



## Can Christians Be Afflicted By Demons?

*By Bruce Gordon*

Many people have asked, “Can a Christian be possessed by a demon?” The consensus answer of most responsible deliverance practitioners would be that it is not possible for a born-again Christian to be completely controlled by a demon in every respect.

This can raise the question of whether a believer’s mind, heart and will can be seriously affected by a demon, to a greater or lesser degree. Let us say that a believer is deeply giving himself over to pornography, violent video games and occult practices. Most practitioners would say that this man could be seriously oppressed and even demonized.

While I don’t believe that it is possible for a genuine believer to be possessed, there can be various levels of oppression. These can take the form of an increased intensity of temptation, or of strong disordered thoughts, feelings or impulses that seem too powerful to resist. A person experiencing this could be called troubled or oppressed by demons, or demonized.

When talking about the demonic affliction of believers, I favor a descriptive approach rather than one that relies on terminology that can be misunderstood or argued over. Rather than using a certain word like possessed or demonized, I prefer to talk about a person as having problems or troubles that appear to have a demonic component.

Since there is no objective ‘lab test’ for the presence of demons, we are forced to interpret what we see or hear of sense, and by what we believe to be the voice of the Holy Spirit. I will give two examples of prominent Christian leaders who changed their minds on this issue.

Merrill Unger earned his doctorate at Dallas Seminary and later taught there. His doctoral thesis was published in 1952 under the title *Biblical Demonology*. This work became the standard in its field for decades among conservative evangelicals. Unger taught in it that a Christian cannot be invaded by demons. Over the years he received many letters from missionaries and pastors who described cases of people who were known to be sincere believers, and who were clearly oppressed and almost controlled by clear demonic manifestations. Unger traveled widely, and over the years witnessed many cases of demonic manifestations and the expulsion of demons in people who then gave glory to God, showing evidence salvation and the joy of the Lord. Unger reversed his position, publishing *What Demons Can Do To Saints* in 1972.

Charles Swindoll studied at Dallas Seminary while Unger taught there. He also grew up with the standard teaching of Unger’s earlier book. After decades in the pastorate, he also reversed his position, saying as Unger later did, that in cases of persistent sin, occult involvement or deep lasting unforgiveness, that demonic oppression of believers was, as far as he was concerned, a reality. In his book, *Demonism*, he said, “I have worked personally with troubled, anguished Christians for many years. On a few occasions I have assisted in a painful process of relieving them of demons.”



Both Unger and Swindoll stressed that they were not saying that these believers were completely possessed in the same manner as an unbeliever could be, but that true believers could be oppressed to the point where they needed deliverance in order to follow Christ as they used to.

Last year I participated in the deliverance of a devoted Christian who suffered from scattered thinking, impaired emotional responses and a sense of being 'stuck'. Most people would not consider that he has oppressed, but one deliverance minister did. This brother agreed to a deliverance session. He confessed and renounced certain sins and verbally forgave and released people that had hurt him in the past. Oppressing spirits were dispatched and inner healing was prayed for. This brother felt miraculously free and looked different right away. He has continued to keep up the fight of spiritual warfare and is doing well today.

The most important component in deliverance is spiritual discernment that reveals what is going on, what the issues are and how to proceed. Years ago, while working with a church in India, I was asked to pray for a woman who had stomach pain. The Holy Spirit showed me that her pain was caused by a demon, not by any physical disorder. I took authority over the demon and cast it out, and her pain immediately disappeared.

John Wimber, in his book *Power Healing*, reminds us that "Often physical illnesses are caused by emotional, spiritual or even demonic elements and vice versa. Complex interrelationships between the various types of sickness, the parts of the human make-up, and the different kinds of healing, must always be taken into account."

So to conclude our series, here is a summary:

[1] We don't use the word "possessed" to refer to the oppression of Christians, though this is frequently seen in unbelievers, who are under the demons' control.

[2] Believers are often afflicted by demonic entities, though the type of affliction can vary widely, from being unnoticeable to the average person to being fairly obvious.

[3] Any part of the believer's life can be affected. We may see relationship trouble, sickness, compulsions, addictions, emotional trouble, or lack of ability to function at home, work or church. Almost any physical, emotional, relational, mental, or spiritual disorder can be the result of demonic oppression.

Of course, the last sentence could also be said of the effects of stress, so this is one important reason why spiritual discernment is the most important component of deliverance ministry.