

Building Biblical
COMMUNITY *in* CHRIST

THE FIGHT
Ephesians 6:10-13

INTRODUCTION

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then... Ephesians 6:10-14a

About a year before we left the United States to be missionaries in France, I spoke with a friend who was a veteran missionary to that country. As I expressed my youthful and possibly idealistic enthusiasm about tackling the challenges of ministry in that land, he looked at me and said (...and I'll never forget it!), "David, you better put on your spiritual boxing gloves."

His words were prophetic. From day one it was a fight. But never so much as when we began to mobilize prayer on behalf of that country. Early on in our ministry we realized that, apart from a massive, national movement of prayer, little would be accomplished in that place of such resistance to the gospel.

Now if you want a ministry that is popular and to which people flock in mass, don't choose prayer. But if you want a ministry that stirs up the fury of the devil, there's no better choice.

About six years into our ministry, I began meeting with two key French leaders in the country: a pastor from Paris named Joël and an evangelist from Marseille named René. We all shared the strong conviction that only a movement of prayer could push back the darkness that held so many captive. And so we began to meet regularly on a mountain in southern France to intercede, asking God to raise up such a movement of prayer among the churches. We covenanted that we would devote ourselves to this end.

As I look back on it, it's not surprising that within several months, Joël's wife came down with terminal cancer which eventually took her life. René, the evangelist from Marseille, lost his support and had to take a full-time job limiting his ministry of prayer mobilization. And I became clinically depressed and had to return to the States for counseling and spiritual renewal.

"David, if you come to France, you better put on your spiritual boxing gloves."

Evagrius of Pontus, who lived in the fourth century after Christ, once said this: "The further the soul advances, the greater are the adversaries against which it must contend."ⁱ

Some Christians have the mistaken notion that the further you advance in the Christian life, the easier it becomes. It is certainly true that as we learn more and more of who we are in Christ and the spiritual weapons God has placed at our disposal, we can more effectively die to the old life and put to flight the enemy. But that in no way implies the battle rages any less. No, the further the soul advances, the greater are the adversaries and the more fiercely they attack.

Many Christians want a life without conflict. But that is not the picture of the Christian life that the Bible presents. Did you know that only the first two chapters of Genesis and the last two chapters of Revelation have no hint of the titanic conflict between good and evil, between God and Satan? No, the Christian life is a life of warfare on three fronts: the world, the flesh and the devil. We must want God more than we want a life without conflict.

Little wonder then that Paul writes to these Ephesian believers (who were relatively mature in their faith and grounded in Scripture) and describes the Christian life as a "struggle." "For our *struggle* is not against flesh and blood..." (verse 12).

OUR STRUGGLE

First, just what is this "struggle" to which you and I are called?

Just as the wrestling matches of Asia Minor were one of the main attractions of the games, so this struggle Paul speaks of is not a parenthetical aside, but the main thrust of the passage. On the battlefield a soldier can remain relatively removed from the enemy. But that doesn't work on the gymnasium floor. Two opponents don't normally stand at opposite ends of the mat engaged in verbal warfare or throwing objects at one another (unless, of course, your watching TNA wrestling!). No, they are engaged in a hand to hand, body to body struggle. And that is the meaning of the term here.ⁱⁱ The term refers to a grueling contest in which, in some cases, the loser would have his eyes gorged out resulting in blindness.ⁱⁱⁱ

Of course, Paul is quick to tell us what our struggle *is not*. It is *not* against flesh and blood. Ephesians is about the church. Ephesians is about relationships. Ephesians is about unity. And there is nothing more that Satan wants to destroy than our experiential unity as believers. We do not have the energy to waste fighting among ourselves! The real battle is elsewhere!

What then *is* our struggle against? As we saw last week, it is not against people, but against powers, spiritual powers such as rulers, authorities, and spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Such descriptive titles paint a picture of giant grotesque spiritual beings á la Darth Vader or the evil forces of Saruman in Lord of the Rings. We've seen

that these demonic powers are fallen angels and that they compose a vast army with specific roles. For example, while the “rulers” and “authorities” of verse 12 seem to carry out a more *cosmic* role influencing cultures and political structures such as in Daniel 10 (and I hope you read that passage this past week!), the “spiritual forces of evil” seem to carry out a more personal role parallel to the demons that attach themselves to individuals in the gospel accounts.

But what I want you to notice today is that their *primary* target is the church, you and me as believers in Jesus Christ. Peter reminds us: “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings” (1 Peter 5:8-9). His desire is to “devour” the Christian. The image is of an animal that swallows or drinks down its prey. In the Old Testament it described the whale swallowing Jonah (Jonah 1:17) and the sinking of Pharaoh’s army in the sea (Exodus 15:4). In the New Testament it describes being overwhelmed with extreme sorrow (2 Corinthians 2:7).^{iv} No wonder that in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* the chief of staff of the hellish forces is called “pandemonium.” Right in the middle of that word is the word *demon*. And that’s what demons want to do, work pandemonium in our lives and in the church.^v

Think of it this way. In the book of Genesis we read that God told Satan, “He [Christ] will crush your head, and you [Satan] will strike his heel.” Satan lashed out against Christ at the cross and he continues to lash out against God by striking at the “heel” of Christ, his Body. Because we are in Christ, we are hated as Christ is hated. Christ’s purpose is to “destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). And because of that, Satan wants to destroy us. We are at the “bulls-eye” of Satan’s target. And one of his foremost strategies in “hitting the bulls-eye” is by working havoc in your life as a believer and in the church.

How does he do this? That leads us to the second word I want you to notice in this passage. We *struggle* because Satan *schemes*.

SATAN’S SCHEMES

Paul says in verse 11: “Put on the full armor of God, that you may take your stand against the devil’s *schemes*.” The word is *methodeia* and sounds like our word, “method.” His schemes are his crafty methods, maneuvers, and strategies to deceive, defraud and destroy.

Coming from the southeast, I’m particularly fond of anything relating to the Civil War. The Battle of Antietam in 1862 lasted for only 12 hours, but ranks as the bloodiest day of the Civil War. Though militarily a draw, General George McClellan was able to hold off Robert E. Lee’s thrust into Maryland, forcing him to retire across the Potomac. How was this possible? Two Union soldiers found a copy of Lee’s battle plans and delivered them to McClellan before the engagement. They knew his strategy.

Our enemy's battle plans have fallen into our hands. Peter, James, John, and Paul all talk about Satan's schemes. But this is never to inspire in us fear or paranoia of Satan's ways, but rather to incite dependence upon God's power. And here's what the Bible tells us. His schemes are both *overt* and *covert*.

Satan's Overt Strategies

These Ephesian believers as well as many Christians today are overtaken by Satan's more overt strategies. These include the occult, cults, and false religions. The Bible makes it abundantly clear that Satan and his hordes of demons inspire these kinds of practices.^{vi} Therefore, any type of participation on this level can open the door to the enemy in the life of a believer.

Ephesus was the bastion of all types of charlatans and sorcerers in Paul's day. It was the crossroads for the occult and false religions. But in Acts 19 we read that these believers were convicted of how wrong and dangerous this involvement was and they came and brought all of their magical paraphernalia and burned it in the middle of the city. This was a massive ceremony of renunciation. The estimated value of what they burned was worth 50,000 days wages. Luke adds: "In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power" (Acts 19:20).

As for these believers in Ephesus, any type of passive or active involvement in the occult or false religions *must be renounced and repented of*. For the early Christians, this often took place at one's baptism. The baptismal candidate would often say out loud: "I renounce Satan and all his evil works." And his "evil works" often referred to the mystery religions that so many of these believers had been actively involved in before their conversion.

As in Paul's day, so today. Did you know that there are documented "unholy days" when ritualistic sacrifices (both animal and human) are made by adherents to Satanism? February 2, March 20 (Spring Equinox), April 26-May 1, June 21 (Summer Solstice), August 3, September 22 (Fall Equinox), October 29-November 1 (All Hallow's Eve), and December 22-24 (Winter Solstice). And so here at Central Bible Church we provide a safe, fun environment for our children on Halloween where we focus not on the devil, but on Christ. I hope you will take advantage of this opportunity to invite your friends and neighbors.

Satan's Covert Strategies.

But Satan's strategies are in no way limited to the *overt*. The majority are *covert*, that is subtle and surprising. I don't know about you, but Satan has never come up to me and said: "I am the Great Red Dragon, Satan, along with 25 other endearing, heinous names the New Testament gives me and I would like to lead you astray!" In fact, Paul says that he even masquerades as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

What are his covert strategies? There are many and we don't have time to mention them all. Here I will focus on just three.

Satan blinds. First, he *blinds*. Paul says, "Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has *blinded* the minds of the unbelieving..." (2 Corinthians 4:3, 4).

The other night I saw *Bateman Begins*. And towards the end of the movie, right where you think it should have been called "Bateman Ends," his opponents are releasing poisonous, toxic gases into the city of Gotham, causing hallucinations and eventually death. The blinding power of Satan is like that. J.O. Fraser, missionary to the Lisu people of China once described it as the "asphyxiating gases" that keep people in unbelief.^{vii}

Satan blinds unbelievers to the gospel, but he also blinds you and me as believers. He blinds us to our sin. He blinds us to his strategies. He blinds us to Christ's sufficiency in overcoming evil in our lives. And that is why prayer is so important. Paul prays for us in Ephesians 1 that we would see with our spiritual eyes all the riches and authority that we have in Christ. But our eyes must be opened.

Satan beguiles. Not only does Satan blind, he *beguiles*. That is, he deceives (Revelation 12:9; 13:14). The devil and his demons promote a program of deceit and death. They seek to control individuals (Ephesians 2:1-2) and entire societies (Daniel 10:13, 20). They attempt to influence the world's philosophy and course of history (John 12:31; 2 Thessalonians 2:8-10). They oppose God's purposes primarily through promoting false religion. The Bible views idolatry as inspired by Satan himself (Psalm 106:36-38; Psalm 95:5; Deuteronomy 32:7). Today, it may not in the West be asherah poles or Baal worship, but materialism, intellectualism, pursuit of power and pleasure.

In all of this, Satan adapts himself to cultural precedents. What do I mean by this? Where the mental paradigm of people allows for the world of the supernatural, his approach is more overt, working through visible expressions of demonic influence. Where the culture is more materialistic and naturalistic, Satan's approach is somewhat less obvious, and yet equally if not more deceitful.

When we look for Satan head on, beware! He'll come from behind in a most deceitful way. Satan began the art of deception in the Garden of Eden and he has been perfecting it ever since. *And Satan's number one target is our minds.*

Notice what Paul writes to the Corinthians: "But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your **minds** will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3). Our *minds* are assaulted as was Eve's. The enemy attempts to mix demonic thoughts with the believer's thoughts until the two cannot be distinguished.^{viii}

More specifically, how does he do this? He attacks our confidence in the Word of God (Matthew 16:22-23; 1 Timothy 4:1). He instills doubt about the character of Christ (1

John 4:1-4; 2 Timothy 3:5; 2 Peter 1:16). He accuses us, reminding us of our sin and failures (Revelation 12:10). He creates thoughts and feelings of guilt, doubt and fear, saying to us such things as: “You are nothing but a product of your past,” “You will never conquer this sin in your life,” or “You will never surmount your negative thoughts.”

How do we counter these attacks on our mind? We do as Jesus did; we counter these attacks with truth. Each time Jesus was tested by Satan as recorded in Matthew 4 he responded by “It is written.” Satan is a liar from the beginning (John 8:44). Jesus even said that when he lies “he speaks his native language.” And only the truth of God’s word will ward off his attack on our minds.

But not only does Satan target our minds. He also attacks us through what we might call “sin-based oppression.”^{ix} The Bible clearly teaches that our enemy will gain a “foothold” in our life there where there is ongoing sin.

First, Satan can oppress us through *pre-conversion sin*. I believe the experience of the Ephesian believers described in Acts 19 demonstrates this. It was *after* their conversion that they brought their magical books and burned them, renouncing the deeds of darkness. They recognized that such pre-conversion sin, though forgiven, if not renounced would be an open door for Satan to afflict them in the present.

Second, Satan can oppress the believer through *generational sin*. Though much of the biblical evidence for this is from the Old Testament (Exodus 20:5, 6; 34:7; Jeremiah 32:18; 1 Kings 15:3 “he committed all the sins his father had done before him.”), in light of the solidarity of the human race, I believe that to a certain extent the same holds true for us today.

How are we to respond to sin that has been repeated generation on generation within our families? We are to confess this sin and repent of this sin (Leviticus 26:40-42).^x

But the most typical way in which Satan gains a foothold in the believer’s life is through *post-conversion sin*. Any sin that you willfully continue in as a believer opens you up to demonic influence. Paul makes this explicitly clear in Ephesians 4:27 – “In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a *foothold*.” The word here, “foothold,” literally means “place.” It is used to describe the fact that there was no “place” for Mary and Joseph in the inn.^{xi}

Several sins in the New Testament are specifically linked to demonic influence: immorality (1 Corinthians 7:2,5), false doctrine (1 Timothy 4:1-3), and lack of forgiveness (Ephesians 4:27; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11). Why is this?



Because demons are like rats (picture of rats and garbage). They go where the garbage is. That is why in many cases, the real problem is not the demons, but the garbage...those persistent sinful behaviors and attitudes in our lives. Sinful “garbage” provides Satan a “place,” a foothold in our lives from which he can then begin to influence us in even more profound ways. But in all of this, Satan’s desire is, as A. W. Tozer states it, to “keep us bound and gagged, actually imprisoned in our own grave clothes.”

Satan buffets. Now if Satan cannot trip us up through blindness and beguilement, he will *buffet* us physically. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 12:7 – “there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself.”

This “thorn” seems to refer to a sickness or physical weakness that beset Paul. Just what this was, we do not know. It could have been eye trouble, such as ophthalmia, or a fever such as malaria. Others have suggested epilepsy, hysteria, periodic depressions, leprosy or an impediment in his speech.^{xii}

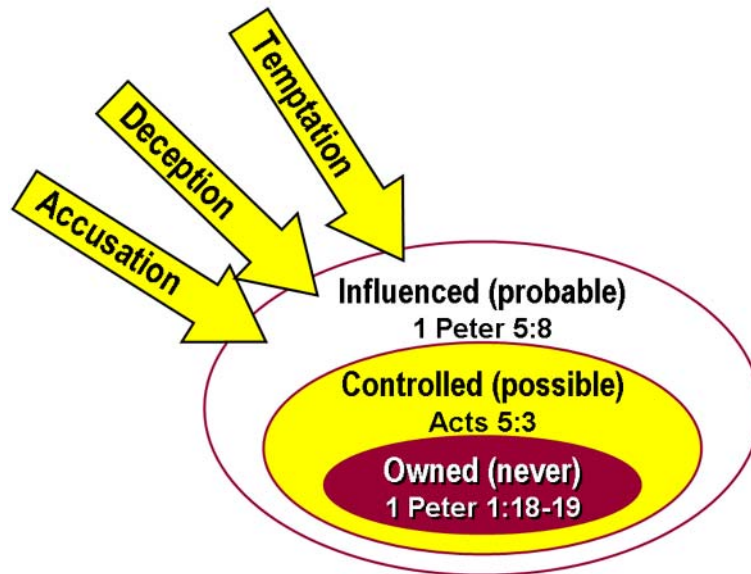
What we do know is that standing behind the infirmity was a demon, a “messenger of Satan.” And even though Paul requested three times to be delivered from this attack, God’s only answer was “my grace is sufficient for you.”

This passage should be a great encouragement to you and me. Here we see the interplay between God’s sovereignty and the devil’s – not *your* – free will. Sometimes it seems that the devil and his demons are out of control, free to work pandemonium in our lives.^{xiii} But remember, they are on the leash of God’s sovereignty. Sometimes that “leash” appears to be quite long. But it is there (Job 2:7-9; John 17:15).

Now all of this raises a serious question. Can a Christian be “demon possessed?” In other words, can a Christian come under a high degree of influence by a demon?^{xiv}

Actually, the words “demon possessed”—implying ownership – are never used in the Bible.^{xv} But the word that is used (*daimonizomenos*) is best translated “demonized” (Matthew 4:24; Mark 1:32; Luke 8:31b). This word speaks of influence and control to varying degrees, but *not* ownership.^{xvi}

Can a Christian then be “demonized?” Yes, I believe we can be. The Bible seems to teach that there are varying degrees of spiritual vulnerability in our lives (chart).^{xvii}



For example, through accusation, deception and temptation, the devil can influence all of us (1 Peter 5:8). As we said last week, though Satan may not instigate every temptation in our lives, he is certainly interested in every temptation.

But as we open a door to Satan’s influence, normally through our mind, we risk falling into a more profound level of influence which we might call “control” (chart). This is most often through what we have described as “sin-based oppression.” In Acts 5:3, Peter says that Satan “filled the hearts” of Ananias and Sapphira, inciting them to lie.

But can the devil and his demons own us? Never. We have been redeemed, literally “bought out of” the slave market of sin and demonic ownership (1 Peter 1:18,19). Satan can exert an influence – sometimes a profound influence – in your life as a believer. But he cannot steal your identity. Just like the Temple in the Old Testament, evil things can be brought into our temple, but the temple still belongs to the Lord. And as Christ controls (Ephesians 3:17), he crowds out sinful and demonic influence. After all, any demon influencing our life is simply a “squatter.” He has no legal right to be there.

OUR STANCE

In light of our struggle and Satan’s schemes, what should be our stance as believers? Paul answers that question very specifically in these verses.

First, he answers the question: *what are we to do?* “Finally, be strong in Lord,” he says. Literally, he says, “Be strengthened!” Here Paul gives us a command, but in the passive voice. It is not something we can do ourselves (like “pull yourself together” or “get with it!”), but something we allow Christ to do for us. That’s why Paul adds, “...in the Lord.”

Paul uses the expression “in Christ” or its equivalent thirty-three times in this letter. Only as you and I find our strength *in Christ* and who we are in him will we be able to effectively engage the adversary.

It is this strengthening for which Paul prays in Ephesians 3:16-17 – “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” As we are strengthened inwardly by God’s Spirit, Christ can “dwell” in our hearts. This means that he can “settle down and be at home in our lives.” And as Christ controls, the devil and his demons are crowded out.

This is what we are to do. Be strengthened in the Lord. But how are we to do it? Paul tells us that too. We are strengthened as we “put on” the armor of God (verses 11, 13). We’ll be looking at this aspect more specifically next week and just what it means to put on each piece of the armor mentioned in these verses.

But lastly, *why* are we to “be strengthened” and “put on?” It is so that we can “stand firm.” James says the same thing when he writes: “*Resist* the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7; cf. 1 Peter 5:9).

Some believe that we are only on the defensive when it comes to spiritual warfare. They argue that such terms as “stand firm” and “resist” are purely defensive, warding off the devil’s onslaughts. But as we’ll see, while several pieces of the armor provided for us are defensive in nature, there are at least two which are clearly offensive: the sword of the spirit which is the word of God and prayer.

Actually, even the word “resist” has an active, aggressive sense to it. The same word is used of Paul as he *opposed* Peter in Galatians 2:11. And when Jesus resisted the attacks of Satan as recorded in Matthew 4, he did it actively and authoritatively by each time quoting the Word of God.

So this must be our stance against Satan’s influence and attempted infiltration into our lives. We rely upon our identity “in Christ.” We do this by putting on the various pieces of the spiritual armor that God has provided as detailed in Ephesians 6:14-20. And we do this in order to effectively take our stand against the enemy, resisting his deceitful schemes. And the Bible promises that when we resist, he will flee (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:9).

What about you? Are there areas of your life that have been an open door for the devil? Are you giving him a “place” through unforgiveness, immorality or any occultic involvement? Are you aware of Satan’s strategies in your life and the subtleties of his deceitful ways? Are you standing firm against his attacks, depending fully on Christ’s sufficiency?

As we were becoming more aware of the nature of our spiritual battle while in France, Mary Alice penned these words that may be an encouragement to you in the fight:

*Do I dare to live the life of God,
A child, and not a slave,
In full possession of his rights
for which the Lord Jesus paid?*

*Do I dare to put to death
Those things that draw me to this earth,
That make me less than what I am,
A child of heavenly birth?*

*Do I dare to speak with gentle words
And walk in obedient joy,
To be a channel of the Life
No power can destroy?*

*Does it seem strange to venture
This way, to live a life of peace,
Peace with God, peace within,
Yet facing the enemy?*

*The strangeness felt is just a sign
Of a life once enslaved to sin,
But remember that life has been
On the cross where the battle
Our Savior did win.*

*So dare to press on in newness of life,
Each day live for God, in His grace,
'til the old and familiar seem
distant and strange,
and the new is put firmly in place.*

ⁱ Evagrius of Pontus (d. 399), "Eastern Orthodoxy," *Christian History*, no. 54

ⁱⁱ Cited in Clinton E. Arnold, *Three Crucial Questions about Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 37. Compare the description cited by Arnold of one match: "The Council and the People honor Alexander, sn of Menodorus, grandson of Dionysus, an Ephesian who won the wrestling [*palē*] at the Isthmian games, the Common Games of Asia at Ephesus, and at the great Epheseie...[H]e also won the wrestling [*palē*] in the Common Games of Galatia...and he also won the wrestling [*palē*] in the Common Games of Asia in Sardis and t very many other games."

ⁱⁱⁱ Kenneth Wuest, *Ephesians in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1983), 1:141.

^{iv} William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: Univerisity of Chicago, 1957), 417, s.v. *Katapinō*. Merrill Unger adds that this term "certainly conveys the idea that the powers of darkness are able to make a very serious encroachment upon the life of a child of God." Merrill F. Unger, *What Demons Can Do to Saints* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1977), 92.

^v Satan is called *appolyon*, the destroyer (Revelation 9:11). Jesus told Peter: "Satan has asked to have you that he might sift you as wheat" (Luke 22:31).

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^{vii} Compare the birds of the air that steal the seeds of truth implanted in people's hearts (Matthew 13:1-23).

^{viii} Cf. 1 Chronicles 21:1; John 13:2; Acts 5:3. Would King David have carried out a census of Israel if he thought it was the devil's idea? This seems to indicate that Satan is able to put a thought in our minds in the first person singular, making us think that the thought is our own.

^{ix} I have taken this term from Tom White and his excellent book *The Believer's Guide to Spiritual Warfare* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Servant Publications, 1990).

^x "But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers--their treachery against me and their hostility toward me, which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies--then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, I will remember my covenant ..."

^{xi} cf. Luke 11:24; Revelation 12:7-8.

^{xii} William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957), 442, 763.

^{xiii} Satan and his demons incite persecution, imprisonment or even the death of believers (Revelation 2:8-10; 18:2, 24).

^{xiv} Merrill Unger in his book *Biblical Demonology* (1952) argued that this could not be possible. But in two later books, *Demons in the World Today* (1971) and *What Demons Can Do to Saints* (1977) he revised his previously held position, arguing that demons could influence believers in a number of ways including possession or inhabitation.

^{xv} There are other words that the biblical writers could have used if they wanted to convey the idea of ownership or possession e.g., *huparchō*, *echō*, *katechō*, *ptaomai*, or *peripoieō*. We do find the expression "he has a demon (*echei daimonion*)" as in Luke 4:33; 8:27, but never "a demon has him."

^{xvi} "...*daimonizomenos* does not mean owned by a demon, but simply 'demonized.' This basically describes the condition of a person who is inhabited by a demon or demons and is in various degrees under control with various effects. The idea of ownership is foreign to the New Testament word and its usage. Satan and his demons own nothing. God owns them. They are creatures of God. He is in control of them and determines their limitations and their destiny. They are judged by the cross of Christ, defeated, and bankrupt." Dickason, 130.

^{xvii} This chart has been adapted from Neil T. Anderson *Resolving Spiritual Conflicts* (Freedom in Christ Ministries, 1992), 17.