

UNHOLY SPIRITS

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Some of the Jews accused Christ of having a demon. They had reached that last stage in spiritual degradation which mistakes light for darkness, holiness for unholiness – theirs was the supreme blasphemy. By nature all men are the children of wrath and have to some extent shared in that deed of crucifixion, and by His death can be made children of light. As such, they are now involved in a spiritual warfare with the powers of darkness. This warfare will continue until the Christ returns again. Any frontier pioneer who seeks to live in the power of the Holy Spirit will become aware of unholy spirits. He will become more aware of the sin of his own heart and of the power of his adversary, the devil, opposing his every step in the daily round and common task. Also, he will meet those who practise magic, fortune-telling, spiritism, idol worship and who deal in “hidden things”. It is always dangerous to underestimate one’s enemy, and so I make this attempt to expose the works of the devil so that through the Son of Man they might be destroyed.

Many would recognise that under the influence of local alcohol and the teachings of witchcraft, rebel troops achieved superhuman feats of survival in the Congo. Bishop Stephen Neill in his book, ‘The Unfinished Task’, writes: “The more deeply the missionary enters into the life of his adopted country, the more likely he is to find himself striving unto blood against the evil that lies hidden behind the non-Christian systems of religion. We have joyfully recognised all that is good in the non-Christian world. It is merely myopic to refuse to recognise the other side. Idolatry, witchcraft, the worship of

evil spirits and the seeking of fellowship with them are terrible and evil things. I do not think that any missionary who has lived really close to the village folk in India or Africa doubts the existence of this unseen, malignant, persistent and almost personal power of evil. There is plenty of evil to be fought against in the West, but there is a difference, somehow, in the lands that have once been Christianised: the cross has prevailed against the evil spirits as it has not prevailed in the lands that are yet to be won.”

There is an increase in these forbidden practices in the United Kingdom as evidenced by the number of newspaper and magazine articles on magic, witchcraft and spiritism. As secular materialism replaces true faith in these islands, it’s possible that the house once cleansed will be possessed again sevenfold. The influence of Christ has gone deep into our society, history and tradition, but if we deliberately reject light and choose darkness, it is possible that a darkness darker than that of paganism will come upon us.

The bible is very clear in its condemnation of “hidden things”. To ancient Israel God said: “When you come into the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practises divination, a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord.” (Deuteronomy 18:9-12). Israel was not wholly obedient, and in the end the majority

of Jews rejected Christ.

It is necessary in a study of this sort to distinguish between these practices named above and superstition. What is superstition to one person is not to another. Superstition has been defined as religious belief or practice founded upon fear or ignorance. If this definition is accepted, then any superstition is un-Christian, although it may be unconsciously so. In the list of practices in Deuteronomy, the person deliberately and consciously takes part in something forbidden by God. If he does not know that God has forbidden such a practice, it does not make his bondage any less. Fear torments.

Some Christians recognise others as being superstition, but attribute no power to magic, witchcraft, evil spirits and demons. By such an assumption they deny the clear teaching of Scripture and render themselves powerless in a struggle against those satanic powers. It is possible that some missionaries, with their scepticism, have withheld from those they serve their sympathy and understanding and a knowledge of how to combat “the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places”. It is possible that the Church is sometimes not only bound by the party spirit, by lawsuits and factions, but also by hidden satanic powers which prevent many who belong to the Christian community from ever coming to know Him. Those who have preached deliverance through Christ to those imprisoned by Satan have sometimes seen more magicians, soothsayers and spiritists. This is not to suggest that success is the measure of spiritual enlightenment, but that unless the deep underlying bondage is perceived, wrestling with only some of the evils will never result in full

deliverance. “Christ disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in the cross”. (Colossians 2:15). The Apostle Paul writes of the Christian warfare against such powers. Even in the age of nuclear warfare no one can be stronger than this, “Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour 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.” We can all take part in such warfare as we use God’s armour and pray at all times in the Spirit.

Spiritism is the effort to communicate with the dead in the spirit world. In the East one sometimes meets those who worship at the grave of a person with whom they seek to communicate. In the West this attempt to communicate with the dead is sometimes called spiritualism. It is forbidden by God, for it is an abomination to Him (Deuteronomy 18: 11)

where it is called necromancy. Some people maintain that they do get in touch with the spirits of the dead. Magic can accomplish extraordinary things. The fact that there is power in something does not make it right, if God has forbidden it. In His sovereignty He may forbid that which is an assault on His own power. Satan can masquerade as an angel of light, but this does not make him a good angel. In seeking to use supernatural powers for his own ends, man puts himself deliberately under the authority of the prince of darkness who had a share in the fall of primeval man. A woman asked a Christian’s prayer for the healing of her child. She had first gone to a magician. The

christian challenged her about his, and finally she admitted what she had done, but was not repentent. The only prayer for her could be that she might repent. A warning was given that the sins of the parents are visited on the children.

The question of demon possession is often referred to in the New Testament. It seems that those who are possessed by demons generally recognise this themselves, and this is a helpful factor in counselling. It is vital to counsel correctly and not to confuse mental illness with demon possession. The Christian worker needs the gift of being able to distinguish between spirits. "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God; every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God." (1 John 4:1-3). The hold of evil is sometimes stronger than we realise: it would seem that for an idolater to destroy an idol is not enough; the spirit behind the idol must be driven off in Christ's name. Satan is the master deluder; for example, he deludes some people into relying on visions - sometimes a vision of Christ - for their salvation. Such a reliance is of the devil. Only a personal reliance on the death of Christ is of avail. This may be accompanied by a divine vision, as in the case of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus.

The object of this chapter is to encourage Christians to pray for each other in their warfare against Satan, and also to help any who have to counsel those oppressed by Satan through the practice of forbidden things and through the sins of their forebears. "The weapons of our warfare are not worldly, but have divine power to destroy strongholds."

The following are our weapons to be used under the guidance of the Holy Spirit:

1. **THE NAME OF CHRIST.** We can pray that those who practise witchcraft against the servants of God may know that there is more power in Christ's name than in any name they use. We can rebuke Satan in the name of Christ and cast out demons in His name.
2. **THE BLOOD OF CHRIST.** In such a warfare we need the protection of the blood of Christ. When anyone has confessed his sin, he needs the cleansing of Christ's precious blood.
3. **THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST.** This is a delegated authority, and therefore we should not rejoice in it, but that we belong to Him who gave the authority. Christ said: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the Spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." (Luke 10:18-20).
4. **THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST.** Reference has already been made to some of the gifts of the Spirit, and in a ministry of this sort it is necessary to accept and exercise any gift that the Spirit gives. He can give several gifts. He can give them for special occasions or for a general ministry. "He apportions to each one individually as he wills." He gives the ability to distinguish between spirits; He gives the utterance of wisdom and the utterance of knowledge as, for example, in the case of a Pakistani evangelist to whom God revealed that a certain woman was using black magic against him. The woman, hearing his utterance of knowledge, admitted what she had done and confessed he was a man of God.

5. THE PEOPLE OF CHRIST. Often, in such warfare, fellowship is a necessity and God gives it. There are promises given to the two or more who shall pray in Christ's name. The disciples failed to cast out a demon because they neglected prayer and possible fasting.

6. THE LIFE OF CHRIST. It is vital to know victory in one's own spiritual experience. Any sin is a lining-up with Satan. He who fails in any way to walk with Christ not only is powerless to help another, but endangers himself.

7. THE ALLIES OF CHRIST. It is well to remember that there are evil powers, but that there are also powers of God. There are the legions of angels "who are ministering spirits sent forth to serve for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation" (Hebrews 1: 14), and God Himself can be a wall of fire around His own people (Zechariah 2:5).

Some may find the devil's assault on their own souls too fierce. He has already lost. Perfect love casts out fear. The way of deliverance and victory is to cry to God for deliverance through the name and blood of Christ and to praise Him.

I have given more attention to hidden and occult things, to Satan's use of supernatural powers in attack, because these are not recognised so

much today, and where they are recognised there is sometimes confusion as to how to deal with such attacks. The New Testament, however, gives more space to the devil's attack through human frailty than to his use of the supernatural. It refers to many sins such as cowardice and apostasy as direct and personal operation of the devil. Covetousness was attributed by Peter to the direct work of Satan in Ananias' heart (Acts 5:3). Lack of love is a sign of allegiance to Satan according to John (1 John 3:10). We are commanded to put to death what is earthly in us; immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire and covetousness which is idolry (Colossians 3:5). The passage in the sixth chapter of Ephesians on the Christian's armour suggest that the forces of darkness concentrate their attack on ordinary human frailties, for example, on loyalty to truth or tendencies to slackness, doubt and fear – for at these points protection must be provided. So, using the whole armour of God, the weapons of our warfare, the Word of God and prayer, we can stand against our adversary and all his stratagems, whatever they may be, being strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.