

8. Describe in biblical categories the operations of the devil. Is there a difference between Believers and unbelievers regarding the activity of the devil? What is a biblical methodology for responding to the demonic in the context of counseling?

I. Overview

- A. Introduction
- B. Describe in biblical categories the operations of the devil.
- C. Examine the activity of the devil regarding both believers and unbelievers.
- D. Describe a biblical methodology for responding to the demonic in the context of counseling.

II. Introduction

- A. The first issue that we must acknowledge is that the Word of God is not exhaustive on the topic of the devil or demons. Instead, there is a significant amount of mystery behind the operation and methods, as well as the scope of their abilities, of the devil and demons. Although, as we will see, there are instances in which the Word is explicit.
- B. The overarching topic known as spiritual warfare is an important topic for all Christians but has special significance for biblical counselors. There is so much “known” about the devil and demons, but so little that is biblical. If you counsel for any length of time, you will encounter a variety of beliefs regarding spiritual warfare. It’s important that biblical counselors have a biblical understanding of what the Scriptures teach regarding the devil and demons, as opposed to relying on mystical teachings or Hollywood’s depiction of demonic possession in the movie the “Exorcist.”
- C. Westerberg “Many false doctrines exist surround the area of Spiritual Warfare . . . False doctrines, such as deliverance ministries, have done great harm to individuals who are suffering and sought help through them.”¹
- D. Ditches to Avoid!
 - 1. When we consider the devil and demons, we want to be careful that we do not ignore them completely, as this would be unbiblical. This view would lead to a world view in which you have no concern for any spiritual warfare. On the other hand, we must be careful that we do not fall into the ditch on the other side, in which we see a demon behind every bush, every curtain, in every closet, or taking up residence in our hearts. This too would be unbiblical.
- E. Unbiblical teachings or beliefs about the devil.
 - 1. The devil made me do it!
 - a. Powlison “. . . people I have met grant the devil and his demons such mighty power that their working theology of human evil is ‘the devil made me—or you, or him, or her—do it.’”²
 - 2. I sure hope that God can find a victory against Satan.

¹ Randy Westerberg, *Spiritual Warfare*, from an outline at the 2018 Biblical Counseling Conference at Cross Pointe Church.

² David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare*, 11-12.

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- a. Powlison “. . . other people see Satan as a second god, viewing life as an *ultimate* conflict between good and evil. . . (that) in the trenches of life Satan and God fought for his soul as near equals; the outcome was always in doubt; his own will cast the deciding vote.”³

III. Describe in biblical categories the operations of the devil.

A. A brief description of the devil.

1. The devil is a created being with limitations.
 - a. **Col 1:16** *For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.*
 - b. Christians commonly attribute God’s attributes to Satan, specifically that he is omnipresent and a formidable enemy of God. However, these beliefs are not based on the Word of God.
 - 1) **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.*
 - 2) **Matthew 8:28-34** *And when he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way. And behold, they cried out, “What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?” Now a herd of many pigs was feeding at some distance from them. And the demons begged him, saying, “If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs.” And he said to them, “Go.” So they came out and went into the pigs, and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the waters. The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men. And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region.*
 - c. Powlison “Satan is on our side of the Creator-creature divide; he is only the false god of this world. . . He exists at God’s forbearance, to fulfill God’s purposes.”⁴
2. The devil was an angel in heaven that rebelled against God. When he was removed from heaven, he took a third of the angels with him (Rev 12:4; 7-12).
 - a. **2 Corinthians 11:14-15** *And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.*

³ David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare*, 13.

⁴ David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare*, 53.

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- b. **Jude 6** *And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day—*
 - c. **2 Peter 2:4** *For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until judgment.*
3. Powlison “Our opponent, the lord of darkness, is variously named and described as adversary, evil one, enemy, accuser, devil, Satan, slanderer, god of this world, serpent, dragon, murderer, liar, and tempter. . . His people include false prophets, murderers, unbelievers, cowards, fornicators, drunks, enemies, oppressors, and all whom Scripture says will not inherit the kingdom of God.”⁵
- B. What are the devil’s goals or desires?
- 1. Satan wants to be God.
 - a. “It is obvious from the text that Satan’s sin was pride. He was so beautiful, so wise, and so powerful as an angel that he began to covet God’s position and authority. He chafed at having to serve God and grew angry and rebellious. He did not want to serve, he wanted to be served; he, as a creature, wanted to be worshipped. How starkly contrasted to our savior Jesus Christ, who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).”⁶
 - 1) **Isaiah 14:12-15** *“How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’ But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.”*
 - 2) **Revelation 12:7-12** *Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 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. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come*

⁵ David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare*, 20.

⁶ Troy Lacey, *The First Sin*, as found at: <https://answersingenesis.org/sin/the-first-sin/>

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down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”

- 3) **Revelation 12:4** *And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it.*
- b. Because of Satan’s desire to be God, he wants to destroy everything that glorifies God.
 - 1) **John 10:9** *The thief comes only to steal and kill, and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*
 - 2) **Revelation 9:11** *They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek is called Apollyon.*
 - i. “Abaddon or Apollyon—These names mean ‘the one who destroys.’ Satan creates nothing but seeks to ruin what God has made.”⁷
 2. Satan wants to influence and sway legal proceedings and governmental structures for his ends.
 - a. “In Revelation 2:10, Jesus states that Satan is in the process of influencing Smyrna’s legal proceedings by throwing a collection of Christians into prison.”⁸
 - 1) **Revelation 2:10** *Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life.*
 3. Satan aggressively seeks to trap individual Christians.
 - a. “1 Timothy 3:7 says he seeks to trap elders. He is spoken of as a federal head type of figure. His minions study individuals and then seek to tempt and twist them in accordance with particularized patterns of sin. They cater and concoct a seemingly irresistible elixir of poison just for you. Television, social media, fast food, biology, age, and gender are all thrown into the recipe.”⁹
 - 1) **1 Timothy 3:7** *Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.*

⁷ Mike McKinley, *Did the devil make me do it? And other questions about Satan, demons and evil spirits*, 20.

⁸ Sam Bierig, *A Biblical Theology of Satan*, as found at: <https://www.mbts.edu/2019/10/10-truths-about-a-liar-a-biblical-theology-of-satan/>

⁹ Sam Bierig, *A Biblical Theology of Satan*, as found at: <https://www.mbts.edu/2019/10/10-truths-about-a-liar-a-biblical-theology-of-satan/>

IV. Examine the activity of the devil regarding both believers and unbelievers.

A. Unbelievers

1. Westerberg “The enemy of our souls does his best to keep the lost people blind. Satan doesn’t want them to see the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”¹⁰
 - a. **2 Corinthians 4:4** *Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don’t believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don’t understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.*
 - b. **1 Corinthians 1:18** *For the word of the cross is foolish to those who are perishing, but to us who are saved it is the power of God.*
2. Deceptive teachings and false teachers continually twist the Truth to cause division within the church, stumbling of believers, and to embolden the unrepentant.
 - a. **1 John 4:1** *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.*
 - b. **2 Corinthians 11:13-15** *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 no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.*
3. Satan has control over unbelievers, under God’s sovereign authority, to do his will.
 - a. **2 Timothy 2:22-26** *So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.*

B. Believers

1. Satan cannot take away a believer’s salvation.
 - a. **John 10:28** *I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand.*
 - b. **Romans 8:33-39** *Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of*

¹⁰ Randy Westerberg, *Spiritual Warfare*, from an outline at the 2018 Biblical Counseling Conference at Cross Pointe Church.

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Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

2. Satan is able to cause suffering, afflict, or even kill Christians.
 - a. The book of job is a picture of how Satan is able to afflict a believer, causing a significant amount of pain and suffering. However, Satan cannot touch the soul of a believer.
 - b. **Matthew 10:28** *And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*

V. Describe a biblical methodology for responding to the demonic in the context of counseling.

A. Deliverance Ministries

1. Westerberg "A Deliverance Ministry is a ministry where a pastor or counselor believes your problems are caused by demons, and their role is to cast them out of you. . . Deliverance Ministries remove any personal responsibility for sinful actions and blame them on an indwelling demon. This takes away hope, as you are at the mercy of a demon, and have little control over your actions."¹¹
 - a. **Acts 19:11-20** *And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them. Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.*
2. Powlison "In the gospels when someone suffered an unclean spirit, Jesus showed mercy by casting it out. The practice of casting or driving out spirits captures the most distinctive feature of contemporary deliverance ministries, or EMM. Proponents say that Christians and non-Christians often require an

¹¹ Randy Westerberg, *Spiritual Warfare*, from an outline at the 2018 Biblical Counseling Conference at Cross Pointe Church.

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‘ekballistic encounter’ to cast out inhabiting demons that enslave us in sexual lust, anger, low self-esteem, substance abuse, fascination with the occult, unbelief, and other ungodly patterns.”¹²

- a. Powlison “Contemporary EMM is obviously based on the key assumption that demons of sin reside within the human heart. . . Demons take up residency and, to a greater or lesser extent, take over functions of the human heart. As squatters in the soul, they exert the power of a behind-the-scenes government.”¹³
 - b. Powlison “Ekballistic sanctification seeks to break demonic strongholds inside Christians; ‘when the demon goes, the Christian grows.’”¹⁴
3. Powlison “Proponents say that demons gain access—a ‘ground’—in several ways. One is through our own sins. Such habitual sins as immorality, anger and unforgiveness, and addiction to drugs, alcohol, or food can give demons a foothold, which they can then solidify into a stronghold.”¹⁵
4. Issues with EMM or Deliverance Ministries
- a. Powlison “Scripture, however, never says a word about causes of demonization. Plainly we do not need to know how the Gadarene demonic got that way, because it is not important for faith and practice, for ministry or personal growth in grace. The Bible will answer the questions we need to know to live to God’s glory instead of being bound in sin.”¹⁶
 - b. Powlison “EMM advocates often cite Job to prove that Satan can directly afflict and tempt believers. They draw the further implication that therefore EMM must be part of the solution to our problems.”¹⁷
 - 1) Rather than the account of Job displaying Satan’s ability to afflict and tempt believers, it displays just how submissive Satan is to God’s authority and omnipotence.
 - i. God questions Satan, and he has to answer (Job 1:7-11; 2:2-5).
 - ii. God limits Satan’s ability to affect Job (Job 1:12; 2:6).
 - 2) Powlison “. . . notice Job’s mode of spiritual warfare. Job actually never mentions Satan . . . Nor does he focus on the tertiary causes: murderous raiders and thieves, painful sores covering his body, rejection by his wife and relatives. Instead Job wrestles with God, the primary cause, because God is sovereign. And finally Job repents of self-righteousness. He proved to be the wise spiritual warrior by honesty, by reproving

¹² David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare*, 29.

¹³ David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare*, 29.

¹⁴ David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare*, 29.

¹⁵ David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare*, 30.

¹⁶ David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare*, 41.

¹⁷ David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare*, 56-57.

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his wife's and counselor's folly, by repentance, by faith. In so doing, Job glorified God and humiliated Satan."¹⁸

- i. **Job 1:21** *And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."*
 - ii. **Job 2:10** *But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.*
 - iii. **Job 38:1-4** *Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me. "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding.*
 - iv. **Job 42:1-6** *Then Job answered the LORD and said: "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. 'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me.' I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes."*
- c. Powlison "The stunning lesson is that God uses wickedness: Satan, evil spirits, false prophets, the evil of Joseph's brothers, Chaldean oppressors, Judas. What the wicked mean for evil, God works for good."¹⁹
- 1) **1 Peter 5:8-10** *Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.*
 - i. **Job 1:7b** *Satan answered the LORD and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it."*

B. Classical Ministries

1. Westerberg "A Classical Ministry is a ministry where a pastor or counselor believes your problems and sins are caused by your own sinful nature."

¹⁸ David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare*, 57.

¹⁹ David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare*, 58.

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- a. This approach understands that the devil may be at work behind the curtain of eternity, as can be seen in the account of Job, but we understand that God is sovereign in all things, and that neither the devil, nor his demons, can do anything apart from the will of God.
 - 1) **1 John 5:18-19** *We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him. We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.*
 - b. The classic mode also focuses on our individual sin natures and our subsequent responsibility for our sinful behavior rather than transferring the responsibility from our sins to an invisible demon.
 - 1) McKinley “And so the Bible’s instructions to people caught in sin are not to rebuke a demon, but to flee from temptation, confess your sins to one another, and refrain from those sinful behaviors.”²⁰
 - 2) **James 1:14** *But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.*
 - 3) **Romans 8:7** *For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot.*
 - 4) **Romans 8:13** *For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*
2. Powlison “. . . the classic mode of warfare-of evangelism, discipleship, and personal growth—has followed the pattern of Jesus facing Satan in the desert. The textbooks for spiritual warfare in this mode have been Psalms and Proverbs, the ways that Jesus addressed moral evil, and the teachings of the New Testament epistles.”²¹
 - a. Powlison “Spiritual warfare with the power of evil is a matter of consistently and repeatedly turning from darkness to light in the midst of assailing darkness. Christians fight spiritual warfare by repentance, faith, and obedience.”²²
 - b. Powlison “. . . human beings are always responsible moral agents and . . . People are responsible for their own evil . . . ”²³
 - c. Powlison “. . . the mode of warfare that God taught was having faith in the Word of God, fearing God, turning from evil involvements, taking refuge in the LORD, and obeying his voice. (Biblically speaking) EMM is never the mode of warfare.”²⁴

²⁰ Mike McKinley, *Did the devil make me do it? And other questions about Satan, demons and evil spirits*, 51.

²¹ David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare*, 35.

²² David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare*, 36.

²³ David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare*, 61.

²⁴ David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare*, 61.

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- d. Powlison “Whenever and wherever Jesus addressed Satan’s attempts to establish or maintain evil moral headship, he used the non-EMM, classic mode of spiritual warfare. He never cast our demons of sin from people, but instead exposed and reprovved sin, inviting people to the God of grace.”²⁵

VI. Suggested Reading

- A. David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare*.
- B. Mike McKinley, *Did the devil make me do it? And other questions about Satan, demons and evil spirits*.

²⁵ David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare*, 69.