

## Can a Believer be Demon Possessed?

The following paper was written by Mike Jentes for Dr. Plaster (*Theological Foundations 1*) at Grace College, IN in November 1993 with minor editing in July 2000.

There are only two answers to the question of "can believers be demon possessed?" Obviously, the answers are yes or no. Before a conclusion is drawn there are a variety of issues that one must look at dealing with this topic.

First of all, this author does not like the vocabulary that is used for this topic. The word possession is not a New Testament word (neither is oppression). These words were used as the Greek language was translated into English. The word which we translate, as demon possessed is *daimonizomai* in the Greek. The word *daimonizomai* means, "to have, to be vexed with, or possessed by a demon" and also carries the idea of ownership (Beals 2). In *Vine's Dictionary* it is defined as "to act under the control of a demon." Instead of dealing with the descriptions of the term in English (which invariably lead back to the discussion of terminology), one needs to dig into the original Greek word to see what the word itself says. The verb *daimonizomai* is aorist, passive, punctiliar (from Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich); which means that the action happened (aorist), the action is being received by the object (i.e. The ball hit Bob, passive), and it happened at a specific point in time (punctiliar). In other words, the demon (or demons) came into a person at a point in time in the past and that demon (or those demons) controls the person.

The problem begins when one tries to convey this meaning in a word or phrase. Why not let the Scripture speak for itself? Just as translators brought the word *baptizo* directly into English as baptize why isn't this done with *daimonizomai* and the word demonized. Demonized could be used as the term to describe exactly what the word *daimonizomai* does in Greek. Terms such as possession, which is an explanation of the Greek term, could then be dropped from the discussion and make things much clearer. The current discussion of this topic often blurs terms such as possession, so each time one writes or speaks on this topic he must define his terms. If all people could refer to one set of terms using the biblical ideas, then this discussion would be much clearer.

The use of the word *daimonizomai* is limited to the gospels. Here is a listing of where the seven appearances of this word are:

- > Matthew 4:24; 8:16, 28, 33; 9:32; 12:22; 15:22.
- > Mark 1:32; 5:15, 16, 18.
- > Luke 8:36.
- > John 10:21.

As Paul A. Beals examined the seven passages of Scripture in which the word *daimonizomai* appears he drew four conclusions:

- 1.) Usage of the term is limited to unbelievers. Nowhere in Scripture is this term used of regenerate persons.
- 2.) The term indicates another personality indwelling the person.
- 3.) The term demonstrates control by another personality at the will of that personality.
- 4.) In each context where the term occurs, without exception Christ delivered the victims. (2-3)

As Beals pointed out, the use of *daimonizomai* is limited to unbelievers. Not once is this word used of believers. The argument has been used that Christians cannot be demon possessed because they have the Holy Spirit in them and that the Holy Spirit and demons cannot coexist in the same

place. The first point (Christians are indwelt with the Spirit) is true because of verses like Romans 8:9 and Galatians 4:6, but the idea that the Holy Spirit and demons cannot dwell in the same body comes into question. Where is the "clear, emphatic Scriptural support" (Murphy chap 53) for this?

Although logic may say that the Spirit and demons cannot both indwell a person, as humans we are handicapped because we do not understand the spiritual world. To impose our logic into a world that we know very little about is very naive and probably will not give an accurate account to what is going on in that realm.

Believers can be influenced, but not demonized or controlled, by demons. These influences are made through the "footholds" which Christians leave for Satan and his demons through their sin. Paul uses this "foothold" terminology. Paul never used the language of "demonization" (often described as "demon possession") in his letters, which is so common in the Gospels. The closest he came to "possession" language is his concept of giving a "foothold to the devil" as found in Ephesians 4:27... *Topos* is the Greek word that the NIV translates as "foothold." It could also be translated "opportunity" (NASB, RSV) or "chance"(TEV) (Arnold 128).

Can demons influence believers? Why would Paul encourage believers to put on the "full armor of God" (Eph. 6:10-17) if there was no way the demons could touch Christians? The battle is against "spiritual forces"(Eph. 6:12). Believers fight against them and in the heat of the battle can be influenced by demons. The sin in the believer's life is the way demons influence Christians. There are degrees to which demons influence believers. Some influence is to a lesser degree and some influence is very severe. In fact, the very severe influencing by demons can look just like the person is demonized when this is not the case. The demons have not gained control of the believer, but have influenced him to such an extent that it appears as though he has been demonized.

A lot of the ideas about believers being demonized and possessed come from stories and experiences people have had. One must be careful of these experiences changing one's theology. "Shall one construct his theological system on the basis of recorded experiences or on the foundation of clearly defined Biblical ideas?" (Davis 12)

When it comes down to the base question of "can believers be demon possessed?" we need a change of vocabulary and need to ask the question "can believers be demonized?". Believers **cannot** be demonized because 1) the word was never connected to believers in the Scriptures and 2) being demonized means yielding control and ownership to the demons. Can a believer be influenced by demons? Yes, the Christian leaves the door open for demonic influences when there is sin in his life.

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