

Can A Christian Be Demon Possessed?

There is no doubt that today's society, especially our American culture, is becoming more and more enamored with things pertaining to the supernatural realm. Supernatural-themed T.V. shows are enjoying a larger fan base. People are intrigued by stories of psychic phenomena, thrilled by stories of spirits caught on film, and the notions of "things-that-go-bump-in-the-night" are less frightening and more accepted as part of the world in which we live.

Among those garnering a slight increase in attention due to this supernatural interest are the Charismatic-type churches of today, where spiritual events and the supposed "power of the Holy Spirit" is put on display on a regular, weekly basis. One of the attractions of late has been live exorcisms and the casting out of devils or demons from controlled persons.

The subject matter and the theatrics of such things have brought some confusion among professing Christians, and have raised questions and concerns within the true church in the area of demon possession. Many have wondered about the status of believers in relation to such claims. Can a Christian be demon-possessed? An overview study of this question from a Biblical perspective will assuredly tell us the answer is "No."

What do the Biblical accounts of and about possession reveal?

A look at accounts of persons in the Bible being possessed by a devil or demon gives us some helpful insights into the matter. To start off with, it is always an unbeliever that is the possessed individual. No where in the Old or New Testament is there even one clear, uncontested example of a true believer who is demon possessed. There are only four out of the total fifteen examples that could even remotely lead to the conclusion that a Christian can be indwelt by demons. We will briefly look at these four examples.

The first three examples pertain to Saul, the first king of Israel, in 1 Samuel. If we assume that Saul was a believer, it would appear that he was not demon possessed, as some would argue. Consider the following passages: 1 Samuel 16:14-15 tells us that Saul was terrorized by a "spirit of the Lord." Verse 16 says that the spirit was "on" him. In verse 23, it "came to" Saul, and it "came mightily upon" him in ch.18, verse 10. Finally, in ch.19, verse 9 it again states that the evil spirit was "on" him. If Saul was a believer, we can conclude that these phrases only suggest that the evil spirit never existed within Saul, but rather it tormented him externally. There is Old Testament language usage that does indicate indwelling, such as when the Spirit of God enters Ezekiel in Ezekiel 2:2. So if Saul was demon possessed, then the Hebrew language in all of the instances pertaining to him would have been sufficient to say so if that was the case.

The fourth example that some use to justify Christian possession can be found in the sad story of the sick woman in Luke 13:10-17. Verse 11 tells us that she had a sickness for eighteen years that caused her to be bent double and not stand up straight. Clearly this woman was sick because of the "spirit" that indwelt her (verse 11) which was identified as "Satan" in verse 16. To bolster their argument, advocates of Christian possession cite that she was undoubtedly a believer because of the title given to her, "a daughter of Abraham." This, they would say, clinches the argument that a believer can be demon possessed. If this lady was a believer then clearly we would have to conclude that believers can be indwelt by evil spirits. However, this phrase does not mean she was a believer. Take for example the story of Zachaeus in Luke 19:9. "And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham.'" Here the title "a son of Abraham" is used of Zachaeus prior to salvation. To use the titles "son of Abraham" and "daughter of Abraham"

simply describes ethnicity. In other words, these descriptive titles speak of their Jewish heritage. The people Jesus came to save . . . from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Clearly, Zachaeus was called "a son of Abraham" before he was saved, not afterward. Therefore, we can confidently conclude that the sick woman was not a believer while experiencing this satanically induced illness.

Also of note is the fact that the very act of casting out a demon from a person is found exclusively in the New Testament, and was used by our Lord Jesus Christ, the apostles, and also the seventy disciples sent out in Luke 10:17, for a strictly evangelical purpose. These acts verified the authority of Christ as the Son of God, and also the apostles as the ones chosen by Christ to start the Church age.

Refuting those who hold these "live exorcisms" today, Scripture itself is silent on instructions for exorcisms in the church body. Especially noteworthy is their absence in the pastoral epistles. This silence actually speaks volumes, as there apparently was no concern from the early church, nor are there any detailed histories, of any Christian ever being demon-possessed.

Demon-possession afflicted unbelievers in many ways, causing insanity, muteness of speech, immorality in the individual's life, deafness, seizures, blindness, suicidal mania, physical defects, great strength, and also having the person harm themselves. But God is quick to show us that believers don't have to worry about possession.

How does God protect Christians from Satan and demons?

One of the ways God protects believers is through the use of His angels. Angels, doing the Lord's will concerning those who are saved, form part of the "hedge of protection" that God imparts to those that are His. Let's look at some general verses regarding this action.

Hebrews 1:14 tells us that they are "ministering spirits" sent out to render service to those who are the elect. Psalms 34:7 tells us that the angel of the Lord "encamps around" those who believe in God. Psalms 91:10-11 states that God gives his angels charge concerning us, guarding us and keeping us safe in all of our ways.

Quite an encouragement to know we have that protection, isn't it? And not only does God give us angelic help, He also is sovereign over what Satan can and can't do. In Romans 8:38-39 Paul is convinced that nothing will be able to separate us (those who are in Christ) from the love of God, not even angels! (This includes the fallen angels.) 1 John 5:18 tells us that the "evil one" (Satan) will not touch those who are born of God.

These are just a few of the passages confirming that God is faithful concerning His elect, and that He will not leave us without aid, especially in the realm of spiritual warfare. The Old and New Testaments have plenty of other instances where angels aided believers in times of need. In Acts 5:5-11, Peter was freed from prison by angel. In 1 Kings 19:5-8, an angel came and fed Elijah in the wilderness. In 2 Kings 6:8-17, Elisha's aide was enabled by God to see a great angelic army that was there on their behalf. Angels even ministered to Christ after his temptation by Satan in Mark 1:9. They are definitely there to help us!

God also uses fellow Christians in aiding us. For a Christian to be a part of a body of believers is absolutely essential to his or her walk with God. Being in and around a group of believers in a personal way does much for our welfare. There is power in just the assembling together. Jesus tells us in Matthew 18:20, "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their

midst.”

A group of believers will do many things for one another if they are following Christ and His words. They will love one another, serve one another, encourage one another's faith, admonish one another when one falls into sin, share another's burdens, provoke one another to love and good workings, and pray for one another's restoration, spiritual help, and concerns.

We also tend to act like what we are immersed in, and when we are around God's word, teaching, and Christ's people, we should grow in acting like our Master more and more each day. This enables us to stand firm for Christ. And it is also helpful to remember James 5:16, "...The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much." This includes matters of victory in spiritual warfare.

What does my salvation mean in all of this?

Salvation is the key issue in this matter. Perhaps the greatest testimony of God's mercy, grace and protection is the fact that He indwells all believers. Scripture tells us in John 14:17 - "...the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides in you and will be in you." John also states Jesus' words six verses later in verse 23: "...If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him."

This is the ultimate discourager to the thought that a demon can possess a Christian, because all three Persons of the trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit reside in those who know and love God! Paul clearly reaffirms this fact in 1 Cor. 6:19, stating that our bodies are a "... temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God..."

It would be safe to say that Christians are already possessed, by Almighty God! We are in Christ and there's no way He will share His holy temple with an evil spirit. 2 Cor. 6:14-18 again states that we are the temple of God and that there is no fellowship of light with darkness. Eph. 1:13-14 tells us we are SEALED with the Holy Spirit. He's not coming out, and demons aren't coming in! 1 John 4:4 sums it up very well and plainly, "...greater is He who is in you that he who is in the world."

What should Christians be concerned about then?

While we're Biblically assured that we cannot be directly possessed by a demon, we can be influenced by evil spirits. Believers in Christ are currently undergoing the lifelong sanctification process (being made holy). As such, our sin nature and our new nature in Christ are at a constant "tug-of-war" with one another (Gal. 5:17). Our sin nature is vulnerable to the lusts of the flesh, and this is the area where the devil and his angels come at all men, believers included. 1 John 2:16 lets us know that "...the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world."

We are tempted by those three areas, and it is through manipulation of these unholy desires that Satan, the god of this world, tempts unsaved man and blinds him to the gospel of Christ (2 Cor. 4:4). Satan knows that he can't blind believers to the gospel, so he tries to render us ineffective in our witness for Christ to the world by tempting us to give in to our sin nature

Thankfully, God has given us everything we need pertaining to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). True power in spiritual matters comes from God's word which equips us for every good work (2 Timothy

3:15-17). It is no surprise, therefore, that our instruction is not to worry about being demon-possessed, nor are we to cast out demons. Thomas Ice states it nicely, “Never are believers said to respond to Satan or demons by casting them out...instead, for the believer the command is always to stand or resist, which is counter to an external temptation by Satan and the demonic.”

God tells us that our battle is spiritual, and that we are to put on the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:11-12) for combat. We should also pray for God’s help in our spiritual walk and growth, especially when we need help in guarding against the weak areas of our lives. Proverbs 22:3 wisely tells us that “The prudent sees the evil and hides himself...”, while the naïve are punished for their lack of discernment in regards to sin. James 4:7 commands us to “Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

What great comfort God gives His children! Submitting to Him and resisting the devil is like having “demon repellent” sprayed all over you. They will flee from you! If we follow God’s instructions and have faith in His word, if we obey Him and keep His ways, then we have part in the victory that Christ won over the Devil, and we should certainly not be worried about ever being possessed by him or his followers.