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Deliverance Ministry and Worldview Beliefs

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Introduction

Deliverance ministry has been a niche, but visible, part of the broader Charismatic and Pentecostal movement beginning around the 1950s. These are Christian ministries that emphasize helping people experience freedom from demonic oppression, spiritual bondage, or generational curses. They typically focus on prayer, counseling, and spiritual practices aimed at breaking strongholds in believers' lives.

Of course, these things can certainly be legitimate matters to consider when dealing with the Christian life. There is an objectively real spiritual world, and Satan, along with his demonic cohorts, do attack human beings in various ways as we live our lives. Most of Satan's attacks are not so dramatic that they would require the attention of a self-proclaimed deliverance ministry. Most spiritual problems Christians face in daily life can and should be dealt with by prayer, discipleship, counseling, or sometimes even medical help. The most prominent struggles Christians have to deal with are simply temptations in various parts of one's life to do what is wrong.

Deliverance ministries, only need come into play when there are spiritual issues that go beyond the usual. These might include such things as genuine persistent spiritual oppression where people are overwhelmed by a sense of heaviness or bondage, patterns of sin that seem unbreakable despite repentance and accountability, physical or emotional manifestations that can't be explained by more traditional means, or the result of involvement in occult practices. Overall, only a very small percentage of spiritual problems people have are due to the kind of spiritual oppression that would require the attention of a deliverance ministry.

Christians definitely need to be aware of how Satan is working to affect their lives, and society in general. That

said, the Deliverance Ministry movement is also easily subject to excesses and abuse. If people are not careful and aware, these abuses can end up causing serious harm to people physically, psychologically, and spiritually. As such, it is critical for Christians to understand the distinction between true and false beliefs when it comes to this topic. Knowing true beliefs helps us stand strong as we deal with various spiritual attacks, and knowing false beliefs helps us keep from drifting into spiritual error.

One of the things that is important is to make a careful distinction between demonic possession and spiritual oppression. This distinction is important, and those looking into this arena should do so with eyes wide open.

Demonic possession involves full control or inhabitation of a person by a demon. This is not possible in a Christian, as the Holy Spirit is already dwelling in the person and will prevent that from happening. It is, however, possible for people who are not Christians. While actual possession is generally the exception rather than the rule, it is possible for non-Christian's to be possessed or heavily influenced by demons. Even then, however, it is rare, so when people exhibit what might possibly be demonic possession, it is important to first rule out other possibilities such as emotional or psychological problems.

Demonic oppression, on the other hand, relates to Satan's common attacks on people in the course of daily life. It can be defined as external attacks, influence, or pressure by demonic forces against a person, as opposed to the internal control that characterizes possession. Christians are, potentially, subject to this. Spiritual oppression involves external harassment, temptation, or spiritual attack (which can sometimes even be quite severe). Virtually everyone has experienced times in their life when they seem to be overwhelmed by evil of some kind or another, including Christians. These instances do not necessarily rise to the level of oppression, but in some cases they may. The biblical defense against this is spiritual

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warfare: standing firm in faith using the armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18), prayer, and resistance (James 4:7).

History

The history of modern deliverance ministries as a Christian effort actually began in fairly recent times. At the same time, it claims continuity with biblical exorcism traditions. There are instances of Jesus and the apostles delivering people from demonic possession or oppression. The early church considered exorcism a part of spiritual warfare demonstrating Christ's victory over Satan.

Exorcism became more formalized in the Medieval Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches as they began incorporating formal prayers and rituals. During that period, many saints were credited with performing exorcisms.

During the Reformation era in the West, the Roman Catholic Church continued their exorcism traditions. Most Protestants, however, rejected those rituals and instead preferred invoking the authority of Christ's name and the use of Scripture. Later, during the Enlightenment period, people increasingly questioned the very concept of demonic possession, and attributed what was formerly considered to be possession to mental illness or superstition.

In modern times, the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches maintain their traditional practice of exorcism, but it has moved in a different direction in Protestant and Pentecostal denominations. This is where modern deliverance ministries emerged.

From the early 1900s - 1940s, belief in the baptism of the Holy Spirit in Pentecostalism brought renewed attention to spiritual warfare. During that period, healing revivals emerged that sometimes included exorcism. This carried over into the mid-20th century where evangelists like Oral Roberts and A.A. Allen occasionally performed public exorcisms.

Deliverance became a distinct ministry emphasis in the 1970s and onward led

by people such as Derek Prince (focus on generational curses and deliverance as part of discipleship), Don Basham (published books on how ordinary Christians could cast out demons) and Frank & Ida Mae Hammond (wrote *Pigs in the Parlor* as a foundational text).

In our present day, deliverance ministries have spread primarily across charismatic, Pentecostal, and certain independent churches. These ministries generally have a focus on issues like generational curses, territorial spirits, and spiritual strongholds. They also became increasingly visible through movements such as the "Third Wave" with John Wimber and the Vineyard churches, Bob Larson, Apostle John Eckhardt, and Isaiah Saldivar. They have become even more ubiquitous because of access to modern media livestreaming technology and YouTube. Some of the more well known contemporary leaders in the Deliverance Ministry arena include: Isaiah Saldivar, Vlad Savchuk, Alexander Pagan, and Greg Locke.

Authority

Those who promote Deliverance Ministry as a Christian endeavor of course use the Bible to justify what they do. They do this based on three basic foundational principles.

1. They cite Jesus and the apostles as their model and example of casting out demons

And He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew who He was. Mark 1:34

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He anointed Me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to captives, And recovery of sight to the blind, To set free those who are oppressed, Luke 4:18

16 It happened that as we were going to the place of prayer, a slave woman who had a spirit of divination met us, who was bringing great profit to her masters

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by fortune-telling. 17 She followed Paul and us and cried out repeatedly, saying, "These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you a way of salvation." 18 Now she continued doing this for many days. But Paul was greatly annoyed, and he turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out at that very moment. Acts 16:16-18

2. They point to biblical admonitions to actively resist Satan

Submit therefore to God. But resist the devil, and he will flee from you. James 4:7

3. They point to biblical instructions about how to wage spiritual warfare to demolish strongholds

4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 We are destroying arguments and all arrogance raised against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, 2 Corinthians 10:4-5

Worldview Beliefs

In dealing with the worldview beliefs related to Deliverance Ministry, we need to make a couple of fine distinctions. These distinctions are not necessarily unique to Deliverance Ministry, but are things that people need to be aware of in every aspect of the Christian life. That said, when dealing with this particular area, it is important to be very careful not to veer off into a set of cultic beliefs and practices.

The people who engage in Deliverance Ministry are definitely working off of biblical worldview beliefs, as theologically they hold to basic Christian Theism concerning God, man, and salvation. That said, there are those who shift the focus away from pointing people to Christ and toward seeing the work of Satan around every corner. At that point, deliverance moves away from positively accomplishing the actual purpose of God in the world, to an overarching focus on fighting against

Satan. The distinction that must be maintained is between accomplishing the actual purpose of God in the world vs. a mechanical formulaic view of overcoming Satan.

Ultimate Reality (God)

Christianity affirms that there are both spiritual and material parts of reality that exist as described in the Bible. This includes the existence of the God of the Bible, as well as evil spiritual beings (Satan and his demons). In the current fallen world, Satan is able to influence those who open themselves up to his influence.

Man

Based on biblical teachings, man is made in the image of God, but fallen. The implication of that is that human beings have the ability to interact with the spirit world. We are able to communicate and personally connect with God. But by the same token we are also able have interaction with Satan and his demons. As fallen creatures, we actually have a tendency to sin.

Salvation

The Christian faith teaches that salvation was accomplished by the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Those who repent of their sin and invite Christ into their life will, upon physical death, live eternally in heaven with God. Those who do not will be eternally separated from Him in Hell.

Other Beliefs and Practices

Core Beliefs of Those Who Promote Deliverance Ministry

- Spiritual Warfare - Christians must actively resist demonic forces. (They take this belief from Bible passages such as Ephesians 6:10-18.)
- Demonic Influence - Demons can oppress Christians, even if not "possessing" them in the full sense.
- Bondages & Curses - Many teach that generational sins, occult involvement, trauma, or habitual

sins can open doors to demonic influence.

- Authority in Christ - Based on verses like Mark 16:17 and Luke 10:19, they stress that believers have authority through Jesus to cast out demons.

Common Practices in Deliverance Ministries

- Prayer Sessions - Many who deal in this practice use targeted prayers, asking God to reveal root causes of bondage and to expel demonic influence.
- Renunciation - Believers are urged to confess and renounce past sins, occult involvement, or unhealthy ties.
- Exorcism/Deliverance Prayer - These are often rather dramatic practices involving commanding spirits to leave in Jesus' name.
- Inner Healing - Some ministries combine deliverance with counseling in order to focus on emotional wounds.

Controversies

- Theological Concerns - Some critics argue that deliverance ministries may overemphasize demons instead of focusing on salvation and discipleship.
- Abuse/Fear - In extreme cases, deliverance practices have caused emotional harm, obsession with demons, or even false memories.
- Teaching That Christians Can Be Demon-possessed - Some teach that Christians can become demon possessed, which many evangelicals reject as contrary to Scripture.
- Creating elaborate demon classification systems - Some ministries create demonic systems not found in the Bible –such as naming spirits of gluttony, laziness, gossip, etc.
- Some deliverance ministries build deliverance doctrines based on experience and anecdote, rather than on Scripture.

Excesses and Abuses

Some Deliverance Ministry leaders have earned a reputation for practices that do not correspond to the teachings of Scripture.

Overemphasis on Demons

- Seeing a demon behind every problem (illness, addiction, financial trouble, marital conflict, even personality quirks).
- Attributing complex issues that are not necessarily linked to demonic activity to demonization (like trauma, mental illness, or sin habits).
- Giving teachings that lead people to live in constant fear of demonic attack.

Psychological & Pastoral Harm

- Blaming people's problems on demons to the exclusion of addressing personal responsibility, discipleship, or counseling.
- Misdiagnosing mental health issues as demonic, which can delay proper medical or psychological treatment.
- In some cases, intense exorcism sessions have led to trauma, fear, or even physical harm.

Power & Control Issues

- Leaders sometimes exercise spiritual dominance by claiming authority to “discern demons” in followers.
- Deliverance can sometimes lead to a cycle of dependency where people continually come back for more “sessions” instead of growing in Christ.
- In extreme cases, it can foster cult-like environments where leaders claim special revelation.

Sensationalism & Commercialization

- Some practitioners practice public “showy” exorcisms that are designed to draw attention to themselves, rather than quietly ministering in love.
- There are some media personalities who have turned deliverance into a spectacle, sometimes even charging for events or training.

- There are those who hold conferences, sell books, and make “special prayers” as if deliverance were a spiritual product.

Division & Stigma

- There are cases where those practicing Deliverance Ministry have fostered a mentality pitting those who have had “deliverance” against those who haven’t.
- There are situations where people have been stigmatized as being “demonized,” when they’re simply struggling with normal human weaknesses.
- This practice can sometimes lead to broken families or church splits when accusations of demonization are made.

Witnessing to People of this Persuasion

Worldview Bridge

People who are engaged with Deliverance Ministry, whether performing or receiving it, typically consider themselves Christians. If they didn’t, they probably wouldn’t be involved in the first place. And they very well may be. With that, however, we run into a particular issue we must be aware of, even in an average church setting. There are people in nearly every church who self-identify as Christian but who may not be. The deciding factor is not self-identification, activity level, or affiliation. It is whether or not they know a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Certainly, they do believe in Christian Theism as a worldview platform, so if it turns out that they don’t know Christ and you have the opportunity to share that with them, no worldview barrier needs to be crossed.

Gospel Bridge

On the other hand, there are those who so focus on the idea of deliverance that they exclude the actual gospel message. If that is the case, it may be necessary to clarify where the differences lie. Many people who are immersed in this arena are so focused on the miraculous work of God in the world that they pass over the purpose of those works. God’s purpose is not to do miraculous works, but to bring people into a personal relationship with Himself. In dealing with people who are engaged with deliverance ministry, it is important to make this distinction. If the focus is to “be delivered” rather than know a personal relationship with God, the person very well may not know Christ in the first place. If not, the first step is to lead them to receive Christ.

Conclusion

Probably the most important thing to know about Deliverance Ministry is that it is not an end in itself, and when it becomes that it ceases to be a biblical practice. We do read in the Bible where Jesus and the apostles, on occasion, did free people from the possession or oppression of evil spirits. But they never did it as the object of their ministry. They never held “Deliverance Meetings.” The focus of their ministry was ALWAYS to bring people into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. And even when they did deliver people from the oppression of a demon, they always pointed them to a relationship with Christ and directed them to go forth and share the faith.

Also, it is essential to keep in mind that not every struggle people have is demonic. Some are emotional, mental, or physical in nature. In fact, some struggles are actually God working in a person’s life to help them grow spiritually. “Deliverance” should never replace pastoral care,

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counseling, repentance, and discipleship. A credible deliverance minister operates under biblical authority, love, confidentiality, and the oversight of a healthy church community. Again, it is not an end in itself.

It is not that there is never a need for direct interaction against spiritual powers, but it is truly the exception rather than the rule. When it is necessary, however, there are a couple of things to keep in mind. Evangelicals see deliverance ministry for Christians as more about breaking strongholds (habitual sin, false beliefs, trauma) and resisting oppression. It is not so much about casting out inhabiting demons. Concerning non-Christians, it actually may sometimes involve casting out demons. But the ultimate goal must always be a person's salvation and spiritual growth, since without Christ they remain spiritually vulnerable. Deliverance should be subordinate to the gospel, not the main focus of the Christian life.

When Deliverance Ministry becomes an end in itself, it is not accomplishing the purpose and work of God. It is when the priorities get messed up that the ministry ceases to be the work of God. This cannot be emphasized too strongly.