

Setting the Captives Free

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Introduction

The observations that follow stem from two decades of involvement in deliverance ministry. During that time, I have seen the Lord do some wonderful things, taking demons out of the lives of people who ranged from students to drug addicts to members of satanic covens. I had the benefit of good teaching from people such as John Wimber, on the one hand, and C. Fred Dickason, on the other, that is, from people who ministered and understood deliverance, and who held both charismatic and cessationist positions theologically. My ultimate resources, though, were the Bible, against which I measured every experience, and the Holy Spirit, who led me in the work, and who indeed did the work, as Jesus affirmed even of his own ministry of deliverance (Mk 3:20–30). In that sense, I am reluctant to say that “I delivered” anyone; I would rather say that the Lord delivered the person. He is the one who came to set the captives free, and to proclaim release for the prisoners. We who worship him are being transformed into the likeness of his glory, and as we are we have the privilege of being coworkers with him in the work of his kingdom.

How We Manage Ourselves and the Gifts of the Spirit

I am a firm believer in Ephesians 2:10 (as well as in the rest of the Bible!), which states that the Lord has prepared good works for us to do. I take that quite literally, so that, for instance, I know the Lord has prepared some good works for me to do today. There is a world of other good works which he has not prepared for me today, or at all. Those good works are for other people to do. I think that such an attitude to our life in Christ can help us to avoid many pitfalls, including burnout, which can occur if we take on works the Lord never intended for us.

When it comes to acquiring or using the gifts of the Spirit, the same principle applies. We are encouraged, for example, to ask for the gift of prophecy, but we do not all receive it (1 Cor 12:29). Moreover, anyone who does receive the prophetic gift will find that there are times when he or she would like to use it to benefit someone else, but the Lord is not telling them anything of that sort, or anything at all. So it is with healing, and with deliverance, which is a sub-category of healing. One may ask for the gift of healing, but not receive it. Or, if one does receive it, one will find that the Lord does not always heal when one asks him to.

In deliverance ministry, the same considerations that have been noted above apply. I may ask for such a ministry but not receive it. Or, I may ask for it and receive it. If I do receive it, my best course of action is to ask the Lord to lead me to the people he wants me to deliver. If I minister deliverance, or attempt to minister it, to a person the Lord has not “scheduled” for me (so to speak, in the spirit of Eph 2:10) one of two things will happen: either the Lord will deliver the person (but then I would have missed some other good work that the Lord had wanted me to be doing at that time), or the Lord will not deliver the person. The latter possibility may seem wrong to some readers, but I hope that anyone who understands the importance of being “in step with the Spirit” will see the truth of what I have written. The Lord does not always do what we ask him to do.¹

Can a Christian Have a Demon?

Given, then, that God heals, and that he delivers, another question arises: Who is to be delivered? This question implies another: Can a Christian need deliverance?²

1. I will not address at any length here the question of whether the gifts of the Spirit are for today. I have long issued to my students, and continue to issue to anyone, a standing invitation to demonstrate from Scripture that the gifts have ceased. As far as I can see, there is no scriptural declaration, and no good argument from Scripture, to that effect.

2. For a good discussion of this question, which considers biblical, theological, and experiential approaches and

Experience says yes to this question. It may seem counterintuitive, but there is no biblical evidence that a Christian may not have a demon. There are several lines of argument or evidence that are worth considering in this regard.

We know that light can have no fellowship with darkness (“What fellowship can light have with darkness,” 2 Cor 6:14), but that has nothing to do with the question.³ The question is one of proximity, not one of fellowship. Satan could appear before the Lord, for example, and dispute with him about Job (Job 1–2), or about Joshua the high priest (Zech 3:1–2). At those times, Satan was in God’s proximity, but he and God were not having fellowship. So, the objection that there can be no fellowship between light and darkness has nothing to do with the matter. A demon in a Christian is in proximity to the Lord (the Holy Spirit) within the Christian, but the demon and the Holy Spirit are not having fellowship.

A second consideration has to do with temple realities. We know that believers are temples of the Holy Spirit. For a Christian to have a demon would mean that an evil spirit is in the vicinity of the Holy Spirit (so to speak) within that person. If we look at the temple in the OT, say, during the days of Josiah, what do we see? We see a temple in which the Lord was present (he did not abandon it until later, Ezek 10–11), but in which also Baal, Asherah, and Shamash (the sun god) were being worshiped: Josiah, when he read the rediscovered “Book of the Law,” cleansed the temple of the idolatrous equipment that was part of the worship of those deities (2 Kgs 23:4). However, if those gods were being worshiped there, then we know that demons were present. Both the OT and the NT make it clear that demons are the powers behind idolatry. Paul says quite clearly that “the pagans offer their sacrifices to demons” (1 Cor 10:20), as Moses earlier had identified pagan idolatry with demons (Dt 32:16–17):

They made him jealous with their foreign gods
and angered him with their detestable idols.
They sacrificed to demons, which are not God—
gods they had not known,
gods that recently appeared,
gods your fathers did not fear.

Now, if demons were (and are) behind idolatry, then they were present receiving those sacrifices, as both Moses and Paul declare. But that means that they were present in the temple, receiving those sacrifices, in Josiah’s day—and, yet, the Lord was also there, since he had not yet abandoned the temple. It would be consistent with this OT reality if Christians, who are now the temple(s) of the Holy Spirit, could also have demons because of their idolatry (and all sin is, in some sense, idolatry; cf. Col 3:5).

A third and final point on this matter has to do with God’s omnipresence and its implications. The Lord is not only omnipresent. He also sustains all things by his powerful word (Heb 1:3). That means, however, that he also sustains demons, and even Satan himself, in existence. Here again, there is no scriptural statement that God and evil spirits have fellowship. But, somehow, God’s Spirit, working through his word, sustains all things, including the enemy and his fallen angels.⁴ To put it negatively, nothing in the universe, visible or invisible, can exist of itself. Only God does that. Everything else has a contingent existence, contingent upon God’s creating and sustaining that thing. That is why Jesus’ statement about himself and his life is so unique: “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself” (Jn 5:26). No other being has “life in him/her/itself.” The only life or existence that any being has is the life that God imparts. Hebrews 1

evidences, see C. Fred Dickason, *Demon Possession and the Christian* (Wheaton: Crossway: 1989).

3. All biblical quotes are taken from the NIV unless otherwise noted.

4. More needs to be written about the dynamic relationship between God’s word/Word and his Spirit, and I aim to develop the topic in a forthcoming biblical theology. For now it is worth noting that Jesus equates his own words with the Holy Spirit’s (Jn 6:63).

tells us that God sustains all things—keeps them “alive” or in existence—by his powerful word. So here, again, God does not have fellowship with the evil beings he sustains, but he must have a good deal of proximity to them if he is actively sustaining them.

In two decades of deliverance ministry, I, myself, have only ministered deliverance to Christians. All of them experienced the radical change, the freedom from besetting sin, that comes with deliverance. In the following pages I hope to give a reasonable account of the dynamics of acquiring demons, living with them, and being set free from them. My comments will be drawn from my own experience in ministry, but they are the sort of comments that anyone who has had serious involvement with a deliverance ministry could make and affirm.

How One Acquires a Demon, and What a Demon Does

Demons usually come into a person through sin. Paul implies this when he warns us not to let the sun go down on our anger, lest we give the devil a foothold (Eph 4:26). In most cases the sin is deliberate. But sometimes one can have a sinful reaction when one has been wronged, and that reaction apparently may open the door to demonic involvement. I have ministered to several women who have been victims of physical or sexual abuse, and some of the demons they had were there because they had been able to enter the person when the traumatic event took place. My best understanding of this is that the person had a deep and outraged reaction within, perhaps including an ungodly hatred and a desire for retribution, which made it possible for the demon to have access. Maybe the demon was associated with the abuser, but then influenced and entered the abused. It seems possible that patterns of abuse which continue through several generations (e.g., the father abuses his son, his son grows up and then abuses his son, and so on) are the result of such a combination of sinful human and demonic activity. Demons can also enter a person if that person deliberately asks them to enter. Bizarre as that may sound, it does occur in covens and satanic groups. I ministered to one such person who had asked certain demons to enter him in order to acquire more power, or certain gifts. One of the demons he acquired was a “goddess of rock-and-roll,” and gave him rock-and-roll lyrics, so he could produce songs impromptu. Once the demon was cast out, he could no longer produce songs.⁵

Whatever a demon may do inside a person, even if it gives some sort of gift (which I believe is actually the demon working through the person, just as the Holy Spirit works through a person, with the Spirit’s gifts intended to do good in the church and in the world), the bad effects of having a demon far outweigh any gift the demon may give. The most important effect that demons have on people may involve, in a certain sense, devotion—that is, devotion to the sin which the demon cultivates in the person. As we have noted, they motivate people to idolatry. That means they want humans to worship or be devoted to them. But since Paul can refer to greed as idolatry, it seems that demons can also inspire idolatries that have nothing to do with idols made of wood, stone, or metal—images of false gods and goddesses. Rather, idolatry is a matter of putting anything before God, and making that thing, in effect, the object of one’s devotion. So, any sin to which one gives oneself can be an idolatry, and can have demonic involvement in some way: Either the demon tempts one to the sin, or one indulges in the sin and thus becomes open to demonic influence. It is important to affirm, however, as James does, that a person can sin on his/her own (implicitly, without a demon’s help or involvement, Jas 1:13–14).

Why do demons want to enter us? Demons apparently desire intimacy with us. Apart from the serpent’s temptation in Genesis 3, the first hint of a connection between demonic power and sin occurs in the Lord’s warning to Cain: “But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it” (Gen 4:7b). The Hebrew here is identical to the Hebrew in Genesis 3:16, and it should be rendered in a way that shows that parallelism:

5. Whatever one thinks of rock music, what I have written is simply an account of one case of deliverance, and of how the demon came to enter the person.

“your desire will be for your husband” // “it’s [sin’s] desire is for you.” The Hebrew verb, “crouching” (*rabats*) is very important here. It is used routinely of the way a lion couches as it prepares to attack its prey. It may be that this is an implicit zoomorphism, one in which sin is compared to a lion. But, if so, it is more than a local zoomorphism, that is, one whose sole significance consists in its being a poetic touch in this verse. For we later read a warning to believers that is very similar to God’s warning to Cain: “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8). The warnings are parallel: Cain must rule over sin // believers must be self-controlled and alert against it; sin crouches [like a lion] at Cain’s doorstep // the devil prowls around like a lion; sin’s desire is for Cain // the devil looks for someone to devour. The parallels imply that Genesis 4:7 does more than simply portray sin in a zoomorphism: it portrays sin as an active entity with volition and desire, like the one portrayed in 1 Peter. As the devil desires to devour a person, “sin” desires intimacy with one.

If demons are behind sin, at least some of the time, what is the meaning of this demonic desire? The same term is used of the woman’s desire for her husband (Gen 3:16). It can apparently have something to do with sexual, and thus relational, intimacy, since the same term is used in the Song of Songs to characterize the lover’s desire for his beloved (Song 7:10). Given this area of meaning, it seems that demons who want to inspire sin also want intimacy with people. They seek to inhabit people and know them intimately from within, and then cause them to bear fruit of evil. This is the dark, demonic counterpart to what humans were actually made for. We were made to have the Holy Spirit within us, who will have intimacy with us and cause us to bear good fruit, the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

The Calling of Deliverance Ministry

It seems that deliverance, biblically considered, is a subset of the healing ministry, and thus of the gift of healing. The list of gifts in 1 Corinthians does not mention deliverance. But in the gospels we find statements regarding it that apparently class it with healing, e.g., Matthew 4:24:

News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and *he healed them*.

The same Greek verb (*therapeuein*, from which we get such English words as “therapy” and “therapeutic”) is used here to characterize both physical healing and deliverance (which we might understand as a form of spiritual healing). If deliverance is a subset of the healing gift, it would follow that some people are unusually gifted in and called to this ministry, which does seem to be the case. That would mean that anyone *could* do deliverance (just as anyone could pray for healing and God might do it). But there have been, are, and will be some whom God more particularly calls to this ministry.

If one is called to such a ministry, it is important to understand that the Lord may choose to “do deliverance” in different ways. It follows that the minister needs to be open to ways that the Holy Spirit will lead in the ministry. For instance, when I first began to minister deliverance to people, it looked much like Jesus’ encounter with the demonized man in the synagogue in Capernaum: the demon was “up” and speaking through the person, resisting Christ, and not wanting to leave the person. Many who have practiced this ministry have encountered, and evicted, demons in this way, by direct confrontation, including and culminating in a command that the demon leave the person. After a few years, however, I found the Lord leading me into a different form of the ministry. He would tell me what demons, and how many, the person had; then he would have me pray over the person, and, so to speak, lift them right up out of the person. I could literally feel them leaving as they passed between my hands (which I was holding over the head of the person).

When I say the Lord “would tell me,” I mean what some believers have experienced as well. The Lord does sometimes speak to a person in a way that I call “interior audition,” to distinguish it from those apparently rarer and more dramatic cases of “exterior audition,” such as the Lord’s encounter with Saul on the road to Damascus, when he spoke audibly to Saul. Interior audition happens when the Lord speaks within one. It is very much like hearing oneself think, except that, in my experience at least, it has more of a sense of flow and power. I suspect that such interior audition was God’s way of communicating to OT prophets many times, e.g., when he told Elijah to go to the Wadi Kerith, or when he told Elisha that the Lord would soon be taking Elijah away from him. Probably he spoke to Jesus in the same way, since Jesus could say that the words he spoke were the words the Father gave him.

One does not have to hear from the Lord in this way, in order to have a deliverance ministry. But the addition of such a prophetic dimension can obviously be a great asset. A similar sort of help can come, if one has a team of helpers around one, and one or more of them can hear from the Lord for guidance in the ministry. In my first exposure to deliverance, I was part of a small team ministering to a young woman who had begun to manifest an evil spirit during an evening worship service at a Vineyard Church in San Diego. Over the course of two hours, the leader of the team (the assistant minister of the church, and a Gordon-Conwell graduate) had evicted two demons from the woman. One more remained, but he could not discover its identity, and was not having any success in evicting it. At that point, the Lord spoke to me about it, giving what I believe the NT calls a “word of knowledge,” and identified the demon as having to do with lust. I told the team leader, and that knowledge facilitated the deliverance, and the demon was soon evicted. When we got back to his house after midnight, he said in a good humor, “That’s life in the Vineyard: another day, another demon!”

Getting Them Out

I want now to build upon the observations made above about some cases of deliverance. Those observations were based upon my own experiences. I have indicated two possible ways of deliverance the Lord might employ. The first, and I believe by far the more common, is the confrontational style so well illustrated by Jesus’ deliverance of the man in the Capernaum synagogue. The second is the sort involving interior audition and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in delivering someone without any apparent confrontation. Whichever form of deliverance the Lord chooses to employ, two things are fundamental to the success of the process: the person has to want to be delivered, and the person has to choose to forgive and ask forgiveness wherever needed.⁶

I have said that the confrontational form looks much like the encounter portrayed between Jesus and the demonized man in the Capernaum synagogue. When I have had such encounters, I have followed the counsel of my teachers, and taken care not to engage in prolonged conversation with the demon. Demons seem to like to “show off” and will talk with you as long as you are willing to indulge them. In this respect, for example, I have seen lists of supposed territorial spirits over the United States, lists given by demons who were in the process of being evicted from two different people by two different ministers in two different places. In each case, the minister thought he would get some extra information from the demon before he cast it out. Unfortunately, the lists did not agree with each other regarding either the demonic names or the demonic ranks. The best advice, then, is to stick to the business at hand, and not try to learn something about the enemy’s kingdom as a sort of bonus in the course of the deliverance.

It is necessary to talk with the demon, though, in such a confrontation. I like to give them a few commands and ask a few questions, which I have found to be conducive to deliverance. Here are the commands:

6. An excellent book on this topic, which recognizes the importance of both repentance and forgiveness, is by Don Basham, *Deliver us from Evil* (Royal Oak, Mich.: Chosen, 2005).

1. “I command you to confess that Jesus is stronger than you are.” I like this command because it establishes between the demon and myself who is really in charge.
2. “I command you to tell the truth only, in Jesus’ name.”
3. “I command you to confess that you are going to leave [name of the person] today, by the power of Jesus Christ.” Demons are very legalistic, and I have found that such a specific confession helps prepare the ground for evicting them.
4. “Now, tell me your name.”

The name of the demon often seems to give one a “handle” on it. Demons, as noted, are very legalistic, and one sometimes has to establish certain things before the demon will be ready to leave. Knowing the name of the demon seems to give one further power over it, and I would liken this to the ancient pagan concept, that knowing the name of a god gave one the ability to call upon or influence the god. Of course, in the final analysis, the only things necessary for casting a demon out are those things the Lord determines in the ministry at hand. The fundamental question must always be: Lord, how do you want us to proceed here?

5. “Tell me how and when you entered [name of the person]—what made it possible for you to enter, and what makes it possible for you to remain in him/her?”

Knowledge of such things seems to be very important, because the person must recognize when and how he/she sinned, in order to repent of it, ask forgiveness for it, and renounce the demon that has taken advantage of it.

Once I have asked these questions and had them answered, I command the demon to “go down” and let me talk to the person. Then I ask the person if he/she has heard all of the preceding. Normally a person will be fully aware of what has been going on. Only in the most severely demonized case is the person unaware, and then I have to explain what has transpired. In any case, the person must then pray, ask forgiveness, renounce the sin, and renounce the demon, and ask the Lord to take it away.

Sometimes the demon will resist answering the questions or obeying the commands listed above. The power of the demon to do so has, I believe, little to do with the intrinsic power of the demon itself, and more to do with the degree of authority the person has allowed the demon to have (through sin) in his or her life. One way a demon will try to avoid responding to the commands or questions is to try to avoid eye contact with the minister. I believe that the reason for this is that the demon can recognize the authority of the Holy Spirit in the minister, and this holy presence and authority are apparent in and through the eyes of the minister. Our eyes are truly the windows of our souls, and it is probably for this reason that John talks about the “lust of the eyes.” In any case, one must command the demon to look at one, if it is trying to avoid eye contact. Similarly, it may be necessary to command the demon “not to hide,” since the demon may try to retreat back down into the person in order to avoid the confrontation with the minister of Christ. So, I will say, “I forbid you to hide. You stay here and talk to me, in Jesus’ name.”

However long the process takes, the demon will come out. In the confrontational deliverance we are describing, a demon usually exits a person with a growl, a shout, or a scream. Other manifestations of its exit may occur, however: the person’s eyelids may flutter, or the person may weep, or sneeze, or even throw up (I am happy to say that I have not seen a demon leave in this way, but I have heard of it and have no reason to doubt it).

I have said that I have also seen the Lord take demons out of a person in a non-confrontational way. My experience of such ministry has been that the Lord simply tells me how many spirits are in a person, and usually (although not always) the names or types of the spirits, and then has me pray over the person, and lifts the demons out of the person as I hold my hands over his or her head. In such cases, I have literally felt the spirits leave between my hands. The closest biblical analogy

to such deliverance, as far as I can tell, is Jesus' deliverance of the woman crippled by a spirit for eighteen years (Lk 13:10–13). He does not confront and talk with a demon, but simply lays his hand on the woman and commands the spirit to leave, which it does. I came into this form of ministry as a result of a desperate plea to the Lord, in the case of a woman whom our pastor and I could not deliver by confrontation. I cried out to the Lord for more revelation and more power, and the Lord generously gave both, so that both I and my pastor, and others in our deliverance team, found the Lord lifting evil spirits out of different parts of the woman's body. She was set free of many demons during three weekend sessions, and was not troubled by them thereafter. One thing that struck me about her was that before deliverance her blue eyes were cloudy, whereas after she was set free her eyes were clear and literally sparkled.

Demons and Multiple Personalities

This is an article on deliverance, not on multiple personality disorder (MPD). Since the two may sometimes be confused in people's minds, however, it is important to make a distinction before concluding our discussion. I do not profess to be an expert on multiple personality disorder, but I have ministered to two women who had it, and have seen the multiples reintegrated into the whole person with a speed that is quite remarkable. I first acquired teaching about multiple personalities at a conference on spiritual warfare in Sioux City, Iowa. A week after my return home from the conference, I found that I had to minister to someone who had the disorder, and who also had some evil spirits. A brief description of the ministry to her will illustrate the effectiveness of what I learned in Sioux City, since everything that I heard there proved to be true in subsequent ministry.

First of all, it is important to understand that multiples, or "alters" as they are sometimes called, are not demons. They are parts of the personality of the whole person, and have apparently been separated from the individual's personality by some trauma. People who have been subjected to sexual abuse or to satanic ritual abuse (sometimes referred to by the abbreviation SRA) often develop multiples.

The account which I received is as follows. Someone abuses a person. A small "part" of that person's personality "splits off" and submerges. When it submerges, it takes the memory of the abuse with it. As a result, the person now has another, separate personality within himself or herself, and that new "personality" holds the memory of the trauma, so that the person does not recall it. The new personality is very shallow, and is the same age that the person was at the time of the abuse. This is only a working description, but it seems to fit the facts that one discovers in ministry. So, for example, one woman to whom I ministered had been raped by her uncle on three different occasions: when she was three years old, nine years old, and thirteen years old. As a result of those abuses, she had three multiple personalities: one three years old, one nine years old, and one thirteen years old. The woman herself did not recall any of the abuses perpetrated on her by her uncle.

I was taught to minister to multiples in the following way, which proved to be very effective.

1. Ask the multiple how it came to be.
2. Tell the multiple about Jesus, and ask it if it wants Jesus to forgive it of its sins, so that it can reintegrate with the person, and become part of Jesus' family.
3. Lead the multiple to identify and forgive the abuser. Forgiveness is just as important for a shallow, multiple personality, as it is for the whole person.
4. Have the multiple renounce its sins, and also renounce any demons that may be involved with it.

Experience shows that demons may become involved with the multiples, and so it may be a long process to have the multiple renounce and become free of each demon. In such a process it may also be necessary to lead each demon through the steps of deliverance outlined above, just

as though one were delivering a person rather than a multiple personality. Our team had to go through such a process many times, with many multiples and demons, in the case of a woman who had been adopted for use in satanic ritual abuse. She had been badly abused herself as she grew up, and had also been forced to commit abusive acts, including the sacrifice of human infants, the drinking of their blood, and eating of their charred flesh after they had been sacrificially burned.

5. Once such matters have been dealt with, invite the multiple to reintegrate with the person, and ask the Lord to come and help that take place.

We saw many multiples reintegrated in this ministry, with wonderful results for the women who received help. Jesus has come to set the captives free and to bind up the broken hearted—including those with broken and multiple personalities.⁷

I hope that the observations made above will be of use to people who have been called (or who think they may have been called) to deliverance ministry, and also of interest to those who are not called to such a ministry. It is important that Christ's church not be ignorant of the devil's schemes. Today's society is producing many people with demonic problems, and as they enter the church they need spiritually intelligent help every bit as much as did the catechumens coming out of an idolatrous lifestyle in the days of Augustine. One thing always to remember about such matters, I think, is that the One who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world, and that One has already won the victory and given us all that we need to carry on his work, by the power of his Spirit, who works so powerfully in us.

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7. James G. Friesen, *Uncovering the Mysteries of MPD* (Resource: OR, 1997), is a very lucid and useful guidebook for those who would like to learn more about MPD.