

Demons and Deliverance

written by Randy Starkey | 09/03/2023

Demons, deliverance and casting out evil spirits is a popular topic these days, and often popular topics spiritually are ripe for populist beliefs and practices that may not align with Scripture. Sometimes this is fairly harmless, and sometimes it can really confuse and hurt people.

I have now been a Spirit-filled believer for nearly 50 years, and I have pastored for 38 of those years. I have been familiar with demons, deliverance, casting out evil spirits, spiritual warfare and all associated topics for nearly all of those 50 years. There have been wide variations of teaching and practice abounding in these areas over these years, from denial of their existence, to seeing demons as being everyone's problem for any issue they might have!

In this blog post I'm going to try to provide a balanced and Scriptural overview of demons and deliverance, and to cut through the errors and excesses that often exist.

My own experience in this field includes experiencing deliverance from evil spirits the day I was saved (I was involved in the occult), even seeing it visually; subsequently having to battle forces in my home, causing me headaches and actually creating physical disturbances in my basement; later as I matured in Christ, casting out a spirit in a young teen-age girl who had tried to harm her mother, and was talking to me in a deep male voice; having a woman fall out of her seat while I was preaching in Costa Rica and writhe on the floor while foaming at the mouth; having a teen-age girl in a rehab ministry I was involved in on a farm property go into a pig pen in the middle of the night while all the animals began freaking out and bellowing, and when we got to her she said "I'm going to take over this place!" I've learned to do spiritual warfare in many personal instances, taking thoughts captive, learning to use the authority of Jesus, and helping others in all these areas.

So what I'm going to teach here is based on Scripture and also 50 years of my own experience.

The word "deliverance" actually only occurs two times in the entire New Testament (Phil. 1:9, Heb. 10:35), and neither time is its use related to casting out of demons. It's used in a much more general way. I use the word here in this blog mainly because it is so commonly used of casting out of demons today.

So here's some important points...

1. Focusing on the New Testament, all the narrative examples of casting out demons are by Jesus or His followers in the Gospels or the book of Acts. There is no exact instruction on this in any of the letters.
2. All the examples and stories of casting out demons involve people who are spiritually new to Jesus, or

in other words, for our day, it would be most often lost people. NONE of these situations, of what we might call “possession”, that would require “casting out” of a demon, involve dedicated believers.

The closest situation is Judas, when he totally turned against and away from Jesus, when Satan subsequently entered him (Luke 22:3). This happened BECAUSE he totally forsook Jesus. He walked out of God’s grace. Another situation, where Jesus mentions Satan, is when Peter tried to convince Jesus not to go to the cross, when Jesus turned and said “*get behind me Satan*” (Mt. 16:23, Mark 8:33, Luke 4:8). This was a situation where Peter’s THINKING was the problem, his MIND and his THOUGHTS needed to be changed and renewed, but he wasn’t possessed by Satan. I’ll say more about the mind problem in a bit. The mind is important because it also affects your HEART!

3. NONE of the narrative examples in the gospels or Acts took a long time for the demon to be cast out. It was basically immediate. No fasting by the person needing deliverance, no hours-long session, no pre-planned deliverance session, no screaming or yelling or shouting (volume is not a measure of spiritual authority), no bringing a trash can to vomit into. We see none of this in Scripture anywhere. It was simply Jesus or His followers encountering someone with a demon, and then dealing with it right there.

Demons also often leave on their own when we enter into genuine WORSHIP! (1 Samuel 16:23 is the case of David playing on his harp, and an evil spirit leaving Saul.) They can’t stand WORSHIP! I actually experienced this very thing right after I was first saved at a meeting I was at in Illinois in 1974. I was healed and delivered and actually that night was the last night I took psychotic meds for my LSD flashbacks and mental health – I had been under demonic influence! All gone from the presence of God in worship!

In one instance, however, in Mark 9:17-29, the disciples could NOT cast out a demon in a young boy, and Jesus pin-pointed the problem as the disciples not being prayed up! Their walk was not strong enough to match their talk! In another situation, seven Jewish exorcists (non-Christians) were trying to effect deliverance on a man (Acts 19:13-19), and that man attacked all seven of them and beat the tar out of them! So if you are going to cast out demons from people, make sure you are spiritually up to it!

4. In EVERY CASE in the Gospels and Acts where we see narratives of demons being “cast out”, there are DRAMATIC occurrences! When a person is “possessed” and needs actual deliverance from an inhabiting demon, dramatic things are seen in the person who is possessed!

Too often what we see today, is every issue any person has, including mature believers, being diagnosed as them needing “deliverance”, and there are no genuine dramatic spiritual manifestations, just an arbitrary judgment that this person needs “deliverance”. It’s often a knee-jerk assessment without considering natural causes or spiritual growth issues. Sometimes these “sessions” create psychologically suggestive practices where people are encouraged to vomit into a trash can, etc. (True deliverance in a person who does not know Jesus might involve retching. In the Bible some people needing deliverance did exhibit such things as foaming at the mouth.) Today we often see a “side-show” atmosphere that is “fadish” and basically a “*wind of doctrine*” (see Eph. 4:14) instead of true biblical deliverance. Often many of these situations are a need for inner healing, mental health, emotional health, mind renewal, spiritual growth, repentance issues, the need to break generational curses, the need for genuine

conversion, or if there is a need for prayer against the enemy, the need to do and teach personal spiritual warfare is the more genuine need! (See #'s 6 and 7). I personally rely on the spiritual gift of "*discerning of spirits*" in 1 Cor. 12 to be able know how to pray in various situations I encounter. Without this gift, telling someone haphazardly they need deliverance can really be harmful.

5. Demons in the Bible are NOT normally named as a matter of practice! Today one hears demons given names for every conceivable issue people could have, and we simply don't see this in Scripture. It has the disastrous side effect of making every issue people face a demon problem!

Two instances that are often confused with this are Mark 5:8-9 where Jesus asked the question "What is your name?" to an unclean spirit that He had already commanded to come out. ("Unclean" is actually the general name ascribed to ALL demons in the New Testament. They are ALL "unclean", or simply evil). Jesus probably asked that question because something was unique here, and "name" can also mean "character" in the Greek, the spirit answered "Legion, because we are many". In other words this was not a name of a single demon, it represented the name or "character" of a group of demons. Very different from naming specific spirits by a multitude of issues.

In another instance (Mark 9:25) Jesus had again rebuked an unclean spirit, and He spoke to the spirit and said "*Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more.*" This was not so much a NAME for the spirit, but rather the EFFECT the spirit had on the boy by being in him. The spirit had already been identified as an unclean spirit.

We do see a spirit called a lying spirit in the Old Testament in one place 1 Kings, and in 1 Tim 1:7 we learn we have not been given a spirit of fear, but this is a far cry from the multiple categories of demons and multiplied dozens of names within these categories!

Books on deliverance often list multiple categories of demons and multiple names of demons. We simply don't find this in Scripture, and these are simply human ideas. What is normally happening here is we see the results, or the fruit of demon activity in attacking people, which can be a myriad of issues, but this is not the NAME of the demon. They are all simply "unclean" spirits as we see them called in the New Testament. (There are HIERARCHIES of demonic forces, varying in strength and authority (see Eph. 6:12) and the demons in Mark 9:25 and Acts 19:15 seemed to be quite strong.)

6. When it comes to Christians and deliverance, we need to emphatically state that a demon cannot "possess" a believer. (There is actually only one word in the New Testament original Greek, "*Diamonizomai*", in English "*demonized*", that is used for demonic influence. It has a wide range, but is most used in the gospels of people genuinely possessed.) When someone is a true Christian, they are "*born-again*" (John 3) and they have Christ in their spirit, which has been made alive to God (Col. 1:27, 2 Cor. 5:17, 1 Cor. 6:17). A demon cannot occupy the same space as the new nature and the Holy Spirit!

However, there are many passages that highlight that the devil CAN attack and "oppress" believers. We are told to "*resist the devil and he will flee from you*" (James 4:7), and we are told that we must "*wrestle*" with forces of darkness (Eph. 6:12). Here is the KEY POINT here... It is the job of the individual believer to do this!! We do not see stories in the Bible of BELIEVERS running to other believers to get set free! We do

not see believers telling other believers they need “deliverance”! In Celebrate Recovery language, we have too many “fixers” running around! Believers now have the promises of God for THEMSELVES, such as the authority of Christ (Luke 10:19) and THEY must learn to “resist” and “wrestle”! To discern and repent and close doors the enemy uses to enter! Those are things that an INDIVIDUAL does! We clearly see this very emphasis from the apostle John’s commendation in 1 John 2:14 *“I have written to you, young men, Because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one.”* John commends these “young men” for being “strong” (individually), for having “the word of God abiding in them” (and God’s Word is our offensive sword against the devil! Eph. 6:17) and then specifically “you have overcome the wicked one”. These are PERSONAL commendations, and not someone who is running to others for deliverance sessions!

There are, however, definitely many times when I have prayed for new or weaker believers, sometimes them asking for prayer help, to stand with them against the devil and to bind the forces of darkness that are oppressing their lives, often their mind or emotions, or their circumstances, but these are normally NOT some big pre-planned session, and are often spontaneous. I’ve even done this from the front at a service, leading people in victory over the enemy ! During these times I make it clear that they must now learn how to stand against the devil and how to use their spiritual authority. To discern from God’s Word where they have let the enemy in, and to repent of that and renounce it. These problems are called “pollution” of flesh and spirit (see 2 Cor. 7:1 YLT). Both the flesh AND evil spiritual influences must be removed from our lives! Often the problem is their THOUGHTS. They need more of God’s Word (which is what John commended in 1 John 2:14) to renew their mind and to counteract the LIES of the devil. The devil is a LIAR (John 8:44), and if we believe his lies we open the door for him to oppress our life! (We can open doors to the devil through things like believing in and using New Age practices like crystals, Ouija boards, tarot cards, etc.) What we think determines what we believe (which affects our heart, see Romans 10), and what we believe determines what we experience! So every individual believer needs to learn how to PERSONALLY renew their mind and to do PERSONAL spiritual warfare and not become co-dependent on others!

Note: Mental health, the need for medications, etc. is another subject, and I’m not addressing that here, but this is why we don’t want to “knee-jerk” deliverance, but to really pray for God’s discernment.

7. One last area I’ll comment on is STRONGHOLDS. This comes from 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 (NKJV) — *“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ...”* Strongholds are not something people need “deliverance” prayers for! As in our previous point (#6), the EMPHASIS here is on arguments, knowledge and thoughts. These are things in a believer’s mind and thinking and believing that are wrong, opening doors to the devil, and these are called strongholds. The answer, once again, is for the INDIVIDUAL BELIEVER to attack this! ONLY THE INDIVIDUAL BELIEVER can “bring into captivity every thought for obedience to Christ”! SOMEONE ELSE CAN’T DO THAT FOR ME! People can teach, counsel, instruct me, and pray for me, but I must personally tear down those strongholds! I’ve even heard strongholds described as “nests” that demons have, that need to be “cleaned out”. The Scripture NEVER uses language remotely like that, and the focus in this passage about strongholds is on our THINKING! Much like Peter’s wrong thinking in

telling Jesus He didn't need to go to the cross!!

8. A final note I'll mention, is that spiritual warfare is also something we do together as a CHURCH, and not just individually and for individuals. Praying for our cities and our nation and our world for *"God's Kingdom to come, for His will to be done, on earth as it is in Heaven"* as Jesus taught us to pray, is hugely important. This is why it's important to part of a biblical and healthy local church, submitted to your pastors and leaders (Heb. 13:7,17), and not fighting alone, but as an army together! When you see people independently operating apart from being part of a local church, not being submitted to church leadership, not serving in their local church, you can know they are vulnerable to deception and operating outside God's ways. For instance, there is at least one deliverance minister today using the title of "Demon Slayer". This is sheer foolishness. Raw sinful pride. Pure ignorance. No human can "slay" a demon. They are spiritual beings and they don't "die" like we do. Jesus said in Luke 10:20 — *"...DON'T rejoice because evil spirits obey you; rejoice BECAUSE your names are registered in heaven."*

Hopefully these few points help to bring a balanced and Scriptural perspective to "deliverance" and how to deal with demons and the forces of darkness! Fads and excesses will always be around, but the answer is to simply STUDY God's Word carefully and fully, then live and practice that, and avoid things that don't line up with God's Word. The Bible is our instruction manual from God, and we are safe when we follow that!