

DEMONOLOGY AND THE BELIEVER

by  
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The question of the relationship of Satan to believers is one which divides evangelical Christianity. Much of the teaching in this area has found its source in experience. The author, therefore, seeks to study the subject inductively to find the biblical teaching on the subject.

The main problem in a study of this sort is definitions. The terms used in the Bible to describe a person under demonic influence are "to be demonized" (*δαμονίζομαι*), and "to have a demon" (*ἔχειν δαμόνιον*). Since this is the case, the author uses the term influence to be equivalent to the Greek word *δαμονίζομαι*, and control as the end product of influence or complete captivity.

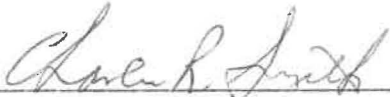
Satan is in a state of rebellion against God and, therefore, focuses his attacks on His children both personally and mediately. Since Satan is finite, he is in need of other angels to aid in carrying out his work. These demons are organized into ranks (Col. 1:16; Eph. 3:10) to operate effectively against the believer, and carry out the programs of Satan.

The methods Satan uses to influence the believer are nowhere delineated in the Bible, but are assumed by the writers. These methods seem to fall into two categories: communication and influence. Since the mechanics of communication are not mentioned, it is probably best explained as the communication of two spirits in a way similar to what is called Extra Sensory Perception. This is used by Satan to tempt the Christian, but when the believer yields to this temptation he opens himself to possible demonic influence. Satan is not able to influence a believer without permission from the believer.

When a believer is influenced by Satan, the question arises, "Can a believer be indwelt by a demon?" The author believes it to be possible due to the fact (1) the Gospels imply that influence involves indwelling, (2) an evil spirit is able to indwell the human body along with the Holy Spirit since the human spirit is sinful, and (3) the argument against indwelling shows a misunderstanding of the physical and spiritual. A demon could occupy the same space as a human body without controlling the individual. Therefore, indwelling probably accompanies influence.

The main question which arises from this study concerns the extent of influence. The author studies 1 John 4:1-3; Matthew 16:23; 2 Timothy 2:26; Acts 5:3 and Ephesians 6:10-18, inductively. From these verses it is seen that the believer is able to be influenced by Satan (Mt. 16:23), even to the point of control (2 Tim. 2:26; Acts 5:3). The believer can only be influenced as he yields to Satan.

Accepted by the Faculty of Grace Theological Seminary  
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Advisor



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
Chapter	
I. DEFINITIONS . . . . .	4
The Problem . . . . .	4
Biblical Definitions . . . . .	4
Different Definitions . . . . .	6
The Author's Definitions . . . . .	8
II. THE MEANS OF INFLUENCE . . . . .	10
Personal Influence . . . . .	10
Mediate Influence . . . . .	11
III. THE METHODS OF INFLUENCE . . . . .	13
Communication . . . . .	13
Influence . . . . .	15
IV. THE EXTENT OF THE INFLUENCE . . . . .	20
1 John 4:1-3 . . . . .	20
Matthew 16:23 . . . . .	23
2 Timothy 2:26 . . . . .	26
Acts 5:3 . . . . .	32
Ephesians 6:10-18 . . . . .	37
Conclusion . . . . .	39
CONCLUSION . . . . .	41
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	43

## INTRODUCTION

Pat had been a believer for about a year. He was a student in a Bible College in the Philippines. He had confessed his sins and received forgiveness and assurance of salvation. Yet, he had not yielded his life completely to God's will. In addition to this, he came from a family that had a history of occult oppression because his mother had been a practicing sorceress. These two circumstances seem to be the determining factors in Pat's becoming demonized.

Suddenly one day he complained of a terrible headache and nausea and went to the director of the school to ask him to pray for him. While the director was praying, the student suddenly lost consciousness and went into the demonized state. He became so violent that it took several men to hold him down. Strange voices began to speak out of his mouth.

One of the faculty members present addressed these voices: "In the name of the Lord Jesus, tell us why you have invaded Pat."

"Because he did not surrender his life completely," the voices responded.

"How many are you?" continued the interrogators.

"Fifty" came the reply.

Several of the faculty continued to counsel with the young man. They commanded the demons to leave him alone.

All this was a call to a real spiritual battle that was to last a total of nineteen and a half hours until complete victory was won and all fifty demons had been expelled.<sup>1</sup>

Stories like this one evoke varying responses among different Christian readers. Many people, especially those who have been to the foreign mission field, would accept such an account since they accept the idea of Christians being possessed by evil demons. Others would violently disagree with this and say, "We know a Christian cannot be controlled by

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<sup>1</sup>Merrill Unger, What Demons Can Do To Saints (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), pp. 137-38.

demons because his body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19), and greater is He that is in him than he that is in the world (1 Jn. 4:4). This definitely proves that no believer could be indwelt or controlled by an unholy spirit."

This tension among Christians has been manifested in the writings of Merrill F. Unger. In his first book on the subject of demonology he stated, "To demon possession only unbelievers are exposed; to demon influence, both believers and unbelievers."<sup>1</sup> The books he has written more recently have taken the opposite view that a Christian can be controlled and indwelt by a demon or demons. During the time between writing his first book, Biblical Demonology, and his later books, the experience of people with whom he came into contact caused him to re-evaluate the biblical data. As Dr. Unger states, "the author has received many letters from missionaries all over the world who question the theory that true believers cannot become demon-possessed."<sup>2</sup>

Experience is an area which must be scrutinized so that it does not control our viewpoint of the subject. When Dr. J. L. Nevius began examining the subject of demonology he "began his studies with a detailed questionnaire, which he sent to many missionaries and Chinese Christians, so as to discover as much first hand information as possible."<sup>3</sup> The problem with such a method of study is caused by the subjective nature

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<sup>1</sup>Merrill Unger, Biblical Demonology (Wheaton: Scripture Press Publications, 1952), p. 100.

<sup>2</sup>Merrill Unger, Demons in the World Today (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), p. 117.

<sup>3</sup>J. Stafford Wright, Mind, Man and The Spirits (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1968), p. 129.

of such experiences. If the exegete misinterprets these experiences, and then uses them as a presupposition in studying the biblical text, they will control his interpretation of Scripture and add an element of possible error into the theological process.

Since experience is a very subjective teacher, it is the writer's purpose to examine the Scriptures pertinent to the subject in order to determine the biblical doctrine of demonology and its relationship to the believer.

## CHAPTER I

### DEFINITIONS

#### The Problem

The major problem in dealing with the area of demons and the believer is the area of semantics. Many Christians use differing definitions for the same terms. In other cases, a person's position concerning the issues is controlled by his definitions. A person can define a term such as possession in such a way that a believer cannot be possessed. J. Stafford Wright describes possession as a control of a person's body so that the person is controlled against his will.<sup>1</sup> If this definition is assumed to be correct, it would cause serious problems to promote the idea that the believer can be possessed by a demon. It would jeopardize the believer's position in Christ and the possibility of repentance. For this reason it is important that the terms are defined by the usage of the biblical terms for demonic influence.

#### Biblical Definitions

The problems of defining terms are caused by the use of different terms from those found in the New Testament. The terms oppressed, possessed, or influenced are not found in the Bible. The two key terms

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<sup>1</sup>J. Stafford Wright, Mind, Man and The Spirits, p. 129.

in Scripture are δαίμονίζομαι (to be demonized) and ἔχειν δαίμονιον (to have a demon). The former term means to "be possessed (controlled) by a demon."<sup>1</sup> A better rendering of the term would be "demonized." When the Bible uses these terms to speak of being demonized or having a demon it refers to a person being controlled by a demon or demons.

The Bible does not make a distinction over the degree of influence which is practiced by a demon. Whether there is little influence or greater influence to the place of absolute control, the Bible would use the term demonized. The Bible would allow for the usage of terms such as oppression or possession, but one must be very careful in making these words mean more than biblical usage expresses them to mean.

Merrill Unger states:

Much of the opposition to the possibility that demons can invade and control a believer stems from the failure to see that all invasion, however mild it may be, constitutes demonization (being demonized). Unfortunately, the term "demon possession" has been commonly used, not to refer correctly to all cases of demon invasion, but incorrectly to refer only to the basest and most enslaving forms, such as those represented by the demoniac of Gadara (Mk. 5:1-20).<sup>2</sup>

While there are practical differences between slight influence of a demon and complete control by him, this is a distinction which the Bible does not make. Since this is the case, it would be better to avoid use of terms which set up an artificial division.

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<sup>1</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, (herein referred to as A Greek-English Lexicon) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 168.

<sup>2</sup>Merrill Unger, What Demons Can Do To Saints, p. 87.

### Different Definitions

The Bible makes no distinction concerning the degree of demonic influence. Whether the person was mildly influenced or strongly influenced, they were still considered to be demonized. In spite of this, most theologians make distinctions concerning the different degrees of influence. They see the practical differences between these and create new terms to describe them.

The most widely accepted terms are those presented by Merrill Unger in Biblical Demonology. In this book he states:

It is important in considering the function of evil spirits in Satan's kingdom, as Lewis Sperry Chafer points out, "to distinguish between demon possession or control, and demon influence." The New Testament gives ample warrant for making such a differentiation. To demon possession only unbelievers are exposed; to demon influence, both believers and unbelievers. In the one case, the personality is actually invaded, the body inhabited, and a dominating control is gained; while in the other instance, attack is made from without, through pressure, suggestion, and temptation.<sup>1</sup>

In several books read by the writer, the authors spoke of the ample amount of evidence in the New Testament which merits the distinction between demon possession and influence. In no case did the authors ever present any evidence. The experiences they may refer to would be too subjective to base this type of a distinction on and then build a theology on it. In one case, man is mildly influenced, so this is an external attack by a demon or demons. In another case, this man is more strongly influenced so that he is indwelt by a demon, his

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<sup>1</sup> Merrill Unger, Biblical Demonology, pp. 99-100.

personality is invaded, and he is being controlled. This is a bit too much to base on an artificial distinction which comes from observation.

Dr. Unger's definition of oppression or influence is also somewhat amiss. He defines it as "pressure, suggestion and temptation,"<sup>1</sup> but temptation is not equivalent with influence. A person can be under a great amount of temptation or pressure to sin from Satan, but as long as the person continues to resist and keeps from yielding, he is not being influenced by Satan. The influence comes when the person yields to that sin (Acts 5:3), so that Satan has a foothold to work. In this way, influence should be defined as the resultant partial control of a person which comes about by yielding to sin and Satan.

Most of these problems were corrected in Dr. Unger's later books. In his book, What Demons Can Do To Saints, he says:

It is evident, then, that all demonic invasion is demonization of whatever degree of mildness or severity. To call it "demon possession" rather than demonization is biblically permissible, but insofar as the usage does not attempt to differentiate it from demonization in general or limit it to some cases (the milder forms) rather than all cases (including the more severe forms). . . . all invasion, however mild it may be, constitutes demonization (being demonized).<sup>2</sup>

In this section Unger has corrected those areas which were deficient in his earlier book. Though he still makes a distinction between demonizing and influence, he makes it clear that the distinction is artificial.

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<sup>1</sup>Merrill Unger, Biblical Demonology, p. 100.

<sup>2</sup>Merrill Unger, What Demons Can Do To Saints, p. 87.



A second means of dividing the degrees of influence or demonization is harassment, influence, and control. This is the view taken by Tim Timmons in Chains of the Spirit.<sup>1</sup> The first degree of attack is harassment. This is equivalent to Merrill Unger's early definition of oppression. It consists of temptation and pressure to sin. When the believer does not yield to the traps and temptations laid, Satan is said to be harassing. Since there is no yielding to Satan, there is no influence or control by him. Once a person yields to sin and Satan, he comes under another degree of testing which is influence (Mt. 16:23). The more he yields, the more Satan's influence increases. When a person yields one or more areas to Satan's influence, he enters into a state of control (Acts 5:3). This breakdown of degrees of demon influence conforms closest to the biblical usage of the terms, if by control the author means complete control as the ultimate influence. This appears to be the meaning he intended.

#### The Author's Definitions

The terms which will be used in this paper are influence and control. The term influence will be equivalent to being demonized. This is the result of a believer yielding to sin and Satan, which has resulted in some degree of control by him. The degree of influence, in this case, may be great or small.

The term control refers to the end product of influence; complete control. In this case, the believer is in a state of complete

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<sup>1</sup>Tim Timmons, Chains of the Spirit (Washington: Canon Press, 1973, pp. 42-45.

captivity to Satan. In this state, every thought of the believer is being influenced by Satan. These definitions will be adhered to throughout the remainder of this paper unless otherwise specified.

## CHAPTER II

### THE MEANS OF INFLUENCE

Satan is a spirit being (Eph. 6:11-12) who was created by Christ (Col. 1:16). After the creation week, Satan was lifted up in pride (Ti. 3:6) which lead to his condemnation by God. Along with Satan, many angels followed him into sin and became fallen angels or demons. When Christ was present on earth, Satan and his demonic hosts focused their attack on Him. Today, their work is focused against the saints as the physical representations of God on earth.

#### Personal Influence

Since the fall of Satan, he has been continually working against God and the things related to Him. Since he is not able to express all his rebellion against God personally, he focuses much of it on the children of God.

The greatest desire of the Devil in this area is to cause believers to live defeated Christian lives. When we find resistance in our lives toward holy living, it could very well be our unseen enemy (Eph. 6:12). This angelic enemy tempts us in the areas where we are weakest (Eph. 6:14-17), in order to cause us to sin against God.

The Devil causes us to sin by tempting us in many areas. He tempts Christians to lie (Acts 5:3), to doubt the Word of God (Mt. 16:23), to disobey God (Gen. 3:1-5), to commit sexual immorality (1 Cor. 7:5),

and to cause leaders to be lifted up in pride (1 Tim. 3:6). Satan "prowls about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8).

Since Satan is finite, he can be in only one place at one time. Even though he can move very quickly (Dan. 9:21-23), this limits the extent of his ministry. For this reason, Satan uses other fallen angels to carry out his work.

### Mediate Influence

Since Satan is finite, he is in need of other angels to aid in carrying out his work. Satan is the commander of a whole army of fallen angels who are set to carry out his desires (Mt. 25:41, 12:24; Rev. 12:7,9). These angels have similar purposes as Satan and they seek to carry out his program of rebellion against God.

Satan's influence is extended through the use of demons. They are organized into ranks (Eph. 6:12) so that his presence may be extended to many places at one time. Demons are divided according to levels of descending authority. These levels are described as "thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities" (Col. 1:16, Eph. 3:10), and "powers" (1 Pet. 3:22). Dr. Dickason states concerning demons:

Since there are many demons, Satan's influence may be felt in many places at once. With organization of information and cooperation in the ranks of demons, their presence and power may be extremely efficient and effective.<sup>1</sup>

Through the help of these diabolical workers, Satan's presence becomes practically ubiquitous.

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<sup>1</sup>C. Fred Dickason, Angels: Elect and Evil (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), p. 167.

The ubiquity of Satan through his angels has caused C. S. Lovett to state:

I am satisfied that demons no more do the work of Satan, than the angels of God do the work of the Holy Spirit. Satan's subordinates hold and maintain his conquests, but he is the conqueror. He is the attacker. As the Holy Spirit is the One Who brings the conviction of sin, certifies the Word of God and makes Christ real to individuals, so also does the unholy spirit personally lead, tempt and inspire men to do evil. Demons should no more be mentioned in this regard than angels can be said to establish the indwelling presence of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

In this way, the author has almost placed Satan on a level of omnipresence. Satan is believed to be the tempter of every man personally at the same time. This is caused by a failure to see demons as representatives of Satan. Since demons do the work of Satan, it would not be impossible to refer the work of a demon as a satanic work.

Demons have the same power and nature as Satan. Demons act as the workers of Satan to carry out his plans in the world. This allows Satan to further his work and carry out his tempting ministry on believers individually. This is why Paul states, "Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil" (Eph. 6:11).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>C. S. Lovett, Dealing with the Devil (Baldwin Park, California: Personal Christianity, 1967), p. 25.

<sup>2</sup>All Bible quotations are taken from the New American Standard Bible.

## CHAPTER III

### THE METHODS OF INFLUENCE

The methods Satan uses to influence the believer is an area which the Scriptures generally assume. The Bible clearly teaches that Satan does tempt and influence the believer (Mt. 16:23, Acts 5:3, Eph. 6:11-18, 2 Cor. 12:7, etc.), but the methods used to accomplish this are nowhere delineated. The methods of Satan to control the believer seem to fall into two categories: Communication and Influence.

#### Communication

The Bible clearly reveals that Satan and his hosts communicate with the believer to tempt him (2 Cor. 2:11) and to cause him to yield in order to influence him (Mt. 16:23, Acts 5:3, 2 Tim. 2:26). The mechanics are never explicitly stated.

The Scriptures reveal that Satan can communicate to believers. In Matthew 16:23 Christ addresses Peter as "Satan." The best way to properly interpret the harshness of the passage is to acknowledge that the words were both Peter's as well as Satan's. This strongly implies that Satan had communicated these thoughts or words to Peter.

Ananias also had communication with Satan in Acts 5:3. Peter asks Ananias, why he had allowed Satan to control his heart (mind) to lie against the Holy Spirit. Ananias' sin was found in his yielding to Satan's temptation to sin. If Ananias was able to yield to him, it must

have been in response to an offer by Satan. The mechanics are not described in these two cases, but in both, Satan communicated his will to them in an attempt to lead them into sin.

Satan is able to communicate with the believer's immaterial being. This is best explained as a communication of two spirits. In the non-physical realm, communication takes place without the physical organs. Since man is a spiritual being, why could he not communicate with other spirits?

The type of communication could possibly be illustrated by Extra Sensory Perception (E.S.P.). E.S.P. is said to be, "communication without the intervention of the ordinary sensory channels."<sup>1</sup> Concerning E.S.P., J. Stafford Wright states,

There has, however, always been a strong body of belief that on occasions at least the mind can reach out beyond the walls of its physical house . . . (but) it is normally impossible to furnish cast iron evidence that the skeptic demands; even when reasonable evidence is available.<sup>2</sup>

Concerning the questionable nature of E.S.P., Hansel states that E.S.P. has been established beyond reasonable doubt.<sup>3</sup>

Since Satan can communicate with the believer on the spiritual level, the Word of God continually emphasizes the purity of the mind in such passages as 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 and 11:3:

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup>C. E. M. Hansel, E.S.P.: A Scientific Evaluation (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), p. xiv.

<sup>2</sup>J. Stafford Wright, Mind, Man and the Spirits, pp. 34-35.

<sup>3</sup>C. E. M. Hansel, E.S.P.: A Scientific Evaluation, p. 4

But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

Satan can tempt us by communication, but temptation is not sin. It does not become sin until we yield to these thoughts or actions. Since this is the case, C. S. Lovett's book, Dealing With the Devil, has much to teach us in the way of resisting Satan (Jas. 4:7) by placing our thoughts on the Word of God.

### Influence

Satan's goal in communication is to influence the believer. By having influence, he seeks to lead him deeper into sin and control. This was the final result of the sin of Ananias in Acts 5:3. He yielded to sin and Satan so that the result was influence to the place of complete control (ἐπλήρωσεν). Ananias was then condemned by Peter for allowing Satan to control him.

The Scriptures reveal that for Satan and his hosts to influence a believer they must have permission from the person. (1) This is demonstrated by the example of Ananias. He was guilty of yielding to the will of Satan so that he was controlled by him. (2) When a demon leaves a person he seeks to control another person (Mt. 12:43, Lk. 11:24). It appears that he cannot control just anyone or everyone, otherwise he would not have to seek for a person. (3) It would seem that something which is as important as Satan's control over the believer would certainly be discussed throughout the Epistles, but to the contrary, nothing in the New Testament Epistles is found except commands to resist (Eph. 6:13, Jas. 4:7). This may show that the Apostles believed that holiness was



the best resistance to Satan. If the believer was obedient to the Bible so that he resisted temptation, then he would be keeping Satan from having influence in his life. This would mean that the whole New Testament is indirectly against Satan because it is against sin. The believer must submit to sin in order to come under the influence of Satan.

The term influence is generally defined by the degree of influence and the location of Satan or the demon(s). The term influence has been previously defined as some degree of control over a believer. Some Christians may object to this by asking how a Christian can be influenced or controlled by a demon, since he has been redeemed from the power of Satan and his hosts. The fact that Satan can influence the believer does not put his salvation into jeopardy. The genuinely saved person can never lose his salvation or his position in Christ because of the work of Satan. His security is a fact, but if the believer yields to sin, God allows Satan to temporarily influence the believer even to the place of complete control (2 Tim. 2:26, Acts 5:3). The same problem is manifested in a sinning Christian. The believer has been delivered from sin but he is able to temporarily fall back under the power of sin. In the same way, the saint may (through sin) be allowed to come under the control of Satan in order to chastise him so that he will repent of his sin (2 Tim. 2:25). If a person is able to live in a state of satanic control, then this reveals that he or she is not a genuine believer.

The second aspect of influence is the location of the demon(s). This is one of the key problems on the subject of demons and the believer. The question is often asked, "Can the believer be indwelt by a demon?"

Many take the position that the believer's position in Christ forbids any indwelling. Merrill Unger supported this in his earlier book by saying:

The very nature of the believer's salvation, as embracing the regenerating, sealing, indwelling, and filling ministry of the Holy Spirit, placing him "in Christ," eternally and unforteitably, is sufficient explanation why he is not liable to demon inhabitation.<sup>1</sup>

Some others take the view that the Christian can be indwelt but indwelling takes place in degrees. Tim Timmons states, "Though I cannot prove conclusively that evil spirits are able to indwell believers, it is my opinion from experience that they do this to certain degrees."<sup>2</sup> An interpretation such as this comes from the equation of indwelling with control. The result of indwelling may very well be control, but the two are not synonymous. There is no reason to believe that a demon could not occupy the same space as a human body without controlling the person. He may be indwelling a believer and only tempting him to sin. The location of the demon is not the real issue in the matter of influence and control.

The problem of demons dwelling in the space occupied by the believer is not an insurmountable problem. First, the Bible demonstrates that Christians can be controlled by Satan and his hosts (Acts 5:3, 2 Tim. 2:26).<sup>3</sup> Since control in the Gospel accounts implies indwelling,

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<sup>1</sup>Merrill Unger, Biblical Demonology, p. 100.

<sup>2</sup>Tim Timmons, Chains of the Spirit, p. 41.

<sup>3</sup>These passages as well as Matthew 16:23 and Ephesians 6:10-18 will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four.

then a person would expect that these believers were indwelt. The Scriptures do not make a distinction in this area. Indwelling should, therefore, be assumed unless those holding differing views can present definite evidence to the contrary.

A second reason why a demon could indwell a believer is because of his own spirit. The argument that the Holy Spirit would not allow His temple to be defiled by an evil demon cannot be used as an argument because a sinful human spirit (1 Jn. 1:8) dwells in the believer's body together with the Holy Spirit. If this is true, it would not be incompatible for a sinful angelic spirit to dwell in the same space with Him also.

Arguing against indwelling seems to imply a misunderstanding of the relationship between the physical and spiritual. As has been previously stated, indwelling is not equivalent with control. A demon could enter the space occupied by a believer's body and yet not influence him. The important thing is not whether the demon is indwelling the body but whether he is influencing or controlling the believer. The demons must be local for them to influence a person since they are "finite spirit beings . . . Therefore, they are limited with regard to space."<sup>1</sup> The location is not what is most important. What is important is the control of these spirit beings.

The control of Satan is something which is completely avoidable for the Christian. He has been redeemed by Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and is given authority over the satanic host by prayer (Mt. 9:29)

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<sup>1</sup>C. Fred Dickason, Angels: Elect and Evil, p. 33.

and promises (Jas. 4:7). The Christian can resist the tempting communication of Satan and protect himself from his influence. The key question on this subject should not be "Can a believer be indwelt by a demon?" but "To what extent can a Christian be demonized?"

## CHAPTER IV

### THE EXTENT OF THE INFLUENCE

The main difference which divides evangelical Christianity in the area of the relationship of Christians to Satan is over the extent of influence. How much influence can Satan or a demon exert over a believer? Can Satan control (possess) a Christian who is secure in his union with Christ? This chapter will examine the biblical material concerning these issues. The key texts pertaining to the extent of influence are 1 John 4:1-3, Matthew 16:23, 2 Timothy 2:26, Acts 5:3, and Ephesians 6:10-17.

#### 1 John 4:1-3

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

Today, there is much confusion in Christian circles over the testing of demonically influenced people. Many Christians are performing ministries of exorcism which are based on this verse.

Today, many take a view of this passage which says that these spirits are the Holy Spirit or demons. In this way, when John says they are to try the spirits, they are being commanded to test Christians to see if they are being influenced or controlled by a demon. Merrill Unger supports this view by stating:

The apostle John warns the "beloved" people of God not to believe every spirit but to put the spirits to the test because many false prophets are energized by evil spirits . . . . The expression "receiving another" or "different spirit" therefore means more than simply believing and receiving false teachers. It denotes believing and receiving the spirits "not of God" (1 Jn. 4:3), who energize all false teachers.<sup>1</sup>

This view applies the test to the demon who may be inside a person. When the demon answers in the negative he is exposed.

This position is tenuous when the test is examined more closely. John uses the term δοκιμάζετε which means to test with the view of approval. Trench states that the word, "always implies that the proof is victoriously surmounted, the proved is also approved."<sup>2</sup> If John had been talking about testing demonic spirits he would surely have used πειράζω, which means to test, "with the intention and hope that the 'proved' may not turn out 'approved,' but 'reprobate.'"<sup>3</sup> If the word implies the tested spirit is approved, then it would be referring to the approving of the Holy Spirit, but John uses the plural πνεύματα for spirits. It would be very strange for John to use the plural to describe the approval of the Holy Spirit.

The interpretation of the passage to be a test of demonically influenced people ignores the context of the passage. The problem John deals with is an early form of Gnosticism. Harrison shows from several

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<sup>1</sup>Merrill Unger, What Demons Can Do To Saints, pp. 91, 93.

<sup>2</sup>Richard C. Trench, Synonyms of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1953), p. 278.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 281

passages, especially 1 John 4:2-3 that possibly the source of the trouble "was Gnostic with a Jewish flavor."<sup>1</sup> John was dealing with false prophets (v. 1) who were in error concerning their Christology (v. 2). The confession is obviously made by a man.

The verse would hardly give a test of demon influence. If this question were posed to demons in Christ's day, they would have been the first to confess the deity and humanity of Christ. They knew exactly who He was and believed it (Jas. 2:19). Dwight Pentecost has said, "While men give way to unbelief and skepticism concerning the person of Christ, no demon from hell has ever yet questioned the absolute deity of Christ."<sup>2</sup> This would be true of other areas of Christology. The demons of Jesus day, as well as Paul's day, readily confessed concerning the person of Christ (Mk. 1:23, 24; 3:11; Acts 19:15). Finally, suppose this were a test of demon influenced people and suppose demons did reject the biblical teachings concerning Christ, what would keep them from lying since they are ruled by the father of lies (Jn. 8:44)?

The main question here is concerning the meaning of the *τὰ πνεύματα* in verse one. The previous view assumes this to be "supra-human spirits"<sup>3</sup> and yet the term spirit can also be used of people.

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<sup>1</sup>Everett F. Harrison, Introduction to the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1964), p. 439.

<sup>2</sup>Dwight Pentecost, Your Adversary the Devil (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1969), p. 157.

<sup>3</sup>James Boyer, Greek Exegesis: Johannine Epistles (Unpublished classroom notes, Grace Theological Seminary), p. 67.

Schweizer comments, " . . . it can denote man as a whole, with a stronger emphasis on his psychical than on his physical nature."<sup>1</sup> That these tested ones are people, is supported by the causal phrase found in the latter part of the verse. John seems to make false prophets parallel to the spirits. This would support the anthropological usage of πνεῦμα by John. Therefore, what John is saying is that the recipients of this letter are to put those who claim to be prophets to the test. If they are incorrect in any area of their Christology then they are not from God, and should be treated as a false prophet.

Since these verses are not dealing with tests of a demonized person, they are not a valid source of information concerning demonology and the believer.

#### Matthew 16:23

But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's."

The verse is found in a context of praise for Peter. Peter had made a true confession concerning Jesus and Jesus blessed him for this revelation of truth which came from God the Father. Now that the disciples realized that He was the Messiah, Jesus began showing them the necessity of His death and resurrection. This prompted Peter to take Christ aside and rebuke Him by saying, "Mercy on thee, Lord! In no

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<sup>1</sup>Eduard Schweizer, "πνεῦμα," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. VI, ed. by Gerhard Friedrich, Trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1968), p. 435.



way shall this be to thee."<sup>1</sup> In response to this statement, Christ turned to Peter and responded by saying, "ὑπάγε ὀπίσω μου, Σατανᾶ " (Mt. 16:23).

The questions which arise from this harsh rebuke are, "What is meant by the term Satan?" and "What is its relationship to Peter?"

The first question which must be answered is "What is meant by the term 'Satan'?" Some writers attempt to soften the term by making it adversary. This view is defended by saying,

This is the proper translation of the Hebrew word שָׂטָן Satan, from which the Greek word is taken. Our blessed Lord certainly never designed that men should believe he called Peter, Devil, because he, through erring affection had wished Him to avoid that death which He predicted to Himself.<sup>2</sup>

This view would say that Satan was not involved in the offense, but when Peter openly resisted the will of God he was temporarily doing the work of Satan, since Satan opposes the will of God. The author believes this view to be inferior.

A second view toward the problem of identifying Σατανᾶ states this to be the proper name for Satan. Morison supports this view by stating:

Be gone out of My sight, Satan! It is the same kind of expression that our Lord used in reference to the devil in chapter 4:10 and doubtless He used it here in reference to the very same tempter. . . . The word Satan means Adversary; but in our Savior's time it was used as the proper name of the great spiritual adversary."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>R. C. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1957), p. 638.

<sup>2</sup>Adam Clarke, Clarke's Commentary, Vol. I, (New York: Carlton and Phillips, 1854), p. 173.

<sup>3</sup>James Morison, Practical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1895), p. 289.

The term Σατανᾶς has its origin in the Hebrew term שָׂטָן which means an adversary or "one who opposes another in purpose or act."<sup>1</sup> Some would use the etymology of the word to determine its translation in this verse and yet the translation is never determined by a word's etymology but by usage. The usage of the term in the New Testament supports it's translation as the proper name for the great adversary of God or Satan. In the New Testament the word is always used as a proper name unless this passage and its parallel verse in Mark 8:33 are the only exceptions, as seen in Thayer's,<sup>2</sup> and Arndt and Gingrich's<sup>3</sup> Lexicons. The strong usage of the term as a proper name forces Foerster to say:

In the saying to Peter (Mk. 8:33 par. Mt. 16:23) it might at first seem most natural to take σατανᾶ as an appellative in the sense "opponent." Yet the tradition would hardly have<sup>4</sup> retained the Aramaic word except as a term for the one opponent.

Usage of the term definitely supports the definition of the term as a proper name for the adversary of God but in most lexicons, this verse is given as the exception to the rule. This problem arises not out of the meaning of the term Satan, but out of the theological presuppositions which are taken into these two passages. Therefore, the proper name of Satan should be assumed in the New Testament passages unless the specific context forbids this usage.

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph Henry Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (New York: American Book Company, 1886), p. 572.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 572.

<sup>3</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon, p. 752.

<sup>4</sup>Werner Foerster, "σατανᾶς," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. VII, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), pp. 158-159.

The problem which arises in the text concerns Christ's addressing Peter as Satan. Thus, the second question arises which is, "What kind of a relationship exists between Peter and Satan?"

It clearly appears from the passage that Satan was using Peter to attempt to trap Christ. This temptation to bypass the cross is also seen in the temptation of Christ in the wilderness (Mt. 4:8-10). In that temptation Jesus uses an expression ("ΥΠΑΧΕ ΣΑΤΑΝΑ") which is very similar to the one found in Matthew 16:23 ("ΥΠΑΧΕ ὀπίσω μου ΣΑΤΑΝΑ"). When Jesus realized He was being tempted again by Satan, He responded with a similar rebuke acknowledging the ultimate source of the temptation.

The bout between Christ and Peter illustrates a mild case of influence by Satan. How Satan influenced Peter to set his mind not on God's interests but man's, is not spelled out in the text. It seems best to be explained by communication of thoughts. Satan may have communicated these thoughts to Peter, so that actually these were ultimately from Satan. Peter was guilty of accepting the thoughts even though they contradicted the Word of God (Mt. 16:21). In this way, Jesus could level this rebuke at Peter and at the same time address Satan.

#### 2 Timothy 2:26

And they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

Paul is seeking to show Timothy the proper relationship that he should have toward those who "wrangle about words" (2 Tim. 2:14) and teach false doctrine. The question Paul answers is, "How should a pastor handle these type of people?" In dealing with this issue,

Paul describes those who were teaching false doctrine and gives several insights into their present state.

The first problem of the passage is the identification of the ones who are trapped by the snare of the devil. This is determined by finding the antecedent to they. Hendriksen emphasizes the use of the term *μετανοίαν*. According to him this would make those who are trapped unregenerate men who have placed themselves in opposition to the truth. He supports this view by saying the word, *μετανοίαν*,

. . . means more than repentance. It is a conversion; a term which looks forward as well as backward. Conversion moreover affects not only the emotion but intellect and will; a complete changeover in mental and moral outlook.<sup>1</sup>

It is certain that this word can refer to conversion but this does not mean that it must. The root of the term means "a change in mind."<sup>2</sup> The term could be used to refer to a salvation experience itself or any later act of repentance (Rev. 3:19). From the context, the latter view seems to be the best.

The alternative to the view that these are unbelievers, would hold them to be Christians who have been caught up into doctrinal error. To these, Paul suggests that Timothy handles them with gentleness, a kindness not recommended to those who are working violently against the truth. As Kent says:

These persons who have been trapped by the Devil were not the same type as those described in 2:21 or Titus 3:10. From such,

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<sup>1</sup>William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Pastoral Epistles (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1957), p. 276.

<sup>2</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek English Lexicon, p. 513.

the minister of God is to remove himself. Those in 2:25, 26 are to be dealt with kindly in order to bring about a return to sober thinking.<sup>1</sup>

This view is reinforced by the previous context centering on those within the church rather than those outside the church. These things would suggest that the passage best be interpreted as referring to believers.

The passage states that these opposers have been trapped by the snare of the devil. The "snare of the devil" is a term which is rare in the New Testament, but is found three times in the letters to Timothy (1 Tim. 3:7, 6:9, and this passage). These references reveal believers can be trapped in Satan's snare by falling into disrepute with unbelievers, seeking to fulfill various lusts, or falling into doctrinal error.

The word used here is *παχίς*. This term refers to "things that bring danger or death suddenly and unexpectedly."<sup>2</sup> Schneider adds to this:

The New Testament reference to the *παχίς τοῦ διαβόλου* is to be seen in this context. The devil is not just man's accuser. He is the demon which opposes God which is equipped with weapons that bring destruction, which is at work in the world, and which seeks to capture men and destroy them.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Homer A. Kent, Jr., The Pastoral Epistles (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), p. 280.

<sup>2</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek English Lexicon, p. 607

<sup>3</sup>J. Schneider, "*παχίς*," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. V, ed. by Gerhard Friedrich, Trans, and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), p. 595.

The term is used here to refer to the type of trap which captures a person without killing him. Dr. Kent says, "They are captured alive by Satan."<sup>1</sup> Satan would seek to destroy them but he is controlled by God who will only allow him to go as far as He desires.

The final question surrounding the verse concerns the antecedents of αὐτοῦ and ἐκείνου. Who is it referring to when it says, "having been captured by him to do the will of that one?" Since the terms are probably both masculine, singular, the antecedents could be either Satan or God. The antecedent of αὐτοῦ is best seen to refer to Satan since he is the one who has captured these believers in doctrinal error and was now holding them in a state of captivity. Most commentators would agree with this interpretation.

The differences arise over the antecedent of ἐκείνου. The first view would say that the antecedent is Satan. This view is defended by Dr. Hendriksen who supports this by saying:

It is difficult to see why there is so much disagreement about the pronouns αὐτοῦ and ἐκείνου. The antecedent of αὐτοῦ is naturally the nearest noun (the devil) and the antecedent of ἐκείνου is the nearest pronoun (αὐτοῦ) . . . . attempts to connect these pronouns with remote antecedents in order to prove that one or both of them refer to God or to the Lord's servant impress me as unsuccessful.<sup>2</sup>

The rule of the nearest antecedent is the strongest argument in favor of this view, but this is not a binding rule in Greek. The rule

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<sup>1</sup>Homer A. Kent, Jr., The Pastoral Epistles, p. 280.

<sup>2</sup>William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: The Pastoral Epistles, p. 276.

is generally true but there are many exceptions such as 2 Peter 1:9, or Mark 2:14. Therefore, this is a very weak argument.

There is more support for God to be the antecedent of ἑκείνου. The first reason is grammatical. Dr. Homer Kent, Jr. explains this reason by saying:

To this writer the most feasible explanation understands the capturing as by Satan (in his snare of false teaching), but sees the "will of that one" as referring to God. This viewpoint gives proper recognition to the change in pronouns, since the shift to "that one" (ekeinou) undoubtedly was meant to indicate a different antecedent.<sup>1</sup>

An example of this shift is seen in 2 Timothy 3:9. Here Paul is talking about the apostates of 3:2-7, and says, "But they will not make further progress for their (αὐτῶν) folly will be obvious to all, as also that of those (ἐκείνων) came to be." In this case the αὐτῶν refers to the apostates, whereas the ἐκείνων refers farther back to the illustration of Jannes and Jambres. If we assume this in 2:26, then it would force us to conclude that the preferred antecedent is God rather than Satan.

Along with the grammatical reason, there would be theological problems involved with Satan having free sway over a believer. This would place God's sovereignty over and protection of His saints in jeopardy.

The verse reveals that yielding to doctrinal error can lead a believer into a state of control. Paul uses the symbol of Satan setting a trap, so that when the believer yields to the sin, Satan captures and holds him captive (under God's supervision).

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<sup>1</sup>Homer Kent, Jr., Pastoral Epistles, p. 280.

This passage demonstrates that a believer can be influenced to the point of control by Satan. This could very well be similar to the control that Satan can have over an unsaved person. The main difference between a saved and an unsaved person is the time. For a saved person, domination can only be temporary.

Satan may have complete control of the believer for a period of time. The length of this time is dependent on the speed in which they repent of their sin and yield to God.

When a believer is held in captivity by Satan, they have a will of their own. In 1 Timothy 2:25, even though this man was currently being held in a state of captivity, he had the ability to repent and resist the will of Satan. The believer can resist the control of Satan at any time by yielding to the will of God.

The believer can yield to Satan and his will, and be temporarily controlled, but he has a way of escape. The desired path of deliverance is by repentance (2:25), but all may not follow this path. It is possible that the person may commit "a sin unto death" (1 Jn. 5:16), and be chastised with death. This is illustrated by 1 Corinthians 5:5, where one had yielded to sin and Satan, so that Paul delivers "such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." This in no way questions a person's salvation, but is an act of chastisement of a sinning saint (Heb. 12:5-11). The control of Satan is allowed by God for the believer's good so that he might come to repentance.

The captivity of the believer can only be temporary in nature. As John tells us in 1 John 3:8-10, the believer cannot live in a continual



dominance by Satan because he is a child of God. It is possible for a believer to temporarily fall into sin, but his position in Christ will be revealed by his repentance from sin. In the same way, the believer can temporarily come under the control of Satan, but his salvation will demonstrate itself by repentance from his yielding to the devil. If a person does not repent of this sin he demonstrates himself to be not of the family of God but of the family of Satan (1 Jn. 3:10).

#### Acts 5:3

But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land?"

Ananias and Sapphira are two examples of Satanically influenced Christians. Satan attacked them in the area of their truthfulness (Eph. 6:14) through pride and gained the victory. The question which arises out of this account is the nature of the influence seen in Acts 5:3.

Ananias and Sapphira were most certainly believers. They were part of the community of believers at Jerusalem and they were willing to sell their property to help the church. Along with this, if Ananias was not a believer, why was Peter surprised at his sin and why was he judged for lying to the Holy Spirit? To argue that these two were not believers is to argue that a believer cannot sin and act deceitfully! From all indications Ananias and Sapphira were genuine believers, and voluntarily sinned against their Savior.

There are two views concerning the nature of the influence which led to their judgment. The first view interprets the sin as the temptation of Ananias by Satan. This can be argued by variant readings found

in Sinaiticus and the Bodmer papyrus (p<sup>74</sup>) which substitutes ἐπήρωσεν (disabled or crippled) and ἐπείρασεν (tested or tempted) respectively, for ἐπλήρωσεν. This may have been caused by an incorrect division of the words so that the λ could have easily been omitted. Since the majority of manuscripts support ἐπλήρωσεν, this argument is very weak.

The second argument for the temptation view comes from a possible Hebraism. In the Septuagint, the phrase to fill the heart is used to translate to dare (to do something). This is the view defended by Dr. Bruce Metzger.<sup>1</sup> If this is true the passage would read, "Why has Satan dared you to lie to the Holy Spirit?" The problem with the question should be apparent. If the question is interpreted in this way, then it places Peter's knowledge of Satan in question, because he knew it was natural for Satan to tempt people. It should be assumed that Peter was familiar with his nature and desires since Satan had conflict with Peter previously (Mt. 16:23). This interpretation of Peter's question implies moral responsibility on the part of Ananias for allowing Satan to tempt him, but there was nothing he could have done to stop his temptation. Since there was nothing Ananias could have done to keep it from occurring, this interpretation of the passage is seen to be unplausible.

The second interpretation of the passage declares the verse to be referring to Satan's control of Ananias. This is a proper use of πληρώω as most Greek lexicons would confirm. Arndt and Gingrich

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<sup>1</sup>Bruce Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (London, United Bible Societies, 1971), pp. 327-328.

define it to mean "take full possession of it (the heart)."<sup>1</sup> With this definition Delling agrees, as he states that in the non-literal usage of the term it means "to fill with a content."<sup>2</sup> In this way he says, "Satan finds a place in the heart of the deceiver (Ananias), so that he dominates it."<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the act of Satan was an act of possessing or dominating the heart of Ananias.

The heart in Scripture is seen as the "center and source of the whole inner life, with its thinking, feeling, and volition."<sup>4</sup> This term takes into consideration the whole man "including especially the mind and will."<sup>5</sup> Therefore, Satan had been given complete control of the heart of Ananias. He had yielded his mind to Satan to be led by him. Satan was able to influence every thought of Ananias. At this point, the only way for Ananias to break this influence was through repentance and submission (Jas. 4:7).

The question which Peter asked shows that this control was completely voluntary on the part of Ananias. Peter interrogated Ananias by using the phrase εἰς with τί (because of what). What he was asking for was an explanation as to why he allowed Satan to control him. The question reveals moral responsibility on the part of Ananias for Satan's work. Lenski states that the question, "refers the guilt back to it's

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<sup>1</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon, p. 676.

<sup>2</sup>Gerhard Delling, "πληρώω," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. VI, ed. by Gerhard Friedrich, Trans. and ed. by Geoffrey W. Bromily. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), p. 291.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 291.

<sup>4</sup>Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon, p. 404.

<sup>5</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1934), p. 197.

real source and implies that Ananias could have and should have resisted Satan."<sup>1</sup> If this is true, then he must have had the ability to keep this work from coming to pass. Believers cannot keep Satan from tempting or communicating with them, but they do have ability to resist (Jas. 4:7) instead of yielding.

The account of the sin of Ananias teaches several key lessons concerning the influence and control of Satan. First, just as was seen in 2 Timothy 2:26, sin allows Satan to have greater influence over the believer. This sin does not necessarily need to be serious or continual for him to come under Satan's dominance. Ananias did not commit what some would call a serious sin, and as far as Luke communicates, he only sinned one time. This should cause Christians to seek to live holy lives. By living holy lives, believers will be resisting Satan and keeping him from being allowed to control them.

The passage also teaches that the believer is completely responsible for the sin he commits. Quite often when people become involved in sin they place the responsibility not on themselves but on a demon. This transfer of responsibility is seen in most books on the subject of demonology. Don Basham refers to his identifying and exorcising of a demon by saying:

John was very badly overweight. He described a lifelong struggle against overeating. "It's not glandular, it's not a medical problem. It's simply a case of too many calories," . . . I led John step by step through deliverance. As we both expected, gluttony was identified and cast out.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles, p. 197.

<sup>2</sup>Don Basham, Deliver Us From Evil (Washington Depot Ct.: Chosen Books, 1972), p. 165.

This as well as many other examples reveal that many people place the responsibility for problems or sin on demons. If you have a problem with eating, cast out the demon of gluttony. If you have a problem with anger, cast out the demon of anger. It is interesting to note the testimony of one who had the demon of self-pity cast out.

When I was delivered from self-pity, I had quite a battle for a while. It was a great temptation to start feeling sorry for myself every time my husband blasted off about something. However, I found I could will to stop reacting to him . . . and decide not to feel sorry for myself. And I didn't.<sup>1</sup> [Emphasis added]

In cases such as these, the supposed exorcised demon made no difference in this woman's problem. The problem was not caused by the control of a demon, but sin in her own life which she needed to deal with. When she finally began to deal with this sin in her life, then she began to see victory over the problem. This woman may have been under a state of temptation by a demon but there is no sin in temptation. The believer must yield to the temptation as Ananias had done. If she was being influenced by a demon, all that would be necessary was repentance from the sin and discipline to live in holiness, so that the influence would end. In this way, she should have accepted responsibility for the sin instead of transferring it to a demon.

The final lesson seen in Acts 5:3 along with 2 Timothy 2:26, is that the control of Satan ends in either repentance or death. Ananias and Sapphira had gone too far and committed "a sin unto (physical) death" (1 Jn. 5:16), but the man in 1 Timothy 2:26 still had the option of repentance (1 Tim. 2:25). God uses satanic domination as a type of

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<sup>1</sup>Pat Brooks, Out! In the Name of Jesus (Carol Stream, Illinois: Creation House, 1972), p. 108.

chastisement for sinning Christians. The sexually immoral man of 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 was chastised by being delivered over to Satan "for the destruction of the flesh that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. 5:5).

#### Ephesians 6:10-18

Finally be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might.

Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world-forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one.

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.

The Christian life is a life of warfare against an unseen enemy. Paul uses the illustration of a Roman soldier to refer to the believer's defense against this enemy. The believer is continually being attacked by Satanic wickedness but there are certain times when there is special temptation (6:13) by Satan and his hosts. In all of these temptations, the power of God is greater than the power of Satan. Because of this power, the Christian will generally be victorious over Satan.

Dr. Hendriksen reminds us, "Assurance of this superiority, however, does not diminish the seriousness of any given conflict on any 'evil day' nor give certain assurance of victory in any particular battle."<sup>1</sup> Though this is true, the believer is assured the victory whether through overcoming or death.

Paul begins with several commands, "Be strong in the Lord, . . . put on the full armor of God (Eph. 6:10,11). The believer needs to have the power and armor of God to be victorious over Satan. The commands here imply that it is possible for Christians not to acquire these and use them against the devil and his hosts. This would result in defeats to Satan as the Christian may yield to areas of temptation. The enemy attacks the Christian in the weakest point in his armor. If the believer is having a problem with lying or false doctrine, Satan will focus his temptations on the area of truth (6:14a). In this same way, Satan attacks the Christian in areas of righteousness (6:16b), peace (6:15), faith (6:16), salvation (6:17a) and the Bible (6:17b).

As the Christian yields in these areas, he yields to the influence of Satan. If the believer continually yields to these spiritual forces, this may result in the temporary control of the believer.

There are many illustrations given of this in the Scriptures. The Christian Paul describes in 2 Timothy 2:26 was guilty of failing to gird his loins with truth. In this way, Satan was able to lead that believer into his trap so that as an end product he was controlled by Satan.

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<sup>1</sup>William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary: Ephesians (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967), p. 271.

Ananias and Sapphira were guilty of being unequipped in the same area. They had let down their guard in the area of their truthfulness so that when they were tempted to sin by Satan, they yielded to him and to his control. The control was only temporary since the Lord took them home by means of death.

Peter was unprepared in the area of faith. He had expressed faith in Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God (Mt. 16:16), but his faith in the word of Christ was lacking. Jesus had just expressed the necessity of his death and resurrection, and Peter rejected these words. He reveals his lack of faith by taking Jesus aside and rebuking him. When Satan communicated this thought to him, he should have rejected it as contrary to the Word of God. Instead he yielded to the influence of Satan and prompted the rebuke of Christ. It seems certain that Peter repented of this; thus keeping from a stronger influence by Satan.

The believer has within his reach the power to overcome the attacks and temptations of Satan and his hosts. It is only through sin that the devil is able to win the victory over the saint, and influence him to the place of control.

### Conclusion

Having completed a study of the key passages concerning satanic or demonic influence of the believer, it has been adequately demonstrated that Satan is able to influence a Christian (Mt. 16:23) even to the point of control (2 Tim. 2:26; Acts 5:3). Satan can only influence the Christian to the degree that the Christian submits or yields to him. The distinguishing point between Christian and non-Christian is a matter of time. The Christian's control will only be temporary.



The problem of a Christian living under the control of Satan is as problematical as a Christian living in a state of sin. The Christian cannot live in a state of sin (1 Jn. 5:18), even though Christians do sin (1 Jn. 1:8-2:1). In the same way, a Christian can come under the influence or control of Satan but it will only be temporary because his salvation will be manifested by repentance (or death).

## CONCLUSION

The believer is absolutely secure in Christ. He is a child of God and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. In spite of this, the Bible teaches that the Christian can, through yielding to temptation, involve himself in influence by Satan. This can result in the complete control of the believer on a temporary basis (Acts 5:3, 2 Tim. 2:26). God uses influence or control of this type to chastise the believer for sin (1 Cor. 5:5). This chastisement is performed under the supervision of God.

Indwelling by Satan and his hosts is also open to the believer who has yielded to sin. There is nothing in the believer's position or inheritance which would not allow the demon to occupy the space filled by the believer's body. Though this is important in a discussion of the control of the believer, the key idea is not the location of the demon, but the degree of influence.

In the study of the doctrine of demonology and the believer, the question arises, "Why are there so few passages which command the believer to resist Satan, if this area is so serious?" It is a fact that there are few verses in the Epistles which deal openly with this problem, yet much of the Epistles does deal with Satan indirectly. The best way to "resist the Devil" (Jas. 4:7) is to keep from sin and live in holiness. If the believer does not yield to the tempting work of Satan, then he will not be influenced by him. Therefore, the Epistles deal with Satan by dealing with sin.

There is no reason for any believer to come under the influence or control of Satan. God has given us all the armor that we need to resist. Therefore, "Submit to God. Resist the Devil and he will flee from you" (Jas. 4:7).

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