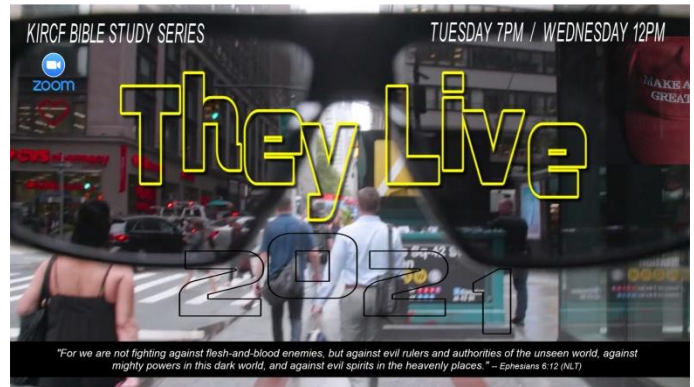


## ***Demonic Influence and Mental Disorders***



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In exploring the relationship between demonic influences and mental disorders, we must remember ... that the question is not whether Satan is involved in mental disorders; rather, it is a question of how he is involved.

***Mental disorders, like any other human malady, came with the Fall and the entrance of sin into the world.*** All human suffering can be traced, in part, to that momentous event. Satan's role in the Fall ... and thus in all earthly ill, must be acknowledged. Discerning the means of his involvement in mental disorders is the issue at hand.

- [To help us do this, we will be examining at the following excerpts taken from *Counseling and the Demonic* by Rodger K. Bufford]

As we examine the relationship of demonic influence and possession to mental disorders, it is important to keep in mind several considerations. ***The First*** ... consideration must be that of distinguishing among spiritual, psychological, and physical problems. ***Second*** ... given our assumption that mental disorders and demon possession both occur, we must realize that a given person may show any of the following conditions:

- 1) Physical disorder alone
- 2) Demon possession alone
- 3) Mental disorder alone
- 4) A combination of physical disorder, demon possession, and mental disorder

Demon possession is understood to be a spiritual problem, while a mental disorder is a psychological problem. ***Third*** ... it is important to remember that Satan was involved in the entrance of sin into our world, and thus in the many changes that resulted. Whether the problem is spiritual, psychological, physical, or a combination of these, Satan is nonetheless involved.

In practical terms in an attempt to distinguish between ***demon possession and mental disorders***, we must observe the person who shows disturbed behavior and determine whether or not a demon is present. ***Demons do not readily reveal their presence for analysis and treatment.*** If we knew beforehand that the person had a demon, then there would be no difficulty in distinguishing demonic influence from mental disorders.

Comparison of the two conditions reveals that virtually all of the symptoms associated with demonic influence are duplicated in at least one mental disorder as defined by the ***Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) of Mental Disorders***.

Supernatural knowledge is often claimed by individuals with the hallucinations and delusions of psychotic disorders, especially paranoid schizophrenics. Exploits of unusual strength and endurance may be observed in manic episodes and in catatonic conditions (where normal fatigue reactions seem to be absent). Nakedness or deterioration of dress and appearance is common in the psychotic disorders, especially in schizophrenia.

Loss of speech and hearing, and blindness, along with a number of other physical symptoms, are characteristic of the Conversion (hysterical) Disorders. Seizures occur in epilepsy and a variety of other disorders: "Most of the etiological (medicinal) agents underlying chronic brain syndromes can and do cause convulsions, particularly syphilis, intoxication, trauma, cerebral arteriosclerosis, and intracranial neoplasms."

Speaking in a different voice, and even the appearance of two or more distinct personalities are classified as Dissociative Disorders (e.g. , Multiple Personality Disorder). Bizarre behavior is characteristic of all of the psychotic conditions. Finally, fierce and violent behavior is found in certain psychotic conditions, especially Delusional (paranoid) Disorder, as well as in Intermittent Explosive Disorder, Antisocial Personality, and Conduct Disorders of Childhood and Adolescence.

Those who are demon possessed sometimes admit that fact. Claims to be demon possessed are specifically included as a consideration in the diagnosis of Multiple Personality Disorder. *Finally, persons who are demon possessed often show involvement in occult practices*; while this activity is not a defining symptom for any specific mental disorder, it seems likely that it could be observed in persons diagnosed with a number of disorders.

Demonic influence and mental disorders are conceptually distinct phenomena, but in view of the extensive overlap among symptoms, it may be difficult in a given instance to make a firm conclusion regarding which phenomenon is present. See Table 4 comparison ...

Comparison of Demonic Influence and Mental Disorders <sup>15</sup>	
Characteristics of Demonic Influence	Parallels among Mental Disorders
Supernatural knowledge	Hallucinations, delusions of psychotic disorders; God told me . . . etc. (Also note parallels with psychics)
Supernatural strength	Observed in manic episodes, certain psychotic conditions; e.g. catatonic does not show normal fatigue.
Going about naked	Deterioration of appearance and social graces is typical of psychotic disorders, especially schizophrenia, and of schizotypal personality disorder
Unable to hear, speak; blind	Associated with conversion (hysterical) disorders
Seizures	Observed with epilepsy and many chronic brain syndromes such as syphilis, intoxication, trauma, cerebral arteriosclerosis, and intracranial neoplasms
Use of "different" voice; presence of distinct personality	Commonly found in dissociative disorders, which include multiple personality disorder
Bizarre behavior	Characteristic of psychoses
Fierce, violent behavior	Common in certain psychotic conditions, especially, paranoid; also found in intermittent explosive disorder, antisocial personality, and unsocialized aggressive reaction of childhood or adolescence
Claims of demonic influence	Found in multiple personality disorder
Involvement in occult practices	May occur with many disorders, though not used as diagnostic criterion

Table 4

One final observation is that ... there is also similarity between organic and nonorganic mental disorders. For example, disorientation, mental confusion, and depressed mood may be the result of such organic causes as exposure to toxic chemicals or a minor stroke, or may result from nonorganic factors, such as a psychotic depressive condition. Thus, it is important to remember that similarity in symptoms does not necessarily mean that the sources of the symptoms are identical. Nor does it necessarily mean that the symptoms are identical in all respects.

### ***Satan's Character***

Another reason for highlighting distinctions between mental disorders and demonic influence involves the nature and character of Satan. Satan is a deceiver who seeks to hide his working in a variety of ways. Thus, it is not surprising that demonic influence or possession sometimes appears much like mental or physical disorders, and that such similarity may be most common in Western culture where there is a high degree of concern with mental and physical disorders.

### ***Personal Evil***

Personal evil is a complex issue. It is clear that volition is involved to some degree in many mental disorders. Factitious Disorders, for example, are defined as *"physical or psychological symptoms that are intentionally produced or feigned."* A voluntary component may also be involved in Somatoform Disorders and Dissociative Disorders. In fact, it is believed that the symptoms of most mental disorders may be voluntarily exaggerated for personal benefit; often this is referred to as *"secondary gain."*

***Another category of mental disorder that involves personal volition is drug and alcohol abuse or dependence.*** For some individuals such dependence grows out of medical treatment for pain, injury, or illness. For most, it begins with the choice to drink, smoke, snort, or inject the substance. It is now widely believed that, regardless of how the habit first began, biological factors play an important role in determining which individuals will become dependent upon drugs or alcohol. However, for most, volition plays at least a minor role; had they never participated to begin with, abuse or dependence never would have developed.

***There is considerable controversy regarding the relationship between personal volition and mental disorders.*** The relationship between volition and demonic influence is similarly complex. King Saul, for example, chose to disobey God, and as a consequence God's spirit departed from him (see 1 Samuel 16:14). But was not Saul's affliction by the evil spirit an unanticipated consequence of his sin, much as becoming an alcoholic is an unanticipated result of choosing to drink alcoholic beverages?

It seems likely that in most cases the person has made a clear, conscious choice that leads to influence or control by demons. Often the person does not initially recognize the demonic influence; recognition comes later, when the control is well established.

### ***Personal Faith***

The role of personal faith is another factor in seeking to discern whether demonic influence is involved. A number of Scriptures warn of the need to be on guard and to arm ourselves for protection from the evil one. These make it clear that a Christian can be influenced by Satan (Eph. 6:12-17; 1 Pet. 5:8-9). It also seems clear that faith in God and faithful obedience to God are important factors in protection from the power of Satan and his emissaries (Rev. 12:1-11). It is important at this point to remember that all false worship is ultimately worship of demons, and of their chief, Satan.

### ***Discerning the Spirits***

In this approach the helper seeks within himself or herself for the guidance of God's Spirit through a "word of wisdom" or "word of knowledge." In some instances, God's guidance is sought in the context of a diligent search of the Scriptures for behavioral patterns and attitudes that distinguish those who are seeking to honor and serve God from those who are not. The basic theological conviction underlying this approach is that God is a discerner of spirits, and that he is able to reveal his omniscient knowledge to the receptive servant.

***One basic problem with exercising spiritual discernment is that we are warned that Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light, and that it may be difficult to distinguish his human followers from citizens of the kingdom of God.***

This approach has biblical support, and there is little doubt regarding God's ability to know or communicate knowledge about the presence of an evil spirit. However, we must consider carefully the question of whether God chooses to reveal special knowledge such as this ... since such detailed knowledge about specific individuals is rarely revealed by God. ***As a general rule, medical, scientific, and theological knowledge comes as a result of carefully studying what has already been revealed.***

***Discerning of spirits is a legitimate approach, but must be used with considerable caution.*** Special care must be taken to insure that the "victim" and the helper do not develop unrealistic expectations about the effectiveness of this approach.

### ***Testing the Spirits***

Testing the spirits is a process that involves directly addressing the presumed demons, commanding them in the name of Jesus Christ to acknowledge their presence, and to state their name and rank.

There are those who propose that in the name of Jesus we command the evil spirit to come forth and acknowledge its presence, state its name, and give its rank. Believing that since God has won a major victory over Satan in the resurrection, and Satan and demons are thus subject to our control, they must respond to this use of our authority.

- **Talking with demons is not recommended. Holding a dialogue with [demons] is not only unproductive, it is dangerous ... not to mention that demons are known liars!**

Table 5 presents a brief summary of the major behavioral indicators of demonic influence, culled from a number of sources. These are divided into two groups: Cultic or Occultic Religious Practices (elsewhere referred to as Avenues into the Demonic) and Other Clues.

<b>Behavioral Indicators of Possible Demonic Influence</b>	
A.	Cultic or Occultic Religious Practices
1.	Involvement in the practice of magic.
2.	Involvement in occultic religious practices.
3.	Conscious invitation extended to Satan and/or demons to become involved in the person's life.
4.	Involvement in Eastern religions or "New Age" channeling practices.
5.	Family history of demonic influence, witchcraft, palmistry, Satanic worship, or other occult practices.
6.	History of living in areas without a strong Judeo-Christian cultural influence.
7.	Participation in American Indian or Oriental religious/cultural practices.
8.	Personal use of tarot cards, Ouija boards, horoscopes, palmistry, fortune tellers.
B.	Other Clues
1.	Disinterest in or absence of spiritual growth by a professing Christian.
2.	Extreme negative reactions to the mention of God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and to Christian religious practices.
3.	Systematic pattern of personal sinfulness.
4.	Prominent evidence of unforgiveness/bitterness and vengefulness.
5.	Unusually high resistance to benefits from medication and psychotherapy.
6.	Personality disturbance and especially multiple personality disorder (a dissociative disorder), rather than schizophrenia or psychosis.
7.	Addictive patterns such as abuse of alcohol or drugs, habitual gambling or sexual preoccupations.
8.	Personal preoccupation with power, position, wealth, and fame.

**Table 5**

### **Summary**

Three major approaches to discovering the presence of demonic influence have been developed. These involve the use of spiritual insight or the spiritual gift of "discerning the spirits," examination of personal history and behavioral indicators, and testing the spirits. **The third approach is discounted as of dubious merit and without biblical support.**

***The approaches of spiritual discernment and examination of behavioral indicators both have some merit ... though each is limited as well.*** Thus a prudent counselor will use elements of both and look for consistency in the conclusions drawn from the two approaches.

***Because of the potential for interaction among the various dimensions of the person, there is a risk of overlooking problems in one or more areas.*** Thus, it is strongly advised that the person's spiritual, psychological, and physical functioning be carefully evaluated, and any needed treatment be given in each area. Usually, this will require referral to others, or a team approach. If these precautions are taken, it seems likely that an incorrect preliminary assessment of the person's status regarding demonic influence need not be a major problem.

### ***SPIRITUAL WARFARE***

Since the Bible is silent about procedures for exorcism, we will begin with the clear commandments and prohibitions regarding how we are to deal with demonic influence.

***The basic biblical teachings regarding the believer's means of becoming free from demonic influence involve seven aspects which commence following the new creation.***

- 1. Considering ourselves dead to sin;**
- 2. Being filled with the Holy Spirit;**
- 3. Fleeing from temptation;**
- 4. Submitting ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness;**
- 5. Practicing righteousness;**
- 6. Regular, ongoing confession of sin;**
- 7. Resisting Satan and his demons by the power of our testimony and with the armor of God.**

### ***PRACTICAL APPLICATION***

***The counselee needs to personally receive Christ if he or she is not a believer.*** As we have earlier said, if not a Christian, the person belongs to the kingdom of Satan. This has two major practical implications. First, the person may not desire to change, and second, even if the desire is present, without the presence of the Holy Spirit he or she may lack the necessary spiritual resources to make the needed changes.

The counselee needs to be active. He or she must confess and renounce all sin and occultic involvement; all objects or connections with the spirit world must be removed and, preferably, destroyed (see Acts 8:9-25). Satan and demons must be actively resisted. Conscious commitment to Christ and to following the commands of Scripture should be reflected in reading and memorizing Scripture, praying for personal growth and deliverance, participating in Christian fellowship, serving in whatever capacity is suitable, and in sharing the gospel. He or she should solicit prayer from understanding fellow-believers.