

Diagnosis: Demon Possession

Pam signed up with a short-term mission project in which she would spend a year teaching English to high school students in Bulgaria. She had always been an admirer of strong women missionaries such Elisabeth Elliot and Amy Carmichael. Through readings their biographies and books she began to develop romantic notions of the mission field. With all of the excitement and zeal of a young woman set out to conquer the world for Christ she embarked on the Trans-Atlantic flight to the unknown.

Three months later Pam became lonely and homesick. Her frustrations with the culture were compounded by the fact that the Bulgarians did not respond as readily to the gospel as she once believed. Further, she had not been able to sleep for days on end. Pam had also developed an irrational fear of the dark. Furthermore, her homesickness had escalated into depression. Bob, the mission director took notice of her plight and asked if he could possibly be of assistance. He too had similar experiences but he has been delivered from such bondage through the writings of Neil Anderson. As he conversed with Pam he began to ask her about her experiences before she was a Christian and what specific sins corrupted her life. He then began to ask her if she had any contact with an ouija board or any other artifacts of the occult. As the conversation progressed, Bob started to connect the symptoms that Pam has been enduring with demonization. He carefully explained that demonization differs from the traditional understanding of demon possession, outrageously tormented people who have lost the battle of wills to the resident demon inside of them. Rather, demonization is a common affliction that affects more than a few Christians. In fact, Neil Anderson alleges that 85 percent of Christians

are under some sort of Satanic Bondage.¹ Thus, the prescription was simple; Bob must intercede for Pam and confront the demon within her. In short, the key to Pam's sanctification lied in eschewing demonic dominion over her life.

A growing movement in America spearheaded by Neil Anderson and Timothy Warner seeks to awaken the evangelical Christian consciousness to the reality of demonic possession in the lives of the Christian and the Non-Christian alike. In a day and age in which a materialistic, ultra rational mental paradigm dominates the western worldview the appeal to the reality of the spirit realm is a noble pursuit. The Bible presents no reason to believe in the cessation of demon possession. Yet, men such as Timothy Warner and Neil Anderson expand the definition of demon possession to include Pam's behavior as they contend that both Christians and Non-Christians can be possessed by demons. However, when the symptoms of demon possession include mild depression, anxiety, and insomnia it becomes difficult to distinguish demon possession from other sinful patterns of living. As any doctor knows, different diagnoses demand different prescriptions. As one attempts to encounter the dark forces indwelling inside an individual, he must be sure that the person is indeed demon possessed.

What is Demon Possession?

Before one diagnoses an individual with demon possession, he must be familiar with the term. The compound structure of the Greek word itself, *daimonizomai*, provides remarkable insight into the word's meaning. The word can be broken down into three parts, *daimon* (demon), *iz* (a causative verb stem), and *omai* (a passive ending). In light of the semantic breakdown, one can conclude that *daimonizomai* simply means that a *demon controls a passive host*. Essentially, when one is demon possessed his will has

¹ Neil Anderson, *Bondage Breaker* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1990), 107.

been completely dominated by that of a demon. It is this facet of irresistible influence that differentiates demonization with demonic influence and affliction.

Matthew 12:43-45 provides the only didactic declaration by Jesus regarding this phenomenon. The passage deals with a demon voluntarily leaving a man, but once he finds no place of restful habitation he returns to his former home to find it not only unoccupied, but a welcoming habitation. Thus, the demon summons seven other spirits more wicked than itself to indwell and wreak even greater havoc than before.

Four key observations can be extracted from this passage. *First of all*, the Demon departs and enters at will. Someone may no longer be possessed on account of the will of the demon. *Secondly*, the demon indwells the person. The demon or demons abide in the body of the human. *Thirdly*, a demon desires a place of habitation. For whatever reason the demon leaves the body, but he discovers no place of rest. Finding no place of rest indicates that finding another human to inhabit became a difficult task as no willing human seemed to be available. The seven other demons that were summoned more than likely endured a similar plight. *Fourthly*, Jesus enunciates, “the last state of that man becomes worse than the first” (12:45). Instead of being inhabited by one demon, eight indwelled him increasing the severity of his suffering

Another key passage crucial to diagnosing demon possession involves the case of the Gerasene Demoniac (Mark 5:1-13). When threatened with the reality of being cast into the abyss the demons had to ask permission to enter the swine. Further, it is interesting to note that when they entered the swine, they were able to kill their host, but that was not the case with the man. Of course, when one considers the account of Matthew 12:43-5, it is not to the demon’s advantage to slay their human host since they would have to find another one.

From these two passages one can conclude that the *severity of demonization varies*. The Gerasene passage illuminates that demon possession seems to be *limited in scope* as the demons' will was subverted to Jesus'.

Overall, one can conclude demon possession means that a demon occupies an individual and exerts a dominating and irresistible influence over the will and well being of the individual. One must realize that the physical afflictions allow the demons great control over the will of the host as they could threaten the host with increased affliction for disobedience. This physically tormented state serves as just one of the many symptoms necessary to diagnose true demonic possession.

What are the Symptoms of Demon Possession?

The frightening images of the academy award winning movie *The Exorcist* come to mind when asked what demon possession looks like. If one was to see someone levitating above the bed, spewing projectile vomit, and he or she had the ability to perform a 360-degree neck turn; the diagnosis would be obvious. However, the Bible speaks nothing of those attributes of demon possession which William Peter Blatty's movie made famous.

Even though the Bible is void of 360-degree neck turns the demoniacs in the Bible were characterized by *super human strength*. In Acts 19:13-16 a demon possessed man left the seven sons' of Sceva bloodied, beaten, and naked. The Gerasene Demoniac tore apart chains and shackles, and no one was able to subdue him (Matt. 5:4). Another symptom is that the demon generally *torments the individual that it inhabits*. The Gerasene Demoniac gashed himself with stones night and day (Matt. 5:5). Further, the demon insured that his human host would not be wearing any clothes so that he would endure the harsh conditions of the desert, which the demon drove him to (Lk. 8:27-29).

In the case of the demoniac boy, the demon would cause him to fall into water and fire (Matt. 17:16). Yet demons did not restrict their violence to their human hosts, *but they would unleash it upon others* (Matt. 8:28). *Loud cries* also characterized the demon possessed (Mark 1:23, 5:5). Physical maladies such as *muteness, deafness, and convulsive seizures* afflict the demon possessed as well (Mark 9:17,18, 25).

However, the Bible draws a distinction between those who have various physical infirmities, epileptics, and demoniacs (Matt. 4:24). It may be concluded that other characteristics compounded with the physical infirmities and seizures led Matthew to distinguish his diagnosis between the demon possessed and the physically afflicted.

These demons also possess a definite *sense of identity* even though they reside in someone else. They knew who they were, whom they resided in, who their creator is, and what their limitations are. In the case of the Gerasene Demoniac he correctly identifies Jesus as the Son of God (Matt: 8:29). He presents a request to Jesus to be cast into the herd of swine (Matt. 8:31). The demon also possessed a name (Mark 5:9). Further, *lunacy* did not characterize this demoniac as he had an intelligible conversation with Jesus. These conversations illumine the cleavage between the demonic and human personality. It seems hard to imagine why a human would seek to mutilate and destroy himself. Perhaps the soulful wails of the Gerasene Demoniac (Mark 5:5) came from the human hostage held in bondage by his demonic inhabitants. In the case of the possessed pigs, they went from sustaining their life through grazing to ending their lives through impersonating their mammal cousins, the lemmings (Mark 5:13). Two opposing wills seem to be present in the life of the demoniac, yet through the iron rod of physical affliction the will of the demon pervades.

Finally, certain demoniacs had *supernatural knowledge*. They knew who Jesus was before anyone had an opportunity to tell them (Mark 1:24). The slave girl in Phillip made quite a profit for her master through fortune telling (Acts 16:16). She also identified Paul and his cohorts as servants of the Most High God (Acts 16:17).

The fact that the demon possessed were obvious intertwines all such cases of demon possession. In fact, the gospels never disagree about a single case of demonic possession.² It did not take a counseling session for Jesus or for that matter the people who brought the demon possessed to Jesus to realize the problem. The obvious absence of these symptoms in the case of Pam should call into question Bob's hasty diagnosis. The demon possessed were easily diagnosed on account of extreme physical and mental torment on account of the demon.

Who Gets Demon Possessed?

Men and women from all walks of life fell victim to the torturous reality of demon possession. From the Phillipian slave woman to the man residing in the Gerasenes to the daughter of the Canaanite woman, demon possession knew of no ethnic distinctions. Further, two children were afflicted with demonization. In the case of the demonized boy (Mark 9:14-29) and the daughter of the Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:22) the parents had to intercede in behalf of their children. Demon possession was not limited to human beings alone, but also to animals as noted in the Gerasene encounter (Matt. 8: 32).

The fact that children were demonized seems to rule out the possibility that only hardened sinners were possessed. Further, the person who is demon possessed never

² Alex Konya, *Demons: A Biblically Based Perspective* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 1990), 31.

receives a rebuke from the exorcists. So the question arises, “Who are the most likely candidates for demonic possession?”

To answer the question, one must keep in mind the discussion over Matt. 12:43-45 in which the demon fails to find another host. Apparently, not all individuals are susceptible to demon possession. Further, in I Corinthians 10:21 Paul warned the Corinthian Church against partaking in food sacrificed to idols, since in actuality that food is sacrificed to demons. This fact coupled with the demonic encounters of the apostles and Jesus with gentile demoniacs who hail from idolatrous cultures may suggest that idol worship may provide the demons with a beachhead into their hosts. Even though many of the animistic religions may not realize it they actually worship demons in their service to idols. Further, the account of the Phillipian slave woman may also suggest that forays into the occult may expedite demon possession. When a psychic seeks to become a spirit medium, they invite demonic habitation. Skeptics may scoff at the clairvoyants of TV psychics who know the personal lives of their call in customers, but it might be demonic influence that provides the information with accuracy.

What is the Prescription?

After the disciples unsuccessfully attempted to cast the demon out of the boy they ask Jesus for his secret. The simple answer was prayer (Mark 9:28-29). There is no reason to believe that demon possession could not happen today. With the rise of the New Age movement and the rekindled interest in the occult more people leave themselves susceptible to demonic inhabitation. The medium of prayerful intercession appeals to the God of the universe who possesses dominion over the forces of darkness.

For many, the most frightening aspect of demon possession lies in the loss of control. The thought of submitting to the forces of darkness abhors the human mind.

Yet, all of those who have not repented and placed their faith in God indirectly serve the forces of darkness as they harden themselves against God. Ultimately, until one seeks to have Jesus inhabit the house of their heart, they leave themselves open to the oppression of demons.

Pam's plight as a struggling missionary had been confused by the inaccurate doctrine present by Bob. Instead of taking responsibility for her own sin, she now excuses it on the demons. The key to Christian holiness is not found in exercising demons, but through prayerful and persistent obedience to the word of God. Ultimately, when one repents and becomes united with Christ, the Holy Spirit resides in their heart (John 14:17). The Demon traveling over the desert places will not find room to inhabit the heart of the believer as the Holy Spirit has already prepared a spacious dwelling. Thus, the prescription for those diagnosed with demon possession is to repent and place faith in the redeeming work and person of Jesus Christ.

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