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Evil Spirits

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Evil Spirits

In classical usage the diminutive form δαίμωνιον is used synonymously and interchangeably with the noun δαίμων. Originally it was merely the neuter of the adjective "divine," referring to godlike "divine power." The noun δαίμων occurs but once in the New Testament (according to the best texts), viz., in Matt. 8:31, οἱ δαίμονες.

In mythology it gradually came to denote an inferior divinity, or a demon. It still has this connotation in Acts 17:18, where some of the Epicureans and Stoics suspect Paul of proclaiming ξένα δαίμονια, i. e., strange (foreign, outlandish, un-Greek, hence barbarian) gods to them. Luther must have felt the former force of the word when he first translated "*seltsame Goetter*," instead of his later "*neue Goetter*."

1 Cor. 10:20-22 is somewhat of a *locus classicus* of this meaning, where δαίμονιους is used in its Old Testament connotation of heathen deities, false gods, as in Deut. 32:17, ἔθυσαν δαίμονιους καὶ οὐ θεῶν, et al. Strong words are those employed by St. Paul, terrible in their implications: κοινωνοὺς τῶν δαίμονιων, ποτήριον δαίμονιων, and τραπέζης δαίμονιων, the communion of demons, the cup of demons, and the demons' table, condemnatory concepts to make any Christian's soul shudder with horror. The Revelation of St. John also speaks of demon-worship and idolatry in one and the same breath: ἵνα μὴ προσκυνήσουσιν τὰ δαίμονια καὶ τὰ εἰδωλα τὰ χρυσᾶ . . . ἀργυρᾶ . . . χαλκᾶ . . . λίθινα . . . ξύλινα (9:20).

In the Scriptures these δαίμονια are spirits consistently characterized as evil. This *usus loquendi* is in contrast to extra-Biblical usage, where *demons* may be used of good and bad spirits alike. The New Testament has no such word as εὐδαμονεῖν or its cognates, so prevalent in pagan speech. The believer's sole source of happiness and blessedness is the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent, never any inferior god of man's fertile and evil imagination; for He alone is ὁ μακάριος Θεός.

That the word "demons" designates spirit-beings is amply demonstrated by its synonymity with τὰ πνεύματα (Luke 9:20: τὸ δαίμονιον . . . τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἀκαθάρτῳ; also 10:17, 20: τὰ δαίμονια . . . τὰ πνεύματα), denoting unholy and unclean spirits, evil in their nature and action on men and women. In the New Testament these spirits are frankly credited with causing such ailments as are often baffling to, and beyond the ordinary reach of, medical science to this day, e. g., lunacy and epilepsy. (Cp. Matt. 17:15, 18: ὅτι σεληνιάζεται καὶ κακῶς ἔχει· πολλάκις γὰρ πίπτει εἰς τὸ πῦρ καὶ πολλάκις εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ. . . . Καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ τὸ δαίμονιον.) There are deaf and dumb demons, the same are often the very cause of

these trying afflictions: τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἀκαθάρτῳ . . . τὸ ἄλαλον καὶ κωφὸν πνεῦμα (Mark 9:25); προσήνεγκαν αὐτῷ κωφὸν δαμονιζόμενον. Καὶ ἐβλήθηεντος τοῦ δαμονίου ἐλάλησεν ὁ κωφός (Matt. 9:32, 33).

The devils (demons) indeed believe that there is one God, and they quiver in abject fear (τὰ δαμόνια πιστεύουσιν καὶ φρίσσουν, Jas. 2:19); it is that same fear which caused them to cry out and acknowledge that Jesus is His Son, Matt. 8:29. There is, then, and it is terrible to contemplate, a demoniac fear of God. The Scriptures everywhere regard these evil spirits as opposed to God and all His works.

As evil in general has its instigator, so the demons have their leader and ruler over them, none other than Βεεζεβούλ, ἄρχων τῶν δαμονίων (Matt. 12:24, 27); which is another of the evil works and offices of Satan.

A study of the New Testament references to spirits and demons yields a peculiar fact: The adjective ἀκάθαρτος (unclean, impure) is not employed in the gospels except as a description of spirits; in Acts only once in another connection, and in other places the term is practically entirely restricted to this modification. "Evil spirits," πνευμάτων πονηρῶν, Luke 7:21, presents no difficulties; nor is it hard to understand the fact that some are more evil, πνεύματα πονηρότερα, than others (Matt. 12:45; Luke 11:26); but why "unclean"?

This nomenclature no doubt harks back to the impure and unclean spirit of idolatry. To the ennobled and regenerated Christian soul, uncleanness was inseparable from the pagans' worship of their lesser divinities, or demons, both from a physical and psychical point of view. This is echoed by an emphatic longer descriptive phrase, occurring once only, and this in Luke 4:33: πνεῦμα δαμονίου ἀκαθάρτου. This phrase is all-comprehensive, and the sometimes cynical but celebrated Gibbon has correctly described the situation in *Decline and Fall*, Vol. 1, p. 523:

"It was the universal sentiment, both of the Church and of heretics, that the demons were the authors, the patrons, and the objects of idolatry. Those rebellious spirits who had been degraded from the rank of angels and cast down into the infernal pit were still permitted to roam upon earth, to torment the bodies and seduce the minds of sinful men. The demons soon discovered and abused the natural propensities of the human heart toward devotion, and artfully withdrawing the adoration of mankind from their Creator, they usurped the place and honors of the Supreme Deity. By the success of their malicious contrivances they at once gratified their own vanity and revenge and obtained the only comfort of which they were yet susceptible—the hope of involving the human species in the participation of their guilt and misery."

Edward Gibbon here expresses the view of the early Church as to the identity of the demons, which agrees with the teachings of Scripture. Some commentators have gone to great length in differentiating between these evil spirits and the fallen angels. Maitland, in his essay *False Worship*, makes a fine distinction as between the demons and their arch-demon, the devil; neither will he identify them with the angels that sinned (2 Pet. 2:4). They, he suggests, are not free to enter and possess, δαμονιζειν (demonize), human bodies, because they are in Tartarus, chained in darkness unto judgment, being indeed the imprisoned spirits of 1 Pet. 3:19. With reference to the LXX reading of οἱ ἄγγελοι τοῦ θεοῦ in Gen. 6:2 (Cod. Alexandrinus rescriptor) and the view that it is these that Peter has reference to, he deems it possible to identify the demons of the Bible with the disembodied spirits of the "mighty men who were of old," the issue of the unequal union between the sons of God and the daughters of men. The adjective ἀκάθαρτος would thus describe their mixed nature, partly human, partly angelic. He points to St. Paul's use of this very modifier when discussing the issue of mixed marriages, 1 Cor. 7:14. That Maitland errs in holding that the fallen angels cannot leave Tartarus may be inferred from Luke 8:31 (ἄβυσσος=Τάρταρος).

The gospels have more frequently δαμονιζεσθαι, to be possessed by, or under the power of, a demon; always for an ill purpose. Thus, viewed in the light of God's Word, Spiritism and related occult systems are clearly recognizable as prohibited dealings with the demons and their dictator, the devil. Consequently, those few inexplicable phenomena that men meet with in the realm of the occult and spiritistic, in soothsaying, clairvoyancy, sorcery, Christian Science, Vedanta, etc., plainly come under the apostle's warning when he speaks of those who προσέχοντες πνεύμασιν πλάνοις καὶ διδασκαλίαις δαμονίων, 1 Tim. 4:1, thus recognizing their demoniac power to influence the thoughts and opinions of fickle men.

There never has been any rescission of the numerous and prohibitory warnings of Moses, as in Lev. 19:31; Deut. 13:1-3; 18:10-12, and others.

Let Christians be on their guard lest they be drawn into the haunts and companionship of modern demon-worshippers, not even by curiosity or "for the fun of it." The divine directive of the one true God still stands: "And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits and unto wizards that peep and mutter—should not a people seek unto their God?" Is. 8:19.

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