19 - Discerning of More Spirits

Can we cast out demons? Jesus did and instructed others to.

Mark 3:14-15, 6:13

And he [Jesus] appointed twelve, whom he named apostles so that they would be with him and so that he could send them out to preach

and to have authority to cast out demons.

And they cast out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

The 12 apostles could and did. Then Jesus expanded the instructed and empowered to 72.

Luke 10:1, 17-18

Now after these things the Lord appointed 72 others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every city and place where he himself was about to go.

And the 72 returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name!”

Then Jesus expanded the mandate to all that would believe from Pentecost on.

Mark 16: 17

And these signs will accompany those who believe: they will cast out demons in my name, they will speak in new tongues,

Discerning of spirits is a tool in our gospel toolbox that can be used to help others (like healing and miracles) to demonstrate the power and love of God to the oppressed. How do we do it? In other words, how do we cast out spirits we can’t see, hear or touch with power we also can’t see, hear or touch? It all starts with revelation from God. DS is not a physical ability to discern faults or diagnose mental or physical illness. It’s revelation. God tells you that there is a spirit, or spirits present. That’s the only way we know. Just because someone looks like a mess doesn’t mean they are demonized. They could be having a really bad day (or year). If God reveals that there are spirits present, then He can also tell us whether we may cast them out. And if so, He provides the power to do it. How? No clue - but the spirits obey. That’s all we need to know. It’s like electricity. How does it work? Who knows? We just need to flip the switch and see the results. The same is true with spiritual evictions. God and words do the work. Here’s a record God gave for our learning.

Acts 16:16

And it came to pass as we were going to the place of prayer, a certain slave girl who had a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing her owners much profit by fortune telling.

Paul and his travel companions were in Philippi, Greece, sharing the gospel on his second missionary trip. As they went to prayer a fortune teller girl started ‘prophesying’.

Acts 16:17,18a

Following after Paul and us, she kept crying out, saying, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation.”

And she did this for many days.

What?! The fortune teller girl starts following them around and announcing that they were making salvation available! What’s unusual about this? Everything! This is not normal human behavior. When was the last time you followed some people around for days announcing to everyone what they were doing? Never, of course! Although this is bizarre behavior to us, it was not totally bonkers to people at that time and culture. What we call ‘fortune tellers’ today, they considered spiritual mouthpieces of the ‘gods’ then and people paid money to be advised by them. She had obviously been successful and brought her owners “much profit” from her messages. She was not considered a crackpot, but a credible source of info which accounted for the continued business.

Another thing that’s odd about her behavior is that she is prophesying unsolicited (Paul wasn’t paying her) about the believers’ mission. Was what she said true? Yes, it was. Assuming she had an evil spirit (which it says she had) what is the spirit doing prophesying the truth? Isn’t that working against “its team”? People might get saved, right? So, what’s going on?

When you walk by the spirit, you must buckle up for the ride. We get pulled seven ways from Sunday, as the saying goes. You see, there’s lots of free wills in the world. Paul has free will. The slave girl has free will. The spirit (or spirits) have free will (s). Each of the Philippians also have free will. That’s a lot of players in the Philippi missionary story. What did Paul want? The gospel spread. What does the girl want? To do and say whatever the spirit urges her to do. When she does that, her masters are happy and she gets fed. What does the spirit want? To talk about the biggest event happening in the whole world – salvation for humans! That was obviously the spiritual buzz going through the spirit world at that time. And not only was this exciting to the ancient fortune teller spirit, but those who are helping humans get *pneuma hagion* have come here! “They’re HERE!” she cried.

Now you might wonder, “Why would an evil spirit announce salvation to the unsaved? That could mean someone could get saved and leave Satan’s dominion and enter Christ’s freedom, right? That’s seems counterproductive to its team. Is Satan that stupid?” Well, number one, this isn’t Satan, it’s a run of the mill fortune telling spirit in a ten-year-old slave. Satan is smart, but this spirit is not the brightest bulb on Satan’s holiday tree. Am I saying that some spirits are stupid? Yep. I heard about a spirit once telling the person who was casting out spirits from their host, “We’re all gone now.” Holy nincompoop! That’s a response appropriate from a 4-year-old child!

It could be that there were a few demons in the slave girl, and they were arguing about what to do about Paul sharing the gospel in Philippi. One said, “Let’s announce the news!” Another one said, “No way - what will the boss say?” They concluded, “OK, we’ll do it in an irritating and distracting way!” So, they agreed on that crazy compromise and followed the disciples around for a few days giving free, annoying prophesy. There are many free wills involved in this scenario. Oh, yeah! I forgot the big one, God’s. What does He want?

1 Tim. 2:4

Who [God] wants everyone to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

He wants a family. What’s HE doing? We’ll see. Back to Acts.

Acts 16:18

And she did this for many days. But Paul, being greatly disturbed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And it came out that very hour.

How annoying would it be to be followed by a wailing 10-year-old?... “for many days”? Did Paul know that she was demonized? Probably. That’s what she had done for years. She was successful so she was not guessing but spiritually empowered. Common spiritual sense said that she was “packing” an evil spirit. So why didn’t Paul kick the spirit out on day one? No revelation. How about the second day? No revelation. Finally, Paul was ‘greatly disturbed’. I’d assume he was disturbed on day one or two, but he became greatly disturbed later and he “knew” it was time to act.

Did he pull a cross out and douse her with holy water? No. He used his authority in the name of (in the place of) Jesus Christ and used words. He didn’t pray to God. He talked to the spirit, not the girl. She was a victim, not the villain. Paul threw the head spirit out. Sometimes there are a few spirits in someone and you deal with the boss of the spirits, like Jesus did with Legion. Then what happened? “And it came out that very hour”. That was an idiom meaning, “right then”.

There was no negotiating or bargaining with the spirit. Have you ever seen “Exorcist” type movies? They usually portray a priest or some sort of “holy man” entreating an evil spirit to come out of someone, usually a young innocent girl. They use prayers from an exorcism book and try to cajole the spirit to leave. They use crosses, holy water, candles, etc. The negotiation takes hours and/or days. Think about it. This process assumes that the priest and the spirit are on the same level and negotiations are needed. What a joke! The devil likes this portrayal because it gives him more stature than he has or deserves.

How should we evict stray dogs living in an abandoned house? Should we try to negotiate and talk them out? That might take a long time, if it was successful at all. How is it done? You first go open the back door to the house and then go around to the front door and walk in with a big stick and start clearing the rooms. The dogs will start running out the back. If any dog challenges you, we swat them with the stick and look them in the eye with confidence and they back down. They will quickly follow their less bold pals out the back.

Paul was the boss, the spirit was the hoss. Every knee bows, right? That fortune teller spirit should have seen this coming! (Was that a joke? Yes, it was!) But it brings up a teaching point. Evil spirits don’t know the future any more than you or I do. Sure, they know the Bible and that they’ll be judged one day, but what’s going to happen tomorrow, they have no clue outside their plans, just like us. So why do they “foretell the future”? Because it sells! People love it and open themselves up to it. Did you see what happened to King Saul when he visited the witch of Endor and she told him his future? He went off to his doom. Fortune tellers are evil spirit ‘realtors’. They match up gullible humans with evil spirits who then follow them home and work to make happen whatever was ‘foretold’. Remember spiritual group plays, like football? This is one where they manipulate a person into trusting the fortune teller (really, the spirit) and do what the spirit tells them to do. The evil spirits don’t know the future. They try to get humans to trust them to gain more control over them. This process ended for the slave girl when she was delivered from the divination spirit.

Acts 16:19-24

But when her owners saw that the hope of their profit had gone out, they took hold of Paul and Silas, and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers.

And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, “These men, being Jews, are seriously disturbing our city,

and are promoting customs that are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or to observe.”

And the crowd rose up together against them, and the magistrates tore their clothes off of them, and gave orders for them to be beaten with rods.

And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely,

who, having received such a command, threw them into the inner prison, and he fastened their feet in the stocks.

If I was Paul, about this time I’m asking God to put the evil spirit back in the girl! Just kidding! Can you imagine trusting God through all this? For what? We’ll see. It’s bone chilling to think of the sacrifices of our spiritual forefathers! What examples!

Acts 16:25-34

But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing songs of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them,

and suddenly there was a great earthquake so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken, and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s bonds were unfastened.

And the jailor, being roused out of sleep and seeing the prison doors open, drew his sword and was about to kill himself, assuming that the prisoners had escaped.

But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.”

And he asked for lights and sprang in, and, trembling with fear, fell down before Paul and Silas,

and brought them out and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your house.”

And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.

And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their wounds. And immediately he was baptized, he and all his household.

And he brought them up into his house, and set a table with food before them, and rejoiced greatly, with all his house, because he had believed in God.

Why didn’t God give Paul the revelation to cast out the divination spirit on day one, or two? Here’s an answer from the REV commentary:

“It seems that one unstated reason was the salvation of the jailor. The fortune teller chanted her cry, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation,” for many days. Philippi proper was a relatively small town and was only about three-quarters of a mile long at its longest point, and considerably less than that in width, and the jail was more or less in the middle of the north side. So it is very possible that during those “many days” there was much discussion and debate in Philippi about what she was saying—that is, who was the “Most High God,” and what did it mean to be “saved.” The chief jailor would certainly have been a part of those discussions, and it seems that God used that to build a hunger in his heart to be saved and to take part in a wonderful afterlife, something that Roman mythology did not promise. The jailor asked Paul, “What must I do to be saved?” and he certainly did not learn about salvation from his Roman mythology background, so it seems certain that it was part of what he learned about during the “many days” that the slave girl talked about Paul’s showing “the way of salvation.” Interestingly, if God had given Paul the revelation to cast out the demon after only a day or two, the jailor would not have found out about salvation or developed a hunger to learn about it, and thus would have never asked Paul the question about how to be saved. This is a great example of when we humans wonder why God seems to be delaying answering our prayers (for certainly Paul, Silas, Luke, and Timothy prayed that the woman would stop following them) and we later find out that if God had not delayed answering them, then wonderful things—like the salvation of the jailor and his household—would not have happened.”

When we walk by the spirit, we realize that there’s lots of “wills” involved. We should do whatever God tells us so that His will dominates all others and everybody gets blessed.

Sometimes I get tempted to think that walking by the spirit is too complicated for me. I fear that there’s so much spiritually going on around me of which I’m ignorant that there’s no way I can keep up with it all. The truth is that I don’t have to keep up with it all – God does. I just pay attention to Him and if He thinks I need to know something, He’ll tell me. I keep living life and doing what I know is right and what I want to do. If things aren’t right, I ask for God’s help, and He’ll come through when it’s the right time and place.

Prov. 3:5,6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding;

In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.

That’s walking by the spirit. It’s simple, not necessarily easy. What’s easy about witnessing with a 10-year-old screeching nearby? Or getting whipped and jailed? That’s the opposite of easy. But successful? This was the birth of the Philippian church. Perhaps your or my spiritual lineage may have come through there! Paul and Silas’s trust was amazing!

Luke 13:10,11

And he [Jesus] was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath,

and look, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity 18 years, and she was being bent double and was not able to straighten herself at all.

We want to remember that in ministering healing and deliverance, there must be mutual trust to activate it and God to energize it. This is why throughout the gospels Jesus teaches and then heals and/or casts out demons. This was perhaps another reason why it took several days for the slave girl’s deliverance. She had to hear the gospel and believe, too. Here, Jesus teaches in the synagogue and trust in God is brought to a peak and Jesus goes to work. He sees a woman bent over. Is it an injury or a disease? Is it a congenital problem or a spirit? God reveals that it’s spiritually based.

Luke 13:12,13

And when Jesus saw her, he called her and said to her, “Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity.”

And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight and glorified God.

Why did Jesus lay hands on her and on other occasions he didn’t? Revelation. Even though it seems all the faith healers on TV do it every time, Jesus didn’t. He didn’t even command the evil spirits out every time. Here he simply tells her that she’s free from her infirmity (the spirit). Once again, words spoken by inspiration do the job. Do you see the formula here? No? Good! **There is no formula – just trusting God. That’s the “formula”!**

Note that when the spirit was evicted, there was no big show. Most of the time when spirits get the “heave ho” it is a simple process and little evidence is displayed. Just as when sheriff deputies throw out an evicted tenant, it is usually a quiet affair. Occasionally the squatters vainly complain, but the outcome is the same – Vamoose varmints!

Mark 1:21-24

And they went into Capernaum. And immediately on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue and began to teach.

And they were astonished at his teaching because he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as the experts in the law.

And immediately there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit, and he cried out,

saying, “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.”

Remarkably, the ruins of the Capernaum synagogue from the second century AD still stand today by the sea of Galilee. We can see where perhaps Jesus stood teaching and delivered this man. Once again, we also see teaching God’s word proceeding deliverance. Why?

Rom. 10:17 NKJV

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

The potential delivered one must believe that God is able and willing to deliver them and that the minister is able. Another thing to notice is that the potential “deliveree” refers to himself in the singular and plural. “Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are…” In modern mental health there is a diagnosis called “Dissociative identity disorder (DID)”. This was formerly known as “Multiple Personality Disorder”. It’s described as a “mental health condition where you have two or more separate personalities that control your behavior at different times”. Do you know why it presents itself this way? Because there are “two or more separate personalities controlling their behavior at different times”! They have multiple personalities within – spirits pretending to be human personalities. We think we are so modern and advanced, but here is this modern diagnosis 2000 years ago. And the cure still works, too!

Can there be multiple spirits in one person? Regretfully, the answer is yes. Think of a bunch of dogs in a pen. Some will bark constantly, and some will just mope around. There will be one “alpha” who will be “the big dog”, but all the dogs bark, bite and slink around. Sometimes a few bark at the same time and sometimes it’s just the alpha barking. That’s what’s happening here.

Notice they know who the boss is. The same is true with dogs and humans. The only times that dogs dominate humans are when humans are afraid or by sheer numbers, dogs overwhelm a fearful person. Other than that, dogs know the pecking order and so do evil spirits. They know that Jesus will destroy them. They feared him. And believe it or not, they fear us too! We have the spiritual authority conferred on us by Christ. We must act like it.

Mark 1:25-

And Jesus subdued him, saying, “Be bound!” and “Come out of him!”

And after throwing him into convulsions and crying out with a loud voice, the unclean spirit came out of him.

And they were all amazed, so they debated among themselves, saying, “What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.”

For a more historical and cultural idea of what “bound” meant at that time, read the REV commentary. Once again, the spirit (the “big dog”, infirmity, and other spirits) came out at his command and trashed the “house” as they were evicted.

Can you believe that this needy individual was in the synagogue? Some think that those in church or a place of worship should have their “cookies together”. The truth is that most of us have our cookies “crumbling” at times. We come to “God’s house” because we want help, not praise. That guy was right where he should have been, approaching God and fighting thoughts and impulses from multiple personalities vexing him. God heard his prayer for deliverance and sent His son. I wonder how many people we meet are praying for God’s deliverance in their lives like him? Are we God’s answer for them? Let’s be!