

**“The ABC’s of the Christian Life: (33) Following Jesus Christ Rightly:
#19c. Three Great Foes: Third, the devil (part 3)**

Introduction:

This is the third occasion on which we have addressed this third of three spiritual enemies to our souls, that being the devil. The devil is our foe. At one time, when we were non-Christians, he was our master. But the Lord set us free from his rule and now we are citizens of the kingdom of God. Now King Jesus is our Lord, our Master. The devil still troubles us, but King Jesus has effectually deposed him in his ability to do us true spiritual harm. Yes, he still tempts us. Yes, he sets snares before us attempting to capture us in sin. But he has no power to overwhelm us and defeat us. He may afflict us for a time, but he is limited by our Lord who protects us from him. And so, we could say as Paul once wrote to the church at Rome, “*The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly*. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen” (Rom. 16:20). We are not to yield to the devil’s temptations, but rather we are to resist him in Christ. James wrote to Christians, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, *and he will flee from you*” (James. 4:7).

Now in addition to what we have already considered in the past two Sundays, there are a few more matters that we should address before we move on to more delightful subjects. We need to speak somewhat of the devil’s minions--demons, and of their relation to the citizens of the Kingdom of God. We will begin with reading **Matthew 12:22-32**.

²²Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. ²³And all the multitudes were amazed and said, “Could this be the Son of David?”

²⁴Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, “This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.”

²⁵But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. ²⁶If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? ²⁷And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. ²⁸But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²⁹Or how can one enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. ³⁰He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.

³¹“Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men. ³²Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.

In this account we read of the reaction to our Lord for having brought deliverance to a demon possessed man. The people in general responded favorably to the event. It was inclining them to believe that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah, the son of David. It appears that the Pharisees reacted to the favor the crowds showed toward Jesus, so they spoke up before the people in an effort to turn them away from receiving Him. They falsely accused Jesus of performing miracles by the power of satan. Our Lord showed that their charge was not only nonsensical, but that they were placing themselves in danger of everlasting damnation for their false accusations and blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

When we attempt to set forth what the Bible teaches about these matters, we do so in the face of a great deal of errant and rather bizarre teaching and practice in the evangelical world regarding spiritual warfare. If there were a subject that one should not attempt to research on the internet, it would be in the realm of spiritual warfare, satan, and demonology. Stay away from doing so, and you will be better off for having done so. But it is a subject of which we should have some understanding, and so, before we deliberate in detail the account we just read, let us first consider...

I. Demon possession in the Bible

The Bible describes demon oppression or possession as a problem from which God may bring deliverance. Actually, the mention of the word, “demons”, is found mostly in the Gospels. There are only four references to the English word “demons” in the Old Testament. In each of these instances the children of Israel are said to have sacrificed to demons (cf. Lev. 17:7¹; Deut. 32:17²; 2 Chron. 11:15³; Psalm 106:37⁴).

Apart from the references to demons in the four Gospels, the New Testament contains seven references to the English word “demon(s).” None of the references apart from the Gospel accounts speak to the subject of demon possession. They refer to pagan worship as worshipping or sacrificing to demons (1 Cor. 10:20f) and false teaching as doctrine promoted by demons (1 Tim. 4:1). James stated that demons “believe” in God; that is, they certainly know that God is real and true. The Book of Revelation speaks of the fallen world system as the abode of demons (Rev. 18:2), in which demons have the ability to deceive people through miracles (Rev. 16:14), a world in which people living for the world do worship demons (Rev. 9:20).

The Bible uses another word to refer to demons--the word “spirit” or “spirits.” Occasionally “spirit(s)” is prefaced by the word, “unclean.” We do not find the word “demon(s)” in the Book of Acts, but we do read in a number of places the expressions, “spirit(s)” or “unclean spirit(s).” For example, we read of **the apostles** who cast demons out of people.

“The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and *those afflicted with unclean spirits*, and they were all healed.” (Acts 5:16)

And **Philip**, being a deacon, also preached the Word of God and he exorcised demons.

⁴“Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. ⁵Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. ⁶And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. ⁷*For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them*, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸So there was much joy in that city.” (Acts 8:4ff.)

God also used Paul among the Gentiles to deliver many from demonic oppression.

¹¹“And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, ¹²so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and *the evil spirits came out of them*.” (Acts 19:11f)

¹ In Leviticus 17:7 the NKJV uses the word “demons”, the KJV the word is “devils”, the ESV and NASV use “goat demons”, and the NIV uses “goat idols.”

² The KJV translates the Hebrew word as “gods”, the NKJV, ESV, NIV, and NASV all use the word “demons.”

³ The KJV uses the word “devils”, the NKJV uses “demons”, the ESV uses “goat idols”, the NASV uses “satyrs”, and the NIV uses “goat idols.”

⁴ In Psalm 106:37 the KJV uses the word “devils” and the NKJV, ESV, NIV, NASV all use the word “demons.”

On one occasion Paul used both terms, “spirits” and “demons”, in the same verse: “*Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to **deceitful spirits and teachings of demons**...*” (1 Tim. 4:1) We should not think of these as two different kinds of spirit beings; rather, he was simply describing both their spiritual and malevolent nature.

In contrast to the relative few instances in which demons and demon exorcism are mentioned in Scripture, the exception is in the Synoptic Gospels--Matthew, Mark, and Luke.⁵ During our Lord’s ministry He delivered numerous people, who were both oppressed and possessed by demons. Consider these instances:

Matthew 8:16. “That evening they brought to Him *many who were oppressed by demons*, and He cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick.”

Matthew 10:1. “And He called to Him his twelve disciples and *gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out*, and to heal every disease and every affliction.”

Mark 1:27. “And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, ‘What is this? A new teaching with authority! *He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.*’”

Mark 3:11. “And *whenever the unclean spirits* saw Him, they fell down before Him and cried out, ‘You are the Son of God.’¹² And He strictly ordered them not to make Him known.”

Mark 6:7. “And He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them *authority over the unclean spirits.*”

Luke 4:33-37. “And in the synagogue there was a man who had *the spirit of an unclean demon*, and he cried out with a loud voice,³⁴ ‘Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who you are--the Holy One of God.’³⁵ But Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be silent and come out of him!’ And when the demon had thrown him down in their midst, he came out of him, having done him no harm.³⁶ And they were all amazed and said to one another, ‘What is this word? *For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out!*’³⁷ And reports about Him went out into every place in the surrounding region.”

Luke 6:17-19. “And He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon,¹⁸ who came to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases. *And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured.*¹⁹ And all the crowd sought to touch Him, for power came out from Him and healed them all.”

Luke 7:21. “In that hour He healed many people of diseases and plagues and *evil spirits*, and on many who were blind He bestowed sight.”

Luke 8:1-3. “Soon afterward He went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with Him,² and *also some women who had been healed of evil spirits* and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, *from whom seven demons had gone out*,³ and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means.”

⁵ The only reference in John’s Gospel to demons is when Jesus was falsely accused by others of being used or controlled by demons (John 8:48f, 52; 10:20f).

Luke 10:17-20. “The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, *even the demons are subject to us in Your name!*’¹⁸ And He said to them, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. ²⁰Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that *the spirits are subject to you*, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.’”

The point we may make is that which is expressed here:

The level and intensity of demonic manifestations in people during Christ’s ministry was unique, having no parallel in Old Testament times or since; it was doubtless part of Satan’s desperate battle for his kingdom against Christ’s attack on it.⁶

The manifestation of demon possession in the Gospels is seen in some cases as physical and psychological disorders. Here in the account of Matthew 12 the man is *blind* and *mute* due to a demon that possessed him. Earlier in Matthew there is an account of a man who was only *mute* due to a demon (Matt. 9:32). Mark records the account of a demon being exorcised by Jesus that had caused a man to be both *deaf* and *mute* (Mark 9:25). We also read of the two men possessed of demons in Gadara who seemed to manifest *insanity* (8:28ff). Later in Matthew’s Gospel we read of a boy who had *seizures* and was at times *suicidal* (Matt. 17:15). We read of this in Luke’s Gospel of a woman who was *physically disabled* due to a demon.

“Now he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. ¹¹And there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. ¹²When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, ‘Woman, you are freed from your disability.’ ¹³And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God. (Luke 13:10-13)

Demons are immoral creatures, who often lead the people they possess into acts of immorality. There is a reason they are called “unclean.” They led some to run about *naked* (Luke 8:27). They are said to be the cause of *violence, sorcery, and sexual immorality*. The Book of Revelation describes some:

The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up *worshipping demons* and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, ²¹nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts. (Rev 9:20f)

Demons are able to give the people they possess what seems to be *super human strength*. The demoniac of Gadara, in whom was 7,000 demons, is described:

For He (Jesus) had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. (For many a time it had seized him. He was kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles, but he would break the bonds and be driven by the demon into the desert.) (Luke 8:29)

When Jesus delivered people from being possessed or oppressed by demons, He demonstrated that He was bringing forth the Kingdom of God into the world, which was defeating and intruding upon the kingdom of satan.

II. Jesus delivered a man from the power of satan (12:22-31)

⁶ *The Reformation Study Bible*, note on page

Some people brought this man to Jesus with the hope that He would cure him of being blind and mute. It is clear from the account that his physical maladies were caused by a demon that possessed his soul. **Verse 22** reads, *“Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to Him, and He healed him, so that the man spoke and saw.”*

A. The response of “the people” (12:23).

Matthew narrated a collective response of those who witnessed this miracle. *“And all the people were amazed, and said, ‘Can this be the Son of David?’”* The people recognized that God was with Jesus in a marvelous way, in a way that was extraordinary. He seemed to manifest the kinds of works that they expected would occur when the Messiah would come. They wondered if Jesus was the promised Son of David. The people anticipated a reestablishment of the Davidic kingdom, over which they believed God ruled. This is why the anticipated kingdom of David was often described as the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. It was the kingdom that God would bring about through David’s promised son in which He would deliver His people from the guilt and the power of their sin.

C. The response of the Pharisees (12:24)

In contrast to the people, we read in verses 24 the response of the Pharisees: *“But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, ‘It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons’”* (v. 24). Later, our Lord would determine that the Jewish leaders sought to crucify Him because they were motivated by envy. Matthew 27:18 reads, *“For He knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered Him up.”* It may be that envy is what motivated the Pharisees to lay this charge upon Jesus on this occasion.

They accused Jesus to have performed this miracle through the power of “Beelzebul.” The Jews regarded Beelzebul as the leader of demons. The name itself was understood to be another title for satan. The name may mean, “lord of heaven.” It has Old Testament roots being related to the word, “Baal-Zebub”, meaning, “lord of the flies”, which was a god worshipped by the people of Ekron (cf. 2 Kings 1:2)

D. The response of our Lord (12:25-30)

Our Lord responded to His detractors using several arguments that discredited their accusation. First, He showed...

1. The illogical nature of their charge; it was contrary to common reason ((12:25-26)

We read in verse 25 and 26,

Knowing their thoughts, He said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. ²⁶And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?”

Probably most of us are aware of the how **Abraham Lincoln** employed the words of this verse, a “house divided against itself cannot stand.” He argued that the union could not remain united, half free and half slave. Of course the context of the verse says nothing of such a thing, although the principle that he asserted may rightly be derived from this verse.

We read that our Lord knew their thoughts. He knew what they were thinking and why they were thinking what they thought. He knew that they were not sincere seekers of truth. He never turned away one which truly wanted to understand. But He knew these were not of that nature, so He dealt with them

accordingly. But further, because Jesus knew their thoughts and the way they thought, He was able to take all of their reasons for rejecting Him and dispel them as void of substance. He shows how ridiculous their argument was by simply reasoning that if it were as they charged, then the devil would be fighting against his own purposes. Satan has more sense than to destroy himself. It is obvious that this was not the case.

Next, our Lord shows...

2. The illegitimacy of the charge; it was contrary to common belief (12:27)

Jesus said, ***“And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges.”*** Exorcism of demons was practiced by the Jews. Their success rate was not 100%, as was our Lord’s. The apostles’ success rate was almost 100% (cf. Luke 9:48). We read of some unsuccessful Jewish exorcists in the Book of Acts.

¹³“Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, ‘I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.’ ¹⁴Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. ¹⁵But the evil spirit answered them, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?’ ¹⁶And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. ¹⁷And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled.” (Act 19:13-17)

Now there are many today who claim to perform exorcisms of demons. There have been a number of news releases recently that Roman Catholic priests are working extensively all over the world in exorcising demons. Here are a few headlines that I have seen on the Drudge report:

- * *Irish priest asks for back-up as demand for exorcisms rises ‘exponentially’* – January 24, 2018
- * *Dublin priest blasts Church for lack of training in exorcisms* – November 23, 2017
- * *Vatican Reports Surge in Exorcisms Worldwide* -- December 1, 2016
- * *‘Astonishing’ rise in demand for exorcisms putting mental health at risk, report finds* – July 4, 2017

How do we deal with this? Does this legitimize their priesthood and practice? I would say, “Not at all.” First, we would assert that their methods are often unbiblical, even heretical. They often call on the help of “saints”, the Virgin Mary, use what they claim is “holy water”, Latin incantations and relics to perform their “exorcisms. Second, we know that there will be “many” on the Day of Judgment that will be damned in their sins, who will protest that they had cast out demons in Jesus’ name. We read our Lord’s words in Matthew 7:22f,

“On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

Here is one more recent article:

- * *Woman in Burqa Writhes Back and Forth as British Imam Spits on Her in Islamic Exorcism* -- February 27, 2018.

This article tells of Islamic imams who practice the exorcisms of demons. Claims of exorcising demons is no proof of divine favor or legitimacy.

Let us return to our account. We read that our Lord next showed...

3. The implication of the miracle (12:28)

They could not dismiss what He had done. The man was healed of his infirmity, delivered from the demon. Our Lord could then reason, ***“But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”*** The power of God manifested by Jesus Christ was proof that the long-anticipated Kingdom of God had arrived in this Son of David.

Wherever sin is being conquered and God is being served, the presence of the kingdom of God is being made evident. The reign of God in people’s lives is due to the fact that they have been taken out of the realm of the kingdom of satan and placed into the kingdom of God.

¹³He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. (Col. 1:13f)

Here is one of the clearest references to the ***present existence of the Kingdom of God*** and that Jesus had inaugurated His kingdom during His earthly ministry. Some conservative (dispensational) Bible interpreters have in effect denied this reality. They claim that the kingdom was offered by Jesus, but was rejected by Israel and therefore God’s “offer” of the kingdom was postponed until He reappears at His Second Coming. Some have gone so far as to say that Jesus is currently Prophet and Priest, but He will not be enthroned King until He returns a second time in glory. This is not in accordance with the teaching of Scripture. Our Lord made it clear that if He were casting out demons, then the kingdom of God was invading and conquering the stronghold of satan.

Yes the Scriptures do speak of the future coming of the kingdom in its full manifestation at the end of the age. We read, for example, that Paul could write,

“The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen” (2 Tim. 4:18).

We also read of Paul’s preaching on the matter in Acts 14:21f, “And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, ‘We must through many tribulations ***enter the kingdom of God.***”

Our Lord next shows ...

4. The necessity of defeating satan (12:29f)

Verse 29 reads, ***“Or how can someone enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house.”*** The Lord is presenting Himself in the posture of a man who intends to rob a house. The “strongman” of the metaphor represents satan, who protects his “house.” In this metaphor satan’s “house” would be his kingdom and his control over the subjects of his kingdom. He is powerful, and he does not yield an inch. Any ground must be taken from him. The devil has possession of his subjects and will not let them go. Nor can they escape his control of them. If they are to be taken from satan’s “house”, someone would have to break into his house and disarm the devil, subdue him, and tie him fast—binding him. Then the robber would have free access to take away all that is in the house. The Lord Jesus is saying that it was necessary that He defeat or depose the power of the devil before ones like this demon-possessed man could be delivered from his controller and tormentor.

Whenever our Lord or one of His representatives (apostles) cast out a demon, it signaled a defeat of the power and authority of satan. It suggested that satan had been “bound” as a strong man who had

defended his goods, in order to affect the release of his people so that they might become the Lord's people, who became citizens of His kingdom.

The Lord expressed this same deposing of the devil from his power and authority when His disciples had returned to him, reporting the results of their short term preaching mission in Galilee. We read of this in **Luke 10:17-20**:

¹⁷Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name."

¹⁸And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. ²⁰Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven."

Our Lord then made it clear to His hearers that they were to commit themselves to Him without reservation. In effect He said:

E. "Choose your side; there is no neutrality" (12:29f)

He said, "*Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.*" There is no middle road to travel. There is no fence to ride. You are either for Jesus or against Him. Your life is either promoting the kingdom of God or opposing it. If you are seeking by grace to believe and live according to the will of King Jesus, you are participating in "gathering", an image of harvesting. But if you are not actively for Him, believing on Him, seeking to live for Him by grace, then He regards you as one who is scattering his harvest, not gathering; you are opposed to His kingdom, not promoting it.

We next read of our Lord's teaching regarding...

III. The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (12:31-32)

Our Lord declared,

³¹Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. ³²And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Jesus declared that all sins are pardonable but one (12:31). Here in these verses we have the comforting thought that all sins and blasphemy may be forgiven by God through Jesus Christ. **Matthew Henry** expounded on our Lord's promise:

Here is a gracious assurance of the pardon of all sin upon gospel terms: this Christ says to us, and it is a comfortable saying, that the greatness of sin shall be no bar to our acceptance with God, if we truly repent and believe the gospel: *All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men.* Though the sin has been *as scarlet and crimson* (Isa. 1:18), though ever so heinous in its nature, ever so much aggravated by its circumstances, and ever so often repeated, though it *reach up to the heavens*, yet *with the Lord there is mercy, that reacheth beyond the heavens*; mercy will be extended even to blasphemy, a sin immediately touching God's name and honour. Paul obtained mercy, who had *been a blasphemer*, 1 Timothy 1:13. Well may we say, *Who is a God like unto thee, pardoning iniquity?* Micah 7:18. Even *words spoken against the Son of man shall be forgiven*; as theirs were who reviled him at his death, many of whom repented and found mercy. Christ herein has set an example to all the sons of men, to be ready to forgive words spoken against them: *I, as a deaf man,*

heard not. Observe, *They shall be forgiven unto men*, not to devils; this is love to the whole world of mankind, above the world of fallen angels, that all sin is pardonable to them.

And yet the Lord gave one exception. There is one sin that God will not forgive. This is the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. This is the troubling idea of *an unpardonable sin--blaspheming the Holy Spirit*. The weak soul with little faith will tend to trouble himself with respect to this. But we may at the outset assert that only an unregenerate person, one who is not born again, may commit this sin. This commands a few moments of our attention.

All other sins, murder, dishonesty, blasphemy against God the Father and the Son. A lifetime of sin can be pardoned in a moment before death as the dying thief bears encouraging witness to us, but not this sin, the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Why not? Essentially, they have refused to heed the promptings, urgings, convictions, which the Holy Spirit has brought to them. When a man has so become hardened that he no longer pays attention to the promptings of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit being grieved, and in judgment, withdraws His presence and ceases His effort which would lead to the conversion of that soul if continued. This man has entered the road which leads to hell and nothing will drive Him from it. And the Spirit Himself refuses to any longer dissuade the man from his course.

Some have, therefore, described the blasphemy against the Spirit as the result of a gradual progress of sin. First, there is a grieving of the Spirit (Eph. 4:30), if unrepented of, this leads to resisting the Spirit (Acts 7:51); if continued results in quenching the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19).

What should be done so as to prevent this? When the Spirit prompts you to do something, do it, do not delay. "Today, if you hear His voice, harden not your heart" (Heb. 3:15)

I had a good friend years ago, before I became a Christian (Pat). We use to ride motorcycles every weekend—dirt bikes. He was married to a Christian woman. He had dated her throughout their teen years, and Pat would attend church weekly with her. But he was no Christian. Later I became a Christian. I would witness to him regularly. One night while speaking to him about his soul and attempting to set the gospel before him, he said to me, "I do not doubt anything you are saying. What you are saying may indeed be true. I just can bring myself to worry about it." Here was a man who had so long resisted the Spirit that no influence of the Spirit was present in His life. There was no concern for sin, no interest in biblical truth, no desire to be or live as a Christian. He had perhaps blasphemed the Holy Spirit.

Others argue that the sin of the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit must be seen in a more limited way. It was Jesus during His earthly ministry that these men resisted. They knew what He was doing was by the power of God. But they purposely accused Him of performing His miracles by the power of satan; therefore, they were guilty of the unpardonable sin. I personally believe that this is too restrictive a view. The unpardonable sin is when a person through the hardness of his heart has sinned against every privilege and opportunity and God has abandoned him.

IV. Several lessons to understand and take to heart

First, some have twisted the doctrine about demons to an unhealthy emphasis on demonic activity and exorcism in their churches. They focus their ministry on identifying demons and the physical and spiritual problems they cause. Their ministry is centered on delivering people from "demons" that they say are the root cause of sin and sickness. In order to be healed or to obtain God's blessing, they say, Christians need to be delivered from each demon that causes a specific ailment or manifest a specific kind of sin. But this is very deficient and defective form of ministry, and it does not reflect the ministry of the gospel to which we should give our focus and efforts. It tends to diminish human responsibility for one's own actions. The person is seen as passive, who needs "delivered" rather than a sinner, who must repent of his sin, believe on the Lord Jesus, for pardon and to live in obedience.

Second, although we are to be wary of the devil, we are not to be fearful of the devil or his forces. We are to be wise respecting his "wiles" (Eph. 6:11), but we should always remember and affirm that our Lord who dwells within us as Christians is far greater than he, the devil, which dwells in the world. John

the apostle wrote of the victory that Christians have over the fallen world and all of the evil spirits of the devil. He wrote,

You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. ⁵They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. ⁶We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (1 John 4:4-6)

Third, it is important to understand that demon possession is not a matter that is commonly experienced in modern, industrialized (and generally western) societies. I personally believe that this is because the kingdom of God has been historically quite predominant in western societies for many centuries. Even non-Christians will be protected and preserved in a measure from the more radical and frequent cases of demon possession, because they live in a society in which righteousness is the norm. However, as our societies become increasingly anti-Christian and unrighteousness is permitted and celebrated, the instances of demon possession will occur more frequently.

Fourth, the manifestation of demon possession and deliverance from this state was more frequent in the days of the Lord's earthly ministry and that of the apostles than at other times in biblical history. This is, I believe, due to the great in breaking of the kingdom of God in the person and ministry of the Lord Jesus. And although it is not seen or at least manifest openly in many parts of the world, in those nations and societies in which antichristianity is predominant, instances of demon possession are much more frequent. We can expect that we will see in our own society a great increase in demon possession in coming years.

Fifth, although demon possession is depicted in the Holy Scriptures frequently as manifesting quite violent and strange behavior, sometimes a person may be demon possessed and not exhibit bizarre behavior. Our Lord Jesus spoke of those who have departed from former evil practices while demon possessed, who apparently became somewhat moral and respectable, but were far worse for it.

“When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. ⁴⁴Then he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes, he finds *it* empty, swept, and put in order. ⁴⁵Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation.” (Matt. 12:43-45)

Sixth, it is not possible for a Christian to become demon possessed. Christians are “possessed” by the Holy Spirit, not by unclean spirits. However, a Christian may be terribly afflicted or oppressed by demonic attack, deception, or activity. There are some Christians who are more susceptible and experience these assaults than others. What are the reasons for this? There may be a number of them, but I would suggest that it is a more common experience by those who have been in a church that has embraced and promotes errant teaching and practice. This spiritual setting in which there is little spiritual protection, results in their people being more vulnerable to this kind of spiritual problem.

Seventh, our Lord spoke of the necessity to first “bind” the strong man before his house could be spoiled. There are some of us who believe that this suggests what our Lord actually accomplished when He died upon the cross. He deposed satan's authority and our Lord ascended above him, vanquishing him as his conquered enemy. As a result, the Lord was able to expand His kingdom throughout the world. This, we would argue, is what the Book of Revelation speaks of in chapter 20, in which it is said that satan would be bound for “1,000 years.

¹Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. ²He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; ³and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set

a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.

⁴And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. ⁵But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

⁷Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. ⁹They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. ¹⁰And the devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. (Rev. 20:1-10)

But we will need to speak of this another time.

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude,
like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder,
crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns." (Rev. 19:6)
