

# Soldier Up!

Saints & Spiritual Warfare

*"Beach Bum"*

Ephesians 4:29

Friends of mine used to make light of an important question by asking, "Can a demon be Christian-possessed?"

By changing the order of the words, they were indicating their disdain for the real question, "Can a Christian be demon-possessed?"

They thought it so obvious that the answer was "No" that it was foolish to even ask the question.

Let me be clear from the start: If you ask me, "Can a Christian be demon-possessed?" my answer is, "No."

More-and-more, however, it's becoming popular to say "Yes, a Christian **can** be demon-possessed."

In 1952, noted and respected scholar, Merrill Unger, wrote a book, *Biblical Demonology*, in which he concluded a believer could **not** be demon-possessed. That seemed to answer it for evangelicals.

Some twenty years later, Unger came to the opposite conclusion, mostly from reading letters sent to him from foreign missionaries.

He visited some foreign fields, and then he claims to have encountered what he believed were genuine cases of Christians being possessed by demons right here in the United States.

It was Unger's change of position that paved the way for the modern deliverance ministries we have today.

This view received more credibility when the chairman of the theology department at Moody Bible Institute, C. Fred Dickason, published a book setting forth a theological argument that Christians can, in fact, be demon-possessed.

He claimed to have been involved in counseling at least four hundred believers, between 1975 and 1987, who were possessed.

This new theology of Christian demon-possession abandons the word "possession." Possession, they say, does not occur in the original manuscripts, and is therefore a poor English translation. They say there is no Greek word for possession, and that the word in Greek is a single word, better translated *demonized*.

They want to ask, "Can a Christian be demonized?" and their answer is, "Yes."

I might agree with that, except they go on from there to describe a demonized Christian exactly the same way we would describe a demon-possessed person. So, while they may be right about the word, the end result is the same.

One of the arguments put forth for why we cannot be possessed is that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. The proponents of being demonized note that, even though that's true, we still have the flesh to contend with. By that they hope to show that the Holy Spirit can and does coexist with something less than holy.

True, we have our flesh, and we will until we go to be with Jesus. But the Holy Spirit coming to dwell within us is a whole lot different than a demon coming to dwell with Him.

We see the violent reaction of demons to the presence of Jesus and what is holy. God does not have to flee but demons do. The Scripture shows them in agony just being near Jesus; the same would be true of proximity to the Holy Spirit.

I just don't see them as roommates.

One scholarly proponent of this new way of looking at demonization honestly admits, "the epistles do not use the terms *demonization* or *have a demon* to describe a Christian," but he goes on to say, "the concept is nevertheless present."

I say it isn't.

The apostle Paul wrote prolifically on the subject of Satan and spiritual warfare. It is Paul, primarily, who lets us know that there are a group of demons subordinate to Satan, assisting him in his malevolence. In Ephesians chapter six he calls them "principalities... powers... the rulers of the darkness of this age... spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (v12).

Let me say one quick thing about these demons. While they are most likely organized, Paul's description isn't really meant to give you their ranks; nor does he anywhere indicate we need to know anything about how they are organized in order to resist the devil and defeat them.

Something else we want to notice about Paul. While it is recorded of him that he personally confronted and cast-out demons, he never gives any instruction about how to go about doing so. In other words, he knew folks could be demon-possessed, and he delivered them; but the Holy Spirit thought it best to not inspire Paul to talk about it.

If the writers of the New Testament letters, and Paul especially, did not warn of Christian demon-possession (or demonization), then it's most likely because a Christian cannot be demon-possessed (or demonized) in the way these modern scholars say they can.

It may be an argument from silence - but it's a pretty deafening silence, don't you think? I mean, if you and I can be demonized, we really need to know it, and know how to deal with it. But Paul and the boys say nothing.

Here is what Paul does say. Paul says we were once of darkness but now we are light. Light always rules over the darkness. Try bringing darkness in the room when the light is on. Only if there is no light there can there be darkness. Scripture never says that we can go on and off like a light switch.

But don't breathe a sigh of relief just yet. The devil is a vicious, evil foe, and he is not going to let you go your merry Christian way without a fight.

If you are not careful and vigilant, he **can** and he **will** make rather significant inroads in your life.

In fact, he can ruin your life; and he wants to. Paul did have this to say:

Eph 4:27 nor give **place** to the devil.

The word for "place" is *topos*, meaning *a foothold*. "Don't give the devil that kind of foothold in your life."

We sometimes speak of getting a foot in the door. We mean by it that we have a further opportunity to influence the person.

This word 'foothold' has also been understood by some to mean a *beachhead*. It's like an invasion force landing on the beach, trying to establish a base of operations from which to launch further incursions.

It seems best to understand it as giving the devil an opportunity, a base of operations, to influence you. It's not demon-possession; but it's not good, either.

Maybe an example would help. In fact, Paul gave several in the verses surrounding the word "foothold."

Eph 4:25 Therefore, putting away lying, "LET EACH ONE OF YOU SPEAK TRUTH WITH HIS NEIGHBOR," for we are members of one another.

Eph 4:26 "BE ANGRY, AND DO NOT SIN": do not let the sun go down on your wrath,

Eph 4:27 nor give place to the devil.

Eph 4:28 Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.

Eph 4:29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

It would seem these are examples of giving the devil a foothold, meaning giving him an opportunity to influence us.

Since the devil is a liar, it's no surprise that, if I lie, I give him a foothold in my life.

The book *The Day Americans Told the Truth* says that 91 percent of those surveyed lie routinely about matters they consider trivial, and 36 percent lie about important matters; 86 percent lie regularly to parents, 75 percent to friends, 73 percent to siblings, and 69 percent to spouses.

Anger is the second example Paul used. In the Book of the Revelation we read that the devil has great wrath (12:12). If we don't deal with our anger, the devil has a foothold.

He is, according to John 10, a thief; if I steal, it gives him a foothold.

Corrupt speech is a specialty of Satan's. It's how he deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden. If I use it, I'm giving him a foothold.

This idea of the foothold, or the beachhead, is far from demon-possession. But it is very serious. We all know believers who gave the devil some small foothold from which to influence them, whose lives have subsequently been ruined by him.

Those in the "Christians can be demonized" camp say this foothold is, in fact, an example of the devil (a demon) taking up residence in your life.

I say "No," because the solve for it isn't any kind of exorcism or deliverance ministry. It is to simply quit lying and tell the truth; or quit being angry; or quit using corrupt speech, etc.

When Paul encountered a demon-possessed slave girl, he cast out the demon. He didn't turn to her and say, "quit deceiving people and tell the truth."

The Christians he was talking to, here in Ephesus, were not demonized. Foothold does not correspond to being demonized or demon-possessed.

Concerning what Paul did say, one scholar put it this way:

When Paul wrote to his Christian readers, what he did relate to was the importance of *resistance* and *identity*. For a Christian who gives in to the temptation to steal, for instance, Paul would urge the person simply to quit, to resist. If this pilfering appetite, fueled by Satan, is left unchecked, it can lead to a greater measure of demonic influence in that individual's life.

Behind such an injunction of refraining from a certain [sinful] behavior is a whole theology of identity. Christians not only have the obligation to eradicate such unseemly patterns of behavior, but they also have the ability to do so. This capacity to resist is an integral part of what it means to be a Christian - experiencing forgiveness, being on good terms with God, receiving a new nature, having a real oneness with the resurrected Jesus, experiencing the power of the new age and so much more.

To indicate that the problem, the sin, a Christian has is being caused by demonization is to deny their personal responsibility; and it might delay repentance and obedience.

Does Satan have some foothold in your life? If he gets his foot in the door, he will establish a beachhead. He cannot possess you. But he can influence you, and he will if you let him.

Resist him, based on your identity in Jesus; because, "greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world" (1John 4:4).