
SPIRITUAL WARFARE

A couple is searching for a house to buy. They finally find the right one after many disappointments. They write an offer sure to secure the house they feel is the one God has provided for them. Alas, another offer is written and accepted just ahead of theirs. Did Satan steal it?

A child suffers from nightmares and is afraid of all kinds of unseen things. Later, her father has a nightmare and wakes to a terrifying sense of evil in the house. Is this a demonic force?

A couple experiences marital conflict in a normally peaceful marriage. After discarding a rock CD that the husband discovered his boarder possessed, harmony is restored. Was the demonic influence removed?

A person is struggling with insecurity, lust, depression, fear, desolation, rebellion and the list goes on. Is a demon sitting on his shoulder whispering lies?

The only way to answer questions such as these is to turn to the truth of the scriptures. We can't deal with all the doctrines relating to angels and demons. For the purpose of this article; the assumption is that the reader accepts there are angels and demons. Satan is the ruler of the demons and the good angels are God's ministers or servants. So what does the Bible teach about spiritual warfare?

"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." (2 Cor. 10:4) "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all to stand." (Eph. 6:11-13) "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (James 4:7b) "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith..." (1 Peter 5:8-9a)

These verses and others leave no doubt that we have an adversary and he is strong and bent on destruction. We also learn that in this raging battle we are to arm ourselves. We are told our foe is not one we see and therefore is fought on a different level than physical enemies. What are we to do?

Modern deliverance ministries usually focus on the casting out of demons to try to solve the problems related to that demon. For example, casting out the demon of lust to overcome lust. These ministries focus on tearing down strongholds (see 2 Cor. 10:4), finding inner healing, and claiming victory in Christ over all enemies. Other terms in the vocabulary are "soul-ties, curses, legal rights of demons, and oppression.

In order to find a sense of direction in this subject, let's turn to the histories in the Gospels and in Acts to gain some insight into the way Satan's angels interact with humans. In the Gospels (Matt. 8:28-33; Mark

5:1-18; Luke 8:27-37) we encounter a man in the land of the Gaderenes or Gergesenes. He is described as strong, fierce, unclothed, living in tombs, harmful to himself, and able to recognize Jesus with no previous introduction.

In Matthew 17:14-21 (also Mark 9:14-26 and Luke 9:42) we encounter a young man that the disciples tried to help, but couldn't. The symptoms of demonic activity are shown by the self-destructive behavior of convulsions and casting himself into water and fire.

Mark 1:23-26 and Luke 4:33-41 describe another man; who, on first sight, knew who Jesus was, and suffered convulsions.

In Matthew 15:22 and Mark 7:25-30, we are introduced to the Syro-Phoenician's daughter. The spirit is said to have vexed her and after the spirit left her, she was laid down to rest. It seems that the spirit had some effect on her that would not allow physical rest.

In some passing verses (Matthew 9:32-33; Matthew 12:22; Luke 11:14) we are told that a spirit kept people from seeing and speaking.

In the book of Acts, we have two instances of demonic possession. First in Acts 16:16, a girl who knew things that no one else knew. Then in Acts 19:15 & 16 the man who overpowered the 7 sons of Sceva.

To summarize these stories, we learn that people possessed by evil spirits have superhuman knowledge, superhuman strength, physical distortions, altered personalities, anti-social behavior, and self-destructive actions. It is interesting to note the case of the man in tombs we have record that he went on to talk about Jesus and desired to follow him. The only other case that specifically mentions a follower of Jesus being delivered from devils is Mary Magdalene. There may be more, but having demons cast out is no guarantee that a person is then a follower of Jesus. On the other hand, it seems to go without saying that a person truly possessed of a spirit would need that problem addressed if he were to follow Christ.

What about the idea that we can be oppressed by Satan? The Bible does have verses about fighting and warfare. Is this because we have spirits lurking around and they are oppressing us? Does every sin have a demon? Can inanimate objects possess spirits that will cause spiritual problems, like a rock CD? Does the Bible say anything about spiritual oppression of Christians?

Second Corinthians 11:4, 13&14, tell us that Satan is a master at lies and transforms himself into an angel of light. Ephesians 4:27 warns about giving place to the devil. Ephesians 6:11 & 12 teach us about the armour of God. James and Peter speak of resisting the Devil. These passages show a level of pressure or oppression from the devil upon believers in Jesus Christ.

Do objects have demonic powers? These objects can be as varied as a doll, book, picture, or CD. Here are two things to consider: first, the Ephesians did burn their books. Was this because the books had special power, or were they in the process of making no provision for the flesh? Might they have burnt those books to keep the corrupting influence out of reach? We just don't know to what extent the "power" of those books were. The second thing to consider is the meat offered to idols. If there would ever be an object devoted to Satanic ritual and worship, it would seem this meat would qualify. Paul, however, only

warns against it in the context that a weaker brother might be offended at the eating of it. He never indicates it should be avoided because of the ritual surrounding the meat itself.

How do we look at oppression of Christians? In the OT (before Christianity as we think of it) we have the story of Job. He certainly was a target for the forces of Satan. In the NT, we find almost nothing. In fact, the little bit we do have can be easily missed. In 2 Cor. 12 Paul describes a vision so glorious he can't talk about it and then he says in verse 7, "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the *messenger of Satan* to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." (emphasis mine) The word messenger is translated as angel and is used in places in which we would understand a spiritual being. This is an indication from Scripture that demons do have the ability to create some thorn in the flesh.

So far we have established that bad angels, or demons, exist. They have some influence in people's lives, but in the case of Job and Paul, God Himself sets the boundaries. We don't. This would seem to disagree with the deliverance ministries' idea that Satan gets his foot in through our agreement with him. It is interesting to note that in both cases, the relief from this oppression is through contact with God. Job never gets relief until he comes to the place of realization that God is much bigger and wiser than he. Paul's answer from God was to embrace the thorn in his flesh, because it was through that buffeting that the power of Christ rested on him.

The idea that every sin has a demon is problematic as well. Jesus tell us that a lot of nasty things come from inside, from the desires of our flesh. Furthermore, Galatians 5 lists witchcraft right in there with the works of the flesh and later in Galatians 5 the solution to the works of the flesh is to crucify them. James tells us that the process of sin starts from our own lusts. The answer is never to bind or rebuke a demon.

James 4 and 1 Peter 5 both mention resisting the devil; not rebuking him. It is also important to notice in both passages we are called to humble ourselves and resist the devil and to draw near to God. Repent, believe, resist, pray, humble and deny yourselves, put off the old man, crucify the flesh; these are the Biblical answers to any demonic oppression a Christian faces. It is never taught either explicitly or implicitly that we have any business ordering the devil around.

The deliverance ministry type of spiritual warfare is also unscriptural in that it requires a "gifted" person to discern these spirits. The lists of spiritual gifts and gifts of ministry mentioned in the Bible do not include this type of discernment. Along with that, many of the proof texts these teachers use are snatches that do not fit the broader context. Another alert is that much of this teaching leads people away from the local body of Christ.

To conclude this article, here's a quote from A.W. Tozer, "The scriptural way to see things is to set the Lord always before us, put Christ in the center of our vision, and if Satan is lurking around; he will appear on the margin only and be seen as but a shadow on the edge of the brightness. It is always wrong to reverse this – to set Satan in the focus of our vision and push God out to the margin. Nothing but tragedy can come of such inversion... The best way to keep the enemy out is to keep Christ in... It is not the praying sheep Satan fears, but the presence of the Shepherd."

~Lyndon Burkholder