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## Introduction - from "Counseling and the Demonic"

Rodger K. Bufford

George Fox University, [rbufford@georgefox.edu](mailto:rbufford@georgefox.edu)

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## INTRODUCTION

If a group of Christian counselors were questioned about their experience in dealing with demonic influence, the majority probably would indicate that they have never faced anything demonic. It would be easy to conclude that the average Christian counselor is rarely faced with this problem. But such a conclusion would be a serious error.

Throughout human history the question of demonic influence has been a controversial one. It continues to be so now, when there are two widely held views. According to the first view, demons are everywhere. Those who believe this are preoccupied with demons and with efforts to appease, avoid, or escape them. The second view discounts demons, looking on them as irrelevant, at best, or even as nonexistent. Both these views are mistaken. Unfortunately, reality is both less comfortable and more complex than either outlook permits.

The idea that demons are everywhere focuses attention on dealing with the demonic, to the neglect of human evil in

motives and actions. The epitome of this approach is the expression, "the devil made me do it." If we think this way, we either become passive (awaiting divine action since we are not responsible for our condition or its solution) or we actively seek to drive out the demons.

In contrast, when we discount the relevance of demons or deny their reality, we magnify the role of human agents. We fail to realize that we are involved in a spiritual struggle, and that we are opposed by powerful spiritual forces. As a result, we rely on human resources and fail to use the spiritual resources available to us through the power of God and the Holy Spirit. This view seems prevalent in Western culture at the present time.

Either view is blind or short-sighted, misconstrues the problem, and fails to employ all of the resources God provides. We must recognize that the problem has both spiritual and material (or natural) dimensions. We need to make full use of the resources which God provides, both material and spiritual.

As the following pages will show, the tendency to polarize the material and spiritual dimensions produces disagreement over whether demonic influence or mental disorders account for unusual human behavior. This disagreement has a long history, and continues both inside and outside the Christian church. It will be our goal to examine both sides of this issue, to suggest that mental disorders and demonic influence are related, and to recommend ways to identify and treat persons experiencing demonic involvement.

As we shall see, demonic influence is far more common than most of us think. Strategies for dealing with demonic influence are clearly presented in Scripture, yet they are little practiced. It is my prayer that this book will help many to more clearly identify the problem, and to practice biblical solutions.

My interest in the issue of counseling and the demonic was sparked several years ago by the questions of those with whom I counseled. As I pondered and studied the issues involved, I discovered that I often dealt with spiritual issues, and that many of the individuals with whom I counseled were at some level or other influenced by Satan and demons, although I rarely encountered people who were possessed. More and more over the

years I have come to realize that in counseling I am involved in the task of “taking on the gods.”<sup>1</sup>

This book looks directly at the question of how the Bible presents demonism, and places demonic influence in the context of the broader biblical teachings about evil in the world and the agents of evil, including Satan and fallen angels, as well as Christian and unbelieving persons. Biblical accounts of demonism and the work of Satan and his agents are compared and contrasted with the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III-R)*.<sup>2</sup> After defining the problem and setting it in context, biblical principles for dealing with demonism are addressed along with practical suggestions from psychology and counseling. Examples from the counseling office are given to illustrate various approaches.

Because all evil as we know it, including physical illness, mental disorders, and social aberrations, begins with the influence of Satan and is often ascribed to the will of Satan in subsequent biblical accounts, it is of primary importance that we examine the nature of this personification of evil and his manifestations in people’s lives. Thus, in the first section of the book we will address biblical teaching about the demonic, beginning with the person and work of Satan and examining biblical accounts of the occult in order to draw general principles from these accounts. Then we will address the relationship of the spirit world to material existence, and draw conclusions about Satan’s tactics.

In the second section of the book we will move to an examination of the defining characteristics of mental illness, compare and contrast mental illness with demonic influence, examine the implications of this analysis, and address practical strategies for helping persons who experience personal distress and crises as a result of demonic influence. We will conclude with a discussion of the tools which God has provided for Christians involved in the struggle “against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).

In the case studies included in this volume all names have been changed and other identifying information has been altered to protect the identity of the individuals involved. In some

instances, elements from the lives of two or more individuals have been combined.

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The views expressed here are, ultimately, my own. It is my hope and prayer that through this book the kingdom of God will be advanced, and that help will more effectively be given those who suffer the afflictions of Satan and his demonic emissaries.