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## Power Over Demons

By Edgar Lee

The telephone rang about midnight just as I prepared to retire after a busy day in our metropolitan Atlanta pastorate. On the line was a soft, diminutive voice pleading for help. I could visualize a pretty 16-year-old in distress. Then to my utter shock and consternation, the voice turned chillingly guttural and snarled threats which I instantly recognized as demonic.

For the next few minutes I talked alternately with the girl and the demons who were determined to keep her in their power. Thus began the most bizarre experience of my ministry. I arranged for her to visit our church and sought the assistance of Harris Fennell, pastor of the Smyrna (Georgia) Assembly of God, whom I considered wiser and more experienced in exorcism than I, my wife Louise, our associates Doug and Mary Kinder, and several others.

The young woman turned out to be possessed with so many evil spirits that I can only relate her case to that of the unfortunate Gerasene (Mark 5:120, NIV). He was inhabited by so many demons that they were named "Legion," an allusion to the number of soldiers, 6,000 or so, making up a legion in the Roman army.

In three long deliverance sessions, extending over several days, we encountered one demon after another, each with a different name, voice, and personality.

The first evening we succeeded in casting out seven demons apparently of high rank, all very vocal, stubborn, and defiant, and who frequently expressed their contempt for Christ and His followers in blasphemous terms. They were, however, no match for the power of the Holy Spirit as we repeatedly commanded them to leave in the name of Jesus. One by one they departed with a shriek—except for the demon who contorted its victim in a silent scream after Pastor Fennell commanded it to leave silently.

By the next evening it was apparent our work was not complete. Another demon surfaced and identified itself as "Molech," having the same name and vicious appetites as the Ammonite god of child sacrifice in the Old Testament (Leviticus 20:1-5; 1 Kings 11:33). This devious spirit, when faced with expulsion, would fall silent and put the young woman to sleep; but reading scriptural warnings against the worship of Molech compelled it to resurface.

Molech's expulsion quickly was followed by a succession of encounters with lesser spirits, all articulate, all associating themselves with some type of sinful practice or destructive emotion. For example, some associated themselves with fortune telling. Others with feelings of rejection. Some seemed fluent in foreign languages. On occasion they expressed intense hatred for other demons and for persons involved in the occult.

Finally we led a peaceful and happy girl to confession of faith in Christ. Then much against our better judgment but at her insistence, we put her on a bus for home, having received a promise she would return and enter a local program for girls.

This mind-boggling experience highlighted the 1 fact that such recent developments in this country as widespread drug use, the popularity of occult and new age practices, and the influx of third world religions have made our population more susceptible to demonic invasion.

As a result, every Christian minister and layperson needs a balanced biblical understanding of demons and deliverance that will stand the test of sudden and unexpected confrontation.

That understanding should avoid two extremes: One is an obsession with demonism that demands exorcism or deliverance for every sin or illness. The other is an attitude of indifference or disbelief in what both Scripture and experience teach to be a fact.

Demon possession is a biblical reality. There are scores of references to demons, also identified as "spirits," "unclean spirits," "evil spirits," and "[evil] angels" in the New Testament.

Jesus regularly ministered not only to the sick but also to the demon-possessed. Mark's comment from the beginning of Jesus' Galilean ministry is typical: "That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed.... Jesus healed many.... He also drove out many demons" (Mark 1:32-34, NIV).

Note in Mark's comment that the Gospels usually distinguish carefully between sickness and demon possession, and so should we. In several instances, however, physical infirmities are attributed to demonic involvement (Matthew 9:32ff., 12:22, Luke 13:10ff.); Jesus dealt with these by some type of exorcism or deliverance.

It is also important to note that our Lord never solved anyone's temptations to sin by deliverance. Spiritual renewal, moral instruction, and Spirit-empowered personal sanctification are keys to victory over sin.

While exorcism in severe cases is so excruciating that in my opinion it is not a ministry to be sought, it is nonetheless a ministry Christ has given

to His church. It is sometimes essential for ministry to hurting people eager for spiritual health.

Jesus gave the power of deliverance not only to the Twelve (Matthew 10:1) but also to the 72 who returned from their itinerant ministry rejoicing, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name" (Luke 10:17, NIV).

Mark's account of the Great Commission is followed by a list of signs which will accompany believers, one of which is to "drive out demons" (Mark 16:17, NIV).

Not surprisingly, modern Christians like their counterparts through the centuries have found that the same Holy Spirit who empowered Jesus to cast out demons (Matthew 12:28) also empowers them when the occasion demands.

Exorcism should be attempted only where there is definite proof of demon possession. Biblical examples, like the case of the Gerasene demoniac, shed a great deal of light on both the symptoms and the process of deliverance.

This man lived among the tombs. He was possessed of supernatural strength, breaking the chains his neighbors used to bind him. Inner turmoil is indicated by his crying out night and day among the tombs and in the hills. Self-destructive impulses are seen in the way he cut himself with stones.

The most telling evidence of demon possession is found in the Gerasene's supernatural knowledge of the identity of Jesus. "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" he shouted. "Swear to God that you won't torture me!" (Mark 5:7, NIV).

Mental illnesses such as multiple personality and certain types of schizophrenia are similar to demon possession, so great care should be exercised before exorcism is undertaken. When in doubt, seek the counsel of a believing psychologist.

One telling difference between mental illness and possession will be the reaction to the name of Jesus and the sharing of His Word. Demons will usually be driven to some type of resistance, either physical or verbal.

While demon possession can usually be detected by observable symptoms, the spiritual gift of "distinguishing between spirits" (1 Corinthians 12:10, NIV) may spontaneously make that identification, as I once discovered to my utter amazement.

I had been asked to join a parishioner who was attempting to witness to a slightly inebriated neighboring housewife. As I talked to the neighbor about Jesus, she kept responding, "I don't understand that concept." Up to

that time I had never encountered the demonic, but suddenly I knew deep inside and without any doubt that this woman had a demon.

Though I had never exorcised a demon, I quickly stood up, asked the woman to stand, prayed, and commanded the demon to come out. She shrieked, fell to the floor, and quickly ran from the room, returning a few minutes later for a final prayer and instruction before my departure.

When exorcism is definitely indicated, if time permits, it should be preceded by careful preparation. Personal prayer and self-examination are imperative.

Exorcism is a task for the mature. Powerful demons can quickly turn the tables on presumptuous novices whose lives lack basic Christian character (Acts 19:13-16).

Exorcisms should be conducted in private if possible. Loud shrieks and unusual phenomena will normally accompany deliverance in cases of genuine possession. Difficult cases are also best handled with the assistance of other mature believers. In this way a variety of spiritual gifts can be brought to bear. One can observe and assist while another leads the exorcism; others may be involved in intercessory prayer or other physical support as the demons stage a determined resistance.

It is also important to determine that the one possessed really wants to be delivered and is willing to renounce both the demon and his or her sinful life-style. Otherwise deliverance will be difficult and perhaps in the end a waste of time and energy.

Sadly our young "Gerasene" never returned to enter the program we arranged, and her telephone calls seemed to indicate a continuing pattern of lying and deception. The alcoholic housewife checked into a local hospital the next day and clearly did not wish any pastoral follow-up. Faced with these cases again, I would want to be more assured of a genuine desire for spiritual wholeness before moving to exorcism.

In any event, without a spiritual commitment on the part of the one delivered, re-possession will probably occur. As Jesus taught, if the evicted spirit returns and finds its former residence unoccupied, it takes other spirits more wicked than itself and returns; so the final condition of the person is worse than before (Matthew 12:43-45).

Once begun, the process of exorcism demands utter faith in the power of the Holy Spirit to evict demons as they are firmly commanded to leave in the name of Jesus. There is no room for arrogance on the part of the exorcist. Note that even the angel Michael relied on the name of the Lord when disputing with the devil (Jude 9).

Spirits of low rank in the satanic hierarchy will flee with little struggle. More powerful spirits will refuse, bluster, threaten, and attempt all kinds of intimidation. Unusual phenomena may occur. Knowledge of Scripture, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, patience, and determination will be needed.

Dialogue and bargaining are common as the demons prepare to leave. Even in the case of the Gerasene demoniac, full deliverance required dialogue extending over at least a short period of time. Repeated commands of Jesus are noted in the NASV translation of the Greek imperfect tense of Mark 5:8, "For He had been saying... 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!'" "Then in verse 10, the demons "begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area" (NIV).

Dialogue with demons is heady stuff. While by no means omniscient, they have supernatural knowledge of many things, and one can easily fall victim to their practiced deceptions. They will readily confirm any bias or heresy; Lying is second nature. Always consider their information suspect and keep dialogue to the minimum required for successful deliverance.

In deliverance, one will find the power of the Holy Spirit to be a thrilling and amazing resource which is more than a match for demonic forces. The supernatural power of God will be strikingly manifested. Prayerfully allow Him to give a word of wisdom (James 1:5; 1 Corinthians 12:8), a word of knowledge (1 Corinthians 12:8), and miraculous powers which doubtless include exorcism itself (1 Corinthians 12:10).

When deliverance is complete, it is important to lead the person to a definite experience of salvation and baptism in the Holy Spirit with follow-up instruction in Bible study, prayer, and the disciplines of the Christian life including regular fellowship with the local church.

With the abuse of exorcism in some quarters, it needs to be noted this is a rare strategy employed only when decisive signs of possession are present. Those who attribute every problem to a personal demon and attempt to solve it by exorcism run the risk of traumatizing those to whom they minister as well as the risk of impeding their moral development.