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Modern Myths About Satan and Spiritual Warfare

By David Servant

MYTH #7

Various Minor Myths

Myth #7A: “When a Christian sins, he opens the door for a demon to come and live in him.”

It is true that when a Christian sins, it may be because he has yielded to temptation from an evil spirit. Yielding to the suggestion of an evil spirit, however, does not mean that the evil spirit himself is thus able to come inside the believer. If that were the case, every one of us would be so demon-possessed that we would all need to be locked away in padded cells, because as James wrote, “we all stumble in many ways” (Jas. 3:2).

When we sin as Christians, we break our fellowship with God, because we have disobeyed Him (see 1 John 1:5-6). We feel guilty. We have not, however, broken our *relationship* with Him, as we are still His children.

If we confess our sins, “He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Then our fellowship with Him is restored. Notice John did not say that we needed to be cleansed from any indwelling demons when we are guilty of sin.

Every Christian is faced with daily temptations from the world, the flesh, and the devil. Paul wrote that we do indeed have a struggle against various evil spirits (see Eph 6:12). Therefore, to some degree, every believer is harassed by demon spirits. That is normal, and it is our responsibility to resist the devil and demons by faith in God’s Word (see 1 Pet. 5:8-9). When we believe and act upon what God has said, that is resisting the devil.

For example, if Satan brings thoughts of depression, we should think on a scripture that counteracts depression, and obey God’s Word to “rejoice always” (1 Thes. 5:16) and “give thanks in everything” (1 Thes. 5:18). It is our responsibility to act upon God’s Word and replace Satan’s thoughts with God’s thoughts.

We must recognize that as free moral agents, we can think whatever we want to think about. If a believer continually *chooses* to listen and yield to the suggestions of evil spirits, he can certainly open his mind to being *oppressed*, which is simply a state of being more receptive to, and more dominated by, wrong thoughts. If he chooses to yield even more he could become *obsessed* with a certain kind of wrong thinking, which is very rare for a Christian, but can occur. Yet even then, if the obsessed Christian desires to be free, all he needs to do is determine to think about and yield to God’s Words and resist the devil.

But could he ever become *possessed*? Only if he willfully decided, from his heart, without being pressured, to reject Christ and turn His back upon Him completely. Then,

of course, he would no longer be a Christian¹ and thus potentially could become possessed—if he yielded himself all the more to the evil spirit that was oppressing him. But that is a far cry from the idea of opening the door for an evil spirit to inhabit you through committing one sin.

It is a fact that there is not a single example in the New Testament of any Christian being possessed by a demon. Nor is there any warning addressed to Christians about the dangerous possibility of their being inhabited by demons. Nor is there any instruction regarding how to cast out demons from fellow-Christians.

The truth is that as Christians, we don't need demons cast out of us—what we need is to have our minds renewed upon the Word of God. That is scriptural. Paul wrote:

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom. 12:2).

Once our minds have been cleansed of old thinking patterns and been renewed with the truth of God's Word, we gain victory over sinful habits and live in a consistent Christ-like manner. The truth is what sets us free (John 8:32). We are transformed as we renew our minds, not as we have all the demons exorcised.

Why then are there so many Christians who testify that they have had a demon (or demons) cast out of them? One possibility is that they just imagined that they had a demon in them that has since been cast out. Many Christians are gullible and lack knowledge of God's Word, and so they are easy prey for "ministers of deliverance" who psychologically manipulate people into thinking they have demons. Once people are convinced they have a demon living in them, they will naturally cooperate with anyone who appears confident of his ability to exorcise the demon.

Another real possibility is that such people who have had demons cast out of them were not true believers in Christ at the time of their deliverance, even though they thought they were believers. The modern gospel, which stands in stark contrast to the biblical gospel, has deceived many into thinking they are Christians even though they are indistinguishable from non-Christians and Jesus is not their Lord.² In Scripture, we find that when people believed the gospel and were born again, demons that lived in them automatically came out (see Acts 8:5-7). Demons can't possess people who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit indwells all people who are born again.

Myth 7B: "Through studying the history of a city, we can determine which evil spirits are dominating it, and thus be more effective in spiritual warfare and ultimately in evangelization."

This myth is based upon several ideas that cannot be supported by Scripture. One such idea is that territorial spirits stick around for a long time. That is, the ones that lived over a region hundreds of years ago are supposedly the ones still there. Thus, if we find that a city was founded by greedy people, we can then conclude that there are spirits of greed dominating the city today. If the city was once an old Indian village, we can conclude that spirits of shamanism and witchcraft dominate the city today. And on and on it goes.

But is it true that the same evil principalities and powers that lived over a geographical area hundreds of years ago are still there today? Perhaps, but not necessarily.

¹ Those who hold to the position of "once saved, always saved" will no doubt disagree. I would encourage them to read Rom. 11:22; 1 Cor. 15:1-2; Phil. 3:18-19; Col. 1:21-23 and Heb. 3:12-14, paying special attention to the word "if" whenever it is found.

² See my book, *The Great Gospel Deception*, for an in-depth study of this topic.

Consider the story we've previously considered from the tenth chapter of the book of Daniel. The unnamed angel who was assisted by Michael to fight "the prince of Persia" said to Daniel, "I shall now return to fight against the prince of Persia; so I am going forth, and behold, *the prince of Greece is about to come*" (Dan. 10:20, emphasis added). History tells us that the Persian Empire fell to the Greeks through the conquests of Alexander the Great. Yet this unnamed angel was aware of imminent corresponding changes in the spiritual realm—the "prince of Greece" was coming.

When the prince of Greece did come, did he rule in the spiritual realm over the Greek Empire just as the prince of Persia ruled in the spiritual realm over the Persian Empire? That would seem to be a reasonable conclusion, and if so, then some high-ranking evil spirits changed geographical locations, as the Greek Empire included practically all the territory of the Persian Empire. When there are political changes on earth, there is a possibility that there are changes in the kingdom of darkness. In our nation, every election could potentially mark a change of powers in the spiritual realm. That fact is, however, that we just don't know unless God would reveal it to us.

Regardless, it makes little difference what particular evil spirits are ruling over any given geographical area, as there is nothing we can do about it through "spiritual warfare," as proven in earlier chapters.

Over-Categorizing Evil Spirits

Moreover, it is an assumption on our part to think that there are ruling spirits that specialize in specific sins. The whole concept of there being "spirits of greed," "spirits of lust," "religious spirits," "spirits of strife," and so on, cannot be supported by Scripture, much less the idea that those different kinds of spirits exist in the higher ranks of evil spirits who rule the kingdom of darkness.

Amazing as it is to those who have never studied the four Gospels closely, there are only three specific kinds of demons that Jesus cast out: Once a "dumb demon" is mentioned (Lk. 11:14), once we read of a "deaf and dumb spirit" (Mk. 9:25), and more than once we find reference to "unclean spirits," which seem to include all demons which Jesus exorcised, including even the "deaf and dumb" one (Mark 9:25).

And is it not possible that the "deaf and dumb spirit" was able to do something other than make someone deaf and dumb? There is no doubt it could, because it caused the boy of Mark 9 to have terrible seizures as well. Therefore "deaf and dumb" may not be a reference to the specific *type* of spirit it was but rather a simple reference as to *how it was harming* a certain individual. Many of us have become "category-crazy" when it comes to demons, going way beyond biblical revelation.

In the entire Old Testament, the only specific spirits that are named that could perhaps be considered specific evil spirits are a "deceiving spirit" (1 Kings 22:22-23), a "spirit of distortion" (Is. 19:14), and a "spirit of harlotry" (Hos. 4:12; 5:4). In regard to the first and the second, certainly all evil spirits could be referred to as "deceiving spirits" and "spirits of distortion." In regard to the third, the phrase "spirit of harlotry" is not necessarily a reference to a specific evil spirit, but simply a prevailing attitude.³

In the whole book of Acts, the only time a specific evil spirit is mentioned is in Acts 16:16, where we read about a young girl who had a "spirit of divination." And in all the epistles, the only kind of specific evil spirits that are mentioned are "deceitful spirits" (1 Tim. 4:1) which, again, could be a description of any evil spirit.

³ The "spirit of jealousy" spoken of in Numbers 5:14-30 and the "spirit of haughtiness" of Proverbs 16:18 are good examples of the word *spirit* being used to convey a certain kind of predominant attitude, rather than an actual demon. In Numbers 14:24 we read that Caleb had a "different spirit," which is obviously referring to Caleb's good attitude.

In light of the few references to specific kinds of demons in the Bible, it is amazing to read through some of the modern lists which contain hundreds of various kinds of demons that might inhabit people or control cities.

We should not assume there is any categorization, by specific sin, of any higher ranks of evil spirits. It is an assumption to say, "Because there is so much gambling in that city, there must be gambling spirits over it."

Smoking Spirits?

Think how foolish someone would appear who said, "There must be many smoking spirits over that city, because so many people in that city smoke." What were those "smoking spirits" doing before those cities existed? Where were they then? What were they doing before tobacco was ever used for smoking? Is the reason fewer people are now smoking is because some of those old "smoking demons" are dying off or moving to new territories?

Do you see how foolish it is when we say such things as, "That city is controlled by spirits of lust, which is why there are so many topless bars there"? The truth is that wherever people are not serving Christ, there exists the kingdom of darkness, and many evil spirits operate in that realm, who entice the subjects of that kingdom to sin and continue in their rebellion against God. Those spirits will tempt people in every area of sin, and in some places, people yield more to one sin than other sins. Their only hope is the gospel that we are called to proclaim.

Even if there were specific kinds of evil spirits who specialized in certain sins and who ruled certain geographical areas, it wouldn't help us to know about it, because there is nothing we can do to remove them. Our responsibility is to pray (in a scriptural manner) for the people there who are deceived and to preach the gospel to them.

The only good it would do to find out about the most predominate sins in a certain city would be so that we can preach more convicting messages to the unsaved living there—by specifically naming the sins that hold them guilty before God. But there is no need to research a city's history to determine that. One only needs to visit for a short while and keep his eyes and ears open. The predominant sins will soon become evident.

Finally, there is no example in the New Testament of anyone doing "spiritual mapping" as a means of preparing for spiritual warfare or evangelization. Nor are there any instructions in the epistles to do so. In the New Testament, the apostles followed the Holy Spirit in regard to where they should preach, faithfully proclaimed the simple gospel of Christ's death and resurrection, and relied upon the Lord to confirm the word with signs following. Their method worked quite well.

Myth 7C: "We can be more effective in spiritual warfare for unsaved people if we pray 'on location.' Therefore, it is worthwhile to travel to foreign countries to do spiritual combat there."

If one wrongly assumes that he can do something to weaken the effectiveness of territorial spirits by shouting at them, then he might be fooled into thinking that the closer he got to them, the more effective he might be. For this reason, some Christians actually fly over population centers in helicopters in order to "pull down the strongholds," and some go to the tops of skyscrapers to scream at the "strong man" over their city.

All of this is a waste of time, as there is nothing anyone can do to weaken any evil spirit's influence over a city other than challenge *people* to believe the truth of the gospel. Even if some people respond to the gospel and are saved, it doesn't weaken any demons. Those demons just have fewer people to deceive, but they are just as active as ever.

In regard to actually *praying to God* on behalf of unsaved people, there is no need to travel to the resident country in which they live to pray for them, because God hears our prayers no matter where we are.

Some say they need to pray in foreign countries because it enables them to see first-hand the bondages and needs of unsaved people living there, and thus they can pray more specifically for them. However, all unsaved people need one thing more than anything else, and that is to hear the gospel. We can pray for that right where we are. That is why Jesus instructed us to pray that the Lord of the harvest would send laborers (see Matt. 9:37-38), and why He commanded us to go into the entire world and preach the gospel (Matt. 28:19).

There is no example in the New Testament of anyone journeying to a foreign city for the sole of purpose of praying for the inhabitants of that city. There are many examples, of course, of people journeying to distant cities in order to preach the gospel. This makes sense, as Jesus commanded us to go and preach, not go and pray. As it has been said by one, "You can pray for unsaved people until hell freezes over, but unless those people hear the gospel, the only difference your praying will make is that when those people go to hell, they will freeze instead of burn."

It is alarming to hear Christians exuberantly report, "Since we started doing spiritual warfare for our city, the crime rate has dropped by 5%!" So what? Is anyone being saved? Are any disciples being made? Is our spiritual objective to lower crime rates or save people from hell?

No one can be saved unless he hears the gospel. How can we justify spending thousands of dollars on airfare to travel to foreign countries just to pray "on location" without ever sharing the gospel once we are there? Is that wise stewardship? Are such deeds "wood, hay and stubble" or "gold, silver and precious stones" (see 1 Cor. 3:12-13).

Myth 7D: "Some Christians need to be set free from generational or satanic curses."

The whole of idea of "generational curses" is derived from four passages of Scripture found in the Old Testament that all say essentially the same thing. They are Exodus 20:5; 34:7; Numbers 14:8 and Deuteronomy 5:9. Let's consider Numbers 14:18:

The Lord is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, *visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations* (emphasis added).

How are we to interpret this passage of Scripture? Does it mean that God will put a curse on or punish someone for the sins of his parents, grandparents, great grandparents, or great, great grandparents?

Absolutely not. Anyone who has any sense knows that would be unfair of God. He is, of course, completely righteous in His dealings with people. God Himself has stated that punishing someone for his parents' sins would be morally wrong:

"Yet you [the Israelites] say, 'Why should the son not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity?' [God responds:] When the son has practiced justice and righteousness, and has observed all My statutes and done them, he shall surely live. The person who sins will die. *The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity*; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself" (Ezek. 18:19-20, emphasis added).

Moreover, under the Law of Moses, God commanded that neither father nor son should bear the punishment for the sins of the other:

Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin (Deut. 24:16).

There is no possibility that our God of love and righteousness might curse or punish someone for his ancestor's sins.⁴ So then what does Scripture mean when it says that God will "by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations"?

It can only mean that God holds people responsible for the sinful example they set in front of their offspring, and He thus holds them partly responsible for the sins their offspring commit, since those offspring learned their sinful practice from their parents. God holds people partly responsible, because of their wrong example, for the sins of their great grandchildren! That is how holy God is. And no one can say that in doing so He is unfair.

Notice that the passage under consideration states that God will visit "the iniquity of the fathers on the children." It is *the iniquity of fathers on their children* that is being *visited*.

Thus, the whole idea of "generational curses" is a superstition, and a bad one at that, as it makes God appear unrighteous.

Satanic Curses?

But what about "satanic curses"?

First, there is nothing in the entire Bible that indicates Satan is able to "put a curse" on anyone, nor are there any examples of his doing so. Certainly we find Satan afflicting people in the Bible, but never do we find him "putting a curse" on a family which then results in continual bad luck upon them and their successive generations.

Every Christian is harassed by Satan and evil spirits (to a limited extent) all of his life, but this does not mean that any of us need someone to "break a satanic curse" over us that has been passed down to us from our parents. What we need to do is stand on God's Word and resist the devil by faith, as we are told to do in the Scriptures (see 1 Pet. 5:8-9).

In the Bible, God is the one who has the power to bless and curse (see Gen. 3:17; 4:11; 5:29; 8:21; 12:3; Num. 23:8; Deut. 11:26; 28:20; 29:27; 30:7; 2 Chron. 34:24; Ps. 37:22; Prov. 3:33; 22:14; Lam. 3:65; Mal. 2:2; 4:6). Others may curse us with their mouths, but their curses are powerless to harm us:

Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying, so a curse without cause does not alight (Prov. 26:2).

Balaam had it right when, after being hired by Balak to curse the children of Israel, he said, "How shall I curse, whom God has not cursed? And how can I denounce, whom the Lord has not denounced?" (Num. 23:8).

Some Christians have gone overboard on the idea of people placing curses on other people based upon Jesus' words in Mark 11:23: "Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it shall be granted him."

Notice, however, that there is no power in just speaking words, but rather, in speaking words that are believed from the heart. There is no way a person could have faith that his

⁴ This is not to say that children don't suffer because of their parents' sins, because they often do. When they do, however, it is not an indication that God is punishing those children for their parents' sins, but an indication that people are so evil that they practice certain sins which they know will cause their own children to suffer.

curse against someone could actually bring harm to that person, because faith is a confident assurance (Heb. 11:1), and faith only comes from hearing God's Word (Rom. 10:17). A person might *hope* his curse against someone will bring misfortune, but he could never *believe* it, because God has given no faith-supplying promise about cursing people.

The only exception to this would be if God gave someone "the gift of faith" along with a "gift of prophecy" (two of the nine gifts of the Spirit), that would be spoken in the form of a blessing or curse, as we see He occasionally did in the lives of some Old Testament characters (see Gen. 27:27-29, 38-41; 49:1-27; Josh. 6:26 with 1 Kin. 16:34; Judg. 9:7-20, 57; 2 Kin. 2:23-24). Even in those cases, the blessings or curses originated from *God*, not man. Thus, the whole idea of someone being able to "place a curse" on another person is just a superstition. This is why Jesus did not instruct us to "break curses that have been spoken against us," but rather to simply "bless those who curse us." We do not need to be afraid of any person's curses. To be afraid of someone's curse is to display a lack of faith in God.

Occult Curses?

Is it possible to have some satanic curse upon us because of past involvement in the occult?

We must not forget that when we are saved, we are delivered from Satan's power and the kingdom of darkness (see Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13). Satan no longer has any hold on us unless we give it to him. Although the Bible indicates that the Ephesian Christians were heavily involved in practicing magic before their conversion (see Acts 19:18-19), there is no record of Paul breaking any "Satanic curses" or binding Satan's power over them after they were saved. The reason is because they were automatically set free from Satan's dominion the moment they first believed in Jesus.

Additionally, when Paul wrote to the Ephesian Christians, he gave no instructions regarding setting anyone free from generational or satanic curses. All he told them was to "not give the devil an opportunity" (Eph. 4:27), and to "put on the full armor of God" that they might "be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil" (Eph. 6:11). Those are every Christian's responsibilities.

But why, in some cases, have Christians apparently been helped when someone broke a "generational" or "satanic curse" over them? Simply because the individual who needed help had faith that the devil would flee once the "curse" was broken. Faith is what puts the devil on the run, and every Christian can and should have faith that when he resists the devil, the devil will flee. There is no need to call in a "deliverance specialist" in order to send Satan running.

Finally, the Bible tells us that Christ "became a *curse* for us," and in so doing, "redeemed us from the *curse* of the Law" (Gal 3:13, emphasis added). All of us were formerly under God's curse because we had sinned, but since Jesus bore our punishment, we have been released from that curse. Praise God! No longer cursed, we can rejoice that we have now been *blessed* "with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3).

Myth 7E: "We can break demonic bondages through fasting."

Some Christians seem to regard fasting as one of the most preeminent aspects of Christian life and responsibility. This is quite amazing in light of the fact that in all the epistles of the New Testament, there is not one instruction given to Christians regarding fasting. Nowhere in the epistles are Christians even encouraged to fast. In fact, the epistles have nothing at all to say about fasting, other than Paul's mention of a few times when he had to go hungry, examples of involuntary fasting.

In the book of Acts, there are only two examples of voluntary fasting:

And while they were ministering to the Lord and *fasting*, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then, when they had *fasted* and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away (Acts 13:2-3, emphasis added).

And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with *fasting*, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed (Acts 14:23, emphasis added)

We learn that the primary benefit of fasting under the new covenant is to give us more time to concentrate on prayer. This is especially important when we are seeking God for specific direction, as we wait for His guidance to become clear within our own spirits.

In ancient times, the preparation and eating of meals was much more time consuming than it is today, and by fasting, people were afforded much more time to pray. That is the primary reason to abstain from eating.

As every Christian knows, probably the most difficult thing about spending extended time in prayer is finding the time to do it. Sometimes the only way to find a few hours to pray is to eliminate something else. That is probably why Jesus once prayed all night (notice it was before He chose His apostles), and why He often rose early in the morning to pray. That is why Paul wrote to married Christians and told them not to deprive their spouses of sexual relations, “except by agreement for a time *that you may devote yourselves to prayer*” (1 Cor. 7:5, emphasis added). In order to spend an extended time of prayer, we may have to abstain from some of the legitimate pleasures of life, such as sleep, sex, or food.

Fast or Hunger Strike?

Fasting does not change God. We shouldn’t think that because we are afflicting ourselves by fasting, God will more readily listen to our prayers. That would be more like a hunger strike. We don’t need to gain God’s attention by fasting—we already have His attention when we pray according to His will (see 1 John 5:14).

Fasting does not give us more spiritual power or give us authority over demons. As members of Christ’s body, we already are “seated in heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named” (Eph. 1:21). We already have the authority to cast out demons according to Jesus’ promise in Mark 16:17: “And these signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons.”

But what about Jesus’ statement concerning a demon He once exorcised: “But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting” (Matt. 17:21)?

First, my Bible indicates that many of the original manuscripts of Matthew’s gospel do not contain this particular verse, which means it is possible that Jesus never said, “This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”

In Mark’s account of the same incident, Jesus is recorded as saying, “This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer” (Mark 9:29), and it is noted in the margin that many manuscripts add “and fasting” to the end of the verse.

So did Jesus say that fasting is a necessary ingredient in exercising a particular kind of demon? The answer is that we don’t know. Nevertheless, if Jesus did actually make the statement regarding fasting, that is the only time He or any of the New Testament writers associated fasting with deliverance from a demon.

Perhaps it would be helpful to ask ourselves how fasting could be an aid in exorcising demons. Certainly fasting could not increase anyone’s authority over demons. If God has given one authority to cast out demons, he has it. The only thing that fasting could do

would be provide one with more time to meditate on God's promise of his authority, thus increasing his faith in what God has said.

In the case under consideration, the disciples had previously been given authority to cast out unclean spirits (see Matt. 10:1), but they failed to cast out a demon from a young boy. When Jesus heard of their failure, He immediately lamented their unbelief (Matt. 17:17), and when they asked Him why they failed, He responded, "Because of the littleness of your faith" (Matt. 17:20). It is a few verses later that we find Jesus' questionable statement concerning fasting.

Thus we can conclude the reason for their failure as being one of two possibilities: Either they didn't have faith in their God-given authority *plus* they didn't pray and fast beforehand, or they didn't have faith in their God-given authority, and time spent in fasting and prayer could have helped them build their faith. I would prefer to accept the second scenario, as it makes more sense, while the first seems to make Jesus contradict Himself. Keep in mind that both possibilities are predicated upon the assumption that Jesus actually made the statement about fasting.

Regardless of the correct interpretation, we must not forget that the overwhelming majority of references to spiritual warfare and deliverance from demons make no mention of fasting. There is no mention at all of fasting in connection with our *personal warfare* against Satan and evil spirits, and to say that we must fast to gain personal victory over the devil is entirely unscriptural.

The Fast That God Chooses

One other passage of Scripture that is often misconstrued to prove that fasting can break demonic bondages is Isaiah 58:6:

Is this not the fast which I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke? (Is. 58:6).

Does this verse of Scripture teach that we can break demonic bondages over people by fasting? It can only when it is taken out of context and then assumptions are added to it. But when read in context and no assumptions are added, it clearly does not.

Let's beat Satan at one of his games (taking scriptures out of context), and read most of the fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah to learn what God was actually saying:

"Cry loudly, do not hold back; raise your voice like a trumpet, and declare to My people their transgression, and to the house of Jacob their sins" (Is. 58:1)

Here God is speaking to Isaiah, commissioning him to declare to Israel their sins. In the very next verse, God begins to enumerate those sins:

"Yet they seek Me day by day, and delight to know My ways, as a nation that has done righteousness, and has not forsaken the ordinance of their God. They ask Me for just decisions, they delight in the nearness of God" (Is. 58:2).

Here is revealed Israel's hypocrisy. They claimed to be righteous, but their religion was just a facade. They were only going through the motions of devotion. They asked God,

"Why have we fasted and Thou dost not see? Why have we humbled ourselves and Thou dost not notice?" (Is. 58:3a).

And God responded:

Behold, on the day of your fast you find *your desire, and drive hard all your workers*. Behold, you fast for *contention and strife* and to *strike with a wicked fist*. You do not fast like you do today to make your voice heard on high. Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself? Is it for bowing one's head like a reed, and for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed? *Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the Lord?*" (Is. 58:3b-5, emphasis added).

Apparently, they had been fasting to gain God's attention or favor, and wondered why their situation hadn't improved. God responded by reminding them of their selfish lifestyles, displayed even during the days of their fasting. Additionally, their reasons for fasting were purely selfish. God said it was completely unacceptable. Then He tells them about the kind of fast He is looking for—a fasting from selfishness:

"Is this not the fast which I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke? Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into the house; when you see the naked, to cover him; and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? (Is. 58:6-7).

Is God saying that if they fast, it will set people free from demonic bondage? Not at all. God wants them to abstain, not from food, but from being selfish. He wants them to love their neighbor as themselves. He wants them to break yokes, "let the oppressed go free," divide their bread with the hungry, bring the homeless poor into their houses, and cover the naked. The act of abstaining from food by itself will not result in any of those things. Those are things *people* must do.

This interpretation becomes even clearer as we continue reading. If the Israelites would begin to fast from their self-centered lifestyles, God promised,

"Then your light will break out like the dawn, and your recovery will speedily spring forth; and your righteousness will go before you; the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.' If you remove the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, and if you give yourself to the hungry, and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light will rise in darkness, and your gloom will become like midday" (Is. 58:8-10, emphasis added).

Verse 9 makes it very clear that God is not talking about Himself removing some demonic yoke in response to their fasting. Rather, He is telling them that *they* are the ones who should be removing, not demonic, but human yokes from people, such as injustice and poverty. God was much more interested in the Israelites abstaining from selfishness than He was in their abstaining from food. This is no doubt true for us as well. The second greatest commandment is not, "Make sure you fast often," but "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31).

The idea that we can break people free from Satan's grasp by the act of fasting is erroneous. The primary way to get people set free from Satan is to tell them the gospel. If they respond with faith, they'll be set free. Then we can teach them how to resist the devil by faith in God's Word.