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## Do Demons Possess People Today?

*Edward O. Bragwell, Jr.*

Occasionally, I run into those who want to know whether or not demons possess people today. Sometimes we see accounts of supposed demon possessions in newspapers, in magazines, or on television shows. Demon possession has also been a favorite subject in Hollywood, with such movies as "The Exorcist" and "The Omen". With so much fanciful material bombarding our lives, it is no wonder that we run into people who have questions concerning this. Let's, then, look at what the Bible says about it.

First of all, one who examines the Bible will have to immediately admit that demons or unclean spirits did possess people in the days of Christ. There are numerous examples. There was the man in the synagogue. (Mark 1:23-28) There were the two men of the Gergesenes. (Matt. 8:28-34) There was Mary Magdalene. (Mark 16:9) There were others as well. Jesus demonstrated his power by casting out these demons, and was even wrongly accused of using Satan's power to cast them out. (Matt. 12:24) The power to cast out these demons was also given to His disciples. (Matt. 10:1; Luke 10:17) So no one can deny the fact that demon possession did occur at one time.

The question that we want to address, however, is whether or not demons still possess people today. Let me say from

the outset that I believe that the Bible strongly indicates that people ceased to be possessed by demons after the days of the New Testament. There are several things that causes one to come to this conclusion. First, the ability to cast out demons was usually connected with the ability to speak in tongues, heal people of diseases, and to prophesy. (Mark 16:17,18; Matt. 10:1; cf. Matt. 7:22) We know from I Corinthians 13 that the ability to prophesy and the ability to speak in tongues ceased with the coming of the complete revelation of God. We realize that in general, the miraculous spiritual gifts that the early disciples possessed, were given to them in order to confirm the word that was being revealed at the time. (Mark 16:20) When the complete revelation had come, there was no more need for them. These spiritual gifts then ceased from the earth upon the completion of God's revelation and one would assume that the ability to cast out demons ceased with the ability to speak in tongues and prophesy and heal the sick and so on. If the ability to cast out demons has ceased, then it would follow that the possibility to be possessed by demons no longer exists. It would be ridiculous to think that God would allow us to be possessed by demons with no way to rid ourselves of them.

I'm sure, however, that there may be some reading this who will say, "Alright, I realize that the ability to prophesy and speak in tongues have ceased, because they are specifically mentioned as things that would pass away. But demon possession is not so mentioned, so how can you be so sure that it ceased at the same time?" I think that we can turn to Old Testament prophesy for that answer. Several Messianic prophesies tell us about what will take place during the time that the Messiah's kingdom is established. One such prophesy is found in Zechariah 13:1-4. Here Zechariah talks of a day when "a fountain shall be opened" to His people "for sin and uncleanness". This is clearly a reference to the time when the blood of Christ would be made available to take away sins. The prophesy goes on to say that three other things would happen "in that day". He says that the name of idols would be cut off from the land, a reference to the fact that those in God's kingdom do not worship idols but the true God. He goes on to say that the prophet and the unclean spirit would be caused to depart from the land. As we have already seen, eventually prophesy ceased in His kingdom. It was done away with. So today if one claims to be a prophet we know that he is a liar. Zechariah says that if anyone still prophesies, he will be told, "You have spoken lies." It is impossible for one to speak prophesies when prophesies have ceased, and if one does you know he is a false prophet. But notice that at the same time the prophets were to depart from the land, the unclean spirit was to depart from the land. So just as surely as prophesies have ceased, people have ceased to be possessed by unclean spirits or demons. Homer Halley makes the following comment concerning this prophesy: "In the conquest of Christ over Satan and his forces, unclean spirits have ceased to control men as they did in the time of the ministry of Christ and the apostles." (A Commentary On The Minor Prophets, p. 392).

While demons do not possess men today, we need to realize that it is possible for us to allow Satan himself to control our lives. It is him that we need to be concerned with today and not some demons that might possess us. While the

demons of Christ's day came in and took control of someone against their will, Satan can only control our lives if we allow him to do so. So we need to be diligent in our efforts to keep him from controlling our lives. (1 Pet. 5:8,9) We need to turn to Jesus and let him control our lives.

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## Pep Rally Religion

*Bill Robinson, Jr.*

An esteemed friend, who is neither cynical or grumpy, astutely observes that most folks (including many Christians) are more interested in having a pep rally than they are in having sound preaching when it comes to gospel meetings. Looking at the titles in a religious book store these days one soon learns that my friend's perception may not be all that blurred.

I have read a good number of books by popular authors of the so-called positive mental attitude (PMA) philosophy. Some of the material is good but I seldom if ever recommend it because a vast majority of it leaves the impression one can manipulate God through prayer or one can think himself into spirituality by positive thinking. Furthermore, a lot of what I read is nothing more than an attempt to deify man and humanize God (Romans 1:20-22).

Frankly, I am a little alarmed when brethren start quoting Swindoll, Wiersebe and other popular denominational writers of our day more than the Bible. Furthermore, it is disturbing to think that some brethren would miss an assembling of the church to hear a Zig Zigar, Norman Vincent Peale or Charles Swindoll seminar. In fact it is down right disgusting to hear some brethren talk in such glowing terms and accolades about how such blatant false teachers as Zigar, Wiersebe, Swindoll, Peale, etc. are motivational; especially when they look down their noses at good faithful, godly men who for pure love of the truth have sacrificed to preach and defend it.

Answer for yourself brethren, do the Wiersebes, Swindolls, Ziglars and Peales of the world fit the class of men Paul was talking about when he wrote, "Breth-

Only One Pastor (Elder; Bishop) Is Un -  
scriptural

Though most religious bodies refer to only one man among them as "The Pastor" (and he might not come close to meeting the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1) we find not a single case in the New Testament of a church having only one pastor.

Here is what we do find:

"And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed." (Acts 14:23)

Note:

1.They DID NOT appoint ONE ELDER over every church.

2.They DID NOT appoint ONE ELDERSHIP over ALL THE CHURCHES.

3.They DID appoint ELDERS (plural) over EVERY CHURCH (singular).

"And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church." (Acts 20:17)

Note: The church at Ephesus DID NOT have AN ELDER, AN OVERSEER, or A PASTOR. That one congregation had ELDERS; OVERSEERS; and PASTORS (feeders of the flock), Acts 20:28.

"Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons." (Philippians 1:1)

Note: The church at Philippi DID NOT have A BISHOP and A DEACON, but BISHOPS (plural) and DEACONS (plural).

"For this cause I left thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting and ordain elders in every city." (Titus 1:5)

Note: Titus was not told to ordain A BISHOP in each city, but ELDERS (plural) in each city. Some may contend that this means that one eldership could oversee many congregations in one city. Let those who so argue show that each of these cities had many congregations. If they cannot, then we must conclude that there is authority for ONE ELDERSHIP over ONE CONGREGATION.

It is necessary that if a congregation had elders (bishops; pastors) that there be more than one. The Bible teaches it, wisdom and good judgment is served by it, and the danger of ungodly one man rule (which is exactly what led to the papacy of Roman Catholicism) is prevented by it.

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ren, be ye imitators together of me, and mark them that so walk even as ye have us for an example"? Or do they fit the category of those who "are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is perdition, whose god is the belly, and whose glory is their shame, who mind earthly things; (Phil. 3:17-19)?

If we fail to live by principle that nothing but the preaching of the gospel will save men from their sins then we are sure to die by it (Romans 1:16)! It was the preaching of the gospel which brought the church into existence in the First Century (Acts 2:16-47). It was by the preaching of the word that obedient penitent believers were added unto the Lord in the First Century (Acts 11:22ff). Furthermore, it was through the preaching of the gospel in the First Century that men surrendered their will to the Lord being

baptized for the remission of sins and went on their way rejoicing (Acts 8:26-38; 16:30-34). The meaning of the cross of Christ and His glorious resurrection provided the motivation - such a message was presented "not with excellency of speech or of wisdom" (1 Cor. 2:1).

Brethren, it is high time we got more emotional over the message instead of the messenger! When, and if, we do then we will be motivated to properly imitate those men whom the apostle encouraged - namely, those who love the message and who have willingly sacrificed to preach and defend it as it is "the power of God". We do not need pep rallies to psych us up ABOUT the religion of Christ - we need commitment TO GET INVOLVED IN the religion of Christ, reviving in our hearts a genuine love for plain gospel preaching.

## A church must have more than one pastor

*Tom Moody*

In most denominational churches one man is designated as "Pastor". Generally he is the local preacher. Denominational thinking sees the "Pastor" (the preacher) as the head of the congregation; the administrator; the president; the chairman of the board. This way of thinking is wholly unscriptural.

Unfortunately, this concept is not uncommon in churches of Christ, especially in congregations which have no elders. Let's carefully consider what the New Testament teaches concerning who pastors are and the necessity of a plurality of pastors (elders; shepherds; bishops) in one congregation.

### Different Words Referring To The Same Men

Pastors are not different from elders or bishops. The words do not mean the same things, but they are designating the same men. "Pastors" are shepherds tending and feeding the flock of God (Acts 20:28-31; 1 Peter 5:1-2). "Elders" are men of age and experience (1 Timothy 3:6 - "not a novice"). "Bishops" are overseers (Acts 20:28). Therefore such men, whether called "elders", "bishops", or "pastors" are men of age and experience who have the

responsibility of overseeing and tending the flock which is among them. To handle such an important task, men of proven ability and great competence are required. The qualities which must characterize these men are found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

Acts 20:17-28 shows all three of the terms (elder; bishop; pastor) referring to the same men. In Acts 20:17 Paul called for the "elders" of the church at Ephesus. In Acts 20:28 Paul calls them "bishops" (American Standard Version) or "overseers" (King James Version). In Acts 20:28-31 Paul states that they are to "feed" (pastor or shepherd) the flock and watch for the flock.

In Titus 1:5 Paul instructs Titus to "ordain elders". But in giving the qualifications for an elder, Paul calls him a "bishop", Titus 1:7.

Peter gives commands to the "elders", 1 Peter 5:1. In 1 Peter 5:2, Peter tells the elders to "feed" (pastor; shepherd) the flock of God which is among you". 1 Peter 5:2 also states that elders who are pastoring the flock are to "take the oversight thereof" - that is to say that they are "bishops" of the flock.