

# ***CAN A CHRISTIAN BE DEMON POSSESSED?***

## ***I. Introduction***

During my first pastorate I had a member of my church ask me if Christians could be demon possessed. My answer was not "yes" and it was not "no." It was "I don't know! I'll have to study it some more. I am not satisfied with traditional arguments against the idea of the demon possession of Christians." That member became extremely riled up over my comments (he eventually left my church due to a bevy of such concerns).

I have some concerns about our overreaction to positions held by Dickason and the later Unger. *Although I have come to a position that is different from either one*, I believe we are treating this issue much like we used to (and sometimes still do) treat spiritual gifts. We are so afraid of Charismatic abuses that we do not allow biblical data to be sufficient. If we allow for demon possession of believers, the nature of our ministry in the church house will be affected. We might begin to look and sound like the Charismatics. We might even be forced to practice exorcism to answer some of the church's problems. Let's be brave and let the Bible go where it goes, if it goes anywhere on the issue.

## ***II. Major Concerns***

***However, there are legitimate concerns on the part of those who do not hold to the possibility of the demon possession of Christians:***

1. If the Christian can be demon possessed, will the door be opened to blame bad Christian behavior on demons and shirk personal responsibility?
2. Will such a belief diminish the work of Christ in believers in any way?

***Some legitimate concerns on the part of those who deny that Christians can be demon possessed are the following:***

1. Will a denial of the possibility of demon possession of Christians bring a false sense of security for the believer?
2. Will this denial underestimate the depth of Satan's attack upon believers?

## ***III. Arguments AGAINST the view that Christians can be demon possessed***

1. It is impossible for the Christian to be possessed since he or she is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. *THE HOLY SPIRIT'S PRESENCE ARGUMENT*

2. It is impossible for a Christian to be demon possessed because of his identity and union with Christ. *THE PROPERTY OF CHRIST ARGUMENT*

3. Examples of demon possession in the Bible appear mostly to involve unbelievers.

- Saul (I Sam. 16:14-23; 18:10; 19:9) -- OT dispensation
- Isa. 14
- Ez. 28
- Dan. 10:13
- Mark 5 -- the picture of conversion
- Mark 9:14-29
- Luke 22:3 -- Judas Iscariot

#### **IV. Arguments FOR the possibility of demon possession of Christians**

1. The presence of the sin "nature" in a believer even though he is indwelt by the Holy Spirit answers the objection that an evil spirit and the Holy Spirit could not reside in the believer because of incompatibility. There could be war between them inside the believer since such a war already exists between the flesh and the believer!

2. The identification of the believer in union with Christ assures his ultimate salvation but does not rule out demon possession any more than the believer's ongoing difficulties with sin are ruled out. (a corollary to # 1 above)

3. There are no specific biblical promises to rule out demon possession, only to rule out ultimate victory on the part of Satan (Rom. 8:31-38). You cannot extrapolate from one to the other.

4. Examples in the Bible of demon possession are not conclusive. We are simply not told about the relationship of demon possession to the salvation status of many biblical personages who are possessed.

- Acts 16:16-18

5. In light of the absence of biblical instruction in this matter, the testimonies of godly servants who have had encounters should be trusted in this matter. THE ARGUMENT FROM EXPERIENCE

**NOTE:** Dickason makes an important statement on p. 191 -- "We must make it clear that no Christian who is walking in fellowship with God and obeying God's Word can become demon possessed."

## **V. Analysis**

It seems to me that both views have some elements to commend. Many of the arguments used for the possibility of demon possession have been thoughtfully crafted and holes in the traditional arguments (#1, 2) against demon possession of Christians revealed.

However, the argument from # 3 against the demon possession of Christians seems the deciding factor. Too often the picture of Christ's deliverance from demons is couched in the context of spiritual deliverance as well. In light of the paucity of biblical data to help us, it may not be prudent to be overly dogmatic. But that is where I am currently.

I do, however, reject the idea of accepting the experiences of those on "mission fields" as determinative since it cannot be validated in all cultures among all missionaries. Experience is an input to systematic theology although it must, in the final analysis, be subjected to biblical theology.

## **VI. The Relevance of the Whole Issue**

It seems to me that this debate has suffered from a "relevance" problem. What motivates many to deny demon possession for Christians is the supposed theological necessity to either guard the power, presence or character of God (in Christ and the Holy Spirit). But we recognize that the work of Satan is real and that he attacks Christians (I Pet. 5:8). So we craft two categories:

- ***demon possession*** (from within) -- for unbelievers
- ***demon oppression*** (from without) -- for believers and/or unbelievers

For the last category, we safeguard our concerns while still acknowledging the significance of Satanic opposition.

However, it must be pointed out that some of the attacks which we would be comfortable with as **demon oppression** of believers have the same practical impact as the demon possession examples given in the Bible for unbelievers. Notice some of the things that Satan can do to believers:

- Cause sickness (Job 2:7; 2 Cor. 12:7)
- Kill (1 Cor. 5; 1 Tim. 1:19-20)
- Deceive (Matt. 24:24-28)

So the question of demon possession versus demon oppression may be largely irrelevant at the practical level. We have a sincere and powerful opponent that we must be on guard against.

Also, the concept of "demonized" may be broader than demon possession or indwelling. It could include oppression by demons. So be careful to see how different brothers in your churches are using their words.