



Understanding and Dealing with Demonic Oppression and Interference: Common Concerns

(Revised 7/2/2001)

Is it okay (Biblical, wise, safe) to deal with demonic spirits directly? Wouldn't it be better to just pray and ask the Lord to deal with them? This is a common question/concern, and one that we have asked ourselves. Leanne Payne raises valid concerns about “practicing the presence of demons,” and many who are familiar with her material are concerned that dealing directly with demonic oppression and interference during ministry sessions is unwise and un-Biblical.¹ Our perception is that scripture supports confronting demonic spirits directly in the context of Christian prayer for emotional healing. Wayne Grudem M.Div., Ph.D., Chairman of the Department of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, presents a brief and clear discussion of Biblical references supporting the practice of Christians confronting demonic spirits directly in Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine². He also offers additional comments that are so helpful we are including them here:

We may ask, however, why does God want Christians to speak directly to the demon who is troubling someone rather than just praying and asking God to drive away the demon for them? In a way, this is similar to asking why Christians should share the gospel with another person rather than simply praying and asking God to reveal the gospel with another person directly. Or why should we speak words of encouragement to a Christian who is discouraged rather than just praying and asking God himself to encourage that person directly? Why should we speak a word of rebuke or gentle admonition to a Christian whom we see involved in some kind of sin, rather than just praying and asking God to take care of the sin in that person's life? The answer to all these questions is that in the world that God has created, he has given us a very *active* role in carrying out his plans, especially his plans for the advancement of the kingdom and the building up of the church. In all of these cases, our *direct involvement* and *activity* is important in addition to our prayers. And so it seems to be in our dealing with demonic forces as well. Like a wise father who does not settle all of his children's disputes for them, but sometimes sends them back out to the playground to settle a dispute themselves, so our heavenly Father encourages us to enter directly into conflict with demonic forces in the name of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Thereby he enables us to gain the joy of participating in eternally significant ministry and the joy of triumphing over the destructive power of Satan and his demons in people's lives. It is not that God could not deal with demonic attacks every time we prayed and asked him to do so, for he certainly could and he no doubt sometimes does. But the New Testament pattern seems to be that God

¹See Payne, Leanne. Restoring the Christian Soul. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996) p. 208-216. Note that on page 213 she acknowledges that she addresses demonic spirits directly in certain circumstances.

²Grudem, Wayne. Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994) p. 427-429.

ordinarily expects Christians themselves to speak directly to the unclean spirits.³

How can Christians be demonized if they are filled with the Holy Spirit and Jesus is living in them? This is a common concern, and one that is so significant for some people that it hinders them from participating in Theophostic ministry. This question has certainly been debated extensively.

Our study of scripture, review of theological discussions regarding this question, and our personal clinical experience⁴ lead us to believe that demonic spirits can infect wounded Christians. Our understanding is that Jesus and the Holy Spirit abide in the believer's spirit, and therefore demonic spirits cannot live there, but that demonic spirits can inhabit the fallen body and the wounded and lie-infested mind.

The following are several sources that provide additional discussion of this question:

Fred Dickason: Dr. Dickason, chairman emeritus of the theology department at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, provides an exhaustive discussion of this question (seven chapters). See Demon Possession and the Christian. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1989, p. 73-213.

Wayne Grudem, M.Div., Ph.D.: Dr. Grudem presents a short, careful, and readable discussion of the Biblical references addressing this question. See Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994, p. 423-425.

Peter Horrobin: Horrobin includes a chapter discussing this question in Healing Through Deliverance: The Biblical Basis. Kent, England: Sovereign World Ltd., 1991, p. 294-306.

Charles Kraft: Dr. Charles Kraft, professor of Anthropology and Intercultural Communication at Fuller Theological Seminary, also includes a chapter discussing this question in Defeating Dark Angels. Ann Arbor: Servant Publications, 1992, p. 61-78.

Francis MacNutt, Ph.D.: Dr. MacNutt offers several helpful comments and insights in Deliverance from Evil Spirits. Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 1995, p 72-73.

Ed Smith, D. Min.: See Beyond Tolerable Recovery. Campbellsville, KY: Alathia Publishing, 1999, p. 203-217, 286-292, and especially 297-299 for a discussion of Dr. Smith's experiences and thoughts regarding this question.

³Ibid., p. 429

⁴See "EMDR, Traumatic Memories, and Physical Phenomena" on the Articles/FAQ's page for description of some of our personal clinical experiences.