

Can a Christian Be Demon Possessed?

**A Reflection Paper
Submitted to Dr. Steve Tracy
Phoenix Seminary
Scottsdale, Arizona**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for
TH 502**

**by
Troy A. Griffitts
24-November-2006**

A demon is an evil spirit. Demon-possessed people are indwelt by unclean spirits and driven by them (Luke 8:29). People can be possessed by more than one unclean spirit at a time. (Luke 8:30) Animals can be possessed by demons (Luke 8:33). Demons often cause physical harm to the people they possess (Luke 9:43). Demons often cause physical disabilities during the time of their possession which are eliminated when the demon is cast out (Luke 11:14). Throughout history, demon possession has had a number of different definitions, descriptions, and prescriptions. Rabbi Huna in 297AD cites four characteristics: walking about at night; spending the night on a grave; tearing one's clothes; and destroying what one is given.¹ The Puritans in the 17th century list these: to think oneself possessed; to lead a wicked life; to be persistently ill, falling into heavy sleep and vomiting unusual objects (either natural objects: toads, serpents, worms, iron, stones, etc., or man-made object like nails and pins); to blaspheme; to make a pact with the devil; to be troubled with spirits; to show a frightening and horrible countenance; to be tired of living; to be uncontrollable and violent.² Modern scholars compile their own eclectic lists, but are these characteristics Biblical? The Scriptural descriptions we have clearly define demon possession as: a host being inhabited and controlled by an unclean spirit. The spirit often causes disease or other physical harm to the host. In all Biblical accounts, the demon acknowledges the Person, power, and authority of Jesus Christ and does not mock or speak blasphemously against Him.

1 Bock, Darrell L.; Luke Volume 1, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI; p. 766

2 The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology; Crown Publishers, New York, 1959, p395

Christians disagree whether or not a true believer can be possessed by demons. There isn't definitive data sufficient to determine if any of the examples of demon possession in Scripture portray a true believer as the host of demon possession. If we remember our narrow definition of demon possession from Scripture, we may go a long way in reconciling disagreement. The defining characteristics all Scriptural examples portray are that the host is indwelt and controlled by the evil spirit, suppressing the will and personality of the host. Virtually all Christians agree that Satan and evil spirits can tempt, deceive, and influence. The Bible is clear that God will not allow a demon to tempt a true believer beyond what they can handle (1 Cor 10:13). This must then preclude demon possession which involves controlling the host in suppression of their will.

How might one counsel a believer who feels they are oppressed by evil spirits? A believer's primary purpose for existing in this life is to plead with non-believers to accept the gift of salvation which Christ offers to them. Demons tirelessly work to thwart this effort. Demons try to deceive both those who would accept Christ as their savior, and those who have already have been saved (1 Timothy 4:1; James 3:15). If demons can then deceive, it can be assumed that, while they cannot indwell believers, they can influence a believer. However, Christ tells us the certainty of the believer's ability to defeat these attacks. In James 4:7, we learn that if a believer resists the evil one, that evil spirit will flee from the believer. We see Paul struggling with temptation in Romans 7-8. Paul tells us to be spiritually minded and led by the Spirit of God. And while sometimes we will give in to the war waging in our members, we must always know that since we hate the sin in our lives, we agree with the Law of God,

and there is no more condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Paul encourages us to hope in the fact that if we are believers, we have the Spirit of God dwelling in us. “And if the Spirit Who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He Who raised Christ from the dead will give life even to your mortal body through the indwelling of His Spirit in you” (Rom. 8:11). This promise is sure to give hope to the believer struggling in the battle against evil spirits. If God's Spirit proved He can raise Christ's mortal Body from the dead, and if God promises that He wants to give life-- both spiritually for eternity, and also physically to resist sin, then we are able to trust in the security that we have the power to live Godly lives and defeat the offenses of evil. “Now we have been together buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, in just the same way, so also even you, in newness of life might walk” (Rom 6:4).

The believer who is severely oppressed should be encouraged to trust in these promises from Scripture and to persevere in resisting the attack of temptation. A counselor should be sensitive to mental illness which may be causing the believer to feel they are demon oppressed. If signs of true demon possession are observed, prayer asking God for deliverance should be given and the Gospel of Christ presented. A church who discovers a brother or sister under heavy attack should have members spend more time living daily life together with their targeted member. The victim should be encouraged to focus on their service for Christ, taking on the attack directly, and the victory they are promised therein.