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Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg explores the concept of "blasphemy of the Holy Spirit" as discussed in Matthew 12 and parallel verses in Mark. He delves into the story of the healing of a demon-possessed man and discusses the potential implications of the man's possession. Gregg also considers the reactions of the people around Jesus and the accusations that he was possessed by a demon himself. Ultimately, the talk highlights the complexity of these issues and encourages a deeper understanding of the scripture.

Transcript

Matthew 12 and the parallel in Mark chapter 3. We're going to be working from Matthew chapter 12 in this story, but I do want to read a couple verses in Mark 3 because they are unique. And not only are they not found anywhere in Matthew, they're not found anywhere else in the Gospels. Mark chapter 3 verses 20 and 21 says, And the multitude came together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread.

But when his own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of him, for they said, He's out of his mind. Now, the question arises, who are his own people? It would appear from the sequel, which is found at the end of this chapter, that his own people included his brothers and his mother. Because in verse 31, a few verses down, it says, Then his brothers and his mother came, and they asked to see him, but he wouldn't grant them an audience.

In fact, he said, Anyone who does the will of my father is my mother, brother, sister, which insinuates that the people who had come to take him were not in that category at the moment. They were not on an errand from the father. They were thinking that Jesus was out of his mind.

Now, this is troublesome to many people because we think, Well, how in the world could Mary, of all people, think that Jesus was out of his mind and feel like she needed to take him into custody? Certainly she knew he was the son of God. Certainly she had angels tell her so and all that. But I guess we just have to say the same thing with John the Baptist.

John the Baptist had his moments of doubt also, and he had seen a great deal. We must not underestimate the ability of human nature to doubt and to be slow to believe, even when we've had tremendous signs and confirmations. Now, you might say, I've never seen an angel like Mary had or never seen a dove come down and land on someone's head like John the Baptist had.

That's true, but you have seen enough. You have seen changed lives. You've seen answered prayers.

You've seen the supernatural. If you've been a Christian very long and in Christian circles, you've heard testimony to the same, many of which I'm sure you accept uncritically. And that should be enough to make you never have any doubts ever.

But there are times when God doesn't seem to act in the way that you think he should. That was John just wasn't doing what John thought the Messiah was supposed to do. In all likelihood, Jesus wasn't doing what Mary thought the Messiah was supposed to do.

Now, we could give her more of the benefit of the doubt in this situation. We could suggest that she was just swept along with the rest of the family. She was kind of a quiet and retiring person.

She kept things in her heart rather than speaking them out. And, you know, it's possible that this is the brothers or the neighbors who initiated this idea. Jesus, your son, is bringing disgrace to the family name.

He's a nut. He's gone so fanatically, he doesn't even stop to eat food. He's just gone berserk here.

He's a megalomaniac. He's denying his own health, not eating. That could get to do with his mother.

We don't know how much Mary may have initiated any of this or how much she was swept along in the movement of the family. It's possible that the brothers, who we are directly told in John chapter 7, were told that Jesus' brothers didn't believe in him. Certainly Mary did, but the brothers were grown by now, like Jesus was, and very possibly were running the family more or less, and kind of, you know, pressured her into going along to try to get Jesus to come down and see them.

Whatever Mary's level of complicity in this matter, we don't know whether she was actually having her doubts, as John the Baptist apparently had, or whether she was simply being a peacemaker and not standing up against the family. We cannot say. We know this, though, that Jesus didn't honor her.

Now, this isn't really the story we wanted to talk about. That is the story about the brothers and Mary arriving. We do have to notice, however, in verse 20 and 21, that

somebody, who are called his own people, set out from Nazareth, or wherever, and came to take him into custody.

They thought he was just going too far. He was being too fanatical. He was missing too many meals.

It says he didn't even take time to eat bread. Probably didn't take time to sleep either. And that, you know, it just seemed like the man was obsessed with a vision that was going to be damaging to his own well-being, and that's a mark, in their opinion, of one who's kind of on the verge of a mental breakdown.

He's beside himself, they said. Now, as far as their arrival goes, there's much that occurs between the setting out of these relatives of his, in Mark 3 20 and 21, and their actual arrival. It's not their arrival that we want to look at today, but what happened in between.

And what happened in between is told in much greater detail in Matthew than in Mark. So, I'd like you to turn to Matthew chapter 12, and this starts at verse 22, and we'll go all the way to the end of the chapter. That means, what, 28 verses or so.

So, we've got quite a lot of material, and they're not the easiest of all verses to comment on either. Some of them are quite challenging. Matthew 12 22, Then one was brought to him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute.

And he healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. And all the multitude were amazed and said, Could this be the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow does not cast out demons, except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons. But Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.

And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.

Or else how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house. He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters abroad. Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven men.

Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come. Either make the tree good, and its fruit good, or else make the tree bad, and its

fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. Brood of vipers, how can you being evil speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it on the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you'll be condemned.

Now this is a natural stopping point in our reading. We'll comment on these verses before we endeavor to take the rest, and in fact we may never get to the rest. But we'll, I mean there's an awful lot here.

First of all, let's talk about the situation that precipitated the insult that was ranged against Jesus by his opponents here. It occurred when Jesus cast a demon out of a person. Now this certainly was not the first time Jesus had done so, and it wasn't the first time people had marveled at Jesus doing this kind of thing.

In fact, the very first time he got attention for himself in Capernaum, which later became his headquarters, it was by casting a demon out, and people were astonished and said, what kind of authority is this? What kind of a teaching is this? This man can command even the demons and they obey him. And so the word spread abroad about him. So he was famous for casting demons out of people.

This particular case, however, resulted in people saying what was secretly in their hearts for a long time and very few had said out loud. Namely, surely this could be the son of David. Now of course we know that Jesus was a son of David.

That is, his parents were both descended from David. Joseph was not his natural parent, but Joseph was descended from David, but Mary was also descended from David. Both had Davidic genealogy.

So of course Jesus was the son of David, and that probably was no secret. But of course that's not what they're saying. When they say could this be the son of David, by the term son of David, they are actually employing a messianic title.

The term son of David, when applied other than generically, had a very specific meaning of the Messiah. You know, Jesus later in his ministry, he said to the leaders, the Jewish leaders, what do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he? And they answered without hesitation, he's David's son. The idea, of course, he could be called Abraham's son, he could be called any number of persons' sons who are in his genealogy, but David is a significant person because there was a promise made to David in 2 Samuel chapter 7, that a son of his, a seed from his own body, would be raised up to sit on his throne after him, whose kingdom would be established forever by God.

And God said, he will be my son, not just David's. He will be a son to me and I will be a

father to him. This is all in 2 Samuel chapter 7. And from that day on, it was understood the Messiah was going to come from David.

And by the time of Jesus, David's son, or son of David, it was just another way of saying the Messiah. Now, when they said, could this be the Messiah, that's essentially what they're saying, that caused a serious tremor to go through the ranks of the opponents, who were, of course, the political and spiritual leaders in Israel. I mean, obviously, the Romans held political authority over Israel, but within their ranks, the Romans had given the Jews a tremendous amount of autonomy, and they had their own political system, which was mixed in, you know, inseparably with their religious system, the Sanhedrin.

And these men were, in fact, no doubt, delegates. The ones who objected were the ones who were delegates from the Sanhedrin. Now, it doesn't say they were.

It says they were Pharisees in verse 24. But in Mark chapter 3, in the parallel, in verse 22, it describes these ones who raised the objections as the scribes that came down from Jerusalem. Now, there were Pharisees all over the country.

And by Matthew's gospel alone, we wouldn't know that these men were from Jerusalem, since Jesus was not at this time in Jerusalem. He was at the other end of the country. And there might have been Pharisees locally.

In fact, there were. Jesus had just had dinner with one of them, a man named Simon, in Luke chapter 7. We said that yesterday. But these were not just Pharisees of the local, you know, synagogue.

These were men who were Pharisee scribes sent from Jerusalem, no doubt as official delegates, just like those who had first confronted John the Baptist in John chapter 1 and said, well, who are you? We were sent. We have to give an answer back to the people who sent us. Are you the Messiah? No.

Are you Elijah? No. Are you that prophet? No. Well, then who are you? We have to give an answer to the people who sent us.

Whenever somebody would cause a religious stir in the Jewish community, it was a concern to the Sanhedrin. They would send their spies or reporters or whatever, who would go and get information, bring it back. These apparently were those.

And since these men almost certainly represented the religious establishment in Jerusalem, the suggestion that there was a rumbling in the populace, saying this could be the Messiah, this could be the Messiah, was clearly a threat to the existing political powers of the Jews, because the Messiah would mean the king of the Jews. And a king would do away with the need for a Sanhedrin. If the Jewish king came, there would be no need for the Sanhedrin.

Or if it continued to exist, it would be greatly reduced in its sovereignty and its authority. And of course, it's possible that had Jesus been the kind of Messiah the Sanhedrin liked, they would have welcomed this reduction of their sovereignty to put him in charge. But Jesus was not the kind of Messiah that they liked.

It was quite clear that if this man was made king of the Jews by popular demand, he would not choose the existing members of the Sanhedrin as his cabinet. In fact, he had entirely different ideas than they had. He violated their Sabbath.

He ignored the traditions of the elders that were so important to many of them. He just was in their face an awful lot. And it was clear that they weren't his friends and he wasn't theirs.

And so the idea that people might begin to recognize this man as the Messiah, suppose they had taken him and forcibly made him a Messiah. They almost did that. This would threaten, of course, all of the authority of the Sanhedrin and men who have power, unless they're extremely humble men, which cannot be said about the men of the Sanhedrin, usually are jealous over their power.

And so this was a desperate situation. No doubt, a lot of people had been secretly in their heart of hearts saying, I wonder if this Jesus guy is the Messiah. But it wasn't being spoken out loud before this, maybe in private.

We know that when Andrew first met Jesus, he went and got his brother Simon and said, we found the Messiah. We found the Moses and the prophets spoke about. Philip did the same thing in speaking to his friend Nathaniel.

There might've been a lot of people around their dinner table saying this Jesus, I think he's the Messiah, but no one was saying it out loud. It was too dangerous for one thing. The political situation in Israel was always volatile.

And the Romans were always on the lookout for somebody who might be sticking his head up above the crowd saying, follow me and might lead the Jews in yet another revolt against Rome. So many of which had already been, had to be quelled at great bloodshed. And the Romans just didn't like Jewish people claiming to be King.

And the Sanhedrin didn't like it either, especially if the person who was recognized as King, wasn't one of their own people or agreeable with their people. Therefore, Jesus was beginning to be threatening to them in a, in a bigger way than before. He was always popular and that always made him unhappy.

But now they were talking about, Hey, this, this could be the Messiah, you know, and they were saying it outdoors. They were saying it in the crowd. They were, it had come out from, uh, you know, the private dinner time conversation in their homes out into their, you know, that's the theory that is now being circulated.

Now the representatives of the Sanhedrin had to, of course, quell this immediately. They had to do something. The problem was of course, how do you stop the truth? The fact is he was the Messiah and is the Messiah, but whether he was or is, was not the issue to them.

The problem was the ramifications on their own stature and status in the community. And, uh, you know, that he may have been the Messiah was not the, not an issue. The point was he couldn't be, as far as they were concerned, that is, they couldn't allow him to be.

It was too costly to them to allow this to be acknowledged. And therefore they desperately started lashing out for any argument they could to discredit him. Now they'd been plotting to kill him even before this.

We've read of that already. They no doubt spoke against him as often as they could, but it wasn't working. Uh, you know, he was gaining in popularity and this is for the first time people are starting to speak out loud about him maybe being the Messiah.

And therefore out of an irrational sort of a desperation, his critics had to speak up and give some alternative explanation for those evidences that were being now hailed as evidence that he was a Messiah. There were, the reason people were saying this must be the son of David is because there was a demon possessed man who, unlike most of the demon possessed people that Jesus had delivered, had visible signs of demon possession, which were visibly relieved. You know, uh, when Jesus said to the man lowered through the roof, your sins are forgiven.

No one could see whether that happened or not. That's an invisible thing. And so in order to prove that something had really happened spiritually, Jesus said, well, I'll do something visible to confirm it.

I get up, take up your bed and walk. Now, when you see that happen, you'll know that I have the authority to also forgive sin. Uh, likewise, when Jesus cast demons out of some of the people before, there's always the possibility that people could say, well, you know, how do we know the guy really had a demon? I mean, the guy was nuts though, that's for sure.

But you know, is it impossible that there wasn't really a demon and that Jesus didn't really cast out demons? I mean, there was no visible demons. No one had seen the demons. All that could be pointed to is this man's crazy behavior in the synagogue and Jesus' strong rebuke made him stop doing that.

But perhaps one could argue that was all, you know, mind over matter. That was all Jesus intimidating, you know, a crazy man or whatever. But here's a case where a man's demonized and he's got symptoms that are undeniable.

He's blind. He's mute. He can't speak.

Now, this raises some interesting things, I suppose. Demon possession as a phenomenon is kind of fascinating to many of us, mostly because we know so little about it. We tend to be very curious about things that are very different and very, you know, inaccessible to us.

There can be a very unhealthy obsession or interest in this. And I think some Christians have succumbed to that temptation. I have certainly known people who look for demons everywhere and are all continually asking questions about demons.

And I just don't have that much interest in them. But I have some interest because the Bible says some things about them. And since we do have to encounter them from time to time and deal with them, we need to strike a balance between, on the one hand, becoming obsessed with that, which is just morbid curiosity about the spiritual unknown, on the one hand, or on the other hand, of simply refusing to acknowledge there is such a thing and caring nothing about it.

I do care about it. I care about it only in terms of practical things. You know, I mean, I'm often asked, both on the radio and elsewhere, you know, can a Christian have a demon? Is it possible for a Christian to be demon-possessed? I just say, well, I don't recommend it.

You know, why would you want to? You know, I don't really think that it certainly isn't necessary. And whether it's a possibility or not is, who cares? I don't want one. Do you? You know, I mean, now, the fact of the matter is, what they're really asking is, I wonder if some of the problems I have or somebody else has that is a Christian, I wonder if those could be caused by a demon or not.

Now, the question then is not really, it doesn't boil down to, can a Christian have a demon? That's what people perceive it as. But, you know, let me lay it out for you. There is, there are strongly two camps on this very issue.

There are evangelical, charismatic, spiritual believers who say a Christian cannot have a demon, and there are people of the same description who say a Christian can. Now, those who say a Christian can have a demon generally support the argument with evidence from experience. I knew of so-and-so who was very obviously a Christian, and they got demon, they were demon-possessed, and a demon was cast out of them, and they barked like a dog, and pulled me to the mouth, and rolled on the floor, and spoke in strange voices, and then they were normal.

Now, those are pretty convincing experiences, and those are the kinds of things that bolster the idea that a Christian can have a demon. On the other side, you've got people who say you can't have a demon, and those that I was earliest trained under held that

position, and the argument was basically this. We can't base our theology on experience, we have to base it on the Bible.

And the Bible says what fellowship has light with darkness, what concord has Christ with Belial, or the temple of God with idols, your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, you know, greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. Resist the devil and he'll flee from you. He that is of God keeps himself, and that wicked one touches him not.

The Bible says all those things, and therefore, they say, based on the scripture, we say that a Christian cannot have a demon. Now, I remember my former pastor actually once, when teaching this very point, he said, listen, we don't, we can't use experience as a basis for our doctrine, we have to develop it from scripture. He says, and the scripture says a Christian can't have a demon.

Then he said, now, you might ask me, what do I say about these people who writhe on the ground, and spit up demons, and so forth. And he says, well, I don't have to explain it because it's on scripture, and I don't participate in it, so I don't have to explain it. I can't explain it.

Frankly, I wasn't real satisfied with that statement. I mean, if there are, in fact, people who give every evidence of being Christian, and also give every evidence of being demon possessed, then to say, well, I don't have to explain that, because I don't do that, you know, is, I think, kind of dodging the issue a little bit. Now, the fact of the matter is, and I've, I've given this many years of consideration, that doesn't make me a final authority on it, but the scriptures that are given to prove that a Christian cannot have a demon, if you look them up one by one, as I have done, and look at them in their context, not a single one of these proof texts comes from a passage that is talking about the issue of demon possession, or of demons at all.

The passage about what fellowship has dark and lightness, and so, light, lightness and darkness, and so forth, it's talking about not being unequally yoked together with unbelievers, 2 Corinthians chapter 6. When the Bible says, greater is in you than he that is in the world, that's true enough, but that doesn't address the issue of demon possession. The point of the matter is, that he's warning in that case, in 1 John 4.4, against being deceived by the spirit of Antichrist, and, and, and not, you know, that the spirit of Christ that's in you is greater than the spirit of Antichrist, and therefore, you needn't succumb to intimidation, or whatever, but it's not talking about demon possession, near as I can tell. And as far as the statement, you know, the wicked one touches the child of God not, certainly that needs to be qualified, because Paul said, he had a thorn in the flesh, in his body, that was a messenger from Satan sent to buffet him.

So, it seems like the wicked one can touch your body, at least, and who knows what else. Obviously, there, you know, the passages quoted do not seal up the matter. They do not,

they do not prove that a Christian cannot have a demon, because they don't even address the question, and that's not what they're even talking about.

And the question of whether they present principles that can, by extrapolation, be applied to the issue is a questionable matter. Now, what I've just tried to say is, you cannot prove from scripture that a Christian cannot have a demon, even though scripture is the thing appealed to by those people who say you cannot have a demon as a Christian, even though they say we must determine it by scripture, yet the scriptures they use don't teach the thing they say they teach. Therefore, you cannot prove from the scripture that a Christian cannot have a demon.

On the other hand, those who say a Christian can have a demon, they argue from experience, but you cannot prove from experience that a Christian can have a demon. Do you know why? It would only take a moment's thought to know why that is. Because if you see a person who appears to be a Christian and also appears to have a demon, there are three possibilities, not one.

One is, of course, that that is a Christian demon possessed and that Christians can have demons. There's two other possibilities. That may be a genuine Christian, and his problem may not be demonic.

It may appear to be, but it may not be. Or, what seems more probable, if not the obvious, if, in fact, a Christian could not have a demon, one could still explain this phenomenon by saying, well, that person may clearly have a demon, but he's not a real Christian. Now, I don't want to be the one to determine who is and who ain't real Christians, but I'll tell you one thing.

A lot of people who look like Christians aren't Christians. There's a lot of people who have jumped through the hoops and say the right words and do the protocol and live the life temporarily, at least to a point, until persecution or whatever comes up and they fall away, as you've said. But the fact of the matter is, you never can be sure 100% who is a Christian.

Now, you can come to a fairly high level of certainty. But the fact that only God knows who really is a Christian, and that is, as we look at other people, we don't know 100% if they are. We could be fairly sure, but that would mean that if that person that we think is a Christian turns out to have a demon, it's not a proof that Christians can have demons, because the person might not have a demon or the person might not be a Christian.

Therefore, you cannot finally prove from experience that a Christian can have a demon, because you can't prove by experience that any particular person really is a Christian. Only God knows that, and the person himself, hopefully. Now, what I've just said is there's two camps.

One bases their view on experience, the other on scripture. The view that bases their position on experience cannot prove their position from experience. And the view that bases their conviction on scripture cannot prove their position from experience.

What does that say? It means that we are left with uncertainty on the question. But I can give you something about which you need no uncertainty. You don't need to be demon possessed.

A Christian who walks in the spirit and wages a good warfare, that person can't be demon possessed. How could they? I mean, greater is he that is in you than he is in the world. If you wage the warfare, I mean, you know, resist the devil, he'll flee from you.

That's a promise of God. Now, on the other hand, if you don't wage any warfare, then what happens? I don't know. The Bible says we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against prince-like powers and the rulers and guardians of his age and spiritual wickedness and heavenly places.

What if we don't wrestle? I mean, Paul describes the Christian as a wrestler against demons. But what if you don't put up a fight? What happens then? Do you know any Christians who don't appear to put up much of a fight against temptation or against deception or against worldliness? I mean, I know some Christians who are not very good fighters. And, you know, Peter says in 1 Peter 5, 8, he says, Be vigilant, be sober.

Your adversary the devil, like a roaring lion, walks about seeking whom he may devour. Okay, so you're supposed to watch out for this guy. He's like a lion seeking to devour anyone.

But what if you don't watch out? Is there any danger of a person who is so warned, neglecting to heed the exhortation, and then being devoured? Because there is, the exhortation is given because the devil thought they're seeking to devour. If the devil is incapable of devouring anyone, why give any warnings about it? And if he is capable of devouring a Christian, what does devouring mean? What does it mean? Is that demon possession? Is that loss of salvation? What is it? But I will say this, the Bible doesn't give us any grounds to get lazy in spiritual warfare and in resistance to the devil. Because, I mean, if someone just kind of is sailing through life on some kind of a Pollyanna assumption that I'm a Christian now, I can't be demon possessed, they may be surprised.

It may be they can be. Or if not, there may be something else that's just as bad. What does it mean to be devoured by Satan? Maybe that doesn't mean demon possessed, but doesn't sound much better, more desirable.

Therefore, what I'm saying to you is, I don't know if a Christian can be demonized or not. Now, the fact of the matter is I don't even care. I talk a lot about things I don't care about, don't I? Now, the fact is I talk a lot about things I think other people care about.

And then I'll tell you what I think, I don't care. Because I don't intend to get demon possessed. And I don't intend to encourage anyone else to.

If the people do what I tell them to do, I'm going to tell them to do what Jesus said. And if you do those things, you're not going to be demon possessed. So what are you worried about? You know, I mean, you can't follow Jesus.

You can't serve two masters at once. If you're serving Jesus with all your heart, you're going to be serving a demon with all your heart. How can you do that? Or with any part of it? Now, you know, Jack Hayford, I think it was, in the midst of a great controversy in Southern California, over which the functional question was, can a Christian have a demon? He put out a message in a tape called, Can a Christian Have a Freedom? And his argument was, yeah, you know, I don't know.

I don't know whether he thinks Christian can have a demon or not. He said, that's beside the point. The real question that everyone should be asking is, can I be free? Can I be free from demons? And the answer is yes, you can be.

You don't have to worry about demons. If you live in the spirit, if you conduct the good warfare, if you're following Jesus Christ, if he's the Lord of your life, how could any demon get a mastery over you? I don't, I can't understand how anyone would have anything to worry about in a case like that. It seems to me like this question of whether Christians can have demons or not is one of those irrelevant questions like, can I lose my salvation or not? I mean, isn't that irrelevant? It's irrelevant to me, because even if someone could show that it is possible to lose my salvation, which I think probably can be shown biblically, but I'm not going to get, I'm not going to do that, you know? And I can't imagine anyone who'd want to.

You know, it's, I mean, if somebody wants to lose their salvation, I wonder whether they had a very firm grip on it in the first place. And it's a backslider's argument. It's a backslider's concern.

If you're a backslider in heart, then you've got reason to wonder, can a Christian get demon possessed? Because I think I'm a Christian and, you know, I want to, I want to play with the devil a little bit, but I don't want to get possessed, you know? So I want to find out if I've got some kind of ipso facto immunity because I'm a Christian. Uh, and it's also a backslider's concern. Can I, can I lose my salvation? I can't lose mine, not because I believe in eternal security.

I actually believe people can lose their salvation, but I'm not going to lose mine. Thanks. And you know, I don't recommend anybody else losing theirs.

It'd take an idiot to lose their salvation. You just don't lose things that you value. It certainly can't be stolen from you.

You know, you'd be your own negligence. But the point is those are, to my mind, irrelevant questions, but they're the kind of things everyone wonders about. What I'm interested in is the practical questions about things like, how do I, how do I live as a saved person? How do, what, how do I relate to the reality of demons in the world around me? And those, those issues I can get interested in.

And I think the Bible gives enough information on most of those things, at least between the lines. One of the issues that I find important is, you know, what do I do if I encounter a demon-possessed person? One of the questions related to that is, how do I know a demon-possessed person from one who isn't a demon-possessed person? What are the symptoms? What, what indicators are there? Are there any certain symptoms? Now, in answering a question like that, which to my mind is practical to anyone who's involved in ministries of unbelievers and, or to anyone who may have a demon, the answer is the Bible gives a whole variety of things as symptoms of demon possession. Now, it's not as if you have a passage somewhere in the Bible that you can turn to and say, these are the symptoms of demon possession, like you have the works of the flesh in the passage.

It'd be nice if there was just before that a list of the works of demon possession, you know, and then we'd be able to distinguish between flesh and demons. It's not always that easy. But what we do have is descriptions, anecdotal information about demon-possessed people and descriptions of how they behave.

And I think we to understand that their behavior, at least what was unusual about it, was caused by the demon because they stopped doing those unusual things once the demon came out. So we could make some kind of a compilation of a list from all the different cases of what kinds of things have been at times evidence that a person was demon-possessed. The problem is some of the things on the list, at least, would be questionable.

Here's a case of a blind man and a mute man, same man, he's both blind and mute. We're told that he had a demon, blind and mute. And it says, it doesn't say Jesus cast the demon out, though that's implied, it says he healed him.

Why? Because his condition was a physical one. The man was physically disabled. He was blind, he couldn't speak.

And what Jesus did for him is described as healing, although we're specifically told that the man had a problem of demon possession. In fact, his critics, in trying to reinterpret it, what he did, they said he casts out demons by the ultimate. Clearly he cast the demon out, but this is a healing in this instance.

Now, not all demon-possessed people were disabled physically. There were people who were just nuts. And there were people who were empowered with supernatural powers, whether it was the man in the tombs who broke chains, or fortune tellers like the girl with the spirit of python in Acts 16, who was a fortune teller, but when the demon cast

her, she couldn't do it anymore.

There are a variety of categories of symptoms, and some of them are very telltale, some are not. For example, some of the symptoms of the Bible would seem to be that a person, you know, like I said, has occultic power or supernatural strength. I would say if you meet a person with those kinds of powers and they're genuine, that you probably have no other possible explanation but that that is a case of demon possession.

Now, if you meet a blind person, there's a different possibility there. Maybe their blindness is caused by a demon. Maybe their blindness is caused by, you know, nerves.

I mean, maybe their optic nerve is degenerated. Maybe they're lacking a, you know, they're lacking a lens or a retina or something like that. I mean, blindness may or may not be a case of demonization.

Same thing with being dumb or a number of other things. There was a woman in Acts or Luke 13, I think it was, Jesus encountered her and she was bent over. She said she had a spirit of infirmity and Satan had bound her for 18 years and Jesus loosed her from her infirmity and she was stood up straight.

Apparently the only sign of this spirit that she had in her, this spirit of infirmity, was that she couldn't stand up straight. So actually, you know, things like arthritis and stuff like that might even in some cases be demonic in origin. Certainly epilepsy is one of those things that can be a demonic thing and the Bible specifically describes a boy who had fits which apparently were epileptic in nature when it went, occasionally because he had a demon.

A demon would throw him into a fit and so, but I would not wish to say that every person who has epileptic seizures has a demon. There can be neurological explanations for this that don't require a demon presence. So on the one hand, you've got these occultic powers that would be an almost certain proof that a person has a demon.

Then you've got on the other end of the spectrum, these physical conditions that may or may not be demonic. They may be physical merely or they may be demonic. And then of course in the middle there's behavioral stuff.

You know, cutting yourself with broken glass and biting people and, you know, running around naked in the tombs and, you know, having an outburst in the synagogue and just doing crazy stuff like that. Now, that's possibly one of the most difficult gray areas of all, because the physiological stuff can be tested. You know, a person who's blind now could be medically tested to see if there's a medical cause for it or if it's not, if there's none, then maybe it's demonic.

In the case of behavioral stuff, it's just, it's kind of up for grabs in a sense. I mean, a person could just be trying to get attention. A person could be, have brain damage.

The person may have mood swings based on hormonal imbalances, you know, periodically or something like that. A person may be just sinning. A person may have an overburdened conscience, overburdened with guilt that drives them nuts.

But it may not be a demon, but it might be. That's the problem. You just don't know in some of those cases.

It's not always easy to tell. But one thing I would point out, and this passage gives us the information, is that there are some demon possessed people who apparently have no behavioral or occultic or moral indicators that they are demonized. This person was simply a handicapped individual, a blind man.

Now, Jesus healed a lot of blind people, at least what, six or more are reported, maybe more than that. At least six cases of blind people were healed in the Gospels. And each time a little differently, but only this one time we told it was a demon that caused the blindness, not the slightest suggestion of that in any of the other cases.

So, we have to assume that blindness is one of the things that mostly isn't caused by demons. You know, most of the blind people Jesus dealt with, there were no demons involved, as near as the record would indicate. But there are those rare cases where a person is blinded, as this man was, by being demon possessed, in which case, you know, the only thing that can help him would be a deliverance.

But deliverance in this case would be tantamount to a healing, inasmuch as Jesus healed him by casting the demon out of the court. Now, it was this act that caused people to say, could this be the son of David? It caused the Pharisees, the scribes that came down from Jerusalem to get all scared and say, oh, we got to come up with some explanation of this supernatural behavior. I mean, it's clear everyone watched it happen.

This guy was blind, now he's seeing. This guy couldn't talk, and now he's talking. It's clear this man that we're dealing with has supernatural powers.

What are we going to do about this? Now, they concluded, whether honestly or dishonestly, that Jesus was doing it by demonic powers. They would not deny that Jesus was doing something supernatural. But they, of course, had two choices.

One would be to attribute it to God, and the other would be to attribute it to the devil. Now, I wonder to what degree they sincerely believed it was the devil. Certainly, the way we understand God has been colored by our acceptance of Jesus.

And it seems obvious that watching someone going around healing the sick and doing good and living the way Jesus was, being loving and everything, that that would clearly be not demonic. That we would say such a person gives every evidence of being from God, and therefore we would not wish to say that his powers were from some other diabolical source. But the way that Pharisees understood God was very different than the

way we do.

To them, God was a nitpicky, peevish, legalistic, ritualistic being. And Jesus was violating many of the things that they thought God was concerned about. And they may have interpreted his behavior as just the kind of thing a demonized person would do or a false prophet or false teacher.

I don't know to what degree these people knew how wrong their assessment was. Remember that these are men who came down from Jerusalem. Later in John chapter 8, Jesus was in Jerusalem, interacting very possibly with these very guys or their peers in the 8th chapter of John.

And it says in verse 48, when the Jews answered and said to him, Do we not say rightly that you are a Samaritan and you have a demon? And then in verse 52, excuse me, then the Jews said to him, Now we know that you have a demon. Now they accused him of having a demon here also. And in verse 48 he says, Do we not say rightly that you have a demon? In other words, they're suggesting that they already said that before.

When did they say that? These might have been the same men, now on their own turf in Jerusalem in John chapter 8, but who had been sent from Jerusalem in Matthew 12 and had initially postulated the theory that Jesus had a demon. Jesus argued very strongly that he didn't have a demon and that was the wrong way to think about it. But these are the very people that later had Christ crucified.

These are the very people who railroaded him through the Jewish kangaroo court at night and into the Roman court with false charges. And basically by extortion and by threat got Pilate to condemn him. These are the guys who had Jesus nailed to a cross.

And yet from the cross he said, Father, forgive him. They know not what they do. Now, I'm not sure exactly how to interpret them.

Forgive them. They not, who's them? I mean, is he saying that about these Jews? Was he saying they were really ignorant? They really thought he did have a demon? They were really innocent of this matter? I mean, not innocent, but kind of naive and not fully responsible. That's not necessary to interpret it that way.

I mean, when he said, forgive them, he could easily be talking about the Romans who actually nailed him to the cross who didn't know a thing about who he was. You know, Father, forgive them. They know not what they do.

It's hard to say. We are inclined to think of Jesus forgiving virtually everybody who was involved in the plot by that statement. And maybe that's what he did have in mind.

We know this, that 3,000 of those people got saved within about six weeks of that time on the day of Pentecost. Perhaps some of the very ones who were saying he had a

demon previously. It's hard to say.

In any case, I don't know in Matthew 12 whether these people were sincerely believing that Jesus had a demon or whether they couldn't have cared less whether their statement was true or not. It was expedient for them to say it. It was necessary for them to say it.

They had to give some explanation of what was undeniably supernatural power that was operating through them. And whether it was true or not didn't matter to them. They just wanted to say what was necessary to say to get people to stop believing in it.

You know, it's interesting that liberal scholars, liberal Christian scholars, the word Christian I would put in quotation marks because I don't believe they're real Christians because I don't believe in Jesus. But they often say that Jesus, the man Jesus, never really did any real miracles. He was just a sage, just sort of a Jewish peasant guy who went around and had witticisms that made people think he was smart.

And eventually, you know, legends after his death grew up about him, about him being God or claiming to be God and doing miracles and rising from the dead and all that stuff was later fabrications the church came up with. That's what the liberals say without a shred of evidence in their favor. It's just a theory that they like.

But the fact of the matter is the evidence is against them in that theory because the Talmud, which to this day is the official Jewish religious document of modern Orthodox Jews and basically is the written oral traditions that dominated the Pharisee religion at the time. The Talmud was codified in the third century or fourth century, but it was the oral traditions of the elders that had been passed down for over almost a thousand years prior to that and were the dominant thought patterns and ideas and opinions of the rabbis of Jesus' own day. Now, it's interesting that in the Talmud, Jesus is mentioned there and the Talmud mentions that Jesus was crucified on charges of being a sorcerer.

Now, of course, that's not true. The Gospels don't indicate that sorcery was one of the charges at all that were brought up on his trial, certainly not before the Romans and it doesn't even appear to have been brought up when he stood before the Jews. But I find it interesting that the enemies of Christ, the Jews who wrote the Talmud, did not deny that Jesus did supernatural things.

They couldn't. It was too common knowledge. It's interesting that it's not the Jews who deny the supernatural character of Christ, it's the liberal Christians, the liberals who call themselves Christians.

They'll deny that Jesus did anything supernatural, but the enemies of Christ acknowledge that he did. They just have to interpret it and they do the same thing the Pharisees did in Matthew chapter 12. They say the devil did it.

He was operating in the power of the devil, the sorcerer. And so, I mean, we have tremendous confirmation of this passage from the Talmud itself, which the Talmud, of course, because it's antagonistic toward Christianity, does not in any sense wish to confirm this. But we find the Jews in Matthew saying the very same thing about Jesus' miracles as the Jews later said in the Talmud.

It's a typically Jewish response to the fact of the miracles of Jesus. Well, Jesus responded to them. And as usual, he got the better of them.

He was just better in debate. I mean, that's not all he was, but he was certainly better in debates than they were. They come up with absurdities and he'd reduce their absurdity to absurdity.

Actually, he basically uses a rhetorical device, which is called *reductio ad absurdum*, which is an actual name for a type of argument where you show the absurdity of your opponent's claims or of your opponent's arguments. And that's what he did right here. He said Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.

And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?