

Demon Possession and the Believer

The growth of 'deliverance ministries' since the early 1970's has been little short of phenomenal. Some individuals have established large conference centres and old stately manors to be given over entirely to 'deliverance' and counselling ministry. The extreme practices undertaken in some have aroused national attention through media exposure and TV documentaries. Even the BBC's *Everyman* series devoted an entire programme to this subject exposing the bizarre antics of at least one such ministry.

Before this time, exorcising demons from believers to solve their problems had mainly been the province of the Pentecostal churches, although the Anglican and Roman Catholic denominations have prepared forms of ritual to deal with the issue should it ever arise. The Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements states that '*a review of the literature, history, and oral "stories" of Pentecostalism reveals the centrality of the practice of exorcism, in the expansion of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements.*'¹ Yet at the same time this authoritative work, authored by Pentecostals, admits that '*exorcism has been practised but not formally theologised*'.² It also admits that there is a widespread diversity of technique and no unanimous agreement in supporting theology, especially in relation to healing: '*There is no monolithic agreement in doctrine and practice*'.³ Some Pentecostal writers have even suggested that '*every accident, misfortune, quarrel, sickness, disease, and unhappiness is the direct result of the individual work of one or more wicked spirits*'.⁴

Like other Pentecostal aberrations (e.g. 'Latter Rain' theology) excesses of exorcism activities led to widespread condemnation in mainstream churches and the practices went underground to a degree, that is until the Charismatic Movement re-awakened them in the late 60's - early 70's. Discovering 'deliverance' afresh, especially from the early 1980's onwards, Charismatics began to imbibe old Pentecostal works on the subject and a host of material flooded in from the States, some of it truly awful and damaging. Even some Reformed writers began to favour the technique. With the impact of John Wimber in the mid 80's onwards, the whole ministry of exorcism became a groundswell, even in the mainstream churches that were not part of the Charismatic Movement.

I think there were two key reasons for the rise in popularity of 'deliverance' ministry. The first was the change in society whereby everyone was taught to feel that they were a victim. Everyone had rights and no one had responsibilities anymore. Even violent criminals were cases to be pitied and rehabilitated in prison; no longer was imprisonment a retribution for evil deeds, it was a hospital to care for maladjusted misfits, even if they were psychopaths. As such ideas entered the church, sin was downplayed and self-esteem was turned up. Sinners became victims, not people who needed to repent. In this atmosphere it was an easy step to treat people with sinful hang-ups as people that were afflicted by a demon

¹ Page 290.

² Page 291.

³ Page 292.

⁴ H A M Whyte quoted on page 292. John Wimber also connected sickness with demonic activity.

which caused those hang-ups. If they had a lot of problems, it was because they had a lot of demons. Smokers were told they had a demon of addiction which was why they could not give up - a specialist was required to expel the demon. Men given over to immorality had a demon of lust. One Scottish family, whose ancestors were defeated at Culloden, were told that they needed to be delivered from the 'spirit of Culloden' which was causing defeat and depression. Sometimes people are delivered of dozens of demons in one night.

The other reason is that, with all the erroneous ideas and practices entering the church in the last fifty years and with the degeneration of theological study and Bible reading, churches have adopted a very low standard of assessing converts. As the Gospel became cheapened with: Arminianism, revivalism, easy believism, decisionism, free-willism, cheap grace and so on, many people were accepted as believers who had never truly repented or knew any conviction of sin. The church became filled with professing, superficial converts (and it still is). These people became massive pastoral problem cases requiring frequent counselling and never seeming to really break through into Christian liberty and assurance. As method after method was tried, to no avail, it became a last hope that certain long term problem cases could be resolved with deliverance from evil spirits. Such characters often tend to manifest the necessary signs of possession or affliction as they are vulnerable, impressionable and weak people in the first place; so the deliverance sessions seemed to be effective as there were lots of expressions of demon activity (screaming, shouting, sighing, coughing, spitting, laughing, agitations, fits, falling over, speaking in another voice and sometimes vomiting). Such manifestations would deem the ministry a success, even if the basic problems continued. Then the patient was said to have 'fallen back', rejected the ministry and become re-possessed or was simply recalcitrant. Few people surveyed the whole scene which showed that the real success rate in solving problems was virtually zero.

For years there was no theological attempt to form an apologetic for this practice, books on it would focus upon stories, case histories and a few random texts taken out of context. Later more solid works did arrive but these too could find little basis in scripture to support them. What we need to know is: what does God really say about this whole idea.

Can believers be possessed by demons?

Christians are already possessed by God

Do you not know that your body is the temple [inner sanctuary] of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. (1 Cor 6:19-20)

Christians are possessed, but not by demons. They belong to God and are indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. (1 Jn 4:4)

... what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial [Satan]? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (2 Cor 6:16)

Since our bodies are God's temple and he abides in us, and since God is greater than Satan, it cannot be possible for the spirit, or new nature, of a believer to be indwelt and controlled

by a demon since this is where the Holy Spirit dwells. God specifically states that he will not share his temple (us) with Satan; there can be no communion between them. Nothing can be clearer.

If not possessed, can Christians simply have an afflicting demon present

The majority of modern Pentecostals and Charismatics would balk at the notion of a believer being 'possessed' by a demon and avoid the more extreme traditional Pentecostal descriptions. John Wimber, for instance, made much of calling the afflicted person 'demonised', 'occupied' or 'invaded' by a demon in order to avoid the idea that a Christian, owned by God and indwelt by the Spirit, could be possessed by a demon at the same time. But is this distinction of terms scriptural?

There are two main terms used for demon possession in the New Testament:

- *Daimonizomai*: translated as 'to be possessed by a demon', 'to be tormented by a demon', 'to be demonised' or 'demoniac'. It occurs 13 times in the Gospels.
- *Daimonion* ('demon') in connection with *echo* ('to have', 'to possess' etc.): translated as 'to have a demon'. It occurs 8 times: Matt 11:18; Lk 7:33; 8:27; Jn 7:20; 8:48,49,52; 10:20. [*Daimonion* is also used in connection with other words like *ekballo*, 'cast out' or other words like 'hold', 'come upon', 'gone out', 'come out', 'entered' etc.]
- There is one occurrence of '*has Beelzebul*' (the prince of demons Mk 3:22).
- Sometimes *echo* is used with *pneuma* ('spirit'): '*possessed with a spirit of divination*', (Acts 16:16, occurs once only); '*had a spirit*', (occurs twice, Lk 4:33; 13:11).

In the Gospels, those who were demonised had a demon controlling them from within. To be demonised, to have a demon, is thus the same as to be possessed by a demon. The terms are used synonymously. For example the following is a clear case of possession and control but which uses the phrase 'to have a demon': *'There was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon. And he cried out with a loud voice saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are -- the Holy One of God!" But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" And when the demon had thrown him in their midst, it came out of him and did not hurt him.'* (Lk 4:33-35).

All demonisation involves the control of a person by one or more demons. Whether this is called 'possession', 'demonised' or something else is irrelevant. A person who has a demon is dominated by it since a demon can only occupy someone when they have allowed it to have a measure of control by submitting to its temptations.

So can demons never afflict believers at all then?

This is a wrong conclusion. The best comparative analogy is that of sin. The believer has been freed from the power of sin, is not under its dominion (Rm 6:14, 6,7,11); yet a Christian must not yield to sin (Rm 6:12,13). If a believer ardently follows sinful pursuits, he becomes a slave of sin (Rm 6:16). Is this not a contradiction?

The full consummation of the kingdom comes with the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. Until that time we have the earnest of salvation, but not the fulness in our bodies on earth. Our spirits know the fulness of the Lord (Col 2:10), this is where the new man abides (Eph 4:23-24), but our souls and bodies are not yet fully changed (Heb 10:39; 1 Pt 1:9, 1:22; 1 Cor 15:42; 1 Jn 3:2).⁵ Sanctification is a process going on now. So, the Christian is not ruled by

⁵ This is not the place to argue for or against the tripartite nature of man. All would accept a distinction between our spirit as the abode of the Holy Spirit and our mind, for instance, as the

sin but can become a slave of sin (at least temporally). A Christian walking in the light is cleansed from all sin (1 Jn 1:7) and whoever is born of God does not sin (1 Jn 3:9) but a believer cannot say that he has no sin (1 Jn 1:8). Confusing?

The explanation is the difference between what has transpired already in my spirit (born again, a new creation, the new man - past tense of salvation) and what is happening now in my soul (being saved, process of sanctification - present tense of salvation) and what will happen in the future (resurrected body with no sin - future tense of salvation). I have a perfect new man (nature) which is Christ, so that he lives in my spirit by his Spirit. But I have a will that sometimes chooses to sin, an emotional life which sometimes lusts and a mind which sometimes thinks wrong things. These amount to the soul. Sanctification is giving God the control of these areas and learning to die to myself in one matter at a time. My body is the expression of my soul and thus the manifestation of good or bad. It's material weaknesses hinder sanctification (it is dead in sin, it thirsts etc.), result in the soul's conflict and requires a complete transformation which will occur at the second coming.

Now, demons cannot gain possession of a believer's spirit, because the Holy Spirit lives there and it is a new creation, created after the likeness of God, corresponding to God (Eph 4:24). But Satan can wage war against our members (i.e. faculties), he can afflict our minds requiring us to recapture thoughts (2 Cor 10:5), he can tempt us into sensual emotional desires (Jm 1:14, 4:1). A person thoroughly given over to sinful lust and evil temptations will find that his old nature, his flesh, his sinful Adamic life, can become captivated by demonic influence. He has given Satan a foothold (*topos*, a specific location) in his life (Eph 4:27). This requires deliverance from the snare.

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will. (2 Tim 2:24-26)

Those who oppose God's will can become ensnared by the devil to the degree that they disobey God. '*Having been taken captive*' clearly means that someone is controlled by Satan as a result of failing to repent of sin. Although the text does not identify these opposers as believers, the context is regarding life within the church and it seems sensible to view these people as backslidden Christians. It appears that many fell in this way in apostolic times (1 Tim 3:7, 5:15).

Paul calls this spiritual defilement: '*Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness [defilement, pollution] of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God*', (2 Cor 7:1). The word 'cleansing' (*katharizo*) has the meaning of 'to prune' in old Greek and, in its other form, it is translated as 'prune' (*kathairo*) in Jn 15:2, but in Koine Greek it means ceremonial cleansing and is usually translated as 'to make clean'. It is clear that a stripping off of all spiritual stains is in view. Now, does Paul mean that a spiritual force has invaded his person (say, emotions through temptation) and needs casting off? Or does he mean that his human spirit has been defiled by something? The context is about idolatry and the need to separate from harmful contacts, especially those of false religion. Wrong contact can lead to defilement. The obvious reading is that the human spirit can be damaged and defiled through sinful association, especially idolatry. The polluting effects of demonic activity through sin can do

rational organ of man as a human.

serious harm to a believer - but Paul never states that demons need to be expelled from one's spirit.

So, as well as tempting (Matt 4:1), accusing (Rev 12:10), afflicting (Job 2:6-7), restricting (1 Thess 2:18) and otherwise harassing a believer, Satan (or his demon) can gain entrance into a person's soulful life (mind, emotions, will) as a result of repeated sin and the spirit can be defiled (damaged) as a result. Such a captured believer needs to resist the devil, repent of all known sin and determine to follow Christ. This may require pastoral assistance, but elders are never instructed to cast out demons from believers because demons have no power if temptation is refused; they have no rights to remain and will never stay in a holy place (see later).

Note: 2 Cor 11:4

For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him.

In this text Paul speaks hypothetically in castigating the Corinthians who were too ready to listen to error. Is he suggesting that believers can be possessed? The word 'receive' is the Greek word *lambano* which has a wide variety of meanings, as does the English word 'receive' i.e: to take with the hand, to remove, to associate with, to claim, to seize, to admit, to regard someone's power or rank and on that account neglect something or do some injustice, to make a trial of etc. Paul is not talking about allowing a spiritual entity into one's heart but receiving the preaching, proclamation, of a demonic teaching. The word implies this and the whole sense of the verse relates to accepting false teaching. There isn't really another 'Jesus', there is only one Lord Jesus Christ. The reception of a false Gospel is equivalent to accepting a false Christ, or 'another Gospel', but there isn't really a different Christ preaching it. Similarly accepting error is like receiving a false spirit, accepting the teaching of a demonic source as if it was the Holy Spirit.

The dangers of demonic invasion of ministry

In the Old Testament we see that previously godly servants of God not only rebelled but became seduced by evil spirits, sometimes as a punishment from God for rebellion. Saul was an anointed king who knew the Spirit of the LORD coming upon him, who prophesied, who became a new man and of whom Samuel said '*God is with thee*' (1 Sam 10:6-7); and yet he was troubled by an evil spirit which came upon him intermittently (1 Sam 16:14,15,18-23; 18:10-11; 19:9-10). This was a divine judgment resulting from Saul's disobedience. About 400 hundred prophets who used to enquire of the Lord received a lying spirit (1 Kg 22:23), and were controlled so as to speak what it wanted to the kings.

As the end approaches, the activity of Satan in the church will increase (2 Thess 2:1-12). Some Christian teachers will be seduced to follow doctrines emanating from demons (1 Tim 4:1) and false prophets will arise in the church who follow a wrong spirit (1 Jn 4:1). Even Paul knew of the danger of Satan's devices which sought to gain an advantage in Paul's ministry (2 Cor 2:11). Preachers who come and preach a different Jesus to the Biblical testimony of Jesus or who preach a different Gospel are doing so by a different spirit (2 Cor 11:4; Gal 1:6-9 1 Jn 4:3). Christians who follow these false spirits become bewitched (Gal 3:1). One of Paul's stated qualifications for potential eldership is specifically geared to prevent a recent convert being captured by the devil (1 Tim 3:6-7). This means that even an elder can be ensnared in certain circumstances, especially pride.

So, a Christian minister can become seduced by demonic forces so that the ministry itself becomes a demonic expression. This is especially true in the case of heretical, deceptive teaching. As we approach the end such demonic ministry is going to become commonplace and believers who submit to such teaching will be in danger of becoming bewitched. This is clear New Testament teaching. Do we see such things today? The answer is emphatically, 'Yes, we do'. There has never been a time of such diverse and extreme deceptive teaching and aberrational practices in the professing Christian church. If such errors are prompted by demons, as Paul states, the modern church is being gradually more and more seduced by demonic activity; this is the great falling away which both Jesus and Paul spoke of (Matt 24; 2 Thess 2). Believers must beware.

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. (1 Pt 5:6-9)

Is Exorcism a Valid ministry?

Exorcism of believers

There is not one text telling an elder to expel demons from *believers* - not one. The language of possession is also never used in this context - never. The apostolic letters never talk about demon possession of believers and there is no theology explaining it anywhere. Demon exorcism is only mentioned in connection with establishing the kingdom ministry of Jesus (Matt 12:28) and, by extension, the mission activity of the apostles in representatively bringing the kingdom to new foreign areas (Acts 8:7 Samaria; 16:16ff Philippi; 19:12 Ephesus). In Revelation, where demonic activity is described, there is no command to expel them (Rev 9:20, 16:13-14, 18:2).

In the interesting case of the woman afflicted for 18 years we see something important:

And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up. But when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, "Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity." And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. ... "So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound -- think of it -- for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?" (Lk 13:11-13, 16)

Here there is a definite case of demon possession or control. 'Had a spirit of infirmity' could be translated as 'had a spirit of illness'. Her affliction was caused by a demon under the orders of Satan himself. There is no argument about this.

Is she a believer under the old covenant or just a Jewess? This is the crucial question. I think that serious Bible students cannot doubt that she was a true believer. Jesus found her in the synagogue and went out of his way to call her forward to heal her even though he knew it would cause a controversy. She immediately glorified God on being healed and Jesus himself called her 'daughter of Abraham'. Jesus used this phrase of Zacchaeus when he was converted ('And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham"' Lk 19:9); this could not mean that Zacchaeus became a Jew when he repented or that he was saved because he was born a Jew. He became a son of Abraham because he received salvation; however, the implication here is that the woman was already a true believer.

The point is that Jesus does not expel the demon to heal her, even though he did this with other cases. Jesus' prayer for her welfare was enough to make the demon flee without extravagant warfare. We should also note that this took place before the cross, before the full effects of salvation had been given to the church. It was only after Jesus was glorified that the Spirit was able to indwell believers (Jn 7:39); it was only after the Spirit's outpouring on the elect that a new nature was given that was the actual dwelling place of God by the Spirit. Such demonic invasion and bondage cannot take place in believers after the cross.

Exorcism may be necessary with unbelievers but not with believers.

Pastoral assistance with sinful believers

There may be cases where, for one reason or another (usually wilful, repeated sin), a person has become detrimentally affected by the enemy having given place to temptation, the mind may have become a stronghold of sin for instance. In such cases the normal instructions of: fleeing from sin, standing against the enemy with faith, resisting Satan etc. may need pastoral assistance in prayer if the person is very weak in faith. Confronting the enemy may be appropriate, but never do we see a casting out of one sinful conduct after another (spirits of fornication, greed, envy, addiction etc.). Indeed, scripture commands that we strive against these things taking responsibility of our lives.

There may even be cases where God has afflicted a sinner with a spiritual force as a chastising punishment. This was certainly the case for Saul and others mentioned earlier. David was also chastised by God whereupon he despatched Satan to lure him (2 Sam 24:1 with Chron 21:1). Jesus implies that unforgiveness can result in this type of torment:

'And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers⁶ until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.' (Matt 18:34-35)

Admittedly, demons are not specifically mentioned here but, taken with OT examples, it appears that they could well be alluded to. Certainly, unforgiveness gives Satan an opportunity (2 Cor 2:10-11). In cases like these, there can be no hope of deliverance from the effects of demonic oppression unless the prior sin is completely repented of. The key is dealing with sin not commanding spirits to leave.

The real root matter is holiness. If a person is following Christ and seeking to put on the new man, they are walking in the light and no demon could bear to remain in that place. The light overcomes the darkness. Freedom and deliverance from demonic oppression, or affliction comes in the way of sanctification and lifelong repentance (changing direction to follow Christ and obey his commands).

So being captured by the enemy is a situation where scripture commands repentance, confession, prayer and resolute action in sanctification to deal with sinful actions, yet Charismatics instead use a completely unscriptural practice to personify these things and cast them out of people which requires little or no responsibility of the sinner themselves. A sinner is not an innocent, oppressed victim as modern society would like us to believe, but a

⁶ Lit. someone who uses pain to elicit the truth, exact full punishment. It is only used here in the NT but in the non-canonical Apocalypse of Peter it refers to avenging angels. In Jesus' story the tormentors are obviously human but why does Jesus say that God will do likewise to sinning believers? Who are these tormentors? Some take the view that it may be isolation from fellowship, sickness or difficult circumstances, but does this do justice to the anthropomorphism?

guilty person who needs to repent.

The proof of the pudding is always in the eating and my experience with people supposedly delivered of spirits is that they soon fell back into their old habits and needed continual ministry.

Having said all of this, there are a few testimonies where soundly converted people have explained that they experienced a serious demonic problem which was totally solved when the demon was expelled through prayer. Examples may be found in Merrill Unger's *What Demons Can do to Saints*, for instance. What are we to say about this?

My view is that such folk have usually become so involved in a sinful condition that they have become ensnared as a result (the testimony on pages 72-74 is a case in point). A demon has not possessed their spirit, but has dominated their flesh, the old nature, their will, mental faculties and emotions so that the Holy Spirit is both grieved (Eph 4:30) and quenched (1 Thess 5:19) and the believer has thus lost all power to resist the enemy. They try to resist but utterly fail and become despondent. Part of the severity of these experiences is the chastening (*paideuo* can mean whipping', 'scourging' as well as instructing) of the Lord. When they realise the true cause of their problems, as the Lord gives light, they repent, seek help from a pastor thus implementing the Biblical principles of the body, fellowship and mutual edification. As the pastor prays they receive grace and help and the hold of the demonic force is released and the demon flees - the principle that the prayer of a righteous man avails much (Jm 5:15-16). The action of going to an elder, confessing the sin, seeking help, submitting to prayer and counsel is a normative church ministry for sickness, especially in connection with sin and is thus appropriate for demonic affliction.

Such cases should be considered extreme and unusual, but in today's degeneration of morals, availability of illegal drugs, widespread manipulation of a sinful media and universal temptations to sinful and occult activity it may be become more common. It does not imply that believers are possessed by demons in their spirit, or that deliverance ministry is acceptable as a specific para-church function. It means that some can be affected by *'the deep things of Satan'* (Rev 2:24) and need pastoral help to overcome. The fact that they can't defeat the enemy alone is part of their discipline under God, they are forced into dependence upon church ministry.

Pastoral assistance to unbelievers

As unbelievers do not have the Spirit of God, they are vulnerable to Satanic attack. They have no means of defeating the enemy since they are subjects of his kingdom. As such, it is quite possible for a demon to occupy and control an unbeliever. Where there has been a godly restraint in a nation, it appears that it is less common for possession to take place. In the past, English people grew up with the influence of Sunday school, learned the scriptures by heart in primary education and attended church quite frequently, even if they were not believers. Where God's word has such an influence, Satan has less chance of interference. In countries given over to idolatry, or even Satanic religious practices, demon possession is very common. Early missionaries had to face such very real obstacles when they went out from cosseted Victorian England and you can read about it in their biographies. It was stories like these which helped to forge a Pentecostal apologetic for 'deliverance' ministry at the turn of the century.

As the UK degenerated spiritually, the nation is now far more open to demonic assault than ever before - hence the sort of crimes and shocking news we read about every day. There is

a greater chance that Christians will confront demon-possessed people in witnessing than previously. Believers need to be aware of this and ready for it when it occurs. When someone truly bows the knee to Jesus and repents of their sins, demonic forces will be forced to flee; but sometimes a repentant soul may need pastoral help.

Enemy contact

Rebuking the devil

Scripture on this matter is not fully clear. It is true that the archangel Michael, in disputing with Satan over the body of Moses did not rebuke him but left that to the Lord:

'Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, "The Lord rebuke you".' (Jude 9)

However, Jude is not contending against exorcism but about corruption and defying authority, people who were *'speaking evil of what they do not know'* (v10). Elsewhere Paul explains that it is the lot of believers to judge angels:

'Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?' (1 Cor 6:3)

It appears that it contravenes God's law for an angel to rebuke another angel, just as a man should not utter a condemning rebuke to another man (Hos 4:4)⁷; therefore it is difficult to extrapolate that it is wrong for a believer -representing God- to not rebuke Satan. In fact the reverse appears to be the case. We are told to stand against the enemy (Eph 6:11), to wrestle with the enemy (Eph 6:12, to resist Satan (Jm 4:7) and to wield the sword of the Spirit against him (Eph 6:17). It seems logical, therefore, that rebuking the enemy may sometimes be required. Isaiah 1:17 tells us that we should rebuke the oppressor.

Talking with demons

The apostles never conversed with demons; never. There is no precedent for it in the letters and there are no commands to do it. Neither is there a theology which requires us to do this to effect release in a pastoral context. The fact that Jesus did it does not mean that we are enabled or entitled to do it as well. Jesus walked on water - I cannot do that, I am not commanded to do it and the apostles didn't do it either (after the cross). Since Jesus was God, there were some things which he could do as a divine prerogative under the instigation of his father's will. He frequently dealt with the opposition in a certain way because he could read their thoughts (Matt 9:4, 12:25; Lk 5:22, 6:8, 11:17). We cannot do that and there is no apostolic precedent for us to try.

A classic Pentecostal technique in expelling demons was to talk with the demon to attempt to find out its name, the command to leave would then have more power if the demon was personally identified. Many Charismatics in the renewal movement also followed this technique. There is no Biblical basis for this. In the case of the Gadarene demoniac, Jesus asked the man his name, not the demons, even though they also answered (Mk 5:9).

The devil is the father of lies and confusion (Jn 8:44; 1 Cor 14:33). His demonic followers abide in his character and share his sins - they lie. How could we possibly know which aspects of their conversation were true and which were deceptions. If commanding the demon in the name of Jesus to identify itself is supposed to force submission and guarantee

⁷There is a place for godly rebuke, but this is usually the function of church office bearers in dealing with church discipline (1 Tim 5:20; 2 Tim 4:2). The only other exception is when a brother may rebuke another who has sinned against him (Lk 17:3).

a truthful response, why not just command it to leave if it will submit? Jesus, being God, could fathom their deceiving ways, we cannot. Consequently, all communication with demonic forces is proscribed.

‘Generational sin’ or ‘ancestral demons’

Most pastors, who use exorcism techniques, would suggest that people have been possessed by spirits as a result of sin, trauma, pre-occupation with the occult or rejection; but some go further and state that most people are infected as a result of sins or occult activity committed by past ancestors, or even through curses put upon the family line. Peter Horrobin takes this view in his book *Healing through Deliverance* as does Kenneth McAll in *Healing the Family Tree*. Information on what actually transpired in the past is impossible to discover for certain and exorcists usually ask demons to tell them - and then take appropriate action. The comments above on talking to demons obviously apply here.

The real difficulty with this notion is that it totally demeans the glory of God and the work of salvation achieved by Christ on the cross. Would God really apply salvation to us, deliver us from bondage to sin and Satan, bring liberty from the curse of the law, inform us that we are dead to sin but let the sin of ancestors trouble us? On the contrary, God tells us that Jesus triumphed over Satan and his hordes at the cross, disarmed them and made a public spectacle of them (Col 2:15); and this conqueror lives in us (Eph 3:17).

Apologists for the idea claim support in Exod 20:5 where the sins of fathers are visited upon the children to the fourth generation; but this is referring to punishment not occupying people with demons. Furthermore, if God commanded this punishment, would it not be sin to seek to deliver people from it? The verse is about idolatry in Israel which brings the punishment of dispossession from the land. When this divinely ordered captivity occurred, it took several generations before the exile was complete (e.g. 70 years in Babylon where children born would suffer exile and possibly slavery for idolatry committed by the parents and grandparents Lam 5:7). The verse says nothing about the hereditary transmission of demonic activity. Ex 34:6 is not a widening of the punishment but a renewal of the covenant after the idolatry of the golden calf. The warnings were about national responsibility in theocratic Israel, not personal sin. When this principle was later misapplied by Jews, Ezekiel was told to teach that the punishment was no longer in operation (Ezek 18:1ff), and Jesus himself later reinforced the doctrine that the hereditary punishment no longer applied (Jn 9:1-3).⁸

Some say that evidence for the hereditary effect of sin is seen in cases like alcoholism, fornication, adultery, greed etc. when children are brought up by parents excelling in such behaviour and then manifest the same sins. The problem is that many children react against such influences and behave in the opposite fashion. Apart from this, the Bible teaches us that our lives are predestined by God (Ps 139) not predetermined by the sin of our parents. No doubt there is a genetic predisposition to certain behaviour and attitude just as much as the colour of our hair or eyes, but even this varies and some genes jump generations. At the end of the day the clear NT and OT teaching is that we are all responsible for our own behaviour and will have to give an account for it (Ps 62:12; Ezek 18:20; Rm 2:6); spiritual characteristics are not inherited.

⁸ I am indebted for some thoughts in this section to Stephen Anderson's *Christians & Demonology*, Rutherford House (1995).

Conclusion

This is a controversial subject because scripture does not say in black and white that true believers can be possessed, or that they cannot. As a result, most Charismatic works make much of case histories and anecdotal stories. No matter how valid and trustworthy these may appear to be (and many are exaggerated), they must be set in balance against the tenor of scripture and cannot set in motion practices which have no Biblical sanction, even if these practices seem to work. All we need for ministry is set forth plainly in the Bible. Despite the difficulties, scripture gives us sufficient information to make clear the following things:

- It is inimical to the clear statements of scripture, and the general ethos of the faith, that God resides in intimacy with demons or Satan. God abides in our spirit by the Holy Spirit, therefore he will not share this realm with a demon.
- There is no example of a Christian being delivered of evil spirits; no exhortation to seek this deliverance and no instruction for leaders on how to perform it.
- The ministry of Jesus in expelling demons from subjects is not a paradigm for ministering to Christians. There may be a case, in extreme situations, for praying for the release of unregenerate sinners from a demonic hold, especially when there has been a long experience of deep sin, such as witchcraft, addiction or fornication. However, there is no ground for applying this to those who have been freed from the dominion of sin by dying with Christ and being born again by the Spirit of Christ. The way for believers to deal with sin is by putting off the old man and putting on the new nature, which is created in the likeness of Christ.
- Exorcism, at best, is only an attempt to improve the old nature (the stinking ground of Satan), which cannot be improved and grows in corruption until we die (Eph 4:22-24). Thus exorcism of believers is working against God's truth and denying the new creation in believers (2 Cor 5:17).
- Satan works in the sons of disobedience (Eph 2:2), and cannot control or demonise that which has been liberated by God. Christ has triumphed over Satan and those who are in Christ share in this victory (Col 1:13, 2:15). If we are delivered out of the devil's kingdom, how can we be dominated by his servants? Problems with demonic oppression do not require a new deliverance or that would need a new Calvary, but applying the existing benefits of the atonement. A Christian who denies himself, mortifies his flesh, applies the death of the cross, puts on the new man and is filled with the Spirit cannot be troubled by demonisation.
- Satan and his evil angels can have severe effects upon the life of a Christian, analogous with being consumed by a man-eating lion. In some conditions this evil influence, at least, appears to be an occupation. Since this invasion cannot be in the new man, the spirit, it must be in the soul, where the old nature can have sway; just like sin can dwell in the mind or emotions. Thus, just as sin can be tolerated, so can demonic temptation; but this is not possession but willing compliance.
- The freedom from dominion of sin or demons is in the new man, created in the likeness of Christ. Fostering the new man (abiding in Christ), walking in the Spirit and co-operating in the ongoing process of sanctification ensures that a believer is spiritually clean and not open to invasive attacks of the enemy. Any attacks and temptations must be resisted.
- It is not Biblical to repulse Satan's influence in believers by techniques of exorcism; but pastoral assistance may be required in extreme cases to help a suffering believer by prayer and faith. A vital pre-requisite to pastoral ministry is that known sin must be confessed and thoroughly repented of.

- Exorcism of believers manufactures unbiblical notions, such as: the many variations in Charismatic exorcism, the many differences in deliverance teaching, or the use of sacramental objects by some to apply exorcism. A major factor is the manufacture of multiple extra-biblical names for spirits applied to any given condition. Thus we see a spirit of nicotine or a spirit of rejection for example.
- There is no Biblical use of laying on of hands to effect exorcism, nor of requiring a demon's name (they lie anyway, so what's the use?).
- It takes attention away from the real requirement for freedom – a clean conscience. In many cases, exorcism is used to deliver people from a bondage that is really the result of their own sin. It tones down the need for a radical repentance and confession of sin. Thus a person who has committed adultery may later seek deliverance from a spirit of guilt, when what they need to do is confess their sin and lead a life of repentance (including seeking restoration of the marriage if possible).

While demons can damage believers if they submit to their temptations, demons cannot possess a saint. Freedom from demonic activity is by walking in the Spirit and putting on the new nature - living a life of repentance and obedience.

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