

5. Jesus' Authority over Demons

The War Against Satan and his Servants

After marrying my American wife, Sandy, we left the United States, arriving in England in 1981. Although we were young Christians, we wanted to give our lives in service of the Lord Jesus. We encountered our first case of a demonized person within a few months of arrival into my hometown of Harwich, Essex, England.

We met a man who grew up under the influence of his mother, a practicing Jehovah's Witness, and his father, who had been into Spiritualism. We both felt there was something odd or different about him. At this time in our lives, we were pretty naive to such things as demonization, but we knew enough to know that Jesus could help him, so we decided to take him to church with us. We had a little mini Cooper at the time, so we started driving with him sitting in the backseat the twenty-eight miles to the church we attended.

As we were driving, he started opening up about himself. First of all, he told us that he was the Antichrist, the evil world ruler prophesied to rule on the Earth in the last days. Then he went on to say to us that there were male and female voices inside him telling him that he needed to persecute Sandy and me in order "to drive us closer together." When we got halfway to church, I remember it became pretty foggy, and he said that something could happen to us on the road. Sure enough, right after he said those words, a car hit us from behind, altogether totaling our car. None of us were hurt, and we still managed to get to church with him, where the church's leadership ministered to him. The experience convinced me that we knew so little about dealing with the demonic realm. This man probably needed both psychological and spiritual help for the spiritual oppression.

We had a couple of other confrontations with dark forces in people that reacted unusually to the Gospel or the name of Jesus. I wanted to learn how to help people like him, so I read all kinds of books on the subject. Deliverance from spiritual oppression is a topic we all need to learn more about, so in this study, we want to look at Jesus' power over demons.

Where Do Demons Originate?

In our last two studies, we looked carefully at Ephesians 6:12 and discovered that Paul the Apostle taught that Satan has with him at least four different categories of evil spirits that do his bidding. We also looked at evil angels infiltrating the earth sphere to corrupt the human race. The demons in the lower levels of Satan's hierarchy of evil seek to corrupt the human race by the temptation to sin, hoping to bring us into deeper levels of control by dark evil forces. Scripture does not tell us from where these demons come. There are a few theories, but we cannot be dogmatic as to which is correct. Josephus, the Jewish historian that lived just after the time of Christ, believed that demons were the spirits of wicked people who had died.¹ I hasten to add that there is no supporting Scripture to back that tradition. Some believe that demons are unconfined fallen angels, while others say that demons are the offspring of the fallen angelic beings who mated with women before the flood and were killed by the flood (Genesis 6:1-8). I

¹Notes are taken from a Spiritual Warfare seminar with John Wimber on Demonization.

do not care from where they come. My concern is how to live free of their evil influence and how to seize back the territory they have claimed in people's lives.

We need to understand that we Christians are in a struggle with evil invisible entities. During the Second World War, if you lived in France in 1941 after the Germans had overrun the country, you would have been residing in an enemy-occupied country. You were in the war, whether you liked it or not. If you are a Christian, you also live in an enemy-occupied country, and as long as you are no threat to the enemy, he will let you continue to sleep. As soon as you awaken to the call to fight on the side of God's kingdom, you become aware of the battle. In this spiritual war, there are no civilians and no fence between one kingdom and another to which you can cling and proclaim neutrality. You are either for Him or against Him (Matthew 12:30). Many are still spiritually asleep and unaware of the battle going on for their families, country, and the world they live in. Our enemy Satan wants to keep the people of God asleep and unaware of his tactics.

As soon as Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, the war against Him and His kingdom began. Right away, He was confronted with Satanic temptations in the wilderness as He fasted for forty days. He came out of that trial in the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:14). The book of Mark indicates that Christ's first sermon in the Capernaum synagogue was interrupted by a man with an evil spirit in him:

²¹They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. ²²The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. ²³Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, ²⁴“What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” ²⁵“Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” ²⁶The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. ²⁷The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.” ²⁸News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee (Mark 1:21-28).

Imagine that, the first sermon He preached, and a demon manifests itself in the middle of the talk. For the most part, Satan would like to keep his presence and his work hidden, but he fears the authority of Christ and cannot stay in the shadows when the Light of the World shines in the darkness. Every advance of the Kingdom of Light will get a reaction from the kingdom of darkness, and Satan fears those who bring his work out into the open, for it shows the supremacy of God over Satan's kingdom. Before the end of the day of Christ's first sermon in Capernaum, the whole area was excitedly sharing that the Messiah had arrived on the scene. They brought their sick and demonized friends to the house where Jesus had just healed Peter's mother-in-law:

³²That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. ³³The whole town gathered at the door, ³⁴and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was (Mark 1:32-34).

Question 1) What was it that brought the whole town to the door? Why did Jesus forbid the demons to speak? Try to describe the scene you see in your mind's eye from Mark's testimony.

Wherever Jesus went, there was conflict. Sometimes it was the reaction of the unbelieving religious rulers of the day, and at other times, there were demonic reactions. In my opinion, the reason Jesus did not let the demons speak about His identity was that His time had not yet come. The closer Christ got to the cross, the greater the attacks from the enemy. His enemies said that He cast out demons through the prince of demons (Matthew 9:34). The Lord would not permit demons to speak through people. He silenced the demons and cast them out. The darkness has to flee when Christ comes on the scene bringing His light, healing, and life!

The critical thing to realize is that disembodied spirits are real, and that Jesus has authority over all the power of the evil one. John the Apostle tells us, **“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work” (1 John 3:8)**. The Lord came to root out, destroy, and deliver humanity from every work of the enemy. There is nothing that the enemy has done in your life that Jesus can't undo! He has the last and the final word over the enemy.

What Are Demons Like and How Do They Express Themselves?

As we said in the first talk on this subject, evil spirits occupy an unseen realm beyond our physical sight. They continually seek opportunities to enter a home (a person's body) and express their will, mind, emotions, and evil nature. Before they find access, they operate from outside a person and try to enter a person's life by prompting a person to habitual sin. One cannot tell at what point they gain access to a person's life to further drive a person into a compulsion toward a particular sin. They have intelligence but no physical body; their longing is to have some host to express their evil tendencies. Without a host, they have no rest until they find one. Here's what Jesus said about evil spirits longing for a house (body):

²⁴When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, “I will return to the house I left” ²⁵When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. ²⁶Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first (Luke 11:24-26).

Question 2) Why is the final condition worse if the house was swept clean and put in order?

A clean house speaks of self-reformation, i.e., cleaning up one's life by stopping certain habits that create a downward spiral. The enemy would love for you to clean up your life and try by your strength to be free from sin. Self-righteousness is a strategy of the enemy. If the goal is just self-reformation, a person often feels “empty” and unfulfilled.

We have been created with a God-shaped void in our lives that only the Lord sitting on the throne of your life will satisfy. Once the natural barrier (the hedge as in Job 1:10) over our lives is broken down by sin and the infestation of demons, the only spirit that will bring wholeness, cleanness, and purity is the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. The Holy Spirit dwells within us when we receive the Lord Jesus Christ into our lives. Self-reformation is not enough. Without

Christ occupying the throne at the center of our lives, a demon that has had to leave can come back with one or more stronger spirits. Paul the Apostle writes:

Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received of God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Paul says that we are created with a place for God Himself to rule and reign in the temple of our spirit. I don't know about you, but I did a poor job directing and managing my life before Christ came to sit there on the throne (Galatians 2:20).

Demons Can Cause Physical Sickness.

Demons do not cause every physical sickness, but some Scriptures indicate that *sometimes*, there is more to the physical condition than what is seen from a surface view of the symptoms. For instance, in Mark's Gospel, Chapter 9, Jesus casts out a spirit from a child whose father testified that his son was deaf because of a spirit's demonizing him:

¹⁷A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not." ¹⁹"O unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me." ²⁰So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. ²¹Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered. ²²"It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." ²³"If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes." ²⁴Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" ²⁵When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." ²⁶The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." ²⁷But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up (Mark 9:17-27).

Today, most physicians would say that the father was blaming the boy's condition on some physical condition, but the boy was also foaming at the mouth, gnashing his teeth, and becoming rigid while lying on the ground. How did Jesus handle the situation? He *rebuked* the demon saying, "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you to come out of him and never enter him again" (Mark 9:25).

The Greek word translated with the English "rebuked" (The New Testament was written in Greek) is the word *Epitimaō*. My Key Word Study Bible says this word means "to blame, censure, chide, rebuke, warn or berate. It is an abrupt, curt, and biting charge, pointedly

expressing disapproval, the taking to task of someone for a fault, and connotes a sharp or harsh tone.”²

What’s my point? I can’t imagine Jesus speaking in such a way to a boy, and in any case, the boy was deaf and mute, which means he couldn't hear what Jesus was saying or speak about his condition. The spirit inhabiting the boy heard the word of command and came out of him. When the evil spirit came out, the boy was restored to complete mental and physical health. We will come back to this passage at a later study for some additional nuggets of truth; time limits us to what we can get into today. Let's look at another passage found in Matthew's Gospel, chapter nine:

³²While they were going out, a man who was demon-possessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus. ³³And **when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke**. The crowd was amazed and said, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel." ³⁴But the Pharisees said, "It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons" (Matthew 9:32-34).

This demonic manifestation was on a different occasion, for Matthew writes about a fully-grown man. The Scripture doesn't say that Jesus healed the man unable to talk. Instead, Christ cast out the spirit, and the consequence of the spirit’s departure was that the man could communicate again. How does a spirit manage to hinder a person from speaking? I don't know. All I can tell you from Scripture is that evil spirits can affect physical bodies. Let's look at another example in Luke chapter thirteen:

¹⁰On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, "and a woman was there who had been **crippled by a spirit** for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. ¹²When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are **set free** from your infirmity." ¹³Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. ¹⁴Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath." ¹⁵The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? ¹⁶Then should not this woman, **a daughter of Abraham**, whom **Satan has kept bound** for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?" ¹⁷When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the beautiful things he was doing (Luke 13:10-17).

Question 3) What things stand out as you read the above passage?

This wonderful deliverance did not come about by an evil spirit manifesting itself in the synagogue. The spirit tried to stay silent and hide itself in the woman. The woman herself might not have known that a spirit caused her illness. It certainly had no problem with her attending church (synagogue). As far as we know, there were no other manifestations of the evil spirit's presence in the woman's life.

²Key Word Study Bible, AMG Publishers, Page 1626.

Jesus saw beyond the physical condition to a spirit causing this deformity. She did not call attention to herself; Christ went to her. He saw her in the crowd that morning and knew her condition. Because it was the Sabbath when healing was considered as work, even though He knew it would open Him up to attack, He still bravely ministered to the women's need, speaking a word of wisdom to those who opposed healing on the Sabbath at the same time. If this woman had been in one of our churches today, most people would attribute her condition to a disease, but Jesus said it was a spirit that had bound her with unseen chains. He didn't say, "Woman, you are healed from your infirmity," but rather, "**Woman, you are set free from your infirmity**" (v. 12). The Greek word translated *bound* in verse 16 means to bind, fasten, or tie as a chain or rope. Jesus didn't care about the scornful words of the religious leaders; He cared that not another day should pass before this woman should be released from the oppression of the enemy. Not another day!

Question 4) Have you ever had a time in your life where you felt under a cloud of depression, doubt, or darkness? What caused it? Could there have been a spiritual root? If not, have you ever tried speaking to someone about Christ and aware of a veil or a heaviness that seemed to prevent them from understanding or praying?

Not all depression and heaviness in people's lives are because of demonization by an evil spirit. Often, problems are caused by poor diet, lack of exercise, or being deficient in many minerals and nutrients that we no longer get through the way our food is produced. There are cases when people have oppression launched at them from outside of their lives. One of the world's greatest preachers, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, was plagued by severe depression, which I believe was demonic spiritual opposition due to his preaching in London, but also because his sermons were transcribed and sent to the four corners of the Earth by the growth of the British Empire at that time.

In the above passage of Scripture, the spirit had gained access and was causing deformity of the spinal column. One other thing that Jesus mentions is that the woman was a believer; He calls her a daughter of Abraham whom Satan had bound (v. 16). Paul the Apostle writes that those who believe are children of Abraham, Jews, and Gentiles (Galatians 3:6-9; Romans 4:16). This woman, a daughter of Abraham, was demonized, which raises a big question:

Can a Christian Be Demonized?

I do not believe that a spirit can gain access into a Christian walking in the Spirit, one whose life is laid down at the foot of the cross. Not all Christians live their lives in such a way, though. Some have been led away from the purity and holiness of a godly life, perhaps because they have not been taught how to live a Christ-centered life. When temptation is listened to and obeyed, we are "open season" to the enemy who seeks opportunity through our ignorance of spiritual things and the strategies of the evil one. Don't get me wrong, I believe in the believer's eternal security (John 6:39; John 5:24), but the enemy can limit our effectiveness as we live as believers in this world.

I don't believe that a Christian or a non-Christian, either, can be possessed in the complete sense of the word. The word *possession* gives us an image of a person under complete and absolute

control by demons. However, even the most terrible demonic case in Scripture, i.e., the man under control by Legion (Mark 5:1-20), was able to run to Jesus as soon as he saw Him. If the demons had complete control of the man, they would have caused him to run the opposite way! They are terrified of Jesus! John Wimber, the man whom God used to start the network of Vineyard Churches, commented on this question:

I do not believe that demons may own people absolutely while they still live on Earth; even when demons gain a high degree of control, people can still exercise a degree of free will that may lead to deliverance and salvation. The Greek word used for having a demon (*daimonizomenoi*) is more literally translated “demonized” (See Matthew 4:24; Mark 1:32; Luke 8:36; John 10:21), which means to be influenced, afflicted, or tormented in some way by demonic power.³

We see this happening in the life of Saul, Israel's first king. Scripture tells us that “**God changed Saul's heart**” (1 Samuel 10:9), with the following verse saying that “**the Spirit of God came upon him in power, and he joined in their prophesying**” (1 Samuel 10:10). However, a few chapters later, as he began to disobey and refused to listen to God's voice and even to reject the Word of the Lord (1 Samuel 15:26), we are told that an evil spirit tormented him (1 Samuel 16:14). I believe that a Christian can be demonized and influenced yet not possessed.

Demons Influence People Through Their Thoughts

Demons can influence the thoughts of both Christians and not-yet-believers. We are told not to believe every spirit but test the spirits to see if they are of God (1 John 4:1). Paul the Apostle wrote to his young disciple, Timothy, instructing him to gently teach his opponents, in the hope that they may be released from the devil's grip:

²⁵Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, ²⁶and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, **who has taken them captive to do his will** (2 Timothy 2:25-26).

Those in the media and influential people around us, if we let them, can influence our decision-making through manipulation and deception. People do not realize that evil spiritual forces can implant thoughts into their minds, hoping to bend their decisions. Paul writes about those who have been “**taken captive to do his will**” (2 Timothy 2:26). Demons will speak even through those in our family and friendships. Often, friends and family will not know why they said such things that issue from their mouths. In the middle of such attacks, be spiritually aware! This kind of attack is what happened to Jesus through Peter the Apostle. When Jesus began to tell the disciples that He was going to Jerusalem to die as a substitute in place of guilty man, Peter began to rebuke Him. “‘Never, Lord!’ he said. ‘This shall never happen to you!’” The Lord knew the source of that thought. He said to Peter (or the spirit that was speaking through him), “**Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men**” (Matthew 16:23). Take care of your thought life and the pictures and thoughts presented to the seedbed of your mind.

³John Wimber, *Power Healing*, Harper Collins, Page 109.

We have not been sent into this battle without protection. When we sense oppression and depression and that we are amid warfare, there are two things we need to remember. One is that the battle is the Lord's and, secondly, that Christ is victorious over all the enemy's works. We are citizens and ambassadors of Christ's Kingdom, and as His ambassadors, we can exert His authority over all the power of the enemy (2 Corinthians 5:20). When we are praying for those who do not know Christ, be aware that you are in a battle and that God has given you **“authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you” (Luke 10:19)**. As you pray for them, ask for them to be released from any spiritual forces that would blind them. People in darkness do not know that they are in darkness. It is possible for people to read the Scriptures and still be blinded to the truth in them. We can take authority as we pray because Jesus is victorious, and the battle is the Lord's!

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38).

Prayer: Father, I pray that you will deliver me from every evil deed. Please grant me the power to live a life of purity and freedom from all demonic forces. Deliver me from evil, for yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, Amen!

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