

Can a Christian have a demon?
A Series on Whether a Christian Can Have a Demon: Part 1

Spiritual warfare is a very real struggle that occurs everyday. Most Christians recognize the more tangible spiritual enemies, such as our sinful nature (Rom 8:3-4, Gal 5:16-17), philosophies and worldviews (1 John 2:16-17), which may (or may not!) be used by demonic forces to tempt our sinful nature or promote a sinful culture. While it can be easily seen that a non-Christian can have a demon (see the article: What is Demon Possession? at www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/6Angels/FallenAngelsDemonPossession.aspx), there is considerable debate whether a Christian can be demonized.

The basis of the debate is that a Christian has the Holy Spirit within him, which seems to preclude the simultaneous inhabitation of a demon. Yet the Bible does not comment on whether this presumption is true or not.

Depending on one's perspective, several questions arise:

If all demonized human beings are not Christians, should evangelism be included with the exorcism?

If Christians can be demonized, what does that say about their faith and assurance of salvation?

The New Testament, during the life and times of Jesus Christ, provides the richest information on demonization (which is "to be under the power of a demon" or "to have a demon"). In many instances, the letters of the Apostles identify or warn of demonic activity, which some interpreters have used to support the idea that Christians can be demonized.

Satan, demons and demonic activity are real, and they can adversely *influence* a Christian's life.

1 John 4:1-4

John speaks of false teachers as being demonic, and some interpreters understand these false teachers as professing Christians indwelt with a demon. However, there is no observable biblical evidence to support this interpretation.

2 Peter 2:1-22

Peter expects false teachers and false prophets to arise from within and without the church and identified by their methods, motives, and message. Were these false teachers professing Christians yet indwelt by a demon or simply "carnal" Christians?

In 1 Peter 2:1, Peter's first reference to these false teachers was that they "denied the Master who bought them." There were later compared with the ungodly in the ancient world (v. 6), called "accursed children" (v. 14) and compared to the false prophet Balaam (v. 15).

While these false teachers and prophets may have been indwelt, these afflicted human beings were clearly not genuine Christians.

2 Corinthians 2:11

In encouraging the church of Corinth to forgive and reaffirm their love for a repentant member, Paul warns of Satan taking advantage of their failure to do so. Paul does not reveal what Satan may do; but problems may arise when there is no true forgiveness. In another instance, similar to this, the warning of Satan was in reference to a demonic presence within the congregation of Christians (see Eph 4:26 on page 2).

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1 Timothy 4:1-3

While it is not spoken in the context of a loss of one's salvation, Paul reveals that some Christians will consciously leave and cease to live an abiding life in Christ. It appears that these Christians, who have fallen away, find heretical doctrines (which have a demonic basis) so seductive that they themselves promote them. Even so this passage does not speak to the question of whether Christians can be indwelt.

Spiritual warfare is real, and Satan and his demons will *attack* Christians.

Ephesians 6:10-18

Described metaphorically in the manner of a Roman battle dress, Paul reminds his readers the Christian's defenses against spiritual warfare. The spiritual war is largely mental. On one side is the confidence in Christ, the Bible, and the system of truth that is morally applied against the demonic crafts and strategies that tempt the sinful nature within man. While Satan seeks to control the mind of Christians, this passage does not speak to the question of whether Christians can be indwelt.

Ephesians 4:26-27

A more thorough examination of this passage can be seen in the article: What does it mean: "Be angry, and yet do not sin"? Righteous indignation towards a fellow Christian's sin is appropriate when it causes one to come alongside to confront and encourage the offender to repentance. Sin cannot be tolerated in the church body lest it provides a means for demonic influence or indwelling within the church. In its proper context, this passage cannot be construed to answer the question of whether Christians can be indwelt.

1 Thessalonians 2:18

While Paul states that Satan prevented him from coming to Thessalonica, he does not elaborate how this interference has occurred, and it is unlikely that it is referring to some form of indwelling.

1 Timothy 3:6-7

In specifying the qualifications of a church elder, Paul warns about "...not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil" and "have good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil." Paul is speaking about the disgrace of being disqualified and dismissed from leadership not losing one's salvation or discussing whether Christians can be indwelt.

2 Timothy 2:24-26

When speaking specifically to non-Christians, Paul encourages Christians to be kind, capable of teaching and reproving with gentleness not argumentative. Blind to the Gospel, non-Christians are held in some manner captive by demonic forces, which could possibly include demonization. Because the subject of this passage is about non-Christians, it does not clarify whether Christians can be indwelt.

1 Peter 5:6-8

The Greek term for "devour" is the same term used when the sea swallows Pharaoh's army and when the fish swallows Jonah. Peter's used the term metaphorically to describe one's spiritual vulnerability when depressed overwhelmed by circumstance. It is for this reason that Peter encourages Christians to "cast all of their anxieties upon God." This passage does not speak to the question of whether Christians can be indwelt.

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While these passages do not speak specifically to the question of whether a Christian can be indwelt, the Bible is clear about the antagonistic relationship between Christians and fallen angels. Satan's spiritual war against Christians is personal and the Bible records that demonic forces can adversely attack or influence a Christian's life (to learn more, see the article: What Can Satan and His Demons Do? at www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/6Angels/FallenAngelsWhatCanSatanDo.aspx).

It is important to bear in mind that when the New Testament referred to demonization, the Greek terms *daimonizomai* and *echein daimonion* were always used in the context of inhabiting a human being. Most, if not all, biblical examples involved non-Believers or before Jesus' Ascension and subsequent indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

This means that the vast majority of demonic spiritual warfare involving genuine Christians occurs outside of their human body.

Because the Bible is largely silent on the matter of whether a Christian can be demonized, it remains a topic of controversy. However, Christians must recognize the clear and present danger of the spiritual war assaulting them everyday.

References:

1. Dickason CF, *Demon Possession & the Christian*, Westchester, IL: Crossway Books (1990).