

# Can A Christian Have A Demon?

By Bob Larson

When I first became involved in exorcisms, I assumed that a Christian was immune from the torment of demons. I based that assumption on the influence of other Christian leaders who convinced me of this. I had perfected the logic explaining my position: "The Holy Spirit and an evil spirit can't dwell in the same vessel." "Light and darkness cannot co-exist." "Those who cast demons out of Christians are making excuses for sin problems." I had given messages to large audiences, boldly declaring that the very idea of a Christian having a demon was heresy. I insisted that Christians claiming to have demons were making excuses for problems of carnality or personal lack of discipline; they were avoiding the tough part of growing in grace and maturing in a deeper understanding of Scripture.

When I began searching the Word of God more diligently about the matter of demons influencing Christians, I discovered that the issue wasn't as conclusive as I had thought. Gradually I understood that my error was based on a narrow understanding of demonic phenomena, and a predetermined reading of Scripture. In my honest moments of contemplation, I realized that those pastors and Bible teachers who had repeatedly reinforced the "Christians can't have a demon" outlook had very little practical experience with the phenomenon. I concluded that, while doctrine is not based on experience, the lack of experiential testimony about such a crucial area of spiritual deliverance was a glaring weakness.

As I began to discuss the subject with others, I learned that theological sentiments are often based on extreme examples. Almost everyone opposed to the idea of Christians having a demon could relate one or more horrific stories about exorcism sessions in which Christians were encouraged to think of their spiritual failures as having a demonic root. They were then told to vomit up demons of everything from morning sickness to nasal congestion-seriously! I had witnessed some of these deliverance sessions. Highly manipulative evangelists preyed on distraught and gullible people who were looking for a quick solution to their spiritual and physical misery. I have since learned the simple truth that when you belong to God, what Satan cannot invade is your spirit. The moment a person is born into the kingdom of God by faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8-9), the spirit is eternally reborn and belongs to God. Jesus declared in John 10:28 that no one has the power to "snatch" us out of God's hand. However, man is a tripartite being (1 Thessalonians 5:23), and there are aspects of the human condition that Satan can afflict. While he is prohibited from touching the spirit of God's saints, nothing prevents him from tormenting the body and soul-if the disobedient conduct of a Christian allows him to do so.

Much confusion about this issue exists because of the use of the word possession. The term doesn't appear in the original Greek language of the New Testament. Bible scholars say those who translated the King James edition added this word in order to classify

varying degrees of demonic control. More correctly, the word translated "possession" should simply be rendered "demonized," that is, under the influence of a demon. Attempting to be verbally precise about such a supernatural phenomenon is pointless. You can't take something enshrouded in a mystical context and reduce it to a paradigm of human language. That's why we must cautiously use terms associated with demons.

By possession I mean that the spirit is internalized and claims certain legal rights to invade the person's body. Demonic "possession" never means a Christian's regenerated spirit has been invaded or that the demon owns the human being. It means that his or her soul or body is influenced by a demon. The demon can manifest through the host's faculties-that is, see with the eyes, speak through the vocal cords, and even subject the person to a trance state of mental oblivion. Deliverance comes when the demon inside is cast outside.

What about those instances in which a demon manifests in a Christian? In most cases the demon entered before the believer's conversion to Christianity, and the evil spirit continued to control some part of the person's life because the specific occult sin was never renounced. The demon claims squatter's rights.

The metaphor of what happens when territory is conquered in a war applies here. Even though the conflict may be officially ended, enemy snipers refuse to surrender, so they must be hunted down. Their right to remain may be technically voided since the territory is under new control, but that doesn't mean they leave automatically or give up easily. An offense must be mounted to enforce the terms of victory. The exorcist must diligently pursue every avenue of deliverance to be certain that every demonic influence has been conquered.

## **CAN DEMONS PHYSICALLY AFFLICT A CHRISTIAN?**

To answer the question of whether a Christian can be physically afflicted, we must first explore the means by which demons influence Christians. Do Christians sin? Of course! First John 1:8-9 says we do. We cannot continue to abide in sin because of the indwelling nature of Christ. Note, however, that in Ephesians 4:23 Christians are admonished to "be renewed in the spirit of your mind." If the mind of the Christian needs renewal, then it stands to reason that when our minds are not renewed, they may be, to some degree, under the control of the ungodly forces.

"Present your bodies a living sacrifice," we read in Romans 12:1. This means our bodies may not be completely sacrificed to God, and could therefore be influenced by Satan. The lack of spirituality in the life of a Christian doesn't necessarily mean he or she is possessed. But it does mean that some part of the Christian's nature is open to evil forces.

In Luke 13:16, Christ cast a demon out of a 'daughter of Abraham'. It's true she wasn't living under the covenant of grace this side of the cross, but as an Old Testament devotee to God, she was spiritually protected by the best that God could offer that side of Calvary. Yet a spirit of physical infirmity demonized her. In fact, the first demon that Jesus cast out came from an apparently devout Jew in the synagogue on the Sabbath. Christ's first exorcism was in a church! The man in Luke 4:33-35 was certainly "possessed" because the demon spoke through his body. Christ told the unclean spirit to "come out of him" (Verse 35).

### **CAN SATAN CONTROL A CHRISTIAN'S THOUGHTS AND WORDS?**

Let me explain how Satan can also control the thoughts and speech of a Christian. In Matthew, chapter 16, Jesus had just concluded His explanation to His disciples on the true nature of His earthly mission-that He must suffer and die (verse 21). Peter immediately spoke up in an effort to dissuade Christ from going to the cross: "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" (verse 22). The response of Christ was abrupt and stern. "Get behind Me, Satan!" Jesus said to Peter (verse 23). I'm not suggesting that Peter was demon possessed. I am proposing that Peter, while standing in the presence of Christ, was sufficiently influenced that he literally spoke the words Satan wanted him to say. Even more astounding is the fact that earlier in verse 16 of that chapter, Peter had given the confessional statement of faith on which Christ said He would build His church!

In Acts chapter 5, Ananias and Sapphira, members of the early church, lied to the apostle Peter. They had sold some possessions to give to the church, and then had second thoughts and conspired to keep back a portion for themselves. When Peter asked them what amount they had received for the sale, Ananias and Sapphira lied. What was the source of that lie? The apostle Peter said, "Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit" (verse 3). In judgment, God struck them dead. If we accept the assumption that Ananias and Sapphira experienced the new birth in Christ, then how can we explain away the fact that their hearts were filled by Satan to such an extent that they were capable of committing a sin worthy of such abrupt and severe divine judgment?

Satan can, in some instances, take over a Christian's mind and speak through his lips. Demons are in certain instances able to place Christians in a trance state so that the unclean spirit controls psychomotor functions and conscious mental processes. I have dealt with scores of cases with people who were undeniably followers of Christ and yet demons spoke through them and even violently attacked me. It is disingenuous to suggest that they somehow lost their salvation long enough to let a demon in and then thereafter resumed their Christian walk. If Satan can control our speech when we are disobedient and fill our hearts with evil when we are rebellious, he may be able to do a lot more to Christians than we would like to admit. What scriptural lessons can we learn from this startling information?

A Christian can be born again and have spiritual victory over the original Adamic sin that eternally separates mankind from God and still have besetting sins (Hebrews 12:1). Uncontrolled thoughts, resentment, anger, and bitterness are some examples. Salvation must not be confused with sanctification. The Holy Spirit's continuing work of grace is a progressive act of God's desire to draw us closer to Him. Those who, yet saved, resist this scriptural plea (1 Thessalonians 4:3) may find they have harbored demonic pockets of activity from their pre-conversion lives. This message needs a greater emphasis in our churches so that we may set free any of our brothers and sisters in Christ who are suffering the "hangover" of Satan's influence from their former lives of sin.

As kindly as I can say it, those who underestimate what Christians can suffer at the hand of Satan are doing a disservice to the body of Christ. They are consigning sincere Christians to a life of continued demonic influence and causing needless suffering in the lives of those whom the Lord wants to set free. Let no one misunderstand me. A Christian cannot be demonized if by "possession" you mean "ownership." The child of God is owned by the Lord. But I will testify that a Christian can be severely influenced by demons and even be inhabited by them. I will also do all that I can in Jesus' name to see that those who are "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17) will experience the hope of freedom from demonic bondage.