

## **Coping with the Enemy**

### **Part IV—Demon Possession and the Power of God**

***“After these things the Lord appointed another seventy also . . . and the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And He said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven”*** (Luke 10:17-20).

The raging warfare of Satan against the creation of God has been the racks and tortures of the human race since its inception. Against this awesome power we hear the words of Him whose power is not only awesome but limitless—*“I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.”* If the passages in the Scripture that depict the power of Satan are numerous, the passages assuring us of His total destruction are even more numerous. The great question of course is what are the limits of Satan’s power and how do we tap the power of God to cope with it. In the last article we discussed the distinction between demon possession and demon affliction. In that article we made a categorical statement—**Satan cannot possess the spirit of one who is possessed by the Spirit of Christ.** We also gave two indicators of demon possession—(1) There will be a total repudiation of Christ, resulting often in furious outbursts at the very mention of His name. (2) There is often an alter ego expressing itself, that is totally out of keeping with the original personality, but is, on the other hand, beyond mere “play-acting,” which might be attempted in an effort to confirm the diagnosis. We further suggested that if one cares about Christ, and seeks His help, it is obvious that one would not be demon possessed.

But how do we humans tap into the power of God over Satan? What are the guidelines and the limitations? What are the terms and conditions? In the first place it is well attested throughout Scripture that God does indeed have all power over Satan. And in the second place that He does use human instruments in the expression of that power. Why then does Satan seem to be able to attack us at will? He doesn’t—if you are possessed by Christ. He does attack us in the flesh, but not at his will. Paul specifically tells the Corinthians in his first letter (10:13) that *“God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tested above your ability to bear it.”* He orchestrated the testings of Job in the Old Testament, for example, in accordance with His own purpose. But, if one is not possessed by Christ, he is in the condition that Paul describes to Timothy as ones who are in the snare of the Devil, *“who are taken captive by him at his will”* (II Timothy 2:26).

But why does God allow Satan to afflict His people? We took this matter up extensively in the last issue, but I refer you again to the passage in I Peter 1—*“Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ”* (6,7). Evidently this test is not to determine whether or not our faith will stand—if it

is the faith of Christ, how can it not stand?—but rather to show to Satan the power of God to keep us, no matter what the test. That one has stood the test is evidenced, not by one's bravery or feelings of confidence or victory, but the fact that in spite of all, one still stays with Christ. If you still want Christ in your life, you have overcome the test, no matter what your feelings and doubts may have been at the time. It is not necessary for the flesh to be victorious, but only the spirit. The spirit is always victorious in spite of our fleshly feelings, because Christ is there. If victory depended upon our human feelings, we would all be sunk.

But wherever there is true demon possession, how do we tap the power of God to overcome it? We don't! It is not for us to tap God's power, which the flesh always tries to do by religious exercise and efforts to prove to God our own fervency and piety, but rather for God to tap us to be channels of His power to deal with Satan in this area. The third point made in the last issue relative to the test of true demon possession was the observation that demons respond to the power of God. Often, excessive religious exercises—fasts and prayer vigils and pious postures—are deemed necessary, because the person afflicted is not truly demon possessed, but merely being affected by Satan—the ultimate source of all bad behavior. In all the dealings with demons by Jesus and his apostles, a simple command was adequate—"Go!" All religious exercises, which depend upon human faith or piety, are futile against Satan. Satan is routed by the power of God and not the performance of the flesh, however pious.

But did not Jesus say, "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting?" Yes, but that was because He was addressing a religious community not as yet filled with the Spirit. For Him, it took only a word to cast out the demon, which the disciples could not cast out simply because they did not as yet possess His power. All of the religious exercises of the Old Testament—fasts and sacrifices—were an accommodation to a religious community which did not as yet possess the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament era, the believer is possessed by the Spirit of Christ and enjoys a continual communication with Christ. The channel is there already and awaits the will of God to employ it. We are never repositories of divine power to act independently. We are always channels in which He Himself acts through us. When God chooses to use the channel, He merely is expressing His own power through it. It was, as a matter of fact, the same with Jesus Himself, who confessed that He was but the channel through which God functioned on earth. "*The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise*" (John 5:19). Again, in John 14:10—"The Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works." Paul exercised the same power that Jesus did—casting out demons with a word—but it was not on the basis of personal piety (which he never claimed) or prayer vigils or any efforts to prove his own fervency. Nor did he ever assume that it was by his own power that he did anything, but rather the power of Christ working through him. Nor did Paul ever, in any of his epistles, indicate that humans could attain a degree of piety that would, of itself, be the condition of God's effecting His own purposes through one. As a matter of fact, Paul saw nothing good in his own flesh ever, nor would he have felt that he was himself strong enough to route Satan. God does what He wants to in the world through the agents that He Himself chooses not on the basis of human goodness, but on the basis of divine purposes.

But what then are the conditions for handling demon possession? Should all Christians be able to cast out demons? Apparently not. On the other hand, while it would be a special gift, that would not prevent God from using anyone He chose for that purpose. A primary condition would be whether or not one is dealing with true demon possession. It should be observed here that demon possession is far more rampant in other countries of the world, where there is not the saturation with the Spirit of Christ. For all of our multitude of problems in the moral fiber of America, we do have a very strong concentration of believers, making up well over a majority of the population. In addition to those that profess to be believers in Christ, there is a large population of those who are sympathetic toward, if not open to God in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Thus, it might be said that somewhere between seventy-five to ninety percent of the American people are in one way or another related to God. In the great concentration of prayer and the ministry of the Word, as well as Spirit-filled believers, there is certainly a deterrence to satanic activity.

The second condition is that we recognize that only Christ has the power to cast out demons. If He uses one of His servants, it is not so much that the servant is more worthy than another—*“What hast thou that thou hast not received?”*—but rather that God has elected to act at that particular time and has chosen a particular one through whom to act.

The third condition is that one have a spirit-given confidence that this is what God wants to do. There is a vast difference between faith that is an expression of the inner spirit—an energy of God—and faith that is merely human confidence—a self-generated emotion. One often hears the expression—*“I just know God wants to do this.”* Such expressions can be merely a human effort to bolster one’s faith. The true expression of the spirit does not require words, but action.

A word of caution must be sounded here. Dealing with demons is an extremely serious matter. In the New Testament, those that did so inadvisably suffered severe consequences. There is, tragically, a good deal of “game-playing” in this area. The label “demon-possession” can have serious consequences. In the author’s own experience he has observed suicides and near suicides from careless handling by those who presume to be special agents of God. Religious exercises in the flesh can easily lead to religious arrogance. Those who are truly chosen of God for such a task will be characterized by a deep sense of humility, along with a spirit given conviction that God is directing them. This conviction is not the bravado of the presumptuous promoters of self-styled authority, but the inner compelling of the spirit, beyond one’s personal feelings.

The indiscriminate use of the label “demon possession” can bring about needless despair and the backing away from Christ. It has robbed many Christians of an otherwise needed confidence that, in spite of their own problems, Christ is still with them. It is like the problem of the so-called “unpardonable sin.” Not a few Christians have felt convinced that they had committed such a sin and were hopelessly lost. When I have been approached on the subject I have often said to them—*“The fact that you have come here seeking help means you have not committed it. If you had, you would not care enough to come and ask about it.”*

If one were truly demon possessed, one would not care in the least about help in their behavior problems.

On the positive side, the true test that one is not demon possessed is the interest in getting help. On the other hand, where there is true demon possession and a true gift of God to deal with it, the demons respond to the power of Christ and not to religious exercise in attempting to acquire power through human capacity.

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*Next month "Concluding Comments"*

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