



Spiritual Warfare

Part 11: Can A Christian Be Demon Possessed?

by Jim Osman
Pastor/Teacher

Kootenai Community Church
kootenaichurch.org

No discussion of spiritual warfare would be complete without answering the question of whether or not a Christian can be demon possessed. How one answers this question will, to a great extent, determine their approach to spiritual warfare. It will determine what type of pastoral counsel one is expected to give or receive. It will dictate the way in which a believer battles against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Entire ministries have been founded for the purpose of exorcising demons from Christians and teaching Christians how to exorcise demons from others. It will be no surprise to discover that believing that the idea that a Christian can be demon possessed fits nicely in the broader theology of spiritual warfare I have been critiquing in this series. I do not believe that it fits at all in a biblical view of spiritual warfare.

In this article I'll answer the arguments used to support the doctrine that Christians are subject to demon possession. The subject of exorcisms is a different, yet related, topic. We will take a look at exorcisms and their purpose in the next article.¹

The Two Views

Can a Christian be indwelt and controlled by a demon?

Some would answer that question with "yes," though they would not necessarily like the phrase "demon possessed" and would instead prefer the term "demonized." They would argue that while a believer cannot be "owned" by a demon,² he or she can be indwelt and controlled by a demon. Those who believe that a demon can inhabit a Christian also believe that the answer for such indwelling and control is an exorcism.

Others would answer the question with "no." We would teach that a demon cannot indwell a believer because a believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. We would say that a demon can attack a believer, deceive a believer, tempt a believer and even oppress

(both physically and spiritually) a true believer. Notice that these are all things done external of the spirit/soul of the believer. Those who believe that a demon **cannot** indwell a Christian would promote *resistance*, not *exorcism*, as the proper method for dealing with satanic attack.

What is Demon Possession?

We need to begin by defining some terms. Ice and Dean offer a helpful summary of the New Testament usage of the terms for *demon possession*:

The New Testament uses more than one term to refer to demon possession. First is the Greek word *daimonizomai*, which is a participial form of the more commonly used noun for demon (*daimonion*). *Daimonizomai* is usually translated "to be possessed by a demon," or when it is used to describe a person in that condition, it is rendered "demoniac." The word is used 13 times,³ all in the Gospels, and is usually referred to by the English expression "to be demonized."

The second term in the Greek is *daimonion echein*, "to have a demon." This phrase is used eight times in Matthew, Luke, and John.⁴ The Greek grammar conveys the idea that the subject is characterized by having a demon indwell him. . . . "Demonized" and "to have a demon" are used in Scripture of only one extreme: to be inwardly controlled by an indwelling demon. They are never used to describe a case involving anything less. For example, these terms never describe Satan's activities of accusation, temptation, deception, or persecution; they describe only the extreme case of being inwardly controlled by a demon.⁵

Those who try argue that a Christian can be demonized try to

1 Previous articles in this series are archived at our website, www.kootenaichurch.org.

2 Since technically Satan cannot *own* anything, they would argue that a believer, while *belonging to God*, can be *indwelt and controlled by Satan*. This ends up being a semantic distinction that makes little difference in the end.

3 Matthew 4:24; 8:16, 28, 33; 9:32; 12:22; 15:22; Mark 1:32; 5:15, 16, 18; Luke 8:36; John 10:21.

4 Matthew 11:18; Luke 7:33; 8:27; John 7:20; 8:48, 49 ("to not have a demon"), 52; 10:20.

5 Thomas Ice and Robert Dean, Jr. *Overrun By Demons: The Church's New Preoccupation With The Demonic* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1990) 116, 118.

distinguish between being “owned” by a demon (possessed) and simply being “controlled by a demon at various levels.” In contrast to Ice and Dean, Fred Dickason writes, “*Diamonizomenos* does not mean ‘owned by a demon,’ but simply ‘demonized.’ This basically describes the condition of a person who is inhabited by a demon or demons and is in various degrees under control with various effects. The idea of ownership is foreign to the New Testament word and its usage. Satan and his demons own nothing. God owns them.”⁶

Those who believe that a Christian can be demonized make no substantial distinction between being *oppressed* by a demon and being *possessed* by a demon. Someone tempted, attacked, influenced from without is, in their view, “demonized.” So too is the one indwelt by a demon. It is a matter of degree.

Those who deny that a Christian can be demon possessed would draw a sharp distinction between a demon indwelling a person and a demon attacking, tempting, or oppressing a person from without. While we would agree that a demon can attack a believer from without, we would deny that a demon could control a believer from within.

By “demon possessed,” we mean indwelt and controlled by a demon. It is obvious that a demon cannot own a person, but they can indwell people and animals, and it is to this we refer when we use the term “demon possession.” The terms used in Scripture for a person who is “demonized” **describe the extreme of being controlled by a demon**. The issue simply is, does Scripture teach that this can be true of a believer?

This is no small distinction! It is upon this issue that a large amount of the teaching of modern spiritual warfare tactics rests. If believers are just as susceptible to all the influences of Satan and his control as unbelievers, then Christians need to have Satan’s influence removed (exorcised) from them. Our standing in Christ is no more secure from the devil than that of an unbeliever. In fact, we are just as open to his attack and control as the rankest unbeliever.

The Danger of Experience-Based Theology

Care must be taken that our understanding of demon possession be based on the biblical data and not on experience or clinical research. The danger of building a theology on experience can be seen in the writings of late scholar Merrill F. Unger.

In his book *Biblical Demonology*, published originally in 1952, Unger emphatically declared that “to demon possession only unbelievers are exposed.”⁷ Unger later admitted that this assertion “was based on the assumption that an evil spirit could not indwell the redeemed body together with the Holy Spirit.”⁸ By the time that

Unger published his later book in 1971, he had changed his opinion. This change was based not on the text of Scripture, which he said “*does not clearly settle the question.*”⁹ Rather Unger had received letters from Christian missionaries from all over the world who testified that they had witnessed “Christians” being demon possessed. Ungers’s change in doctrine was prompted not from a study of the biblical text, but upon **experience**.

Unger then went on to say, “. . . most Christians would hesitate to say that a believer can become demon possessed. Such cases are rarely seen, if ever, in the United States. However, in lands where demon-energized idolatry has flourished unchecked by the gospel for ages, new believers who were delivered from demon possession have been known to become repossessed when they return to their old idols. The testimonies of numerous missionaries in pagan areas support this evidence.”¹⁰

Was Unger convinced by Scripture to change his position? No. He stated, “Everyday experience adds its testimony to that of Scripture that believers can be oppressed and enslaved by demon powers.” Though Unger tries to get the biblical data to fit the experience, it is clear that experience is the determining factor and not Scripture. What type of experience does Unger have in mind? He quotes Hobart E. Freeman, a pastor, “In my personal experience, the majority of those for whom I have prayed for deliverance from occult oppression or subjection were Christians, including ministers and the wives of ministers.”¹¹

Another advocate of this position, Thomas White, writes, “I am aware that this position stirs the opposition of many who stand firm with the notion that the Holy Spirit and an evil spirit cannot cohabit the same vessel. But the bottom line is this: Scripture does not exclude the possibility, and clinical reality affirms it time and time again.”¹² Once again, the silence of Scripture (supposedly) on the issue is interpreted **in light of experience** to support the belief that Christians can be indwelt and controlled by a demon.

Proof Texts To The Rescue!

Several biblical examples are typically supported to show that a believer can be possessed by a demon. We will examine each one to see if, indeed, the case can be made.

King Saul is often cited as proof that a believer can be possessed and/or controlled by a demon. **1 Samuel 16:14** records, “**Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD terrorized him.**”¹³

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 White, 45.

13 Two other passages record the same thing. Both times Saul tried to pin David to the wall with his javelin. **1 Samuel 18:10–11**, “**Now it came about on the next day that an evil spirit from God came mightily upon Saul, and he raved in the midst of the house, while David was playing the harp with his hand, as usual; and a spear was in Saul’s hand. Saul hurled the spear for he thought, ‘I will pin David to the wall.’ But David escaped from his presence twice.**” **1 Samuel 19:9–10**, “**Now there was an evil spirit from the**

6 Thomas B. White, *The Believer’s Guide To Spiritual Warfare* (Ann Arbor: Servant Publications, 1990), 43.

7 Merrill F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology: A Study Of The Spiritual Forces Behind The Present World Unrest* (Wheaton: Van Kampen Press, 1952), 100.

8 Merrill F. Unger, *Demons In The World Today* (Wheaton: Tyndale Publishers, 1971), 116.

The first thing we have to consider is whether Saul was a genuine believer or not. Though at the time of his anointing as king, it appears that he was a man of God (1 Sam. 10), his subsequent conversion is inconsistent with that of a genuine believer (James 2:14).¹⁴ The fact that he was chosen as king and used by God does not prove that he was a believer, since God used pagan kings such as Cyrus and Nebuchadnezzar as his chosen men to accomplish His various purposes.

Even if we set that aside and grant for the sake of argument that Saul was a believer, it does not prove that a Christian today can be demon possessed. The ministry of the Holy Spirit to believers in the Old Testament was remarkably different than that today. The Holy Spirit did not permanently indwell believers in the Old Testament (Psalm 51:11). That fact alone is sufficient to prove that whatever may have been true of Saul is not equivalent to us today.

John Wimber and others would equate Saul being tormented by a demon with demon possession. However, there are three reasons why the example of Saul is not a case of demon possession.¹⁵

First, the evil spirit is said to have been sent from God, not Satan. In the New Testament examples, there is no doubt that the evil spirits exorcised by Jesus were, in fact, sent and empowered by Satan.¹⁶

Second, the evil spirit that tormented Saul is said to leave when David played his harp¹⁷, and no demon is said in Scripture to depart at the playing of music. Instead, Jesus and the Apostles cast out the demons in the name of the Lord.

Third, and most significantly, the texts all say that the evil spirit came *upon* Saul or would depart from *upon* him. The text never says that an evil spirit *entered* Saul. The language of demon possession is that of entering into someone and not just coming upon someone. The language of these passages is what we would expect if it is describing an external attack which can happen to a believer.

Saul is offered as the clearest example from the Old Testament that a Christian can be demon possessed. After examining the case of Saul, I believe we can say that this case does not at all prove the point.

The Daughter of Abraham mentioned in **Luke 13** is also cited as an example of a true believer being possessed by a demon. **Luke 13:11** says, **“And there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was**

LORD on Saul as he was sitting in his house with his spear in his hand, and David was playing the harp with his hand. Saul tried to pin David to the wall with the spear, but he slipped away out of Saul’s presence, so that he stuck the spear into the wall. And David fled and escaped that night.”

14 Brent Grimsley and Elliot Miller, “Can A Christian Be Demonized?” *Christian Research Journal* (Summer 1993), 17-18.

15 See Ice and Dean, 124-125.

16 Matthew 12:22-29.

17 1 Samuel 16:23.

bent double, and could not straighten up at all.” After Jesus healed the woman, the Pharisees were indignant because it was the Sabbath. Jesus replied, **“And this woman, a daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound for eighteen long years, should she not have been released from this bond on the Sabbath day” (Luke 13:16)?**

The fact that Jesus called her a “daughter of Abraham” is supposedly proof that she was a believer. Her sickness caused by a spirit is seen as evidence that she was possessed (or demonized). Neil T. Anderson writes, “Verse 16 states that her physical disability was caused by satanic bondage. This woman was not an unbeliever. She was ‘a daughter of Abraham’ (verse 16), a God-fearing woman of faith with a spiritual problem. . . . Notice that this woman wasn’t protected from demonic control by being inside the synagogue. Neither the walls of a synagogue nor the walls of a church provide sanctuary from demonic influence. Admittedly, this event occurred before the cross. But it is an indication that demons can physically affect believers.”¹⁸

Remember that *physical affliction* and *total control* are all part of being “demonized” in the view of Anderson and others. Therefore, if a believer can be afflicted, they can be controlled and indwelt. Anders jumps from “spiritual problem” and “sickness caused by a spirit” to “demonic control.” To him, it is all the same thing. Anderson’s point that the walls of a synagogue or church could not protect one from demonic control is silly. Nobody believes that walls of a building can protect one from a spirit. However, I do believe that the work of the Sovereign God on the cross and His redemption of His people does provide sanctuary from demonic influence.

Was this “daughter of Abraham” a genuine believer? Fred Dickason believes that the woman was a true believer because (1) she worshiped at the synagogue, (2) she glorified God because of her healing, (3) the phrase “daughter of Abraham” implies salvation since Jesus seemed to suggest that she was a true Israelite with Abraham-like faith (a believer).

However, the fact that she worshiped at the synagogue is no sure indication she was a believer, since the Pharisees in the passage also worshiped at the synagogue and we would never consider them to be true believers. They were, in fact, opposing Jesus and His teachings. People can worship in a synagogue or a church and not be true believers. To borrow the language from Neil Anderson’s silly analogy, being inside the walls of a synagogue or even a church do not indicate that one is a believer.

Second, there is no mention in the text that the woman became a believer, and even if she did, it would have been as a result of her deliverance rather than a cause of it.

Third, the phrase “daughter of Abraham” is no sure indication she was a believer in Christ. It is most likely simply used ethnically to indicate that she was a Jew. Right before His reference to her as a “daughter of Abraham,” Jesus said, **“You hypocrites, does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey**

18 Neil T. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1990) 188.

from the stall and lead him away to water him” (Luke 13:15)? Likely Jesus was emphasizing her ethnic relation to the Pharisees to show them that their objection to His healing on the Sabbath was so utterly void of compassion for even this “daughter of Abraham”—their own fellow Israelite. They would show this compassion on the Sabbath to their animals, and here was a daughter of Abraham! Should she not, as a child of Abraham, receive at least as much compassion as their ox? This designation does not **at all** show that she was a believer.

Further, the text does not indicate that she was possessed. Luke notes that the case of her disease was demonic. She was crippled by the spirit, but that is not the same as being indwelt and controlled by a demon. It is worth noting that Jesus did not cast the demon out, but rather cured her of the illness. In clear cases of demon possession, Jesus exorcised the demons. He did not do that in this case.

Judas Iscariot is also offered as an example of a believer being demon possessed. According to John Wimber,¹⁹ Judas was a believer since he was one of the twelve disciples. We could never argue that Judas was not possessed by a demon since the Bible uses clear language to describe the fact that “Satan then entered into him.” It is clear that Judas was possessed by a demon.

However, it is equally clear that Judas was **not** a believer. In **John 6:70**, Jesus referred to Judas as “a devil” (v. 71). In **John 13:10-11**, Judas was singled out by Jesus as one whose sins were not forgiven, “because Judas was betraying Him.”

It is a distortion of the clear teaching of Scripture to assert that Judas was a believer when, in fact, Scripture makes the point that even though he was among the Twelve, he was no true believer in Jesus. He was chosen by Jesus, not because he was a believer, but in order that the Scripture concerning His betrayal would be fulfilled.²⁰

Peter is said to be a demon-possessed believer since, in **Matthew 16:23**, Jesus rebuked Peter saying, “Get behind Me, Satan!” It is argued that Peter was possessed by Satan and he was no doubt a believer.

Of course I would ask, why didn't Jesus exorcise the demon? As with the other examples, this is an assumption, and not a good one. In **Matthew 16**, Satan's influence of Peter was from without, not within. Jesus' rebuke was intended to identify the *source* of Peter's thinking, just as Jesus had earlier identified the *source* of Peter's confession as being from “My Father Who is in Heaven.”²¹ Jesus was pointing out the spiritual entity that was influencing Peter's thinking. The text nowhere uses language that would indicate that Peter was possessed and controlled by a demon. The language is consistent only with external influence.

Ananias and Sapphira are also cited as examples of demon possessed believers, since Peter said to them in **Acts 5:3**, “**Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?**” It is

assumed that since the heart of Ananias was filled, he was therefore possessed by Satan. Neil T. Anderson argues, “The word ‘filled’ in **Acts 5:3** (*pleroo*) is the same word used in **Ephesians 5:18**: ‘Be filled with the Spirit.’ It is possible for the believer to be filled with satanic deception or filled by the Spirit. To whichever source you yield, by that source you shall be filled and controlled.”²²

Anderson draws a faulty conclusion from the use of *pleroo* by wrongly equating “filling” with “control.” The word filled (*pleroo*) as used in the New Testament does not mean to “indwell” or to “control.” In fact, this would be an impossible meaning for many of the usages of the word. Take for instance, **Luke 3:5**, “**EVERY RAVINE WILL BE FILLED, AND EVERY MOUNTAIN AND HILL WILL BE BROUGHT LOW; THE CROOKED WILL BECOME STRAIGHT, AND THE ROUGH ROADS SMOOTH,**” or **Luke 5:7**, “**So they signaled to their partners in the other boat for them to come and help them. And they came and filled both of the boats, so that they began to sink.**” You can see that the word “filled” does not necessarily mean “to be indwelt and controlled by.” How is a ravine “controlled?” Did the fish indwell and “control” the boats?²³

The phrase “filled your heart” can be taken in two ways. First, it could refer to demon possession—an interpretation I reject. Second, it could simply mean that Satan, the father of lies, has so influenced the heart of Ananias that his heart was filled with the desire to lie, such desire finding its source in Satan. This then would be another case of a demon influencing a Christian from without instead of within.

If we say that Ananias was indwelt and controlled by Satan, then it was not Ananias who lied, but Satan. If Ananias was under the control of Satan, then Satan is the one who spoke the lie, not Ananias. In that case, Satan, not Ananias, was responsible for the lie. Yet Peter says in the very next verse, “**While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.**”

Peter clearly believed that Ananias was responsible and not a demon. It is further evident from God's punishment of Ananias and Sapphira. He struck them dead for their sin (**Acts 5:5, 10**). If Ananias and Sapphira were demon possessed, why didn't Peter simply exorcise the demons from them? Why were they punished for something that a demon did through them?

Satan influenced Ananias from outside, not inside. This is not an example of a believer being demon possessed. Ananias and Sapphira were believers, but they were not possessed by a demon.

These are the most common examples put forth to show that Christians can be demon possessed. Clearly, these do not make the case. Other lines of argument are sometimes offered by advocates of that position. They take any teaching in the New

19 Ice and Dean, 125.

20 John 13:18.

21 Matthew 16:13-20.

22 Anderson, 192.

23 Consider also Luke 5:26; John 16:6; Acts 2:2; 3:10; 5:28; 19:29; 2 Cor. 7:4.

Testament²⁴ on a believer standing against satanic forces and then reason that such teaching only makes sense if a Christian can be demonized (controlled or indwelt by a demon to various degrees). However, it does not follow that just because we are attacked outwardly by Satan, that he is therefore free and able to control a believer in the same way and to the same degree that he does an unbeliever. As we have seen, that is a teaching that is presumed from experience and then imported into the text of Scripture.

Merrill Unger, who believed that Christians could be possessed, stated that Scripture “does not clearly settle the question.”²⁵ Fred Dickason, though he agrees with Unger is candid enough to admit, “We cannot conclusively say that the Bible clearly presents evidence that believers may be demonized.”²⁶ In contrast, I believe that the Bible is clear on the subject, and that every teaching in the New Testament about the position and privileges of a believer precludes the possibility of demon possession.

Not Possible

We might expect that an unbeliever could be possessed and controlled by a demon. An unbeliever belongs to the kingdom of darkness, belongs to the father of lies, and is under the sway of the wicked one.²⁷ These things are not true of a believer. In fact, the change of position and relationship to the world, the flesh and the devil are so radically different for the believer that we are said to be entirely new creations.²⁸ The following lines of argument show that demon possession of a believer is impossible.

We have been delivered. Colossians 1:13 says that “**He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.**”²⁹ We are no longer in the domain of Satan's kingdom. He can attack us, trick us, tempt us, and oppose us, but He cannot control or indwell us. We do not belong to Him.

We are temples of the Living God. 1 Corinthians 6:19–20, “**Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.**” The assumption in Scripture is that one might have God dwelling in them, or Satan, but certainly not both. This is the foundation of Paul's argument in **2 Corinthians 6:14–16**, “**Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in**

common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, 'I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.'” In this passage, the fact that we are the temple of God excludes such intimate fellowship with demons and/or idols. How then would God, who is mightier than Satan, allow a demon to reside with Him in a believer? It is unthinkable!

John comforts his readers with the certainty that “**You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.**” Those who say that a Christian can be demon possessed would have to change this verse to read, “Greater is He who is in you than he who is in you.” Clearly, God is *in* the believer and Satan is *in* the world, but not *in* us.

We are sealed and kept. Ephesians 1:13–14, “**In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.**” Since we belong to God, the Holy Spirit permanently indwells us and we are sealed by that same Spirit until the day of redemption. Because we are kept by God, the promise of Scripture is that the one in the world does not touch us (**1 John 5:18**). The belief that a believer can be demon possessed must turn all of these verses on their heads!

There is a complete absence of instruction in the New Testament on how to deal with a demon possessed believer. If, as is asserted, a Christian can be demon possessed, we would not expect the New Testament epistles to be silent on how to handle such cases of demon possession. We would expect an abundance of information about how to prevent such possession and how to handle such possession. We would also expect numerous examples of possessed believers to fill the pages of the New Testament. We would expect that a church like that at Corinth, with its rampant sin and history of demon worship, would be subject to such demonic footholds and would receive instructions for dealing with demon possessed believers. Yet we don't find any of this. “For if deliverance is as important to victorious Christian living as its advocates would have us believe, we can rightly expect the New Testament to deal with it.”³⁰

“But if Christians can be possessed, then why do not the New Testament Epistles, those letters written specifically to teach believers how to live a victorious Christian life until the return of Christ, tell us that believers can be demon-possessed, or command us to cast out demons from Christians, or tell us how to otherwise deal with this problem? It is unthinkable that a subject as important as this one would not be dealt with in the Epistles. . . . if the Epistles gave instructions on how to cast out demons, then it would be clear that Christians could be demon-possessed. Therefore, since there are no instructions for dealing with demon-possessed Christians in the New Testament, and

24 Ephesians 6; 1 Peter 5; 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Corinthians 12, etc.

25 Unger, 116.

26 C. Fred Dickason, *Demon Possession and the Christian: A New Perspective* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), p. 127, quoted in Brent Grimsley and Elliot Miller, “Can A Christian Be Demonized?” *Christian Research Journal* (Summer 1993), 17-18.

27 Colossians 1:13; John 8:44; 1 John 5:19.

28 2 Corinthians 5:17.

29 See also Acts 26:18.

30 Grimsley and Elliot, 19.

assuming that believers can be demon-possessed, then once again it is back to experience and trial and error as our teacher for functioning in this area."³¹ That is precisely where Unger, Anderson and others would have us to derive our theology, not from Scripture, but from trial and error experience.

The teaching of the New Testament for dealing with the devil is always the same: resist him.³² "Never are believers said to respond to Satan or demons by casting them out, which is always the remedy in the New Testament for a demon possessed person. Instead, for the believer the command is always to stand or resist, which is the counter to an external temptation by Satan and the demonic."³³

What About The Experience?

What then are we to make of the various experiences that people have which seem to suggest that a Christian can be demon possessed?

For starters, we begin by recognizing that our experiences must be interpreted in light of revelation from God and not the other way around. If we take the Bible's teachings as authoritative, then we are forced to find explanations for our experiences which harmonize with the clear teachings of Scripture. With this principle as our guiding concern, I believe there are at least three possible explanations for the experiences cited by Unger and others.

First, maybe these "believers" were not real believers at all. Unger says that "new believers who were delivered from demon possession have been known to become repossessed when they return to their old idols."³⁴ What? Return to their idols? What type of conversion is it that results in a quick apostasy? Not a genuine regeneration by the Spirit of God. The real believers in Thessalonica did not turn back to their idols.³⁵ Those who turn back to their idols and leave Christ, show that they were never His to begin with. They have never been set free from sin, self and Satan and so we should not be surprised if they would be possessed sometime after professing a faith in Christ.

Second, these episodes may be satanic oppression and not possession. Perhaps they are genuine believers, who although not indwelt by a devil, have given such control over to Satan that they are oppressed to such a degree as to appear possessed. If a believer genuinely thinks that their sin, their sickness, their lack of victorious Christian living is the work of an indwelling and controlling demonic influence, and if they submit to this theology in their conduct, they can actually consciously yield their members to such an influence. The psychosomatic power of that belief in this unbiblical doctrine could end up yielding enough control to a demon that its oppression from without would end up

looking like possession from within.

Third, it could be sheer demonic deception. Satan would love for Christians to think that he has more power than he does. If we lived in fear of him, constantly thinking that he indwelt us and controlled us, constantly seeking to exorcise Him out of believers, he would have the church chasing shadows. Satan benefits if our theology about him and his abilities, and our theology concerning how he is to be resisted, is in error.

The enemy gains a victory when he is able to take Christians by the thousands away from the real conflict and have us fight a battle that does not exist.

I believe that the experience-driven theology of Christian demon possession is a demonic deception. It is a deception that Satan has successfully fostered by possessing false converts and oppressing genuine ones, while undermining our confidence in the clear teaching of Scripture.

Can a Christian be demon possessed? **No.** Definitely not. Nothing from Scripture or experience suggests otherwise.

Without Wax-



31 Ice and Dean, 123.

32 1 Peter 5:9; Ephesians 6:10-14; James 4:7.

33 Thomas Ice, "Demon Possession and the New Clinical Deliverance," *Biblical Perspectives*, May-June 1992, as quoted in Brent Grimsley and Elliot Miller, "Can A Christian Be Demonized?" *Christian Research Journal* (Summer 1993), 19.

34 Unger, 116.

35 1 Thessalonians 1:10.