

Demon Really Does Mean Demon!

by Anthony Buzzard

Extensive conversation and correspondence with Christadelphians over many years convinces me that this denomination is caught, unwittingly, in a dangerous piece of rationalism — the denial of the existence of demons in the New Testament. This denial of the existence of demons is akin to the Sadducees' rejection of angels and spirits (Acts 23:8).

Christadelphians are faced with an insurmountable problem when they try to eradicate from the records the real supernatural personalities — the demons — which are so prominent in the Gospels. This discussion can be reduced to a simple question: What does the New Testament mean by “demon”?

We should first clear up the considerable confusion caused by the KJV rendering of the Greek *daimonia* by “devils.” This is completely wrong, as modern translations allow us to see. There is a separate word, *diabolos* (devil), which is never confused with *daimonion* (demon).

From correspondence with Christadelphians, I have gathered a number of different suggested meanings for the word “demon.” It is, they say, an idol, a possession, a possessed person, a madness, insanity, or something non-existent. This variety of definitions points to the difficulty Christadelphians find themselves in when confronted with the demon phenomenon of the New Testament.

It must first be noted that Christadelphian definitions of the word *daimonion* (demon) agree with no Greek lexicons of the New Testament. The latter define the word as “a spirit personality intermediate between God and man.” No Greek authority known to this writer ever thought that *daimonion* means a possessed *human person* or an idol. Of course, a demon in the New Testament causes insanity and other disabilities. But in the records of the New Testament the *cause* of the insanity and the insanity itself are carefully distinguished.

The multiple definitions for “demon” offered by Christadelphians are a result of their conviction that demons do not exist. The New

Testament, however, reveals that they do, and that they are just what all lexicons say they are — supernatural personalities, with intelligence (albeit perverted) and will. This is what the evidence of the Bible and the Greek language presents to us, and we must be careful not to set ourselves in opposition to it. This would involve the suppression of revealed truth.

Defining a demon as a supernatural personality does not, it must be stressed, commit us to a particular theory of the *origin* of such beings. The question of origin must not be allowed to confuse the primary issue: do demons exist? Luke nowhere says that a demon is a departed human spirit, even though some Jews did think of demons as surviving spirits of the dead.

What then is a demon? Even if we were to discount the evidence of all standard dictionaries of New Testament words, the context of the word “demon” in the New Testament lets us know what the writers mean by the term. We gather immediately from what is said of demons that they are personalities with intelligence who oppress some unfortunate human beings and are in violent opposition to Jesus. *What is absolutely clear from the accounts is that the demon is not an alternative name for the victim which it oppresses.* This distinction is no more complicated than the difference between a terrorist and a terrorized person, or a murderer and the one murdered. If Christadelphians were faced with a foreign language, we might reasonably expect some confusion over this point. But the Greek New Testament has been correctly translated into English. Throughout the narrative accounts of the demons, it is always the *demon* (*daimonion*) who afflicts the *demonized one* (*o daimonizomenos*). To pretend otherwise is simply to close one's eyes to what stands written in the sacred text.

The demon enters a human being; possesses supernatural knowledge about who Jesus is; fears being tormented; can request to be sent into swine; can cry out in intelligible speech (using the victim as a mouthpiece); and recognize God as the one true God and tremble at that fact. A demon can speak as one of a larger company; it can assemble other demons; more than one demon may enter a single person. Demons can be addressed and rebuked.

The language of the demon stories precludes absolutely the possibility that demons are possessed *human beings*! The demon is the attacker and invader of his human victim. Nor could a demon, on the evidence of the Gospels, be an idol. No idol, if by idol we mean an inanimate object, ever behaved as demons in the New Testament do. The accounts do not say that Jesus *imagined* that demons spoke, or that people *thought* they could speak. The inspired text says they *did* speak. Demons are not part of a world of fantasy in the Gospels. They are a tragically *real part of the world of history and fact*! Moreover, the accounts are designed to alert us to the reality of an unseen world which we ignore at our peril. It would therefore be most unwise to silence that part of divine revelation which we find distasteful, in the interests of our own rationalizing theory. The rejection of the world of supernatural evil presented to us by the Bible is in principle no different from the rejection of miracles, the virgin birth, and the resurrection!

A simple exercise in Bible study will reveal to a Christadelphian that his various theories as to the meaning of “demon” cannot be upheld. Let any Christadelphian adopt one of his chosen meanings from “demon” and substitute it for the word “demon” in the accounts. Suppose he chooses “something that does not exist.” Then “somethings that do not exist” cried out, spoke, and were rebuked by Jesus. They also recognized Jesus as the Messiah when the ordinary people did not. In James 2:19 “some non-existent things” believe that God is one and tremble. Suppose that the term “possessed person” or “insane person” is selected. Then “possessed persons” had entered a “possessed person”! The accounts tell us that “demons” entered their victims who were then “demonized,” i.e. demon-possessed or demon-influenced. It is clear, therefore, that the “demon” cannot be the “demonized person.” In James 2:19 “demons” believe in the one God. This demonstrates that they have intelligence. Note carefully that it is “demons” who believe in the one God, not “demonized persons.”

If we were to select the term “insanity” we have to ask whether “insanity” can speak in company with other “insanities”; whether “insanities” believe in God or recognized Jesus as

the Messiah. Can “insanities” request to enter pigs? (Note the plural “demons” in Mark 5:12: “all the demons said...”) Such an exercise reveals that any other definition of “demon” than supernatural personality leads to complete incoherence, and is properly rejected.

We are left with the plain truth of the scriptural accounts. They should be left untampered with. They must be allowed to carry their important message about the unseen world of evil which rationalism has been keen to discount.

It is characteristic of any system of theology that it seeks to eliminate from the Bible anything that challenges that system. The reverse procedure, as we all know, is the right one. We are to bring our own ideas to the touchstone of Scripture to have them corrected or modified. This is how growth in grace and knowledge occurs. A tragedy occurs when ideas become enshrined in stone as part of a dogmatic system in opposition to the Bible.

At present Christadelphianism continues to suppress the truth as presented by the accounts of the demonic world. By refusing the plain lexical meanings of words and by substituting their own definition of the word “demon,” Christadelphians effectively alter the meaning of Scripture. It is a grave mistake especially when it is found among those who otherwise so expertly deal with the doctrine of the Kingdom of God and the unity of God.

The challenge presented to rationalism is found in the following inspired testimony to the facts of history:

“A great number of demons had entered him. The demons begged [Jesus] not to order them to go into the abyss...The demons begged him for permission to go into the pigs. He gave them permission. So the demons came out of the man and went into the pigs” (Luke 8:30-33).

“When an evil spirit goes out of a person, it goes through waterless places looking for rest, and when it finds none it says, ‘I will go back to my house I left.’ When it returns, it finds the house all clean and tidy. Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and live there” (Luke 11:24-26).