

**Misconceptions  
in Modern  
*‘Spiritual Warfare’***



By  
Terry Arnold



## **‘Deliverance Ministries’:**

Much emphasis today is being placed on ‘Spiritual Warfare’. ‘Deliverance ministries’ abound. The Devil is ‘rebuked’ and ‘bound’. Demons are blamed for sinful behaviour and are being ‘driven out’ of Christians. ‘Territorial spirits’ and ‘strongholds’ are supposedly being broken and cast out of areas of the earth. ‘Spirits’ of varying kinds are being named - there are supposedly spirits of Jezebel, control, death and hell, divination, python spirits, insecurity, lying spirits, filthy mind, ego, vanity, forgetfulness, suicide, asthma, allergies, autism, dyslexia, blindness, homosexuality, materialism, greed, egotism. Then there are lists of ‘curses’ - sexual perversion, pride, rebellion, stubbornness, etc. Many of these ‘spirits’ and ‘curses’ are simply never mentioned in scripture as ‘spirits’. *Rather, they are mentioned as sin!* There is simply no objective or Biblical way to tell if any spirits are actually called by many of these names! Added to this, some ‘deliverance ministries’ teach that the way one can tell if a spirit is active or ‘leaving a person’ is when there is yawning, coughing, burping, heat or tingling in various parts of the body. This would mean that at some times I could necessarily have at least one of these ‘spirits’ or ‘curses’ - since I suffer from one or two of these symptoms at least every year!

There are also methods of ‘cleansing’ rooms or houses in which spirits are ‘bound’ and then the ‘blood of Jesus’ is placed around the doors and boundaries. All of this is again totally *outside of scripture*.

These teachings go well beyond the simple Biblical view that demons can *oppress* individuals in their minds. In the eighties and nineties there was a surge of ‘deliverance ministries’ and seminars on spiritual warfare. I personally know of once sound ministers who were caught up in *new and extra biblical* teaching on demons. In the USA Christians met to ‘*bind Satan from the San Francisco Bay area and bring Godliness to public life through spiritual warfare... and to dethrone the spirit of homosexuality from its capital city, San Francisco...*’ (1) In these meetings Satan was rebuked and ‘bound’ by verbally addressing him publicly and directly. These meetings spent more time talking to Satan than to God. The results spoke for themselves - the city of San Francisco got worse!

Although some believe there is implied Biblical evidence for some territorial spirits (Daniel 10:12-13), the practice and methods of trying to expel these spirits are erroneous. The Bible does show Jesus and Paul verbally rebuking demons which physically possessed unsaved individuals. (There is not a single case in the New Testament of a Christian being *possessed* with a demon). However, Jesus, or the disciples, never rebuked or taught anyone else to rebuke geographic or ethnic demons! None of the great evangelists spent time talking to the Devil or delivering spirits! Theologian and Christian author, R.C. Sproul, writes, ‘*Within Christian circles there has arisen a new concern for ministries of deliverance. Some of these deliverance ministries have developed a bizarre and radically unbiblical view of demon possession and deliverance... Well known deliverance*’ (1) *Christian Research Journal*, Summer/1992, P.38.

*ministries teach the signs of a departure of the demon. A sigh, for example, indicated the departure of the demon of tobacco... There are demons for every conceivable sin. Not only must each one of these demons be exorcised, but there are necessary procedures to keep them from returning on a daily basis. I know of no polite way to respond to this kind of teaching. It is unmitigated nonsense. Nowhere in sacred scripture is there to be found the slightest hint of this kind of demonic diagnosis. These teachings cross the line into the sphere of magic and result in serious harm to believers who are duped by them. Sadly, too much concern with Satan and demons means that we focus less of our attention on Christ. That must please Satan, though it certainly is not pleasing to God... All this emphasis on Satan and demons tends to distract us from another very real menace, our own sin... We cannot pass the blame and responsibility for our sin to a controlling demon... We can say that we are tempted or incited or seduced by Satan, but not that we are controlled or coerced by him'. (2)*

### **The 'strongman':**

Much is made of the phrase 'strong man' and 'binding' him, quoting Matthew 12 and 18. But these scriptures do not instruct us to 'bind the strong man' and release people from demons. The context is Jesus using an *illustration* of what *He is doing himself*. It is about His own power and Messiahship and *the defeat of Satan at the cross*. Casting out demons was Jesus demonstration that He was the Messiah and that '***the kingdom of God had come***' to them (Matthew 12:28).

### **The purpose of deliverance of demons:**

The purpose of casting out demons was to prove who Jesus was - the anointed one, the Messiah. Jesus proved this to John the Baptist who when in prison asked for proof of the Messiah. Jesus answered: '***And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight. Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things you have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached***' (Luke 7:21,22). Why these words were so important to John the Baptist was because they fulfilled prophecies and *matched the words in Isaiah* concerning the blind, deaf, dumb and those bound by spirits! (Is.35:5,6; 61:1,2). Jesus also quoted these words from Isaiah in the temple and said it was about *himself!* Added to this are the many scriptures that clearly state that these signs were to prove the *messiahship of Jesus* or the '***signs of an apostle***' (Acts 2:43; 5:12; 2Cor.12:12; Hebrews 2:3,4). Do we need these signs today when the Messiah has already come and He has given us a closed canon of scripture with the Gospel that sets people 'free'?

One author sums up: '*In the epistles we find absolutely no expectation or command that Christians should be doing exorcisms. Not a mention. Not even a hint that this is something the apostles expected Christian Churches to be*

*involved in... The apostles... performed 'the signs of a true apostle' as Paul calls them. They did not expect all Christians to do these things or perform these signs - in fact, these signs wouldn't have been signs of an apostle if everyone could do them. The New Testament gives absolutely no encouragement to Christians to directly engage with the devil or demons through such practices as exorcism or deliverance or praying against territorial spirits... Please forgive me for speaking strongly, but love requires that a clear message be heard: These 'ministries' are not Christian ministries in the New Testament sense. They are profoundly misguided, and should be shut down, never to be re-opened. One very important clue that these ministries are not truly Christian ministries is that they reintroduce the fear of the underworld that Jesus died to banish. The ancient world was afraid to step in the wrong spot in case they came across an underworld space... So, why do these ministries scare the life out of people once again? Why are we warned that we could be under a curse, afflicted upon us by some ancestor's involvement in a Masonic order, or through someone else being involved in the occult? Why are we told that we accidentally, imperceptibly 'give the devil a foothold', to misquote Ephesians 4:27, which is taken to mean giving the devil an opportunity to take possession of your body, or to seriously influence your life for the worse? (Instead the verse is saying that anger against a Christian brother harms the life and unity of God's people, which is what the devil is also trying to do - so why help him along in his mission? We should be serving Jesus mission)...if any ministry claims to be Christian and raise the old fear again, then it is seriously misguided and is not being governed by the Gospel of God's grace. And I repeat my strong words: such ministries should be disbanded, for they are doing nothing good for the work of Christ in this world and, in fact, are doing harm. Those involved may be well meaning and wanting to help... but to create fear is not the work of God. It is to unwittingly play into the devils hands, because fear has always been one of his favourite instruments (Hebrews 2:14,15)...Our weapon is the gospel of Christ and our strategy is to remember it, speak it, believe it, cling to it and pray in response to it!...Perhaps the most damaging consequence of focusing on exorcism, deliverance, and other dramatic forms of so called 'spiritual warfare' is that it diverts our attention from the truth that is so clearly observed in the scriptures...' (3)*

### **'Generational curses':**

Many involved in 'deliverance ministries' quote Exodus 20:4,5 for believing that Christians can still have 'curses' hanging over them from something in the past. ***'You shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me'***.

This is part of the second commandment of the ten given to Israel. The passage does not actually use the word 'curse' but if this is a 'curse' then it was upon Israel only and was conditional. Verse 6 continues ***'And showing mercy***

(3) *'Living With The Underworld'* by Peter Bolt; Matthias Press, P.143-147

*unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments'. This 'curse' was lifted in the book of Ezekiel for the lawful ones: 'Yet say you, Why? does not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son has done that which is lawful and right, and has kept all my statutes, and has done them, he shall surely live. The soul that sins, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him' (Ezek.18:19,20).*

The New Testament then demolishes any idea of residing 'curses' on a Christian. When a person is Born Again any 'curses' are gone: *'Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation'* (2Cor.5:17). To say that the New Birth does not rid a Christian of demonic judgements and curses is to limit the very salvation and power of God in the New Birth!

Can any Bible believing Christian say that a demon can exist in the same sphere as the Holy Spirit of God - in the temple of the Holy Spirit, in the Holy of Holies? (Would God ever have allowed a demon to exist in the Holy of Holies in the Jewish temple of old?). Those who teach that Christians can be possessed by a demon need to think on this! If Christians can be possessed by demons then it makes the indwelling Spirit of God to be impotent. I can accept that Christians can be *oppressed in the mind*, but to teach that a Born Again Christian can be possessed by a demon strikes at the very heart of who God's Spirit is.

### **Real Spiritual Warfare:**

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 is sometimes used to teach the breaking of 'demonic strongholds' and 'territorial spirits': *'For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ'*. The word '*strongholds*' here does not refer to spirits from without but refers to trusting in strong points or arguments *in the mind*. The word '*imaginations*' ('logismos' - used once elsewhere and translated '*thoughts*' in Romans 2:15) further proves the context is to do *with the mind*. The phrase '*high thing that exalts itself*' refers to any proud thoughts or reasonings against God. This pulling down of '*strongholds*' in 2 Corinthians 10:3-6 has nothing to do with territorial demonic strongholds, but rather refers to *the mind*! The context is clear - we are to resist and captivate *thoughts* (vs.5) that oppose '*the knowledge of God*'. The battle here is not with 'spirits' without or within, but in the *thoughts of the mind*.

The phrase '*principalities... powers*' in Ephesians 6:10-18, is also taught by some to refer to us making war with demons. However, the passage is almost all

*defensive*. We are told to ‘**stand**’ our ground. The only weapons of ‘attack’ here are the ‘**Word of God**’ and ‘**prayer**’. This passage clearly tells us how to do ‘spiritual warfare’ and deal with Satan and demons: ‘**Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all taking the shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit...**’

This scripture gives us a list of armour by which we can live in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, which *is sufficient* for us. *When we preach the Gospel demons must leave people of any possession.*

I once had an interesting discussion with missionaries who had gone into lost tribes and had encountered witchdoctor's, shamans and healers who were empowered by spirits. Demon possession was common. These missionaries did not attempt to deliver the demons but were intent on preaching the Gospel to the people, even with opposition from the Shaman. They told me how it appeared that demonic power would come on and off the Shaman in intervals. However, the missionaries did not waste time with any Shamans, but concentrated on winning the people *with the Gospel*. (4)

As we disciple people they will learn to resist any *oppression* from demons in the mind. In all the letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation there is not one mention of binding demons or commanding them to leave an area, despite several mentions of Satan and evil! Yet today thousands of books, tapes and ‘deliverance ministries’ have been spawned in an attempt to solve what is really man’s age old problem - the flesh or *sin* nature! The modern ‘deliverance ministries’ are simply not found in Scripture. The modern church has truly gone ‘**beyond the Word of the Lord**’ in this area (Numbers 22:18)!

### **The real issue:**

The danger of the modern ‘spiritual warfare’ teaching is that *it takes the emphasis off personal responsibility for sin*. The real issue is sin.

One writer sums up: ‘*As a former teacher and supporter of modern warfare methods... for me fighting demonic forces was a daily routine. I don’t recall*



(4) A similar story is told in a DVD ‘*Delivered From The Power of Darkness - A True Story*’. This highly recommended DVD tells of the struggle and victory of a tribal people over demonic forces before and after conversion. The story has much to teach about ‘spiritual warfare’ and answers many questions such as: Can Christians be demon possessed? Do territorial demons hinder the work of the Gospel? Can spirits possess houses? This DVD puts all these questions in a real life situation and testifies to the truth of Scripture.

*many meetings which did not include casting out devils, pulling down strongholds... I truly believed my efforts were Biblical. But... I began to re-evaluate these tactics and questioned the Biblical accuracy of my ministry... I began to ask 'what happens when we war after the flesh and call it spiritual?' Are we pulling down strongholds that are not Biblical or casting out demons that have been fabricated by men?*

*I began to intensely study Jesus earthly ministry. I discovered that Jesus regularly cast out devils. But I also discovered that we in the modern church were regularly casting out demons that Jesus never heard of. I took extra effort to notice when Jesus did not cast out devils... Jesus did not cast out demons of deception or religious spirits out of Pharisees. I would have attempted it. Jesus confronted their teachings and their religious ideas... It is now common for us to believe that people are not responsible for their own deceptions. Today we credit spiritual blindness to powerful demonic forces which are assigned against individuals, churches or cities... We seem to forget that Jesus came as the light of the world but was rejected by men because 'men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil' (John 3:19).*

*I also discovered that Jesus did not cast out the spirits of murder or alcoholism as we do today. We have invented new extra-Biblical demons. How convenient! We can now credit our fleshly lusts to demons of pornography. We can blame our anger on spirits of rage that come and go as they please... We can now attribute our abusive tendencies to family spirits and generational curses. All kinds of emotional problems can now be assigned to familiar spirits. Our Adamic nature is no longer at fault. Our unhappiness can now be attributed to spirits of oppression. We can blame our addictions on spirits of alcoholism or demons of nicotine.*

*In defence of our modern deliverance ministries we claim, 'We are doing what Jesus did'. But in reality we are not doing what Jesus did, we are doing what He did not do... We no longer understand the Gospel of crucifixion... Our deliverance ministries belittle Jesus earthly ministry. We are more anti-christ than we dare admit... we need to once again exalt Christ as the ultimate minister. His ministry was complete... all the works that are of God can be found in His ministry... The miracles He performed are all the miracles we need... Christ is sufficient'.*

Nowhere in scripture are we told to speak to Satan or his demons. We read in Jude 9 the archangel Michael did not dare rebuke the Devil, but rather said: **'The Lord rebuke you'**! When Satan came to tempt Jesus, He simply and effectively quoted the Word of God! This coupled with holy living will make the devil flee!

**Terry Arnold**



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P O. Box 1499, Hervey Bay,  
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Web Site: [www.taministries.net](http://www.taministries.net)

Email: [taministries@bigpond.com](mailto:taministries@bigpond.com)

Ph. 0411489472

