



CAN DEMONS POSSESS CHRISTIANS?

Settling the long-running debate

BY DAVID DIGA HERNANDEZ

The devil would like nothing more than for us to believe what we see in the natural world is all there is. He'd love for us to think the supernatural exists only in popular novels and TV shows. That is deception of the darkest and most dangerous sort.

The devil is real, and he is obsessed with your destruction. He leads an army of ancient, menacing beings who exist upon the plains of an unseen world and stalk about with malicious intent.

They seek bodies to inhabit. We see this in Jesus' words to His disciples: "When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through dry places seeking rest, but finds none. Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and brings with itself seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it be also with this evil generation" (Matt. 12:43-45).

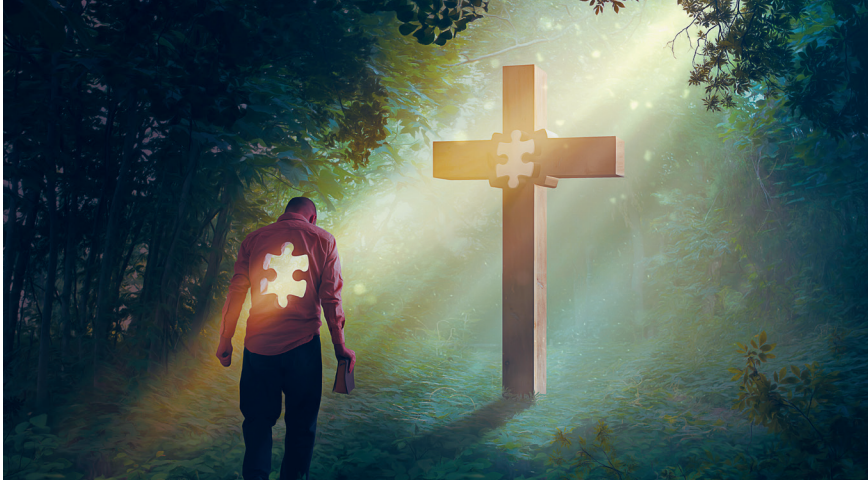
Demons grow tired outside of a body. Whatever their specific tasks may be, the activity becomes more strenuous for the demon when it is outside a human vessel. By contrast, when they are in a body, demons can possess great strength, as the following story attests: "When He had come out of the boat, immediately a man with an unclean spirit came out of the tombs and met Him. He lived among the tombs. And no one could constrain him, not even with chains, because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. But he had pulled the chains apart and broken the shackles to pieces. And no one could subdue him" (Mark 5:2-4).

So it seems that demons are more effective when carrying out their purposes through a human vessel. The firmer their grasp upon the physical world, the more effective they can be. This is why they seek to possess people. But there are some people demons cannot possess.

Demons Want to Dominate Mankind

Any discussion of the demonic starts with understanding there are only two kingdoms: the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of darkness. We know God the Father is the ultimate ruler of all and Christ is seated at His right hand because the Bible tells us so: "If you then were raised with Christ, desire those things which are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God" (Col. 3:1).

But the kingdom of darkness is also in operation. And though it is ultimately defeated, anyone who is not part of God's kingdom is under its control, as these verses



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attest: “Jesus answered them, ‘Truly, truly I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin’” (John 8:34) and “We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in wickedness” (1 John 5:19).

From their attempts to possess mankind and keep us enslaved to sin, it is obvious, once considered, that demonic beings desire to dominate mankind to build their kingdom. Ever since Satan took man’s dominion in the Garden of Eden, there has been an ongoing war between mankind and the forces of hell (Satan, fallen angels and demons) for influence in the earth. We read of this in the book of Acts: “To open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me” (Acts 26:18).

This battle is also referenced in Ephesians: “You formerly walked according to the age of this world and according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2).

Satan wants to build his kingdom by tempting us to disobey God, just as he did Adam and Eve. Through disobedience, people become slaves. So Satan and his demonic forces have systematized their efforts to focus on one thing: causing man to disobey. Such systematized attacks are carried out in a very organized manner. Demonic beings work to ensure that many stay blind and, therefore, prone to reject Christ.

But those who have been redeemed by Christ are no longer enslaved to the kingdom of darkness: “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and has transferred us into the kingdom of His dear Son” (Col. 1:13).

Many people avoid fully committing their lives to Christ because they believe the Christian life is limiting and oppressive. However, the truth is just the opposite. Without Christ, people are slaves to sin and subject to degrading and destructive lifestyles. Whether they realize it or not, those who live in sin are bound, not free. They are subjects of the kingdom of darkness.

Satan Has Authority— With Limitations

The kingdom of darkness is rooted in rebellion. It is made up of all that resists the will of God. Because he was the first to rebel, Satan is the leader of the dark kingdom. Not even Jesus denies Satan’s rule over the sinful.

When tempting Jesus in the wilderness, Satan offered Him the kingdoms of the world if Jesus would worship him. Given that Christ is all-knowing, why would Satan offer Jesus all the nations of the world if they weren’t his to give? It’s very difficult to tempt someone with something they know you cannot give. Rather than deny that Satan could give Him the world, Christ instead chose to resist his temptation. Jesus knows Satan has influence in the earth through the kingdom of darkness.

Jesus also acknowledges the demons are subject to the rule and authority of Satan. The religious people of Jesus’ day watched Him cast demons out of people, and after seeing those exorcisms, the religious rulers accused Him of doing so under the authority of Satan. Jesus, of course, corrected the accusation while revealing Satan as the king of demons. “And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, ‘He is possessed by Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons He casts out demons.’ So He called them to Him and said to them in parables, ‘How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand’” (Mark 3:22-24).

So Satan does, indeed, have some level of authority upon the earth because he was able to usurp it from man back in the Garden of Eden. Now those who live in sin are subject to that dominion. They become puppets through their disobedience, and they live out the will of Satan in the earth, thus giving him influence. However, though their authority is powerful, both Satan and his demons have limitations.

So Can Demons Possess a Christian?

Mankind is tripartite, meaning we are made up of three parts: body, soul and spirit. You are a spirit who has a soul that lives in a body. The apostle Paul wrote of this in his letter to the Thesalonians: “May the very God of peace sanctify you completely. And I pray to God that your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:23).

Before he is saved, a man’s spirit is dead. But when we accept Christ, our spirits come alive in Him. This is why Jesus said in John 3:5 that a man must be born again of the Spirit. Our spirit is what communicates with God, who is Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10-12). The spirit is where we experience inner fellowship with God. Demons cannot dwell there because “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Cor. 3:17b).

But something else happens when you are saved. Your body becomes the dwelling place for the

Holy Spirit: “What? Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God, and that you are not your own?” (1 Cor. 6:19).

You interact with the earth through your body. This is why some theologians call the body your “earth suit.” But if your body is God’s temple, it can’t be a dwelling place for demons. The Holy Spirit certainly doesn’t want a demon as a roommate, and He wouldn’t allow one to stay.

So we see that demonic beings cannot dwell in your spirit, and they cannot dwell in your body. This leaves your soul, which is your mind, will and emotions. These are the components that make up your distinct personality. So can a Christian’s soul be demon possessed?

Scripture seems to indicate that demons seek bodies to inhabit, and the Bible doesn’t talk about “soul possession,” which leads me to believe that demons do not possess souls. If they did, demons would gain authority over a person’s will, something that God doesn’t even allow Himself to take from us. Furthermore, if demons were looking for souls to inhabit, how could the demonic legion have possessed the pigs in Matthew 8? Pigs do not have souls.

Also, if one’s spirit and body are dwelling places of the Holy Spirit, how could any demonic force have any level of comfort possessing the soul of the same? Demons could not even approach Jesus without being tormented. I, therefore, must say I see no biblical or logical reason to believe demons can possess a believer.

Possession, Oppression and the Redeemed

However, that doesn’t mean demons are powerless to influence the believer. They cannot possess the soul or the body, but they can attack the soul and the body. Yes, sadly, demonic beings can carry out successful assaults against Christians. They can assault us with fear, doubt and worry, for instance, and they can affect us through sins we refuse to let go of. But just to be clear, I would not call such demonic success “possession,” nor would I call it “oppression.”

Some believers use the term demonically “oppressed” to describe a lower level of demonic influence on Christians. They’ll say something such as, “Christians cannot be possessed, but they can be oppressed.” This has become a common but incorrect view. Oppression, as it is most commonly understood, is still a form of demonic

the demonic being like the man in Mark 5 who cried, “Legion, for we are many.” They growl, hiss, contort, shake and rage.

It is one thing for a believer to appear weighed down, confused or otherwise discomfited by demonic assault. It’s something else entirely for a believer to display signs of full-on

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dominance, so I don’t believe a Christian can even be oppressed.

This is, to some extent, a matter of semantics. Demons can most certainly affect believers. Otherwise, what meaning do we find in the biblical commands to be aware of our demonic foes? I usually avoid the term “oppression” because it is often associated with a kind of less powerful “possession.” So instead of oppression, I prefer to use the word “attack.” For the believer, demonic attack may cause depression, loss of peace, confusion and even feelings of condemnation. However, this is not the result of demonic ownership but demonic assault. Demons can—and certainly will—be against believers, but they cannot be in us.

On the issue of possession now, the reason some believe Christians can be possessed is because some Christians seem to be under demonic possession. They scream and yell when the Word of God is being preached. They writhe on the floor in agony. They speak for

demonic possession. That’s an important distinction. Any believer can be affected by demonic assault and display the results of that assault. But no believer, biblically speaking, can be possessed.

Yet some act out the mannerism of a demoniac, one who is possessed by a demon. Yes, some who claim to be Spirit-filled sometimes demonstrate these extreme signs of demonic possession. And many have difficulty explaining that. If Christians cannot be demon possessed, why do believers sometimes act as though they are? There really can be only one of two explanations: Either they aren’t really saved or they aren’t really demon possessed.

In the end, demon possession has to do with ownership. How can we belong to any other if we belong to Christ? As the apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:23, “And you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.”

Because the Bible is clear, the matter should be settled: Demons cannot possess believers. Christians can be emotional. Christians can even be convinced that they are demon possessed. But Christians cannot actually be demon possessed. The unbeliever, on the other hand, is a potential vessel for demonic beings. Actually, the unbeliever is already a slave in the kingdom of darkness. ◀

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