

Position on Christians and Demon Possession

Adopted at CVC Elder's meeting, 1/23/2003 – revised 1/29/2005

This position paper is designed to answer the question, “Can a Christian be demon possessed?” It also explains our position on a controversial and often divisive approach to spiritual warfare called “deliverance ministry.”

The term “demon possession” is an unfortunate term that has found its way into some English translations of the Bible but is not really reflected in the Greek text. The Greek New Testament can speak of people who “have a demon” (Matt. 11:18; Luke 7:33; 8:27; John 7:20; 8:48, 49, 52; 10:20) or it can speak of people who are suffering from demonic influence (Gk. *daimonizomai*), but it never uses language that suggests that a demon actually “possesses” someone.

It does not seem very helpful to attempt to define categories or degrees of demonic influence, as has sometimes been done, with words such as “depressed,” “oppressed,” “obsessed”, etc. for Scripture does not define a list of categories like this for us to use, and such categories only tend to make complicated what is a simple truth that there can be varying degrees of demonic attack or influence in a person’s life (see Luke 4:2; 2 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 6:12; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8).

An individual Christian’s life can become influenced by demons especially if that person does not know about or make use of the weapons of spiritual warfare that are taught throughout the Bible and emphasized in Ephesians 6:10-20.

It would seem that in some cases the degree of demonic attack or influence in a Christian’s life could be quite strong. Yet the distinction between influence and control must be maintained. Repetitive sin puts people in moral bondage but not in bondage to indwelling spirits. The teaching of the Scriptures is that Christians cannot be controlled against their wills by demonic habitation. Followers of Christ have the King Himself dwelling in them (John 14:23, Romans 8:9-17) and the One who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world (1 John 4:4).

A believer’s will cannot be completely dominated by a demon so that the believer has no power left to choose to do right and obey God. Scripture guarantees that sin shall have no dominion over us since we have been raised with Christ (Rom. 6:14, see also vv. 4, 11).

When it comes to spiritual warfare, all Christians should believe in deliverance. We know that we have been delivered from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son he loves (Colossians 1:13). Through the Holy Spirit, we are in Christ and Christ is in us and we are the freed captives of our King.

One real potential for problems in the Christian life is blaming things on the demonic and neglecting normal Christian growth and maturity. Many Christians are looking for the quick fix of “casting out a demon” to help them overcome some sinful behavior rather than doing the hard work of consistently applying the classic spiritual disciplines over a long period of time. This can be a sign of a lack of maturity in the lives of many believers or a poor understanding of the biblical process of sanctification.

Our mode of warfare is best captured by Ephesians 6:10-20: reliance on the power and protection of God, embracing the Word of God, specific obedience, fervent and focused prayer, and the aid of fellow believers. Spiritual warfare with the power of evil is a matter of consistently and repeatedly turning from darkness to light by applying the classic disciplines of our faith. We resist the devil through disciplines such as prayer, reading scripture, memorizing verses, meditating on the Word, repentance, faith, obedience, worship, service, stewardship, evangelism, fasting, accountability, and solitude. Following Jesus in this way releases the power of God in our lives.

Our enemy is real and tempts us in a myriad of ways. We stand upon the teaching of God's Word and Jesus who taught us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Our warfare is focused on the power of God, rather than the devil's ploys. Ephesians 6:10-11 says, "Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes." Our enemy may prowl like a lion but he is on God's leash.

At CVCC, we will not permit a ministry of "casting out spirits" from believers to function. Members and regular attenders who practice this kind of "deliverance ministry" will be instructed to stop. This is an unbiblical practice that hinders the process of biblical sanctification, confuses the saints, and divides the church.

(For further understanding of our position, please read *The Covering* by Hank Hanegraff and *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare* by David Powlison.)