

Lesson #8

The Nature of Demonization

A. *Definition of Demonization*

We will avoid speaking of "demon possession" for three reasons:

- (1) The phrase "demon possession" nowhere appears in the Greek NT. It was popularized by its appearance in the KJV, although it had appeared in other English versions prior to the 1611 edition (see Arnold, p. 205, n. 11).
- (2) The emotional impact of the phrase detracts from an objective discussion of the subject. It is difficult for many to dissociate the concept of demon possession from scenes in the movie *The Exorcist*.
- (3) The term "possession" implies ownership, and it is questionable to say that Satan or a demon own anything.

There are four ways the NT describes demonic influence:

- (1) *"Demonized"* - This is a translation of the Greek term, *daimonizomai*, which is used 13x in the NT (all in the gospels). It is always translated "demon possession" in the KJV. See Mt. 4:24; 8:16,28,33; 9:32; 12:22; 15:22; Mk. 1:32; 5:15,18,26; Lk. 8:36; John 10:21 (a disparaging remark concerning Jesus).

Every case of demonization involves someone under the influence or control, in varying degrees, of an indwelling evil spirit. The word "demonization" is never used in the NT to describe someone who is merely oppressed or harassed or attacked or tempted by a demon. In every case, reference is made to a demon either entering, dwelling in, or being cast out of the person. Matthew 4:24 and 15:22 at first appear to be exceptions to this rule, but the parallel passages in Mark 1:32ff. and 7:24-30 indicate otherwise. Hence, to be "demonized", in the strict sense of that term, is to be **inhabited** by a demon with varying degrees of influence or control.

- (2) To "have" a demon is used 16x in the NT. It is twice used of John the Baptist by his accusers (Mt. 11:18; Lk. 7:33). Six times the enemies of Jesus use it of him (Mk. 3:30; Jn. 7:20; 8:48,49,52; 10:20). Eight times it describes someone under the influence of a demonic spirit (Mk. 5:15; 7:25; 9:17; Lk. 4:33; 8:27; Acts 8:7; 16:16; 19:13). Hence to "have" a demon is to be "demonized" or inhabited by a demon. See esp. John 10:20-21.
- (3) On two occasions (Mk. 1:23; 5:2) we find reference to someone who is "with" (*en*) a demon or spirit. To say there is a person "with" a demon is to say he "has" a demon which is to say he is "demonized" or that he is indwelt by a demon.
- (4) The terminology of being "vexed" by or with an unclean spirit is used only once in Acts 5:16.

In summary, if a demon indwells or inhabits a person it is a case of demonization. Merely to be tempted, harassed, afflicted or oppressed by a demon is not demonization. ***Demonization always entails indwelling.***

B. *A Case Study: Matthew 12:43-45*

- Jesus uses the case of demonization and deliverance to describe the generation of unbelief to which he is speaking. It is as if he says: "Let me tell you what you Pharisees are like, indeed, what this entire generation is like. You are like a man who in some way is delivered of demonic influence. You put your life in order; you reform your ways; you clean up your act; you become morally respectable. But you are still spiritually dead and your house is empty because I don't live there. So when that demonic influence comes back he returns with seven of his cohorts and makes the latter situation worse than the former!" His point is that external reformation without internal regeneration is deceitfully dangerous. Beware of a morally reformed but spiritually Christless life.
- A "repentance" that does not lead to a new and wholehearted allegiance to Jesus leaves a void which a demon will exploit. In other words, neutrality towards Jesus can be deadly.
- How was this man delivered of the demonic inhabitation? We don't know. Does this suggest a demon may leave at will and return at will? If so, this might explain the apparent success of pagan rituals of exorcism. Such may be the voluntary departure of demons for the purpose of deception. Or again, Jesus may be assuming that a valid deliverance has occurred (see vv. 22-28). In any case, it is important to remember that not everyone who was healed or delivered by Jesus became a believer in Him. In the absence of commitment to Christ, they are always susceptible to renewed invasion.
- In the OT demons are found in deserted cities (Isa. 13:21; 34:14; see Rev. 18:2). Hence, "waterless places" probably refers to desolate, barren places, uninhabited by people. With no one to indwell, the demon returns "home".
- Be it noted that there is no indication that this person does anything willful or deliberate that would invite a renewed infestation of demons. The mere absence of the indwelling Christ makes him susceptible to indwelling demons.

C. *Description of Demonization*

What are the symptoms of demonization? Our problem is that the NT provides us with few examples. We must be careful lest we conclude that all cases of demonization will manifest the same symptoms. In other words, we must be cautious before drawing generalizations from the NT examples and applying them to every other possible instance. It is only reasonable to assume that the symptoms will vary on a broad spectrum depending on any number of factors:

- how the person came to be demonized, i.e., the legal and moral grounds on which the demon took up residence in the person;
- how many demons are involved (cf. Mk. 5);
- what kind of demons are involved (i.e., the extent of their wickedness; see Mt. 12:44-45);
- the power of the demon(s) involved (Mk. 9:29);
- the purpose for their indwelling;
- the degree of complicity on the part of the person indwelt;
- the permission of God.

In the following list are symptoms of the most severe cases of demonization in the NT. ***There is no reason to conclude that these are the only symptoms or that every case of demonization will manifest all of these ten.*** In Mt. 4:24 many people are brought to Jesus who were "demonized." There is no indication, however, that they were in the extreme condition of the man we read about in Mark 5. In fact, it may well be that the so-called Gadarene (or Gerasene) demoniac in Mark 5 is described in detail precisely because his case is so

unique and extreme. The purpose of portraying his deliverance at length is to demonstrate that not even the worst case scenario is beyond the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. With that in mind, we note these ten characteristics of the more extreme cases of demonization:

- (1) Projection of a new personality in the victim; often the virtual eclipse of the victim's personality by that of the demon. This, again, is obviously subject to varying degrees.
- (2) Extraordinary physical strength (Mark 5:3-4; Acts 19:13-16). Is this due to a) supernatural enhancement of the person by the demon, or b) utilization of something such as adrenalin that could conceivably occur under circumstances other than demonization? Possibly both, although the cases in Mark 5 and Acts 19 can hardly be explained by an appeal to adrenalin! If possible, avoid physically engaging a severely demonized person, such as the demoniac in Mark 5. Some have argued that Jesus himself never laid hands on the demonized, but the account in Luke 4:40-41 would indicate otherwise.
- (3) Fits of rage or extremely violent behavior are common. See Mark 5:4b; Mt. 8:28. Consider also Saul's attempt to kill David in 1 Sam. 19:8-10 (cf. 1 Kings 18:28).
- (4) Vocal tirades and screaming (Mk. 5:5a). This often becomes both obscene and blasphemous.
- (5) Self-destructive behavior (Mk. 5:5b,13; Mt. 17:14-20).
- (6) Anti-social behavior, often designed to humiliate the victim (Lk. 8:27).
- (7) Physical disease or disability or deformity (Mt. 9:32-34; Lk. 13:20-21). This does not mean all disease is caused by demonic influence nor that all those who are demonized have a disease or disability as a result.
- (8) An alien voice speaking through the vocal chords of the victim (Mk. 5:7,9; Acts 19).
- (9) Resistance to spiritual things, such as repentance (Mk. 5:7).
- (10) Possible clairvoyance. In Mark 5:7 the demonized man knew immediately, evidently without prior information, who Jesus was (cf. Acts 16:16).

D. *Demonization and the Christian*

Can a Christian be demonized? Can a Christian be **inhabited** by a demonic spirit? In a subsequent lesson we will examine the arguments pro and con. For now, consider this true story taken from Merrill Unger's book, *What Demons Can Do To Saints* (Moody Press, 1977). We will call the lady, "Susan" . . .

This young lady's experience will be interpreted in different ways. For example,

- (1) Some will say that Susan was truly saved, subsequently fell into sin and came under the influence of an indwelling demonic spirit, and was later delivered by the prayer of Christian friends.

A variation of this position is to suggest that Susan was already demonized before she was saved and that she only later experienced deliverance. It should be noted that some argue that the experience of conversion itself automatically "delivers" a person of any inhabiting spirits. If that were the case here, Susan would have had a demon while a non-Christian, then experienced deliverance upon conversion, only to become demonized later on because of willful sin, after which she experiences yet a second deliverance.

(2) Others will insist that Susan was indeed a Christian and that her problem was indeed demonic. However, she was not indwelt by the demon but only oppressed or harassed from without. She was then genuinely delivered, not from an indwelling demon, but from the influence of a demon who attacked her from the outside.

(3) Others say that Susan was undoubtedly under the controlling influence of an indwelling demon. She was truly demonized. But she was not truly saved. In other words, she was not born again until after her deliverance.

All admit that Christians can be attacked, tempted, harassed and oppressed by demons from the outside. But can a Christian come under the control (in varying degrees) of an indwelling demon, one that operates from the inside?

Charismatics and Third Wave believers have traditionally affirmed the reality of the demonization of Christians whereas mainstream Evangelicals have not. Why?

- TW's are more open to the experiential reality of supernatural phenomena whereas E's are more cautious and skeptical.
- TW's embrace angels and the demonic as a functional part of daily experience whereas for E's they are, often times, a mere theological category in one's doctrinal belief system.
- TW's tend to emphasize human responsibility and thus the possibility of opening oneself to demonic invasion, whereas E's stress divine sovereignty and God's protection of all His children.
- TW's tend to go looking for a spiritual fight (or, rarely run from one!), whereas E's believe we should avoid situations that might involve confrontation with the enemy.

The boundaries between these groups, however, are beginning to blur.

Be it noted that the Assemblies of God have traditionally denied the possibility of a Christian being demonized. In this regard they differ from the mainstream of those who believe in the perpetuity of spiritual gifts.

A brief history of the debate . . .

- Merrill Unger (OT professor at DTS; d. 1980) - *Biblical Demonology* (1952, 1965) - denied the possibility of a Christian being demonized. He reversed himself in his books, *Demons in the World Today* (1971) and *What Demons can do to Saints* (1977, 1991).
- Mark Bubeck - author of *The Adversary* (1975) and *Overcoming the Adversary* (1984)
- C. Fred Dickason (former chairman of the theology department at Moody Bible Institute) - author of *Demon Possession and the Christian* (Moody Press, 1987; now available from Crossway Books)
- Neil Anderson (former chairman of the pastoral theology department at Talbot School of Theology at Biola University) - author of *The Bondage Breaker* (1990; and numerous other books)
- C. Peter Wagner, Tom White, Timothy Warner, Ed Murphy, Clinton Arnold, etc.
- Still, though, many evangelicals insist a Christian cannot be demonized: Ice and Dean (*A Holy Rebellion*); Konya (*Demons: A Biblically Based Perspective*); Gross (*Miracles, Demons, & Spiritual Warfare*); Powlison (*Power Encounters*); etc.

Conclusion: