

Demonization

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Strange as it may seem, our versions of the Bible mislead us on this subject. The noun 'demon' is simply a transliteration of the Greek *δαιμονιον* or *δαιμων*. I wish they had done the same thing with the corresponding verb, *δαιμονιζω*. In that event we would have the verb 'demonize'. But no, the translators put 'possessed' of a demon. As a result we have tended to think of demon activity only in terms of possession. Well, so what is the problem? I suggest the following.

By 'possession' the translators presumably intended to connote 'control', but the more common meaning denotes 'ownership', and most people seem to take the second meaning. This has serious consequences. First, the concept is wrong, since demons do not and cannot 'own' human beings (although a demon will often claim that its victim "belongs" to it).¹ Second, it has fostered a misunderstanding about Christians and demon 'possession'—since a believer belongs to God it is presumably impossible that a demon should own him as well. We need to stop using the word 'possessed' in this connection altogether and replace it with the more precise term 'controlled'.

Demon control certainly exists, but it represents only a small part of the enemy's activity against mankind, precisely the most extreme cases. (Although organic insanity does exist it would not surprise me to verify that most cases of insanity involve at least some demonizing.) The vast majority of the demons' attacks should not be characterized as control. There are less severe forms that are sometimes called oppression or obsession. They also cause physical problems. But I believe that the most frequent attacks interfere with our minds in less obvious ways; so much so that most of the time we are not even aware of it. I suggest that we use the term 'demonization' to refer to any and all direct interference, whether in the mind or the body. The following continuum will help us to visualize the concept:

minds | bodies | obsession | oppression | control

Note that I have not included temptation to evil in this continuum. What is included in the concept of demonization, however, encompasses a world of suffering. I make a distinction between the types of interference in the continuum above and temptation to do evil. Those hit us directly and effectively but without our perceiving or understanding it (many times). Temptation is something that is presented to our conscious mind, as an option. If the Lord Jesus was tempted by Satan (see Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13), we need not think that we will escape. I am sure there is no need to belabor this point since presumably everyone recognizes that he suffers temptation. Which makes 1 Corinthians 10:13 a precious promise. "No temptation

¹ Within Satanism there are 'robots', people who have turned themselves over to the complete control of a demon. For practical purposes a 'robot' is owned by his demon.

has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." That is to say, the way out exists, but we do not always use it.

We need to pay attention to the truth stated in James 1:13. "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God', for God cannot be tempted with evil, nor does he himself tempt anyone." The Text is very clear, God **never** tempts us to do evil. So then, when we are tempted we don't need to hesitate even one second—there is no need to roll it around on your tongue or wonder if maybe it comes from God—we should reject the idea immediately, knowing that it cannot be from God and therefore must be from the enemy. It is not smart to play with fire.

Let us now consider some consequences of the translation "possessed". I am not sure how far that rendering is at fault, but 'traditional' churches and schools scarcely touch the subject; perhaps because they think only in terms of ownership and conclude that believers are exempt. Whatever the explanation, you could attend certain churches during 20 years and never hear any teaching on Satan and the demons. On the other hand, 'pentecostal' or 'charismatic' churches and schools do at least deal with the subject, even if only partially. During deliverance sessions, as they are called, they tend to deal mainly with cases of control—is that not so? When does the leader of the service expel a demon? Only when it manifests itself—right? Someone begins to scream, foam at the mouth, roll on the ground or give some other evidence of foreign control, at which the leader confronts the demon and commands it to leave. But if the demon keeps still, what happens? Nothing, usually—nobody bothers it; its presence is not discerned. I know that some people order the demons to show themselves, but do all obey? How do we know? Or if the manifestation is not of a type that we recognize as 'possession', who will identify and repel it? It seems clear to me that even in the churches where there is expulsion of demons the greater part of the enemy's activity against us goes unrecognized. They are focusing only on control.

I see another consequence that can be rather serious. When we conceive of demonic activity only in terms of ownership, and when a church teaches that a believer cannot be 'possessed', the following occurs. A believer is demonized. In terms of the continuum I am suggesting it is not a case of control, yet the person knows he is being attacked. But the only terminology he knows for talking about demonic attack is 'possession' and the church teaches that a believer cannot be 'possessed'. So the person is plunged into anguish—he knows he is saved but a believer cannot be 'possessed'; yet he is being attacked and knows it. What is the explanation and how can he escape? He cannot say anything to the church because if he admits that he is being 'possessed' then they will no longer accept him as a believer. He does not dare talk and so he cannot receive help. Even if he did talk, he would not receive adequate help because the leaders think only in terms of ownership. As a result of all

that, the poor believer may even reach the point of doubting his salvation! The worst of it all is that such suffering is simply unnecessary. We must learn to speak in terms of demonization, understand that believers certainly are demonized, and explain the use of the spiritual weapons that are at our disposal.

In many evangelical circles there exists the catastrophic notion that we are, so to speak, exempt or untouchable—i.e. that a demon may not touch a believer. Indeed, there is a verse that seems to say just that, 1 John 5:18. "We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him." There you have it, "the wicked one does not touch him"—could anything be clearer? Well, let us slow down a bit. What might the semantic content of "touch" be here? It cannot refer to temptation to evil, because the Lord Jesus was tempted (Matthew 4:1-11) and if He could be, then obviously we can too. It cannot refer to an attack against the physical body, because the Apostle Paul was thus attacked (2 Corinthians 12:7), and if he could be, then clearly we can also. It cannot refer to interference in the mind, because the Apostle Peter suffered such interference (Matthew 16:22-23), and if he could be victimized in that way, why should we imagine that we will escape? If our verb 'touch' does not include those three things, then what is left? However, the real solution here is different.

What is the antecedent of the pronoun "him"? Just who is it that the wicked one cannot touch? The context is clear—it is "whoever is born of God". Right? Now then, are you born of God? Who among us will say that he is born of God? I will. And if you have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, you may too. But when did it happen, when your mother gave birth to you? No. Only Jesus was born that way; He was literally begotten by God in the virgin Mary. But what about us? We are born of God the moment we are regenerated. Yet we do not lose our identity; everyone who knew us before we were born again still knows us afterwards. So then, just what is it in me that is "born of God"? It cannot include anything that I, Wilbur, was before the new birth. What then? I take it to be the new nature or 'new man' that the Holy Spirit begets in me. We cannot equate the 'new man' with the Holy Spirit, exactly, but there is a close connection between the two. So much so that in Galatians 5:17 it is "the Spirit" that fights against the flesh. That which in me is born of God is the new man, and this it is, aided by the Holy Spirit in me, that the wicked one cannot touch. It happens that I, Wilbur, am now (after conversion) a mixture of two natures and as a whole being am most certainly 'touchable'. The enemy probably attempts to attack me every day.

Our principal versions render 1 John 5:18 rather differently, offering two serious discrepancies. Where NKJV has "does not sin", NIV has "does not continue to sin". Here it is not a problem of textual variants; they are both rendering the same Greek phrase. The verb 'to sin' is a simple present indicative, but negated—the natural, normal meaning is "does not sin". So where did NIV get the verb "continue"? From

their theological presuppositions, that they have imposed on the Text (also in 1 John 3:9). (In all fairness, they would give a different answer. They would probably tell us that the present tense in Greek has 'linear' force. Well, sometimes, up to a point; sort of like English. If I ask, "Do you drink coffee?" and you answer, "Yes I do"—what should I understand, that you continually drink coffee? Probably not; just now and again, perhaps every morning for breakfast. But if you say, "No I don't"—now what is the meaning? That you do not continually drink? No, you do not drink at all, period. Even if the present tense has linear force when affirmative, it does not have it when negated—negation changes the rules.) The point is, "does not touch" at the end of the verse has precisely the same grammatical form; it is a simple present indicative, negated. So NIV should have rendered "does not continue to touch", to be consistent, but of course they did not. They (and all) render, correctly, "does not touch". NKJV has it right: "does not sin" and "does not touch". What the Sacred Text affirms is that the new mature does not sin, and of course the Holy Spirit who indwells us does not sin.

The second discrepancy does involve a textual variant, the difference of one letter—with the extra letter the relative pronoun is reflexive, without it, it is not. Thus, NKJV, following over 90% of the Greek manuscripts, reads "he who has been born of God keeps himself" while NIV, following a small minority of manuscripts, reads "the one who was born of God keeps him safe." In the NIV the one being kept and the one doing the keeping are two different entities. I give it as my considered opinion that the reflexive form is original (for the theory see my book, *The Identity of the New Testament Text IV*). Are we really capable of "keeping ourselves"? Is the Holy Spirit? How about the new nature, with the Holy Spirit's help?

However all that may be, Ephesians 6:12 is crystal clear. In verse 10 Paul makes very clear that he is writing to believers and in verse 12 he includes himself. "**We** wrestle . . . against . . . wicked spirits . . ." Have you ever watched a wrestling match? Pretty physical, pretty direct, isn't it? If someone is trying to wrestle you down and pin you to the floor and you do not struggle, you do not defend yourself, what happens? You get knocked down. How many times? As often as you try to stand up! Stop and think of the implications for a minute. We have an enemy that hates us and is going for our throat. He prowls around us like a lion (1 Peter 5:8). If we are not vigilant, if we do not defend ourselves, what will happen? We will be "devoured"—we, **believers**.

In short, we are vulnerable to demonic attack—be not deceived! To the extent that I suppose that I understand the subject, and I recognize that it may not be very much, I believe that while my thoughts are **consciously** subject to the Holy Spirit my mind should be free from malignant interference, but as soon as that submission ceases to be conscious, and worse yet if it simply ceases, then my mind is vulnerable. Even when the mind is free the body continues to be vulnerable. At least Paul suffered from a physical problem that was satanic in origin during a considerable space of

time and I would not venture to suggest that he was not subject to the Spirit all that time.

I imagine that many readers are struggling with these suggestions. I know they contradict certain ideas that have enjoyed wide dissemination and acceptance in evangelical circles. But what can I do? I have a commitment to the Word of God and feel obliged to do sound exegesis. Let us analyze the question a bit more. If you were Satan, where would you concentrate your fire? Sometimes, when I am lecturing at a theological seminary, I scandalize the class by asking what place in the city they think has the heaviest concentration of demons. They usually mention the prison, a brothel, an important spiritist center, etc. "Not at all", I answer, "it is right here". "What? You can't mean that, professor!" "Why of course! What place in this city represents the greatest danger to the enemy? This is a 'factory' producing soldiers for Christ's army—it is certainly here that Satan will concentrate his fire. There is nothing else in the city that threatens him more." Can there be any doubt? Is it not obvious? That drunk in the gutter, a prostitute or a drug addict, they are already 'in the bag'. The demons do not have to spend more effort on them. You may be sure, my brother, that the more useful you become in God's hand, the more stature you gain in the Kingdom, so much more you will be attacked. Whatever else he may be, Satan is not a fool.

Well, I guess I cannot put it off any longer—we must deal with the 'chestnut'. After all, can a believer be 'possessed', or not? (I have already stated that demon 'ownership' is a false issue; not even an unbeliever can be owned [with the possible exception of 'robots']. So the real question is: Can a demon 'control' a believer or must its attacks stop short of control?) Please try to keep your cool! Let us go slowly.

Is God not omniscient and omnipresent? Well then, wherever Satan is God is too—it has to be so if God is omnipresent. Job 2:1 makes clear that Satan appears before the very Throne of God! Revelation 12:10 seems to indicate that he still has access there and evidently spends a lot of time there since he accuses us "day and night". The point is this: it is common to argue that if God is in my life then Satan cannot enter at the same time. But how does that follow? If the enemy can enter the very Sanctuary in Heaven, to enter my life is 'small potatoes'—it should not be any problem at all. Let us think of our life as if it were a house. Anyone who is genuinely converted has the Holy Spirit in his life, or 'house'. Unfortunately, however, many believers keep Him in the parlor. He is in the house (which is of maximum importance) but He does not control the house—there are closets locked with seven locks! There are areas of the life that have never been opened up and turned over to Him. So then, if the Spirit is confined to the parlor, if He does not have access to the whole house, Satan can easily install himself in the kitchen. Easy. With reference to the specific problem under discussion here, the basic question is not whether I have the Holy Spirit but

whether He has me! It is not the Spirit's presence but His **control**. We must turn over all the keys to our 'house'.

I know, you still are not satisfied. Then let us think a little more. If I sin knowingly in some area I am rebelling against God in that area. Correct? But if I rebel against God I am joining hands with Satan, because rebelling against God is his thing. In other words, I am handing that area of my life to him on a silver platter. And if I rebel in a second area; there go two areas on the silver platter. And a third, or a fourth? Very frankly, my friend, if you turn three or four areas of your life over to Satan he can mess it up to such an extent that I do not much care what name you choose to give to your condition; I am concerned about the reality.

Let us look again at the continuum suggested above. The division and distinctions are arbitrary. Who told me to draw the lines where I did? How do we know that the line between 'control' and 'oppression' should not be more to one side or the other? Since such distinctions are arbitrary, things that come from people's heads and not the Sacred Text, I judge that we should not attempt to base doctrine upon such distinctions. They may be useful for discussing specific cases, but as soon as we start talking about doctrine we should leave them aside, returning to the Text. The Text speaks of demonization which, for the various reasons I have given, I believe to include everything from mere interference in the thoughts to control of the person. I know of cases where a believer really became controlled; to try to deny that such a person was saved will not work; there are cases where I would say, "If he isn't a believer, neither am I". To elevate our preconceived ideas above reality is a form of idolatry.

Here I want to make an appeal: even if you still feel that you must reject the idea that a believer may be 'controlled', please do not reject the concept of demonization as well. Actually, if God's people will learn to recognize and repel the lesser forms of demonic activity the problem of control (for believers) should not arise. I felt that this discussion would be incomplete if I did not take up the question of 'possession', but I repeat and insist that it is to the lesser forms of demonization that we must pay special attention.

To conclude, we must walk full of the Spirit, consciously controlled by Him. Someone who lives like this will never be controlled by a demon. But, if you give the enemy an opening he will not lose it. We, Christ's soldiers, are certainly the preferred target. We are at war, a war without quarter or cease-fire. As I have explained elsewhere, God will not work a continuous miracle to free us from the consequences of our culpable ignorance. We have to pay for our negligence.