

## § 8. Doctrine of Creation

### Lecture 24

#### The Work of Demons

Today we want to wrap up our discussion of angels and demons by looking at the work of demons. Let's say a word about the present activity or work of demons in the world.

First of all, these demonic creatures blind unbelievers to the truth of the Gospel. In 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, Paul writes:

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God

That's a sobering thought, isn't it? When you encounter an unbeliever who resists the Gospel and is not willing to place his faith in Christ, Paul says that Satan has blinded his mind to keep him from seeing the truth of Christ's Gospel. So Satan is responsible for keeping people in unbelief and making them resistant to the message of the Gospel.

In 2 Timothy 2:24-26, speaking of the character which we are to develop as servants of Christ, Paul says,

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to every one, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth, and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

Notice that according to this verse unbelievers are already in the snare of Satan. They have already been captured by him to do his will. He prevents them from believing the Gospel and from knowing the truth. Moreover, their wills are captive to him to carry out his will. So unbelievers are both intellectually and volitionally impaired. The prayer is that, as we show forth a gracious character which is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in evangelizing unbelievers, God may grant them repentance so that they can escape Satan's snare and come to believe the Gospel and so find eternal life.

Second, Satan and these demonic beings seek to nullify the preaching of the Kingdom. In Mark chapter 4 we have the familiar parable of the sower. Notice what Jesus says in verse 15 in interpreting this parable – “And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown; when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word which is sown in them.” Those who are along the path where the seed is sown represent unbelievers who hear the word of the Kingdom. That's what this parable is about. It's a parable of the Kingdom. But Satan comes and snatches away that word so that they cannot respond to it. Thus, Satan seeks to counteract the preaching of the Kingdom of God.

Third, Satan and the demons seek to destroy the servants of God. That is to say, these creatures not only keep unbelievers in their snare, but they are out to destroy you. They hate you intensely. They will do anything that they can within their power to destroy you. Paul had founded a church in Thessalonica and then went on to other cities on his Mediterranean missionary tour. In time he became worried about the fate of those believers that he had left behind at this infant church in Thessalonica. He wrote 1 Thessalonians to them. In 1 Thessalonians 3:5 Paul writes to his Christian converts, “For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent that I might know your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and that our labor would be in vain.” Here Paul's fear was that Satan the tempter would have tempted the young Thessalonian Christians so that they would have apostatized and all of the apostle's labor would have gone down the drain and been for nothing because they had lapsed in their faith and so had been destroyed by Satan.

Also 2 Corinthians 2:11. Paul says that his forgiving the people in Corinth for their terrible sin was “to keep Satan from gaining the advantage over us; for we are not ignorant of his designs.” Satan's design was to destroy these Corinthian Christians – to gain the advantage over them, as Paul puts it. But Paul says he is not ignorant of that, and so he is careful to exercise the grace of Christian forgiveness in order to keep them in the faith.

Finally, 1 Timothy 3:6-7, speaking here of the qualifications for being a bishop in the church, Paul says, “He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil; moreover he must be well thought of by outsiders, or he may fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.” This is yet one more example of Satan seeking to undo Christians. He's trying to ensnare them, to capture them and so to bring them into condemnation.

In 2 Corinthians 11:28, Paul speaks of the suffering that he endured as an apostle of Christ. It's interesting that, in addition to all of the physical suffering he endured, he also says besides this there is “my anxiety for all the churches.” Why was Paul so anxious for the churches that he had founded? Well, simply because one of the activities of Satan and these demonic beings is to destroy God's servants and to render them as ineffective as they possibly can.

Fourth, these demons can possess people. Remember the story we read of the Gadarene demoniac who was indwelt by a legion of these demonic creatures in Mark 5. What was significant about that exorcism is that it said that the demons *came out of* the man and they *entered into* the swine that were feeding in the area. This is an example of demonic possession where the demons actually indwell a person. Also, look at the example of Judas Iscariot in John 13:27. We don't often think of Judas as being demon-possessed, but

when you read John 13:27 that seems to be what it indicates. During the Last Supper we read, “Then after the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, ‘What you are going to do, do quickly.’” And Judas went out to betray Christ. So he was apparently demon-possessed at that point. He had given himself over to Satan, and Satan had entered into him.

Other exorcisms performed by Jesus in the gospels should be seen, I think, in this light. For example, in Mark 1:32 we read, “That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.” This would be an example of Jesus’ ministry as an exorcist in casting out demons. Luke 9:42 gives another example. This is the story of the epileptic boy that was healed by Jesus. Luke 9:42 says, “While he was coming, the demon tore him and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father.” This would be another example of Jesus’ ability to exorcise these demons from people who were demon-possessed and thereby to show the inbreaking of God’s Kingdom in his ministry.

Fifth, Satan and his demons harass God’s servants. If they can’t destroy you, if they can’t possess you, then they will at least harass you. In 1 Thessalonians 2:18 Paul says to the Thessalonians, “we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us.” Paul wanted to come and visit the Thessalonians once again to see if they were holding to the faith, but Satan was throwing obstacles in Paul’s path preventing him from carrying out the mission that he desired to do.

Also, this kind of harassment can take the form of physical suffering or illness. In 2 Corinthians 12:7 Paul speaks of a bodily infirmity from which he suffered and he calls it “a messenger of Satan, sent to harass me.” Specifically here a bodily infirmity was seen as being a way in which Satan was harassing the apostle Paul. 1 Peter 5:8 advises, “Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour.” Given this, we should expect difficulties, suffering, adversities, and so forth in this earthly life.

Finally, Satan accuses unbelievers. Revelation 12:10 says,

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

Here the reference is to Satan as the accuser of believers before God, until Satan is finally and decisively vanquished.

**START DISCUSSION**

*Student:* I'm curious what you think about exactly how does Satan tempt people? I think people have this idea that he can whisper things in my mind or cause me to think thoughts that come from without and not from within myself. Or does he alternatively put me in situations and arrange me to be in situations where he knows that I will be tempted? Or both of the above? I just don't have a good grasp of that.

*Dr. Craig:* As I read the New Testament, I think that we, as human beings, have a fallen human nature that is deeply sinful and corrupted. This is typically called "the flesh" in the New Testament. That's the word that Paul uses. Now, that shouldn't be thought of just our fleshly bodies. Paul is not saying that our material body is evil. But "the flesh" designates that aspect of human nature that is opposed to God, is sinful, is corrupt. It's twisted. It's bent in on itself rather than aligned toward God. I think that Satan uses the flesh. That's why typically the great enemies of Christians are thought to be the world, the flesh, and the devil. Those appear, for example, in that engraving by Albrecht Dürer where he has the devil along with the knight. So I would say that Satan can work through our flesh. When we indulge in the sins of the flesh we open ourselves to Satan's kingdom and influence and are defeated by him.

*Student:* How do you delineate between demon-possession and a person's just sinning? We talked about Judas.

*Dr. Craig:* I do think that it can be very difficult empirically to know when a person is actually demon-possessed or is mentally ill (schizophrenic say, something of that sort). But it does seem very clear that biblically-speaking demonic possession involves an indwelling spiritual being in your body, and therefore is vastly different from mere sinning – yielding to the desires of the flesh and of the temptations of the world. That is why I emphasized that, when Jesus exorcised these beings, it says they came out of the person and then, in the Gadarene demoniac case, they went into the swine and they perished. They were all killed. So it seems to me that this sort of demonic possession is much, much more serious and involves this kind of indwelling of another spiritual being in your body. And if I might say, I think this is why we as Christians need to avoid like the plague any kind of occult activity. We should not indulge, however innocent it may seem, in things like Ouija boards, tarot cards, seances, attempts to have divination, or contact the dead. These occult practices open us to this demonic spiritual realm, and those who get ensnared in it can be very, very seriously damaged.

*Student:* Two questions. Number one, with the Defenders Christmas luncheon coming up, because of your topic, are you discouraging people from bringing deviled eggs?

*Dr. Craig:* [laughter] Deviled eggs are fine! I love deviled eggs, and will give an angelic blessing on them!

*Student:* Here's a serious question. In the New Testament a frequent theme is that all powers . . .

*Dr. Craig:* Hey, I just thought – if Leanne wants to bring a devil's food cake, she could do that, too!

*Student:* There can be angel food cake to counterbalance it. But a serious question. A frequent theme in the New Testament is that everything – all powers, dominions, names, principalities, and so forth – will be subjected to Christ or put under his feet. There are two verses – Ephesians 1 and 1 Peter 3 – where it says that's already happened. But then there are other passages, like 1 Corinthians 15 it seems to me and Philippians 3:21 and Hebrews 2:8, which say that this is to be future. On Hebrews 2:8, it says we do not yet see all things subjected to Christ. If you look at that passage on the surface, it sounds like it's talking about man – we do not yet see all things subjected to man. But I heard a lecture by Leon Morris, the New Testament scholar, and he said that that refers to Christ. He elaborated and said the reason why we have intractable problems in terms of poverty and hunger and disease and warfare and so forth is because we do not yet see all things subjected to Christ. So my question is: how do you reconcile these two different sets of passages? Has it happened or will it happen?

*Dr. Craig:* I think that there is, very common in the New Testament, a sort of “already, but not yet” tension. This appears over and over again. The Kingdom of God has already come in Jesus and in his preaching and ministry. And at the cross there is a decisive triumph over Satan. But the Kingdom of God has not fully come in all of its victory when the final subjugation of Satan and these demonic beings will take place and they will be cast into eternal hell. That clearly hasn't taken place yet. So there is a kind of “already, but not yet” tension in the New Testament which says that the decisive acts have been done to achieve the victory (namely, the cross and the resurrection of Christ) at which Satan was defeated and our pardon and salvation was achieved, but that these will only be fully realized with the second coming of Christ and his fully establishing his reign and then giving it over to the Father, as it says in 1 Corinthians 15.

*Student:* Is it possible for a truly regenerate believer to be indwelt by a demon – to be possessed by a demon? The way I've answered that is that it appears to me obvious that if a believer has received the Holy Spirit into them that a demon should not be able to overcome the Holy Spirit within you. Obviously, God is stronger than a demon, so how could a demon possess a regenerate believer? But I'm just wondering what you think about that.

*Dr. Craig:* It is a very difficult question which the New Testament doesn't directly address. On the one hand, theologically, there is the point that you make. Someone who is indwelt with the Holy Spirit and is regenerate, it would seem impossible for that person

to also be indwelt and possessed by a demon. And yet, empirically-speaking, those who are involved in occult ministries – trying to free people from the bondage to the occult – will tell you over and over again they know of cases wherein Christians have been possessed by demons and have been exorcised and then finally freed from this influence. How do you put that together? I think it's possible to make a distinction between being *possessed* by a demon and being *oppressed* by a demon. It could be that these Christians, though not possessed by a demon, because of their dabbling in occult practices or sin are nevertheless under heavy demonic oppression and so need to be freed from that. The other possible answer could be that even though a Christian can be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, he may not be filled with the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, he may be living under the power of the flesh, as the Christians in Corinth were. Perhaps for a Christian who is living under the power and the influence of the flesh, the indwelling Holy Spirit doesn't have as much influence. Maybe a person like that could also be indwelt by a demonic being who operates in that person through the flesh and which needs to be exorcised. Either one of those is a possibility, I think, and we don't really know the answer to the question. But empirically, at least, we do know that it is possible for Christians to be very oppressed and bound up in these kinds of demonic occult activities. Therefore, as I say, we ourselves who are not need to avoid these kinds of activities.

*Student:* We've said before that the only difference between angels and demons is the moral alignment. So my question (which is a little bit tangential) is: can angels, and do angels, possess people?

*Dr. Craig:* I've never thought of that question! But it would seem to follow from what I've said that an angelic spirit could possess someone. Maybe that's not the sort of thing that angels do. I don't think we have any example of it in the Bible. The purpose of these demons indwelling people is to take them over and to do them harm, to undo them. That's not something that an angel would do even to bring about good. It would be pointless for an angel to indwell a person so as to do good deeds and will good things because that's the very opposite of moral virtue and moral agency. Do you see what I mean? It's turning him into a puppet where now his moral choices become meaningless and insignificant. So while it might be possible, perhaps it's just pointless. Interesting question.

*Student:* I think that it is possible for a believer to be possessed because if you go back and look at the demoniac in Mark 5, he says, *What business do we have with each other Jesus, Son of the Most High God?* Would a demon praise Jesus Christ as the Most High, Son of God? I don't think so.

*Dr. Craig:* He wouldn't praise him, but I did address that question in my lesson. What I said is that this is an example of, in the ancient world, exercising authority over the other person by knowing his name and by naming him. The person who can name the other one

is in a kind of superior position. That's why Jesus then turns the table and says to the demoniac, *What is your name?* I think that's what the demon is doing here.

*Student:* I wanted to follow up on that also because you see people like that – like Bob Larson. They like to pretend to, *Oh, I have authority over this demon* and *Tell me your name* and that kind of garbage. I don't know that that's really truly effective though. That sounds almost more superstitious. I don't see a lot of biblical authority for that. When you have the power to name something, you have authority in one sense but . . . I know your name so if I say your name that doesn't mean necessarily that I have authority over you.

*Dr. Craig:* You are thinking like a modern in saying that. I don't know how to respond to that because I've never been involved in an exorcism personally. I've read accounts of them, and I know there are techniques that are used. Perhaps asking for the name is in some cases helpful or justified. It would be probably based on this Mark 5 passage. But when I think of, for example, Paul's exorcising the demon from that girl who was following them about saying, *These are men of the Most High God*, he didn't ask her name. He just said, *Come out of her, you unclean spirit!* I don't know that we have in other cases this use of naming, so one mustn't think of these things as sort of mechanical recipes to follow.

*Student:* The distinction between oppression and possession – when I hear those two and what goes on behind them, is there really much of a difference between them? Because it seems almost even with the oppression the same things are happening to someone that is also possessed.

*Dr. Craig:* It is just an attempt to deal with the theological problem that was raised: how can a person indwelt by the Holy Spirit and regenerate be indwelt by a demonic spirit at the same time? It would attempt to answer that theological question by saying this demonic presence is outside the person and is attacking him from the outside. It is not something that is indwelling him in the way that a demon-possessed person is.

## **END DISCUSSION**

Let me wrap up by saying a few words about the Christian response to demons. How should we respond to the devil? Should we worry about him? Should we be afraid? What should we do? Three points briefly suggest themselves from Scripture.

1. We should submit to God and resist the devil. James 4:7 says, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” Notice you must first submit yourself to God. You cannot resist demons in your own strength. You need the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. You need, first, to submit yourself to God, and then be resistant. The prime example of this, of course, would be Jesus himself in his temptations by Satan where again and again he resisted Satan's temptation by bringing

and opposing to it the truth of God's word in taking a stand on what God's word said and submitting to that.

2. We should watch and pray. Jesus says in Matthew 26:41, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Because our flesh is weak and because Satan can get at us through the flesh (which, as I say, means that fallen principle within the human nature that is sinful, corrupt, and perverted), we need to be on high alert and constantly praying as we go through the day so that we don't succumb to our weaknesses and fall.

3. We need to clothe ourselves with the full armor of God. In Ephesians 6:11-18 Paul writes,

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; besides all these, taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.

I think that the overriding point that Paul is making here is that you need to be prepared for spiritual warfare by being involved in spiritual disciplines like prayer, studying the Word of God, developing righteous virtues in your life, and so on and so forth. Dallas Willard has rightly remarked that it's not enough simply to ask yourself in some situation, "What would Jesus do?" because unless we have already developed the character of Jesus we won't be able to do what Jesus would do in that situation. The battle with Satan thus begins long before an encounter actually takes place. It begins with daily walking in the power of the Holy Spirit, praying, reading the Bible, engaging in meaningful worship, sharing the Gospel, and exercising our spiritual gifts in the context of a local community of fellow believers. We need to prepare for battle, to be clothed with the armor of God, so that when we are in a situation of testing we have the ability to do what Jesus would do. Apart from these preparations we will be weak and easily vanquished.

Those are some of the scriptural admonitions about how we can be prepared for spiritual warfare.



With that we come to the end of our discussion of the theological locus of the doctrine of creation on which we've been embarked for the last many months. Next time we'll be moving on to a new theme and topic.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Total Running Time: 35:10 (Copyright © 2018 William Lane Craig)