

Examining the evidence against the demonization of a Believer **A Series on Whether a Christian Can Have a Demon: Part 3**

Among Christians, the one aspect of Angelology that is severely debated is whether Christians can have a demon and be controlled by one. There are legitimate concerns by those who deny whether Christians can have a demon:

- If the Holy Spirit indwells a Christian, the concurrent presence of a demon seemingly diminishes the power and work of Christ.
- If Christians can have a demon, it absolves one from the personal responsibility in living an abiding life in Jesus Christ; a Christian has an excuse for a sinful life.

There are a variety of proof verses that are used as evidence against the demonization of a believer. While none explicitly denies that a demon can indwell a Christian, the evidence presented by many theologians implies such a position. The following are a sampling of the types of verses used to deny the demonization of a Christian.

Satan and his demons are judged and defeated; they are powerless and cannot demonize Christians.

John 12:31-33, 16:11

With the impending crucifixion marking the defeat of Satan, Jesus' statement about Satan's legal judgment would be understood later when the Holy Spirit comes to convince Christians of Satan's judgment to come. Satan has been judged and all those who side with him will be judged as well. While this verse does not consider whether a Christian can be demonized, these verses show that there is no neutral position: one is either a child of God or a child of Satan.

Hebrews 2:14-15

In establishing the close identification between Christ and the Christian, the author of Hebrews concludes that Christ became human so that He could destroy Satan and free human beings from the bondage of sin. In this context, it's hard to see how a Christian can be demonized.

Colossians 2:14-15

The result of Jesus' crucifixion is portrayed in the imagery of a victorious general who returns with the public display of his defeated foes. It was a reference to Christ's legal and positional victory over Satan and demons, which broke their claim to rule human beings. Given that all of the personal sins of a Christian are forgiven, it is difficult to understand how the hypothetical case of an indwelling demon, present before one's conversion, can continue its hold on the former non-Christian.

Christ's work has delivered Christians from the domain of Satan; Christians are not available for demonization.

Ephesians 2:1-6; Colossians 1:13

Formerly citizens in the kingdom of Satan, Christ's atonement provided Christians a transfer of their citizen to the kingdom of God. While these verses are in reference to the legal position of man, the value of citizenship seems lessened by the possibility of a Christian being demonized.

Acts 26:18

In sharing his mission of "opening eyes" so that man can "turn from the dominion of Satan to God," Paul speaks of the change in legal position that man experiences before God. This passage does not speak to the question of whether Christians can be indwelt.

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Christians belong to God and are protected from the power of Satan: Satan is prevented from demonizing Christians.

John 10:22-29

While Christians are figuratively spoken as sheep protected by Christ, this passages refer to Jesus keeping Christians in eternal relation to Himself. This passage does not shed any light on the question of whether a Christian can be demonized.

John 17:15; Matthew 6:13

In His personal prayer and prayer that He teaches to His disciples, Jesus recognizes that Christians will be assailed by demonic forces. While these passages do not speak to the question of whether Christians can be indwelt, they do not necessarily include its possibility.

2 Thessalonians 3:3

Directed towards those who “are doing and will continue to do what we command” (v. 4), Paul’s message of God’s strength and protection from the evil one is to the abiding Christians. This active form of protection from demonic attacks would have to include immunity from demonization. For non-abiding Christians, this verse does not necessarily mean that they have lost their immunity from demonization.

1 John 5:18

While this verse has been used to support the position that Christians cannot be demonized, it is very challenging to interpret. Does this mean that a Christian who sins isn’t really a Christian? A study of this verse can be found in the article: “Do Christians Sin? A response to pseudo Christianity.” When viewed in context, this verse does not speak to the question of whether Christians can be indwelt or not.

Christians are indwelt and sealed with the Holy Spirit; the presence of the Holy Spirit prevents any demonic spirit from residing in Christians.

Psalms 5:4

This form of Hebrew poetry is synonymous parallelism where the two lines of thought share similar meanings. With the first thought as God not delighting in wickedness, the second thought takes “evil” as either an abstract noun equivalent to “wickedness” or in reference to “evil people” which are described in the following verses. Because this verse is likely referring to evil human beings, its use in the argument against the idea that Christians can be indwelt is not pertinent.

1 Corinthians 10:21

Within the context of this passage, this verse is a warning about the sin of fellowshiping with demons by participating in idolatrous actions. This verse does not speak to the question of whether Christians can be indwelt or not.

2 Corinthians 6:14-16

In verse 15, the term “Belial” for Satan, refers to one who is wicked and causes destruction. In these verses, Paul is warning the Corinthians against the dangers of cooperating with false teachers. While Paul is concerned about the Corinthians being influenced by demons through false teachers, this passage does not address the question of whether Christians can be indwelt.

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1 John 4:4

John speaks of the spirits of teachers; a true prophet of God is one who receives direct revelation from God whereas a false teacher does not and promotes false teachings. The Holy Spirit, indwelt in Christians, provides the discernment against false teaching. Would a non-abiding Christian be as discerning?

While there are no explicit verses that deny that a Christian can be demonized, advocates for this view make the case within the context of a non-abiding Christian. And because there isn't any explicit biblical guidance, it has spawned speculation as to how a Christian can be demonized. Yet can the implied evidence against the demonization of Christians be disregarded so easily?

On the other hand, if one denies the possibility that Christians can be demonized, how does one help those genuine Christians who display occasional demonic behavior? Is it simply a medical or psychological problem?

Without any explicit biblical evidence, this controversy will continue with strong advocates representing both sides.

Perhaps this issue of whether a Christian can be demonized calls to attention the real crux of the problem. Even as there is an absence of any obvious biblical mention of Christian demonization after Pentecost or promotion of the practice of exorcism, the emphasis of the New Testament is on Christian living and the process of sanctification: *avoiding sin* and *striving for holiness*.

In this light, the focus on the question of demonization may be misplaced, the question should perhaps ask, "How much can a genuine Christian allow his life be dominated by sin?"

References:

1. Dickason CF, *Demon Possession & the Christian*, Westchester, IL: Crossway Books (1990).