

The **Bible** Unpacked

Comprehensive Study Series

The Bible's teaching presented
for Bible students

Paul Mallison

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for Bible students

36. Standing Firm

Paul Mallison

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A Quick Word

This series of studies aims to present a compilation of the Bible's teachings in a clear and readable order. There are 40 booklets in the series, based on the 40 chapters of the book *The Bible Unpacked - Comprehensive Edition*. Each booklet has two sections, which can be used for two or more studies.

See *Topics in This Series* towards the end of this booklet for a full listing of all the topics. Note that studying booklets alternatively from the two major sections (*What to Know* and *What to Do*) would add variety.

The material contains Bible verses. Before the verses are headings, which reflect what the verses say – in particular the parts of the verses in *italics*. The verses are sometimes followed by a comment.

The verses often have a brief introduction. Usually these state who is speaking and often who they are speaking to. Apart from God and Jesus Christ, the main speakers are:

- Moses – who led the Israelites and taught them God's laws;
- David – Israel's greatest king who wrote many of the psalms, most of which are essentially prayers;
- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and other prophets – who spoke to the people of Israel on God's behalf; and
- Paul, Peter, John and other leaders of the early church – who spoke to various groups and wrote letters to believers.

Much care has been taken in order to correctly interpret the verses. Nevertheless, if you encounter a verse that is used to teach something that is contrary to or goes beyond your understanding, assess its use by doing such things as: reading the passage it is from; and considering how its teaching fits in with Scripture as a whole (e.g. interpret OT teaching in the light of NT teaching).

For more information on *The Bible Unpacked* and free downloads, go to the website: www.thebibleunpacked.net.

Suggestions for Study Groups

Preliminary matters:

- Beforehand the leader should: check the context of any verses they are not familiar with; and review the questions. If need be, they should compose questions more applicable to the group.
- Each person should have a Bible, for things such as checking a verse's context. It would also be helpful to have Bible commentaries on hand.
- Pray before beginning the study. Ask God for help in understanding the meaning of the verses and to affect your lives through them. Also pray together at the end.

Doing the study:

- Ideally, read the material and answer the questions prior to the meeting. Then share answers and discuss any issues arising from the material in the meeting.
- Alternatively, read the material and answer the questions in the meeting – reading either aloud as a group or individually (prior to sharing answers). If reading as a group, **try having one person read the headings, another read the verses and another read the comments.** Additionally, a fourth person could read the Bible references.

General or concluding questions:

If time permits, conclude with one or more of the following questions:

- What is something that you either: **did not know** before; gained **greater insight** into; or **needed reminding** of?
- What verse would be helpful to memorize and bear in mind during the next week?
- In taking the verses seriously, is there anything you should change in:
 - (a) how you relate to God and/or to other people; or
 - (b) any other area of your life (e.g. attitudes, values or behavior)?

If so, are there any specific steps you could take to do this?

I. General

The New Testament contains numerous warnings and exhortations to be faithful to God and to hold to the Christian faith. It is every Christian's constant challenge to do so. We need to stand firm, until the end – while ever watching for Jesus Christ's return and the fulfillment of our hope.

a) Be Faithful to God

Be faithful to God and Jesus Christ . . .

1KI 8:61 [SOLOMON, TO THE PEOPLE:] *May you, his people, always be faithful to the LORD our God, obeying all his laws and commands, as you do today.* ^{GNT}

ACTS 11:23 When he arrived and saw how God had blessed the people, he was glad and *urged them all to be faithful and true to the Lord with all their hearts.* ^{GNT}

. . . Hold fast to God and his ways

2KI 18:6 For *he* [Hezekiah] *held fast to the LORD. He did not depart from following him, but kept the commandments that the LORD commanded Moses.* ^{ESV}

Serve God faithfully

1SAM 12:24 Obey the LORD and *serve him faithfully with all your heart.* Remember the great things he has done for you. ^{GNT}

Do not be unfaithful to God by not keeping his commands, . . .

1CHR 10:13 So Saul died because *he was unfaithful to the LORD and did not obey the LORD's instructions;* he even tried to conjure up underworld spirits. ^{NET}

. . . nor be unfaithful by forsaking God

2CHR 29:6 [HEZEKIAH, TO THE PRIESTS AND LEVITES OF JUDAH:] *For our fathers were unfaithful; they did what is evil in the sight of the LORD our God and abandoned him! They turned away from the LORD's dwelling place and rejected him.* ^{NET}

God protects and blesses those who are faithful to him

PS 31:23 Love the LORD, all his faithful people. *The LORD protects the faithful,* but punishes the proud as they deserve. ^{GNT}

1SAM 26:23A *The LORD rewards those who are faithful and righteous.* ^{GNT}

God punishes those who are unfaithful

NEH 1:8B [GOD, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *If you act unfaithfully, I will scatter you among the nations.* NET

Why do you remain faithful to God and Jesus Christ?

What is involved in serving God faithfully with all our heart (cf. 1Sam 12:24)? What attitudes and actions are needed to do so?

What challenges do you often face in remaining faithful to God? What helps you to remain faithful in the face of these things?

b) Remember God and His Word

Ensure you remember God . . .

DEUT 8:11, 18 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *Be sure you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments, ordinances, and statutes that I am giving you today. ... ¹⁸You must remember the LORD your God, for he is the one who gives ability to get wealth; if you do this he will confirm his covenant that he made by oath to your ancestors, even as he has to this day.* NET

. . . and remember what God has done

1CHR 16:12 *Recall the miraculous deeds he performed, his mighty acts and the judgments he decreed, ...* NET

Remember God's word and commands

Ps 119:16, 93 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *I will take pleasure in your laws and remember your words. ... ⁹³I won't ever forget your teachings, because you give me new life by following them.* CEV

In fact, persistently meditate on God's word and commands . . .

Ps 119:97, 148 [A PSALMIST, TO GOD:] *O how I love your law! All day long I meditate on it. ... ¹⁴⁸My eyes anticipate the nighttime hours, so that I can meditate on your word.* NET

. . . As such, keep God's word and commands in your heart and thoughts

DEUT 11:18A [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *Take these words of mine to heart and keep them in mind.* GW

DEUT 6:6-9 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *"Let these words that I'm commanding you today be always on your heart. ⁷Teach them repeatedly to your children. Talk about them while sitting in your house or walking on the road, and as you lie down or get up. ⁸Tie them as reminders on your forearm, bind them on your forehead, ⁹and write them on the door frames of your house and on your gates."* ISV

God's commands are to be on the hearts of his people (v. 6). As such his people should take steps to keep his commands in their thoughts (vv. 7–9).

Note: Forgetting God has dreadful consequences

DEUT 8:19 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship them and bow down to them, I warn you today that you will be destroyed.* NCV™

What steps could you take in order to more persistently meditate on God's word?

What themes in God's word do you need to focus on at this time?

How can apparent believers get to the point where they effectively forget God? What things should we look out for, so that we do not forget God?

c) Hold to the Faith

See also:

■ *Be Faithful to God and Endure*, Ch. 40

Continue in the faith . . .

ACTS 14:22 They strengthened the souls of the disciples and encouraged them to *continue in the faith*, saying, “We must enter the kingdom of God through many persecutions.” NET

The body of Christian beliefs is often referred to as “the faith”.

. . . and so stand firm

1COR 15:58A [PAUL:] My dear friends, *stand firm and don’t be shaken*. CEV

As such, hold to Christian teaching . . .

2THES 2:15 [PAUL, TO THE THESSALONIAN BELIEVERS:] So, brothers and sisters, stand strong and *continue to believe the teachings we gave you in our speaking and in our letter*. NCV™

. . . and so continue to live by Christian teaching

3JN 1:3 [JOHN, TO HIS FRIEND GAIUS:] I was so happy when some fellow-Christians arrived and told me *how faithful you are to the truth—just as you always live in the truth*. GNT

Moreover, grow in the faith and in your knowledge

PHIL 1:25 [PAUL, TO THE PHILIPPIAN BELIEVERS:] Since I’m convinced of this, I know that I will continue to live and be with all of you. This will help you to *grow and be joyful in your faith*. GW

COL 1:10 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] You will produce fruit in every good work and *grow in the knowledge of God*. NCV™

The final phrase quite likely speaks of growing or increasing in knowledge about God, quite possibly encompassing coming to know him better (cf. CEV, NIV, NLT). But note that some commentators interpret Paul to be speaking of “the knowledge of God” as the sphere in which we grow, or the means by which we grow.

Additionally, grow in all aspects of your Christian life . . .

2PET 1:5–8 For this very reason, *make every effort to add to your faith [moral] excellence, to excellence, knowledge; ⁶to knowledge, self-control; to self-control, perseverance; to perseverance, godliness; ⁷to godliness, brotherly affection; to brotherly affection, unselfish love. ⁸For if these things are really yours and are continually increasing, they will keep you from becoming ineffective and unproductive in your pursuit of knowing our Lord Jesus Christ more intimately.* NET

. . . and produce spiritual “fruit”

GAL 5:22–23 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.* NET

These characteristics are described as “fruit of the Spirit” because their source and means of growth is the Holy Spirit – like fruit from a tree. The implication is that our lives should produce such “fruit”.

What encourages you – particularly in times of doubt – to hold on to the faith, to continue believing the Bible’s teachings?

To what extent have you grown in your knowledge of the faith in recent years? What are you doing – or could you do – towards furthering your growth?

Which of the fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22–23 do you think you most need to work on producing? What can you do regarding this?

Pray for persecuted Christians

d) Persist until the End

Stand firm until the end

MATT 24:13 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *But the one who endures to the end will be saved.* ESV

Persist so that you will receive the reward . . .

ROM 2:7 *He [God] will give everlasting life to those who search for glory, honor, and immortality by persisting in doing what is good.* GW

HEB 10:35–36 *So do not throw away your confidence, because it has great reward. ³⁶For you need endurance in order to do God's will and so receive what is promised.* NET

. . . As such, be like an athlete, striving for a prize

2TIM 4:7–8 [PAUL:] *I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith! ⁸Finally the crown of righteousness is reserved for me. The Lord, the righteous Judge, will award it to me in that day – and not to me only, but also to all who have set their affection on his appearing.* NET

Be careful not to turn away from God . . .

HEB 3:12 *Be careful, brothers and sisters, that none of you ever develop a wicked, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.* GNT

HEB 2:1 *Therefore we must pay closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.* NET

. . . and so do not rebel against God

NUM 14:9A *Only do not rebel against the LORD.* ESV

JOSH 22:29 [THE ISRAELITES:] *Far be it from us to rebel against the LORD by turning back today from following after the LORD by building an altar for burnt offerings, sacrifices, and tokens of peace aside from the altar of the LORD our God located in front of his dwelling place!*

NET

Some people do fall away . . .

1TIM 4:1A *The Spirit says clearly that in later times some believers will desert the Christian faith.* GW

. . . Falling away brings dire consequences

JOHN 15:6 [JESUS:] *If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown out like a branch, and dries up; and such branches are gathered up and thrown into the fire, and are burned up.* NET

How is the Christian life like a sporting contest (cf. 2 Timothy 4:7-8)?

In what ways or in what things do we need to be careful, so as not to turn away from God?

What are some indicators that people are falling away from God? What are the danger signs to look out for?

e) Be Ready for Jesus Christ's Return

See also:

■ *The Timing of Jesus Christ's Return*, Ch. 15

As you do not know when Jesus Christ will come, keep watch and be ready

MATT 24:42–44 “So keep on watching, because you don't know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³But be sure of this: if the owner of the house had known when during the night the thief would be coming, he would have stayed awake and not allowed his house to be broken into. ⁴⁴So you, too, must be ready, because at an hour you are not expecting him the Son of Man will come.” ^{ISV}

To be ready for Jesus Christ's return, live a godly life . . .

1TIM 6:14 [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] *Do what you were commanded to do without wrong or blame until our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.* ^{NCV™}

Likely Paul mentions Christ's return (v. 14) to inspire Timothy to obey his instructions in order to be ready for it.

. . . and live a constructive life

MATT 25:19–21 *Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, ‘Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.’ ²¹His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’* ^{ESV}

The returning master (v. 19; cf. 24:50 ↓) represents Jesus Christ on his return, whereupon he will reward his faithful servants.

So do not live an ungodly life, leaving you unprepared for Jesus Christ's return

MATT 24:48–51 *But if that wicked servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed,’ ⁴⁹and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards, ⁵⁰the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know ⁵¹and*

will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ESV

Wait eagerly for Jesus Christ's return and for all that will follow

PHIL 3:20–21 [PAUL:] We, however, are citizens of heaven, and we eagerly wait for our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come from heaven. ²¹He will change our weak mortal bodies and make them like his own glorious body, using that power by which he is able to bring all things under his rule. GNT

JUDE 1:21 Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the Lord Jesus Christ with his mercy to give you life forever. NCV™

Do not be deceived by false claims, for Christ's return will be only after certain events – and obvious to all

MATT 24:4–14, 26–27 Jesus answered them [his disciples], "Watch out that no one misleads you. ⁵For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will mislead many. ⁶You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. Make sure that you are not alarmed, for this must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁷For nation will rise up in arms against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸All these things are the beginning of birth pains. ⁹"Then they will hand you over to be persecuted and will kill you. You will be hated by all the nations because of my name. ¹⁰Then many will be led into sin, and they will betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹And many false prophets will appear and deceive many, ¹²and because lawlessness will increase so much, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³But the person who endures to the end will be saved. ¹⁴And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole inhabited earth as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come. ... ²⁶So then, if someone says to you, 'Look, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out, or 'Look, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe him. ²⁷For just like the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so the coming of the Son of Man will be. NET

2THES 2:3 Do not let anyone deceive you in any way. For the Day will not come until the final Rebellion takes place and the Wicked One appears, who is destined for hell. GNT

The “Day” is the day of Christ’s return. The “Wicked One” is quite likely the first beast of Revelation 13, understood by many to be a final antichrist.

How does it help in living as a Christian to “keep on watching” (Matt 24:42) for Jesus Christ’s return?

Are there any indicators (cf. Matt 24:4–14) that Jesus Christ’s return may be drawing near?

Are you ready for Jesus Christ’s return? If you knew he was returning in the next twelve months, what would you do differently?

II. Spiritual Warfare

See also:

- *5. Angels, Satan and Demons*

Living as God wants necessarily means involvement in spiritual warfare. Believers are faced with challenges from spiritual adversaries and also from within themselves. Although the forces that oppose believers are formidable, the Bible gives clear instructions on how to counter any threat – through the supreme power of God.

a) The Existence of Spiritual Warfare

Believers are involved in conflict of a spiritual nature

1TIM 1:18B [PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] I tell you this so you can follow them and *fight the good fight*. NCV™

The Greek rendered here as “fight the good fight” alludes to warfare (cf. AMP), in contrast to the Greek behind the same rendering later in 6:12. As such it refers to or at least reflects the spiritual warfare in which believers are involved.

Believers have spiritual enemies . . .

EPH 6:12 *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens.* NET

Although believers may have human opponents, primarily and ultimately their struggle is against spiritual powers.

. . . Most notably, believers have Satan as an enemy

1PET 5:8 *Be sober and alert. Your enemy the devil, like a roaring lion, is on the prowl looking for someone to devour.* NET

Believers also have human enemies

PHIL 1:28A *Be brave when you face your enemies.* Your courage will show them that they are going to be destroyed, and it will show you that you will be saved. CEV

Believers have human enemies who are opposed to them in regard to spiritual matters – notably in seeking to prevent the spread of the gospel and/or in seeking to impose their own opposing beliefs.

Additionally, believers face internal spiritual conflict

1PET 2:11 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] Dear friends, I urge you as aliens and exiles to keep on abstaining from *the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul*. ISV

GAL 5:17 *For the flesh has desires that are opposed to the Spirit, and the Spirit has desires that are opposed to the flesh, for these are in opposition to each other, so that you cannot do what you want.* NET

The opposing desires of the sinful nature and the Holy Spirit, who indwells believers, produce spiritual conflict within believers. Note that the final clause is probably speaking of the influence of the sinful nature in hindering one from doing the good one wants to do – in conflict with the Holy Spirit. Alternatively, it possibly could be speaking of the Spirit helping us to not indulge the desires that we naturally want to fulfill.

Note: God and Jesus Christ aid believers in spiritual warfare, enabling them to overcome

2TIM 4:18 [PAUL:] *The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will take me safely to his heavenly kingdom. Glory belongs to him forever and ever! Amen.* ISV

ROM 8:31, 37–39 [PAUL:] *What then shall we say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ...³⁷No, in all these things we have complete victory through him [Christ] who loved us! ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor heavenly rulers, nor things that are present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.* NET

In what ways are you aware of spiritual warfare, particularly in being involved in it yourself?

What can believers do to resist Satan?

How can we counteract "the desires of the flesh" (1Pet 2:11; cf. Gal 5:17)?

Pray for persecuted Christians

b) Engaging in Spiritual Warfare

Believers are to engage in spiritual warfare both in standing firm in their faith and in advancing the cause of God's kingdom. Generally speaking, the former has a defensive sense and the latter an offensive sense.

Be on your guard against spiritual dangers

2PET 3:17B *Be on your guard, then, so that you will not be led away by the errors of lawless people and fall from your safe position.* GNT

Resist Satan

JAMES 4:7 So submit to God. But *resist the devil and he will flee from you.* NET

1PET 5:9 *Be firm in your faith and resist him* [Satan], because you know that your fellow-believers in all the world are going through the same kind of sufferings. GNT

Use spiritual weapons and armor

2COR 10:3–4 [PAUL:] For though we live as human beings, we do not wage war according to human standards, ⁴*for the weapons of our warfare are not human weapons, but are made powerful by God for tearing down strongholds.* We tear down arguments ... NET

EPH 6:13–15 For this reason, *take up the full armor of God so that you may be able to stand your ground on the evil day, and having done everything, to stand.* ¹⁴*Stand firm therefore, by fastening the belt of truth around your waist, by putting on the breastplate of righteousness,* ¹⁵*by fitting your feet with the preparation that comes from the good news of peace, ...* NET

Verse 15 is most likely speaking of believers having a strong grasp of the truths of the gospel so as to be ready for action (cf. NASB, NCV, NKJV). Possibly a readiness to proclaim this gospel is in view (cf. CEV, GNT, NRSV).

Spiritual weapons and armor include: faith; . . .

EPH 6:16 *At all times carry faith as a shield; for with it you will be able to put out all the burning arrows shot by the Evil One.* GNT

1PET 1:4B-5 [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] It is reserved in heaven for you, ⁵who by God's power are protected through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. NET

... **God's word;** ...

EPH 6:17 And take the helmet of salvation and *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.* NET

The description of God's word as "the sword of the Spirit" reflects its: power; offensive and defensive roles; spiritual nature; and importance to the work of the Holy Spirit. Note that the "helmet of salvation" may well have in view the hope of salvation (cf. 1Thes 5:8).

... **and prayer**

MATT 6:13 [PRAYER TO GOD:] *Don't allow us to be tempted. Instead, rescue us from the evil one.* GW

EPH 6:18 *Never stop praying, especially for others. Always pray by the power of the Spirit. Stay alert and keep praying for God's people.* CEV

In the face of evil (cf. vv. 11, 13), believers should keep on praying – not just for themselves but for all God's people.

What are "the burning arrows shot by the Evil One" (Eph 6:16) – and how does faith enable us to put them out?

How can we use God's word as a sword (cf. Eph 6:17)?

What teachings in this study should spur us on to pray more?

Pray for persecuted Christians

c) Counteraction of Demons

Distinguishing between the Holy Spirit and demons

1JN 4:1–3, 6 [JOHN:] Dear friends, stop believing every spirit. Instead, *test the spirits to see whether they are from God*, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²*This is how you can recognize God’s Spirit: Every spirit who acknowledges that Jesus the Messiah has come in the flesh is from God.* ³*But every spirit who does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist.* You have heard that he is coming, and now he is already in the world. ... ⁶*We belong to God. The person who knows God listens to us. Whoever does not belong to God does not listen to us. This is how we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of deceit.* ISV

In vv. 1–3, “spirit” refers to a spirit influencing a person. Having in view a particular heresy that was facing his readers, John indicates that they could tell if the spirit in a prophet (v. 1; CEV, GNT, NLT) is the Holy Spirit or an evil one by whether or not the prophet acknowledged Jesus Christ, in particular whether they acknowledged that he had come in the flesh. To do so would be indicative of the Holy Spirit’s enlightenment and conviction. Presumably this test for recognizing the Holy Spirit can be applied to other biblical truths about Jesus Christ (cf. 1Cor 12:3).

Additionally, one can infer from v. 6 that prophets or teachers who do not listen to the teachings of the apostles are not from God and are under the influence of evil spirits.

Jesus Christ drove out demons . . .

MARK 1:34, 39 *So he healed many who were sick with various diseases and drove out many demons.* But he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. ... ³⁹*So he went into all of Galilee preaching in their synagogues and casting out demons.* NET

. . . and Jesus Christ gave some of his followers similar authority over demons

MARK 6:7, 13 He called the twelve disciples together and sent them out two by two. *He gave them authority over the evil spirits ...* ¹³*They*

drove out many demons, and rubbed olive oil on many sick people and healed them. GNT

These verses show that Jesus gave his disciples authority over demons. They do not imply that this authority is necessarily given to all believers.

Demons are driven out of people in Jesus Christ's "name"

ACTS 16:18 She [a girl with an evil spirit] continued to do this for many days. But Paul became greatly annoyed, and turned and *said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" And it came out of her at once.* NET

To do things in Jesus Christ's "name" involves acting: as his representative; by his authority; and in accordance with his will. It involves acting in reliance on his power, by faith in him.

The Holy Spirit, faith and prayer also figure in the driving out of demons

MATT 12:28 [JESUS:] But if *I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has already overtaken you.* NET

MATT 17:18–20 Then Jesus spoke sternly to the demon. It went out of the boy, and right then he was healed. ¹⁹Later the disciples went to Jesus in private and asked him, "*Why couldn't we force out the demon?*" ^{20–21}*Jesus replied: It is because you don't have enough faith! But I can promise you this. If you had faith no larger than a mustard seed, you could tell this mountain to move from here to there. And it would. Everything would be possible for you.* CEV

MARK 9:28–29 Then, after he [Jesus] went into the house, his disciples asked him privately, "*Why couldn't we cast it out?*" ²⁹*He told them, "This kind can come out only by prayer."* NET

What indicators are there that someone may be demon-possessed?

If you thought someone might be demon-possessed, what could you do about it?

Some people worry a lot about Satan and demons, while others are hardly concerned at all. How should we view them?

Pray for persecuted Christians

d) Ungodly Spiritualistic Practices

In conjunction with engaging in spiritual warfare, we are not to engage in any ungodly spiritualistic practices, which ultimately involve cooperative interaction with demons and even Satan.

Do not practice witchcraft or other occult practices . . .

DEUT 18:10–11 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *You must never sacrifice your sons or daughters by burning them alive, practice black magic, be a fortuneteller, witch, or sorcerer, ¹¹cast spells, ask ghosts or spirits for help, or consult the dead.* GW

. . . and do not consult anyone who does perform such practices

LEV 19:31A *Do not go for advice to people who consult the spirits of the dead.* GNT

ISA 47:13–14A [GOD, TO THE BABYLONIANS:] *You are powerless in spite of the advice you get. Let your astrologers come forward and save you—those people who study the stars, who map out the zones of the heavens and tell you from month to month what is going to happen to you. ¹⁴“They will be like bits of straw, and a fire will burn them up! They will not even be able to save themselves ...* GNT

Do not have other “gods” or idols

EX 20:2–6 [GOD, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *“I, the LORD, am your God, who brought you from the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery. ³“You shall have no other gods before me. ⁴“You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is on the earth beneath or that is in the water below. ⁵You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I, the LORD, your God, am a jealous God, responding to the transgression of fathers by dealing with children to the third and fourth generations of those who reject me, ⁶and showing covenant faithfulness to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.* NET

Other “gods” or idols are lifeless . . .

PS 135:15–17 *The nations’ idols are made of silver and gold, they are man-made. ¹⁶They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see, ¹⁷and ears, but cannot hear. Indeed, they cannot breathe.* NET

. . . and so they are absolutely useless

1SAM 12:21 *Idols are of no use, so don’t worship them. They can’t help you or save you. They are useless!* NCV™

Moreover, worship of idols is correlated with worship of demons

1COR 10:19–20 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] I do not mean that the food sacrificed to an idol is important. I do not mean that an idol is anything at all. ²⁰But I say that *what is sacrificed to idols is offered to demons*, not to God. And I do not want you to share anything with demons. NCV™

Although idol worshipers may believe that they are offering sacrifices to an idol, they are in reality ultimately offering them to demons.

Having other “gods” and idols is detrimental to our relationship with God . . .

DEUT 31:18 [GOD, REFERRING TO THE ISRAELITES:] *On that day I will certainly turn away from them because of all the evil they’ve done in turning to other gods.* GW

. . . It will in fact culminate in God’s retribution

JOSH 24:20 [JOSHUA, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *If you abandon the LORD and worship foreign gods, he will turn against you; he will bring disaster on you and destroy you, though he once treated you well.* NET

Note: Other “gods” and idolatry are not restricted to physical images

PHIL 3:19 [PAUL, SPEAKING OF ENEMIES OF THE GOSPEL:] Their destiny is destruction, *their god is their belly*, and their glory is in their shame. Their minds are set on worldly things. ISV

Here “belly” possibly is being used as a metaphor for “bodily desires” (GNT, cf. NCV). Regardless, Paul clearly has in view a mindset focused

on earthly or worldly things, making them one's top priority, effectively one's "god".

EPH 5:5 You may be sure that no one who is immoral, indecent, or greedy (for *greed is a form of idolatry*) will ever receive a share in the Kingdom of Christ and of God. GNT

Greedy people effectively put material things in the place of God. As such they are "serving a false god" (NCV).

Have you encountered witchcraft or other occult practices? How should we respond to such encounters – during and afterwards?

What forms of "gods" and idolatry are common in our society?

Are you aware of anything which draws your devotion away from God? If so, what can you do about it?

Notes

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Christian Faith and Freedom – www.cffreedom.org

It advocates on behalf of and aids persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity International – www.csi-int.org

CSI works to defend religious liberty and help persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide – www.csw.org.uk

It advocates for freedom of religion and justice for persecuted believers.

Open Doors – sb.od.org; www.opendoors.org.au

It equips believers for persecution and maintaining a witness to the Gospel.

Religious Liberty Commission – www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc

RLC defends and aids persecuted Christians. See also www.idop.org.

Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin – rlprayerbulletin.blogspot.com.au

It provides weekly bulletins. Send a blank email to join-rlpb@hub.xc.org.

The Bible League – www.bibleleague.org/persecuted; www.bibleleague.com

It supplies Bibles to persecuted Christians and also provides training.

Voice of the Martyrs – www.persecution.com; www.persecution.com.au

VOM helps persecuted Christians spread the gospel. It also gives material aid.

World Watch Monitor – www.worldwatchmonitor.org

It reports the story of Christians under pressure for their faith.

Then the King will answer, 'I tell you the truth, anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me.' Matthew 25:40 NCV

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