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Summary and Conclusion - Chapter 12 of "Counseling and the Demonic"

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CHAPTER TWELVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Despite the materialistic bent of our culture, interest in the demonic is growing. Demon possession is only one of a variety of ways in which Satan and his emissaries work. Consequently, Christians must learn to deal with demonic influence in all of its many guises regardless of whether we believe that Christians can actually be possessed.

An implacable foe of God, Satan seeks to attack and destroy all who serve God. Satan is a living, active, powerful, personal being. Formerly an angel of God, Satan sought to usurp God's throne. As a consequence, he was thrown out of heaven, and his activities now center around the earth. His methods are varied. Though he is the personification of evil, he may appear as an

angel of light. His methods include temptation, deception, slander, fostering guilt, encouraging violence and greed, and a host of other devices. He chooses those approaches which most effectively serve his ends, and he uses different techniques in different cultures and in different historical periods.

Satan's end is sure. He was defeated by the death and resurrection of Christ. Meanwhile, however, he remains a powerful and dangerous foe who must be resisted, using the resources which God provides. The believer is assured that nothing can separate him or her from the love of God, and that Satan's powers are limited and governed by God's sovereign hand. Yet, we must be ever mindful that we are in the midst of a desperate spiritual war, and be constantly on guard.

Satan is not alone in his rebellion against God and in his enmity toward all who would serve God. In his rebellion he took with him a host of angelic beings, now demons, who sided with him and now exercise his bidding. Demons extend his influence over the entire earth.

A key element of Satan's plan is to foster spiritual blindness and encourage all manner of false worship, particularly idolatry. Worshiping any thing other than the true God in the true way is idolatry. All idolatry, in essence, involves the worship of demons and, therefore, of Satan himself. Thus Satan's plot to usurp God's place continues.

There is disagreement about whether Christians can be demon possessed; most evangelicals believe that the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit prevents possession of believers. Regardless of the position one takes on this matter, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that believers may be attacked, enticed, accused, presented with false teaching, and otherwise influenced by Satan and demons. Such was true in the lives of the apostles, and it is doubtless true in ours as well.

MARKS OF THE DEMON POSSESSED

A number of accounts of demon possession are presented in the Bible, chiefly in the Gospels. From these we find that those who are so possessed show a number of striking features. Among these are acts of magic, supernatural strength and knowledge, physical maladies—such as deafness, blindness,

and epileptic-like seizures—altered voices, the absence of social graces, self-harming activities, fierce and violent behavior, and the appearance of distinct personalities. Unfortunately, these patterns are also observed in those who are mentally disordered.

Demonic influence varies widely, from the merest suggestion or enticement to inhabitation and almost total domination of the individual. Symptoms also vary, from the forms found in the Gospel accounts to the magical and oracular powers of the magicians and sorcerers of Egypt, and the astrologers and Chaldeans of Babylon. Contemporary parallels include witch doctors in Third World cultures, and what Scott Peck calls the “truly evil people” of our own culture.

Satan and his demons also produce physical disease and natural disaster; they foster spiritual doubt, and perverted forms of worship. His deceptiveness is so effective that often we are oblivious of Satan’s activities. Such deception, of course, is a key element of his strategy and grows from his nature as a liar.

He and his demons encourage the separation of the spiritual and the material, the sacred and the secular. As a result of this deception, we ignore one important aspect or another of God’s world and of our own nature as bearers of his image. This error takes two forms: materialism, which perceives that what exists is physical or material in essence, and spiritualistic reductionism, which denies the reality or significance of the physical or material realm. In our society, unbelievers tend to hold to the former while many Christians, perhaps in reaction to that, adhere to the latter. Both are distortions; Satan can use either half-truth to distract us from the whole truth and thus subtly distract us from accurately perceiving ourselves and God’s Creation.

Spiritualistic reductionism views God as active in the spiritual realm, but discounts his involvement in ordinary events of the created order. For example, God is seen as active in “miraculous” healings, but not in surgery or the use of medication, or in the other, slower processes that are often attributed to “Mother Nature.”

In reality, all of Creation is sustained moment by moment by God’s power. Thus, all that happens, even the feeding of a single sparrow or the falling of a hair, is a result of God’s action.

God is active in both the material and spiritual aspects of our lives; so too is Satan. Although Satan and his demons are spiritual beings, their influence extends over both material and spiritual aspects of our lives and world. As a result, in countering the demonic we need to be mindful of all these aspects.

One of Satan's ploys is to use methods that simulate familiar events that we normally tolerate. In this way, Satan is largely able to escape detection within any given culture. Missionaries and foreign nationals report that they are much more able to spot evidence of satanic activity in unfamiliar cultures than in their own. Such factors as widespread materialistic naturalism, and possibly the strong, historic, Christian influence in the United States, may account for the relatively infrequent occurrence of demonic possession seen in the United States. But the recent decline of Christian influence seems to parallel a rise in overt evil activities.

Satan's efforts to influence are continuous and pervasive. Scripture warns repeatedly that Christians will be the targets of these efforts, and that precautions must be taken. While non-Christians are also subject to the influence of Satan, their relationship to him is very different. They belong to his kingdom, hence they are his agents along with the demons. He may use and exploit them, often without their awareness, but he is not at enmity with them.

THE TWO KINGDOMS

There are but two spiritual kingdoms: the kingdom of God, and that of the prince of the power of the air, Satan himself. All false worship involves choosing to side with Satan. In fact, all are born into Satan's kingdom; the individual must make a personal choice to enter into the kingdom of heaven. Is it surprising that Satan views people who make this choice as deserters?

As a part of his efforts to thwart God's plan and usurp God's throne, Satan attacks all who serve God. This activity began with his approach to Eve in the form of a serpent in the Garden of Eden and it included his destruction of Job's property, family, and health. During Christ's life on earth, Satan tried several times to get him to forsake the plan established before the foundation of the earth. Satan attacked the apostles. Clearly all

believers are targets of Satan's efforts, either through direct attack or through crafty attempts to influence them in whatever ways best suit his objectives.

The first sin of Adam and Eve had dramatic and far-reaching effects on the entire Creation. Separation from God and personal sinfulness became the lot of all persons. The whole of Creation was harmed, with the result that predation, sickness, death, and natural disaster became commonplace. The occurrence of mental disorders is one aspect of this change. To fully understand the relationship between mental disorders and demonic influence it is necessary to understand the interrelationships among personal sinfulness, the sin of others, and the many effects of sin on our world.

MENTAL DISORDERS AND THE DEMONIC

Mental disorders, as currently conceived by the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, include a wide range of symptom patterns which stem from a variety of causes, including genetics, illness, injury, trauma, biochemical imbalances in brain functioning, and psychological and behavioral disturbances. Even some behaviors considered criminal are included in the diagnostic system as mental disorders.

Evidence is growing that biological factors play a role in many mental disorders, either as a direct cause or as a contributing factor. Manic depressive disorders and Alzheimer's disease are examples.

Virtually all the symptoms of demon possession found in biblical accounts overlap with those included in mental disorders. Thus the two conditions cannot be distinguished on the basis of symptoms alone.

However, given the strong role of biological factors in mental disorders, especially those which resemble demon possession, it seems unlikely that mental disorders and demon possession are merely different labels for the same problem. In contemporary American culture it is likely that demonic influence will be most common in persons who do not show symptoms of mental disorders; these are the people whom Scott Peck terms "truly evil." Often, mental disorders are found in those who

must deal with the truly evil ones on a daily basis, such as family members.

Because difficulties in one aspect of personal functioning make the individual more vulnerable to problems in other areas, it is possible that an individual may be afflicted with both mental disorders and demonic influence or possession at the same time.

Two approaches are helpful in discerning the presence of demonic influence or possession: spiritual discernment and an examination of the person's history for events that predict the likelihood of demonic influence. While neither approach is fail-safe, together they can assist in the difficult task of identifying a counselee's problem.

Since a counselee may have more than one type of difficulty, it is strongly recommended that a comprehensive evaluation be done to discover the full range of physical, mental, and spiritual difficulties that may be present.

Exorcism

The Bible does not provide specific instructions on methods of exorcism. At the same time, though it is not clear that what we now call exorcism corresponds to what occurred in the New Testament accounts, exorcism is not prohibited. Thus, this approach may be appropriate at times, though much caution is urged. It seems most appropriate for use when the persons are totally dominated by one or more demons, and therefore seem unable to avail themselves of help when it is offered.

By contrast, much in Scripture speaks of the need to put off sinful ways and replace them with godly ways, to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and to prepare for and be active in a spiritual conflict. We are told to submit to God, to resist the devil, and he will flee. We are told to take up the full armor of God. We are exhorted to forsake the works of darkness, and to put off the "old man" with its lusts. We are told to pray for deliverance from the evil one; Jesus illustrated this in his model prayer for the disciples. These are the spiritual tools and the means that God has provided. As clear biblical commandments, these approaches are always appropriate. If we commit ourselves to

them, freedom from demonic influence will come about, gradually and surely, if not dramatically.

Personal, willful involvement is essential to freedom from demonic influence. Thus, it is wise to always involve the individual in the process of seeking deliverance from demonic influence. All of the tools of Christian discipleship, worship, fellowship, and service should be employed, along with the additional benefits which counseling, psychotherapy, and medication can often provide. Only as these are utilized can the person be assured of continued freedom from demonic influence.

Beneficial Counseling Approaches

Counseling approaches that can be of benefit include helping the person recognize and deal constructively with emotions, aiding the person in developing right thinking, changing behavior to bring it into conformity with biblical guidelines, and encouraging healthy relationships.

The local church is an ideal place in which much of the transformation can occur for a person who has been formerly under demonic influence or who has been possessed. This is especially true in small fellowship groups centered on Bible study, worship, prayer, service, and developing personal relationships.

When God met Moses in the desert near Mount Sinai he asked Moses what he had in his hand. When Moses answered that he had a rod, God told him to use it to carry out God's appointed task. When God comes to you and me, I believe he asks the same question. We have seen some of the resources with which God has provided us. Will we use them with gratitude and faithfulness? I pray God that we will!