**Demons, Possession, & Their Work Today (SR: Matt. 8:28-34)**

*“There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.”* (C.S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters,* Preface).

Demons seem to hold a fascination for people much beyond many subjects in the Bible. Regardless of what we believe about the present power and work of demons, they can be defeated by Jesus Christ! Having this confidence, let us consider what the Bible has to say about demons and demon possession today. Having undertaken this study, we will draw some conclusions about the work of demons in the present-day.

**I. What Are Demons?**

A. Uncertain etymology

1. Some claim the word came from another meaning, “knowing”. Others claim etymology through the Greek “to be terrified” or possibly “distribute” because demons were believed to assign destinies to men.

2. A modern authority (Vine’s) believes the best explanation is the 1st.

3. The OT Hebrew term is *Seirim* and means “hairy ones” and is connected in definition to a male goat which explains some of the current imagery.

B. Who or what are demons? (be careful not to be pretentious in dogmatism...)

1. Where’d they originate? Two popular opinions are that demons are fallen angels, or the spirits of evil men (akin to the belief that saints become angels...) There is universal belief in demons around the world.

2. The former is to be preferred when comparison between parallel accounts in the Gospels is done (cf. also Matt. 25:41; Jude 6; 2Pet. 2:4). Fallen angels = evil spirits = demons

C. NT references indicate they are immaterial, intelligent beings.

1. Viewed as personalities (James 2:19; Lk. 11:24-26; Mk. 5:8; 9:25).

2. Manifested desires (Mk. 5:12), showed superhuman knowledge (Mt. 8:29). Jesus made a distinction b/w possessions & diseases (Matt. 10:8).

3. Able and willing to cooperate in their destruction (Luke 8:30; Matt. 12:45). Implied also is different skillsets as the term Legion etymologically refers to a Roman military unit comprised of differently skilled men.

4. Malignant In Nature! (John 10:21)

D. Demons possessed a fear of torment (Lk. 4:33-35; 8:28; Matt. 8:29; cf. Matt. 25:41 & final destiny of demons). The demons’ fear of Jesus was undisguised.

**II. Effects of Demon Possession Upon People**

A. Demons are agents of Satan, much like angels are agents of God (Matt. 12:24-26). To cast demons out was to cast out Satan.

B. In the NT demons brought on physical diseases. Examples include: muteness (Matt. 9:32f), blindness (12:22), epilepsy (17:15), & other ills (Lk. 13:16). Sometimes no physical ill is attributed to the demon (Mk. 1:23).

C. Demon possession generally showed itself visibly. The demon possessed person ceased to act as a self-controlled person (Lk. 4:33-35). Those possessed of demons might have extraordinary strength (Mk. 5:2-4).

1. Demon activity was discerned by all in the NT. There is one passage that suggests man was responsible for demon possession (Lk. 11:24-26).

2. In contrast, children are also possessed. This might suggest it was not because of sin that demons entered people (Mk. 7:25; 9:17, 21). We must leave as unanswerable the question of why demons possessed.

D. Why did God allow demons so much freedom during the lifetime of Christ?

1. Since God sent His Son, He allowed Satan to use all of his forces in opposition. Jesus and His disciples came with a message of God. They had power over the demons as evidence (Mk. 1:27f).

2. One of the chief works of Christ was to destroy the work of the demons, and they realized this (1Jn. 3:8; Mk. 1:24). Casting out demons was a special sign (Mt. 10:1; Mk. 16:17, 20).

**III. Do Demons Possess People Today?**

A. Many believe demons are still working in the same degree as when Jesus lived.

1. Some think this explains some forms of mental illness and strange occurrences. Some believe in exorcism, while others do not.

2. At judgment men will claim to have cast out demons (Mt. 7:22f). These are rejected as false.

B. Demons do not possess people as they did in Christ’s day.

1. First, God does not presently give men the miraculous power to cast out demons. Without that power, we are without defense.

2. The gospel is addressed to people as being capable of responding by the free exercise of their will (Acts 2:40). The gospel is free for all, so everyone must be free to act (Mk. 16:15).

3. Christians are clearly told they will never be in a position where they must do evil (1Cor. 10:13). When demons were cast out, it was a sign of Satan’s defeat (Lk. 10:17f; 1Jn. 3:8).

C. God even foretold the end of demon possession (Zech. 13:1f).

**IV. Are Demons Still Active Today? YES! (Eph. 6:10-18)**

*A. On A Personal Level*

1. Distractions – when we get close to God, Satan’s minions do their dastardly work; distracts our purpose, benumbs our heart, wasting time doing absolutely nothing or even things we don’t like; shifting fashions in thought; darkening intellect; Politics; Misdirection – living in “the future”; pop culture – glorifying useless knowledge & interests

2. Manipulation (2Cor. 11:13-15; Philological restructuring is a key ruse)

a. Psycho-Cognitive (2Cor. 10:3-5; 11:3; 2Tim. 2:24-26)

i. Pride – Often displayed in “humility”; endless cycle of self- analysis & negates humility; holier than thou; pride in modesty; skepticism; isolating generation from generation; glorification of self-love

ii. Coarse Jesting, Foul Language – “NBD!”

iii. Contented Worldliness – Materialism – not that it is true but that it is strong, stark, & courageous; it is the philosophy of future; sense of ownership (James 4:13-16)

b. Physical-Sexual (Gal. 5:1, 13, 17; Eph. 2:1-3)

i. Bad habits/fleshly appetites – an ever-increasing craving for an ever-diminishing pleasure (1Pet. 4:1-5; Rom. 6)

ii. Exaggerated weariness & sloth (12x sluggard in Proverbs)

iii. Gluttony – not just in amount, but in temperament/demand

iv. Sex – warped ideas regarding marriage, beauty, sexual taste; exciting the desires of each sex toward something the nonexistent; demanding things more & more impossible

c. Emotional (James 3:15 – demonic wisdom)

i. Anger – Annoyance at People’s Idiosyncrasies & Dwelling On Them; Domestic Hatred; conflict (Eph. 4:26; Jms. 4:1-4)

ii. Evil Social Bonds – Hero complex to justify (1Cor. 15:33)

iii. Sight-Only Walking – Anguish & bewilderment, uncertainty, fear, suspense, anxiety, hopelessness – overlooking the law of undulation; shame (2Cor. 5:7)

iv. High and low points in life are when demons are most active because our emotions are at their most extreme

*B. On A Religious Level*

1. False Ideas Regarding Church, God, & Spirituality (Rev. 16:14; 2Th. 2:9)

a. Disappointment and anticlimax after conversion

b. Focusing on emotion rather than content; demand for novelty

c. Restructuring understanding of own religion

d. Discontent, church hopping, coteries and factions – if a person can’t be kept out of church, keep them attached to a party in it!

e. Making an arbitrary distinction between a “historical Jesus” and the “Christ of faith”; Keeping spiritual matters in superficial realm

f. Believing that prayers are ineffective (Matt. 7:7f)

2. False Religion (2Cor. 11:4; Gal. 1:6-9; 1Tim. 4:1)

a. Idolatry, Hagiolatry (Lev. 17:17/Dt. 32:17; 1Cor. 10:20f; Rev. 9:20)

b. Defensive Self-Piety – like secret society or mystery religion

c. Moderate Christianity – “moderation in all things”, “religion is all very well up to a point”

d. False Spirituality – Using Christianity as a means to an end

e. Doubt & Disbelief of Demonic Activities – comedic portrayals of their appearance or activities

*“The recent fascination with Satan and demons is in reaction to an earlier disbelief. Christians should beware of excessive gullibility as well as extreme oversimplification. Knowledge about Satan and evil angels will alert us to the danger and subtlety of satanic temptation. We should not become too absorbed in satanic forces. Satan and demonic forces are active, but they are limited. We must remember that the main thrust of Christianity is on the availability of God’s power to deliver us.”* (*A Study of Demons*, Bill Mcllvain, 1996, 5).

Sin is the personal responsibility of the sinner and not because of demon possession. We are free to serve Satan or Christ. Will you obey God? (Col. 1:13; 2:15)