

§ 8. Doctrine of Creation
Lecture 23
The Nature of Demons

It was interesting that the hymn that we sang mentioned angels. I hadn't noticed that before: *Angels will attend and help and comfort you until the end.*

We're thinking about angels and demons. Last week we looked at the origin of demons. Today we want to talk about the nature of demonic beings.

First of all, they clearly are intelligent beings. Acts 16:16-18 indicates that demonic beings are intelligent and personal beings. Luke writes,

As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by soothsaying. She followed Paul and us, crying, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation." And this she did for many days. But Paul was annoyed, and turned and said to the spirit, "I charge you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.

In this story we see that this girl had a demonic spirit of divination (that is to say, the ability to tell the future or to tell people's fortunes), and so obviously the demon that possessed her was an intelligent and spiritual being which resided within her body.

Also, 2 Corinthians 11:3 and then verses 13 and 15. Paul says,

But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. . . . For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

In this passage we see once again the deceitfulness, the cleverness, and the cunning of Satan in deceiving people and leading them astray. This obviously implies that he is an intelligent being who is able to deceive people and turn them away from the truth.

Finally, Revelation 12:9: "And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him." Here Satan is referred to as the deceiver of the whole world which indicates, again, his intelligence, his cunning, his craftiness, and so on that he should be deceiving the entire world.

So demons, like angels, are personal, intelligent beings.

Secondly, as I've already indicated, demons are also spiritual beings. They are spirits just as angels are spirits. And so demons are spirits as well. This is stated in Matthew 8:16: "That evening they brought to him many who were possessed with demons; and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick." Notice the synonymy of the terms "demons" and "spirits" in this passage. The people that were brought to Jesus were possessed by demons, and Jesus cast out the spirits. So these beings are spirits in the same way that angels are.

Look at Luke 10:17-20 – a passage that we've already read.

The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" And he [Jesus] said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Here again we see the synonymy between the words "demons" and "spirits." The demons which were cast out by the seventy as they went on their preaching mission are the same as the spirits that were subject to them through the authority of Christ. So the demons are associated with spirits.

Finally, Revelation 16:14a. It says, "for they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world." Here the demons are explicitly referred to as demonic spirits. This is what they are.

So there are, on the one hand, angelic spirits, and then there are, on the other hand, demonic spirits. Both of them have the same fundamental nature; namely, they are minds without bodies – they are unembodied spiritual beings.

The next point is that these demonic beings are, of course, malevolent. They are malevolent in their character. This hardly needs to be said, but let's read a couple of scriptural passages in support of this point anyway.

In Matthew 12:43-45 Jesus says,

"When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest, but he finds none. Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and brings with him seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. So shall it be also with this evil generation."

Notice that Jesus refers to these indwelling spirits as evil and unclean spirits who oppress and possess and destroy, in effect, the life of this man. They are evil and unclean spirits.

This is also indicated in Mark 1:27: “And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, ‘What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.’” Here these demonic creatures are referred to explicitly as unclean spirits.

Mark 3:11 is a similar reference: “And whenever the unclean spirits beheld him, they fell down before him and cried out, ‘You are the Son of God.’”

Acts 8:7 provides further substantiation: “For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice; and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed.” Again you see the same terminology is used in this passage – unclean spirits.

1 John 3:8 says, “He who commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning.” This verse indicates the inherent sinfulness of Satan – that his character has from the beginning been sinful.

Two more passages are relevant. John 17:15. Jesus says, “I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one.” The word here translated “evil one” in my translation could just as well be translated “evil” – keep them from evil. But if it is the evil one that is being referred to then it is talking about Satan. This may be the way the Lord's Prayer is also to be understood. In Matthew 6:13, in my translation, it says, “Lead not into temptation but deliver us from evil,” but it could equally be translated “deliver us from the evil one.” That is to say, from Satan – deliver us from him. That, again, would indicate the nature of Satan as well as his minions; namely, they are evil, they are unclean, they are malevolent, and they seek to destroy God's work.

Next, they also (like angels, once again) form supernatural dominions and levels of authority. We see this, for example, in Ephesians 6:12. There Paul says,

For we are not contending against flesh and blood [that is a Jewish idiom for mortal creatures, mortal human beings], but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

When you read a passage like that you realize what we, as Christians, are up against in our spiritual warfare. We're not just fighting against human beings or human obstacles in life but against a whole panoply of spiritual powers and dominions that are arrayed against God and against his church.

Also, in Jude 8-10, a passage which we've come back to again and again in our study, we have the story about Michael contending with Satan. Jude 8-10, the writer says,

Yet in like manner these men in their dreamings defile the flesh, reject authority, and revile the glorious ones. But when the archangel Michael, contending with the

devil, disputed about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a reviling judgment upon him, but said, “The Lord rebuke you.” But these men revile whatever they do not understand, and by those things that they know by instinct as irrational animals do, they are destroyed.

Here the phrase that I want to draw your attention to is that these heretics reject authority and are not afraid of reviling these demonic authorities and powers even though Michael himself, who is much greater in power and strength than they are, doesn't presume to do such a thing. This would be an indication of the sort of authority structure that exists even among these demonic creatures.

2 Peter 2:10-11 says something very similar. Here Peter also speaks of

those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. Bold and wilful, they are not afraid to revile the glorious ones, whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a reviling judgment upon them before the Lord.

So these foolish human heretics who despise authority are not reluctant to revile what they don't understand and so speak out against the evil dominions that are arrayed against the world, whereas angels (who are greater in strength and power than these human beings) are much more circumspect and careful not to speak out directly against these demonic principalities and powers that are over them. This would indicate the sort of ranks of authority that exist within this demonic realm, like the angelic realm.

Finally, 1 John 5:19 says, “We know that we are of God, and the whole world is in the power of the evil one.” This indicates, I think, Satan's authority over this planet. The whole world lies within the authority, within the power, of Satan. This is his sphere of authority.

So there is a supernatural realm, dominions, powers, principalities, rulers, authorities that are arrayed against God and against his church and which seek to undo God's work.

The next point is that these demonic creatures can possess people and exhibit supernatural strength. Mark 5:1-4 is the story of the Gadarene demoniac. Mark relates,

They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when he had come out of the boat, there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, who lived among the tombs; and no one could bind him any more, even with a chain; for he had often been bound with fetters and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the fetters he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him.

Here we see how this demoniac possessed superhuman strength as a result of his being possessed by a demon.

Another example of this exhibition of superhuman strength would be the story in Acts 19:13-16. Here Luke says,

Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to pronounce the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, mastered all of them, and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

This is just one more illustration of the kind of superhuman strength that can come as a result of demonic possession.

The next point is that these demons must submit to the authority of Jesus' name. Mark 5:7-13, which is the sequel to the story of the Gadarene demoniac, relates the following:

and crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me." For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many." And he begged him eagerly not to send them out of the country. Now a great herd of swine was feeding there on the hillside; and they begged him, "Send us to the swine, let us enter them." So he gave them leave. And the unclean spirits came out, and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea.

In this encounter between Jesus and the demoniac you see the practice of naming someone as an attempt to control him. If you know a person's name then you're in a position of authority, and so the demon identifies Jesus: *Jesus, Son of God. I adjure you, don't torment me.* He was trying to exercise a sort of one-upsmanship on Jesus. Why? Because Jesus had already said to the man, *Come out of him.* Then Jesus turns the tables and says, *What is your name?* Now Jesus gets the demonic host to give him their name, and the demon says, *Legion; for we are many.* He was possessed by a multitude of demonic spirits. Then Jesus casts them out. Here we see the authority of Jesus' name over the demons and his authority to cast them out.

Also look at Luke 10:17 for another example. This is again the mission of the seventy healing and casting out demons and proclaiming the Kingdom of God. Luke 10:17 says, "The seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!'" The phrase we want to highlight there is "in your name." It was in the name of Jesus that they had the power to cast out evil spirits.

This doesn't mean that there's something magical about the name of Jesus. After all, the name Jesus is different in different languages, right? Jesus is the English version of his name, and it's not as though the name of Jesus is a kind of magic formula or incantation that just anybody could utter to cast out demons. I think that's the lesson of Acts 19:13-16 that we read. Remember in that passage the Jewish exorcists did not believe in Jesus but they tried to use the name of Jesus as a sort of formula or incantation by which they could exorcise demonic beings: *I adjure you by the Jesus that Paul preaches to come out!* And the demon just mocks them and overpowers them and beats them up. Why? Because they didn't really have the authority of Jesus' name. When we talk about the power of Jesus' name, whether it's praying in Jesus' name or casting out demons in Jesus' name, it doesn't mean just the verbalization of some sort of a formula or an incantation. Rather, it means doing the thing with the authority of Jesus, and these Jewish exorcists just didn't have that kind of authority. For them the name of Jesus was just an empty formula that they would utter. But of course when Jesus and the disciples exorcised demonic spirits they did it in the authority of Christ and with his power in order to rule over the demonic realm.

Finally, these demonic creatures know their own end. Look at Matthew 8:29. Here the demoniacs say to Jesus, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" The phrase we want to highlight here is "to torment us before the time." What time are they talking about here? Well, they are talking about that time when on the Judgment Day they will be judged and eternally cast into hell. We see this in Matthew 25:41 where Jesus says, "Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" This is their fate. The eternal fire has been reserved for the devil and his angels. This is, I think, especially interesting when you reflect on the fact that this eternal fire isn't prepared for human beings. This fate – this place – is prepared for the devil and his angels. It is a travesty in one sense that any human being should ever end up there. It wasn't designed for them. It was designed for the punishment of the devil and his angels. The only reason that some people wind up in hell is because they knowingly and consciously reject God's grace and the convicting power of his Holy Spirit and God's every effort to save them. They separate themselves irrevocably from God and his pardon and so condemn themselves to perdition. The Scripture says that God is not willing that any should perish but that all should reach redemption. God wants all persons to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. So this eternal fire is not intended for human beings and wasn't prepared for them. No human beings should be there. It is intended for the devil and his angels and their punishment, not for human beings. The devil and his minions know ultimately that they will be consigned here at the end of the age.

START DISCUSSION

Student: Is immortality one of the characteristics of demons, as in immortal like we are immortal – we will die, but our spirit or soul will forever exist somewhere? In other words, when a demon is defeated in spiritual battle, they are defeated but they are not destroyed. They are only sent to a different location.

Dr. Craig: I think that's right, and that's indicated by this passage – “the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” They're not annihilated. They don't have immortality in the sense of eternal life, but they do have eternal existence and will not be annihilated but rather punished forever.

Student: Is the only difference really between angels and demons their moral alignment?

Dr. Craig: I think so. That seems right to me. It seems to me that demons were plausibly originally angelic beings and therefore have the same essential properties. But their character has been distorted and perverted so that they are now incredibly evil in their moral character. But other than that, it seems to me that we're talking about the same sort of creature here. This is important because in cartoons and popular culture the devil and demons are often portrayed as comic book characters with horns and a long tail with a point on the end and sort of a buffoon that you can easily deal with. But when you read what Paul is talking about – these principalities and powers and authorities that control the world – it makes you realize we're not up against something so silly as that. This is an incredibly evil and powerful being who is going to destroy you if you let him. I think that underlines the importance of trying to live a sinless life before God, to try to live a life that is guided and filled by the Holy Spirit so as to deviate neither to the right nor to the left. Because when you stray off the path and sin gets into your life, you open yourself up to the power of these demonic beings. It's only as we are in Christ and walk in the fullness of the Spirit that we will be protected from this. So the next time you're tempted to sin, just think of what you're doing and that can help to strengthen you and your resolve to resist temptation.

Student: My question is on the whole concept of this dominion of evil or whatever where you say there is this hierarchy and all that. I'm not sure about that. I'm kind of more along the lines of what C. S. Lewis said when he said hell is more like a confederacy. So you have evil and you might have some organization there, but I'm not sure you have organization like you would with like a military or country or something like that. I see it as more of a decentralized organization.

Dr. Craig: I'm not familiar with Lewis' theology that much, but he did in his *Screwtape Letters* have the idea of a senior demon writing to a junior demon giving him advice. It's ironic and not meant to be literal, but it seemed there that Lewis was expressing the notion that there are different levels of power and authority. And the passages that I read from Jude and 2 Peter that talk about despising authority and how foolish this is and that

even Michael wouldn't do that, that suggests powerfully to me that there is some kind of authority structure here.

Student: Just a quick follow on to that. As far as the authorities are concerned though, even when you see in Revelation in, I think it's chapter 17 or 16, where you see evil eventually turns on itself. Evil is evil, so how can evil trust evil? How does evil respect the authority of something else that is evil? Do you see what I'm saying?

Dr. Craig: I do. Maybe hell in that sense is a chaos of rebellious creatures. That certainly would be plausible.

Student: What I'm saying – you've got Satan who's jealous of God, but who's to say that there's not a demon that's jealous that Satan is in charge? So that's what I'm saying.

Dr. Craig: I understand it. That's a good point. Maybe, though, in this life, it's in their own best self-interests to submit lest they be annihilated – well, not annihilated literally – but lest they be in some way reprimanded and crushed.

Student: Correct. And in *Screwtape Letters*, that's what happens. The senior demon actually ends up killing or destroying or whatever the junior demon because he fails to perform.

Dr. Craig: OK. Well, that brings us to the end of our time.

END DISCUSSION¹

¹ ?Total Running Time: 33:45 (Copyright © 2018 William Lane Craig)