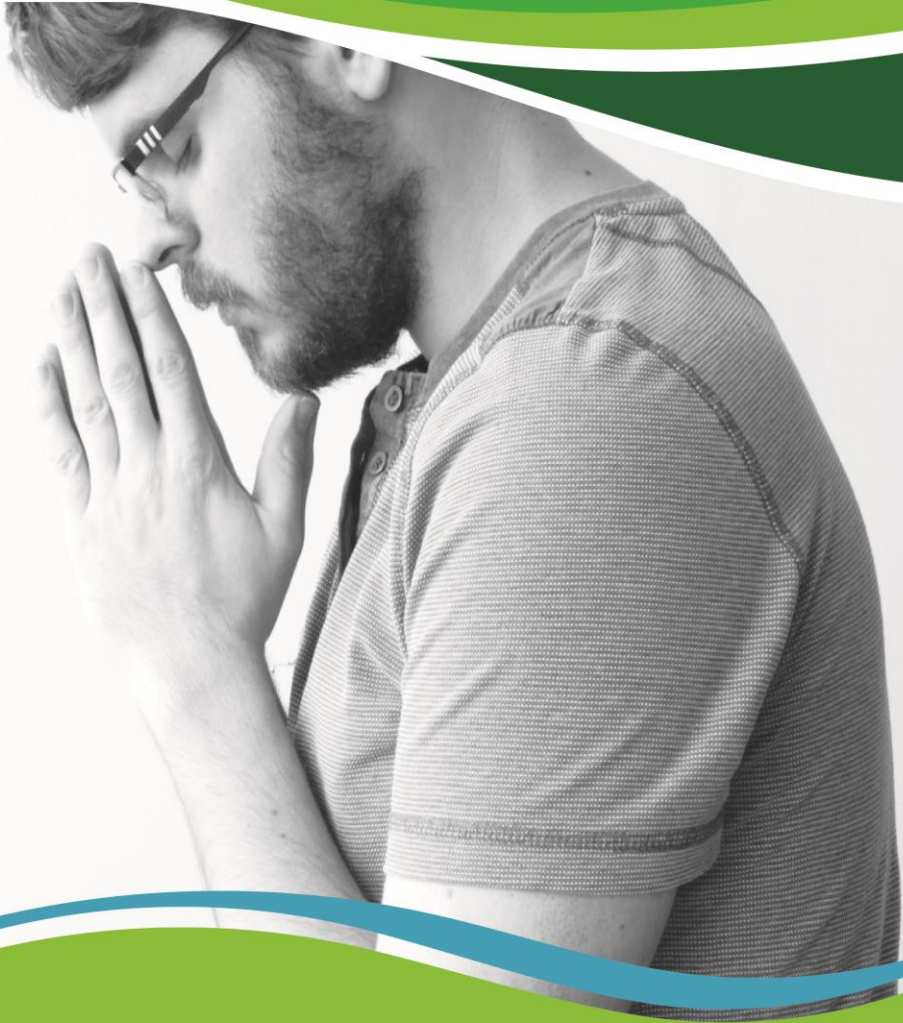


THE WORLD OF SPIRITS

2

NEW

TESTAMENT PERSPECTIVE



DR. PERRY J. HUBBARD

UNDERSTANDING
AND
RESPONDING TO
THE WORLD OF THE
SPIRITS:

A Study
of the New Testament View
of Spirits And their Power

Dr. Perry J. Hubbard

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Foreword

When I finished my doctoral dissertation on Spiritual Powers in the Old Testament my advisor Dr. Paul Hiebert encouraged me to continue the work and do the New Testament as well. Many have asked over the years when I would do just that. It has taken several years of preparation and study for that to happen.

There is always a need to take time to understand what the Bible has to say and provide tools for individuals to increase their knowledge of God's word and how it relates to their world. I trust that this document will provide just such a tool in a critical area of ministry and knowledge.

Dr. Perry J. Hubbard

Acknowledgements

As always I must thank my wife Nancy for her tireless help in making sure I get the grammar right. She does a great job in making sure I stick to the point and keep things clear.

I would also like to thank my fellow missionary Dr. Jim Vermilya for taking time to read through the manuscript. His suggests and critiques were invaluable in dealing with several critical areas.

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Section A

Introduction to Spiritual Powers

Our world today is filled with examples of people trying to make contact with the spiritual world. You no longer have to go to the “dark continent” or the “remote places” to encounter people who are actively involved in this process. If you want to seek out information on your own almost every newspaper has an astrology section with the latest horoscope for you to look at and there are many books available to guide you.

There are so many sources of information about the spiritual realm available now it is easy to be confused about what is and is not the truth. From the ancient religions to modern cults and mixes of the two, there are plenty who are ready to tell you what they believe the truth to be about spiritual power and the beings that exist in the spiritual realm.

The focus of this first section is to consider just who and what spiritual powers are. This will become the basis of the study of key areas of spiritual power in the rest of the material.

1. Reality of Spiritual Power

As we study the Old Testament we quickly realize that there is a great deal of information and time given regarding the existence of a spiritual realm and of its power within our physical realm. The issue of spiritual power and having a clear definition of what that is continues to be a concern as we enter into the New Testament.

In the first chapters of Matthew and Luke there is a story which involves the appearances of an angel. In the first few chapters of three of the gospels there are references to the presence and activity of Satan and demons. With Jesus' appearance the seriousness of this subject is brought to the forefront.

There are spiritual powers that exist in the universe and they are active within our physical realm. There is a conflict that is going on between those loyal to God and those loyal to Satan. We are in the middle. Both God and Satan are seeking to be involved in our lives, but have very different agendas as to why they want to be involved, and varied methods by which they are trying to accomplish that goal.

Mankind senses the power and presence that both sides have. We are watching and evaluating the nature of that power and what it means to us. We want to know what benefit there is, or advantage we can gain, in reference to the lives we live and the situations we find ourselves in. We are seeking power to protect ourselves from the dangers of life on this planet, the dangers of the spirits that appear to be around us and the dangers that are related to death and our life after death.

Before we go further we need to understand what spiritual power is.

There are three levels of power that exist.

- 1) That power possessed by man as a spiritual being and in the image of God.
- 2) That power possessed by the angels and demons that exist within the spiritual realm.
- 3) That power possessed by God who created all of the above.

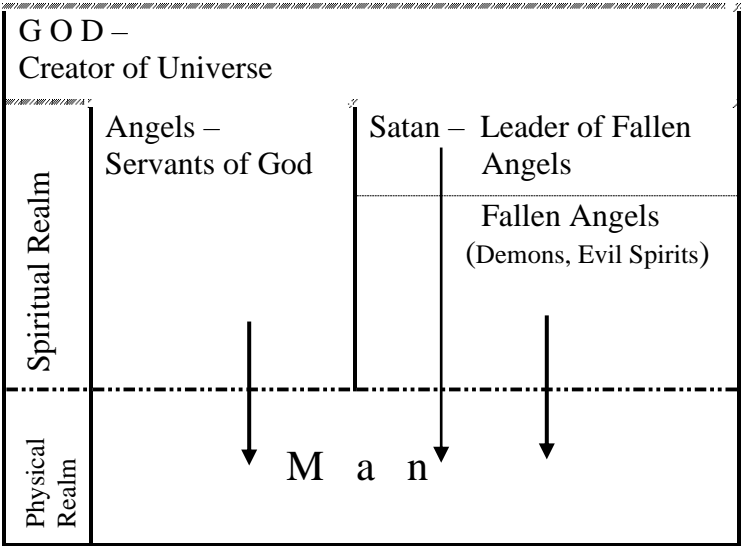
Three concepts of power also exist.

- 1) the ability to influence
- 2) the ability to alter the environment
- 3) the ability to control events and people.

Spiritual power would involve the use of power that comes from a spiritual source to influence, alter or control the events that are part of life the people around us, and the environment in which we live.

There are five key individuals and groups that are involved in this situation.

1. The key player is God who created everything and therefore has the greatest amount of power.
2. Then there are the angels who were created by God and have power that is theirs as a result of how they were created. The angels that serve God are the second group.
3. Those angels who don't serve God are the third group and are identified as fallen angels, demons or evil spirits.
4. The fourth player comes from within this group; he is the leader of the fallen angels. His name is Satan or the Devil, and he has gained control of those who have chosen not to serve God. He has greater power than any other in this group and is their leader.
5. The last individual is man.



Man stands apart from the others. While all are created by God, man has the unique status of being created in God’s image. Man is the only one that exists totally within a physical world and is the only one that is a blended being with both a spiritual and physical reality. Man is the only one who must acquire knowledge of God and of the world, both physical and spiritual. This is not given automatically but gained through experience and learning. That means the knowledge gained can and does vary from individual to individual based on where they are born and how they are raised. This knowledge is different from that of Satan, angels, demons, who possessed clear knowledge of God from the moment they were created.

Man is also the only one that continues in the process of being created. For the others: they all came into being at a specific point in time and their existence has no end as far as we know. Man gives birth to new individuals. Man can procreate physically and spiritually. Each new person born receives not only a new body but a new soul, which is in

God's image. This is a power reserved for man. It may be argued that all life on earth procreates, but only in man does that process include a soul.

The greatest use of power both by God, angels, Satan and demons is for the purpose of influencing man. Influencing man to make one key decision, whether to follow God, or to follow himself which means he is following the pattern of Satan. Man also gets involved in this process when he seeks to influence others to believe, live, and act in the same way he does.

Power is gained by several means, the first is by virtue of who I am. Some aspects of this are not something I have control over nor can I alter or even influence them. By birth I gain an identity, position and access to power. This relates to my social position, my physical location and my genetic heritage. These will all impact my access to power and how I will use that power. While this is where I start it may not be where I end. It is possible to change my status by force of will and strong desire. I can also ruin my access to power by careless living and lack of concern. I can even choose to do nothing and be completely controlled by others.

One example should help understand this. Parents and children are a relationship where all three types of power, listed above, can be active. A parent, by the manner of their life, can use that life to influence how their child develops. The parent can impact the life of a child by how they alter the environment in which the child lives. It can be as simple as maintaining a clean and safe living space or having a lack of concern for such issues. The parent can also exert direct control over a child by creating rules and guidelines for the child to obey. Along with this would be a system of rewards and punishments to maintain that control.

In the spiritual realm this is also true. We are born into a world that has clear ideas about the reality or non-reality of spiritual power and what that power may look like. That belief is then used to influence, alter and control people, events and environments in which a person lives. Man in his search for spiritual power has wandered far from the truth about the spiritual world as revealed in the Bible.

Being born into a Hindu, Muslim, Christian or animist setting will result in vast differences in how spiritual power is defined, how it is accessed and what can be done with this power. It will also define who has the most access to spiritual power. Even those without a belief in a spiritual realm define some areas of life in terms of ones spirit. One person has a humble spirit, another has an indomitable spirit. These suggest that an integral part of man is defined as spirit and this spirit has power in it such that it can affect the world around that person.

The Bible states that man is possessed of a spirit. This is what marks him as unique in the entire created world. He has a physical and spiritual reality. While he may have personal ability to accomplish many things, influence people, alter our world and even control certain aspects of life, he seeks to gain more power. Man wants to have greater control, greater power.

As was stated earlier our location of birth will define, in many ways, how we gain this power and define for us what power is available. We do not have the time or scope to look into all the variations this represents. What we do need to do is look at how Scripture defines spiritual power and how it works. From there one can compare the reality of where they live and what their group of people believes and so know how to respond.

Personal Spiritual Power

The first level of spiritual power would be who I am as an individual and how my spirit affects the world around me. For in fact we have a great deal of power available just because of who we are. We can influence people toward good or evil. We can influence what they believe about spiritual truth and what spiritual power is. We can influence their knowledge of God and if they will desire to know God. Our influence will affect others view of God, His personality, activity and other areas of truth. It is easily seen that we will work hard to influence others to believe as we do and follow that belief.

Righteous people have great influence on those around them. By their lives we are influenced. They will often alter the world around them to encourage what they believe, and where resources and opportunities permit; they will seek to control others through structures and regulations. False teachers can have the same effect but in a negative way. They focus on using their personal charisma, or spirit, to influence others to follow them. They will also use their ability or power to create an environment to support their claim. This even goes so far as to create rules and structures that allow them to control all who follow them. Rewards and punishments are part of their effort to gain further control of others.

At this point we can see similarity between righteous influence and false truth. The process is the same but the end results are quite different. In our use of personal spiritual power we either point people to God or draw them to ourselves.

Objects of Spiritual Power

The next level of spiritual power would be what some call power inherent in objects or settings. This could include use of idols, icons, talismans, rituals and special sites. Let's take a look at each of these briefly.

Idols – These are objects made into the form of a being which many believe to have power. The idea here is that by having the image, we have created a focal point for spiritual power that we can now use. The closer we are in proximity to the image the greater the access to power. Even those who follow God can be caught up in this kind of thinking. In 1 Samuel 4-5, when the Israelites took the Ark of the Covenant into battle thinking that the use of the ark would influence the outcome of the battle. Likewise, in Greek thinking the presence of such images of the gods was to increase the favor of the gods, and thus increase access to power.

Icons - These are symbols of what we believe. It is often believed that the symbol has power. Crosses are often used as such symbols. Holding a cross is thought by some to protect them from danger. In like manner other religions have key symbols and objects that they believe contain special power. Statues of the saints are used to focus power; shrines are maintained in people's yards or on dangerous roads as a means of seeking protection from trouble. On many roads in Mexico you will see such shrines.

Talismans – These are objects both natural and manmade that represent power, and the possession of them gives power to that individual. People will go to great ends to obtain these or have them constructed by specific people in order to have access to the power they represent. Amulets are a very common form of this and are usually worn by people for protection or for good luck. A rabbit's foot and a pouch with

a bible verse written on paper in it, are two more examples of talismans.

Rituals – These are very carefully defined activities performed to gain power. Some rituals are very simple. Crossing oneself is a simple ritual that for some is a means of accessing power and protection. Never stepping on the threshold of a door relates to protecting oneself from evil entering a house. Throwing salt over one's shoulder is used to protect oneself from bad luck or demons that may be following them. Always wearing a certain piece of clothing for certain events represents an attempt gain luck or power.

Then there are more elaborate rituals. These involve performing a specific series of actions in order to gain a blessing, protection or even power. People often go to the witchdoctor or obeah man or similar person for direction. In the church we may find people going through ritual fasting, actions of penance, using prayer beads, as attempts to gain favor or avoid punishment. Even communion and baptism can easily be treated by many as rituals to gain access to power. Paul warns against such treatment in 1 Corinthians 11:27ff and that such an attitude may actually have the reverse effect, a loss of power and even life.

Locations with special power – These are often called holy sites. People go on pilgrimages to these locations to gain blessing and power. These are places where it is felt that healing and visions are possible. A special program for training can become such a place. The home of a teacher or prophet can become such a place because it is related to a location where power exists. These places often have special buildings on site and personnel to help you get the most out of your visit. Often a ritual (pilgrimage) is closely associated with the site. Within the Christian community there are those that feel the most effective prayer must occur on a mountain

retreat. Visiting certain churches or locations that are considered holy can also be a part of this process.

So we become focused on gaining these objects and performing these rituals to gain power. Such objects and actions did occur in scripture. Handkerchiefs that were touched by Peter were used to heal people. Naaman performed a ritual washing in the Jordan to be healed. When bitten by the snakes in the wilderness the people looked at the brazen serpent to be healed. Later this brazen serpent became an idol, and so was destroyed to bring an end to such belief by the people. In the Old Testament people went to the high places believing that they had a better chance of accessing power in those locations. In all of these there is an awareness of the existence of spiritual power.

Power over others

The last level involves gaining control of other people and events. In truth the more we obtain power at the first two levels the more control we will have over others. They will see us as people who have access to power and give us greater authority to control the world they live in. Simon Magus was such a person. He had gained power and then used it to impact the lives of those around him (Ac 8:9-11). Bar-Jesus had gained this kind of control over the governor of Crete (Ac 13:6-8). These men gained control of others based on what was seen as spiritual power or their ability to access this power. Even the Pharisees and Priests relied on their access to the power represented by the temple and sacrifices. Though they had lost their relationship with God they still had great power and used it to control their world and the people in that world.

In each of these settings the focus of power was on the spiritual realm. Each of these depends on the existence of spiritual power to be able to control the people and events of

their world. The people listened and responded because they wanted to benefit from their ability to access this power. Whether the power was from their personal spirit, or from the existence of other forms of spiritual reality, the benefit to be gained is the key concern.

We seek power because we want to influence others, have personal gain or other benefits for selfish reasons. We may want others to like us, leave us alone or even fear us because of the power we possess. Some will seek power to help others, some will seek power to gain control, and some will seek power to harm others. We want to affect the world around us.

Power from Spirits

The next source of power is that which comes from beings that exist in the spiritual realm. We call them angels and demons. In some places they are called gods or spirits. They, by virtue of their existence, have power greater than us and our physical world. They can move between the physical and spiritual world and have knowledge that is greater than we possess.

When people cannot access power nor have access to power through other means, they will turn to the spirit world for assistance. They will attempt to win the favor of these spirits, find ways to control these spirits, or in reverse protect themselves from the spirits and those who serve them.

There are many Christians who even seek after angels for protection and power and pray to them and for them. Some hope that they might see an angel or some clear evidence of their activity. Others want to see the spirits, demons and their power and activity. It is becoming popular to have a story that suggests one has their own guardian angel or has had an angel provide them with needed protection or other benefits.

While it is true that God, on occasion, sends angels for protection, these people want this to happen because they desire access to the power they represent.

It is a tempting situation, even for Christians, to imagine having the power to drive out demons, to have control over disease and the physical world. Imagine having power to know what will happen next, or insight in what to do so that I will be blessed and have all that I need. It is a tempting situation to realize there is power and it can be used to improve our life, and to possibly influence even God.

Throughout the world the practices involved in worship of the gods and of demons are as varied as there are languages and tribes involved in this practice. People know that the demons can do more than they can and they will do what is needed to draw on their power. So they seek to do whatever is necessary to deal with the demon's reality and power. We will look at this area of spiritual power at greater length in later chapters in this material.

Power from God

Finally there is the supreme source of all spiritual power. God. He created all that exists and has power over all that exists. The scriptures reveal the extent of his power to control nature, to control disease, to control the flow of history, to control death and to control all other beings within the spiritual realm. The greatest focus of God's power, according to Scripture, is the work he does to restore man to his original relationship with God. To do this God became a man, lived without sin, died and rose again. All of this expression of power was for one purpose, to correct the effect of sin on the spiritual aspect of man.

Unfortunately man does not always understand this truth or understand the ultimate nature of God and often treats God

as another member of the spiritual realm. He is just another god to be worshipped for the benefits to be gained and the potential for power to control his world and those around him. Instead of building a relationship with God we treat him as a resource to be accessed.

As a result there are people who seek out God for the power he has so they can heal, so they can drive our demons, so they can have greater control in the church and of God's people. They lose sight that the greatest power God wishes to give is that which will change our heart and remove our sin.

Summary

Spiritual power is a critical topic and covers many areas of the life of man. We cannot cover all that is involved in this topic as you can see just from the summary. material will focus on key topics and issues related to the existence of spirits, the spiritual realm and the power of the spiritual realm. Such discussions may focus on what is power, discussions on who the players are, summaries of key areas of activity of power our responses.

The hope is that as the key texts are presented, the topics discussed will make us better equipped to understand how we are affected by the world of spirits and the use of spiritual power. This would then give us knowledge of how God is working and what Satan is trying to do. If in fact the beings that occupy this realm are real, and I believe they are, and then what do we need to know about them? What do we need to know about God's attitude toward them and what should our response be to the power they represent? With this understanding we will know how to help others be freed from the power of sin and of Satan.

2. Spiritual Powers - Definitions

Whether it is through ‘traditional’ religious practices, through manipulation of Christian activity, or a synthesis of the two, it is clear man believes in, and is obsessed with, the idea of spiritual power. Even if he does not believe in the existence of God or Satan he still believes in his own spirit and his ability to take control of a situation and change reality to suit him. The spirit of man becomes the focus of power. Man can overcome, man can change the world. Man can become more than he is at this moment. Man can evolve to a higher level of consciousness and spirit.

Yet in sharp contrast to that is the depth of depravity that man can descend to. Man without conscience, without morals. At this end of the spectrum we wonder if man has a soul; if there is any good in man. At this end people believe that the devil exists. They believe in demons of power whose only purpose is to destroy. Man begins to act the part of a demon and seeks out greater power to control and destroy others for his own pleasure and benefit.

So what do we mean then by spiritual power? How can its use appear to be so selfless and noble on one hand and so wicked and depraved on the other? Spiritual power would appear to be the ability of beings that have a spiritual reality to affect the physical and spiritual realities of the world around them. Creation, healing, and other physical phenomenon would be evidence of the exercise of this power by those who have a spiritual reality.

Let us start with a definition, remembering that it is only a starting point and not a final definition. Spiritual power is power that is capable of influencing and altering the spiritual reality of man. It is power exerted in the spiritual realm that may have an impact on things spiritual and also may have an

impact on the physical realities in which those of a spiritual nature exist.

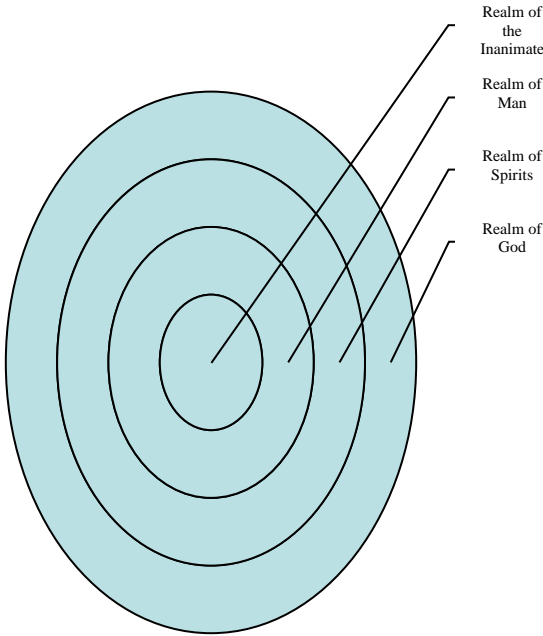
This power has access to our lives through four realms.

1. The realm of God or Supreme Being.
2. The realm of spiritual beings such as demons and Satan and the gods.
3. The realm of living physical beings of which man is the supreme form.
4. The realm of the inanimate.

First Realm

The highest form of spiritual existence is that of God. Within God's view of reality there are no other gods. He alone exists at this level; all others who seek to call themselves god are merely fallen angels (from now on we will refer to them as demons). God reveals the ultimate form of spiritual power. He took his power and formed the physical universe (Ge 1) and maintains it by that power (Col 1). He further used that power to create a physical being in his likeness, called man.

God continues to use that power to transform and impact both the spiritual and physical realms. He seeks to build relationships with man whom he created through restoration of his original state. He physically entered this world to make this possible and overcame its greatest barrier called death. This now makes possible the final stage of the use of his power, the recreation of man and the universe into something far superior to what currently exists. He then assists in helping man understand all that he wants to happen through the ongoing use of his power to heal, to restore, and to reveal himself. A further expression of the nature of this power is His ability to live in man to impact man's physical reality.



After God, everything else is in a lesser state. All the other levels of spiritual existence are a result of God's creative use of His power. Here is where the other three levels of spiritual reality are to be found and also the two realms of existence where they reside are encountered.

Second Realm

The second realm of spiritual existence relates to those who live in the spiritual realm, the angels and demons. In appearance there is no real difference between these two. What is different is the nature of their activity and purpose. While they exist for the most part in a realm unseen by man, a spiritual realm, we learn that they can move freely between that realm and the physical realm in which we live. Angels are seen as the servants of God, beings who spend the majority of their time in worship and service, beings of great

power who are intimately aware of our existence and often sent by God to inform aid and protect us.

Demons on the other hand, while having the same appearance and abilities as angels, use them for other purposes. They are opposed to God and any who serve him. They seek to destroy what God has created and those who follow God. They too have power, but it is a power focused on evil. The greatest of these demons is Satan. The expressed goal of Satan is to take God's place and if that is not possible, to cause the destruction of as much of what God has created as is possible. The most common use of his power is for deception and control of man and creation.

Third Realm

The third realm of spiritual existence is man. Man has a spirit, which scripture says is what makes man to be in the image of God. While other creatures possess life they do not have a spirit. While many may claim that animals have spirits, we will deal with that as part of the fourth level.

Man has the power to determine the nature of his existence. He can choose to walk with God or turn away. Unfortunately, Adam chose to turn away and unleashed the power of sin. Sin is the action of man to ruin what God had created in man - the ability to have a personal relationship with God, to exist with and be able to perceive God. This was destroyed when man chose to sin.

Man can perceive the spiritual realm and can be affected by the spiritual power around him. He can be healed or harmed. He can do wonderful things and dreadful things as that power works through him. There is a place within the existence of man where another spirit(s) can exist alongside his spirit within in his body. Such coexistence allows God, the Holy Spirit, or demons to exercise their power through

that individual. It is interesting to note that angels never seek to occupy this place. All of this is based on the choices that man makes in regard to believing such power exists and whether he in fact has a spiritual existence.

In Scripture we are told that some day a spiritual existence will become the dominant reality and the physical will be changed to accommodate this new existence, which Paul calls the resurrection body (1 Co 15:35ff). We will be recognizable for who we are, but very different in that we will be capable of existing in both the physical and spiritual realm. This is are called the new heaven and earth (Rev 21:1).

Fourth Realm

Finally there is realm four. This is the physical world, which includes animals and inanimate objects all of which have no spirit. Many people believe that this level of reality has innate power, that there is power in everything and that some objects, either by their nature or by association, have more power than others. This belief has affected the church. For example some people have sought to obtain a piece of the cross or objects specially blessed by key leaders or saints so that they would be blessed and protected, believing these objects contained special powers.

God calls this idolatry - worshiping an object with the hope of influencing what it represents. Most often the object represents something other than God. Even if the object is connected to God such worship is rejected. This occurred in the Old Testament when Israel tried to use the Ark of the Covenant to influence the outcome of a battle (1 Sam 4-6.)

Interrelation of Realms

While Scripture tell us that the universe exists and is maintained by the power of God, it clearly states that these objects and creatures possess no power. One stone is no better than another, even if it has been carved to look like something else or even to represent a demon or a man. Isaiah had some very scathing remarks about such belief, especially as he talked about a man who took a piece of wood and carved an idol from one part and used the rest to build a fire to cook his food (Is 44:13-17).

So there is power that exists within the spiritual realm which can affect both the physical and spiritual existence of man. The greatest expression of that power today is the reversal of man's condition, the restoration of what he lost when he sinned in the garden. The most damaging expression of that power is found in sin. Sin controls man and destroys both body and soul. While Satan has power and uses it to influence and harm man, he cannot affect the spiritual reality of man.

The power to alter the impact of sin can only be accomplished by God. He alone has the power to reverse the effect of sin. But even that is restricted by man's choice. If man chooses not to believe, nothing can be done. Man has the ultimate responsibility for what can be done to his life and his soul. He chooses what power will have affect in his life: God, Satan, or himself.

As we look at Scripture there are at least seven key ways to look at spiritual power and how it impacts our lives. Keep in mind spiritual power relates to power that can affect our lives both physically and spiritually.

| <u>Level</u> | <u>Impact</u> | <u>Focus</u> |
|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Power of Satan | Spiritual Temptation | World |
| Power of Sin | Spiritual Ruin | Law |
| Power of Death | Spiritual Separation | Judgment |
| Power of Gospel | Spiritual Salvation | Love |
| Power of Resurrection | Spiritual Renewal | Jesus |
| Power of Godliness | Spiritual Growth | Truth |
| Power of Holy Spirit | Spiritual Freedom | Holy Spirit |

Power of Satan

The power of Satan, and of those who serve him, is actually very limited. He cannot cause us to sin or take control of our lives. His power is in his ability to confuse and misdirect us. Any control he gains in the process is only possible as we yield it up to him. While Satan and the demons can affect us physically, that again is limited to now, within the framework of the physical world and the scope of time. Whatever physical affect they create is restricted to the physical realm and is not permanent in nature, it will not carry over into eternity. What is more permanent is the nature of temptation and our failure to see the truth. This is Satan's greatest power, that of deception. All of this is restricted to the world. This is where he is active and he cannot move beyond its boundaries.

Power of Sin

The power of sin relates to our response to temptation. It is at this point that real damage can be done to our spiritual existence. Sin, by our choices, has the power to ruin who we are and what we are created to be. Sin focuses on our activity within the world. Sin is revealed in the Law and the law reveals to us our sin. The Law helps us see the nature of the ruin sin causes in our spiritual existence. Sin has the power to destroy our relation with God and with others.

Power of Death

The power of death is an extension of the power of sin. Death is the ultimate result of sin and occurs at two levels. Death separates us from our physical life and the possibility of correcting the ruin caused by our sin. Death also separates us spiritually from God. At death we no longer have the possibility of returning to the relationship God intended us to have with him. Death reveals God clearly and reveals our responsibility for our actions. Judgment is the focus of death. Judgment means we will die physically and may mean death spiritually as well.

Power of the Gospel

The power of the gospel relates to the power involved in overcoming the impact of our sin and its control over our lives. It represents the salvation of that which was hopelessly lost. It focuses on the love required to make such salvation possible. The power of the gospel lies in the hope it brings to those who have come to understand the ruin their sin has brought to their lives. Its power lies in the hope that while physical death can not be avoided spiritual death can be overcome.

Power of the Resurrection

The power of resurrection relates to the power that restores what was dead and lost. It brings with it renewal of relationship with God and renewal of the life we were intended to have. The focus of the resurrection is on Jesus who lived the life God intended and willingly gave it up so that others could be resurrected from the power of sin and death.

Power of Godliness

The power of godliness relates to the power to live the life of Jesus. It is the power to be holy as God is holy. Access to this power allows us to grow spiritually in our knowledge of truth. Truth is the focus of godliness. When we know the truth we are able to grow in our knowledge of God and our relationship to him.

Power of the Holy Spirit

The power of the Holy Spirit relates to freeing us from the limitations of this world. The Holy Spirit allows us to see beyond the limits of this life and begin to prepare us for the life we will have with God. The focus is on the Holy Spirit and all that the Holy Spirit is able to do; to use us to reach out to others with the knowledge we have gained, and the freedom we have experienced and the spiritual power that is available to restore the image of God.

Summary

The first spiritual power level relates to what Satan is doing to impact our life. The next two spiritual power levels relate directly to man and how he impacts his own life and world. The last four spiritual power levels are related to God and his activity in relation to man. What is interesting is that, for the most part, the world is trapped at the first level, the power of Satan. We find ourselves dealing with deceptions and traps and temptations for false power, power that ruins and destroys.

Further at every other level of spiritual power Satan tries to bring in his power of deception to confuse and prevent us from experiencing God, the true source of power. Even Jesus was a target of Satan's deception and that is where we will

begin to look at how Satan and the demons seek to confuse us and lead us astray in seeking after false power.

We will not spend extensive time in the other levels of spiritual power except as they may relate to a given topic in this material. For most of our struggles grow out of Satan's ability to deceive and our inability to recognize the deceptions in the realm of spiritual powers.

Section B Rulers of the Spiritual Realm

We must first take a look at the two key individuals who are at the center of this discussion of spiritual powers. Their roles are critical to a clear understanding of every other aspect of the discussion.

Jesus as the Son of God represents the one who created everything and so is the ultimate source of any power that exists. His presence and activity helps us to understand what is happening in the spiritual realm. His life on earth is intended to guide us into the truth and know how to live in this world and to find God. His title of ruler is given to him by God. It relates to all of creation. All will submit to him, even Satan in the end.

Satan as the leader of the fallen angels is the ultimate deceiver. He is trying to lead us away from God and use his power to confuse and control. Even the power he has was given to him as a result of his creation by God. His presence only creates lies and confusion and is designed to lead us away from God. His title of ruler is assumed by him and is a deception. It relates only to those who choose to follow him.

The next few chapters will look into the interaction between Jesus and Satan. We will also look into who Satan is, what he is trying to do, and ultimately what will happen to him.

B1. Jesus and Satan

The story has barely started and the battle begins. Angels come to announce the good news, King Herod is influenced and tries to kill the child. Angels are sent to warn everyone. Jesus' birth ends the long wait and openly proclaims what Paul called God's secret plan. God, though, is not about secrets, not about hiding and moving in dark corners. He openly declares he has come. Satan responds with a direct attempt to snuff out the life of the one who represents God. God has openly declared that it is time carry out the plan he has been revealing to those who would listen.

The Holy Spirit comes to mark the beginning of Jesus' message and Satan is not far behind to try and turn Jesus aside, confuse the plan, alter it in some way. Every chance he gets he will try to get Jesus to take the easy way out or just give up in frustration with the attitudes and lack of belief of those around him.

Jesus begins to teach, begins to heal, and begins to care for the people. Then comes the constant flow of demons and the troubles they cause, the constant testing of Jesus' commitment and resilience. It is interesting to note, that the demons come to Jesus. One would think they would go far away or do their best to avoid Jesus and do their best to hide the truth. They know who has the greater power and they still come. It becomes a constant test of Jesus' will and commitment to his Father's plan.

The demons are more than ready to proclaim who Jesus is. This proclamation is a false confession. Its purpose is to deceive and confuse. It is designed to make it look like Jesus' power over them is because he is one of them. This is what the Pharisees state (Mt 12:24), but they do so to avoid having to submit to Jesus. If he is not one of them, part of

Satan's kingdom, then they must submit to Jesus, because the only other answer, to someone having such power, is that he is from God (Mt 12:28). If this is true then they must submit to Jesus. But then they would lose much of the power they have gained over the people.

The demons come, even seek him out. They call Jesus by name (Lk 4:41). He tells them to be quiet (Mk 1:34). The demons want to shift the focus of the message from love and forgiveness to power and control. They want to pressure Jesus, wear him down. It is the same temptation that Satan used on Jesus; yield to me and I will give you control. Yield to me and the demons will leave you alone. Yield to me and I will stop hurting these people and I will tell them to follow you.

It is a tempting option. Yet it is seriously flawed. It carries within it the suggestion that Jesus is somehow weaker than Satan and needs help to bring an end to the harm the demons are doing to these people. Jesus refuses. Jesus knows who is stronger, who is really in control, his Father. With a word the demons are gone.

It is interesting to note that as the demons come they do so in fear. They know Jesus and they are in fear of what Jesus can do and will eventually do. They know someday, if they fail to twist Jesus and corrupt his resolve to remain true to God's plan, they will pay. They know that they are doomed and their judgment has already been passed. It is just a matter of time.

The demons are constantly wrapped up in repeating the actions that got them to where they are now. Satan's fall was because he tried to take God's place. Satan tries to get Jesus to yield to his authority and so replace God. The demons represent a constant attempt to force Jesus to yield. The suggestion is that Jesus' work would be so much easier if he

would just yield to them and to their leader Satan. It is not easy to resist. Satan flaunts his power to take possession of people, people who are created in the image of God, people who are designed so that the Spirit of God could dwell in them. He makes Jesus' life as miserable as he can by twisting, damaging and controlling these people and then parading them before Jesus. To make it worse Jesus knows that for everyone that he sees and frees there are many others around the world who are not being freed.

The taunting is hard but the resolve is stronger. If Jesus were to yield to Satan it would create a much worse bondage, a much worse end - imprisonment forever. Jesus' life would have no meaning, no power to free our souls from sin, much less free us from the oppression and possession of the demons, because his life would be bound and controlled by Satan. Everything would become a lie and all hope would die. Jesus must stand firm.

The battle rages all through the life of Jesus, even to the moment of death on the cross when the leaders cried, "if you really are the son of God come down, show us your power." The battle continued into the struggles faced by the early church. It continues today with the temptation to take short cuts, to take the easy road and let Satan have access to our lives. The battle will always be there.

In all of this we learn that Satan and the demons were telling everyone the truth about Jesus. They were informing them that Jesus is indeed the Holy One sent from God. Now ask this simple question. What did they gain by telling the truth?

Jesus knew the answer. They hoped to gain control of Jesus' life and ministry. So it is little wonder Satan appears as the Holy Spirit comes. No wonder the demons are coming, coming and coming. If he yields once, just once, they have

control. They will use any means, hurting people, telling the truth when it suits them, anything to wear Jesus down.

Let us go back and look at four of these encounters and try to understand what is going on.

Satan in the wilderness

(Mt 4:1-11; Lk 4:1-13)

Jesus is confronted by Satan three times and challenged to take matters into his own hands and deny God's plan. Each temptation looks at who has control of the power that can change ones physical state and spiritual focus.

The first temptation is not just about food but about who is in control of the food. It is about accessing power to find satisfaction without concern for the consequences. It is about putting faith in self and personal power and not in God, the source of true power. It is about the ultimate source of life and the ultimate end of life. It carries the lie that I have the power to take care of myself and provide for my needs. That I am the one in control.

The second temptation is not just about protection, it is about who should be protected. It is about putting man in the central place of power instead of God. It is about measuring mans importance and requiring angels, beings with power, to take care of and protect man. This is a flawed view of God, not as the one man serves, but expecting God to serve man. This is about ultimate responsibility. Man believes that he so important that God should prove it by protecting him from harm. And so everyday man lives in this world of disease and danger he faces this question over and over. Isn't God's power supposed to be available to heal every sickness and solve every problem? Shouldn't man have all that he wants and be totally comfortable, with no struggles, no pain, and no

worries. Everyday, instead of letting God, man puts him to the test. God, why didn't you heal this, why did you let that happen, why didn't meet my needs (or really my wants)? Man wants God to use his power to provide man's every whim.

The third temptation is not just about power, it is about worshipping power. This is about trying to become like God by any and all means. You see everyday man desires that people adore him and bow to his will. Man uses any means at his disposal to do so. Man bribes some, threatens others, or finds a powerful friend to get others to do his bidding. Man looks for ways to gain power over his world that will take the least amount of effort and cause the least amount of personal discomfort. Man prefers easy over hard. Satan was offering Jesus' the easy way out but it would require Jesus to worship Satan for the sake of power, worshipping power, and not God.

But like most temptations offered by Satan it will come at a cost. The first time Satan offered an alternative to the truth, to being like God, it cost man the garden and put his soul at risk. This time the stakes are even higher. The possibility of restoration and our future relation with God is on the line.

These types of temptations in life are about listening to the wrong advice and so losing important knowledge, experience and skill that we did not take the time to gain. The alternative offered here is about losing knowledge about God, it is about not experiencing God's truth and it is about losing the respect of God. This puts us and what we are doing at greater risk. Gaining power by ignoring God's plan will cut us off from God and the power he has to offer to help us carry out his plan. Jesus saw this and rejected the alternative Satan offered, though he knew it would involve a struggle and would be costly. In the end what was gained would far exceed the alternative offer.

First encounter with a demoniac

(Mk 1:23-26; Lk 4:33-35)

In Mark and Luke the first recorded miracle is about Jesus driving out a demon. Jesus has begun his teaching ministry and people are amazed by the teaching and his manner. He taught as one who had authority and then up pops a demoniac (demon possessed person) right in the synagogue. That must have been incredibly unsettling to those around Jesus. Quite a challenge presented by Satan - here in a place of worship a demon has come and challenged the teaching of Jesus.

The demoniac asks two questions and states one fact. These are again a challenge to Jesus to misuse his power and to yield to Satan.

The first question is “What do you want with us?” This is very interesting in that it is not recorded that Jesus had called on him to come and listen or compelled him in anyway to attend this meeting in the synagogue. Another translation states it this way, “Why are you bothering us?” Again there is no indication that Jesus had sought out the demoniac. In fact it appears actually the opposite. The demoniac has come to disrupt and challenge.

Indeed man has this same attitude - what does God want of us and why is God bothering us? Jesus has a clear word from God and comes with the authority of God. Satan would prefer that man not see that truth but rather see God as one who disturbs and bothers him with his rules and regulations. Man likes to believe that he is doing alright at taking care of himself. He thinks that God is just going to upset everybody and everything.

Jesus is not given a chance to answer and the demoniac claims to know who Jesus is. “I know who you are – the Holy One sent from God.” This sounds like a great testimony. A demon declares that the man they are listening to is truly from God. Jesus does not accept the testimony, it is flawed. The only reason for this testimony is to distract the people from Jesus and turn their attention to the demon. If they believe because of this testimony then they will turn to Satan for confirmation of the truth.

This is exactly what Satan wants. Believe and trust in him first. This will allow Satan to usurp Jesus’ place, Jesus’ authority and will taint Jesus’ power. People will look to Satan to learn about Jesus. Satan is not above using the truth to get control of others.

Jesus brings this plan to a quick end. There is no discussion, there is no correction, and there will be no opportunity for people to consider the words of the demoniac. Jesus, with a word, drives the demon out of the man and out of that place. The demoniac screams, or rather’ the demon screams throwing the man into a convulsion. This is not what he wanted or maybe not even what he expected. The hope could have been for a discussion and so a forum to create a misplaced faith in some of those listening before being forced to leave. The demon may have hoped to create the belief that having a demon may be a blessing, that one so possessed will have access to knowledge about God and what God is doing and so have power that others do not have.

Jesus does not allow this. Instead there are no answers to the questions, just the truth about who is in control and who will be the source of any information regarding what God is doing.

The people are amazed. They forget about the comments of the demon. They now are focused on what Jesus has been teaching and the level of its authority, for even the demons must obey. This is definitely not what Satan wants. He wants to cause doubt and confusion. He wants people to come to him for information and answers.

The Gadarene

(Mt 8:28-34; Lk 8:27-36)

The story of Jesus encounter with the demoniac of Gadarene further reveals the nature of the conflict between Satan and Jesus. This man is wild beyond anything we can comprehend. The demons take control and provide superhuman strength. He can break chains with his bare hands. He is impervious to pain. People are terrified of him and keep as far away as possible.

Jesus arrives unexpectedly. He is seeking a quiet place to rest from the crowds. He barely gets his feet on shore and up rushes the Gadarene. Jesus did not call him, he came, and Jesus knows exactly who he is and begins to command him to leave. The Gadarene cries out a repeat of the questions from the demoniac in the synagogue. “Why are you bothering us? The question, “What do you want with us,” is changed to a statement, “you have no right to torture us”. This is interesting statement in that it is the demoniac who has come to Jesus and Jesus has done nothing except appear near his dwelling place.

Jesus could easily have asked, why did you come to me? Why are you bothering me? What do you want with me? Why didn't you run away when you saw me?

There are two possible answers and both are possibly correct. The demoniacs may not have had any option. Once God was present then they could not run away but had to

come and submit. They were the ones abusing a creation of God and so had to present themselves to God's representative. Yet there is no other place in scripture, outside of the life of Jesus, where such an action occurs. Even in Revelation, Satan and the demons come before God only with great resistance to be judged.

The other possibility is that Satan is using each setting to test and challenge Jesus, to get Jesus to use his power inappropriately or in a manner exceeding what is allowed by his Father. The demoniac challenges Jesus. "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?" (Mt 8:29) They are reminding Jesus, it is not the time for our judgment, it is not the time appointed by God. Jesus does not respond to this challenge, instead he asks the name of the demon. What he gets is not a name but a description of how many demons are actually present.

What a tempting situation. If Jesus used his power to remove them permanently then just think how many people would be spared from what is happening to this man. Just think how much suffering would be avoided, how many would have a better chance of finding God. Yes very tempting. It is a test of two issues, just how much power does Jesus really have and how far will he go in using that power.

Jesus reveals that he does have the power and that he knows who is truly in charge. So the demons enter the swine. They must submit. Those with Jesus see clearly who is in control, God.

Disciples' failure and Judas' betrayal
(Mt 17:15-18; Mk 9:17-27) (Jn 13:27; Lk 22:3)

Why was there such complete failure on the part of the disciples? Judas betrays him, Peter denies him and the rest run away. Jesus sheds some light on this for us in Luke

22:31. He states that Satan had asked to sift them all. Satan has met Jesus and revealed his desire to destroy those closest to Jesus. Actually given all the events recorded about the life of Jesus that should not come as a surprise. Satan is putting the pressure on. Can you hear what he is telling Jesus? “I will attack those closest and dearest to you. So what are you going to do about it?” “They will fail you. So what are you going to do to stop me?” “I already have Judas in my hand and Peter is faltering.” “What are you going to do about it?”

The challenges ring in Jesus’ ears. Use your power to stop me. Protect them from me. Come on, try to stop me. The taunting is there. Satan doesn’t have to speak. Every time Jesus looks at the disciples he is reminded of what Satan plans to do, is fully able to do, and without protection will do, to anyone who chooses to deny God and seek after power for their own purposes, to those who decide to live without God.

The temptation to use his power to protect and rescue is great and it comes at a time when Jesus is facing an even greater trial. He knows his death is near at hand. He knows he will suffer. He knows that if he interferes then the Father’s plan will be flawed because he did not depend on his Father but looked to himself, looked to his own power to take control.

Jesus chose not to act. Instead he turned to the Father and prayed. He turned to Peter and encouraged him that though he would fail there was hope. Jesus chose to follow the course marked out for him and trust his Father, and not himself.

It could not have been easy, to watch Judas choose to betray him for mere money. It could not have been easy, to watch them run away in fear in the garden, even after he said he could call a legion of angels if he so desired. It could not have been easy to hear Peter’s denial, not just once but three

times. Satan did everything he could to turn Jesus from the path set before him, even to the point of taking a personal part in the events. It was Satan that entered Judas and not another demon.

Jesus does the only thing that will make a difference. He submits to God's will, prays for them that their faith will not fail, and leaves it in God's hands.

Summary

Now let us bring it forward to today. If we think the struggle is difficult for us, imagine what it would be if Jesus had yielded. If he had become tired of the battle, and just said "I give up." We would find ourselves living in a utopia only to discover it ends in hell. Satan would be glad to leave us alone for today the end would be what he desired. It would be like a beautiful mask covering a horribly scarred and ugly face. It is all deception.

The temptation continues today. Satan is ready to tempt us to gather power under false pretences. He wants us to look to him and put him in the place of God. Satan is ready to offer us access to power if we let him mix a little of his life with our life. He might ask us to use this ritual as we pray, carry this amulet and go to church, ask the seer for advice on how to serve God. If we submit to Satan's schemes those who hear our words and hear our message will not see the truth, but see Satan.

This is what happened with the Pharisees and others. They could not see the truth because they had a false relationship with God based on attitudes and actions that were controlled by Satan. When they saw Jesus drive out a demon they could not accept it as from God and claimed Jesus was doing it by Satan's power. This accusation occurred a number of times.

Satan was working through the leaders to discourage and discredit Jesus' activity.

Here we see Satan trying to get people to believe what he had tempted Jesus to do. If Jesus submitted then he would give Jesus control of the kingdoms of the world. Satan wanted them to assume that the only way that such control of the world could be gained was if Jesus had submitted to him and then Satan would put Jesus in charge of all that were under him. It made Jesus look like a traitor or deceiver, saying one thing but under the control of Satan.

At this point it would have been easy to let the demons speak out and declare him Son of God. They knew the truth and could be made to speak. But would have been wise? Again the shift would have been from God being in control to depending on Satan for what was needed. The testimony of a demon was a tempting idea. So much simpler and less frustration. But can you trust a liar?

Jesus could yield or take a stand. Jesus chose to take a stand.

Jesus was not inclined to let Satan take credit for God's work. He was not willing for Satan to get any credit and so risk confusing the truth. Once again he would reject the temptation. The people would have to decide if God was at work. Did it make sense for Satan to allow someone to take control of his world in such a manner? Even more so would that person then give credit to God and none to Satan?

Jesus continued to silence the demons and then challenged the people to choose. He challenged them to consider what was happening. He showed them there really are only two explanations for what they were seeing happen. If they believed it was of Satan and not of God then Jesus challenged them to explain to how they drove out demons. If

they believe Jesus was serving Satan, then God doesn't have the power to deal with Satan and demons.

The other option is that God is indeed present. Jesus is indeed serving God. Which means the kingdom of God is present among you and is actively opposing Satan and those who serve him. This would reveal the truth and the power of God over Satan and his kingdom.

Those are the obvious attempts to divert from the truth. There are the superstitions and myths, interpretation and additions to the truth that accumulate over time. They all attempt to divert us from worshipping God. The challenge is yield to the superstition and we will be free to worship. Follow the superstition and give control to Satan. The reality is that Satan does not care if we submit to him, to a ritual, to a demon or to a superstition, as long as we do not give primary control of our life to God. Even if we believe we can control our own life, and so keep God from having a place in our heart, he has won.

Satan came, the demons came, the people came and the pressure to take the easy way out continued day and night. Jesus said no and the intensity of the battle took a major step up. The battle for man's soul was fully engaged. Jesus must not yield. He must not yield.

Jesus did not need the testimony of Satan and demons. We do not need that testimony either. It is irrelevant and designed only to confuse. Letting demons speak may seem a useful way to proclaim the truth, but hidden inside is a lie. It involves trusting a liar, a deceiver. They know the truth but they have chosen not to serve the truth but to serve themselves. Telling the truth does not change their situation, or their judgment. Telling the truth is just another attempt at trying to get us to listen to them before we listen to God.

Jesus did not yield. He gained the victory. So that wherever we go there is no question about who is in authority, about who has authority. Still Satan continues to try to test our resolve. He may have lost to Jesus, but he is still trying to break down those of us who serve God. He is still trying to confuse those who are bound and need to be released. Wherever we go this tactic will continue to be present. If he can get us to use his power to do our work, or to use our own power, then he has won. He will have gained control over those who agree with his plan.

Jesus dared not yield to such a tempting offer; we today must not be trapped by the same situation. This is at the heart of all the discussion of spiritual power and how it is to be used. Who will be in control? Who will we listen to?

1. Satan – His power and kingdom

Satan is the key opponent to the plan of God and those who serve God. There is very little said about Satan in the Old Testament. What we know is that he was present in the garden, there he is there called the serpent and described as more crafty than any other animal (Ge 3:1). He is the source of the temptation that results in the fall of Adam and Eve. The next clear Old Testament reference is found in Job 1, 2. There Satan is described as roaming to and fro about the earth. He is also credited with causing natural disasters, directing groups of people in acts of violence, and causing disease.

The last reference is the least clear, but most commentators feel that it describes the reason for Satan's fall from heaven. It is about his attempt to take God's place in heaven (Is 14: 12-14). This Scripture suggests that Satan at one time had a place in heaven. This is no longer true. In the New Testament we begin to learn more about Satan, his attitude, actions, and final end.

All that we have learned in the Old Testament is confirmed in the first appearance of Satan in the New Testament. He is trying to get Jesus to act in a manner not approved by God and in such a way that will give Satan control. Satan makes it appear that he has control of the world, which is also a lie. His claims to authority are all suspect, hence the name given to him by Jesus, "father of lies of lies" (Jn 8:44).

Titles

By looking at the titles given to Satan we can begin to get a picture of who he is and his character. These titles reveal that people recognize he has power the titles. They also leave room for suspicion and questions about the reality of his

claim in Mt 4:8-9 to be able to deliver control of all the nations to Jesus.

The first title for Satan is the “*prince of this world*” (Jn 12:31, 14:30, and 16:11). This title may suggest a position of power but that is still tentative. A prince can only assume power if the king dies, or abdicates the throne. Even then all those involved must recognize the prince as the legitimate heir. There is often more than one prince and other issues involved in establishing a true heir. Many may claim the right but in truth are only pretending to have the right. They do not meet the criteria of one who has a legitimate claim.

The second title that is used is the “*god of this age*” (2 Co 4:4). Here again is a mix-up of terms. The term god suggests a being of power. Yet according to scripture there is only one God and God does not share his rule with anyone, except his Son, the only legitimate heir. So Satan is like all the other gods; false. He does not have the power to rule such a realm and has never been given authority to do so. This title, used by Paul, carries with it much sarcasm. In several places he refers to the false gods and outright calls them demons (1 Co 10:20). They are not from God and do not have any authority or right that gives us cause to worship them or even consider responding to their assumed position. This would then be true of Satan who, in the same manner, is trying to assume a position that is not his.

The third title used is the “*ruler of the kingdom of the air*” (Ep 2:2). A ruler is an appointed position at best. At worst it is an assumed position that people are forced to accept. Further he is the ruler or prince of the kingdom of the air. This could be seen as a vast kingdom. Whether we think of air as the atmosphere surrounding the earth or as the space between heaven and earth it would be a large area to operate in and would touch all of mankind in some way. Yet it is a very tenuous kind of kingdom. Real life is lived on earth and

real power is with God in heaven. Everything in between is air.

One of the things about air is it is unstable and unpredictable. Today it is calm and tomorrow it is tumultuous. Air cannot be depended on to maintain anything or stay in any one place. Satan's kingdom is the same. It is one of deception and unreliable. While air can have great power and it can have significant impact on objects, the power cannot be maintained and it is possible to build barriers or find shelter from its most destructive forms. In the same way Satan cannot maintain his power and there is the possibility of protection and shelter from what he does. The title sounds impressive but only in a limited sense.

The fourth title is used to describe the assumed rule of Satan is the "*god of this evil age*" (2 Co 4:4). This may be the most accurate description of his position and his power in the world. His position is false in that the term god refers to those beings trying to assume a position that is not theirs by right. His power is not based on a true right to rule but based on the failure of mankind to know what is right. It is based on the evil that surrounds the heart and life of man and so allows Satan a place in which to assert himself and gain power. Without the willingness of man to live in sin and deny God his rightful place Satan would have nothing to rule and no power to act.

So when Satan makes the attempt to impress Jesus with his power and authority it is all a sham. Satan may have control, but it is not his by any legitimate claim, but by default. The true nature of Satan's offer is really this, that if Jesus will bow to him then he will stop interfering and confusing man so that man may have a chance to hear God speak and be able to hear the truth. There is a problem with this offer as well. Satan could then claim that it is because of him that people hear about God. It would be a way of gaining a place

of prestige and diminishing God. God needs me for you to know him. This is just another attempt to assume a place that is not his.

Even the descriptions of Satan's presence and power again suggest limited authority and limited duration of activity. The two key terms used of this are strongholds (2 Co 10:4-6) and strongman (Mt 12:29). Both of these again have the feel of something that is temporary and not permanent.

Strongholds and Strongman

When we discuss the idea of strongholds many people will think of this as some kind of permanent structure. This is not necessarily true. It is about a place, argument or position taken in an attempt to defend a given position.

Occupancy of a stronghold is never guaranteed. Neither is a stronghold something that will always be usable and defensible. Scattered all over Europe and the Caribbean are forts or strongholds that have been abandoned because they no longer are functional as positions of defense or protection. Even in the active years of a stronghold, it was rare that it was always used by a single group or country. A stronghold often changed hands, depending on the fortunes of war. Even the kingdoms that Satan supposedly showed to Jesus are not the same. Many of them no longer exist, including the Roman Empire, a kingdom that lasted longer than most.

Arguments are the same. Unless the argument is based on God's word then it will always be flawed. One position will attack and replace another position; each one thinking they are the final and complete argument. The problem of any argument presented by anyone other than God is that it is based on incomplete information. Only God has all the information needed. So any argument, or as some say a stronghold of belief, presented by Satan, is by its very nature

flawed. Satan just doesn't have adequate knowledge and ability to create anything that is permanent in nature and undefeatable. The same applies to a position Satan might take. He has no permanent authority and so no permanent position where he can stand. His kingdom is of the air, always shifting, and based on evil, unreliable and untrustworthy. So any claim to a stronghold, argument or position is tenuous at best, guaranteed to lead one to doom and not control.

The other concept is that of a house held by a strongman (Mt 12:29ff). You would think that a house would be a truly legitimate concept of ownership and residency. Again it is based on a false concept. While the earth was created for man it was not created for ownership. Man was to care for it, subdue it (Ge 2:1), but it would always remain God's possession (Ps 24:1). God chooses who will dwell where and for how long. That is the basis of Paul's argument in Act 17 when talking to the people in Athens. God sets up the nations and moves them around for one purpose, so they will know God. In the end we are told that this earth will be destroyed and replaced by a new earth (Rev 21:1), further evidence that we cannot claim any form of permanent ownership here.

Satan may think he owns a house (the world) but it is not a legitimate claim. The property belongs to God and has always belonged to God. The house is there by permission and tenancy is only by agreement. Any other form of tenancy in a house it therefore illegal and the true owner of the land has a right to remove the tenant. Being a strongman means nothing in a legal battle. Jesus has every right to bind Satan and carry off any goods he desires (Lk 11:21-23). They were obtained on false pretenses and kept under the same lie.

Even if we think that Satan might have a claim to the house (world) it is apparent that he is not strong enough to maintain the claim. Satan has claimed the world as his kingdom and

yet Jesus is actively moving about and taking away his property, or as stated, plundering the house of Satan (Mk 3:27). If Satan were truly the king or God of this world then Jesus would not have the power to take away his possessions. But in truth, he has no kingdom, no territory and therefore no rights.

Satan's Behavior

Further, Paul talks about Satan seeking a foothold (Eph 4:27). He has no place to stand or any right to stand. Only as we give him access through our own false choices does he have a chance at a foothold, and then only within the scope of our lives. Peter calls this activity of Satan prowling (1 Pe 5:8). The kind of prowling that is done by a lion. Prowling is not what we think it is. It is not Satan seeking to grab a prey. This is not how lions hunt. Lions hunt in groups. Some of them go to a certain place and wait. One or two then begin to prowl or wander about in a place where there is prey. The goal is to cause the prey to become confused and leave their main group. When they become separated they run into the lions waiting in hiding Satan is prowling, trying to separate us from God who is stronger than him.

Prowling also indicates a lack of defined territory. Lions don't stay in a given place or territory waiting for the herd, rather they follow the herd. The result is that they are constantly moving and changing territory according to the location and weakness of their prey. They are not in the front but generally in the rear, or at the sides of the herd, where it is easier to find those who are careless and less watchful. If the lions did not change territory with the herd then they would die of starvation. The territory is defined by the location of the herd. Satan, too, is prowling; driving victims into the control of those who follow him.

Jesus' own description of the behavior of a demon that has been driven from a person's life further strengthens this concept (Mt 12:43). The demon, having no place to be wanders in barren places until it finds a suitable place to dwell. Even when they do find a place or even a person to possess, it is still only temporary. When the person dies they will be forced to move on again. If the people leave a given area the demon will not remain but move seeking another group to influence. Satan is no different than those who follow him.

While it appears clear that Satan has not territory it does not mean Satan is not organized. While some claim that the ideas of rulers, authorities, powers and forces suggest control of territory, it is not necessarily so. Lenski and EBC suggest that it refers to the forces of Satan, the level of their authority, the state of their power and scope of their activity. So each demon may have a certain activity, with a given authority and power to carry out that activity. It is more about the idea that Satan has set up a structure by which he rules his pseudo kingdom. His prowling is very organized and so dangerous.

Satan does not have a place that is his. Nor can he claim any place. His true place was in heaven but he has been driven from there by his own actions and the activity of those in service to God. Jesus reports as much when he tells the disciples that he saw Satan fall from heaven (Lk 10:18). Satan has sets up a structure to maintain the false image he has created regarding his kingdom.

Power

While Satan may not have a true kingdom, or a place that is truly his, he still has much knowledge and power that are greater than mans. Satan knew who Jesus was and realized the importance of getting Jesus to yield to temptation (Mt

4:1ff). He knew which of the disciples could be persuaded to betray Jesus. He had a thorough knowledge of God's word and what needed to be altered to make his offers seem plausible. He knew why Jesus came (Mt 12:29) and that the coming of Jesus now and his return in the future spelled his doom.

Satan could do some amazing things that suggest power. He took, Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and showed him the kingdoms of the world. This power is limited. Though he sought to ruin all of the disciples, only one was permanently affected.

The angels of heaven are also cautious and not careless when dealing with Satan. In Jude 9 we have the story of Michael contending with Satan over the final disposition of the body of Moses. It states that Michael did not accuse Satan of blasphemy or assume power over Satan but rather turned to God to deal with Satan. Satan is recognized as an angel with power and not to be treated lightly or casually. It is God's business to deal with him and that is where we can go to gain control over Satan's activities and power.

The New Testament gives us some idea of the extent of his power on the physical realm in which we dwell. It talks of counterfeit miracles (2 Th 2:9). If he can cause disease in Job then why not the ability to heal the disease he has caused? Revelation records Satan healing a mortal wound of an individual (the beast) (Rev 13:3) who then becomes a powerful ally in the end times. The meaning of counterfeit relates to the idea of false. They are false in that they do not reveal the truth or are based on the truth.

Something that is counterfeit is based on tricks and traps (2 Ti 2:26). Tricks to get you to believe in something that is not real, and traps that will bind you so that you end up losing control. The more cunning the trap, the more you lose

control and then yield control to the one who has trapped you. That is Satan's greatest power; the ability to create a lie that will make us believe it is the truth. This is what has happened to man over the centuries and we reap the results of the lie and our desire to have the power Satan suggests we can have. But it is counterfeit - a lie (Ro 1:25).

Deceiver

Satan is here to cause trouble, as much trouble as possible. He wants to create situations where we grow tired because of the constant opposition. James encourages us to resist the Devil (Ja 4:7). Resistance is a continuous process. We are dealing with a relentless foe and we need to be relentless in our attitude. The danger is that he may outwit us. This was Paul's concern for the church in Corinth (2 Co 2:11). Satan is intelligent and complex. His tactics are designed to misguide us so we do not see what is really happening. He builds his tactics around existing failure or the potential for failure in our lives. This was Paul's concern in 2 Co 7:5 when he talked about the issue of self-control.

Satan is subtle in what he does. He tries to get us involved in commitments and partnerships that look good on the surface but are just another way for him to gain control. This is the focus of Paul's comments in 2 Co 6:14ff. When we make such commitments, even ones that look innocent, then Satan is able to gain access to some area of our lives and then works from there.

Ananias and Saphira were fooled into thinking they could hide the truth (Ac 5:1-10). They wanted others to praise them. Judas was fooled into thinking he could force Jesus to take an action he had already refused (Mt 27:3). Peter was trapped into thinking about his safety more than the truth (Mt 26:69-75). Paul was constantly under attack and a thorn from Satan was allowed in his life (2 Co 12:7). If we are not alert

we are destroyed. If we are alert God is revealed and we grow.

Satan is all about deception. If necessary, the Bible tells us that he can appear as an angel of light (2 Co 11:14). It is the focus of a portion of Paul's comments on the second coming of Christ to the Thessalonians.

2 Th 2:9-10

The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

Satan will do whatever he can to deceive us and draw us away from God. Jesus warned the disciples about it and that Satan's deceptions could even confuse the righteous (Mk 13:22).

Summary

It is apparent that we are involved in a battle. Jesus was under attack by Satan from the moment of his birth. At his baptism he was further attacked and throughout his ministry must deal with Satan's activity around him and in the lives of the disciples. This is such a concern that in John 17:15 Jesus prays for the safety of the disciples that they will be protected from the evil one. In the Lord's Prayer a line is included stating "deliver us from the evil one (Mt 6:13)."

Satan is like a raging bull that presents two types of danger for man. The first danger is to climb into the bullpen without proper respect for his power. That leaves man unprepared for Satan's actions. The second is to treat the bull in a cavalier manner from the assumed safety of being outside the fence.

Man might think that nothing can reach him there. That is a false assumption. While Satan may be confined, not all of those who adore him and his power are so confined. There are people who serve him that he can use to affect us if we are not alert.

In all this it should become clear that true spiritual warfare is not about power struggles. The power struggle has already been won. Jesus defeated Satan for control of death and control of the impact of sin. The real struggle is over a true view of God. Satan is constantly trying to present a false view that puts him in the key role. He wants us to believe he is in control when he is not.

Satan will directly assault our body and make us believe that our health and well being is the key issue. Only a false view of God makes this the most important concern. The real issue is the battle over our thoughts and our mind. That is where the critical battle is being fought. Satan wants us, though, to seek our own well being and not the presence of God (Ep 2:1-3).

Over and over we are shown that we have within our grasp the power to resist and defeat Satan and his schemes. Paul's armor of God is such an example (Eph 6:11). Jesus tells us even the gates of hell will not prevail (Mt 16:18). This is not about a physical location but a figure of speech that means the combined plans and desires of Satan and his host are not adequate to prevail against the church and so against anyone of us who belongs to God. It is possible to identify and avoid the traps he sets. Paul says we are aware of his schemes (2 Co 2:11) and so he should not be able to outwit us.

Jesus came to bind the strongman and take away his possessions. In Ephesians 4:8-9 it states that Christ descended and when he ascended he took captives with him. The captives were Satan's control over death and the grave.

When we serve Jesus faithfully he is defeated in our lives. Satan can only pluck the seed of truth from us or choke its growth in our lives if we allow him to. This theme is repeated over and over. Satan only has power as we allow him to have it. Prowling is only effective when we don't pay attention or refuse to keep close to God. He may cause us trouble, he may even bring physical harm to us but he cannot keep us from God (Ro 8:38). He just doesn't have that kind of power.

No matter what his power, no matter what his influence it is all destined for destruction. Over and over in Revelation this is made clear. Whatever he tries will fail. In the end he and all who serve him will be cast into the Lake of Fire, never to trouble anyone again.

John describes the struggle for the truth. Those who are wise and understand will have victory. The victory over Satan will be gained in the same manner that Jesus gained his victory, by knowing God's word and living it; by knowing the lies of Satan for what they are, but choosing to know God. And finally, by knowing what is most important, it is not the things of the world but the things of God.

1 Jn 2:13-17

I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one. Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the

boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

NIV

Section C

Angels and Demons today

There is so much discussion about the activity of angels. Books are being written about how angels are busy and helping in the work of God. We even have programs on television that suggest angels are actively working to save and protect people. People seem desperate to “have” an angel and show how that angel has protected them or helped them. An interesting aspect of these stories is how human these angels are, and how limited their knowledge appears to be.

There is even more discussion about the presence and activity of demons. Movies, television and books, often focus on stories about the activity of demons. There is even a television program about a demon who has repented of his evil ways and is trying to make amends for his past activity. Along with that come materials on how to identify demons, how protect yourself from demons, and deliver yourself from demons. An interesting aspect of this is how demons are blamed for almost everything that happens in some people’s lives, even our attitudes and behaviors are no longer one’s personal responsibility but are the result of demons.

So to even ask the question of are angel’s active today, or conversely if demons are active today, seems silly. But is it? This incredible fascination with the supernatural world is nothing new. Man has always been interested in who inhabits that realm and what activity (if any) they have in our realm. The level of this interest varies from place to place and time to time. We are intrigued yet we must be careful. To become too fascinated places one in the dangerous position of being more concerned about angels and demons and how to control them, then one’s concern about God and how he wants us to give him control.

Are angels and demons present and active? If I were to look at our life as missionaries and our experiences the answer would have to be yes.

We have seen clear evidence of the presence and activity of demons. We have seen people clearly possessed by demons, in Sierra Leone and Guyana. In Guyana a friend of our daughter came was clearly controlled. My daughter and her friends gathered around and began to pray for her. They prayed until the demon relented. It would take several days of prayer before the demon completely released her.

We have experience the presence of angels. While in Papua New Guinea it was apparent that an angel was sent to watch over our family and that of a fellow missionary family. One night a large group of bandits broke into our property and began to steal tires off our vehicles and seek a way into the house. I woke up and called the security company which did not come quickly. The bandits were unable to get into our house, but remained in the yard, acting in an arrogant manner. They had guns and seemed to know that the security company would not arrive soon. We learned later there was another break-in across town. The bandits apparently knew this and so had targeted our house. When the security people finally arrived the bandits had left but we knew they were not far away.

After having a conversation with the security people my fellow missionary and I secured the compound as best we could and went inside. My wife commented about how nice it was of the security company to leave a person behind to watch over things the rest of the night. I looked at her and said they did not leave anyone. She then proceeded to describe a man dressed in a red shirt and barefoot who was standing right next to me. He looked like a Papua New Guinea man. When my fellow missionary heard her

comment, he too stated he had seen no one and that the security company had not left anyone behind. The place where we were standing was a brightly lit area so she was clearly not confused by shadows or other objects. It became clear that she had seen an angel. The Lord knew there was the possibility of further trouble and sent an angel to watch over us.

Do I know how often God has sent an angel to watch over us? No. Do I know how often demons have been near and God has prevented them from interfering with our lives and ministry? No. One thing I do know - God is in control. I do not have to spend time looking for angels and demons. God already knows and is taking care of business. My task is to walk in faith ready to do what God asks of me.

The danger is that I may try to get involved. Try to find ways to attract angels. Try to find ways to control demons. I could also get caught up in feeling like my faith is not very strong if I am not able to see the angels around me. Or become overwhelmed with worrying over what the demons may be doing to try to harm me and my family. The more I focus on angels and demons the less I focus on God.

Consider the differences in the Bible when angels appeared and when demons appeared. Angels were sent for very specific purposes. They bring messages (Lk 2:20) and provide needed assistance (Ac 5:19). Only a very few people in scripture have actually seen an angel. David was extremely close to God, yet he never reports having seen an angel. The few scriptures that suggest angels are around tell us that we may not recognize them or be aware of their presence (He 13:2).

Demons on the other hand are more than ready to reveal themselves and show off their power, if it will serve their purpose. They want to intimidate and confuse us. They want

to ruin the work we are doing and they want credit for that. They will even take credit for messing up our lives, even though they are not responsible. They love a lie and the fruit of a lie because it prevents us from seeing the truth.

Another big difference is that angels are exactly where they need to be, when they need to be. We may not see them or know it but they are there. Only those who need to know are ever aware of the facts. Demons though seem to be constantly wandering, looking for any opportunity to make trouble. They just don't know what is going down or where. In Scripture the terms used to describe their actions are prowling (1 Pe 5:8), seeking (Lk 11:24), looking for any opportunity to harm God's creation.

Why is this? God knows everything and so angels are always where they need to be, doing what needs to be done, when it should be done. There are no mistakes no errors. Demons, on the other hand, do not have that kind of information so they are roaming and wandering, searching for opportunities, testing to see what they can do.

So, yes, angels are active. The good news is that their activity is guided by a loving God who cares for us and wants as many as possible to hear the good news.

So, yes, demons are active. The good news is that God is never surprised by them; they may not know what is next, but God does. The second part of this good news is that God always has the power needed to deal with whatever they are planning to do.

In both cases our responsibility is not to go seeking out angels and demons. We are to seek out God who already knows where they are and what they are doing. By seeking out God we will focus on Him and he will take care of the rest.

The next few chapters will look at who the angels and demons are, what they can and cannot do, and their activities in relation to us.

1. Angels – True Servants

Everyone wants to know what an angel looks like, what an angel does, how does one communicate with an angel and many other similar questions. The Bible tells us some things but definitely not everything. Much is left in the realm of unknown. This is very typical of anything that relates to those created beings that live in the spiritual realm. Let us look at some of what is told us and consider how that relates to our lives.

Angels have appeared to man at various times throughout the Bible. The focus here will mainly be from the New Testament.

Appearance

An angel's appearance is hard to describe. The most common description is of a young man dressed in clothes that are brilliant and white. Often they are described as having light emanating from them. Their appearance is awesome and frightening to many who report seeing them. The soldiers guarding Jesus' tomb fainted away in fear at the sight of those who came to open the tomb of Jesus. . Later in Revelation other descriptions are added of living beings that have the appearance of man with features of animals. There are also special angels called mighty angels, some have wings and can fly, like the seraphim of the Old Testament.

The depictions of angels by artists seem to vary a great deal from what we have in scripture. You will see them depicted as women and even as children, especially in the form of babes. None of these descriptions occur in scripture.

It is suggested though, that most of the time, we may not recognize them or their presence. They move among us

hidden from sight. They are among us but unseen. This is the most common way that they appear. Quietly, silently, invisibly; doing the work they have been given to do.

This would mean that they have the ability to control their appearance. This is clear from the fact that they are usually not visible to us. In their natural form they cannot be seen in the physical world. So they must alter their normal form to be seen by us. Those who describe their appearance in heaven do so because they have been granted the ability to see what normally cannot be seen. Much like Elisha asking God to let his servant see the army of God and then he saw horses and chariots of fire.

In Hebrews 13:2 we have a statement that many believe suggests that angels assume the appearance of man and spend time among us. We are told to be aware that some have entertained angels and not been aware of that fact. But in ready the whole context the author is reflecting on the fact that Abraham and Lot entertained people that appeared just like them. The people around them were not aware they were angels. The members of Abraham's camp did not realize the three men were angels. The people of the town, where Lot lived, thought they were strangers and sought to use them for personal benefit. In both cases before the end of the story the true nature of the individuals was revealed at least to some of those present. They were angels and in one case the Lord.

The idea here is that angels do come among us but never for their own purposes or for deception. They do not need to sneak among us to know what we are doing. They can watch us without being seen. They can watch our activities and know our heart (1 Ti 5:21). There is no need to assume a disguise for any of these purposes. God does not need them to gather information.

Jesus further tells us that angels live in a unique state. They do not marry for example, nor do they procreate, they are eternal (Mt 22:30). Jesus states that a time will come when we will exist as the angels do (Mk 12:25). We will no longer be affected or influenced by the physical needs of our bodies and existence on earth.

Status

In Hebrews it states that the angels are only a little higher than man (He 2:7) in the structure of creation. They have a unique position and a role that goes with that position. They are called the servants of God who are called to minister (He 1:14). Their key role in that position is in the proclamation and worship of God (Rev 7:11). Secondary to that is their role in serving God so that others will be able to join in that worship (He 12:22-24). This all occurs in heaven which is the main residence of angels. They are constantly in the presence of God. They are also clear about what that means and refuse the worship of man which is due God (Rev 2:9).

Jesus indicates also that angels are limited in their knowledge. This was made clear when he stated that they did not know when the end would come, nor the timing of the final judgment (Mk 13:32). They do know who is saved and who is lost for he indicates they will be sent to sort out the saved and the lost (Mk 13:49). It is said that they do not understand all that God is doing and are seeking to understand the work of the gospel (1 Pe 1:12). They are concerned about matters that relate to the worship of God and are present during our worship (1 Co 11:10) to observe and possibly participate.

Power

They are also beings of power. It is a power that is directed and limited by God. They have the power to change their

form. They appear and disappear suddenly and without warning. This happens to Mary, Joseph, Zechariah, Peter, Paul and several others.

Angels have the power to alter or affect physical objects. The angels that released the apostles, and latter Peter, could unlock doors without the need for keys (Ac 5:19; 12:7-11). In one case an angel is recorded as causing Herod to become sick and die (Ac 12:23). When Zechariah refused to believe the message brought to him. Gabriel caused him to be unable to speak (Lk 1:19-20). The effect was to last the entire time of the pregnancy and would not end until Zechariah was ready to name his son.

In Revelation the extent of their power is revealed. They control plagues (Rev 15:6-8) and various catastrophes that bring great destruction to the earth (Rev 7:2). They can control various aspects of nature and the world. They have the power to destroy (Rev 9:14-1). Jesus says he could have called twelve legions of angels (Mt 26:53) and that would have been the end of everything at that moment. All this power though, is for one purpose - to serve and worship God.

Role

Angels are used to provide us with needed information. This information can tell us what God wants us to do. God sent an angel to Philip for him to go witness to a man on a certain road (Ac 8:26). God told used an angel to tell Cornelius where to find Peter so they would hear the gospel (Ac 10:22).

The information can be to tell people what God is going to do. Gabriel was sent to Mary and Zechariah to tell them what God was going to do in their lives (Lk 1). John received the Revelation from angels about what God was going to do in the end times (Rev 1:1).

The information can be to prepare us for what lies ahead. Paul had several angels sent to him to give him information that helped him be prepared for the work God was giving him (Ac 27:23). It also prepared Paul for the shipwreck and how to save everyone on board.

The angels sometimes bring a message of encouragement. This was true of when the apostles were encouraged by the angel that released them from prison (Ac 5:19). The angels at the tomb of Jesus encouraged those who came to not be afraid (Mt 28:5). This was true for Paul as he was at sea and an angel appeared to encourage him. Angels also came with messages of warning. Joseph was warned about the plans of Herod to kill the baby Jesus (Mt 2:13).

Whatever the message, it is always related to the work God is doing. It is about proclaiming the gospel to others and protecting the work. None of the messages brought by angels were to provide information of a personal nature for an individual. We tend to want help making decisions about jobs, investments and safety for us and those we love. What is also interesting is that no one who received an angel's message was expecting that message. That suggests quite clearly that we cannot call on angels to guide us or give us a word from God.

Here is one other key truth about angels and their messages. The angel does not tell a person what to do with the message or help them decide how to respond. They are not involved in proclaiming the gospel or explaining the message they are sent to give. So Cornelius must wait for Peter in order to hear the gospel. Peter must go to Cornelius and so find out what God wants to do through him (Ac 11:13-14). Joseph had to decide to go to Egypt; the angel did not pack his bags and take him. Angels are not sent by God to convince us of the truth or explain the truth. That is up to us.

Angels do provide protection when God so directs. This is one of those areas of great interest of people today. The question usually takes the form of, 'are there guardian angels?' This is based on a comment by Jesus in regard to children and how their angels stand in the presence of God (Mt 18:10).

As we study Scripture it is not hard to find examples of how angels serve in the capacity of protectors. On two occasions angels are sent to free people from prison (Ac 5:19: 11:13ff). Angels are sent to alert Joseph to move the family to a place of safety (Mt 2:13). An angel is sent to Paul to explain how to survive the shipwreck and save everyone (Ac 27:23). It is likely to assume that angels were present to make this possible. Satan uses the idea of promised angelic protection to tempt Jesus in the wilderness (Lk 4:10).

Yet for every case of protection there is one or more situations where God did not send an angel to protect. Though the baby Jesus was protected, the children of Bethlehem were killed by Herod's soldiers. James was beheaded by Herod. Paul was put in jail many times and beaten many times. Some were protected and saved and others became martyrs.

Looking at these facts then difficult to believe there could be such a thing as a guardian angel. So many are not protected. So many are left to suffer. So many do not escape. If we limit our thoughts of angels as guarding individuals then this dilemma will return. But if we think of them as being assigned by God to help in guarding the truth, in guarding our faith, then we may have a better understanding of their role as guardians. They are sent at critical times to guard specific people in special settings to maintain the work and spread of the gospel. They may also be sent to maintain

vigilance over the demons and Satan to be sure they do not overstep themselves in attacking man.

If this is the true meaning of guardian then the angels may be much busier than we realize or will ever know. Protection will then be based on many factors beyond our awareness and only known by God. In truth, without God sending angels to protect we have no idea how bad our world could actually be if Satan were allowed to have complete freedom in his activity. We have seen a little of that when we see what happens when a vicious dictator gets unlimited power. The death and destruction are often incomprehensible. Consider some of the events in several of the countries in Africa in recent years, or the Kmer Roug of Cambodia or Hitler and Stalin of the last century.

Revelation indicates there will come a time when God will withdraw and Satan will have complete freedom and control to act. It is said to be a time unlike any in history. It will not last and then God will bring it all to an end. Angels will have a part in closing that chapter in the history of man (Rev 20:1-3).

Alongside the idea of protection is the concept of support. Angels are sent to support and strengthen Jesus on two occasions. The first is at the end of the temptations. They come to Jesus and bring what is needed to help him recover from the trials of the fasting and the temptation (MT 4:11). Then during the time of prayer in Gethsemane it says angels came to strengthen Jesus (Lk 22:43). Paul on two occasions was given encouragement or and strengthen (Ac 18:9; . The first is while he is ministering in Corinth. Things look to be getting dangerous and an angel is sent to encourage and strengthen Paul for the work that lies ahead. The other is while on a ship headed for Rome (Ac 27:23-24). The message is sent to encourage Paul and prepare him for the trials that lie ahead.

Angels will be involved in various aspects of the judgment to come. The first of these mentioned is to act as an escort for those who are to go to heaven. Jesus reveals this in the story about Lazarus and the rich man. Angels are sent to carry Lazarus to paradise (Lk 16:23). They also will be involved in gathering the righteous to bring them before the Lord for their rewards (Mt 24:31). They will also gather the unrighteous and bring them for judgment (Mt 13:41-42). It is indicated that they will be present as witnesses of the judgment (Lk 12:8-9). This makes sense in that we are told that the angels are spending some of their time observing and protecting the proclamation of the gospel. They will know and can report for any who wish to hear what they know.

Judgment of Angels

In like manner we are told angels will be judged by Christians (1 Co 6:3). It is not said which angels will be judged. Will it be both the angels who faithfully serve God and those who follow Satan? Will the angels who serve God be given honors and rewards for their service? Is it even possible for those angels to do less than their best or better than their best? Is such a thing possible?

We know that the fallen angels are to be judged and punished. So how will we be able to judge them beyond the judgment waiting for them from God? So many questions and so few answers. Maybe it will be a time of revealing clearly to all the basis of their judgment and to hear the verdict from the mouths of those they sought to harm. Whatever this passage means it does indicate God will give us a chance to speak in praise for those angels who serve God and in judgment for those who oppose. The end result? Their judgment is linked to their treatment of us.

It is also clear that angels are present at every major event in God's master plan. They were there to announce the plan to the prophets (He 2:2). They were there to reveal the plan to those chosen to carry it out (Mt 1, Lk 1). There were there to announce the birth of Jesus and fulfillment of God's plan (Lk 2:9ff). There were there at the resurrection to announce the success of God's plan (Lk 24:4-6). They were there at the ascension to announce both Jesus return to heaven and the nature of his return (Ac 1:10-11). Finally according to scripture they will be there when it is all brought to completion (Mt 25:31).

Let us look at one other area that is of interest; the angel's relationships to the key people in the world.

Their relation to God is laid out very clearly. He is their creator and they are his ministering spirits, servants to carry out the word of God as directed. They respond with worship and obedience. They have free access to the presence of God and a place of prominence in heaven.

Their relation to the other angels is not as clear. Here we have only a few comments to give us some guidance as to what is happening. The angels are involved in an ongoing battle with the angels of darkness (the demons). This is clear from some of the images given to us in Revelation (Rev 12:7-9) and from information found in Daniel (Dan 10:12-13). The angels are fighting them to assist us in carrying out God's work. Yet they do not have a careless attitude in their dealings with Satan and the demons. They do not rely on themselves but on the authority given them by God (Jude 9).

Relation to Fallen Angels

The angles are loved by God, the also know that Satan and the demons are not under their authority. They do not speak of them in an abusive or slanderous manner. They do not

accuse but leave that to God (Jude 9). 2 Peter 2:10-11 is an interesting passage about angels who do not bring a slanderous accusation against celestial beings though certain men do. It is not totally clear who the celestial beings are but it is suggested by Clark, in his comments on this passage, that they are Satan and his demons. Those who slander them are those who try to lie and lay blame on them. While some men appear to dare such foolishness, the angels do not. Angels do not overstep themselves. They know they are in the right and do not need to flaunt such information.

Have you ever seen a child standing next to their parent accusing a brother or sister of a crime committed against them? Many times they are reluctant to accuse, at other times only with the parent's encouragement will they reveal the problem. But there are some occasions when the child will begin to lash out. They will gloat over the fact that they have the parent on their side. Sometimes they will even try to make the other sibling look worse by adding lies to the truth. They may do it for several reasons; to make them look even better, increase the sibling's punishment, or just to demean. All of the reasons are wrong.

Angels know who they are, where they are, and see no need to go beyond the truth. They are in the right and God already knows that. There is no need for slander or abuse or any other such action on their part. They are respectful and somber because they know what will happen in the end.

We should keep this in mind when dealing with Satan and his servants - both demons and humans. We are not in a position to be disrespectful or treat them lightly or be careless in our manner toward them. Our position as a member of God's family was given to us and we could just as easily have found ourselves on the other side of this equation - the one being accused.

Man's response

The last item to cover is how we should respond to angels. Here again there is little in the way of a direct statement of how one should receive and treat an angel. The most common response is one of awe and respect. The few times someone has tried to bow down and worship them, the angel responded by saying no that is not proper (Rev 22:8-9). They are servants of God, as we are servants of God, and not to be worshiped.

We are never told to be on the lookout for angels. We are never told to pray for an angel to come. We are never told to provide for the needs of angels. What is revealed is that when they do come we should listen and obey the message given. When they do come we should turn to God and thank him for his protection and provision.

We are not encouraged to give a special place to angels. Paul told the church in Colossi not to get involved in the worship of angels (Co 2:18). They were also not to pay any attention to those who did. We are not to be looking for angel guides as some new groups are encouraging. We are not to be determining someone's spiritual state by how many, if any, encounters they have had with angels. We are warned not to give praise and credit to angels, they don't accept it and it belongs to God who created them and sent them.

It is interesting to note that the appearance of angels is not predictable and seems very restricted. They appeared at Jesus' birth and resurrection and then a few times in the life of the early church. And then nothing. Nothing, until Revelation and the time of Jesus' return and the final judgment. They are not gone; they are just out of sight.

Angels are not interested in our attention; they are interested in what God wants from them. Angels do not need our recognition. They enjoy the opportunity to be in the presence of God. That should be our focus as well.

2. Demons – Twisted Angels

In the Old Testament there are very few references to demons or evil spirits. Instead there is a steady flow of references to gods. When we come to the Gospels we discover that changes. There seems to be a constant flow of people, who are under their control, being paraded across the scenes of the life of Jesus. When we come to Acts we see a few reports and then only passing comments made about them in the rest of the New Testament that is until we get to Revelation. There we see them en mass as part of concerted effort of Satan to overthrow the kingdom of God. It is a doomed effort and the demons are thrown into the Lake of Fire along with Satan.

So who are these demons, or evil spirits?

Fallen Angels

Peter tells us that there were a group of angels who left their first estate (I Pe 2:1). They were part of the heavenly realm but made a choice that was unacceptable to God and found themselves excluded from membership among the faithful angels. Paul further helps us understand who they were by calling them the gods who falsely set themselves up as objects of worship. Paul calls these gods demons (1 Co 10:19). They are those who followed Satan in his rebellion and as such are his servants and members of his kingdom. They are avowed enemies of man and seek to do as much harm and damage as is possible to man.

Demons are beings with power. Since they are fallen angels then they would have the same abilities as that of angels. They move freely between the physical and spiritual realms. They have the ability to assume human form when they so desire. Based on the discussions of the idols in the Scripture

it would also appear they can assume the form of animals and other shapes as well. (anything-Ex 20:4; calf-Ex 32:8; goat-Lev 17:7; frog-Rev 16:14). This would be a reality based on some of the descriptions of certain types of angels that have combinations of animal and human features (Ez 1:5-10; Rev 4:7). We are told they can perform miracles (Mt 24:24; 2 Th 2:9; Rev 16:14). They are called false or counterfeit in that they lead people away from God.

Demons then, as fallen angels, use their ability to cause harm and damage to the world around us with evil intent. Angels can cause death in man; they can also cause changes in the physical world around us and influence nature. Since these are attributes given to angels then demons would possess similar power and ability. The key difference is that the angels that remained true to God use those powers only at the direction of God. It is clear that the demons have no such restriction. They use these powers to serve Satan and their own purposes.

As we look around the world we can see the evidence of places where evil has been extreme in its effect; massacres that defy man's comprehension; wars used to destroy entire peoples just to gain power and property; ideologies designed to destroy life and hope. One wonders how mere man can wield such power and control. But if one realizes the power and presence of demons then it is not as surprising. An army of demons could easily do incredible damage when man willingly opens the door.

Demons do appear to be under some form of restraint. Peter tells us that certain of the fallen angels are already bound in hell because God determined they went beyond the limits he had established for them (1 Pe 2:4). In Jude 6 we find a similar statement. There was a group of angels, most likely among the fallen angels, who used their power in some manner not allowed by God. They are already bound and

awaiting the final judgment. If they are not actually in hell it is clear that they are bound or restricted so they are not active in the world. They cannot do all they are capable of doing.

The rest of the demons have been furthered disarmed or rendered ineffective by the actions of Jesus (Co 2:15). This was clearly in evidence by Jesus' ability to cast them out with a single word and to undo any harm they had caused to the individuals they sought to harm. Even when it appears their departure caused the person's death, Jesus nullifies that as well (Mk 9:26).

Demonic Activity

Jesus' encounter with demons in his life and ministry gives us some insight into how they are active in the world around us. The most obvious of these is in the area of possessing a person.

Demons seek to harm and confuse man. They will do damage physically if that suits their purposes. In scripture they caused a number of diseases (Lk 13:11), deafness (Mk 9:25), dumbness (Mk 9:17), epileptic-like seizures (Lk 9:42). They also sought to cause physical harm and even destruction by directing person to cut themselves, throw themselves into fire and water or by whatever other means available. If necessary they enlist other demons to increase the level of their control (Lk 11:26). There are several accounts of multiple possessions; Mary Magdalene (seven-Mk 16:9) and the Gadarene (legion-Mk 5:9) are two examples. The demons presence can result in incredible strength in the individual who has been possessed. The Gadarene demoniac was able to break chains with his bare hands (Mk 5:4). Always there is a loss of control by the individual to the demon.

This leads to the understanding that they can in some way dwell within the body of a person. This inhabiting can result in damage, unusual strength or in the case of the girl in Philippi, the ability to predict the future (or appearance of predicting the future) (Ac 16:16). Nowhere are we told that demons know anything about what is going to happen tomorrow. We do know that because they can move freely among us unseen they can have access to information that would be unknown to anyone else. They can also, by their presence, influence and bring about their own predictions. That is unless they are opposed in some manner.

Looking at the Gadarene we also learn that an incredible number of demons can occupy space within an individual. We do know that the Spirit of God is able to dwell in us and can fill a space especially designed for him as the creation of God. Since God is so much greater than any other being it is clear that no other being could fully occupy a place designed for the presence of God. Hence it is possible for many to exist there when God is not present. If God is truly present then it is unlikely there would be room for any other spirit to be present.

Demons are not tied to a place or a space. Jesus helps us to see this by his description of the behavior of a demon when it is not currently occupying a person. It is a life of roaming, of searching for peace, without hope of finding it (Mt 12:43-45; Lk 11:24-26). The only respite comes when it can find a person who is not committed to God, and who is in some manner open to it coming in and possessing that space. It is further suggested that a demon will seek others to join it to strengthen its hold on the person and make resistance even more difficult and futile.

They, like their master, are involved in deception and lies (1 Ti 4:1). They would be the birds in the parable of the sower who come and steal away the truth before it has a chance to

grow (Mt 13:3, 19). They are the weeds that wrap us up in the cares of the world so we cannot grow. They are the rocks that bring trouble to discourage us from growing. They seek to deceive and confuse. They will even try to present a false gospel to those willing to listen (1 Ti 4:1; Ga 1:8), seducing those who will listen to their false doctrines and hypocrisy.

There are many instances of just such activity. The founder of Mormonism claimed to have received his message from an angel named Moroni. Mohammed said that his revelations came from Gabriel. These revelations became the basis of the Koran. Many of the key people of the new age movement claim that they have spirit guides or angels who are showing them the truth and so providing the information to start a new religion or false doctrine. If Satan can appear as an angel of light, then his followers, the demons, are capable of doing so and spreading false doctrine to those willing to listen.

Even with all this power and ability the demons are still limited. They know that their time is limited and that they are under judgment. When the demons possessing the Gadarene met Jesus they were very concerned that it was not time yet for them to be sent into bondage (Mt 8:28ff). They know they are to be punished. James says they believe in Jesus and tremble in fear (Ja 2:19). They know they have gone beyond the point of no return. They have no desire to stand before God, but they know they will one day. Their only focus now is to take as many of us with them as possible. The idea seems to be since they cannot return to heaven then no one else should be allowed to go there. Demons will oppress and possess any and all to make this happen.

Demons and Jesus

Into this setting Jesus arrives. The demons react to his presence. It seems that throughout the ministry of Jesus, people possessed by demons are there. It raises some key questions about the demons and their activity. Why would they come before Jesus when they know he has the power to drive them out? Why would they want anyone to know who Jesus is and as a result have the chance to learn the truth?

Why they would come has three possible answers.

1. The first is that they were curious.

They did not have as much information as they needed about this person and came to find out more. Or because of their sin they could not come before God, so what would it be like to come before the Son of God? This was the pattern of many who came to see Jesus. They had heard many stories and came to see for themselves. Man is by nature doubtful.

There is a key weakness in this idea. Demons though do not have that issue about gaining information as man. They live in a realm that does not allow for clouding of information. They know who they are, who God is and it will not take long for all of them to know who Jesus is. While information can be easily hidden from us it is not so easily hidden from them. Jesus has but to drive one demon away and he will quickly spread the word. There will be no more need for curiosity. In fact Ephesians 3:7 suggests that God is willingly revealing the truth to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. At first it is through Jesus and now through the church. There is no need for curiosity because nothing is being kept secret. So the information is available to all and is being publicly presented.

2. The second is they had to come before Jesus.

The Son of God was here on earth. They would have no choice and would have to present themselves. This sounds wonderful and yet it is unlikely. If every demon had to present itself to Jesus then people from all over the world should have shown up. It would take more time than the three years available for that to happen. It would also be a constant drain on Jesus' time and energy. The demons could literally overwhelm the situation. It also would deny the concept that demons had a choice and would therefore still be in control of their existence. It also denies man's choice to let demons have a place in their life.

It would further reveal the power of God and convince people of the false nature of the demons and their lies. People would see over and over God's power in dealing with the demons. There would be little room for free choice in this setting. Jesus would become a symbol of power and not a symbol of hope. The demon's own comments to Jesus in Mt 8:29 that it is not the appointed time for them to be called before him suggest this is not why they are in Jesus presence.

3. The third possibility is that they have come to disrupt.

They have come to confuse and gain control of anyone they can. If people see demons speaking the truth about God then maybe people will come to them for more information and for access to God. It would be a deception, but that is the goal. They come to disrupt and to pressure Jesus. They come to tax Jesus and see if they can get Jesus to give in. They are being sent by Satan to

cause confusion and put pressure on Jesus to take the easy way out.

Jesus is being confronted with those being damaged by demons. For everyone he sees, the question is, how many are not here? How many will not be helped? The demons do not have to come but there they are. They do not have to speak but they quickly begin proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God (Lk 4:41). Paul faces the same dilemma in Ephesus (Ac 16:16-17). A demon possessed girl is proclaiming the truth but with an ulterior motive, to gain subtle control over where people will go in the future to find the truth. If the soothsayer knows that Paul serves God then maybe the soothsayer can tell me even more of what I want know. More will come and pay a higher price for what is offered. More will be under Satan's control. They will forget about God.

Goal and Structure

A demon's goal is to get between man and his worship of God. This can happen when a person builds a shrine to a saint and then begins to pray to the saint and so begins to worship the saint before God. It does not matter who or what is involved. If somehow the demons can interpose anything between the person and God they have won. The person no longer looks to God but something lesser for power.

Demons come and proclaim the truth; truth that is designed to trap man in a lie. It is a risk and Satan is willing to take it. The demons may have to wander for a while but there is always another person available and willing to let them take control. Even if it means entering a synagogue or a place of worship, they will come. They are not blocked from access to places of worship. They will come if they can disrupt and misdirect.

This suggests that Satan has an organization with a structure and a plan. Scripture concurs. The realm of the spirits both angels and demons is organized. The terms used are applied to both. There are authorities, powers, rulers, dominions. They were created by God with this structure for his purposes. This was the structure put in place from the beginning.

Col 1:16

For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. NIV

The demons, like angels, have differing abilities and dominions and authority. But this really is of no consequence to us. Col 2:10 states that Jesus is the head over every power and authority and Col 2: 15 further states that Christ has disarmed them all in his triumph on the cross. While on earth Jesus gave the disciples authority over the realm of Satan and its members. He gave them authority to drive out the demons (Mt 10:1). The only time they failed Jesus said it was due to a lack of faith on their part, not in the authority given. Driving out demons and taking control of their realm is to be a sign of the kingdom (Mk 16:17).

Demons are real. Demons have power to control, alter the physical world around us and the physical state of individuals. Demons are part of a structured organization with a clear plan that seeks the ruin of man. Demons are fearful to all who do not know God.

But,

Demons have been limited by God. Demons must obey Jesus and those who serve Jesus. Demons cannot destroy the soul

of man. Demons are liars and not to be trusted. Demons are doomed and they know it.

3. Jesus and the demons

Satan only appears four times in the gospels. These are documented at the temptation of Jesus (Mt 4:1-10), Peter's response to Jesus going to Jerusalem (Mk 8:33), the sifting of the disciples (Lk 22:31), and the possession of Judas (Jn 13:27). Each of these represents a direct confrontation by Satan.

In between all of these accounts is the almost constant presence of the representatives of Satan. It seems like an attempt to wear Jesus down and overwhelm him with the power and presence of those who serve Satan. It will be good to take a little time to look at a number of these encounters to gain a better understanding of the issues we face when confronted by the servants of Satan; the demons that serve him and are bound to him.

Demoniac in the Synagogue

Mark 1:21-26 and Luke 4:31-37

The first encounter seems to occur in an unlikely place. A demon possessed man is sitting in the synagogue listening to the teaching of Jesus. The story is recorded in Mark 1:21-26 and Luke 4:31-37. Jesus is teaching. The people are amazed at what he is saying and the authority used in his teaching.

In the midst of the group a man possessed of a demon begins shouting. This is not designed to be a polite conversation or discussion to gain understanding or information. It is meant to disrupt the people's attention and focus.

The demoniac begins to shout at the top of his voice. He asks two questions and makes one statement. None of these are accurate in their content nor are they designed to help people better understand who Jesus is and what he has come to do.

The first is a question, “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth?” This question makes it appear that Jesus is somehow responsible for the outburst, that Jesus has called them for some purpose. It is interesting that the question is in the plural. We can either see this as meaning the man and the demon, or that there are other demons present.

It seems like wherever Jesus goes the demons will be summoned. This distracts from Jesus’ real purpose of dealing with the sin of man and focuses on secondary activities. The demon’s question suggests that Jesus has come to deal with the demons and their activity. While this may be true it is secondary to the real issue of dealing with man’s need. Dealing with man first will lay the groundwork for dealing with the power and presence of demons.

The second question is “Have you come to destroy us?” This again is designed to distract people from the real issues and is based on something that is not even in the plans of God. God has never indicated that he intends to destroy Satan and the demons. His plan is to punish them and permanently remove them from any possibility of influencing man and creation again.

If Jesus had come to destroy them then every demon encountered by Jesus would have been removed from existence. If this was really God’s plan then this demon would not have come, even Satan would not have come to Jesus. They would not risk the possibility of being destroyed. If it was God’s plan to destroy them then the people would begin to think of Jesus not as one who could save them from their sin but as one who could be their protector. They would not look at changing their lives but only at finding a way to keep Jesus nearby to destroy any demon that may come around.

Jesus is not responding to these questions. We don't know if they were made in rapid order or if a chance for a response was allowed. It doesn't matter. It is clear by the third statement that the demon is not getting an answer, or is not waiting, and is going to push home his point.

The third statement is, "I know who you are – the Holy One of God!" If the first two questions did not get people thinking about how they could use Jesus, this one would. This person in their midst had real power. Here was someone who could protect them, someone who could defeat demons. This person should be cared for and protected. The demoniac was trying to get them to think in terms of power and not of truth.

The demon spoke words of truth, but for all the wrong reasons. Yes Jesus is the Holy One of God, and he would have power over the demons. But the issue here is how that power would be accessed. It is also about who man would listen to and the choice that would be made. If they listened to the demoniac, then they would forever thank the demon for showing them the truth but they would always wonder. Always wonder about who they should go to, to learn about Jesus. It would always color the truth about demons and what they are doing.

The people would choose to believe in Jesus for the wrong reasons. At some point in time they would fall. They would fall because they depended on the presence of Jesus for their protection and not on a relationship with God. So many people today depend on a preacher or teacher for their protection and not on a relationship with God.

Jesus brought this to an end quickly. He rejected the testimony. Be quiet. He revealed his power. Come out. But the damage was done. The people began to talk more about his authority and power over demons than the power of his

message. People began to bring the sick and demon possessed. He healed them all and he drove out all the demons. They all came out shouting that Jesus was the Son of God. But that was all they were allowed to say. They knew the truth but Jesus was not interested in what they knew. Jesus was concerned that the people were choosing to believe in his power to heal and power over the demons and not in his salvation.

It says that Jesus went into a solitary place but the people found him. They tried to keep him there with them. He said no, it is not about driving out demons. It is about preaching the good news, the truth. That is what will truly set people free and allow them to remain free.

Demoniacs of Gadarene

Mt 8:28-34, Mk 5:1-20, Lk 8:26-39

Jesus seeks to get away and find some seclusion. He gets to the other side of the sea only to be confronted with two more who are possessed. One in particular stands out. He lives in an isolated place, out of control. He has incredible strength. He is also the only demoniac that Jesus actually has a conversation with. It begins with the usual challenges and comments. The key difference is that there is no crowd, just Jesus and the disciples.

The demoniacs come rushing up to Jesus. This seems to be a pattern. They are not crying out to be freed as one would expect. It is the demon who speaks. In none of the other encounters with demons do we ever hear the voice of the one possessed until after the demon is gone.

First the demon asks what Jesus wants with him. Included in that question is the fact that he knows exactly who Jesus is. It seems the demon was not expecting Jesus and yet clearly knows who has come. Further the demon does not know why

Jesus has come. Actually Jesus was not looking for him. At least none of the accounts even suggest such a motive on the part of Jesus. Yet the demon knows that Jesus has power and authority over him and is uncertain of what will happen next.

Second the demon begs not to be tortured. This would appear unusual. In Matthew the phrase before the appointed time is added. In the synagogue the demon made a similar comment about being destroyed. That was an attempt to influence the crowd. Scripture does not tell us they will be destroyed. This time there is no crowd and so the comment is more accurate and yet it still contains a lie. Scripture tells us the demons are to be punished. The fact that the demoniac wants to define this as torture is an attempt to make it look unfair. Demons are doomed and know that they will be punished. That punishment may appear to be torture to them and their existence. But that is irrelevant, God does not torture. That is an abuse of power. God judges and punishes according to the sin committed and is totally just.

While they are trying to misdirect and confuse they are still uncertain the purpose of Jesus arrival there. There is a time appointed for their judgment, but it is not now. Will Jesus exceed his authority and try to supplant God's time table? It is a tempting thought given the nature of the third statement. If he does the demons will win.

Jesus asks a question and gets a very interesting answer. He asks for a name but gets a description. There are literally thousands of demons present in this place in relation to the man they are possessing. Why did Jesus even ask the question? It may have been for the benefit of the disciples. It would show them the extent of the man's condition and also reveal the tempting situation being faced by Jesus and the nature of the second comment. If Jesus exceeded his authority he could rid the world of a large number of the enemies' forces. Jesus knew he would not do so. To violate

God's command for any reason would be to attempt to replace God and his decisions.

Sending this demoniac to Jesus contained a veiled temptation, a potential shortcut and a way to make life easier and in a sense show-off Jesus' power. The action of sending the demons to hell was not within the authority given to Jesus by God. It is not within the scope of the authority Jesus has given us as well. God has appointed the time and place of their punishment. Jesus knew this and chose not to yield to that line of thinking.

It is interesting to note that after this the conversation becomes very short and to the point. Come out. Let us go to the pigs. Go. No more discussion of who they are, what they have been doing, or any of the other things we would love to know. It is just not important. The only information we needed to know has been gained. Jesus is Lord. He will not exceed his authority no matter how many are involved and they must go as he has commanded. It is not a matter of if they feel like it, or when they feel like it, but now.

What we learn is that demons know who Jesus is without him declaring that fact. We also do not need to declare who we are for the demons to know our relationship to Jesus. That is also made clear in the story of the seven sons of Sceva in Acts 19:14-15. They also know that Jesus has authority over them and that they will be judged and punished. They even have a sense of when that will happen, though it is not exact knowledge.

What we do not know is also clear. We do not know why Jesus let the demons enter and destroy the pigs, except that is the nature of demons, to destroy. We do not know any names, identities or other similar information. Even the description we are given, Legion, tells us only how many there are and nothing more. There is no biography or history

given or asked for. We do not know what happened to them after the pigs were destroyed.

What we need to know is that demons are able to possess man and more than one can be present and that no matter what they do or how many of them there are they are under Jesus authority and must obey.

Demons Testimony

Mark 3:11

Jesus looked for places to go for some rest. The crowds followed. They brought with them those who were sick and those possessed by demons. He healed the sick and then it says, as the demons saw him they fell down before him and cried out you are the Son of God (Mk 3:11).

The people who were diseased were different from those who were possessed by a demon. It was not the same as one who was diseased. The demons knew Jesus the person and his authority. They fell at his feet crying out Jesus' identity. Jesus tells them to be quiet and to leave. He refuses to let them speak. They only have time for one that one short phrase, "you are the Son of God," and then are silenced.

Jesus is not interested in the testimony of demons, for even truth can be used to misdirect people. If the demons know the truth and can reveal it to the people then one might begin to wonder if they really are evil. Knowing the truth does not mean one obeys the truth. The demons know who Jesus is but that does not mean they will follow him. The demons must be silenced before their words lead to confusion.

When a liar tells the truth one often wonders what they are trying to gain for themselves. Why tell the truth now unless they hope to gain something later? Also telling the truth once does not mean a liar will always tell the truth. That is the

concern here and that is why there is no need to hear the words of a demon. They are to be silenced.

Demon Resistance

Matthew 17:13-20, Mark 9:16-27

While Jesus and the three were on the mountain and Jesus was being transfigured the other disciples were still involved in ministry. But they were having difficulty. They were trying to drive out a demon and it was not responding.

When Jesus came down he met them in an argument with the father of the boy who was possessed. We are not told the nature of the argument but based on Jesus response it had to do with faith. The father willingly admits his lack of faith and need in this area.

As Jesus approaches, the demon throws the boy into a convulsion. Jesus seeks to understand the nature of the demon and what has been happening to the boy. He learns that the boy has been possessed since he was a child and has suffered greatly as a result. He sees that the boy cannot speak and is told that the demon often tries to cause the boy's death by drowning or by fire.

Jesus does not ask how the boy came to be possessed. He does not ask who has sinned or what has happened in the past. He does not seek to place blame for what is happening or give an explanation for why it is happening.

Jesus then speaks and the demon leaves. He further tells the demon never to enter the boy again. With a violent response that causes people to believe the demon has killed the boy the demon is gone. Jesus lifts him and then leaves.

The disciples want an explanation about all that just happened. They want to know why they couldn't drive out

the demon. They probably want to know much more. Jesus deals with only one issue, their faith, or actually their lack of it. He tells them it was their lack of faith that was the issue. In Mark 9:29 he tells them they need to pray to have victory over this kind of demon. But they need to pray, not over the demon but over themselves. It is not about having a conversation with the demon and its departure. It is about self-evaluation. It is about our need to come before God and deal with whatever is hindering our faith from being able to bring about the needed result.

Demons know the level of our faith. Demons also have differing levels of power. If our faith has been weakened by sin, a desire for personal glory, a seeking after power or any other attitude that points to us or blocks God's action, then the demon will not listen.

The discussion is to be with God, not with the demon. From all of Jesus' encounters with demons it is clear that we have only one thing to say to them, "Depart in the name of the Son of God." The demons are not to make any response but to simply go. As Jesus did not need their testimony, we are not to seek out the testimony of a demon. As Jesus had no interest in their name or history, we are not to be concerned about this information.

Jesus' only concern was what the demon doing to the person, the nature of the faith of those involved and being sure that God received the praise for what was happening. In like manner our focus is to be on the person, their need, and the name of God releasing the person from the power of the demon.

Nothing like this

Matthew 9:32, Mark 3:22-29

They bring a mute man who is possessed by a demon. Jesus drives out the demon and the crowds are amazed. Nothing like this has happened before.

The crowds know that demons can possess people. They are aware that demons can be driven out, but in their experience, it is a complicated and difficult process. This is what they believe.

What they did not know was that there was power that could do it with a simple word of command. They had never seen such power before. The leaders were confused and jealous. They knew they had to explain this power. Their explanation though would add to the power of Satan. They knew Satan has control over his demons and therefore only he can do cause a demon to leave. So they said it was by Satan's power that Jesus could drive out the demons (Mt 9:34).

But their explanation is wrong. Always in the past it has taken great effort. For Jesus there is no effort, no ritual, no prolonged period of preparation, and no cost to those involved. When God is present and those who serve him are ready, demons must obey and leave. When God is present that is what must happen.

Nothing like this has happened before because those who tried in the past were not walking in faith with God. Jesus did. The demons knew and departed without delay and without comment. That is what is supposed to happen, nothing more and nothing less.

If something more has to happen then we are at fault. We lack faith. We need to renew and restore our relationship with God so that they see God in us and not us. Then there

will be no delay and the demons will depart, because God is present and that is how it always happens.

Section D

Man – The focal point

Man is at the center of the conflict. Satan is seeking to control, ruin and destroy man. Jesus is seeking to free, renew and restore man. Man adds his voice to this by seeking to gain power to control his world, power to control his life, and power to survive beyond the scope of this world.

There are many areas that we can discuss in relation to man. There are two critical areas that relate to the discussion. Others that may relate will be dealt with under other headings. They are man's relationship to God and man's options in the current situation.

Man's Relationship

Man was created to have a relationship with the spiritual realm. This relationship was to focus on God. When one has a relationship with God then all other aspects of the spiritual realm and spiritual power will become clear and their place in man's life will be clear.

Man, by his own choice, elected to bring confusion to this relationship. No longer would there be a freedom of communication. There would no longer be a clear awareness of the spiritual realm as there originally was. God walked in the garden and man knew when God was present and there was no fear or confusion. Later God's presence would cause fear and uncertainty. God was to dwell with man, but other people and things have taken that place.

Step by step man would add to his distance away from God and further cloud what he could know about God and the power he had known in the garden. The power of being in God's presence and knowing God's creation would be lost. It

says God placed an angel at the entrance of the garden to guard it and the knowledge contained within (Ge 3:24).

Man no longer knows the truth. Man no longer can see anything related to the truth. Only as those who belong to the spiritual realm choose to be seen can man even catch a glimpse of what is now lost. Man knows he has lost this knowledge and desperately seeks to regain that information. He will go to great ends to gain the power needed to reconnect with what has been lost. So man will seek out power to obtain any information that he can.

Man's Options

There are only two sources of information and power. The one source is the very source he walked away from. In pride man finds it hard to admit this and so avoids dealing with the truth by denying the existence of the one he walked away from. Therefore contact with God is not possible because either God does not exist to man or man erects barriers that must be overcome in order to find God. God is doing all he can to aid man but unless man chooses to listen to God, by a choice of his free will God is hindered in what he can do.

The other source is related to a group that has defied and denied God. This source is more than willing to provide man with information and help to control his life, the world around him, and his future existence. Never mind that all the information is flawed, for it is based on the limits of their existence and their own choice to remove God from their existence. So all their information is based on a false hope that they can overcome God, an activity they have already failed at. This means they provide information and power that will fail. They do so in order to mislead man so that he will not escape his doom, even as they cannot escape their doom.

This group cannot control their existence, so any information given to control our lives is false. They cannot control their world, so any information designed to provide control of our world is false, and they cannot control their future existence and so any information suggesting we can control our future state is also false.

What happens is man now is open to control by those who are part of this flawed group. He is open to temptation by Satan and his demons. He is open to their oppression in his life. He is also open to being possessed by them. Once they have access, once they have control, once they own man, he will find it difficult to be freed.

Man's situation may look very hopeless and without God it is. But in Jesus we have hope to find God and rebuild the relationship that was lost. We can have hope that it is possible to overcome the control that Satan tries to exert over our lives.

Let us look at two aspects of the control sin and Satan have on our lives. The first is what it means to be possessed and what it takes to be released. The second is what happens to a person after they have died. What we know about what lies beyond death can have a great impact on what we do while we are alive.

D1. Demons – Getting them out

As we study the New Testament it becomes clear that demons can enter into a person and take up residence. In fact not just one but many, even a legion of demons can do so. Man should be concerned about their presence, the power they have over those possessed and how to get rid of them when they are not wanted.

How demons manage to enter a person is never explained in the scriptures. The only reference we have is from Jesus' comments on what happens when a demon has been driven out and then finds that the person where he once dwelt is still empty (Mt 12:43-45). There is no explanation of why it is empty, of how the demon manages to regain the place, or how the others are also brought in with him. There is apparently something about the person that first suggests they are a potential place to possess and that there is apparently no resistance to a demon coming in.

We see from scripture that it can happen to children (Lk 9:38-39) and to adults (Lk 4:35). Jesus, when dealing with all the different age groups only once asks a question about the beginning of the possession (Mk 9:21). Even that question has nothing to do with how it happened; it is only about when the possession began. There is no suggestion as to how or why it happened. No one is judged or accused.

Effects of Possession

We also see that possession has basically two effects. The most common one seems to relate to physical attacks or attempts to harm a person. People are rendered deaf and mute (Mk 9:25). Some appear to have epileptic type behavior (Lk 9:39) that is harmful to them and frightening to others. Others are driven to acts of harm to themselves and

potentially to others The Gadarene is said to cut himself (Mk 5:6) and behave in wild and dangerous ways to others (Mt 8:31).. He also was said to have incredible strength (Lk 8:29) as a result of the demons present in his being.

The second effect is less common or at least is not reported very often. We have only one instance of this and it relates to a young girl encountered by Paul in Philippi. She is said to have a spirit of divination (Ac 16:16), the ability to predict or see the future. Demon possession on occasion provides skills and knowledge beyond the normal ability of man. Some people would be glad to have this kind of power.

What is not clear is whether the demon is always in control of the person or only takes control at specific times and places. Both seem to occur. Those rendered deaf and mute are under the constant influence of the demon. The boy who was possessed appears to be affected at different times and places (Lk 9:42). In both settings it would appear that the demon is always present but makes a choice as to how visible his presence will be.

In most of these settings it is clear that the presence of a demon is not desirable. They cause harm to the one possessed and are potentially dangerous to others who come in contact with them. In the other case the person with the demon has a unique gift which gives her special status and those around her can benefit as well (Ac 16:16).

Driving out Demons

It is also probable some demons have more power to maintain their control than others, either because they are more powerful or because there is more than one present. The disciples had difficulty in driving out the demon who had possessed a boy. The key issue was that their faith was not strong enough to deal with this kind of demon. Jesus

indicated there was something different in that possession (Mt 9:29). Also in dealing with more than one, there would be a need for greater power and resources. Jesus' description of a demon possessing a person and bringing others more evil than itself lets us see this reality (Mt 12:45).

Getting rid of a demon is not a simple process. One does not simply ask them to leave. Nor is it possible to get them to leave willingly. The main Greek term used for causing a demon to leave is the word *ekballo*. It means to drive out by force. So getting a demon to leave requires access to power that is greater than man possesses.

Still in all of the above settings there was no limit on Jesus' ability. Whether it was a more powerful demon or multiple demons Jesus was able to drive them out with a single word of command, "go." Those who served Jesus had access to this same result. Paul drove out the demon in the girl with a command and with immediate results (Ac 16:18).

It is clear from the various stories and records that it was possible to drive out demons. The Jews claimed Jesus did it by the power of Satan. Jesus countered with a question regarding those aligned with the Pharisees. He asked them how they managed to drive out demons. If Jesus power was from Satan then where did they get their power to drive out demons (Mt 12:28)?

It is apparent that there were individuals or groups that believed that it was possible to drive out a demon. Jesus description of a demon wandering, looking for a place to rest, starts from the point of that demon coming out of an individual (Mt 12:43). This story suggests that it was possible to get a demon to come out of a person. These individuals or groups had a process that was not simple and involved the use of rituals, symbols and power words.

This would be supported by the story in Acts about the Seven Sons of Sceva. They were among a group of Jews that went about exorcising demons (Act 19:13-14). It was the work they were involved in. What is not clear is how they were able to drive out demons. It is said that they were the sons of a Jewish chief priest. It says they went around driving out evil spirits. We are told that they changed their methodology and decided to start using the name of Jesus. We are not told if in fact they were successful before this time or even after they began to use the new formula. It would seem they were successful in some way or they would not have continued in this activity.

What we know is that they heard how Paul used the name of Jesus and saw the power of Paul and determined that these two names would work as power words to make their rituals more effective (Ac 19:13-14). We also know that in this case the demon responded to them and took offense at what they were doing (Ac 19:15-16). The demon knew who did and didn't have the right to remove him as well as access to the power to make it happen.

The problem with their idea is that they had not been given permission to use the name of Jesus. That privilege was restricted to those who had given their lives to God, as Paul had done. Jesus' name was not to be used in a magical manner to enhance the power of a given person. It was the relationship behind the name that brought the power. Much like we cannot use the name of the president or leader of our country, unless we have been properly authorized and identified as one who has been given the right to do so. This means that the demons know who has power and what it is that can force them to leave.

Jesus suggests in his story about the wandering demon that it is possible for a demon to leave a person. He does not explain how or why. It is also mentioned that within the

Jewish leadership there were those who practiced exorcism. If it were not possible they would have quickly abandoned such a practice. What we need to remember is that those who did acted from within the context of a belief in God. The next step in the process is whether it would be possible for those outside of the context to cause a demon to leave.

The key point is that it requires force to remove a demon once they have obtained access. The second point is that unless something is done to prevent them from returning they can and will regain possession of the person they have been driven from. This second state, according to Jesus, can potentially be far worse than the original state. So driving out a demon just to do so can actually cause greater harm, if God is not a part of the process, and the person does not have a chance to let God provide a hedge of protection. This is most effective if one receives Jesus as savior and allows the Holy Spirit to take up residence in his life. This though, will only happen if a person desires it. God does not forcefully take up residence in our lives.

That suggests that a demon will work to enter a person without their direct consent. That would appear to be true from Jesus story. The one demon returned and then brought others (Ac 12:45). At no point in this activity is permission sought from the individual. What is also clear is that the person is not actively seeking to prevent such an event from happening. So man, in the weakness of his will, does not consider such an event and does not prevent it. Even though a person is not seeking out a demon, demons are watching for opportunities to gain access to us.

We are not told how easy or difficult it is for demons to gain access. What is clear is that they are seeking those whom they can possess and, if not actively resisted, in some manner can do so.

Driving out a demon may be possible for those who do not know Christ or the power of God. Even so, it is clear that it will not be simple or easy. It takes a major effort of will on the part of those seeking to drive the demon out and a clear choice, if that is possible, by the one who desires the demon to be driven out. There are many people in the world of animism who spend a great deal of time attempting to do just that.

This is what made Jesus' action in driving out demons so incredible to everyone else. He did it with a simple word of command and the response was immediate. The disciples experienced this reality when Jesus authorized them to drive out demons and then sent them out into the area to preach. When they came back they were very excited about how the demons responded. It was the same situation. They were able to command them in Jesus' name and the response was immediate.

When they had trouble with the demon in the boy the disciples were confused (Mk 9:28). This was not how it was to be. Jesus helped them understand that the issue was not in the procedure but in their relationship to him, in their faith (Mt 17:20). They needed to be sure they were not treating Jesus' name in a magical sense and needed to be sure their relationship was the basis of their activity. The demon would go, but only as they prayed and brought themselves into relationship with God. It is not about more ritual, or more power, or more effort or any other activity we might add to the command to go. The issue is faith and relationship to God.

Power over Demons

It is easy to fall prey to the trap of power here. The potential of having control over demons can be quite intoxicating and we can easily lose sight over what is more important. Jesus

said this clearly when the disciples returned excitedly proclaiming how demons had responded to them. He told them “do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20).” This is the key. Demons will respond when we clearly know who we belong to and allow that relationship to be the focus.

Demons love a show. We love a show as well. The more dramatic things get the more attention comes our way. This is not how it is to be. When Jesus drove out demons it was without drama. Any attempts at a show were cut off. Any attempts at discussion were cut off. It was simple, it was direct, it was God.

When we deal with demons we need to keep this in mind. We have no need to talk to them, we have no need of any information they might have, and we have no need for their testimony. The only thing that is needed is that they see we belong to God and have the authority to drive them out.

Where Demons go

What happens after a demon leaves is not our business nor do we have any control over that activity. Jesus says the demon wanders looking for another opportunity (Mt 12:43). Jesus did not tell the demons where to go after they left the person, though that was a tempting possibility. They were in charge of their activities and went wherever they chose. When the legion of demons left the Gadarene and entered the pigs, it was the demons who asked Jesus if they could do so (Mt 8:31). After they destroyed the pigs we have no information on where they went next and no comment from Jesus on where they should go.

When should we drive out Demons?

We may need to think through why we drive out a demon. Paul seems to be in no hurry to do so in Acts (Ac 16:18). For several days the girl followed him, making statements that appeared helpful but were designed to confuse people and look to her and those who owned her for more information. It was only after several days that Paul drove out the demon. Could it be that unless the person is ready to hear the gospel, to drive out the demon could make their situation worse? Again Jesus' story of the wandering demon suggests such a thing, the state of the person was far worse than before (Mt 12:45).

We need to always be in prayer and clear in evaluating the situation. What is happening to the person? What effect is it having on the proclamation of the gospel? What does the person desire? Hard questions to answer.

We need to remember that possession is a violation of all that God intended us to be. He intended that his Spirit would dwell with us and make us complete. Yet man lives in violation of God's intent. As a result man seeks any means to gain what he has lost.

Demons do not belong in man and they cannot make us whole. We are not to have any kind of partnership with Satan or his servants. We need to seek the means to help the person desire to be rid of them, to see the falseness of what is happening.

Let us pray for wisdom that will keep us close to God and able to deal with those possessed so that they will be freed and free to know the God who can save them and live with them forever.

Possession and the Christian

The most difficult area for discussion in this topic would be whether or not a Christian can be possessed. We can easily see how a Christian can be demonized, to be attacked and tempted over and over in key areas. Paul was under such pressure. He called the thorn he dealt with a messenger from Satan. It was there to torment him (2 Co 12:7). Yet when he prayed for release God responded that he should not worry but depend on God whose grace was sufficient for the challenge (2 Co 12:9).

John talks about how young men have overcome the evil one (1 Jn 2:13). Jesus tells us to pray for protection from the evil one in the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:13). In his prayer in John 17 he prays that the Father will protect the disciples from Satan (Jn 17:15). Satan is always looking for a way to make our life difficult. We are warned that Satan is looking for any opportunity to trap us and ruin our faith (1 Pe 5:8) or at least to undermine it so it will be unattractive to others.

Jesus reports that Satan has requested the chance to sift Peter and the others (Lk 22:31). Peter survived but Judas did not. In Ephesians 6:11 we are warned about the devil's schemes and flaming arrows (Ep 6:13). Paul tells us to put on God's armor so that we will be able to withstand the attacks on our faith that will come (Ep 6:13-17).

If we are diligent and look to God for strength and help, then we will overcome. We are told that there is nothing that is too great for God to deal with and that there will always be a way through the troubles that come (1 Co 10:13). The concern is what we do and how we respond. We can choose to resist Satan in God's strength and find the victory God has promised. If we do then we will be able to endure (2 Co 1:8-10) and stand firm (Ph 1:27). Or we can choose to let our desires and sin provide the access Satan needs to harm us (1

Pe 2:11). We can trust in ourselves, and in our own strength, and not Gods and so open ourselves to attack.

We must be clear on this. Satan will attack. He will attack Christians as individuals and groups of Christians and the church. He will do everything he can to divide and destroy. He is most successful when we, through inattention, through unconfessed sin or through an unwillingness to forgive, give him a point of access, a foothold (Ep 4:27). It will take prayer and commitment to God to discover how we have given access to Satan and to be able to deal with Satan's attacks. We need to remember that Jesus has already defeated Satan. That victory gives Christians the ability to stand firm and overcome the attacks of the enemy.

As to whether a Christian can be possessed by a demon, there is no clear indication of this situation occurring in Scripture. It would seem highly unlikely that once the Holy Spirit dwells in us there would be any space for a demon to dwell. Does that rule out a Christian falling away and in that process being possessed? Again there is no clear answer to this, but it seems like a possibility. To reject the Holy Spirit and so drive him out could open the door for a demon to enter.

There are two occasions that are hard to understand that are often presented as examples of this happening. The first is in 1 Co 5:4-5 where Paul tells the church to hand a person over to Satan. The second is in 1 Ti 1:20 where Paul states he has delivered Alexander over to Satan. At first glance this may appear as though Satan is being given the possibility of possessing these individuals. But in each situation the purpose given says otherwise. In the first the goal is that the sinful nature will be destroyed and the person's spirit saved (vs 5). Later Paul encourages the church to restore this person so that he will not be overwhelmed (2 Co 2:7). In the second Paul states that the reason for his action is so the

Alexander would learn not to blaspheme. In neither case does it appear that the goal was for Satan or a demon to possess them but to allow Satan to oppress and test them.

The one other situation that people may suggest as a possible setting for a demon to be in a Christian might be where one is newly converted. The desire to believe is there, and a decision has been made. Now the question would be, have they become a Christian with a demon in them or does the demon have to be driven out before they can become a Christian? If we were to base in on the pattern seen in Jesus' ministry, it seems likely that the demon is driven out as part of the process of believing or even before to make it possible for the person to choose. Again scripture just does not answer the question.

There has been a great deal of discussion over the years about these concerns, with people on both sides of the issue. The one thing that is clear is this, just because we are Christians does not mean we will be exempted from demons trying to tempt us or test us or make our life difficult. They will do so directly or indirectly through others. The issue is are we doing what needs to be done to protect ourselves and to do what is needed to stand firm when we are attacked. Do we accept the reality of the presence of demons and their power and in accepting that truth are able to go to God for the help we will need?

For this to happen we need to be in God's word learning about the resources God has provided for us to deal with the presence and activity of Satan and his demons. It also means building our relationship with God so that our faith in God will be strong enough to make use of those resources and so prepared for the attacks of the enemy.

1. Demons – Oppression and Temptation

Probably the more significant activity of demons is that related to interacting with man. This may take the form of actively making life difficult (oppression) or influencing man to become involved in sin (temptation).

Oppression and Opposition

There is little said about oppression and how demons work in this area. Paul does talk about such activity in discussing what he calls his thorn (2 Co 12:7-9). Jesus talks about how he has been opposed and that those who follow him will be opposed as well (Mt 10:16-28). Opposition can be extreme, taking the form of physical torture and martyrdom. This has been seen as a means of the demonic realm trying to destroy and discourage the church.

Opposition can be in the form of physical problems. In Luke 13:11ff there is the story of a woman who was crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. This story reveals to us that Satan and the demons can create physical infirmities in our lives. These problems do not require demonic possession. They are in some way caused by demons who are present and have power over a person's body. Jesus' actions further indicate that this is the case. Jesus does not drive out the demon rather he lays hands on her and pronounces her healed. Jesus says she has been bound and is being released.

Physical problems of this nature bind us. The demons use illness to bind us to them and depend on them for our hope of being cured or released. This is a common topic among those whose lives and beliefs center around spirits. They are always in fear of disease and sickness that is caused by demons.

The problem is that man loses the ability to distinguish what is caused by demons and what is caused by living in a sinful fallen world. Man does not understand the reality of what sin has done to us and our world. While Satan and demons can and do use illness to cause trouble, for the most part the pains and illness we suffer are a part of living in a fallen world. It is also true that in special situations God has used illness to punish people (Miriam-Nu 12:10), but that is not the norm. The reality is we are all going to die at some point in time from something.

Opposition can be in the form of opposition from others and the problems that come from greed, jealousy, hatred and other similar actions. While demons are not the source of such attitudes they will use them to create trouble. The main focus of such trouble is to keep people from finding God, or once someone has found God, to make their life as difficult as possible.

Jesus warned his disciples that even as he was opposed and hated they too would have to deal with such responses. He took time to define just how bad this could be. Brother would betray brother (Mt 10:21); child would betray parents (Mk 13:12) and so on.

Temptation

Temptation is the other major area where demons are actively interacting with man. But from the beginning we need to be aware that they are not the only source of temptation. There are actually three sources.

1. The first source being the desires of our own heart. We are our own worst enemy when it comes to wanting and doing what we should not be doing.
2. The second source is other people. In every culture there is the reality of peer pressure, of others encouraging us to do what is wrong.

3. The third source is Satan and the demons. They are on the prowl, looking for opportunities to misdirect and mislead, trying to get us to do or try what we should not, trying to get us to trust ourselves, others, them and not God.

Demons will also tempt man to blame someone else for his troubles and failures. That is the biggest temptation of all. They tempt man to believe he is not responsible. That is a lie. Anyone who claims they are not responsible and then claims it was the demon of this, or the demon of that, is being deceived. There is no allowance for a person to blame someone else or a demon for their sin. When a person stands before God, he will not allow such a testimony. He will say you are responsible.

It is also clearly stated that no temptation is beyond the available resources of God to resist (1 Co 10:13). There is no temptation that we face that Jesus did not also face (He 4:15). In other words we cannot make excuses for the choices we make. We can say that the demons tempted us. We can say that they made our life difficult. But we will not be allowed to say they are responsible for our choices, nor that it was more than we could handle.

Demons may make our life a constant struggle. They may be constantly reminding us of that which tempts us. They may try to confuse us and wear us down. They may bring people around us to make life difficult and hard to do what is right. They may even cause others, who have already yielded to their control, to hurt us but they cannot make us chose to sin. But they cannot force us to yield to the temptation.

We need to make this absolutely clear. Demons do not make us sin. We chose to sin. All the oppression and all the temptations are designed to weaken us, confuse us, and trap us. But in the end we must chose. Saying we didn't know

better, didn't know there was another option, didn't know it was wrong, is unacceptable (Mt 25:41-46). This is what the demons want us to believe so that we will remain trapped, remain susceptible, to their influence. We have sinned and we are responsible for our sin.

The demons want us to believe, that if we yield to them, they will make life easier for us. The reality is that they will take us deeper into the trap and farther away from the truth. Their oppression and temptation are designed to bind us in blindness to their lies. When we yield, the bondage grows and the blindness increases. It only happens when we yield.

God is ready to release us from bondage. He is ready to give us the resources to resist. That is the promise, that is the reality. God will provide the strength, the knowledge, the faith to gain the victory over all the snares and temptations of those who are part of this evil age and over us.

3. Man – Death and afterlife

Man's desire for power and access to power is not restricted to the period of our physical existence. Some want to either have access to those who have died, along with their knowledge and power. Others want to believe that after death they can continue to exist and influence this world.

The first desire is about power to control the spirits. The second desire is about power over death. Both are concerned about an existence beyond the point of death. Neither concept fits well into what the Scripture has to say.

The simplest way to deal with these topics is to take the Scriptures one by one and consider what they have to say.

Jesus walking on water

Mt 14:26-32; Mk 6:48-51

The first reference that gives us any idea of the existence of spirits is when Jesus came to the disciples walking on the water (Mt 14:25-27)). They were terrified, thinking that he was a ghost. The term means apparition or specter. It is an appearance that is unclear and without distinguishing features.

Some people believe in ghosts and spirits that appear to men. Their appearance generally causes fear and a sense of doom. This is what the disciples were dealing with. Jesus quickly dispels their concern over the nature of his existence and in so doing sets aside their fear. He does not comment on whether their belief or fear is legitimate.

Their fear and confusion is easily understood. They had never seen anyone walking on water and so assumed that it must be a spirit or ghost. Even when Jesus identified himself

they were still torn between the fear caused by their superstition and the impossibility of the setting. Peter challenged Jesus to call him out onto the water (Mt 14:28-31). He walks a short way and then is caught up in the storm and the impossible nature of what he is doing. Still he walks far enough to know that something other than a ghost is present. Once Jesus is in the boat and they see he is not a ghost. They realize that Jesus is more than a man, he is the Son of God (Mt 14:33).

Lazarus and the Rich Man

Luke 16:22-31

This is the longest discussion of the existence of heaven and hell, here called Abraham's bosom and hell. It also includes a great deal of other information of interest. We learn that angels escort people to heaven at their death. Those who are not headed for heaven end up in hell.

There is a gulf between heaven and hell that cannot be crossed by either group. This makes a lot of sense in that God does not want those from hell to cross over into heaven. Yet those in hell are able to view those who are in heaven. This would be a terrible way to exist, seeing paradise, but living in hell.

It also seems that those in heaven are not able to see those in hell. Lazarus has no awareness of hell or those that are there. This, too, seems appropriate. Heaven would be a miserable place if there was a view of those who are suffering in hell.

In all of this there is one group that has some ability to see both areas—the angels. The angel is talking with the rich man and responding to his questions. The questions and answers are enlightening.

- Those in heaven are not able to crossover and provide any form of relief to those in hell (vs 24-26).
- Those in heaven are not free to return to earth to share what they have learned with those still on earth (vs 27-29).
- Those in hell are bound and not free to communicate with any who are on earth (vs 30-31).

The key reason is that those on earth already have all the information needed to save themselves from an eternity in hell (vs 29). Someone returning from the grave would not be sufficient to convince them (vs 31), if they refuse to hear the testimony they already have.

What is interesting is that the rich man does not ask to be allowed to leave hell and return to warn his brothers. He seems to be aware that this will not be allowed. He is hoping though that someone who has reached to paradise may have the freedom to do so. The response of the angel is not encouraging.

Transfiguration

Matthew 17:1-6, Mark 9:2-8, Luke 9:28-36

The transfiguration is the only time we clearly see people who have died walking on the earth. We are not told how the three disciples knew who these men were, but they knew that Elijah and Moses had come and were meeting with Jesus. This meeting was especially arranged by God to encourage Jesus and help the disciples understand clearly the identity of Jesus.

What is clear is that these two individuals were very aware of the purpose of Jesus' presence on earth and had come to encourage him. They also were of a form that allowed them to be identified by the three disciples. Of the two, one had

physically died (Dt 34:7) and one had been taken up to heaven without dying (2 Ki 2:11), yet both had the same nature and form.

What we must remember is that they are here, not by their choice, but at the direction of God. These two men had walked on this earth and served God. They had suffered through the struggles of dealing with people who failed to believe what God had revealed through them. This was a special meeting set up by God. It was not a meeting of two spirits who were wandering around waiting for Jesus. It had been arranged.

God generally communicates with man through his word, others or angels. He is not in the habit of sending those who have died back to communicate to man. In this special situation, angels would have had nothing to share with Jesus. They do not know anything about living on earth, or dealing with people who refuse to believe and so make life difficult for the one trying to teach them. God knew this and so he sent Moses and Elijah to minister to Jesus.

This makes sense. Yet such an event only happened here at the transfiguration. Before and after this special event there will be no other appearances of the dead among the living. If there is a message to be sent, God will use an angel. We need to be very careful not to add to the meaning and purpose of the transfiguration. If had been intended for more, then we should have heard more from Peter and John in their letters. What is interesting is there is no reference to anything of this nature in any of their letters.

Raising of many Holy People

Matthew 27:52-53

Matthew records for us the one other time that the dead are among the living. It is at the death and resurrection of Jesus.

He records that at Jesus' death certain tombs of many holy people were opened, and that at his resurrection they entered into the town and appeared to many people.

Jesus' death and resurrection breaks Satan's death hold of those who are holy, and they are freed from the grave. What is interesting is that it does not say all the holy people's tombs are opened, only some. It also indicates that the people are selective in who they meet. Everyone is not given the privilege of seeing or meeting them. It says they appeared to many. This indicates that certain people were selected for this encounter.

It is obvious as we read that the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin, those who had condemned Jesus, were not among those who received these visits. If they had, then their response to the apostles might have been much different. These visits appear to have been for the purpose of encouraging and strengthening those who followed the truth. It is also apparent that this did not open the door for any spirit to make a trip to the earth to meet someone, a friend or family member, to help them find God and avoid hell.

Another interesting note is that it says the bodies were raised. They were physically present. This was not a group of spirits floating about the city. They were bodily resurrected and allowed to move among a select group of people for a certain period of time. How long they did so is not clear but by Jesus' ascension they are gone. There is no other mention of their presence or activity in any of the records of the New Testament.

Jesus Resurrection Appearance

Luke 24:37-39

Jesus appears in the midst of the disciples in a locked room. No doors or windows are opened and shut, he just appears.

Their first response is it must be a ghost. They are bound by their beliefs, superstitions or myths.

Jesus' response is to help them see beyond that and see him. They are not sure they are ready to believe in a resurrected body. Jesus helps them and tells them to touch him and see he is not a ghost, because ghosts do not have flesh and blood. He has come to help them, not terrify and confuse them. His comments are not designed to tell us whether or not ghosts exist, but to confirm that the reality of his presence and his resurrection. If there are ghosts or spirits of the dead that come to man, they cannot assume physical form and substance. They cannot eat. They cannot be touched. They do not bring joy and belief in God.

Jesus' presence is unlike anything that has ever happened before or will ever happen. He comes and goes as he pleases and is not limited by walls and barriers. His actions are more like that of an angel. Angels come and go, eat and drink, and carry with them the presence of God. While they cause awe and fear, their purpose is to help people accept them as a messenger of God. Jesus has said that our future existence would be like that of the angels (Mt 22:30).

And just like the angels, Jesus' coming and going is to serve God's purposes. He is here with the disciples to strengthen and encourage them. But it is only for a limited time. He will leave them so that the Holy Spirit will be able to come. God has allowed Jesus to remain on earth to strengthen these for the work that lies before them. This is only for a limited time and then he will depart. When he is with them they know very clearly he is not a ghost or spirit of the dead.

After his departure there will be only two other clearly recorded events where Jesus appears. That is the call of Paul (Ac 9:4-6) and the Revelation of John (Rev 1). In each of these it is clear that this is not the spirit of someone who has

died. Jesus appears in his glorified body as the exalted Son of God. Every other time God wants to communicate to Paul, or John or anyone else will be through angels. The spirits of the dead are not part of the program of God to spread the gospel.

Summary

From the story of Lazarus we can see that God is not likely to let the spirits of those bound in hell come back and share anything with the living. Further, except for three very specific cases, which were for very specific reasons God does not allow those in heaven to come back and communicate with the living. In all three of these God had a specific purpose and time frame, not to be repeated or extended.

The disciples were concerned about the reality and presence of spirits. Jesus did not deny this and sought to prove that he was not one on two occasions. This suggests that there is something that exists that causes man to be concerned.

The logical answer is demons. We need to remember that demons can alter their physical appearance, and like angels, should be able to appear and disappear. The other key to remember is that the main mode of operation is to deceive. Satan is the father of lies and the demons would be no different. If they can convince us that they are the spirit of the dead, and it confuses us and keep us from the truth, then that is what they will do.

We need to also remember that the demons expressed goal is control. Man also wants control. This situation makes it easier for demons to be convincing. They suggest a way for man to get more information and so more control. They suggest man can do more than is true and so have more

control. Being able to contact spirits and so gain access to more power is a very tempting situation.

So demons are likely the ones appearing as the spirits of the dead. They are able to watch us, observe our activities and hear our conversations. With that information they can be very convincing in their appearance and in their information.

But that is far from the truth. The truth is that when we die we depart this physical realm and enter either paradise or hell. We are not allowed to wander back from those locations or between them. The truth is there is an afterlife. We will continue to exist, but are separated from this world and those that inhabit this world. That is the truth. Anything else is a lie - prepared, promoted and propagated by demons.

There are spirits in the world. They are called demons. They can appear in many shapes and forms. Yet they still are demons.

Section E

Church – Spiritual Power Center

Jesus tells us that the Gates of Hell will not prevail against the church (Mt 16:18). This means the spiritual powers of Satan and the demons are not sufficient to control, ruin or alter the church. Jesus' presence and power will give the church the power needed to deal with anything that Satan tries to do in attacking the church.

The church of Acts was given great power to proclaim the truth and to establish itself in a hostile environment. There has been opposition from man and Satan from the beginning. This opposition has not lessened, and the power available to the church to deal with the opposition has not changed.

The church is described as the body. Within that body power is distributed to maintain the body and to maintain its witness within the world. So let's take some time to look at the power available to the church and how this power is used to actively minister in the world around it.

1. Spiritual Power in the church.

The real power of the church is not expressed in its ability to work miracles and other such actions. Jesus said that the real power would be in its love for each other. Jesus told the disciples that the world would know the truth based on how they loved each other. This theme is repeated over and over in the epistles.

In the book of Acts we are told that no one had a need for anything (Ac 5:34). All who saw a need gave and the needs were cared for. This concern for one another impressed those who observed and listened and it is said that many responded. One of the first tests of the young church was over the resources being used to care for those in need. To resolve the issue they appointed deacons to supervise and make sure that all were given what was needed without prejudice.

Paul spends an entire chapter on love in 1 Corinthians 13 helping us see that none of the other activities of the church, including miracles, have any value if there is no love. Love is the most powerful activity of the church. It contains the power to bring a person to God, it contains the power of God to change a person, and it contains the power to aid a person in overcoming all the wrong in their life.

John states very powerfully that without love we are not children of God (1 Jn 3:10). He shares Jesus words that love is expressed in obedience and obedience is the evidence of love (1 Jn 5:2). When the church lives in the love of God it has power to bring about change and to make all other power effective. Paul helps us understand how critical love is.

Eph 3:17-19

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. NIV

Love makes it possible to understand the extent of God's power expressed in Jesus. Love surpasses all other knowledge and power and makes it possible for God to truly fill us and empower our spirit.

Eph 4:16-18

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. NIV

Love makes it possible for every other gift to function properly and to its fullest potential. When we seek the power of God, or the power of the Holy Spirit without first obtaining love, we are like the Pharisees. They separate the power from the source and think they can gain control of power for themselves. It is a deception. The same is true in the church when we seek power without first understanding and living in love; the action is futile and self centered.

Paul further explains the importance of love in helping us to discern what is best for us.

Php 1:9-11

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ — to the glory and praise of God.

Love gives guidance in knowing what power is needed, when it is needed, and how it is to be used, so that we remain blameless. Not just for this moment but until we stand before Christ. Love will help us to be sure that what we do will yield the right kind of fruit, fruit that brings honor to God.

This kind of love is to be above all other virtues and activities and should bind us together in unity. Paul states this concept in Ph 2:2 and in

Col 3:12-14

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

The greatest power the church possesses is the power of God's love. This love is capable of binding us together in unity. When we are bound in unity then we will understand the place of all the other gifts, all the powers available to the church and will understand how they result in the fruit God desires to give to us (Ga 5:22-23).

This unity is something which Satan wishes to prevent and if established to somehow destroy. The church in Corinth was struggling with this (1 Co 1:10). They were divided by

quarrels and divisions. Paul challenged them to avoid divisions. Division leads to anger and that opens the door for Satan to gain a foothold (Ep 4:27). Satan is watching for any opportunity to breakdown the unity of the church. As we look to God he will help us avoid division, and deal with the cause of division, God will crush Satan under our feet (Ro 16:17-19).

As we read through Paul's letters we see that he has a great concern to hear about acts of love and their unity. He never asks or comments on how many were healed or how many were delivered. Peter and John also have similar concerns.

- Eph 1:15 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints,
- Phm 4-5 I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints.
- Col 1:4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints—
- 1 Th 3:6 But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love.
- 1 Pe 1:22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.
- 1 Jn 4:7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

Seeking any power without first gaining love is never encouraged or even suggested. Love must first be obtained.

Paul tells anyone seeking a gift to first seek the gift of love. (1 Co 12:31, 1 Cor 14:1). Then we are to ask for the special abilities of the Holy Spirit.

Even when we seek the gifts or special abilities available from the Holy Spirit there are to be two primary focuses. The first is so that we may be more effective in proclaiming the gospel (Ac 4:8) and the second is to build up the church (1 Co 12:7, 14:12). Building up oneself or gaining prestige within the church is never a part of seeking spiritual abilities.

Before we get to the spiritual gifts there is one other power we need to understand. That is prayer. In the Biblical record when the church needed the ability to love, when the church needed the power to preach, they first prayed. Prayer is the means by which we come before God and seek out the power to serve and to proclaim the message. The disciples prayed and the Holy Spirit came and they could speak in the languages of those present (Ac 2:1-4). The disciples prayed and God gave them the power to boldly proclaim the gospel (Ac 4:31).

The church in Antioch prayed and the first missionaries were sent out (Ac 13:1-4). They went out with the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim and perform miracles as God directed them. Paul is always asking the churches to pray so that he will have the power to proclaim the gospel (Ep 6:19). The special abilities of the Spirit are not available just because we are Christians and just because we want them. They are available to those who learn the power of love and seek out God in prayer to proclaim the gospel and build up the church.

Paul had to deal with these issues because the church in Corinth was more interested in the gifts and looking 'spiritual' than in building up the church and proclaiming the gospel. They had a problem, it was spiritual pride. They

wanted to look better than anyone else. They wanted special abilities so that they could say 'look at us.' They were forgetting the importance of love and who was ultimately in charge of the church.

When we seek the power available based on our desires, we will harm the church. We will destroy its unity and fracture its foundation which is love. This is exactly what Satan wants and encourages.

We truly underestimate the power of love. It is love that can forgive. It is love that can restore. It is love that can reconcile. It is love that brings repentance. It is love that resurrects our dead soul. It is love that will bring us before God. It is love that makes us a child of God. None of the other spiritual powers or special abilities can do any of this. None of them can heal the soul.

Jesus said we would do greater miracles. The greatest miracles are those wrought by the power of love. Murderers are changed. Thieves are changed. The vilest of sinners are restored by love.

This is the power that the church needs above all others. Until we see that and seek it in prayer we do not deserve any other power. The greatest spiritual power is love.

2. Church – Signs and wonders

In the world today there is a growing fascination with signs and wonders. Signs that reveal there is a spiritual world and that there is power. Wonders that we can be seen and shown to others, so that they know we are connected to and can tap into the power of the spiritual world.

This concern for signs and wonders affects the church as well. In fact we are told by Jesus that if we have faith we will do greater things than the miracles he has done (Jn 14:12). If we accept Mark 16:16-17 as the words of Jesus (many manuscripts do not include these verses) we will perform a number of signs in Jesus' name. Of the five listed, drive out demons, speaking in new tongues, drinking poison, picking up snakes and healing people, we have records of four of them occurring within the book of Acts.

There is no record of anyone drinking poison and surviving. Only Paul is reported as surviving the bite of a snake (Ac 28:3). There are only four reports of demons being cast out, Jerusalem (Ac 5:16), Samaria (Ac 8:7), Ephesus (Ac 19:12) and one girl in Philippi (Ac 16:16). There are only three records of tongues, Pentecost (Ac 2:4), conversion of Cornelius (Ac 10:46) and group of people in Ephesus (Ac 19:6). There are numerous records of healing. In fact healing is the most common of the signs.

It is interesting to note, though, how often there is no report of signs occurring. Most notably there is no report of signs and wonders in the church in Antioch. This is the church that was responsible for sending out the first missionaries. Berea, Thessalonica, Athens and others have no record of signs and wonders. Philip's testimony to the Ethiopian included no signs, just the word of God and a baptism. Does this mean

there were no miracles? No, but it does mean they were not the focus of what was happening.

We must also remember that even though Jesus said that we would do greater miracles, he also warned that signs and wonders would also be performed by false prophets and false Christs (Mk 13:22). So signs and wonders can deceive as well as convince people.

Today there are many ideas and activities being promoted as signs and wonders. Of course the signs of healing, tongues, driving out demons are prevalent. Very few groups deal with poisonous snakes or drink poison. Most consider this a strange way to prove the level of one's faith. Other actions are being added to the list of signs and wonders that are not found in scripture or involve some very creative interpretation of scripture.

The question is why are people seeking signs and wonders? As far as I can tell from reading Scripture the leaders were not always expecting signs and wonders to happen. Peter was not expecting Cornelius and his group to begin speaking in tongues (Ac 10:48).

Paul saw that the lame man in Lystra had enough faith to be healed (Ac 14:9). Paul was in no hurry to drive out the demon from the girl in Philippi. He knew he had the authority and did so when it was clear he should do so.

Paul in his writings to the Corinthians clearly states that the ability to perform such signs is of a lesser value than the ability to preach, teach and of much lesser value than to love.

The concern again is not about the reality of the power to heal, the power to drive out demons, the power to survive dangerous situations, or the power to speak in tongues. The concern is seeking such power without the direction of God,

without clearly understanding the focus of such activities. It is of seeking God's power for personal benefit.

Jesus performed miracles and yet many people did not believe. They came only for the benefit to be gained. Simon Magus became a Christian but he was more fascinated by the power he could have than the value of his relationship with Jesus (Ac 8:18-23). He was willing to pay for the ability to have such power. It was more important to him to have power than to know God.

The danger that we must always be aware of is that we will seek power to promote ourselves within the community of the church. This will bring division and not unity. Paul had to deal with this in Corinth. The church was using two things to determine how important they were. The first was which of the leaders they were associated with. They thought that by claiming to follow a certain person it might give them greater standing (1 Co 1:10-13) and possibly greater access to special abilities. The second is just what has been said. They were trying to gain access to special abilities in order to advance themselves and their position within the overall church of God (1 Co 12:14-27).

When we focus on the gifts or special abilities we bring division into the church. We bring competition into the church and we bring sickness to the body. Paul illustrated this when he said, "if the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be (1 Co 12:17)." We would not be able to hear, to smell, to walk. Even more important it is not our role to assign abilities, that is up to God (1 Co 12:11), he does so in a manner to make the body healthy and strong.

This is the point Paul is making in the second chapter of Philippians. He says that the point of the gifts is not so we will benefit but so others will benefit (1 Co 12:7). We are to

look not to our own interests but the needs of others. We are not to seek places of honor but to be servants (Ro12:10).

When God chooses to provide special abilities they it is to help people be convinced of God's love and help the church be strong. God knows when and what he will provide.

It is interesting that in praising the church in Philadelphia there is no reference to any signs or wonders they are performing (Rev 3:7-12). There are deeds mentioned but they are about having kept Gods word and not denying his name. The focus is the churches' and their dependence on God. God says he will open a door for them and provide them the strength they need.

Those who have opposed this church will see and acknowledge not the level of the signs and wonders, but that they have been loved by God (Rev 3:9). They have kept the command to endure patiently. They will be honored for being faithful to God.

That is the true sign of God's presence. That is the thing the world wonders at and cannot understand. They are amazed when they see our faith and our love for God.

Job said it best.

“Though he slay me yet will I hope in him.” (Jo 13:15)

Paul echoes this thought in Ph 1:21

“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

The most powerful sign of God's presence is our lives, not our miracles.

The greatest wonder the world will ever see is a sinner who has been reborn a child of God.

While all other signs and wonders can be counterfeited and be used for selfish purposes these two cannot.

Section F

Other Concerns and Issues

In every discussion there are always areas that fall outside of a given outline or structure. They are the miscellaneous topics, or they are areas of discussion that need to be covered independently. There are also certain Scriptures that would be good to look at in depth. That is the focus of this section.

These topics are often emotionally loaded with strong views on opposite sides of the discussion. While the hope is to make a definitive statement in key areas, it may not always be possible. Some of the topics we are often interested in and want more detail regarding are just not dealt with in Scripture. Many times there is only a passing Scripture reference to a given subject. The greatest danger is to assume more than Scripture actually says.

The goal then is to help us see what Scripture does say and does not say on a specific topic. Then try to give some guidelines on how to respond to that topic and concern.

1. Miracles – True and False

This is a topic that has fueled much discussion over the years. From groups who say that the time of miracles is past to those who feel we are entering a new era of signs and wonders in the lead up to the end times.

Are there still miracles? Yes.

There is nothing in scripture that even suggests that there would be an end to miracles. They will continue to occur at God's direction until Jesus returns and we receive our resurrection bodies. At that point in time there will no longer be a need for miracles.

The greater debate is related to the level of miracles, how they are accomplished and how we know it is, in fact, a miracle.

As one reads the Scriptures it is not hard to see that there are specific times and places when the amount of miracles is greater. It is also clear that the most common type of miracles are those of healing. There are others but they do not occur with the same frequency. The main groups of miracles in the New Testament relate to the ministry of Jesus (a period of three years), the founding of the new church in Jerusalem (Ac 5:12), the start of the work in Samaria (Ac 8:6-7) and Iconium (Ac 14:3), and the work in Ephesus (Ac 19:11). Paul does comment that his work was accompanied by miracles (Ro 15:19) as he traveled from Jerusalem to Illyricum.

Value of Miracles

Yet as you read through the epistles you will find only a few references to miracles. The one being Paul's discussion of

the gifts in 1 Co 12. Miracles seem to have moved to the background and living the life of Christ becomes more of the focus. There is a growing concern for false miracles (2 Th 2:9)

Jesus own comments on the value of miracles is mixed. He tells people that miracles should help them in choosing to believe (Jn 10:38, 14:11). He said if they didn't believe his words then consider the miracles. If they do not believe then the miracles that have been performed will become a source of judgment (Mt 11:21-22). God had provided evidence of the truth of his word through the miracles, but the people chose not to believe.

Jesus follows this line of thought when he pronounces judgment on the cities of Korazin, Bethaida (Lk 10:13) and Capernaum (Mt 11:23) for their failure to see the miracles and believe. He stated that if these same miracles had been performed in Tyre and Sidon and Sodom they would have believed and been spared judgment. Miracles did not always result in belief. Jesus denounced many cities where he had performed miracles because they saw the miracles and did not repent (Mt 11:20).

Further Jesus clearly saw one of the negative results of miracles. He tells one group that they were following him only because of the miracles (Jn 6:26). He often had to move to another place or seek isolation because the people were more interested in the miracles than in hearing the truth.

False Miracles

Jesus also warns us that there will be many who are able to perform miracles but do so for personal benefit or to confuse (Mt 24:24). At the judgment there are those who will say we did miracles in your name. Jesus will reject them because the miracles were not done to bring honor to him but to serve the

selfish purposes of those claiming to follow Jesus and perform miracles (Mt 7:22).

In Matthew 24:24 Jesus explains how this could be. He says many will come who are false Christs and false prophets. They will be able to perform great signs and miracles. They will do so to deceive people and even the elect – if that were possible. Paul repeats this in 2 Thessalonians 2:9. He states that at the end, a representative of Satan will come with the power to do counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders. The goal is to deceive those who are perishing.

Peter concurs with Paul and states there will be false prophets and false teachers. Their goal is to introduce destructive heresy and bring the truth into disrepute (2 Pe 2:1). John follows this with his challenge to test the spirits to be sure they are of God and the work they do brings honor to Jesus Christ (1 Jn 4:1-2).

Revelations includes the report that one will come who will perform great and miraculous signs. He will even bring down fire from heaven. The power to do so is given him by the beast (Rev 13:13-14). In Revelation 16:14 we are told that the spirits of demons are performing miraculous signs. They do so to enlist people in their work of battling against God. They will delude the people with the mark and lead them to destruction.

What becomes clear is that there are miracles in the world around us. There are also two sources of power to perform these miracles. God, who is the ultimate source of such power, whose goal is to bring people back into relationship with him. And there is Satan and his host, whose goal is to confused and mislead people to bring them to destruction.

Evaluation

Paul's discussion of having gifts and miraculous powering 1 Co 12 should help us know how to evaluate them. He gives guidelines.

1. The first is that God gives the power to whom he desires and when he desires and for the common good (vs 7-11).
2. We are not the one who decides what gift we should have. This is to make sure that all of the churches' (bodies') needs are met and it is able to do its work (11-26).
3. The gifts of miracles and healing are not at the top of the list. They are of lesser importance when compared to those of the apostle, prophet, and teacher (vs 28-30).
4. All the members do not have all the gifts. We are not to think that to be a true Christian means we have to be able to perform miracles and heal. There are other gifts.
5. Over all of the gifts, even those of miracles and healing, is the gift of love. (1 Co 13).

Paul's introduction to the first letter to the Corinthians should help us to see the place and importance of miracles. He tells them he did not come as others with fancy words and power. He came with simplicity and the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Co 2:1-4). He adds that his focus was not on signs or special wisdom. It was on one truth, Christ crucified (1 Co 1:22-23). Later he states clearly that the foundation for all is activity in Jesus and in this discussion there is no mention of miracles (1 Co3:11). There is a warning that if a person uses inferior materials to build on this it will be destroyed (vs 13).

Let me add one more interesting observation. In the three places where Jesus clearly tells the disciples what they are to do after he has left there is only one mention of miracles. First, they are to be witnesses (Ac 1:8). Second they are to

teach, disciple and baptize (Mt 28:18-20). And third, they are to go into the world and preach the gospel (Mk 16:15). It is only in Mark 16:17, 20 where there is any mention of signs accompanying the work. Even in Paul's call in Acts 9 there is no mention of doing miracles only of proclaiming the gospel and of the suffering that lies ahead. Even his first actions in Damascus did not include any miracles (Ac 9:19-22).

Summary

It should be clear that miracles are limited in their function and that we need to be very watchful when they are present and consider the following:

1. Miracles do not always lead to belief.
2. There are false miracles based on the power of Satan and demons.
3. Miracles are not always to be expected.
4. God is the one who is in control.
5. Why is a person claiming to have this power?
6. Why are we seeking for signs and wonders?
7. Miracles have been used to promote heresy and false truth.

Seeking and desiring miracles to happen is not wrong. But it needs to be completely in the hands of God and not in the hands of man.

Miracles are only the evidence that there is spiritual power at work in this setting. They do not always tell us the source of the power. We need to observe the results and who is getting the glory, God, man, or Satan, and so determine their value and purpose.

We need to think carefully about anyone who promises that miracles will happen when they come. If it is all about them,

then we need to be concerned about someone who is promoting themselves above God. Many people are open to suggestions and respond in ways that suggest healing and miracles when nothing has happened.

The scripture also warns us that Satan and demons have the power to create miracles (2 th 2:9). They are called false, not because the miracles are not real, but because they lead people away from the truth and away from God. They put a person, or Satan, in the primary place of importance. We need to be very discerning about the spirit behind the miracle before we get too excited.

Even when the miracle is from God, if the people do not receive the truth they may focus only on the power and again be lost. Seeing is not always believing. It may result in believing in the wrong thing and for the wrong reason.

In the same way we need to evaluate why we want a miracle to happen. When we do the evaluation we need to ask ourselves a question. Is it ...

1. So we will be comfortable?
2. So our family will not have to suffer?
3. So we can gain power and prestige?
4. So God will be praised?

Remember there will always come a time when God will say no. We will have to die as promised because of our sin. This is the result of the fall of man (1 Co 15:21-22). As a result of the sin of Adam all will die (Ro 5:17). Paul states clearly that we participate in this when he says in Ro 3:23 that all have sinned and in Ro 6:23 the result of this sin is death. There will be no more miracles, no more healings and death will come. But that will open the door for the greater miracle - resurrection and restoration for eternity with God.

2. Territorial Spirits and Spiritual Mapping

These topics have had many books and articles written on them. There is neither time nor space to cover this topic in an exhaustive manner. What will be shared here are some thoughts and scriptures to consider as one deals with the issues involved.

Today there are groups teaching the idea that spirits hold territory and that if we can properly identify the spirit we can drive them from the territory and take over. One of the key processes used to do this is called spiritual mapping. It is a process of studying the history of who settled a given area and looking at what kind of crimes are most common in that area. Through this process it is believed that we can learn the nature of the spirit, and in some cases, their name.

One of the more extreme methods in discovering this information would be to use demons themselves. This would be done when one, who is driving out a demon, begins to question the demon about what the nature and character of the demons in that place and seeking out any other information that could be of use in claiming the territory or city for God.

Is it possible?

This whole concept raises many questions and concerns. The first of these is, can demons in fact claim and hold territory. And are there demons that are actually resident in a given place and so identified with that place? This does not rule out the idea that demons can come and reside in an area or pick a place for special activity or attention. The issue is, do they own or have a permanent place of activity? It is clear that they do occupy places and persons, at least for a period of

time, otherwise demon possession of a person would not be possible.

The comments on the behavior and actions of demons in the New Testament do not suggest that demons are tied to a particular place or territory. Jesus describes a demon as one who roams about in arid places (Mt 12:43). Those places could be of a physical nature or represent spiritual realities. The demon is searching for a person or place that will provide rest or refreshment and finding. It has not been a successful search and so returns to the original location. The search is not restricted. The goal is the critical issue.

Peter's description of the behavior of Satan is that of prowling, seeking (1 Pe 5:8). There is no restriction on this activity to a given time or place. This idea is also used in Job to describe the manner of Satan's life as one who is wandering around the world as one with no real permanent place of abode (Job 1:7; 2:2). Always looking for a place to pause and cause some trouble before moving on.

Many of the places where demons existed as gods in the Old Testament are no longer occupied. It would be great if they were somehow permanently linked to those places, then we could just avoid them and set up our dwellings away from their known habitat. This though is not true. They are on the move, always looking for a place to settle. When that place is disrupted they move on, but they could always go back.

The kingdom of Satan is described as the kingdom of the air (Ep 2:2). This gives us the impression of a very open and flexible domain. A domain that is in contact with all of the regions of the earth at the same time. It is neither a fixed domain nor a stable one. The atmosphere is always in a state of flux. If we think of Satan as being linked to that, then we can infer, that is a good description of his kingdom as well, always in flux, never stable.

The titles used for Satan are also those of temporary status. Prince (Jn 14:30) and Ruler (Ep 2:2). Both are titles that are assigned. A prince is one who is hopeful, but not guaranteed of position. Many may carry the title of prince but only one will actually take the throne. In this setting prince designates a pretender to the throne, a throne which has been legitimately taken by Jesus. Ruler is an appointed title. It is also an assumed title. There are many who set up their little kingdoms and assume the title of Ruler. Their rule will only last until one who is stronger comes and removes them from that position.

The other term used in this context of holding territory is strongholds (2 Co 10:4). This again does not suggest anything permanent. A stronghold is a place where a group sets up a center to protect and control a given location or area. It is a very restricted situation. When you are in the stronghold anyone can attack and take control of the places outside of the stronghold. So you then have to leave the stronghold to deal with them, which means weakening your stronghold. Again strongholds don't last. They may be destroyed or abandoned or just plain bypassed.

In WW 2 the Japanese set up a stronghold in the city of Lae in Papua New Guinea. The allies simply bypassed it and isolated it. In the end it failed because it could not function or be reinforced, and once weakened, it was attacked and ultimately deserted. Most strongholds really are only temporary in their usefulness.

We must be aware that Satan and his demons are actively involved in trying to set up such strongholds. These strongholds may relate to areas of sin in a person's life, areas of weakness or failure in a church, or even physical locations, settings that allow Satan to influence our lives and affect our relationship with God. These strongholds should

not be ignored and need to be dealt with (2 Co 10:4). We are to recognize them and remove them. We are also to deal with any arguments or excuses we may propose to avoid dealing with these issues (2 Co 10:5). (There are many good books that provide insight into this issue and how to deal with the various kinds of strongholds.)

Is it wise?

The next concern relates to questioning demons. It is not wise to think you can gain information about demons in a given area. We do not find any situation in Scripture that suggests we should even consider such activity. Jesus only spoke with one and it was to learn how many were present (Lk 8:30). No questions were asked about the kind of demons present, what their territory was, or any other similar concerns. Even the information they did give, Jesus' identity, was rejected. They were telling the truth but in a manner used to confuse and mislead.

Those who think they can gain truth from a demon are forgetting they function by deceit. Their leader is a liar (Jn 8:44). Even if they were to tell the truth it would be done in such a way as to mislead and misdirect. To think we can trust them is to allow ourselves to be controlled by them. We will have the false idea that we have power over them. This is a lie. God alone has power over them and God has never even suggested that we should enter into any kind of discussion with a demon. Further there is no record of any of the apostles doing so. So why should we think differently or be involved in such an activity?

Another concern relates to ultimate control. Can we really define a demon's territory and then drive them away from it completely? This is the concept behind spiritual mapping and certain types of prayer walks. The idea is, through prayer, to create a wall of protection around a given physical

location and then drive the demons out of that area. After that is done we then enter and begin proclaiming the gospel in supposed safety from the activity and influence of demons.

This does not mean we cannot or should not walk through a neighborhood and pray for the lost. It does not mean we should not go to our church and pray for the people and activities that take place there. The concern is the focus of the prayer. We should be talking to God about his work in the lives of his people as they serve and reach out to others. It is not wise to focus on demons and give them undue recognition and place in any aspect of our lives. Pray for protection and move on to talk with God.

The Dangers

There are several false assumptions that we can be trapped into making in relation to these issues. The first is that demons are in control of the life and choices of people. Nowhere in Scripture is this taught. Man is in control of his life. The presence of a demon is simply evidence that he has surrendered control in some way to a demon. They may influence but cannot control man's choices. They may tempt, but they cannot force man to sin.

The next is that before we can act God must drive away the demons. As though the gospel will be ineffective until God removes the demons. Paul clearly stated the Gospel was where the real power was (Ro 1:16). It was in the proclamation of the gospel that people would be freed, that the spirit of God would move. It was by entering into a place and encountering the people that the work would be done.

In one case Paul delayed several days before dealing with a demon (Ac 16:18). He went about proclaiming the truth and people were listening. The real trouble actually started after

he drove out the demon, and then the problem did not come from the demon but from those who wanted the demon to remain in the girl (Ac 16:19). It was the people who attacked Paul, after the demon was driven out. It was the leaders who beat Paul.

Jesus did not prevent Satan from testing the disciples. Jesus' victory over death and the grave did not remove the demons from being active in this world. Even when it was hinted that he could send them away permanently he did not do so when driving them from the Gadarene.

We do need to remember that we are in fact in a battle with the rulers, powers and spiritual forces that are in the world and in the heavenly realms that are part of Satan's realm (Eph 6:12). We also need to remember that they have been disarmed by Jesus (Co 2:15). Further that Jesus is above all of these (Ep 1:21). We are wrestling with the powers, not for the possession of property, but for people. That is what Jesus came for, to free people not to free territory.

We also need to remember that the terms rulers, authorities, thrones and powers are not unique to the realm of Satan. These same terms are used to describe the various levels and abilities of the angels (1 Pe 3:22). Jesus is also described as the creator of powers, rulers and authorities in Colossians 1:16. We are struggling with the rulers, authorities, thrones and powers who have turned from God and now follow Satan.

Territorial Realities

Further these various terms are not about locations. They are about levels. Different levels of power, different levels of rule, and different levels of authority. This would fit with an understanding of how most governments work. There are

those with differing levels of power, rule and authority within any structure.

The demons though have no place that is theirs, they are wandering. The terms define their relationship to each other within their realm and not their relationship to a place.

There is a concern that demons only function in certain places. This is not true for they even show up in church. You would think this would be off limits to them. But they are not restricted and when one shows up in the synagogue Jesus does not reprimand the demoniac for coming there. Rather he deals with him and frees the man (Lk 4:33-36). Maybe we spend too much time worrying about territory when we should be focusing on the people.

Along this same line, our prayers at the beginning of church to drive away demons seem inappropriate. First of all, even mentioning them seems a contradiction. This is God's house and so why are we giving any kind of recognition to the demons or their potential presence? When we come together as the church it does not matter if a demon or demoniac is present. God is in control. Let them watch, let them listen and if they seek to disrupt, then deal with the demon and help the person. Are we so afraid that we have to put up walls to keep those in need out?

The concept of territory suggests that the demons are controlling man's behavior. Spiritual mapping then would suggest that it is not man who is responsible for the troubles of a community but the demons. Many people want to be able to blame their behavior on the demon of this sin or that sin. Much like people want to blame their environment for their behavior. The belief is that until the demons are removed I can excuse my behavior and blame it on the demons. This is not correct. No matter which demons are present, or what they are doing, the ultimate responsibility is

man. Man must choose. Even after the demon is gone man is still there and the results of his choices are still there. Again the real territory issue is related to man.

Thinking in terms of territories opens the doors to give demons more power and control than they deserve. If we are always looking for the demons we may waste a lot of time and not get to the people.

Even if you bind or resist a demon what happens then? They may leave that place but they will simply go somewhere else and cause trouble. The word says resist the devil and he will flee (Ja 4:7). It does not say he will be bound permanently or removed from this world. It says he will flee. The spirit will runaway from you but it will go somewhere else to cause trouble. That means that they are not bound to a territory. They are on the move and so what we learn today may have nothing to do with tomorrow. Their territory is always in a state of flux. Mapping it would be like trying to map the air. It is never the same from one moment to the next.

We appear to be focusing on the wrong territory. The only territory we should be worried about reclaiming is the person who is without God. That is reclaimed by presenting the gospel and letting the Holy Spirit work. Our part is to proclaim, pray and be available to do what God asks us to do. In the end the person who hears the message must be the one to choose. Our prayers should first be that we will live a life that attracts others to God. Second, that our message will be clear. Lastly, that we will have the opportunity to speak to those who need to hear. If we are not praying for that then praying for the demons to be driven out is pointless.

Focusing on God's power to proclaim the truth is the most effective way to hinder any and all activity of the demons in any place. The stronger the church is the less the demons will be able to do. The more the church spreads the gospel

the more people will find relief from demonic activity. That is the most effective use of God's power in us.

3. Curse – A twist of fate

This is one of the harder concepts to handle. From the garden of Eden God pronounced three curses.

- The first curse was on the serpent that it would crawl on the ground, eat dust and there would be constant strife between it and man.
- The second curse was on the woman. The level of her pain in childbirth would be greater and her husband would rule over her.
- The third curse was on man and the production of food. He told man that as a result of his sin the ground would only produce through painful toil. This would be the norm until man died.

These are stated to help us understand that the concept of a curse is not about careless or threatening words that have no power. There are curses that are in effect and everyday we are under their power. The greatest curse is that caused by our sin which affects of our lives everyday, causing pain and suffering throughout the world. Death is the final consequence of this curse.

The power of this curse is that it is directly linked to our behavior. The sin of Adam affected us all (Ro 5:14), but everyday, by our own sin, we continue the curse. We sin and so the curse remains in effect.

Curses are not just threatening words. They are linked to the power of the original curse that gains its power and life from the sin we commit everyday. Paul states that as long as we rely on the law and try to succeed in our own strength we remain under this curse (Ga 3:10). Christ, through his death, had provided the means to be released from this curse (Ga 3:13). The curse though will continue to affect mankind until

its final removal, which is reported in Revelation 22:3 and relates to the creation of the new heaven and new earth.

Structure

Curses take one of two forms and in each of these there is a negative and positive form. Here are the basic structures.

1. Future possibility
 - a. If you do this, then this may happen
 - b. If you do not do this, then this may happen
2. Present reality
 - a. Because you have done this, this may happen to you
 - b. Because you have not done this, this may happen to you

For actions related to God and the law of God the power of the curse already exists. It was set in place by the sin in the Garden and continues to work in our lives.

For actions that oppose God's purposes and plans then it is quite likely that Satan and the demons will help to make those curses effective. They want us to believe in power and that we have access to power. This is not clearly stated anywhere in Scripture. But it is clear that Satan will support any attempt to have power over others that excludes God.

Jesus treats curses as being a real part of the life of the people of his time. He tells the people to bless those who curse you (Lk 6:28). This would seem to be a way to nullify the effect of a curse in my life. It brings into place God's action and a greater power called love. It is, in fact, God's love for us as revealed in Jesus that provides the power to overcome the curse of sin on our life.

A further goal is to bless and not to curse. When we are tried and tested we should not respond with a curse (Ro 12:14; 1 Co 4:12). This guideline would imply that to curse a person has real potential to do harm or at least cause fear in the life of that person. We are not to go down this road or be involved in such behavior. Rather we are to go the other direction and pronounce a blessing on others even when it is not deserved (1 Pe 3:9).

There are only a few examples of someone actually pronouncing a curse in the New Testament.

1. Peter - When he was in the process of betraying Jesus there was a point where it states that he called down curses on himself (Mk 14:71). These were probably in the form of "If I am lying may this happen to me." When he realized what he had done he wept bitterly.
2. Jesus – When walking past a fig tree that had no fruit on it he cursed the tree. Stating that because it had no fruit it was to wither and die. The next day the tree had withered and died (Mk 11:14, 21).
3. Judgment – Jesus reports on the future judgment. Those who have failed to follow are already cursed. Their judgment is a result of the curse that has come from the sin they live.
4. Jesus' Death – The Bible states that everyone who is hung from a tree is cursed (Dt 21:23; Ga 3:13). Jesus' death represents the curse of sin. His resurrection reveals that the curse was wrongly applied and broken (Ga 3:13).
5. Paul – He wished he could be cursed in order to save his fellow Jews (Ro 9:23). This could not happen because the curse did not relate to him. We cannot take on us the curse of another because we too are already under the curse of sin. Only Jesus could do this.
6. Judgment – In Revelation 16:11 it says those left on earth and suffering from the various judgments cursed

the name of God because of their suffering. The problem is that the cause of the judgment was their own actions and so this curse would have no effect. They refused to repent and in so doing made any judgment of theirs null.

A curse is not about power or control but about judgment. This is the basis of what happened in the garden. Because man failed to heed the true word of God, because we listened to the temptation to be like God, then the curse of judgment was in effect. God had warned that it would be so and man refused to listen.

There is a curse that is real and exists. It is the curse we live under because of our sin. That means the concept of a curse is real. It can have real results when it is based on this original curse. We are encouraged not to be involved in cursing anyone. We are told to bless and not curse. We are told that the eternal impact of that curse has been removed but we still live in a world that is under a curse.

The other concern for man is if there are other sources of power for a curse? We will not get a definitive answer but only some hints, mainly from the Old Testament. The key example was when Balaam was hired by Balak to curse Israel (Nu 23). There was a strong belief that this was possible. God intervened and prevented Balaam from cursing Israel, rather he was directed to bless them on several occasions. God treated Balaam's goal of cursing Israel as a concern. It is not stated what power would be at work to make the curse effective. It is stated that God prevented it from happening.

Balaam really wanted the money and so showed Balak how to undermine God's blessing. Balaam was judged and later killed because of his desire for money and plans to help undermine God's protection of Israel (Nu 31:8). When Israel responded to that plan they sinned and so God removed his

blessing from Israel. Sin opens the door for trouble and judgment.

Balaam is accused of divination, a practice that relies on the power of demons to be effective. This would indicate that the power Balaam was relying on for the curse he would pronounce was not from God but Satan and his demons. God treated this as a real concern and prevented this from happening. He had told Israel he would defend them and protect them. He had destroyed the gods of Egypt. He was going to destroy the gods of Canaan. He would also be able to prevent any other activity of Satan from harming Israel.

The most prominent curse in Scripture is that pronounced by God on those who refuse to live by his law (Dt 27, 28). It is a continuation of the curse pronounced in the garden. Those who know God's law and refuse to live by it are cursed.

The power of that curse is real. That there is power to support other types of curses is also real. That we are to avoid being involved in cursing is also very clear. And that God can protect us from the curses of others is also very apparent.

Curses have power. We need to be very clear about the source of the curse and its purpose. God's curse is clearly based on judgment of our sin. Most other curses are based on a desire for personal power or retribution. The best thing we can do as Christians is follow the advice given to us. We are not to curse anyone and we are to bless those who seek to curse us (Lk 6:28; Ro 12:14). We are to be sure there is no cause for anyone to rebuke us for our lack of love and concern for those who are under the curse as we once were (1 Pe 3:8-17).

4. Generational Sin

This has also been called the generational curse. The concept is that the sins of a person's ancestors have resulted in a curse that now affects and controls their life. The sins often included in this are involvement in witchcraft or other such practices and any demonic involvement of one's ancestors. For these people their current problems, sickness, disasters and other issues then are the result of a curse placed on them in the past as a result of those activities.

This kind of curse then would have a great deal of power over even the life of a Christian. It would be good to understand what Scripture has to say about this.

There are a number of Scriptures that tell us that God will punish the sin of one generation in the following generations.

- Ex 20:5
You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,
- Ex 34:7
Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation ."
- Nu 14:18
The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.'
- Dt 5:9
You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God,

punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,

- Dt 28:20

The Lord will send on you curses, confusion and rebuke in everything you put your hand to, until you are destroyed and come to sudden ruin because of the evil you have done in forsaking him.

The key issue to keep in mind is that it is God who is punishing and it is God who is sending the curses. In each of these the focus is on keep God's covenant.

At the same time Scripture clearly states that God does not punish the child for the sins of the father or the father for the sin of the child. Here are a few of those Scriptures.

- Dt 24:16

Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin.

- Jer 31:30

Instead, everyone will die for his own sin; whoever eats sour grapes — his own teeth will be set on edge.

- Eze 18:20

The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him.

Here it is clearly stated that we are not to be punished for the sins of our ancestors or anyone else.

What can be determined from these passages is that the effects of the sin of one generation can in fact affect the

generations that follow. A person will have to deal with the results of the sins of their ancestors. What is further clear is that each person dies as a result of their own sin. What cannot be said is that the curse placed on one generation is also placed on the following generation.

Jesus was asked a question that grew out of the concept of generational sin in John 9:2, 3. The disciples saw a blind man and asked Jesus who had sinned, the man or his parents (Jn 9:1-3). On two other occasions there were events that Jesus could have used to expose the past of a person or groups ancestors. The first was the boy possessed by a demon from childhood. Here would have been a great opportunity to look at the father and blame him for what he or his family had done and what it had done to the boy (Mk 9:18). Jesus does not investigate the sin of the father or the boy; instead Jesus focuses on the lack of belief of the people. This is the crucial issue for the father; he believes and asks Jesus to help him overcome his unbelief. It is not about his sin, it is about his ability to commit himself and his son to God in faith, believing God is able to deal with this situation.

The second and third are recorded together. The one is about a group of Galileans who were killed by Pilate, who then took their blood and mixed it with their sacrifices. The other is concerning a tower in Siloam which fell, killing eighteen people (Lk 13:4). Jesus does not blame the past history of these people for what has happened, he does not suggest they were cursed in some way, or suggest that the cause of their death was because they were especially evil. He does not even blame Satan for these events. He could easily have done so. Instead he warns us that every one of us is in danger. They perished without a chance for repentance. We all are in that place of danger. If we wait too long we will die and so perish (Lk 13:3, 5). The real danger lies not in what has happened in the past but what we do in the present in regards to confessing our sin and seeking forgiveness.

The closest we have to someone pronouncing a curse that will affect the generations to come is found at the trial of Jesus. Pilate wants everyone to know he is innocent of Jesus blood. At that point the crowd shouts, “let his blood be on us and on our children (Mt 27:25).” But the question is can they really make their children responsible for their sin? According to the above Scriptures that would not be possible. Each person is responsible for their own sin. If there is to be such a punishment only God has the right or ability to punish sin beyond the current generation.

The problem is that for those who suggest the possibility of generational sin the blame for what is happening lies is shifted from them to the ancestors and their activities along with the activities of demons that are part of those events and the curses involved. In this situation then we go to God to remove the effect of the past. But that is in contradiction to what Scripture tells us. As Jesus said what is happening to us today is about what we have done, not because of someone else.

That means the only way to solve the problem is to come before God and confess our sin and very likely our agreement with the choices that our ancestors have made. The Bible is very clear that once we confess then all the past is dealt with and forgotten (1 Jn 1:9).

That does not mean we will not have to deal with the effects of their choices on our lives today. In the same way we must deal with the effects of our past sin on our lives today and tomorrow. We do need to be aware of what has happened in the past and break our ties to those events and practices. Children grow up with parents who are addicted to tobacco, alcohol, drugs and who are involved in occult activities. This can create a situation of bondage and we will need to be

prepared to pray with them and help them deal with the effect of their parent's choices on their lives.

There was a situation reported to me about a Christian family who was living with one of the parents. The parents were heavily involved in witchcraft. They reported that they were experiencing many difficulties and wondered what to do. They have two options. One option is to move away and so get out of the situation and its influence. Leaving means realizing this is not the place to be. It will take steps of faith. There is always the chance the parents, in anger at being judged and rejected for their activity will seek to harm the family through their witchcraft.

The other is to pray in faith, believing God will protect them. God has promised he will give us the victory. This will mean making clear statements that what the parents are doing is wrong and rejecting any involvement in those activities. Staying could result in the same kind of angry response. Staying without declaring their belief in God's judgment on witchcraft would open the door to further problems. God's judgment on those who practice witchcraft would then affect them as well as their parents.

The danger here is in allowing Satan to convince us that we are responsible for the sin of our ancestors. Further that those sins have power over us and in our lives. The truth is we live in a fallen world and are all candidates for the problems that exist in this world. Along side of that as Christians we become targets for Satan to attack in any way he can to cause us to fall or be afraid and so fail to trust God and his forgiveness.

5. Strongholds

A stronghold is a position that is established to protect oneself from attack. It can also be used as a base from which to launch an attack on an enemy. It can also be the means by which an enemy sets up a position of power to attack and then defend the territory taken from others. There are several methods by which a stronghold can be established in a person's life. The key concern here is how strongholds are established in this way.

Force – We are overcome by force, and control is gained against our will. To set up a stronghold by force requires the power to overcome a person or group and force them to accept such control in their lives and in their midst. There are other people, other beings that have the strength to control our lives and our world. This is possible when a person has no relationship with God. Satan and demons then can, by force, set up strongholds, but when God is present Satan is not strong enough to do so.

Invitation – An outside power is invited to come in and set up at stronghold. This is done to provide strength one does not have in order to gain resources or access benefits they would not otherwise have the power to obtain. For many this happens when they choose to place other priorities ahead of God. The invitation may not be explicit as in “come in and take control of this area of my life”. It may be more in the manner of preventing control by God which therefore allows by default or in a sense invites, another to take control. This opens the door to influencing many areas of a person's life.

Carelessness – The person is just not paying attention. Their focus is on the cares of this world or personal desires, but not where it should be. This allows others to gain control and influence. When a person is careless anything can happen.

Carelessness means doing a poor job of protecting what a person has or preparing for the attacks that will come. This means when one is attacked they are unable to resist and so can lose control.

Negligence – This means that the person is not doing what is needed to prevent others from influencing them. They are not taking time to understand what could happen. The person is not seeking out needed information and training to be able to deal with what may happen in his/her life. It often involves a denial of the reality of the world and so the person is often not prepared for what happens.

Choice – A person decides that they will set up a stronghold to protect or maintain their way of life and choices. This can involve gathering people of like minds around them. It can involve formulating arguments and explanations to support the choices made. This requires an act of will. As a Christian it is possible to choose to establish strongholds as well. This involves choices and activities that allow one's life to be strengthened. Such activities as the study of God's word, involvement in prayer, gathering together with other Christians for fellowship and encouragement, and meeting together to worship God, will help build strongholds both to defend a person from attack and protect them as they enter the world around them.

The greatest concern is when God is not a part of the process and Satan, demons and other people are allowed to set up these strongholds to control and affect the life of a person. A person can choose to create defensive attitudes and actions to protect their sinful desires and actions. All of these must be destroyed for us to continue to grow in our relationship with God. As Christians we have access to the power to destroy such places of power and influence in our lives.

It will be helpful to look at a few of the key scriptures used to define this topic and see what the Bible says to us about the power that exists to help us deal with :

Strongholds

2 Corinthians 10:1-18

This word, and its Greek word of origin, is only used once in the entire New Testament. Paul is talking about the power we have to deal with the world in which we live. We have the power not just to deal with strongholds but demolish them. To utterly destroy is the concept, leaving nothing from which to rebuild. Paul uses the same term of destroy, to describe how he deals with arguments and pretensions that set themselves up against God.

It is interesting to note that nowhere in this passage are Satan and his demons referred to. The focus of this Scripture is on the attitudes of the church in Corinth and how the world is influencing them. We could state by inference that this includes Satan as the “Ruler of this world, “but that would only be by inference and is not directly stated.

The issue here is the strongholds of pride and obstinacy that are being created by the members of the church and their defiance of God’s commands and teaching. The focus then is not on the skills and abilities of Paul but on the word of God and the power of the Spirit. These are the weapons that are to be used to demolish the strongholds, arguments and pretensions being set up by various individuals to give themselves permission to continue in sin and defiance of the truth, while still implying how mature and strong they are to others.

Bind

Matthew 12:29; 16:19; 18:18; Luke 13:16

The term bind refers to the action of restraining a person's activity. It involves both the authority and the ability to restrain. While it is used many times there are four references that are of particular interest in this subject. In each of these there is a stronger individual binding a person or activity.

In Matthew 12:29 we have the discussion of Jesus about binding the strongman in order to take control of his house and possessions. In this passage it is Jesus using his power to enter and bind the strongman. This allows the stronghold to be taken over, because its master has been restrained. This discussion relates to when Satan or demons take control of a person's life and they are released from this control by the power of God.

Matthew 16:18 uses the word "bind" following Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus states that it is this truth that will make it possible for the church to exist. This truth will also provide the church with the power to resist attacks that originate from the gates of hell, or the stronghold of Satan. At this point Jesus tells them that whatever they bind on earth will be bound in heaven. This discussion helps us realize that we have access to the power we need to resist and repel the activity of Satan and his kingdom.

In Matthew 18:18 we are again told that what we bind on earth will be bound in heaven. The context of this passage is about the steps involved in dealing with sin in the church. The key focus is when one who has been confronted by their sin refuses to confess then the church has the right to deal with that sin and the person involved. They are to bind them and their activity.

This is then expanded to deal with issues that are broader than that of sin. It includes the requests we bring before God for his action. Scripture says that when two agree on what needs to be done then God will respond (Mt 18:19). This must occur when people are gathered in the name of Jesus. God must be an integral part of what is being decided. The power to bind is dependent on the presence of Jesus, not just on our desires.

At the same time we are also directed that what we loose on earth will be loosed in heaven (Mt 18:18). As we understand what needs to be done and come to agreement we are able to loose the resources needed to accomplish what has been agreed upon. When dealing with Satan and demons what is needed is the power to loose people from their bondage. When dealing with sin it is about loosing the power of forgiveness. When dealing with the gospel it is about loosing the power of the gospel to save those who are lost.

In Luke 13:16 Jesus tells of a woman whom Satan has bound in illness for eighteen years. Here we see the power of Satan to bind a person physically. Jesus looses the woman from the binding power of Satan. We are not told how Satan managed to bind her body. But it is clear that Satan has the power to physically impact our lives and so place us in bondage.

This is the only time that Jesus identifies a physical condition as being caused by Satan. As has been mentioned elsewhere the presence and activities of demons can cause a number of physical problems. These are usually the result of demonic possession. In this case there is no mention of possession, only that Satan has found a way to impact her life resulting in a physical problem. Satan has power, but the power of God is more than adequate to release her.

Strong man

Matthew 12:29; Mark 3:27; Luke 11:21

In responding to the Pharisee's accusation that Jesus drives out demons by the power of Satan, Jesus tells the story of a strong man and his house. In order to enter this house it is necessary to tie up or bind the strong man first. To do so requires one who is stronger than the strong man. Once the strong man is bound, then that one can rob his house and carry off his possessions.

The obvious possession that Jesus would be to carry would be the lives of those that had been possessed by the demons or servants of the strong man, who is Satan. The second possession being taken from the strong man is his kingdom. Since his power to control has been bound then he no longer has the ability to control and direct his kingdom as before. The last possession taken would be those who are influenced by the activity of the strong man. Those trapped in sin can now be released from the power of their sin.

As one can see from these few Scriptures the topic of strongholds and the power to deal with them is not simple. We cannot make blanket statements about what is and isn't a stronghold. We cannot say who is in control of each setting; Satan, a demon, others or even myself.

We must carefully evaluate each so that we can determine how to deal with that setting. If the problem is a person's desires and persistence in sin, that will require dealing with the person directly. If the problem is the influence of others on a person that will involve other issues and concerns. If the problem is lack of knowledge, lack of preparation, or lack of concern then again the solution will be different. If the problem is being caused by Satan and demons then we will have to approach the situation from that perspective.

Each one of them requires power to identify the issue, power to overcome who or what is causing the issue, and power to maintain the choices made. Let us be careful not to too quickly call everything a demon, or a stronghold of Satan and so miss the real issue. At the same time let us not be afraid to be prepared to deal with Satan and his demons. We have been given the authority to do so and if we don't then we leave the person in a desperate situation.

Finally we must be aware that these issues affect more than just individuals, but churches as well. Churches can place themselves in similar situations. Churches can make choices and decisions that create the same kinds of problems and concerns.

God has authorized us to deal with the strongholds because they hinder the growth of individuals and the church. God has authorized us to act and deal with what is preventing the church and members of the body from truly experiencing the life he has for us. God has authorized us to set free those who are imprisoned and oppressed (Lk 4:18).

Section G

Conclusion – Seeking Power

As we can see there is no doubt that power exists in the spiritual world. It is real. If the source of the power is Satan and demons, it is dangerous and focuses on our destruction.

How we treat this power and try to access this power is a concern. We need to carefully consider why we are seeking power and how that choice affects us and those around us. There are many ways in which we try to gain access to spiritual power and its sources.

Through Good Works

One of the primary ways we try to access power relates to acquiring salvation. Many people are trying to live lives that are what they call “good.” The focus of this effort is to gain the power needed to earn a place in heaven. Many believe that they have the power to do what is necessary to cause God to let them in.

According to Scripture this is a false belief. Our works do not contain in them the power to overcome the effect of sin (Ep 2:8-9). That power resides only in the resurrection of Christ. Our access to that power is not through any activity we may do. It is based on a realization that we do not have the power to change our condition. It is only as we confess that our sin is the cause and seek forgiveness that the power needed to change our state is made available (1 Jn 1:9). It is through Jesus Christ that we are saved from our sin and so gain a place in heaven (Ac 4:12).

The second activity in the church that involves power is again related to good works. We work hard to improve our status in the church and to improve the possibility of gaining

positions of power. This again is the reverse of what God has told us (Mt 10:43). We are not to seek places of power. Actually the most important place in the church is one of service not of power. It is in setting aside ourselves that we find the truth and learn about love. Loving others is where the real power is. That is what God has said to us over and over. Anything that is done for self is destroyed. That which is done out of love for God and others will last (1 Co 3:12-16).

Through Physical Demonstration

The third area in which we seek power relates to outward signs. There are many who say that in order to truly be a Christian this or that must happen. This would relate to areas like baptism, sanctification, and other outward signs that God is in your life. The focus then is on the outward physical event and not on what may or may not be happening in the heart.

Yet it is very possible to be baptized and have no change in the heart. It is also possible to be slain in the spirit as a result of emotional factors which have nothing to do with the activity of the spirit. It is possible to dance, jump and sing and have no change in the heart. It is possible for people to come and cry over their sin and make a great show of their spirituality but that is all it is, a show.

God tells us very clearly that he is not concerned about the outward appearance. He looks at the heart (2 Sa 16:7). We need to be alert and aware that there are those who are seeking power and believe that going through the right motions will give them access to the power they are seeking. They want to convince us and God that they are worthy.

Through Spiritual Gifts

The fourth area relates to the gifts of the spirit. Over the years many have made lists of the gifts. They are as short as the two lists found in Ephesians 4 and 1 Cor 12 and much longer lists created from collecting ideas throughout the Epistles. Various tools have been developed that can help us determine what our spiritual gifts are. It is good to have an understanding of one's gifts and abilities. It can help a person to focus on areas of strength and so make greater use of their energy and resources.

The danger is that some people, who want to have power in their lives, can misuse the tools. They want others to know what their gift is and they will seek to answer the questions so it appears they have a more prominent gift. There are some who will help you find the gift you are looking for. It has the danger of creating classes of Christians. Those who know and those who don't know. Those who have and those who don't have.

An extreme form of this is when a given group insists that everyone must have a certain gift as proof that they are saved and a member of God's family. If you don't speak in tongues, if you don't have the power to heal, if you have never been touched in this or that manner, you are not really a mature Christian. In fact, until you have the "gift," your salvation is on probation, waiting until it happens.

The only gift that everyone is encouraged to seek after is love. Paul makes this very clear when he discusses love and its relationship to all the gifts in 1 Corinthians 13. Without love the other gifts have no value. Without love we are empty and our message is empty. In fact only some people are given the other gifts, but all are encouraged to seek out the gift of love.

Through Miraculous Gifts

The fifth area relates to the more visible gifts and how they are used. It is easy to see how exciting it would be to be able to heal those who are sick, to drive out demons from those who are possessed, to be able to predict what is going to happen in another person's life and other such miraculous activities. Many people believe this is where the real power is and so they are looking for these miraculous powers or to be associated with those who have such powers.

It is not hard to find an advertisement or program where a key person is publicized as having a certain ability. People are told to come and they will be healed, or come and the demons will be driven away. They are told to come and hear a prophet explain the details of the end times. They are to come and experience spiritual power in their lives. None of these claims are completely valid and should be studied with great care.

No one can claim to heal all who come. Even Jesus did not heal everyone. It states clearly that in Nazareth he did not perform many miracles because of their lack of faith (Mt 13:54-58). In Mark 1:34 it says he healed many, not all, who had various diseases. This same phrase is used in Mark 3:10 and 6:13. We must remember though that in many other settings it does say that Jesus healed everyone who came (Mt 8:16, 12:15, Mark 6:56). But we also must remember we are talking about Jesus.

In Acts we have records of Philip, Peter and Paul being involved in healing ministries and miraculous events (Ac 2:43; 8:13; 19:11). At the same time we never hear about Thomas, Stephen and many others doing the same. The record also does not tell us that everywhere they went were they involved in such miraculous events. In particular was

the ministry in Berea. Here the focus was on God's word. They were focused on knowing God and the truth and Luke praised them for making this the priority (Ac 17:11).

It is also interesting to note that when Timothy was not well Paul did not pray for his immediate healing but gave him medical advice (1 Ti 5:23).

All of this makes one wonder about anyone who claims that when he/she is present people will be healed. But when the healing doesn't occur then their disclaimer is that the person's faith was not great enough. Actually when God is at work he can heal no matter what the level of one's faith. Jesus healed the lame man at the pool without the man's consent or any indication of faith (Jn 5:6-9). Jesus healed the man born blind without asking if he had faith (Jn 9:6-7). In other settings it is clear that Jesus was aware of and concerned about the level of a person's faith (Mt 9:2, 22; Mk 5:34; Lk 17:19).

But what happens when there is no healing. Some might say that the person's faith was not enough, or that there is unconfessed sin, some other excuse that will explain why they could not heal you. But what if God chooses not to heal? Then it is not about faith, it is not about sin, it is about God's purposes and how he wants to work in your life.

Paul had a problem. He sought God out for healing or relief. God said no and not to worry about it. God would be with Paul and give him the strength needed to carry on. He would not be healed. It was not about faith, it was not about power, it was about God's purposes being carried out in Paul's life (2 Co 12:7-10).

In truth we are told not to go to a faith healer for help. We are told to call on the elders and ask them to pray. Here it is

the faith of the ones who are praying that is important (Ja 5:14-15).

One more item about healing. In every setting where healing occurred it was not the primary purpose of that event. The primary purpose was to proclaim the gospel. Jesus traveled about, not to setting up healing programs; but to preach God's word and teach the people. The disciples were not told to tell people to come and be healed. We too always need to be sure what the primary focus is; that of proclaiming the message of the gospel.

Through Prophecy

We all would like to know what will happen in our life tomorrow. When we find someone who claims to be able to look into the future we become both interested and somewhat fearful. There are a group of people who claim to be prophets. They focus on telling people what tomorrow will bring. The larger portion of these people want us to believe they can tell us about the end times.

This claim is debatable. Jesus said he only knows in general about those times. He further stated the angels did not have access to such information (Mk 13:32). The information given is not specific but general in content. Many in the early church felt that what they experienced were the end times and there were prophets then claiming to have critical knowledge. The church in Thessalonica was one of those affected by such teaching. When Paul wrote to them he had to clear up a number of issues that resulted from the teachings of these prophets (2 Th 2:1-2).

There have been many such prophets over the years proclaiming they had special knowledge about Christ's return. They have been part of the cults and part of the church. In the early church there were people who believed it

was Rome. In the 1800's there was a group that claimed the Catholic Church was the antichrist. Some said that Hitler was the anti-Christ. In the 60's and 70's there were a group of them that proclaimed that before the year 2000 Christ would return. They wrote books supporting their analysis. Later many looked at the USSR as the one to bring on the end times. They were all wrong.

Scripture says that anyone who claims to be a prophet must be accurate 100% of the time. They are allowed no mistakes. If there is one error then they are not from God and are to be killed (Dt 18:20-22). While being a prophet was a highly desired position it also was a position of danger. To speak anything other than what God spoke was to place one in great danger. To make a mistake could result in death.

Today we are not so strict. We call their failures simply a mistake, they are only human. However, God does not tolerate those who speak lies in his name (Jer 14:14-15). We are warned about false prophets. They will be in the church (2 Pe 2:1). They will claim to know what is to happen and fool people into listening. We will be tolerant of their mistakes because we hope to have access to the power their potential knowledge represents. Those that desire to call themselves prophets are seeking after power.

The question we all wrestle with is, can we know the future? The answer is simple. NO. Only God knows the future. What is possible is to frame the future. We can bring into being what we hear by our own will. We can speak self-fulfilling prophecies. We can say this will happen and then make it happen. Satan and demons can do the same. They will have greater power than we do to make it happen. The key is that neither we nor Satan's group can make it happen 100% of the time. At some point the self-fulfilling prophecy will fail because we cannot know or control everything around the event we want to happen.

Some of those who claim to be prophets are really good at interpreting what is happening and really good at suggesting what could happen next. They might get it right but not all of the time. Once they make a mistake then we need to see them for what they are - false prophets - people who are after power, using sources other than God to do so.

We need to think through why we are giving them access to our lives. We need to think through why we should even be concerned about tomorrow. Jesus tells us very clearly not to worry about tomorrow, that is God's business (Mt 6:34). Our task is to live today in the power of God. The challenge is to make our plans and leave them in God's hands.

Through Power

When we seek spiritual power for the wrong reasons Paul tells us what will follow. He lists these results in Galatians 5:19-21. Some of them relate to personal issues. When we seek out power it will increase the level of sin in our lives (sexual immorality, impurity, envy). It will lead us into seeking out the power of Satan and demons (witchcraft, idolatry). It will also become a source of division and lead entire groups of people to become involved in selfish and sinful activity (dissensions, factions, orgies). It will clearly reveal that the purpose of having such power is selfish.

Seeking power in this manner will prevent them from entering heaven. These are the goats Jesus speaks about in Matthew 25:41-46, who seek after and use power for their own benefits, caring nothing about others. They are those who will be condemned, who claimed to act in Jesus name, performing miracles and professing they followed Jesus (Matthew 7:22). They gained power for their own purposes. They will be rejected.

Through Love

The best test of whether someone had been given power from God and that it is being used properly is found in Galatians 5:22-23. When we seek after spiritual power for the right reasons, especially as relates to love, then the results are very different. The focus is no longer on us but on others. We will learn gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. We will see our heart changed and be able to experience and share love, joy, and peace. We will be able to build up others through patience, kindness and goodness. We will be the sheep that are allowed into heaven by Jesus (Mt 25:34). We will not need to perform great wonders to prove anything to God.

We will be those who are blessed. We know God. It is in that knowledge where true spiritual power lies. Read the beatitudes and note that those who were blessed are those who seek after truth not power (Mt 5:3-12).

The greatest work we can do, the greatest power we can possess, is to have the knowledge of God that will lead another to salvation. Healing will not last, prophecy will not last, miracles will not last (1 Co 13:1-2). They will all end. Only love will last and the works that come from love. Jesus did not come to perform miracles and display power, he came to reveal what true power is. He came to save the lost and restore their relationship with God.

Remember Jesus told the disciples not to become too excited about the wonders that had performed (Lk 10:20). The greater miracle was to have their name written down in the book of life. If the power we are seeking, the power we are using, does not lead people into the kingdom, then it is false, it is of man or of Satan and is to be rejected. The greatest power is the power of God's love and that is the power we need in our lives above all else.

