers may be demonized. Most of these cases cannot be considered valid evidence for various reasons in the context or from other biblical information.<sup>8</sup>

Concerning his analysis of theological arguments both for and against demon possession of the believer, he concludes:

From the survey and analysis for arguments pro and con, we conclude that we cannot say with reasonable certainty that either position is correct.<sup>9</sup>

And then Dickason concludes the book with:

A rather thorough examination of the biblical evidence leads us to conclude that it neither clearly affirms nor denies the reality of demonization of believers ... But to be fair, we must say that with biblical evidence alone, we cannot reach a definite or dogmatic conclusion.<sup>10</sup>

On what basis then does he seek to resolve this alleged tie? He enters into the realm of "scientific investigation." After citing many case studies from reputable sources, he concludes:

We must allow the distinct probability that biblically guided investigation and counsel has shown in experience that some Christians have been demonized. The evidence is heavily weighted toward that conclusion.<sup>11</sup>

But where Scripture is not decisive, we may gain insight from experience.<sup>12</sup> Dickason is unable to interpret the Bible in a decisive way on this issue, but he does claim the ability to analyze and accurately interpret bizarre human experience and distinguish between extreme sin nature control, mental instability, emotional problems and genuine demon possession. Dickason's interpretation of these case studies leads him to declare that the "burden of proof lies with those who deny that Christians can be demonized."<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, this is not demonstrated.

The view of this writer is that NSW advocates so loosely interpret the biblical data for why a Christian cannot be demon-possessed that the conclusion that the Bible is nebulous and abstruse is automatic. Because these advocates believe they have accurately interpreted experience, they also

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<sup>8</sup> Dickason, *Demon Possession, and the Christian* (Chicago: Moody, 1987), 127.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 340.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

assume valid arguments must necessarily exist that a believer can be demon-5 possessed. The result is that they approach the text predisposed to find uncertainty.

Like many who have struggled to answer this question, Merrill Unger changed his view, although the change was not the result of further Bible exegesis or insights into lexicography. He shifted away from the statement “To demon possession only unbelievers are exposed”<sup>14</sup> to the statement “Demon influence [including demon possession] may occur in different degrees of severity and in a variety of forms, both in Christians and non-Christians.” What changed Unger’s mind? As with Dickason, it was the interpretation of *experiences* of Christians. Unger wrote,

Since the first publication of *Biblical Demonology* in 1952, the author has received many letters from missionaries all over the world who question the theory that true believers cannot be demon-possessed.... The claims of these missionaries *appear* valid. [Emphasis added.]<sup>15</sup>

To make such a conclusion presupposes a vast amount of evidence not available. The problem with empirical conclusions is that tomorrow or the next day, another piece of data may be discovered which invalidates the previous interpretation. Empiricism can never produce the certainty displayed in the writings of the NSW advocates.

To summarize this position, we see Dickason and Unger claiming that the Scriptures are fuzzy and that God has not sufficiently clarified the issue of demon possession. Man is left to his own resources to determine the answers to this important question. With this cloud of uncertainty, man must enter a different arena to decide the issue – the arena of experience. This experiential evidence is so overwhelming, they assert, that we must break the tie in favor of the concept that Christians can be demon-possessed. But is the biblical evidence so opaque?<sup>16</sup>

### **Back to the Bible**

First, the idea that any area of thought is removed from the divine-viewpoint authority of Scripture is a fallacy. Scripture is to be the only source from which we derive a biblical framework so we can then enter other fields of thought to extend our learning and develop wisdom. Without definite conclusions from the Bible to guide us in the unseen spiritual realm of the demonic, we are no different from someone trying to paint a portrait blindfolded. Under these conditions, God’s Word is abandoned and replaced by human thoughts and experiences. Instead of interpreting our experiences within the light of the Bible, we interpret the Bible in the “light” of our

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<sup>14</sup> Merrill F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology*, 100.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>16</sup> Unger, *Demons*, 113.

experience. Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3 that He descended from heaven specifically for the purpose of revealing heavenly things (verses 9–13), which we earthbound creatures cannot discover at all if God does not tell us. So case studies and experience are not the way to break the alleged tie found in Scripture.

A sound definition of demonization must be based solely on the information in the Bible. Unfortunately, some today let experience determine even more of the definition; Wimber criticized even Unger’s later definition as not being broad enough to cover all experience: “The difficulty with Dr. Unger’s definition is that although it may be correct in some cases, it may not be broad enough to function in all cases of demon possession.”<sup>17</sup>

Like many others, Wimber offers his own autonomous definition of demon possession. He elevates his interpretation of his experiences to the same level as Scriptural accounts. Then, based on this assumption, uses the combination of biblical events and contemporary clinical events to derive conclusions about possession. This is the type of “Scripture-plus” methodology that usually leads people to the conclusion that Christians can be demon-possessed.

### Characteristics of Demon Possession

Once a person moves beyond Scripture as sole authority, anything becomes possible if carried to further extremes. Throughout the centuries differing criteria have been given for demon possession. Bock cites a list by Rabbi Huna (d. A.D. 297) which delineates four characteristics: “walking about at night, spending the night on a grave, tearing one’s clothes, and destroying what one is given.”<sup>18</sup> These four could describe tens of thousands of teenagers on any given Halloween night.

In the seventeenth century, Puritans had a more complex list of what they believed to be symptoms of a demon-possessed person:

1. to think oneself possessed,
2. to lead a wicked life,
3. to be persistently ill, falling into heavy sleep and vomiting unusual objects (either natural objects: toads, serpents, worms, iron, stones, etc.; or artificial objects: nails, pins, etc.),
4. to blaspheme,
5. to make a pact with the devil,
6. to be troubled with spirits,
7. to show a frightening and horrible countenance,
8. to be tired of living,
9. to be uncontrollable and violent,

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<sup>17</sup> John Wimber, *Spiritual Warfare* (Anaheim, CA: Mercy Publishing/Vineyard Ministries International, 1989), 98.

<sup>18</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke Volume 1: 1:1-9:50*, Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1994), 766.

From the third to the seventeenth centuries, definitions of demon possession were based on human experience, or human experience plus the Bible, not on the Bible alone.

Modern writers on demon possession frequently compile their own lists. Along with biblically supportable characteristics, Kurt Koch includes the following: cursing, grinding teeth, suicide, falling into a trance.<sup>20</sup> He also claims that the possessing demons “emit a scornful laugh if he hears someone talking about the cross of Christ or the blood of Jesus,” and that the person possessed will display “evil and hateful expressions especially if spiritual things are talked about.”<sup>21</sup> Unger also claims that the possessing demon will voice opposition to Jesus Christ.<sup>22</sup> Yet no possessing demon in any of the biblical cases speaks derogatorily or blasphemously of the Lord. On the contrary, the possessing demons seem compelled to announce who Jesus is and to perform obeisance to him (Mark 1:23; 3:11; 5:7; Luke 4:34; 8:28; Acts 16:17).

Once extrabiblical experience is introduced as a basis for demonology a floodgate is opened through which dangerous doctrine flows. For example, who could say that the above seventeenth-century list is wrong and the contemporary lists correct? And on what basis would such a valuation be made? Everyone’s opinion becomes just as possible as anyone else’s because each experience is equally valid. Experience though, is a poor basis for developing doctrine. Even some of the most respected Bible teachers are duped by this approach. Notice, it is not exegesis that determines the answer but experience:

Can a Christian be demonized? For a number of years I questioned this, but now I am convinced it can occur. If a ‘ground of entrance’ has been granted the power of darkness (such as trafficking in the occult, a continual unforgiving spirit, a habitual state of carnality, etc.) the demon(s) sees this as a green light -- okay to proceed ... I have worked personally with troubled, anguished Christians for many years. On a few occasions I have assisted in the painful process of delivering them of demons ... while present within the body (perhaps in the region of the soul) that evil force can wreck havoc within the life.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Cited by Willem Berends, “The Biblical Criteria for Demon-Possession,” in *The Westminster Theological Journal*, XXXVII:3, Spring 1975 (Westminster Theological Seminary), 342; from R. H. Robbins, *The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1959), 395.

<sup>20</sup> Koch, *Occult Bondage*, 148–149.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>22</sup> Unger, *Demons*, 108.

<sup>23</sup> Chuck Swindoll, *Demonism* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1981), 5.

The discerning reader must ask: Where in Scripture do we find the concept “a ground of entrance?” Was the young boy in Luke 9:42ff. trafficking in the occult? Did this child already have an unforgiving spirit? Was he living in a habitual state of carnality? If living in a perpetual state of carnality is a factor, then why are not more unbelievers demon-possessed, since they can live in no other state? Nowhere does the Scripture mention the conditions that gave rise to demon possession or warn against specific acts as conditions that encourage demon possession. One writer even states that some Christians invite demons to reside within them.<sup>24</sup> Again we see demonology based on popular concepts and folk religion, and not on sound exegesis. Experience must be interpreted by the Word of God, the Word of God should not be interpreted through experience (Psalm 36:9; 119:105; Isaiah 8:20).

### Biblical Examples of Demon Possession

Eight detailed accounts are provided in the Scripture of Jesus casting out demons. Three of these are here examined to understand what the Bible means by demon possession and characteristics of demon possession.

*The Gadarene Demoniac.* The episode of the Gadarene demoniac is described in each of the synoptic accounts. We will summarize the Markan and Lukan accounts to provide information on the event.

After crossing the Sea of Galilee, Jesus and His disciples arrive in the region of Gadara. There He is “met by a man” who had demons. The text does not say the man was coming to Jesus for aid or for deliverance as both Koch and Unger claim. The verb ἀπαντάω may indicate either a pleasant (Luke 17:12) or hostile meeting (Luke 14:31). In this context it indicates simply an encounter.

The man is described as “having demons” (ἔχων δαιμόνια, Luke 8:27) or “an unclean spirit,” (ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ, Mark 5:2). Luke also uses the “unclean spirit” (τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἀκαθάρτῳ) nomenclature (Luke 8:29). Subsequent to his deliverance the townspeople describe him as “demon-possessed” (δαιμονίζομαι) a term Mark uses three times to describe this person (Mark 5:15, 16, 18). The interchange of these three key words for demon possession in this event provides significant information as to their meaning.

When the afflicted man saw Jesus, Mark says he ran up and bowed down, a sign that the demon recognized the authority of the second person of the Trinity. This is not an example of clairvoyance, as Koch maintains,<sup>25</sup> because the demons who control the man’s body know precisely who Jesus is. But this is not the voice of the man himself, but of the demon who indwells

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<sup>24</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *3 Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997).

<sup>25</sup> Koch, *Occult Bondage*, 148–150.

him and controls his body. Throughout the Lukan account, the writer<sup>9</sup> consistently refers to the man with the third person singular pronoun, but when the man speaks he uses the first person plural, “we.” Luke is writing from the viewpoint of the observer who sees one body; the speaker realizes the plurality of demons within the body. Therefore, the speaker is not the man himself, but one of the demons serving as the spokesman for the entire group.

The words uttered by the man were not his own, but they were spoken by the demon controlling him. Contrary to claims of some demonologists today, the demon does not address Jesus with hostility, blasphemy, or cursings, but with respect, “Jesus, Son of the Most High God” (Luke 8:28). His question recognized the authority of Jesus, but he then inquired if Jesus was going to torment them “before the time” (Matthew 8:29). The demons feared Jesus was there to consign them to their eternal condemnation earlier than planned (Matthew 25:41).

Luke informs us that Jesus had already ordered the demon to “come out” (ἐξέρχουμαι). Jesus also inquired as to the demons name. After identifying itself as a Legion of demons, the spokeshdemon, fearing that Jesus would cast them out (ἐκβάλλω, Matthew 8:31), implored Jesus to let them enter into (εἰσερχομαι, Mark 5:12; Luke 8:32, 33) the herd of swine. The demons then came out (ἐξέρχουμαι, Matthew 8:32; Mark 5:13; Luke 8:33).

In this most detailed of accounts we see that the demon is “in” the person’s body. The demon then is cast “out” of the body by Jesus’ command and comes “out” of the body to enter “into” the swine. The use of the prepositions εἰς and ἐκ along with the verbs used clearly indicates an indwelling presence. Further, in contrast to the claims of the NSW that the name of the demon is used by Jesus as a talisman or magic word, He does no such thing.<sup>26</sup>

*The Convulsive Child* (Matthew 17:14–18; Mark 9:14–25; Luke 9:37–43). In this instance Jesus is entreated by a father to heal his son. The unfortunate translation of “lunatic” (NASB) is based on the Greek σεληνιαζομαι, which is literally “moonstruck,” but was a Greek idiom for epileptics.<sup>27</sup> The father attested that these seizures had occurred since childhood (παιδιόθεν) – a time just after infancy when the small child would not be inviting demons into his life, living in rank carnality, or exposing himself to occult objects for worship. Mark adds the information that the demon also rendered the boy mute and would cause all manner of convulsions, grinding teeth, and throwing him into fire and water. The father had asked the disciples to cast out (ἐκβάλλω) the demon. They failed. Jesus commanded the demon to “come out” (ἐξέρχουμαι).

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<sup>26</sup> Unger, *What Demons Can Do To Saints*, 143.

<sup>27</sup> Frederick William Danker, rev. and ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed, by Walter Bauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) s.v. “σεληνιαζομαι.”

Again we observe the same salient features. The term ἐξέρχεται indicates the demon must be “in” the boy in order to come out of the boy. We also learn that demons can cause symptoms that appear to be those of diseases. That they are not common diseases is because their origin is not induced biologically or genetically but from an evil spirit.

*The Man in the Synagogue* (Mark 1:23–28; Luke 4:33–37). Jesus is teaching in the synagogue when a man present who had “the spirit of an unclean demon” (Luke 4:33) suddenly cries out. His cry is not a yell for deliverance, but the demon telling Jesus to leave them (pl.) alone. In the demon’s request he addresses Jesus as “Jesus of Nazareth, the Holy One of God (full title in Luke 4:34). Jesus ordered him to come out (ἐξέρχουμαι) and the demon came out (ἐξέρχουμαι).

The demon does not approach Jesus for deliverance. The demon addresses Jesus respectfully by His title. And once again, the demon must “come out.”

From these three episodes, we can discover the exact meaning of the term demon possession (δαμονίζουμαι), analyze the appropriateness of this translation, and discover important characteristics of demon possession that can then be used as an absolute standard for evaluating modern cases of possession.

### **The Meaning of Δαμονίζουμαι.**

The Greek word δαμονίζουμαι is a participial form of the more commonly used noun for demon (δαμόνιον). Scholars usually translate δαμονίζουμαι “to be possessed by a demon;” or, when it is used to describe a person in that condition, it is rendered “demoniac.” The word is used thirteen times,<sup>28</sup> all in the Gospels. It is increasingly popular to dilute the meaning of this word by translating it as “demonized.”<sup>29</sup>

The second term in the Greek is ἔχειν δαμόνιον, “to have a demon.” This phrase is used eight times in Matthew, Luke, and John.<sup>30</sup> The Greek grammar conveys the idea that the subject is characterized by having a demon indwell him.

Since no systematic definition is given in the Bible for demon possession, the best way to define the term is to examine the characteristics in the biblical examples that define for us these words. From these two basic terms we see that someone “demonized” (δαμονίζουμαι) or who is said “to have a demon (ἔχειν δαμόνιον)” is a person who has one or more demons

<sup>28</sup> Matthew 4:24; 8:16,28,33; 9:32; 12:22; 15:22; Mark 1:32; 5:15,16,18; Luke 8:36; John 10:21.

<sup>29</sup> Dickason, *Demon Possession*, 37–35; Clinton E. Arnold, *3 Crucial Questions*, 75–79.

<sup>30</sup> Matthew 11:18; Luke 7:33; 8:27; John 7:20; 8:48,49 (“to not have a demon”), 52; 10:20.

dwelling *within* him. The demons have taken up residence inside the body, not<sup>11</sup> inside the soul or spirit. (Some writers seek to make a distinction: the demon indwells the soul but the spirit is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, no biblical evidence for this exists.)

If our information about demon possession was limited to the term δαιμονίζομαι, then it might be legitimate to conclude that this is merely a generic term describing some sort of demon activity in relation to human beings. In fact, this is exemplified in an approach increasingly popular today. The claim is made that the idea of demon possession *per se* is not in the Greek of the New Testament:

To be demonized means to be under the control of one or more demons. Demonization is not a matter of extremes, such as the either/or idea of being completely free or totally bound; it's a matter of degrees.<sup>31</sup>

Neo-spiritual warfare advocates claim that the English terms “demon possession” and “demon influence” are merely theological inventions that do not accurately reflect the original language of the Bible. All the Bible says, so the reasoning goes, is that people are demonized, acted upon to some degree by a demon. Unfortunately, this is not supported by linguistic evidence. The standard way of translating this Greek term as demon possession continues to be upheld by the latest lexicons.<sup>32</sup>

The lexical methodology of the NSW advocates commits the fallacy of defining a word based on its root meanings, or etymology, rather than on how the word is actually used and defined in context.<sup>33</sup> “Demonized” and “to have a demon” are used in Scripture of only one extreme type of demonic activity: to have one or more demons take up residence inside the body of a person and exercise control by overriding the individual’s volition in relation to their bodily functions. The person’s soul, his identity, is still there, though suppressed. His volition to believe or reject the Gospel must therefore still be there; however, the ability to control his body is not. Blomberg defines it as follows:

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<sup>31</sup> Neil T. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1990), 174.

<sup>32</sup> Frederick William Danker, rev. and ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed, by Walter Bauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) s.v. “δαιμονίζομαι.”

<sup>33</sup> D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 26-32, 51-52.

Demon possession was viewed as a unique situation in which an evil spirit actually took control of an individual, acting and speaking through that person in at least partial independence of his or her own volition and consciousness.<sup>34</sup>

These words never describe a case involving anything less, such as mere influence or putting ideas into someone's mind. For example, these terms never describe Satan's activities of accusation, temptation, deception, or persecution; they depict only the extreme case of being inwardly controlled by a demon where the only solution is for the demon to "come out."<sup>35</sup>

This is true of every such case in the New Testament and is what distinguishes demon possession from the less threatening demon influence. In fact, δαίμονιζομαι and its synonyms *never* describe a situation where a person does not have a demon *in* them needing to be cast *out*. A person *may* become vulnerable to demon possession because of certain sinful choices or activities such as necromancy, idolatry, or spiritism, into which they have willingly entered. But this is not necessarily the case and is never hinted at in the biblical accounts. The Scriptures never attribute the demon possession of a person to the wrong choices or actions of that person. Though the person's body is controlled by a demon, his identity is still present along with his ability to believe or reject the Gospel. Only his ability to control his body or express himself is lost.

Since the major feature here is control, we must ask if "possess" is an adequate English term to convey this meaning. According to one group, possess is inadequate because it conveys the idea of ownership, which is one of several meanings for the noun. However, the Oxford English Dictionary lists as the first meaning of the verb possess, "Of a person or body of persons: To hold, occupy (a place or territory); to reside or be stationed in; to inhabit (with or without ownership)." This primary meaning for possess clearly accords with the evidence of the biblical events. Therefore, the case for rejecting demon-possess as an accurate translation of the Greek δαίμονιζομαι is without support in either Greek or English lexica or the biblical usage of the term itself.

The hidden agenda for this debate is to break down the distinctions between demon possession and demon influence in order to support the conclusion that Christians can be demon-possessed. This is made evident by one such theologian's statement:

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<sup>34</sup> Craig Blomberg, vol. 22, *Matthew*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1992), 92.

<sup>35</sup> Craig Blomberg, vol. 22, *Matthew*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001, c1992), 151. *Demonization* (a more literal rendering of *daimonizomenos*) involves the indwelling of unseen evil spirits in a way that prevents an individual from fully controlling his or her own actions (see comments under 4:23–25).

If by ‘demon-possessed’ they mean that a person’s will is completely<sup>13</sup> dominated by a demon, so that a person has no power left to chose to do right and obey God, then the answer to whether a Christian could be demon possessed would certainly be no. . .<sup>36</sup>

By rejecting the historically accepted definition of demon possession and reducing it to nothing more than an extreme form of demon influence, that author is then able to say that Christians can be demon-possessed, and thereby justify so-called deliverance ministries and exorcisms of believers.

Having now raised the issue, it must be answered: Can a Christian be demon-possessed? The redefinition of the term δαμονιζομαι is but one approach in the attempt to validate demon possession of the Christian. Another is exemplified in the work of Dr. C. Fred Dickason, along with those he has influenced.<sup>37</sup> Dr. Dickason followed the methodology of examining all of the biblical passages used to either prove or disprove demon possession of the Christian. His conclusion was that no Scripture clearly answered the question one way or the other. He then addressed the theological arguments marshaled to prove or disprove the case. Again, Dickason concludes that these arguments were all found wanting. He then concluded that since the Bible does not clearly answer the question, we can only rely on our own experience to answer the question. Using a clinical approach, Dickason then documented numerous alleged cases of Christians who were demon-possessed, and he concluded that Christians could be demon-possessed. In essence, he claims that his interpretation of these experiences is more certain than the interpretation of Scripture.<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, the arguments against demon possession that he rejected could have been stated in stronger terms. Here are six arguments demonstrating why a regenerated person cannot be demon-possessed.

### **Six Arguments Against Demon Possession of a Christian**

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<sup>36</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology, An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity Press and Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 424.

<sup>37</sup> Dickason, *Demon Possession*. For a detailed critique of Dickason’s faulty methodology see, Thomas Ice and Robert Dean Jr., *What the Bible Teaches About Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications. 1990, 2000), 137–145.

<sup>38</sup> This empirically based methodology suffers the same weakness as the empiricism of the scientist who affirms an age of several million years for the age of the earth. Having experienced numerous fossils embedded in similar strata, the evolutionist concludes the earth must be very ancient. When confronted with the clear biblical evidence of a young age earth, he rejects the literal meaning of the Scripture because it does not fit his empirically determined system. Which is more real: the data of Scripture or the data of experience?

1. *The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit.*

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Every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is indwelt by the Holy Spirit from the instant of salvation (1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). This indwelling has positionally set the believer apart as a Temple for the indwelling of the Trinity.<sup>39</sup> In addition, 1 John 4:4 reminds us that “Greater is He that is in you, then he that is in the world.” Since God the Holy Spirit is stronger than any demonic being, including Satan himself, then no demon or evil spirit can enter.

Some theologians attempt to refute this statement by stating that since a believer is a sinner and Christ indwells the sinner, this argument does not work. For they claim, “if the power of sin can inhabit a Christian’s body and exert such a significant influence that Paul could say it ‘reigns’ (Rom. 6:12–13), why do we suppose that another form of evil influence cannot dwell there?” This ignores two vital realities. First, the believer’s positional sanctification based on the imputation to him of Christ’s perfect righteousness. Christ is able to indwell the believer because the house, the physical body, has been cleansed positionally. Second, the sin nature is not a personal entity and has had its power broken at the instant of salvation.

The strength of this argument is often overlooked. The Greek word used for the “temple” of the believer’s body is ναός [*naos*] rather than ἱερόν [*hieron*]. The significance is that the inner sanctum or holy place [*naos*] is the point of comparison rather than the entire temple complex [*hieron*].<sup>40</sup> Access to the holy place was restricted and nothing evil or unclean was allowed to enter there and coexist with the dwelling of God.

The idea of “temple” must be interpreted in light of the Old Testament. At Sinai, God sanctified the Holy of Holies as He filled the tent of meeting with His presence manifested as the cloud or pillar of fire. Once sanctified God then protects this Temple from any defiling presence. The attempt of Nadab and Abihu to present unauthorized fire is met with their immediate death. Uzzah’s attempt to steady the ark on the back of the donkey as it is being transported to Jerusalem is again met with his immediate death. When God purifies the Temple for His indwelling presence, nothing undefiled may enter.

A further illustration can be gleaned from the analogy of Israel’s organization as they encamped around the Tabernacle. As is frequently the case, events in the life of the nation Israel portray issues in the life of the individual Christian. The nation encamped around the tabernacle is analogous to the body of the believer. Sin could exist in the camp, though it was disciplined by God. The nation itself is indwelt by the glory of God who is in their midst. This is analogous to the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit inside the believer. But nothing defiled or evil could enter that Temple. In the same

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<sup>39</sup> Robert B. Thieme III, *The Panorama of the Shekinah* (Western Conservative Theological Seminary: Unpublished ThM thesis, 1985).

<sup>40</sup> Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Translation of: *Exegetisches Wörterbuch Zum Neuen Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990-c. 1993), 2:457.

way, the believer has been set apart as undefiled, a Temple for the indwelling<sup>15</sup> presence of God the Holy Spirit and God the Son. Nothing can defile that inner sanctum. No spirit can enter and desecrate that holy place.

## 2. *Empty House.*

Jesus gives us a picture of demon possession in one of His dialogues with the Pharisees. In Matthew 12:28, 29, 43–45 Jesus pictures the possessed victim as a house in which demons dwell. Casting out the demons is analogous to throwing the inhabitants out of the house. Therefore, it is clear that demon possession includes evil/unclean spirits, another term for demons, indwelling an individual. This is further reinforced by the terms used to describe the moving in and eviction of demons from their captive. Both transitions are recorded in Mark 5:13, with the “coming out” (ἐξέρχονται) of the demons from their human hostage as they then “entered into” (εἰσέρχονται) the herd of swine. Mary Magdalene is described in Luke 8:2 as the woman “from whom seven demons had gone out (ἐξέρχονται).” These precise terms provide clarity for the meaning of δαιμονίζομαι, making it indisputable that the word means nothing less than the indwelling of a demon in the body of a human host.

These first two arguments work together. Since the Holy Spirit lives in the material house of a believer, then every time a demon knocks at the door, the Holy Spirit answers. Since God the Holy Spirit is stronger than any demonic being, including Satan himself, then no demon or evil spirit could enter. It’s that simple: God is greater than Satan, and thus He protects His children.

## 3. *Intercession of Jesus.*

Several other New Testament passages indicate that Christ’s victory over Satan and the demonic was so extensive and His power so vast that it totally protects believers “from the evil one.” First, Jesus prayed in His great high-priestly prayer that the Father “keep them [Christians] from the evil one” (John 17:15). But what exactly did He mean, “keep from”? As one writer notes, if this is a prayer to protect believers from simple influence or temptation, then it was a vacuous prayer that was never answered.<sup>41</sup> Such would not be in harmony with the intercessory power of the second person of the Trinity. Jesus must have some event much more extreme in mind that the believer is to be kept from. The preposition ἐκ here is used to indicate severance or separation. Whatever else our Lord intended, this would exclude the invasion of a child of God’s body by unholy demons. Since we know the Father has heard and is fulfilling Christ’s request this must at least include protection of all believers, obedient and disobedient from demon possession.

## 4. *Kept from Harm.*

The apostle John later wrote that each believer is kept by God and that “the evil one does not touch him” (1 John 5:18). The context of 1 John 5:18–19 reflects the Lord’s intercessory prayer in John 17, in v. 19 he also refers to the believer living in the world, in the very power sphere of the devil. This particular passage is one that involves several technical difficulties which

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<sup>41</sup> Dickason, *Demon Possession*, 89.

must first be resolved before there can be accurate interpretation. First, the identity of the first “who is born of God” (a perfect participle) is undisputed and refers to the regenerate believer. Second, the identity of the second “who was born of God” (an aorist passive participle) is debated. Some argue that the shift in tenses indicates a shift in reference, so that the second participle refers to the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>42</sup> Thus the verse would be translated: “We know that no regenerate believer sins; but Jesus Christ, the One who was born of God keeps him . . .” This would again indicate that our Lord keeps and protects us from demon possession. However, those who want to say Christians can be demon-possessed reject this interpretation. Though we agree that the above is the best interpretation, for the sake of argument, we will assume the alternate position.

This raises the second difficulty with this passage. The object of the verb “keeps” is “him” in some ancient manuscripts but not in many of them. An alternate reading found in the Majority Text might be understood to mean “himself.” Those who believe Christians can be demon-possessed attempt to avoid the implication of this passage by rejecting the standard reading of the Greek text in favor of the Majority Text alternate reading.<sup>43</sup> But even if we grant for arguments sake that this is the correct reading and interpretation of the text it nevertheless still supports the view that a believer cannot be demon-possessed. Majority text advocate Zane Hodges who follows the same alternate reading Dickason suggests, concludes that the passage still means that believers are not demon-possessed.

John thus affirmed that “the one who has been born of God *keeps himself* (there is no word for safe in the original). This restates the truth of [1 John] 3:9 in a slightly different form. A believer’s new man (or “new self”; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10) is fundamentally impervious to sin and hence the evil one (cf., 1 John 2:13–14; 3:12), Satan, does not touch him.<sup>44</sup>

It is not the textually disputed phrase that clinches the argument against demon possession of the believer; it is the verb in the final clause. The Greek

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<sup>42</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 251-252; Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 51 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984), 302–303; John R. W. Stott, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 191–193.

<sup>43</sup> Dickason, *Demon Possession*, 94. Dickason attempts to obfuscate the passage by throwing out several interpretations and then concluding that the passage just is not clear. If this same methodology is applied to the rest of Scripture, then nothing can be known because there is a plethora of contradictory interpretations of almost every verse in the Bible. In the view of this writer, the exegetical confusion is predetermined by presuming the validity of clinical observations.

<sup>44</sup> Zane Hodges, “1 John” in Roy Zuck, John Walvoord, ed, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Scripture Press, 1983), 903.

ἄπτω in the middle voice means “to touch, take hold of, or hold.”<sup>45</sup> This word<sup>17</sup> indicates touch with intent to harm, which means that Satan cannot touch nor do any serious damage to the believer.<sup>46</sup> Since this would include, at the least, indwelling by an unclean spirit, the Christian is clearly protected from demon possession. The final clause “the evil one does not touch him,” is not conditioned upon the previous clause but is an additional reality. It is hard to imagine how a believer could be demon-possessed but also be said to have not been touched by the evil one! Certainly, this passage would add weight to the teaching that believers cannot be demon-possessed.

#### 5. *Protected from the Evil One.*

Paul declared in 2 Thessalonians 3:3 that “the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.” The Greek preposition ἀπό translated “from” here is different from the previous passages. Here the preposition has the idea of kept away from something and when in combination with the verb to guard, means to protect something “so that it is not lost or damaged.”<sup>47</sup> This protection is based upon the Lord’s faithfulness, not man’s. Nothing in the context indicates it only applies to believers who are walking in obedience. To assume that is to presume one’s interpretation to predetermine the conclusion. It is no wonder some writers believe the Scripture unclear on the matter! It is hard to believe that our faithful Lord’s protection would allow one of His children to become demon-possessed. It does not make sense in the light of Scripture. Why then do some assert that believers can be open to some form of demonic possession?

#### 6. *Argument from Sufficiency and Silence.*

The fact that the Trinity indwells and protects the believer should be reason enough for anyone to conclude that Christians cannot be demon-possessed. Furthermore, when this fantastic truth is combined with the reality that demon possession is not even mentioned as something believers should be concerned about after the resurrection of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, then it should remove any doubt that might still be lingering. The burden of proof lies with those who believe that Christians can be demon-possessed, since the Scriptures do not support that point of view. Valid proof must flow from the Scriptures, not from experience. NSW advocates go

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<sup>45</sup> Frederick William Danker, rev. and ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed, by Walter Bauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) s.v. “ἄπτω.” Here it is suggested that the nuance is to touch for the purpose of harm, it is also likely that the verb is a synonym for ἔχω, another common word in possession narratives.

<sup>46</sup> Smalley, 303.

<sup>47</sup> Frederick William Danker, rev. and ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed, by Walter Bauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) s.v. “ἀπό.”

to enormous lengths in their tapes and books to show from their case studies that the Christians they counseled were under such great demonic bondage that only a diagnosis of demon possession accounts for their symptoms. This is anecdotal theology, not exegetically sound, biblical theology. Often the believer is pictured as having tried all the techniques of the Christian life as found in the New Testament, but without success in dealing with his or her problem. The point which is often emphasized is that if the person had not realized that he was demon-possessed and been delivered, he would never acquire the means to overcome his problem by applying the God-given principles found in the Bible. But if Christians can be possessed, then why do the New Testament Epistles, letters written specifically to teach believers how to live a mature Christian life until the return of Christ, not warn us that believers can be demon-possessed, or command us to cast out demons from Christians, or tell us how to otherwise deal with this problem? It is unthinkable that a subject as important as this one would not be dealt with in the Epistles. If Scripture is foggy as to whether Christians can be demon-possessed, as is claimed, then it certainly cannot be clear as to how to deal with Christians who are demon-possessed. Conversely, if the Epistles gave instructions on how to cast out demons, then it would be clear that Christians could be demon-possessed. Therefore, since there are no instructions for dealing with demon-possessed Christians in the New Testament, and assuming believers can be demon-possessed, then once again it is back to experience and trial-and-error as our teacher for functioning in this area. To those who suggest that this argument is based on the silence of Scripture, it seems that such silence speaks volumes. The Bible clearly claims to give us “*everything* pertaining to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3, emphasis added) and is “adequate to equip us for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:17). Christian demon-possession is certainly a vital matter pertaining to godliness for which we should be equipped. If the Bible claims to give *everything* pertaining to godliness but ignores this particular subject, we can be absolutely confident that Christians need not worry about demon possession. Therefore, those who teach Christian possession are by implication denying the sufficiency of Scripture and are going beyond its authority by promoting the authority of their own experience. They have forgotten the warning of Paul: “... that in us you might learn not to exceed what is written, in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against the other” (1 Corinthians 4:6).

### **Alleged Examples of Demon-Possessed Believers in the Bible**

Attempts are often made by NSW advocates that demon possession also took place in the Old Testament and that Old Testament saints were so afflicted. But is this the case?

“Satan can and does demonize believers,” declares John Wimber.<sup>48</sup> Wimber attempts to support his belief that Christians can be demon-possessed from several biblical passages. His first example is King Saul, whose story is told in the book of 1 Samuel. Wimber is correct that Saul was a believer,

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<sup>48</sup> Wimber, *Warfare*, 100.

since Samuel indicated they would be together in Paradise (1 Samuel 28:19).<sup>19</sup> However, Wimber wrongly equates the fact that Saul was tormented (16:14) with demon possession.

For several reasons, this could not have been a true case of demon possession:

1. The evil spirit is said to have been sent from God, not Satan (16:14).
2. The evil spirit would leave when David played his harp (16:23), and no demon is said in Scripture to depart at the playing of music. Instead, demons are cast out in the name of the Lord.
3. Saul later repented of his sin (26:21). The New Testament presents a demon-possessed person as a victim who needs freedom, not repentance.
4. The Hebrew prepositions clarify that the evil spirit would come *upon* [עָלָה] Saul, or *to* (לְ) him, and depart from upon him (מֵעָלָיו) (1 Samuel 16:16, 23); it is never said to have entered *into* (בְּ) Saul, as would be expected if demon possession was the intended idea. We saw earlier that the language of demon possession is that of *entering into* and *exiting out of* a person, not coming upon. The description in this passage is consistent with an external attack that does happen to believers. Finally, since the case of King Saul is considered the strongest candidate for demon possession in the Old Testament, it follows that there are no genuine cases of demon possession recorded in the Old Testament.

Luke 13:16 is another verse sometimes cited as supporting demon possession of a believer. In this case, Jesus called a woman who had been demon-possessed for 18 years “a daughter of Abraham.” Some suggest that this means she was a believer. However, the term “daughter of Abraham” is a nationalist term for a female citizen of Israel and is never used to indicate a person’s salvation. Many Israelites were believers, but most were not. Nothing in the text indicates whether she was at that time a believer.

A third suggestion is that Judas was a believer because he was one of the twelve disciples. There is no question that Judas was demon-possessed. John 13:27 uses clear “demon possession” language (cf. Luke 8:30) in describing the fact that “Satan then entered [εἰσέρχεται] into him [Judas].” It should be equally clear, however, that Judas was *not* a believer. First, Jesus commented in John 6:70, “Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?”<sup>49</sup> Judas is singled out as that devil in the next verse. This is hardly a term for a Christian. Certainly the burden of proof would be on someone to demonstrate that Judas was a believer after a comment like that on his résumé. Second, Jesus tells the twelve in the upper room that all the twelve disciples

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<sup>49</sup> The anarthrous use of διάβολος here is comparable to the anarthrous use of θεός in John 1:1 and emphasizes the quality of the noun, its essence or attribute. Thus, Jesus is making a clear statement at this early stage that Judas is already indwelt by Satan.

were “clean” *except Judas* (John 13:10–11).<sup>50</sup> “Clean” (καθαρός) in this context clearly indicates salvation. Third, Judas, the “son of perdition ἀπόλεια” perished (ἀπόλλυμι), the same word used of those who fail to believe in Christ alone for salvation (John 3:16). It is wrong to equate a disciple as necessarily being a believer, since not all of Christ’s disciples were believers.

Peter is said by some to have been demon-possessed when he was rebuked by Jesus in Matthew 16:23, “But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.” Once again, this is an inferential assumption that can be demonstrated to be wrong. Satan’s influence was that of persuasion from *outside*, not an operation from *within*. Why? Because Peter had accepted a wrong view about the role of the Messiah: Peter did not want Jesus to die. However, this was contrary to God’s plan for Jesus, so Jesus rebuked Peter to let him know the source of that type of false thinking. False thinking is equated to demonic thinking (James 3:15).

Earlier, when Peter had declared that Jesus was “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (16:16), Jesus had said that the source and inspiration of *that* thought was a revelation from God. However, when Peter rebuked Jesus for following the revelation of God’s will for His life, Jesus wanted to make sure that Peter knew that the source of this thinking was not *God* but *Satan*. Notice that Jesus explained after His rebuke that Peter was not setting his “mind on God’s interests, but man’s” (16:23). This is a picture of Satan using persuasion from outside Peter to try to convince him to believe false teaching.

Ananias and Sapphira are other candidates for examples of believers who were “demonized” to lie because “Satan *filled* your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit” (Acts 5:3, emphasis added). The reasoning is that someone whose heart is “filled” with something is experiencing internal control and thus demon possession. We will not debate whether Ananias and Sapphira were believers, but we will assume that they were. The difficulty with this verse is that so little information is given. It is possible to understand the phrase “Satan filled your heart” in two ways. The first is that Satan, the “father of lies” (John 8:44), influenced the heart of Ananias to lie. This would be similar to the type of external, mental persuasion that we saw in the previous event involving Peter.

The second way, the way deliverance practitioners understand it, is that Satan himself entered the heart of Ananias. However, if this were the case, then it would be Satan who lied; yet it was *Ananias* who lied and was punished. Had Ananias been Satan- or demon-possessed, it would have been Satan inside him who was lying, and the solution would have been to cast out Satan, since Ananias would be the innocent victim and not the perpetrator that

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<sup>50</sup> In the Greek, two different words are used for washing. The first, λούω, is the same word the LXX uses to describe the head-to-toe bath of the High Priest at his consecration, which is analogous to the believer’s salvation. This bath symbolizes the judicial cleansing of sin that occurs at the believer’s salvation. The cognate noun describes the “washing of regeneration” in Titus 3:5.

the Bible declares him to have been. The next verse says, “Why is it that you<sup>21</sup> *Ananias* have conceived this deed in your heart?” (Acts 5:4, emphasis added). Ananias, like every believer, is in control of his thoughts and responsible for his thinking, decisions, and actions – not Satan. Therefore, this is an example of Satan using the rebellious thinking of a Christian as a base of operations, influencing him with “doctrines of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1).

A final example focuses on the incestuous man in 1 Corinthians 5. Some contend that he was a believer whose behavior was a symptom of demon possession. Thus, Paul placed this man out of the church and into the sphere of Satan for discipline, with the result that the man could lose his physical life, even though this would not affect his eternal destiny (verse 5). However, Satan does not have to possess a person internally to kill him. King Saul was not demon-possessed, but he was driven to death by an evil spirit (1 Samuel 31). Job was certainly in no danger of being demon-possessed, but the Lord told Satan that he could do anything to him except kill him. Paul was given a thorn in the flesh to buffet him, a demonic messenger (called an ἄγγελος from Satan, 2 Corinthians 12:7), yet he was not demon-possessed.

### **The Apostles and the Demonic**

On three occasions the apostles are said to have been involved in the casting out of demons (Acts 8:5–8; 16:16–18; 19:11, 12). None of these passages involves a debate over whether those delivered were Christians; all would agree that they were not. The significance of these events is as signs that the apostles had the authority from their risen Head (Christ) to act and speak on His behalf, as was demonstrated by the fact that they had authority over Satan like their Master. Once the foundation of the church had been laid by the apostles (Ephesians 2:20) and the boundary and nature of the Gospel message established, the norm for dealing with demon-possessed unbelievers had become *the preaching of the Gospel*.

Upon belief in Christ as Savior, an unbeliever is delivered not only from his sin but also from any demon possession that might have afflicted him. So the proper biblical way to deliver an unbeliever from demons is to *preach the Gospel to him*. It does not benefit the victim for someone to cast out demons (if possible) only to have him remain in his unsaved condition. Christ told the Pharisees in Matthew 12 that when the demon comes back to his old house and finds it swept and clean, he will go and get seven other demons, so that the state of the person will be worse than at the first. Any believer can deliver another person from demons by leading him to Christ. The Scriptures do not require a second step of deliverance for a believer in order that he may be freed from the demonic; Christ sweeps the house clean at the moment of salvation.

### **Our True Focus**

Since demon possession is not possible for believers, it is not an issue in the believer’s sanctification. For the believer to assign blame for his spiritual

failures to the activities of demons is to subvert the emphasis throughout the Bible on personal responsibility. The Christian indeed faces an unseen enemy. In many cases, that influence may be quite overwhelming. But Christ defeated Satan at the cross and the believer today is to live a spiritual life based on that finished victory. The focus of the believer should be on dependence on the power of God the Holy Spirit, being filled by the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), walking by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16), and learning and applying the Word of God. To be distracted by seeking solutions in deliverance from demonic indwelling will always lead to a life of spiritual failure. By trusting in the sufficient power of the Word of God and the Spirit of God, the believer can defeat any problem, difficulty, or sin.

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