

## Demonization and Believers

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**Abstract:** The New Testament gives several examples of humans being dominated in some manner by malevolent, evil spirits. A common way to refer to such domination is “demon possession”. When believers in Christ experience ongoing attacks from demonic entities, some refer to this as “demon oppression.” New Testament evidence, it will be argued, does not necessarily support “possession” or “oppression” *per se* but uses a broader term, “demonization”. It will be further argued that while a believer in Christ can be attacked by malevolent entities, a full, controlling domination by those enemies is impossible owing to the believer’s identity in Christ.

**Defining the issue.** A woman in India, in an effort to demonstrate her enthusiasm and her loyalty to Christianity, took an idol statue and smashed it. Apparently, the demon behind that idol immediately possessed her. When she was brought to a minister of the Gospel, the evil spirit, speaking through her, cried, “She broke my idol. That’s why I possessed her.” The minister drove the devil out of the woman. Her home, however, still receives visits from this demon, for neither her faith nor that of her household is firmly established in Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Kwo, a Chinese man, and his wife, maintained a home shrine to an idol, as did many of their neighbors. The shrine was dedicated to Wang Mu-niang, the wife of the chief divinity of China. The demon appeared to Mr. Kwo, telling him, “I have made my abode in your house.” Mr. Kwo began to gamble carelessly, and on more than one occasion, fell to the ground,

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<sup>1</sup> Account from N. Daniel of the Layman’s Evangelical Fellowship, taken from *Demon Experiences in Many Lands* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1960), 23.

frothing at the mouth, and had to be carried home. Without warning he once tried to shoot his father, who needed the help of other men to bind his son with chains and carry him to his home. The more the demon tormented the family, including Mr. Kwo's parents, the more they worshipped it, hoping to appease it with offerings of incense. The effects of the demon's presence gave Mr. Kwo heart problems, alleviated only when more incense was burned to the pagan deity. One summer, Mr. Kwo heard the Gospel from a missionary and chose to trust Christ as Savior. The man went home and ripped out the shrine. But when his sick child died a few days later, Kwo's wife, distraught, begged him to reinstall the shrine, believing the death was at the hands of the demonic spirit. The man refused, saying he had trusted in Christ and would not turn back. The demon tried to manifest one last time, but knowing the homeowner was now a Christian, the entity cried it would leave and never return, and the family had no further experiences with the malevolent spirit.<sup>2</sup>

King Saul of Israel suffered torment from an evil spirit (1 Samuel 16:14); the text says this evil or unclean spirit was “from the Lord”. For Saul, the presence of this evil spirit and the *depamrue* of the Spirit of God indicated his rejection as the king of God’s people; the “evil spirit” was perhaps manifested as a particularly nasty temper and depressive episodes, but as Saul continued his toward emotional spiral, it would be “understandable” to suppose he was actually demonically possessed.<sup>3</sup> Ancient Israelite understanding of the cosmos saw all things under God’s control, including activities engaged in by demonic, evil or unclean <sup>4</sup> spirits. God, of course, is

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<sup>2</sup> Merrill C. Unger, *Demons in the World Today* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1971), 104-105.

<sup>3</sup> Mary J. Evans, *1 and 2 Samuel* (NIBC) (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 81.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen D. Renn, ed., *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 998, points to several Gospel texts (Matthew 10:1, 12:43, Mark 1:23ff, 5:2fff, Luke 4:33ff, 9:42; Acts 5:16, Revelation 16:13, 18:2) where *akarthatos* (unclean in a ritual or a moral sense) is applied to evil spirits.

sovereign, and any action in the universe, such as demonic activity, must have His permission.<sup>5</sup> Job 1 and 2 shows this clearly; God set limits on what Satan could and could not do.<sup>6</sup> What is clear is that Saul, because of his deliberate disobedience to the Lord, lost the presence of the Lord and the vacuum was filled by a demonic spirit.<sup>7</sup>

Saul's battle with demons manifested in inflamed and irrational anger with a murderous intent (1 Samuel 18:10-11, 19:9-10). The New Testament attributes certain conditions to demonic influence, such as being made mute (Mathew 9:33, Luke 11:14); experiencing seizures (Matthew 17:14-18, Luke 9:37-43); and physical infirmity (Luke 13:10-17). Belief in demonic activity is not solely the provenance of Christian faith. Primitive, animist societies tend to hold demons in high regard out of fear; they see the very working of nature all around them, including the fate of their food supplies, as owing to "the working of capricious and often vengeful demons".<sup>8</sup>

To traditional peoples there is no natural-versus-supernatural dichotomy. The supernatural directly involves the natural. Traditional peoples live in the middle zone. That is why much of our preaching and teaching seems to have little relevance to their daily life. We explain sickness on the basis of germs, nutrition, and related factors. They explain sickness on the basis of

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<sup>5</sup> David F. Payne, *I & II Samuel* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1982), 84.

<sup>6</sup> H. H. Rowley, *The Book of Job* (NCBC) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 30.

<sup>7</sup> Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel* (WBC 10) (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 165, notes it is at this point in Saul's life whatever of Yahweh's presence Saul may have previously experienced, departed "once and for all." Klein also points out the Old Testament at times "ascribes evil or temptation to the and of Yahweh (e.g., Deuteronomy 13:2-4, Amos 3:6, 2 Samuel 24:1, 1 Chronicles 21:1. God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem (Judges 9:23) and a lying spirit in the mouths of the prophets at the time of Micaiah (1 Kings 22:19-22)."

<sup>8</sup> Unger, *Demons in the World Today*, 150.

curses, the evil eye, witchcraft or karma, all set against them.<sup>9</sup>

Eastern religions, such as Buddhism, influenced by local customs and superstitions, leads people into an animistic view of life, where it is less about one's interaction with God and more about controlling one's fate.

While formal, doctrinal Buddhism focuses on liberation from samsara, in societies where people are born into the religion, the popular practice is a mix of traditional religion and local practices along with Buddhist concepts. This includes ritual accumulation of merit to secure a better future life; ceremonies to control fate, destiny and luck to face present problems; consulting astrologers, palm readers and spirit mediums; asking powerful beings that have great stores of merit to help them with their needs; the use of curses, amulets and tattoos for protection. The extreme difficulty in the pursuit of enlightenment makes people seek answers for daily needs in other kinds of practices.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ed Murphy, *Handbook for Spiritual Warfare* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1992), 6. The "middle zone" is the usually excluded place in Christian proclamation. The Western world hold to the presence of God and the presence of every day things, whereas the "middle zone" among traditional peoples involves the supernatural, including the demonic.

<sup>10</sup> Alan R. Johnson, "Ultimate Liberation: Responding to the Buddhist View of Salvation", *Enrichment* 17:3 (Summer 2012), 79. *Samsara* "is the circle of suffering that is the destiny of all living being until they achieve enlightenment and break the pattern of rebirth to experience the truth of existence" (cited by Johnson, 78; taken from *Buddhist Studies for secondary students*, "Unit Five: Experiencing Buddhism", <http://www.buddhanet.net/elearning/buddhism/bs-s07.htm>, accessed October 21, 2011.

Exposure to such as spirit mediums, use of curses and amulets, astrology and palm readers is a means of demonic influence.<sup>11</sup> Primitive individuals, with an animist cosmology, will see such practices as part of the whole of life without necessarily being able to discern the spiritual danger. Subsequent exposure to the Gospel of Christ presents a competing and superior worldview to the primitive people; the demonic entities, fearing loss of the power and the enslavement, will choose to fight against the Gospel message, usually with the individual being more than likely suffer.<sup>12</sup>

Among non-Christian religions, for example, Hinduism is replete with demonic activity; demons are involved in nearly every aspect of a devotee's life. Followers of Hinduism believe the terrifying demonic beings "must be drive off by dancers wearing the most horrifying masks."

The serpent Vritra is the enemy of the gods, Yama the king of death (with his 2 dogs dragging off dying humanity), and Ravana is the Demon King served by terrifying rakshasas (i.e., enemies of the gods). The god of wealth, Kubera, is attended by demons both male (yakshas) and female

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<sup>11</sup> Alex Konya, *Demons: A Biblically Based Perspective* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 1990), 30, points to Acts 16:16 to argue for a connection between magic/sorcery and demonization, then Acts 19:8-20, showing the popularity of the occult in Ephesus and the presence of exorcists. He writes: "In the light of the above facts (i.e. the references in Acts), it is unsurprising that missionaries and others who minister to those intimately involved with idolatrous cultures, or people entrenched in occultic practices, report the bulk of modern cases of demonization. From the New Testament data, one would expect that such situations would be more likely to lead to the demonized state. In this culture, the most likely places where true demon possession may be encountered could be with persons who have been involved in Satanism or the occult, or persons who come from other cultures with idolatrous backgrounds. The combination of occultic fascination and the influx of such idolatrous cultural ideas as Eastern mysticism may tribute to an increase in cases of demon possession in America."

<sup>12</sup> Kurt E. Koch, *Occult ABC's* (n.c., Germany: Literature Mission Aglasterhausen, Inc, 1980), 269.

(yakshinis).<sup>13</sup>

Evidence of demonic influence in Christian mission goes beyond the Biblical records; missionaries in foreign lands, even those within a stronger Baptist tradition, with less emphasis on demonic activity than what might be found in Pentecostal/full-gospel traditions, testify to such encounters.<sup>14</sup> Some theologians would “demythologize” anything about the devil, demons, and demon possession.<sup>15</sup> Those holding to that position assert accounts of demonic activity stem from a pre-scientific worldview which was superstitious at its core. However, it has been argued removing the supernatural from the Scriptures is to eviscerate it of its essential meaning. Removing the supernatural leaves a “gospel” offering nothing for life-transformation.

In answer to such critics, we respond with the truth and rational claims of the whole Gospel, including Satan's war against it and God's supernatural intervention and ultimate triumph. The world of the occult is real, and God's all powerful Spirit is just as real.<sup>16</sup>

**Jesus and the realm of the demonic.** The Gospels leave no question as to whether Jesus believed in the presence of demonic spirits. On several occasions, He encountered and ministered to people whose lives had been dominated in some form by a malevolent, evil entity. Of interest in many of those

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<sup>13</sup> Leonard R. N. Ashley, *The Complete Book of Devils and Demons* (London, UK: Robson, 1997), 65.

<sup>14</sup> See Unger, *Demons in the World Today*, 101-121 for his discussion on such encounters.

<sup>15</sup> “Demythologization” derives mostly from Rudolf Bultmann, a German theologian, whose skepticism regarding the historicity of the New Testament, and his existentialist interpretation of faith, that it was not believing certain events actually happened but was a decision to live authentically in light of Jesus’ life and crucifixion. See T. A. Noble, “Demythologization”, *NDT*, 248.

<sup>16</sup> Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, *Handbook of Today's Religions* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life, 1983), 151.

encounters is a lack of details as to the effects of that domination. For example:

- Mark 7:25 — the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman was “possessed by an evil (or “unclean”) spirit.”<sup>17</sup> No information is given about any outward evidence of such possession.<sup>18</sup>
- Luke 4:33 — a man in the synagogue in Capernaum is described as “possessed<sup>19</sup> by a demon, and evil (or, “unclean”) spirit”. Nothing is said as to whether the man was crippled, experienced seizures, foamed at the mouth, ranted incoherently or any other evidence of manifestation.<sup>20</sup> The text simply says the man was “possessed” and Jesus commanded the demon to leave.
- Luke 8:29 — the man among the tombs<sup>21</sup> is described as

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<sup>17</sup> An older commentary by J. D. Jones, originally published in 1914, bypasses any mention of the idea of “demon-possession”, preferring to refer to the child’s situation as either epilepsy or insanity (*Commentary on Mark* [London: Religious Tract Society, 1914; repr. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1992], 227. See next note.

<sup>18</sup> But R. C. Trench, *Miracles of Our Lord* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992), 217, makes no allowance for interpreting “demon” of Mark 7:26 as some explainable physical ailment: “*And when she was come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed, weak and exhausted, as these words imply, from the paroxysms of the spirit’s going out; unless, indeed, they indicate that she was now taking that quiet rest, which hitherto her condition had excluded.*” (Italics in original)

<sup>19</sup> Or, “indwelt”; see Murphy, *Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*, 270.

<sup>20</sup> R. Alan Cole, *The Gospel According to Mark* (TNTC) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 61, claims the ability of someone with a demon to worship in the synagogue without notice, until Jesus appeared, speaks to a lack of desire on the part of the demonized to be delivered. However, Murphy, *Handbook on Spiritual Warfare*, 271, argues the issue is not whether the individual desired or did not desire to be released; it is rather a case where those afflicted with a demon may not be aware of their condition until “forced into manifestation” by someone with spiritual authority, as Jesus was.

<sup>21</sup> The evidence for the precise location of this incident is mixed; Matthew 8:28 has “Gadarenes” and Mark 5:1 has “Gergesenes”. Most scholars believe the name points to the same place, Jerash in the modern nation of

having unusual strength, apparently as a result of his domination by demons, and that he did not live anywhere near other people.

- But then the demonized young man in Mark 9:20 was thrown into convulsions by the evil entity when Jesus came to confront the situation.

The language of Matthew 8:16 seems to connect the casting out of demons with healing the sick, but the passage could as well be read as speaking of separate, distinct events.<sup>22</sup> As such, the text is more of a preparation for the Savior's coming suffering on behalf of a sinful people, echoing Isaiah 53:4.<sup>23</sup>

In every such confrontation with a demonic or "unclean" entity, the New Testament is unequivocal in its picture of Jesus exercising unfailing authority in such encounters. Counted as miracles, such encounters played a major role in the course of His ministry, and in the whole of antiquity, no other "healer" can compare to the works of Jesus.<sup>24</sup> No demonic host was ever able to refuse or resist Jesus' demands to depart. The focus on His "exorcism" ministry, by His own testimony, is not as much about demons or about deliverance, but about the advent and presence of the kingdom of God.

*But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you (Luke 11:20).*

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Jordan, south of the Sea of Galilee by thirty five miles. See Philip W. Comfort, *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2008), 190. In the end, the precise name is not as important as the details and intent of the account.

<sup>22</sup> Robert H Mounce, *Matthew* (NIBC) (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 46.

<sup>23</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew* (NIVAC) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 345.

<sup>24</sup> Graham H. Twelftree, *In the Name of Jesus: Exorcism Among Early Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 46.

The stakes in such encounters were cosmic; they had as their goal the right to rule.<sup>25</sup> Included in the commissioning of the disciples as itinerant preachers was instruction to “drive out demons” (Matthew 10:8, Mark 6:7, Luke 9:1), although no stated mechanism or method was ever provided for accomplishing such “driving out”.<sup>26</sup> The disciples’ commissioning and task was an extension of Jesus’ authority and power over demonic beings.<sup>27</sup>

Jesus’ authority and power over the demonic was significantly differentiated from the “pseudo-power” craved by the exorcists and magicians of that time. In His dealing with the demonic, Jesus consistently employed four distinct practices:<sup>28</sup>

1. *Jesus did not employ mechanical objects, such as amulets, wood chips, iron rings or special sounds.* Instead, He simply commanded, operating in His intrinsic authority and power, and the demonic presence was forced to obey (cf. Mark 1:23-26).

2. *Jesus did not pray before driving out a demonic presence.* Among the Jewish exorcists and holy men, certain formulaic,

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<sup>25</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* (NIVAC) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 318. “When Jesus casts out evil spirits, he exhibits in himself the energy of God (Luke 11:20) and a strength that conquers sin and disease (Mark 1:25f., 40f.; 2:5ff.; 3:27-29)” (George Johnston, “Major Themes in the New Testament: Doctrine of the Holy Spirit”, *CJT* 1:2 [1955], 82).

<sup>26</sup> John R. Gilhooly, *40 Questions About Angels, Demons and Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2018), 190, points out “...for all the elaborate history of exorcism in the Christian church, we really have no guide for such practices in the New Testament.”

<sup>27</sup> Wilkins, *Matthew*, 390. Twelftree (*In The Name of Jesus*, 50-51). argues nothing is actually said about driving out demons in his comparison of Matthew 10:8 to Luke 10:9. He concludes Jesus did not actually give such a charge to the disciples but they chose to engage anyway in exorcisms. Luke 10:9, however, is about the commissioning of the seventy-two, separate from that of the twelve disciples. Matthew 10:8 and its parallels are focused on the original disciples. Luke 11:20 shows an emphasis on the coming of the kingdom of God highlighted through displays of power to cast out demons. It is probable the lack of specific instruction about exorcism given to the seventy-two was a change in missional direction.

<sup>28</sup> Graham Twelftree, “Demon, Devil, Satan”, *DJG*, 167-168.

and often lengthy, prayers were uttered as part of the process of deliverance.

3. *Jesus never resorted to the use of a “power name”.* Exorcists searched for names and words which they felt would allow them to have some advantage over the unclean or demonic spirit. In Acts 19:13-16, seven sons of Sceva tried to exorcise a demonic presence, using what they apparently thought was a “power” name — Jesus. But their efforts failed completely. They, as unbelievers, had no legal access to the name of Jesus, in that they had no salvation relationship with Him.<sup>29</sup> Despite warnings from Jewish leaders against using the name “Jesus” in exorcisms,<sup>30</sup> these seven men ignored the counsel. In their deplorable and unsuccessful actions is weight given to both the power latent in the name of Jesus, and the need for have a salving relationship with Jesus in order to obtain the ability to access His name.

4. *Jesus, in contrast to the exorcists of that day, did not use “adjure” (Greek: horkiso) but simply aid, “I command you (Mark 9:25).* To “adjure” was to demand the entity conform to the wishes of the exorcist. Instead, Jesus simply relied on His own latent power; this power is expressed by a form of the Greek *epitasso*, which refers to “command” or “order”.<sup>31</sup> The NIV, in the account of the seven sons of Sceva, translates *horkiso* as “command” (Acts 19:13); it should be rendered “give a solemn charge to”,<sup>32</sup> much less in authority than Jesus' "I command." The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) include accounts of Jesus' exorcism activity, connecting to the

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<sup>29</sup> French L. Arrington, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 194.

<sup>30</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts* (NICNT) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 309fn24, points to such warnings in Tosefta *Hullin* ii22f and *Abodah Zarah* ii, 2.40d-41a.

<sup>31</sup> William D. Mounce, *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 124. Another use of *epitasso* relating to Jesus' authority is in Luke 8:25, where He commanded the storm to cease, and it did so immediately.

<sup>32</sup>Renn, ed., *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*,174.

defeat of the enemy with the power latent in Him as the Son of God. John's Gospel, by contrast, connects Satan's defeat with the power of the cross (John 14:30), which is why in that Gospel there are no deliverance accounts.<sup>33</sup> The change in emphasis from the Synoptics to John's Gospel does not obscure Jesus' latent power over the demonic; John's focus on the cross could bring to mind Colossians 2:15, showing the total defeat of the demonic realm through the agency of the cross.

**The apostle Paul and the demonic.** Jesus' exorcisms pointed to a greater reality -- that the Kingdom of God had arrived (Luke 11:20). Paul, however, makes no mention of driving out demons in the epistolary literature, preferring to see sin, by fallen nature and by free will choice, as the malevolent force within the human condition (cf. Romans 6:17-18).<sup>34</sup> Paul's encounter with the slave girl possessed by a demonic spirit (Acts 16) is claimed by some to be evidence of a "territorial spirit or principality" that held the entire region in bondage.<sup>35</sup> Of note in the Acts 16 account is Paul employed nothing in the way of an exorcistic ritual or other than commanding in the name of Jesus because he was "troubled" (NIV 84) or "annoyed" (ESV, NIV2011). It was less about the demonic presence and more about what was represented in the slave girl's claims.

She constantly followed the missionaries about, shouting that they were servants of the "Most High God" and proclaimers of "a way of salvation" (author's translation). None of this would have been very clear to Gentiles. The term "God most high" was a common Old Testament term for God, but the same term was equally common in the

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<sup>33</sup> Twelftree, "Demon, Devil, Satan", 171.

<sup>34</sup> Terence P. Page, "Demons and Exorcism", *DPL*, 211.

<sup>35</sup> Gilhooly, *40 Questions About Angels, Demons and Spiritual Warfare*, 150, cites Rebecca Greenwood in her co-authored article with C. Peter Wagner on strategic level deliverance in James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy, eds., *Understanding Spiritual Warfare: Four Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 178.

Gentile world and was particularly applied to Zeus. Neither would "way of salvation" be immediately clear to a Gentile. The Greco-Roman world was full of "saviors." Savior/deliverer, salvation/ deliverance were favorite terms. The emperor dubbed himself "savior" of the people. All of which is to show why Paul finally became irritated with the girl's constant acclamations. These acclamations may have been true enough, but they were open to too much misunderstanding for pagan hearers.<sup>36</sup>

It is probable Paul's lack of emphasis on the demonic has to do with his understanding of the heinousness of sin, its devastating effect on the human condition, and the promise of eventual deliverance from that sin. God would effect a full and unyielding victory over all such entities which stood opposed to Christ and the Gospel message (Romans 16:20, 1 Corinthians 15:20-28, Philippians 2:9-11). The apostle's view of the "principalities and powers" was of their present defeat through the finished work of Christ on the cross (Colossians 2:15). A reading of Romans 8 never pits the human condition against any kind of demonic elements; the "battle" is between whether a person has the indwelling (from *oikeo*, "to dwell" or "to live") presence of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9); those who are controlled by the sinful nature are incapable of ever pleasing God (Romans 8:8). The Spirit of God and the sinful flesh are in constant hostility one to another (Galatians 5:17). It was sin, not demons, which is the malevolent presence in a person's life; salvation was cast by Paul as a release from spiritual bondage (Romans 6:17-18).

However, Paul does make a connection to the continuation in sin with the influence of the devil, allowing for a present work of the enemy in people who choose disobedience to God. In Ephesians 2:1-2, he speaks of a sinner's previous living under

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<sup>36</sup> John B. Polhill, *Acts* (NAC) (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1992), 351.

the authority of the “prince of the power of the air”, a metaphor for the devil. The responsibility for that bondage is not the devil’s; Paul is careful to assign accountability on the individual sinner (Ephesians 2:3).

Sinners are such because of their nature, and their enslavement is three-fold: (1) they are under the dominion of the social forces of the world; (2) they are under the spiritual authority of the devil; and (3) they are enslaved in their minds, a servitude that has them in obedience to the sensual desires of their fallen flesh and their fallen mind.<sup>37</sup> Yet, still, as much as Paul excoriates the sinful flesh, he very much does understand the reality of the demonic and the authority exercised by that realm (Colossians 1:13-14). Paul does not necessarily diminish the power exercised by the enemy; in Colossians 1:13-14, he used *exousia* for “dominion” (KJV: “power”; NASB: “domain”). *Exousia* is used in 100 contexts in the New Testament, with the sense of “authority”, “right” and “power”. “Authority” is the foundation for “right” and for “power”, and when power is exercised, it gives evidence of an authority which is being enforced. Both power and authority have no moral implication; as concepts, they are morally neutral. It is in their use whether they are to be understood as either “good or “evil”.<sup>38</sup>

New Testament evidence shows an undeniable conflict between the Kingdom of God and the lesser dominion of the devil. The question then is whether given such a conflict, is it possible for someone who is a believer in Jesus Christ to end up demon-possessed?

**The devil’s authority.** There is a tendency within some charismatic circles to elevate the power of the devil beyond the explicit statements of the Word of God. Those who advocate for

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul: The Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity and Leicester, UK: Apollos, 2001), 138-139.

<sup>38</sup> Renn, ed., *Expository Dictionary*, 79.

territorial spirits will at times warn believers to avoid certain demonically-controlled areas as their ability to exercise spiritual authority will be almost non-existent.

The debate on the enemy and his minions will no doubt continue as a discussion in theological circles, but however intent such an exchange may become, the New Testament is very explicit on certain truths:

- Jesus is the victor, not the enemy (Colossians 2:15);
- The devil is a defeated foe (Romans 16:20).

For that, the enemy still works against people, and particularly believers (1 Peter 5:8). A Christian's focus must be less on the enemy and more on Jesus Christ.

Man is culpable for his own sin (James 1:13-15). It is not as one older commentator, Donald Grey Barnhouse, averred, that the devil is the primary source of man's problem with sin.<sup>39</sup> Neither is it true that, as popular author Neil T. Anderson claims, that the devil is at the "heart of all sin" (1 John 3:8).<sup>40</sup> The devil can tempt, seduce, deceive, cajole, lie and employ double-talk, but he is unable to *force* anyone to commit sin. Whereas Murphy seems to agree with both Barnhouse and Anderson, I would argue that in the Garden of Eden, the serpent never "strong-armed" Eve to reach for the fruit on the forbidden tree. Eve made a free-will choice. The origin of sin in the human creation was a decision to rebel against God.

Our study of biblical theology, both Old and New Testaments, must lead us to the conclusion that the agent of human sin was human. Paul settles the matter in Romans 5:12 when he says that "sin entered the world through one man, and death

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<sup>39</sup> As cited in Murphy, *Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*, 103.

<sup>40</sup> Murphy, *Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*, 104.

through sin." Genesis 3 identifies that man as Adam.<sup>41</sup>

The ultimate responsibility for the commission of sin is in the free-will choice of the individual person whether to remain faithful to the words of the Lord or to choose to believe whatever lie or seduction being promoted by the enemy. The devil has no authority over what any person will determine to do; seductions and deceptions are the best the enemy can do in order to persuade a person to choose other than God's truth. Paul understood the biggest enemy he faced was not the devil but sin (Romans 7:18-20). Never one time in the whole of Paul's discussion in sin in Romans 7 does he introduce the devil; for the apostle, the flesh and its proclivity for sin was in view (cf. Jeremiah 17:9). Paul refuses to impute the presence of sin in him to some other entity.<sup>42</sup> Man's nature does make him "vulnerable to temptation" but to agree with and surrender to the temptation means "sin itself is an act of the will", which is "an abuse of his freedom."<sup>43</sup> While the New Testament speaks of the enemy's defeat, it also speaks the fulness of that defeat will come at the time of the end (cf. Revelation 12:12).

**Demonization.** That the enemy - the devil - works against believers is a Biblically-founded reality. Believers are told to stand against the enemy (Ephesians 6:10-18) because he is active in his "hunt" for believers (1 Peter 5:7). Those who do not believe in Christ are "blinded" by the enemy, a blindness the sinner made possible through their own sin, which the enemy seeks to manipulate and exploit (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Satan controls this age under God's decree. For Paul this malevolent power is seen in the blinding

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<sup>41</sup> David L. Smith, *With Willful Intent: A Theology of Sin* (Wheaton, IL: Victor/BridgePoint, 1994), 339.

<sup>42</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), I:263.

<sup>43</sup> Donald Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, n.d.), I:92.

of human minds to prevent the Gospel from penetrating.<sup>44</sup>

Some believe those who are unregenerate (or, unsaved), can in fact be possessed by a demonic entity. Such are said to be under the will and authority of the devil, to the point their lives are not volitionally theirs. Merrill Under writes:

Demon possession is a condition in which one or more evil spirits or demons inhabit the of a human being and can take complete control of their victim at will. By temporarily blotting out his consciousness, they can speak and act through him as their complete slave and tool. The inhabiting demon (or demons) comes and goes much like the proprietor of a house who may or may not be "at home". When the demon is "at home," he may precipitate an attack. In these attacks the victim passes from his normal state, in which he acts like other people, to the abnormal state of the possession.... The characteristic of demon possession or demonomania is the *automatic projection of new personality in the victim*.<sup>45</sup>

Kurt Koch tells of a case on which he consulted, where a woman in a psychiatric hospital manifested bizarre behavior, with bruises appearing on her body without having an injury; she complained of being crushed by a large snake, and the hospital had photographs of the marks of a snake's coils around her

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<sup>44</sup> Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* (WBC 40) (Waco, TX: Word, 1990), 78. Paul's referent to "the god of this age" has created no small amount of discussion, from the time of the church fathers onward, as to precisely the apostle's meaning. In this paper it is assumed Paul refers to the devil; the reasoning for other interpretations is beyond the scope of this study. For a brief but helpful discussion on the meaning of the term, see David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians* (NAC 29) (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 210-211.

<sup>45</sup> Unger, *Demons in the World Today*, 102 (Italics in the original.)

body; she spoke in male voices, saying she had seven devils, and she was clairvoyant. While the psychiatrist, looking for an answer in medicine, thought this was a case of extreme hysteria, Koch asked if the woman had dabbled in spiritism, and he was told that she had, and that she had even signed a blood pact with the devil. Koch then explained the woman was indeed possessed of demons, which was not a medical problem but a religious one.<sup>46</sup>

Regardless of such examples, the question is whether the term “demon possession” is necessarily Biblically accurate. Murphy has argued the better term is “demonized” over “possessed”, since, in his view, those who translated the Scriptures out of Greek apparently had little, if any, first-hand experience with the demonic, how it manifests and the effect on the life of the afflicted individual.<sup>47</sup> Unger, however, argues for a differentiation between “demon possession” and “demon influence”.

In demon influence, evil spirits exert power over a person short of actual possession. Such influence may vary from mild harassment to extreme subjection when body and mind become dominated and held in slavery by spirit agents. Christians, as well as non-Christians, can be so influenced. They may be oppressed, vexed, depressed, hindered and bound by a demon.<sup>48</sup>

Konya’s analysis demonstrates, in agreement with Murphy, that the New Testament language is better “demonized” than “demon possessed”. Someone who is genuinely demonized will find him or herself under that entity’s control and dominion; that control/dominion, because of the indwelling presence of the evil entity, cannot be resisted by the demonized individual.

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<sup>46</sup> Koch, *Occult ABC’s*, 47-48.

<sup>47</sup> Murphy, *Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*, 49

<sup>48</sup> Unger, *Demons in the World Today*, 113.

Konya suggests “demonized” refers to a person who has experienced an “invasion” by one or more demons, where those demons then exercise a “sovereign control” which the victim is unable to resist or reduce. For those reasons, Konya argues “demonization” must be held distinct from other forms of demonic influence.<sup>49</sup> This same view, that “demonization” is “demon possession”, is held by Pentecostal scholar Morris Williams.<sup>50</sup>

Another view is from Chris Ward, who asserts when churches teach that a believer cannot be possessed by a demon, it is an “over simplification” which leaves believers defenseless. He claims a difference between “fully possessed by demons” and “partial demon possession and activities.” Ward’s position is based on his symbolic view of man.

...a Christian cannot be FULLY demon possessed as long as they (sic) remain a Christian, may have many different kinds of demonic activities or demonic intrusions. A Christian may be visited in their outer court (flesh) or inner court (mind) but their sanctuary (spirit) is protected as long as they do not commit blasphemy of the Holy Spirit and reject Christ.

Demons do not walk to up to a person and say, "Hey! Do you want to be fully and completely demon possessed?" No, they find a weakness or a door through traditional family behavior (iniquities) or through the reckless behavior of the individual (personal sin). The person's active free will must be breached. They usually seduce a person with something simple

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<sup>49</sup> Konya, *Demons*, 21-22.

<sup>50</sup> Morris Williams, “Do Demons Have the Power to Invade Unbelievers?”, in *Power Encounter: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Opal D. Reddin, ed.) (Springfield, MO: Central Bible College Press, 1999), 171.

and almost innocent unless it is generational sin.<sup>51</sup>

Ward's conclusions, I would argue, tend to deny the efficacy of grace in the believer, and conflate temptation to sin with direct demonic activity. The apex for all believers is to avoid sin completely (1 John 2:1); when sin happens, God provides a means for forgiveness and cleansing (1 John 1:9). Ward, referencing Christians, attributes such as having an abortion, committing either physical or mental adultery, and other such sins as the effect of a partial demonic incursion. James 1:13-15 says the genesis of sin in a surrender to temptations aided by one's own evil desires (from *epithumias*, "lust"), and is enticed. James makes no mention of the devil, for that would be shifting responsibility for personal sin from one excuse to another: if God is not the reason for the sin, then it must be devil; in either case it is an attempt to avoid personal culpability for giving in to carnal desires (cf. Galatians 5:16).<sup>52</sup> It would be a better conclusion to allow for demonic influence through seduction, deceit and misrepresentation as adding fuel to the canal nature's fire, but in the end, the act of sin in a person is not properly attributed to some kind of demonic possession, however it may be argued. Jesus attributed the manifestation of sin to the spiritual "uncleanness" in a person's being (Mark 7:20-23). Whereas the Pharisees saw outer influences, such as foods, as contributing to uncleanness, Jesus declared the spirit within a person is "impervious" to material things.<sup>53</sup> The instigation of a sinful action comes from the "heart", the "core

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<sup>51</sup> Chris Ward, "Can A Christian Be Demon Possessed?", <http://logoschristian.org/possession.html>, accessed October 15, 2024. For discussion on generational curses, see Scott Osenbaugh, "Generational Curses: Biblically Supported or False Teaching?", *AJBT* 26(5), February 2, 2025.

<sup>52</sup> James B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James* (NICNT) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 70-71.

<sup>53</sup> Ezra P. Gould, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark* (ICC) (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark, 1975 repr. of the 1896 edition), 132.

of motivation, deliberation, and intention”;<sup>54</sup> it is the seat of a man's behavior, the spiritual part of him where decisions are made.<sup>55</sup> Personal sin defiles, making a person unsuitable for having fellowship with God.<sup>56</sup> Had there been a demonic component involved in the sin coming out of the heart of man, then Jesus would have identified it. But neither here nor anywhere else does He shift culpability for sin onto some demonic incursion.

Scott E. McClelland points out the "specialized term for demon possession (*daimonizomai*)” is not found in the Bible. In the Synoptic Gospels, the most commonly used term is *daimonion echein* (“to have a demon”).<sup>57</sup> McClelland traces the use of "demon possession" to the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus.<sup>57</sup> Murphy bases his rejection of “demon possessed" on the fact the Scriptures never transfer the full and total responsibility for evil onto Satan or demons.

A final reason for rejecting the words demon possession is that the state of being completely, continually and totally possessed or controlled by demons would be very, very rare, if it even exists at all. Such persons would be totally irresponsible for any of their actions since the demons would possess and control them at all times. The Scriptures never place total responsibility for human evil upon Satan and his demons. People are always held accountable for their sinful actions. However, persons severely demonized over a long period of time by extremely powerful demons find it difficult to maintain self-control when the demons are in

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<sup>54</sup> David E. Garland, *Mark* (NIVAC) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 276.

<sup>55</sup> “Heart...denotes a person’s center for both physical and emotional-intellectual-moral activities” (Bruce K. Waltke, “Heart”, *BTDB*, 331).

<sup>56</sup> Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 231.

<sup>57</sup> Scott E. McClelland, “Demon, Demon Possession”, *EDT*, 307.

manifestation, leading to what psychologists call “diminished capacity.” Mark 5 is a case in point, Mark 9 and Luke 9 give added details to the story.<sup>58</sup>

For the apostle Paul, sin is the result of having failed to keep the Law of God (Romans 7:9). He sees a universality of sin in the whole of the human race and that sin will remain an issue as long as man exists on earth.<sup>59</sup> He points to the fall coming through Adam (Romans 5:12); it was Eve, his wife, who was deceived by the enemy (2 Corinthians 11:3, 2 Timothy 2:14), but Adam simply chose what he knew to be forbidden and so, through him, sin entered into the world. It is true the devil worked his deceit into the picture, but the decisions made in Eden that fateful day were the result of the operation of human free will. Returning to Chris Ward’s thesis, there are certain problems with his approach, averring that a partial possession of believers is possible. Where his thesis fails, I believe, is in his attribution of sinful behavior to demonic influence. While there is no argument with the lying, deceiving activities of the enemy directed at God’s people, there is, as I have shown above, the actual choice to sin is not directly connected to the enemy. The New Testament never attributes the choice to sin to the devil or to demons, but rather, to the fallen, sin-polluted human heart.

In Romans 8:9, Paul declares that the control of the believer is not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit of God; belonging to Christ (in salvation) brings relationship with the Holy Spirit (or, Spirit of Christ). The Spirit lives in the believer (Romans 8:11) because the believer is the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16; see also Ephesians 2:22). The ability to maintain the Christian life comes through that indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 1:14).

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<sup>58</sup> Murphy, *Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*, 51-52.

<sup>59</sup> Leon Morris, “Sin, Guilt”, *DPL*, 879.

Paul leaves no room for “possession” by a demonic entity once a believer has been indwelt by the Holy Spirit. As previously discussed, when a believer chooses to sin, it is not because he or she was driven to it by some demonic possession, but came as a result of their choice of the things that are not of God. Scripture plainly says that if someone who is a believer falls into sin, it has nothing to do with control by a demon (cf. Hebrews 3:13). Man deceives himself through sin; his sinful, unbelieving heart draws him into turning away from God.<sup>60</sup> Sin hardens against the truth of the Gospel message. If there was a significant demonic component in this process, then why is it not revealed to the Body of Christ? Why does Paul and the rest of the New Testament on the subject of sin lay the guilt back on the individual rebellion of the individual?

Chris Ward's position fails because it is not based on New Testament truth. There is nothing anywhere in the New Testament corpus which gives even a sliver of credibility to what Ward proposes. Nowhere is there any mention of a "partial possession" of a believer that leads to the commission of some sin. Instead, the truth is simple: those who are regenerate in Christ still struggle with the sinful nature (see Romans 7:7-25), and only through a full reliance on Christ will the sinful nature be kept in defeat.<sup>61</sup>

Postulating that a believer in Christ can be subsequently demon-possessed has caused a paradigmatic shift away from the Biblical use of power encounters, which is evangelism.

Certainly individuals can be demonized and require deliverance. But in the Bible there is not one instance of a believer being demonized. Quite the contrary is true. It is power encounters with

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<sup>60</sup> H. Orton Wiley, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1959), 129-130.

<sup>61</sup> For a helpful discussion on the nature of man and the tension between salvation and the sin-nature, see D. Vincent Palmer, “The Nature of the Christian: A Reflection”, *CJET* 2 (1998), 73-89.

demonized unbelievers that serve as "signs" confirming the Gospel and power of Jesus Christ (e.g., Acts 19:11-12). The larger confirmational function of power encounter must not be ignored when dealing with individuals who are demonized. there is not much confirming power evident if those who are themselves in Christ can be inhabited by demons.<sup>62</sup>

Among those who accept that believers can be demon possessed is C. Peter Wagner. In his book *How To Have A Healing Ministry*,<sup>63</sup> Wagner bases his position not on any Scripture, but simply on his own experiences from his travels and on what others have told him. Oss rightly criticizes this highly subjective approach.

It is clear from Wagner's own discussion that field experience and human perception of events constitute the "scholarly clincher" which affirms that Christians can be demonized. Notice his appeal is to human reason and experience, not to the Scriptures. Taking the starting point founded in autonomous and fallible human reason, Wagner places his entire argument outside the parameters of Biblical authority, and indeed eliminates any possible claim to authority that he might otherwise have made. Only full-orbed Biblical truth can make any claim to authority.<sup>64</sup>

Kurt Koch, a German theologian whose focus was on the occult, and who was not sympathetic to Pentecostal/charismatic thinking, based his view that believers can be possessed by demons on his years of experience confronting demonic entities.

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<sup>62</sup> Douglas Oss, "The Hermeneutics of Power Encounter", in Reddin, ed., *Power Encounter*, 21.

<sup>63</sup> Ventura, CA: Regal, 1988.

<sup>64</sup> Oss, "The Hermeneutics of Power Encounter", 25.

One question is hotly disputed among believing Christians. This is the question whether or not a Christian can be possessed. Many years of experience lead me to the conclusion that those who have no experience of dealing with the possessed say *no*. Those, who have counseled many possessed ones, know that even believers can be controlled or ruled by demons. These facts do not follow anyone's preconceived ideas. Our ideas must be formed, rather, on the basis of the facts. I have had many discussions on this subject, particularly in America. I am therefore all the more thankful for the men who confirm my own experience.<sup>65</sup>

Field experience and the opinions of men do not equal Biblical authority. Experience cannot guide the Word; the Word must be the governor of experience. The Bible says a believer is under the authority of Jesus Christ. A maxim says that authority will assert itself until a higher authority overtakes it. Christ's authority is far above anything the devil or any demon might try to manifest (Ephesians 1:21). Through the power of the cross, Christ fully defeated the enemy (Colossians 2:15). In the cross, Christ took all the demonic powers of the universe and once for all ruined them; they met their match and now are eternally subject to Him. The cross is the sign of liberation from all forms of bondage, "over every evil power and all human schemes."<sup>66</sup> If by some scheme the devil retains authority to "possess" a believer in Christ, then the redeemed are essentially in no better a place than the ones who are unregenerate.

Therefore it is important that we recognize that this teaching, specifically regarding the indwelling and enslaving of believers, is erroneous and even

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<sup>65</sup> Koch, *Occult A B C's*, 50-51.

<sup>66</sup> H. Dermot McDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians* (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 87.

dangerous to the faith. The reasons for this statement are as follows: This teaching degrades the character of God; it demeans the effects of Christ's atonement; it despises the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer; it denies the sufficiency of Scripture; it disavows the responsibility of the believer to put to death the deeds of the flesh and to walk in obedience to Christ.<sup>67</sup>

**Can a believer in Christ be demonized?** When the term “the sufficiency of the cross” is used, it needs to be understood that whatever was needed to bring reconciliation between God and man was fully and completely effected in and through Christ’s death on the cross and His subsequent resurrection from the dead. It is through Christ the enmity, the separation between man and God because of man’s sin, was fully resolved through Christ’s sacrifice, securing atonement, enabling justification (the legal acquittal) and bringing a saved individual into a new relationship with God.<sup>68</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon’s words are helpful here.

The debt was now, to the last penny, all discharged. The atonement and propitiation were made once for all, and forever, by the one offering made in Jesus' body on the tree. There was the cup, hell was in it, the Savior drank it-not a sip and then a pause, not a draught and then a ceasing, but He drained it till there is not a dreg left for any of His people. The great ten-thonged whip of the law was worn out upon His back. There is no lash left with which to smite one for whom Jesus died. The great cannon of God's

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<sup>67</sup> Tom Austin, “On The Demonization of Believers”, *RefRev* 4:1 (Winter 1995), 13.

<sup>68</sup> For a thorough examination of the effects of the cross, see Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987).

justice has exhausted all its ammunition. There is nothing left to be hurled against a child of God.<sup>69</sup>

Whatever power the devil may have exercised over humanity, for those who are saved in Christ, that power was broken, along with the power of any of the devil's minions, the "principalities and powers."<sup>70</sup> The devil is described in the New Testament as the "accuser" (cf. Revelation 12:10); those who are in Christ are made to be "free from accusation" (Colossians 1:22). The devil can accuse but nothing he tries to blame on believers will stand before the freedom which Christ brought through the cross.

If, in any way, the finished work of Christ is somehow insufficient or inefficient to accomplish God's plan for salvation, then all that Christ experienced on the cross was for nothing. If a believer in Christ can subsequently be possessed or controlled by a demon, for which some kind of deliverance is made necessary, then, as was previously discussed, a danger exists where the incursion and expression of sin is attributed to demonic activity rather than the individual's personal responsibility for sin. Seeking a "deliverance" rather than working through repentance and forsaking the sin is a quest for a "quick fix" which demonstrates a lack of maturity in the faith.<sup>71</sup>

One advocate of deliverance for Christians is Neil Anderson, a prolific writer and lecturer on the topic of the attack of the demonic against believers. His methodology has been criticized as being less about Scripture and more about things which have no Biblical basis, such as "blood oaths", "marriage to

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<sup>69</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *The Power of the Cross of Christ* (ed. Lance Wubbels) (Lynnwood, WA: Emerald Books, 1995), 141,

<sup>70</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 231.

<sup>71</sup> Larry Thomas, "In Considering Deliverance Ministries and Demon Possession", <http://www.letusreason.org/Pent24.htm>, accessed May 21, 2012.

Satan”, and generational curses, none of which can be found anywhere in Scripture.<sup>72</sup>

For the sake of argument, assume, for a moment, it is possible for a believer to be overtaken and controlled by a demonic entity. Those seeking to bring deliverance utilize their own incantations or deliverance formulas, making decrees and declarations, announcements and demands that the entity be bound and cast out, all of which is functionally useless because the use of those things assumes the impotence of Scripture in such matters. If the cross of Christ is not enough to “rescue us from the dominion of darkness” and brought into “the kingdom of the Son He (God) loves” (Colossians 1:13),<sup>73</sup> then it is beyond imagination how some humanly-concocted “methods” to effect a deliverance would in any way be able to accomplish their desired end. If the cross is not sufficient then our being seated with Christ “far above all rule and authority, power and dominion” (Ephesians 1:21) is a false statement.

The New Testament informs that a continual state of warfare exists between the redeemed and the world of darkness. Exhortations such as 2 Peter 3:18, which is set as a command,<sup>74</sup> identify the security a believer has when in Christ,

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<sup>72</sup> Christian Research Institute International, Statement DA-080, "Dr. Neil T. Anderson -- Freedom in Christ Ministries", cited by G. Richard Fisher, "Demons, Demons, Where Are The Demons?", <http://www.pfo.org/wdemons.htm>, accessed February 27, 2012.

<sup>73</sup> Those carried from darkness to the kingdom of the Son were not wandering as migrants might, looking for a safe haven. They were in bondage to the darkness, and through the action of God, they were lifted out and away from that darkness and “settled expressly” in that new place. See John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979 reprint of the 1884 edition issued by T. and T. Clark), 36.

<sup>74</sup> A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, n.d.), VI:180 identifies the verb, *auxanete*, as a “present active imperative” of *auxano*. The necessity of “grow” as a command shows grace is not a “static reality” but that in which believers must “grow in it until the day they die”. When connected with growth in the “knowledge of Jesus Christ”, the combination demonstrates these elements are not in any way options but basic requirements of the growing and maturing faith,

a place of being protected from any kind of direct incursion from the enemy. As Pentecostal scholar Morris Williams declared, “It is impossible for Satan to ‘repossess’ what Christ ‘possesses’.”<sup>75</sup>

Some who advocate the possibility a believer can be demon-possessed look to Luke 11:24-26 for substantiation.

“When 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.’ When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. Then 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.”<sup>76</sup>

It is alleged that a believer who experiences an exorcism can be re-possessed and in a far worse state than previous. As Ed Murphy has argued:

Until the bondage to the flesh is broken, however, effective deliverance is not possible for demonized believers. Where it does occur, it will not usually be lasting. *The expulsion of one group of evil spirits from a human life will usually lead to the entry of another group if the sin in the life to which the former demonic spirits had attached themselves is not removed.* The believer must begin to put to death the works of the flesh to become victorious in the sin war which involves them. If not, he will soon become a war casualty.<sup>77</sup>

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“essential for eternal life”. See Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude* (NAC 37) (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2003), 401.

<sup>75</sup> Morris, “Can Demons Invade Believers?”, 163.

<sup>76</sup> Matthew 12:43-45 is the parallel, where the word “unoccupied” is added to the condition of the house: “it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean...”

<sup>77</sup> Murphy, *Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*, 109. (Italics in original.)

Frank Hammond, whose ministry over the years centered on issues of curses and deliverance, is theologically honest enough to admit that a Christian, possessed by God, cannot be simultaneously possessed by a demonic entity.<sup>78</sup> He does apply Matthew 12:43-45, focusing on the word “unoccupied” to argue that a person once delivered from a demon, who does not “occupy” his/her spiritual life with Jesus, with the “opposite” of that from which he/she was delivered, for a failure to do so will worsen that person’s life seven-fold.<sup>79</sup>

Neither Murphy or Hammond necessarily present their conclusions from a strict application of the Biblical text. As Michael Wilkins rightly argues, the Luke 11/Matthew 12 account is not about believers but about unbelievers.

The demon seeks reownership of a person's entire immaterial/material self: "I will return to the house I left (lit. "my house" -- that is why it is called demon possession). So "it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there." The number seven is linked in Scripture with completion, fulfillment and demon returns....

The exorcised person must respond to Jesus’ invitation to believe in Him as Messiah, enter the kingdom of God, and experience new life through His Spirit. The implication here is that this person has not entered the kingdom. Without kingdom transformation, a "cleaned-up" person is more vulnerable to the renewed and persistent attack of the demon world to take back ownership.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Frank Hammond, *Demons and Deliverance in the Ministry of Jesus* (Kirkwood, MO: Impact Christian Books, 2011), 22-23.

<sup>79</sup> Hammond, *Demons and Deliverance*, 24.

<sup>80</sup> Wilkins, *Matthew*, 453.

The key to this account is in the Matthew passage, the word “unoccupied”. From the statements of the apostle Paul, believers have the Holy Spirit living in them (Romans 8:9). A believer's "house", then, is occupied. This teaching is not about a believer; rather, it is about the terrible fate of an unbeliever who persists in the unregenerate state after experiencing the grace of God in deliverance from demonic bondage.<sup>81</sup>

Where some believers often struggle is understanding the connection between their personal holiness (their walk with Jesus) and how the enemy is able to gain access to their minds in order to work his subtle seductions and deadly deceptions. Sin is certainly never a trifle, and it always brings negative consequences. The apostle Paul's examination of the tension between sin and the Spirit clearly shows the need to “dethrone” sin in favor of being guided by the Spirit of God (e.g., Romans 6:14). Every believer is obligated to “offer” themselves as “slaves to righteousness”, which leads to holiness, instead of following in their past, ungodly behavior, of being “slaves to impurity and ever increasing wickedness”, which led to nothing but shame and death. Being set free leads to holiness and to eternal life (Romans 6:20-22). The same basic theme is found in Colossians 3:1-11. The believer, having been “raised with Christ” in salvation, is exhorted to “set (the) mind” on that which is of Christ. Doing this necessary resetting of the mind onto Christ instead of the world, the believer is to “put to death” that which belongs to the “earthly nature”, and also be “rid” of such as anger, rage, and malice.” It is through Christ's completed work on the cross and resurrection that believers are made “without blemish and free from accusation (ESV: “reproach”) (Colossians 1:22).<sup>82</sup> Revelation 12:10 describes the enemy as an “accuser”

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<sup>81</sup> “An empty soul invites unclean renters. A God-filled spirit is armed against all evil” - Owen Crouch, *When God Became Human* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1991), 188.

<sup>82</sup> Eadie, *Colossians*, 80-81 notes that being without accusation, or without reproach (“unreprovable”) means that neither the heart nor the life as a whole can have charges brought against them.

(*katēgōr*<sup>83</sup>) of the brethren; *katēgōr* is the direct, literal translation of the Hebrew *sātān*, indicating a “well-known figure in biblical and early Jewish tradition.”<sup>84</sup> The basis for accusation against believers is their choice to engage in sin. But “accusation” is not being “demonized”; it is the result of giving sin a place when it should have been continually “put to death”.

It is completely outside any Biblical evidence to identify and speak about demons of “hopelessness”, “violence”, “addiction” or “confusion” or “unbelief.”<sup>85</sup> Jesus never employed such a practice, and neither did any of the apostles.<sup>86</sup> Conditions such as hopelessness, confusion, unbelief and others are not the result of demonic incursion but of entertaining works of the flesh — sin. While it is possible demonic entities can work to influence and deceive so that the individual chooses to go against God’s way, it is incoherent to blame as the work of demons what the Bible ascribes to the sinful flesh; the Bible does not in any way connect “despair” or “unbelief”, for example, to demonic activity. The sinful flesh is capable of manifesting such things without any assistance from or participation with the demonic.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> H. Bietenhard, “accuser, accuse”, *NIDNTT*, I:83.

<sup>84</sup> David Aune, *Revelation 6-16* (WBC 52B) (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 700.

<sup>85</sup> This is a practice employed by John Dawson and others who advocate for territorial spirits and spiritual mapping. See John Dawson, *Taking Our Cities for God* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 1989), 24, 29.

<sup>86</sup> “Nor is there a gift of discerning spirits that gives certain individuals supernatural knowledge to know if a person is demonized. Furthermore, it is unbiblical to test people who are not clearly demonized to find ‘hidden demons.’ The only recorded cases of demon possession that Jesus and the apostles dealt with were obvious ones, cases so clear even the unregenerate could recognize the malady” (Konya, *Demons*, 112).

<sup>87</sup> See the objections to Dawson’s “naming” of demons in Steve Mitchell, “Book Review, Part 1: Taking Our Cities for God”, *Answers for India* (<http://www.deceptioninthechurch.com/dawson/index.html>), accessed March 7, 2012.

The level to which demons can accuse, seduce or deceive believers depends, in Rick Renner's analysis, on the state of the individual's spiritual flesh.

One can scream at the devil all day long, but if he or she has willfully permitted area of his or her mind to go unchecked and unguarded -- if he or she has an area of sin they are aware of, but have not been willing to deal with, then they have opened the door for an attack on themselves. All their prayers against the devil will be of no avail. In such case, the devil is not their real enemy; their enemy is their own carnal mind and flesh which must be submitted to the control of the Holy Spirit in order to eradicate these attacks.<sup>88</sup>

The "war" in which believers are engaged in ever day of their earthly lives is the war against the sinful flesh (1 Peter 2:11).<sup>89</sup> The enemy can and will attack, deceive, and/or seduce<sup>90</sup> a believer to take a sinful course of action, especially so if there is a known and unrepented sin in that individual's life.

*Demon spirits have absolutely no power to bring about destruction unless they can find an open door into a person's mind. If such an entrance into the mind can be located, then from this lofty*

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<sup>88</sup> Rick Renner, *Dressed to Kill* (Tulsa, OK: Pillar, 1994), 5-6.

<sup>89</sup> "Abstaining from fleshly passions...is the negative dimension of living a holy and obedient life" (Scot McKnight, *1 Peter* [NIVAC] [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996], 126.

<sup>90</sup> Some refer to this activity of the devil as "demon oppression", which is problematic in that "oppressed" is never connected to demonic activities against believers. Matthew 4:24 in the ESV speaks of "those oppressed by demons" while the NIV uses "demon-possessed." The Greek phrasing, *daimenizomenous*, does not here clearly indicate some kind of demonic incursion or attack; the use of *selēiazomenos* ("moonstruck", probably referring to epilepsy; see Matthew 17:4-21) may well speak to how the ancients understood seizures as being "demonic" in their origin. See Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (WBC 33A) (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 200), 81.

position, evil influences and attacks can begin to be waged 'upon the individual. The Holy Spirit is sure to convict us of these areas and to urge us to repent and change before the devil builds strongholds in our thinking. However, it is still up to us to see that these opened doors are slammed shut and forever closed. If we ignore the Holy Spirit's pleading, and allow sin, willfully permitted temptation or wrong attitudes to continue unconfessed and unchanged, "we are leaving gaping holes through which the enemy will seek to undo us. Most spiritual destruction is avoidable -- if we will reverently listen to the pleading of the Spirit and obey his warnings to us. *Again, demon spirits cannot destroy without an open door into a person's soul — and such an entrance can only be given by way of permission.*"<sup>91</sup>

Ed Murphy argues for “demonization” of believers but against believers being actually “demon possessed”, since he insists “Satan does not possess anything but his own kingdom of fallen spirits.” He agrees with Renner about the dangers of allowing sin to have authority in a believer’s life, but then appears to go beyond Renner in his insistence believers can become “demonized”, having areas of their lives which “can come under the direct influence of Satan through demons operating from outside and inside the believer’s life”.<sup>92</sup>

Murphy further dismisses 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 as having no application to whether believers can or can not be demonized. To insist Paul intends an understanding which precludes demonic incursion into believers is more eisegetical than

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<sup>91</sup> Renner, *Dressed to Kill*, 21-22. (Italics in the original.)

<sup>92</sup> Murphy, *Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*, 430.

exegetical.<sup>93</sup> In support of his thesis, Murphy offers five Biblical case studies.<sup>94</sup>

1. *King Saul*. Murphy claims Saul was “a true Old Testament believer” who was “filled with the Holy Spirit on more than one occasion.” Three times in his life, Saul was afflicted by an evil spirit, causing major changes in his personality.<sup>95</sup>

I would argue two major issues in objection to Murphy’s contention. The first issue is Saul was not a Christian, and Saul’s lifestyle, choices and decisions are antagonistic against him being identified as a “true believer” by any Old Testament terms. The second issue draws from the first: Saul was not fully indwelt by the Holy Spirit.<sup>96</sup> Saul indeed had the Spirit of God come upon him, but it was “upon” not “indwelling” his being.<sup>97</sup> 1 Samuel 19:20-24, which in a basic reading seems to indicate Saul was prophesying as a result of the Spirit’s activity upon him, was probably more a case of his raving because of his ongoing active resistance to the Lord God.<sup>98</sup>

2. *The nation of Israel*. Murphy contends that most of those of adult age sent into captivity were demonized, arguing their

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<sup>93</sup> Murphy, *Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*, 431.

<sup>94</sup> The case studies referenced here are in Murphy, *Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*, 431-432.

<sup>95</sup> Murphy, *Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*, 431.

<sup>96</sup> Anthony D. Palma, *The Holy Spirit: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Springfield, MO: Logion, 2001) 38, notes the Holy Spirit was not a “permanent possession” of the Old Testament people, that He “acted on them when there was specific work to do.”

<sup>97</sup> Whether the Spirit in that time before the coming of Christ and the Day of Pentecost actually indwelt people in the Old Testament or was simply “upon them” or empowering them for certain tasks (e.g., Bezalel, Exodus 31:1-11) has no apparent consensus. For the view that the fullness of the Spirit did not come until the Day of Pentecost, see Geoffrey W. Grogan, “The Significance of Pentecost in the History of Salvation:,” *SBET* 4:2 (1986), 97-107. For the view that the Spirit actually indwelt people before the coming of Christ, see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “The Indwelling Presence of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament,” *EQ* 82.4 (2010), 308-315.

<sup>98</sup> Stanley M. Horton, *What the Bible Says About the Holy Spirit* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing, 1976), 49.

apparently wholesale devotion to the various pagan gods, such as Baal, evidences their being “ensnared by the devil”. He asserts Israel combined the worship of Yahweh with their devotion to the Baals, citing Hosea 2:13, 17. It is difficult to establish any sort of religious syncretism from Hosea 2; the tenor of the passage is one of spiritual and religious adultery, of Israel forsaking Yahweh in favor of the pagan deities.<sup>99</sup> Further, Murphy insists the Israelites became as demonized as the Baal worshipers they had joined”, citing Hosea 9:1, 7-10, 15 - 10:2. It is interesting Hosea never mentions the devil or the demonic as part of Israel’s spiritual malaise; the texts refer to Israel committing adultery or being a prostitute.<sup>100</sup>

Could it be cogently argued that such spiritual and religious prostitution was in fact an indicator of being demonized? I would argue it may well be much less than demonization in any of its forms and more the choice of the sin-tainted human heart to choose the way of sin (cf. Jeremiah 17:9). Nothing in the prophecy concerning Israel’s coming apostasy connects their actions with demonic incursions or activity; it is related to their own innate wickedness (Deuteronomy 31:15-18).

3. *Jews in the synagogue during Jesus’s earthly ministry.* Two examples Murphy provides are Mark 1:21-28 and Mark 1:39. The afflicted individual in Mark 1:21-28 was in the synagogue when the spirit controlling him cried out against Jesus. This example does not advance any case for believers being demonized; the man in the synagogue was not a believer in Christ and as such was not indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

4. *The woman with the issue of blood* (Luke 13:10-17). The woman’s medical issue is explained by Jesus as something the

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<sup>99</sup> Duane A. Garrett, *Hosea, Joel* (NAC 19A) (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 84-85.

<sup>100</sup> One of Murphy’s New Testament supporting texts is listed as “1 Corinthians 19:19-22”, which is an obvious typographical error. It makes it difficult to understand exactly where Murphy was reaching in support of his thesis.

enemy had done to her for many years. Murphy perhaps overstates the evidence. The woman was not necessarily demonized but was afflicted; the textual information given does not allow for clearly determining whether the woman was actually under the power of a demonic entity or the phrasing Jesus used was “an idiom for having a debilitating ailment.”<sup>101</sup> The language of Luke 10:12 is not typical of the times when Jesus confronted an actual demonic entity; for example, Jesus’ encounter with the demonized man in Gadara (Luke 8:26-39) records the Lord specifically and directly conversing with the demons before demanding they depart. The deliverance of the young boy in Luke 9:37-43 does not give any specific wording but simply informs Jesus rebuked the “impure spirit” (verse 42) before returning the boy to his father. In the case of the woman with the infirmity, Jesus simply says “You are set free from your infirmity” (Luke 13:12). There is nothing in the text demonstrating Jesus cast out a demon to set the woman free.

5. *The case of Ananias and Sapphira* (Acts 5:1-10). Murphy asserts this couple are believers in Christ.<sup>102</sup> The apostle Peter’s revelatory accusation against them is that Stan has filled their hearts (cf. Acts 5:3). Horton argues Satan had indeed *influenced* this couple, but the responsibility is fully theirs. Their apparent desire for both money and for fame or notice within the Church that they grieved the Holy Spirit, providing room for Satan to deceive and seduce them.<sup>103</sup> The enemy’s activity of lying, seducing, deceiving and so on is not evidence of being demonized. It is better evidence of one having cooled in ardor for the Lord, giving room to entertain thoughts other than those of the Spirit of God.

As Murphy continues in his work, he asserts the New Testament supports such things as God allowing Satan to “take

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<sup>101</sup> John Nolland, *Luke 9:21-18:34* (WBC 35B) (Dallas, TX: Word, 1993), 724.

<sup>102</sup> Murphy, *Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*, 432.

<sup>103</sup> Stanley M. Horton, *Acts* (Springfield, MO: Logion, 1981), 117. (Italics mine).

the life of godly, obedient, faithful believers.”<sup>104</sup> He offers three passages in Revelation to support his statement.

The first in Revelation 2:10. It seems Murphy has connected the warning about the devil persecuting believers by having them imprisoned to the exhortation for believers to remain faithful, “even to the point of death.” There is no doubt the enemy was behind the local magistrates who condemned believers to imprisonment and to torture, but it is a stretch to then conclude that God “allows” Satan to take those believer’s lives. God specifically prohibited Satan from putting Job to death (cf. Job 2:6), Hebrews 2:14 says Jesus, in His passion, broke “the power of him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil”. Westcott writes the power of the devil over death was owing to the presence of sin; the devil ruled over death but lost that authority in the life bringing work of Christ.<sup>105</sup>

The next passage is Revelation 12:17. This is part of John’s vision of the woman, the child and the dragon. The vision demonstrates the anger of the dragon, a metaphor for the devil (Revelation 12:9). That the dragon/devil wages war against the saints of God is not necessarily indicative that he has some kind of innate power to take their lives; this is perhaps better understood as persecution for being a child of God.<sup>106</sup> While it is true times of persecution results in martyrs, and their deaths have been occasioned through circumstances orchestrated by the enemy, no child of God dies because Satan “took” their life.

Murphy asserts the demonic condition of “demonized believers” is often not profound or necessarily noticed.

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<sup>104</sup> Murphy, *Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*, 432.

<sup>105</sup> B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1951), 53. Wiley, *Hebrews*, 98-99, connects the enemy power of death to the fact of human sin and transgressions. In Christ’s finished work of redemption, He “destroy(ed) or (brought) to nought the power of Satan over death.”

<sup>106</sup> A. J. Beagley, “Beasts, Dragon, Sea, Conflict Motif”, *DLNTID*, 128.

Generally speaking, the demonic condition of demonized believers is usually mild. Most are able to maintain a normal life. They usually realize that something is wrong within them, though they seldom suspect they are suffering from demonization. Many are sincere, Spirit-filled Christians often bound by inexplicable fears, confusion, uncontrollable emotions, and other disturbing phenomena.<sup>107</sup>

Despite Murphy's insistence the Scripture nowhere states "the Holy Spirit cannot or will not dwell in a human body or any other area, where demons are present,"<sup>108</sup> I will argue the Scripture does, in fact teach that the Holy Spirit does not co-abide with anything demonic.

This teaching, that believers can be indwelt and enslaved by demons, despises the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. It teaches that demons which inhabit a person do not leave when he becomes a Christian, and that a Christian can be enslaved or controlled by demons by habitually choosing to sin. The result of this would be that a true Christian, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, is also inhabited (indwelt, controlled, enslaved) by Satan. (This, of course, would explain why so many people who have "responded" to a Gospel presentation are not walking in the Spirit or being controlled by the Spirit.) Frankly, this teaching is unbiblical and irreverent. The Bible does not teach this doctrine anywhere, nor does it give any example of a born-again believer being demon-controlled or exorcised of a demon. However, the Bible does teach that "the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2

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<sup>107</sup> Murphy, *Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*, 433.

<sup>108</sup> Murphy, *Handbok for Spiritual Warfare*, 430.

Corinthians 3:17). The Holy Spirit would not allow a believer to be enslaved by a demon.<sup>109</sup>

The apostle Paul is definite in the separation from the authority of the enemy through participation in the world and the flesh, through living in sin, once a person has received salvation in Christ. He reminds the Corinthians of their former way of life but then tells them (1) that way of life is now in the past and (2) they have been “washed”, “sanctified” and “justified” in Christ and “by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Paul’s wording in describing what the Corinthians once were connects Christ’s prior action in the cross to their current state; the implication is those who are without Christ remain in their lost, sin-fueled life.<sup>110</sup> God’s action in the life of the believer changes their status from God-rejecting, and thus very much open to demonic influence, to God-accepted in Christ, the Holy Spirit effecting the full measure and benefits of Christ’s work in the believer. God brought salvation to bear on the human condition, and the Holy Spirit makes it effectual in those who believe.<sup>111</sup>

It seems Murphy allows for far too much influence of the demonic without necessarily giving proper recognition of the Scripture’s — and particularly, the apostle Paul’s — understanding of the dangers of the “flesh”, the “seat of lust and gross appetites”.<sup>112</sup> Believers in Christ are given the responsibility to set their minds on Christ (Colossians 3:1-3), to put to death and be rid of that which pertains to the sinful flesh (Colossians 3:5-9) because they have “taken off” the old self and

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<sup>109</sup> Austin, “On the Demonization of Believers”, 17-18.

<sup>110</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 245.

<sup>111</sup> Fee, *Corinthians*, 247. See also W. Madison Grace II, “Through the Holy Spirit: His Work in Salvation”, *JBTM* 6:1 (Spring 2009), 87, who rightly notes: “An understanding of union with Christ in salvation needs to be seen as a work of the Holy Spirit. It is Christ with whom Christians are united, but it is by means of the Holy Spirit that this union occurs.” If believers are united with Christ (e.g., Romans 6:5) then it is incoherent they should at the same time be “united” with any kind of demonic entity.

<sup>112</sup> Nigel Turner, *Christian Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1981), 177.

“put on” the new self, which is being renewed in the image of its Creator” (Colossians 3:10). They are exhorted to stay away from the lusts of the flesh which “wage war against” the soul (1 Peter 2:11). Romans 6:5-7 declares the old body of sin has been “done away with”, making those who believe “no longer slaves of sin.” Having “died” in Christ (cf. Galatians 2:20), the believer is set free from sin, and any stranglehold a demonic entity might try to claim.

Murphy asserts nothing in Scripture “states that true believers cannot be indwelt by demons.”<sup>113</sup> I would argue such a verse would be superfluous; Paul’s emphasis in Romans 6-8 makes a clear division between living in the flesh (in sin) and living in and by the Spirit of God. As Austin has noted:

Yet these spiritual warfare advocates do not teach this particular aspect of our union with Christ in this way. Rather they teach that the believer's victory over Satan is primarily up to the believer himself. This is clearly unbiblical in light of this doctrine. God has promised to preserve us in union with Christ-not just to the day of salvation but through the day of salvation. Paul explains this preservation of God in Romans 8:26-39. Satan cannot even bring a charge against God's elect (v. 33), much less indwell and enslave us ("Or what harmony has Christ with Belial?" [2 Corinthians 6:15]). We are conquerors through Christ (v. 37), not slaves of Satan. "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" (v. 32).<sup>114</sup>

“Light”, a metaphor for the holiness of God, and “darkness”, the world of sin and the sphere in which the enemy operates,

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<sup>113</sup> Murphy, *handbook for Spiritual Warfare*, 431.

<sup>114</sup> Austin, “On the Demonization of Believers”, 17.

cannot exist simultaneously in the same place. Where the light of Christ exists, the darkness of the enemy cannot. One must only read through the Gospels to see how much agony demonic entities experienced simply being close to Jesus.<sup>115</sup>

**Is “demonized” the best term to use?** It may well be that much of this discussion devolves into a battle of semantics and definition. That a true believer cannot be “possessed” by a demon is generally consensus among conservative theologians, whether evangelicals or Pentecostals. The issue is the level to which demonic influence can affect a believer in Christ, and the term “demonization” is used to indicate indwelling the believer in co-existence with the Holy Spirit, and as a blanket word to cover harassment, intimidation, opposition and oppression. That the enemy can harass, intimidate and oppress believers, bringing as much misery into their lives as possible, and standing in the way of the work of God in which they are engaged, is abundantly clear in the Scriptures. Paul believed that Satan had strategies designed to “outwit”<sup>116</sup> believers in order to ruin their lives in Christ (2 Corinthians 2:11). He also believed the delay in his trip to Thessalonica was “hindered”<sup>117</sup> by the devil (1 Thessalonians 2:18). Drawing anything beyond the idea of interference from the enemy is to argue from silence; Paul’s audience perhaps understood the intent but since Paul did not explain it, present day readers can go no farther than to know that somehow, the enemy “cut in” on what Paul had intended to do.<sup>118</sup> But the fact of Satan’s interference does not

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<sup>115</sup> See “In Considering Deliverance Ministries and Demon Possession”, *Let Us Reason Ministries* (<http://www.letusreason.org/Pent24.htm>, accessed May 21, 2012).

<sup>116</sup> “Outwit” (NIV) is from *pleonekteo*, “to take advantage of” or “to make gain of”. See William D. Mounce, *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 1245.

<sup>117</sup> From *enkoptō*, “to cut into”, and thus “to block the way.” The NEB/NASB use of “thwarted” expresses the contextual sense well. See Ralph Earle, *Word Meanings in the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 368.

<sup>118</sup> Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (NICNT) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 94-95.

then *a priori* demand a view of “demonized”, if by the term, Paul was somehow “indwelt” by the enemy as part of the hindrance.

Perhaps the word “demonized” carries too much theological baggage with it for it to be used outside the instances where the word *daimonizomai* (lit., “to be possessed by a demon”<sup>119</sup>), is used, which would be mostly in the Gospel of Matthew (e.g., Matthew 9:32). In those instances, the demonized people were not believers in Christ, and thus would not have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. It is suggested here, then, that the better term is “demon-influenced”, because the interaction of the demonic in human affairs is all too clearly demonstrated in the New Testament. That influence allows for the reality of the temptation to sin or rebel against God and preserves Paul's arguments in Romans 8 concerning the on-going strife between the spirit and the flesh or sinful nature, as well as makes sense of Ephesians 6:10-18, especially verse 11, where Paul points to the need for the armor of God as the defense against the “devil's schemes.”<sup>120</sup> The devil will harass believers, the devil will oppose believers, the devil will do whatever he can to bring defeat into a believer's life, a defeat possible only if the believer allows the influence of God through the Word and through the Spirit to wane.<sup>121</sup> If the enemy can succeed in taking control of even one small part of the believer's mind, using lies and deceptions to manipulate how the believer thinks, he will succeed in poisoning that mind against the things of God.

It is for that reason, among others, that Paul exhorts believers to a transformation of their minds (Romans 12:1-2), a setting of their minds where Christ lives (Colossians 3:1-3) and to not give in to the gratification of the sinful flesh (Romans 13:14). Paul's comments in Ephesians 4:26-27, about not giving the devil a foothold, do not definitively point to demonization of a believer

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<sup>119</sup> W. Foerster, “*daimon*”, *TDNT*, 139-140.

<sup>120</sup> “Schemes” or “wiles” (KJV) is *methodeia*, used only twice in the NT, once in Ephesians 4:1-4, the other in Ephesians 6. The basic sense is “threats to which Christians are exposed”. See *NTDNTW*, 895.

<sup>121</sup> Renner, *Dressed to Kill*, 65-66.

in the sense of indwelling, but it does point to the reality of demonic influence when a believer prefers fleshly ways to godly ways.<sup>122</sup> When those ungodly ways are preferred, as Renner previously noted, the mind is opened up to the influence of the enemy and his deceptive subtleties.

Despite the lengthy papers and explanations offered by those who would advocate for demonization of believers in Christ, the Scripture teaches no such thing, and efforts to interpret certain passages to bolster the case are more of special pleading or poor exegesis. Austin's closing remarks in his article are fitting.

There is no reason for a Christian to live in uncertainty and in fear of demons and evil spirits lurking in dark places, waiting to inhabit and enslave them when they sin... Therefore the recent teachings on spiritual warfare and deliverance ministries regarding the believer are aberrant, without proper biblical support, and should be avoided... For the believer, Satan is a defeated enemy. Of course we must still live with the sin nature and the resulting battle which Paul describes in Romans 7: 14-25. (This passage is neither the example of a demonized Christian nor of a defeated, carnal Christian, but it is the description of the struggle and cry of a normal Christian who loves his Lord and is committed to living for Him.) It is through this sin nature that Satan tries to influence us by temptation and deception. But the Lord has given us all that we need to be strong in the strength of His might and to stand firm against the schemes of the Devil. He has given us the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:14-17). Let us put on the full armor of God and

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<sup>122</sup> John Muddiman, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (BNTC) (London, UK and New York, NY: Continuum, 2001), 225-226, compares to 2 Corinthians 2:11, where the lack of forgiveness within the Body of Christ makes an opportunity for the enemy to tempt believers to further sin.

resist the evil one. We are the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. His victorious army against whom the very gates of hell cannot prevail. And in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Christ who loved us (Romans 8:37).<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Austin, "On the Demonization of Believers", 24-25.

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## Abbreviations

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| <i>AJBT</i> | <i>American Journal of Biblical Theology</i>                      |
| BTDB        | Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible                         |
| <i>CJT</i>  | <i>Canadian Journal of Theology</i>                               |
| <i>CJET</i> | <i>Caribbean Journal of Evangelical Theology</i>                  |
| DJG         | <i>Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels</i> (1st ed.)              |
| DLNTID      | <i>Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments</i> |
| DPL         | <i>Dictionary of Paul and His Letters</i> (1st ed.)               |
| ed., eds.   | editor, editors, edited by  |
| EDT         | Evangelical Dictionary of Theology                                |
| <i>EQ</i>   | <i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>                                      |
| ESV         | English Standard Version  |
| ICC         | International Critical Commentary                                 |
| <i>JBTM</i> | <i>Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry</i>                  |
| KJV         | King James Version  |
| NAC         | New American Commentary   |
| NASB        | New American Standard Bible                                       |
| NEB         | New English Bible   |

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|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| NCBC          | New Century Bible Commentary                                  |
| NDT           | New Dictionary of Theology                                    |
| NIBC          | New International Biblical Commentary                         |
| NICNT         | New International Commentary on the New Testament             |
| NIDNTT        | <i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i> |
| NIV           | New International Version                                     |
| NIVAC         | New International Version Application Commentary              |
| n. c.         | no city   |
| n. d.         | no date   |
| n. p.         | no page number  |
| NTDNTW        | NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words             |
| <i>RefRev</i> | <i>Reformation and Revival</i>                                |
| <i>SBET</i>   | <i>Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology</i>              |
| TDNT          | Theological Dictionary of the New Testament                   |
| TNTC          | Tyndale New Testament Commentary                              |
| WBC           | Word Biblical Commentary                                      |