

Jesus' Victory over the Forces of Evil

A Biblical Perspective

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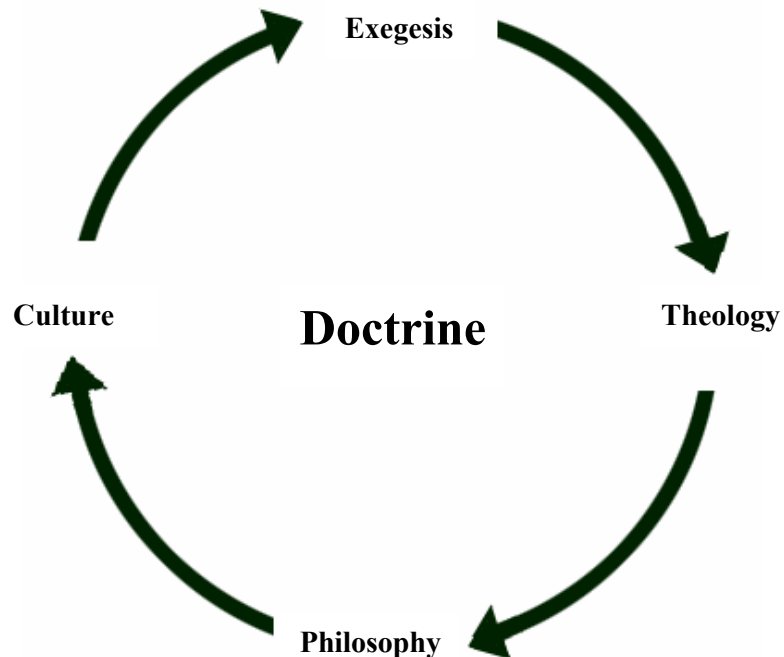
Introduction

This paper is a brief look at a few of the key ideas of Jesus' victory over the forces of evil. This is part of a larger conversation about how the Church of the Nazarene can better contextualize the Gospel for places where the spirit world is a daily reality for many people. The specific task at hand is to consider possible revisions to the "Articles of Faith" contained in the *Manual*. Neville Bartle has raised a number of important issues in his paper, "Articles of Faith and Jesus' Victory Over Satan: Missiological Implications." Significant in his paper is his concern that the Church of the Nazarene, in its efforts to become a truly international church, make the reaching step of re-envisioning its theology to be faithful to both scripture and culture. This is no simple task in a world so diverse, with peoples living in pre-modern, modern, and post-modern (sub-)cultures (however one wishes to describe these labels), nor is it a static process. Theological inquiry by intent and necessity is an on-going search to understand and apply God's revelation of Himself.

We are immediately confronted in this task by several challenges. For one, this topic is much bigger than a quick perusal of Scripture can accommodate. A number of significant questions for theologians, philosophers, historians, Bible scholars, and practitioners are left unanswered. There are many excellent studies available from various theological traditions and positions that need to be consulted in this conversation, and I will admit, up front, that I am no expert at this topic, only a curious conversant in the dialogue.

A second challenge involves methodology. Many of the scripture texts that deal with the spirit world can be interpreted in various ways. One's hermeneutic determines to a great extent what one concludes about what the Bible says about the world of the supernatural. As believers from within the Wesleyan tradition, we would see the final authority for understanding the spirit world as the Scriptures, but the Scriptures must be interpreted through a hermeneutical filter. This is where the challenge lies: what determines this filter? Thomas A. Noble, Professor of Theology at Nazarene Theological Seminary, offers, "The church of Jesus Christ therefore has to assert again and again that the central Christian doctrines constitute the appropriate and definitive hermeneutical framework for the interpretation of the canon of scripture" (p. 190). Perhaps one thought that could be added to this excellent statement, and one which Bartle has raised in his paper and his doctoral thesis is that Christian doctrine is culturally conditioned by our experiences, just as it is historically stationed and reasonably stated. With the deepest respect, I acknowledge the place and necessity of the ancient creeds and contemporary doctrines. However, if we acknowledge that Scripture must be interpreted through a hermeneutical filter, we should also recognize that the articulation of doctrine involves hermeneutical decisions. The struggle we face is making the timeless timely. Obviously, God did not stop speaking to the human race at the end of the Book of Revelation, nor at the great councils of the Church. How has God continued to lead the human race into a fuller comprehension of Himself? How much of a factor is culture in this whole mix? The culture of the Church, whether it be the Church of the first, third, or twenty-first century, significantly molds the doctrine in this community. This community guides the formation of a hermeneutic. As communities change, mature, and grow, so the hermeneutic will change,

if ever so slightly, sometimes even imperceptively. This brings us to the challenge that Bartle has presented in his paper: with more and more Nazarenes coming from non-Western countries, the hermeneutic of the Church of the Nazarene as a denomination will also change. The question we are left with is this: how do we determine which changes in our hermeneutic are consistent with what we believe the intent of scripture to be? Really, this is a circular problem, because we return to the issue that community constructs doctrine, and doctrine is dynamic. Does the contextualization of the doctrine change the doctrine itself, even if ever so slightly? Minimally, does a shift in language or even translation lead to a change in beliefs? A diagram helps picture the circularity:



These difficult questions lead to a third challenge: the certainty or validity of our interpretations of scripture. There is a range of certainty when it comes to interpreting the concept of the spirit world. The following sequence demonstrates this range:

Sure/Obvious ==> Possible ==> Opinion ==> Speculation ==> Heresy

The goal is to base our doctrines on the sure and obvious statements in Scripture that cannot be disputed. Even some beliefs that some may hold as *sure* may, under closer scrutiny, turn out to be *possible* or only *opinion*. We get into danger when we build our doctrines on *possibilities* or *opinions*. No theologian would consciously build a doctrine on mere *speculation*, and he or she would not even be a theologian if doctrine was built on *heresy*.

Now that I have basically set myself up to either a life-long study or failure, I will attempt to highlight a few texts from the Bible that may be relevant to our discussion. Any one of the points below could be expanded into full-length studies.

I. Old Testament Antecedents

A. Sovereignty of God

The most obvious tenet of Scripture is the supremacy of God. What set Israel apart from its neighbors was the idea that there is only one God and that there is none like Him (Deut 4:39; Ps 83:18). The Bible opens with God as creator, hovering over—hence, in control of—the watery chaos. Foundational to Israel’s theology is the creating God who “made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them [who] give[s] life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship [Him]” (Neh 9:6). All creation, even spiritual beings, is under the complete control of God. Both “good” and “evil” spiritual beings are under God’s sovereignty (1 Sam 16:14-23; 1 Kings 22:21-23; Ps 78:49). God’s holiness categorizes and limits everything else in existence, including the spirit world.

B. Satan

The Bible is not always clear about the being known as “Satan.” “Satan” is a transliteration of the Hebrew word *śatan*. The basic meaning of this word is “adversary” (Num 22:22, 35; 1 Sam 29:4). The word itself is used 31 times in the OT. It can also be translated as “accuser” (Ps 109:6-7). It is used of people (1 Kings 5:14, 23, 25; 1 Sam 29:4) and to describe a specific being in Job, Zech 3:1-2, and 1 Chron 21:1, although the meaning of these texts is debated. The Greek term used in the LXX of these passages is *diabolos*, from which we get “devil”, and designates a slanderer or adversary. In the Hebrew of Job 1, the word *śatan* is used with the article suggesting a description “the accusing one” and not necessarily a name. An example of the need for a careful hermeneutic is with Isa 14:12-15 and Ezek 28:12-19, both of which may be allusions to Satan. The traditional approach to these texts has been to interpret here Satan’s rebellion against God. In the context, Isa 14 is a taunt to the king of Babylon and Ezek 28 a taunt to the king of Tyre, but as with other Biblical prophecy, a double meaning could be intended, as Rev 12:7-9 suggests. Another text that may have a double meaning is Gen 3 where the “serpent” tempts Eve. This passage does not explicitly say that the serpent was Satan, but this is only an assumption and interpretation. In the text, the serpent seems to represent something greater than an animal. This story was later interpreted to refer to Satan (see Ezek 28:12-19). These examples show that caution is required in interpreting these and similar passages. Often one’s presuppositions and questions will determine one’s interpretation and answers. Overall, the evidence suggests that Satan is only a minor character in the OT. Minimally, Satan is seen as the enemy of God and God’s people. Satan is not God’s equal, but is created, inferior, and must follow God’s will. Israel’s stress on monotheism left no room for cosmic dualism.

C. Fallen Angels, Demons and Evil Spirits

There are more references to these creatures in the OT than to Satan, but some of the passages are even more difficult to interpret in order to know what ancient Israel believed. These beings are called by different names including “sons of God,” “gods,” “powers in the heavens above,” “princes,” “demons,” and “spirits.” Demons are mentioned in Deut 32:17 and Ps 106:37 where they seem to be related to “gods” (this may be similar to what Paul talks about in 1 Cor 10:19-20). Demons are clearly inferior and under the control of God (1 Kgs 22:21-23). They are not gods but created beings (see Isa 45:5). Evil spirits are referred to in 1 Sam 16:14-16, 23; 18:10; 19:9; 1 Kgs 22:19-23; 2 Chron 18:18-22; and Judg 9:23. These evil forces have a corrupting influence on humanity, tormenting them and depriving them of the freedom to act as responsible, moral agents. As Ps 91 shows, the people of God

have no need to fear, for God will protect from evil. These forces are always subordinated to Yahweh. The strong monotheism of ancient Israel kept Israel from taking too much interest in demons; thus, there was no superstition and fear. We may be able to learn something from ancient Israel at this point.

II. Non-Biblical and Intertestamental Literature

There is an increase in references to Satan and demons in intertestamental literature and late Judaism. This has been attributed by some interpreters to the difficult experiences of the Jewish people during that time or possibly to the influence of Persian dualism (Jub 2:2; 4:22; 1 Enoch 6:1-7:6). God's complete sovereignty was maintained (Jub 2:2, God created all the spirits). Evil became attributed to angelic beings who had fallen and corrupted humans (a Jewish interpretation of Gen 6:1-4; Jub 4:15; 1 Enoch 69:4, and others). These spirits cause trouble and fight against the human race (1 Enoch 15:11; 69:1-15). According to D. E. Aune, "In intertestamental Judaism demons appear to function in four primary ways: (1) they cause and transmit disease among men (Jub 10:10-13); (2) they accuse men who dwell on the earth (1 En 40:7); (3) they act as agents of divine punishment (1 En 53:3; 56:1; 62:11; 63:1); and (4) they tempt men to sin (1 En 69:6)" (Aune, 920). In the Dead Sea Scrolls, there is a limited dualism between the Angel of Light and the Angel of Darkness, but both of these were created by God (1 QS 3:13-4:26). During this period, Satan was still seen as subject to God (Jub 10:4-13). The NT shares many similar concepts with other literature of the period; for example, there were common beliefs that demons could possess a person, cause convulsions, screaming, and change of voice. Likewise, there were many healers (exorcists) in Jesus' day, both Gentile and Jewish. This raises an important question: how does Jesus' ministry stand out in its first century context? This is a significant question for Christians today who deal with similar beliefs and practices—how is their ministry different than the witch doctors and shamans they confront?

III. Jesus' Earthly Ministry

When one reads the Gospels, especially the Synoptic Gospels, one is immediately confronted with the world of the supernatural. In Mark's gospel, one of the first acts of Jesus is to cast out an unclean spirit from a man in the Capernaum synagogue (Mark 1:21-28).

A. The Devil

The devil or Satan is mentioned more frequently in the New Testament than the Old Testament. Satan is the chief adversary of Jesus and His ministry (Mat 4:1-11; Mat 13:39). This creature is described in various ways in the Gospels, for example, Beelzebul (Matt 10:25; 12:24; 12:27), the "evil one" (Matt 5:37; Matt 13:19, 38; John 17:15); "prince of demons" (Matt 9:34; 12:24), "the enemy" (Matt 13:39), to mention a few. In Matthew and Luke, "devil" is used synonymously with "Satan" (Matt 4:1, 5, 8, 11; Luke 8:12; 13:16). Each of the terms used to describe this creature are descriptive of it. Satan is the enemy of Jesus and God's people. Satan attempts to hinder people from coming to Christ (Mark 4:15). Matt 25:41 describes Satan as the chief of the demons, suggesting that Satan has a host of beings that aid it in combating God's purposes.

A revealing passage about the character of the devil is the temptation of Jesus. This story tells a lot about both Jesus and the devil. The devil presents Jesus with a temptation, stated in the Greek as a *first class conditional statement*. This is a serious temptation: "If, for the sake of argument, let's say that you are the Son of God, then prove it by turning this stone into bread" (Luke 4:3). This was a direct threat to Jesus divinity by appealing to His human hunger. The devil had keen insight into both aspects

of the personhood of Jesus. By not turning the stone into bread, it could be interpreted that Jesus is giving the devil the victory, but actually, He is invalidating the devil's scheme. The second temptation reveals that the devil believes that his authority included all the kingdoms of the world (4:6). If the temptation is to have any real appeal to Jesus, then we should consider the devil's statement to be accurate, though still under the sovereign control of God (note the passive verb, *paradedotai*). The last temptation again attacks Jesus' self-understanding as the Son of God. The devil knew the key "buttons" to push for Jesus, but Jesus overcame every temptation. This story shows a very human Jesus with real divine power or potential, yet a Jesus who responded to the devil in ways that we can appreciate and appropriate. As the writer to the Hebrews says, "He was tempted in similar ways to us, but without sin" (Heb 4:15). Although Satan was a problem to the incarnate Jesus, Satan was no match (see 1 John 4:4).

B. Demons and Spirits

Jesus encountered throughout His travels both Jewish and Gentile people under the control of demons and various types of spirits. The gospel writers use the word *pneuma* for both good and bad spiritual beings (Mt 12:45; Luke 7:21; Mark 6:7) and for demons (Mark 1:23, 26; 3:11; 5:2, etc.). The early Christians remembered that Jesus healed "all who were under the power of the devil" (Acts 10:38). Demons or spirits were manifested in Jesus' ministry in various ways including convulsions, loud screaming or change of voice, chaotic and unpredictable behavior, super-human strength, and indifference to pain. Demon possessed people were often on the margins of society. In Mark 1:21-28, the man was a participant in society; the demon only revealed itself when it faced Jesus. Some demon possessed people remained in their family situations (Mark 7 and 9). By casting out the demons or spirits, Jesus brought social restoration to many of these people (Luke 5:19). Demons recognized the identity and authority of Jesus (Mark 1:24; Luke 4:33) and manifested themselves in the presence of Jesus (Mark 1:21-28; 5:1-20; 7:24-30; 9:14-29). Jesus was not the only person in the ancient world to cast out demons. What is significant about Jesus is that He did not use other devices common to the period (incense, medicine, laying on hands, magical charms). The demons or spirits obeyed Jesus simply by the word from His mouth (Mark 1:25; 5:8; 9:25). He commanded and the spirits obeyed.

The authors of the Synoptic gospels make a distinction between being controlled by demons and sickness. Jesus had a two-part ministry of casting out demons and healing the sick (Mark 1:34; Luke 13:32). Some illnesses were influenced by supernatural forces, such as the woman with a curved spine who had been bound by Satan for 18 years (Luke 13:10-17). However, not every "spirit" Jesus encountered may have been "demonic." In Mark 9, a father brought his son, who would be seized by a spirit and fall to the ground, to Jesus' disciples to be healed, but the disciples could not. In desperation, this father brought his son to Jesus who then healed the boy. There are various ways to interpret this story, but from a rather personal perspective of one who has experienced challenges similar to this father, I read this story and see an epileptic child. Epilepsy was not a known medical condition in the first century, so it is easy to conclude that this child was not "demon possessed" but simply suffering from some form of epilepsy. To come to this conclusion, I have to apply a certain "modern" or "scientific" reading of the text that takes into consideration the influence of the "pre-modern" world view of the gospel writers and early church. This is a hermeneutical decision I take based on the fact that no where in this story is the spirit called evil, wicked, or a demon but only "unclean," "deaf and dumb," although "unclean" could be equated with "demonic" as in Mark 7:25 and 30. But what this interpretation suggests to me is that not every "demonic-like" condition we encounter is actually a case

of demon possession but may simply be a physical illness that people interpret as supernatural. It may take supernatural intervention to fix, as Jesus say, “This kind can come out only by prayer” (Mark 9:29).

Jesus’ defeat of Satan, demons, and evil is an important and vital part of the Gospel story of salvation. It showed that the kingdom of God was breaking into the world, transforming the human situation (Matt 12:28). One of the greatest fears of the people of that day was shown to be powerless when confronted by the Incarnate Son of God. The same sovereignty apparent throughout the Old Testament is evident throughout the Gospel narratives and should give believers confidence.

IV. The Church’s On-going Battle

The New Testament shows that those who follow Jesus should expect to experience similar challenges and opportunities as Jesus. This includes battling evil and the forces of evil. Outside of the Gospels and Acts, demons are mentioned only 9 times, although other terms may refer to the same beings (Gal 4:3, 9; Rom 8:38-39; Eph 6:12; Rev 16:13; 1 John 4:1-3). Confrontation with evil continued after Jesus’ ministry through the disciples who were extensions of Jesus.

A. Jesus commissioned and gave His disciples authority to cast out demons or unclean spirits.

In Mark 6:7, Jesus gave His disciples authority or power to cast out “unclean spirits” and sent them out two by two to preach the message of the kingdom of heaven, the same ministry that He Himself was involved in. They were successful in their ability to drive out “demons” (6:13). The longer ending of Mark has Jesus giving this same commission to His disciples just before He ascended (16:17). However one wishes to address the textual issue of Mark 16, casting out demons and healing the sick continued to be a hallmark of the early church as is evidence in Acts 5:16; 8:7; 16:16-18; and 19:12-19. The disciples were able to carry out this mission because of their association with Jesus and use of His authority (Acts 16:18). The theme that underlies the entire book of Acts is that the disciples went out in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit continued the ministry of Jesus (John 16:4-15).

B. The gates of hell cannot resist.

In Matthew 16, the disciple Peter confesses Jesus to be the Christ. In response, Jesus makes the significant statement that He would build His church on Peter, the rock, and the gates of “Hades” would not be stronger than this church (Matt 16:18). There are two ways to interpret this phrase relevant to the topic of this paper. One is to take the defensive position: the forces of evil will not be able to destroy the church. We should not fear that the church will be defeated by the wickedness that is all around us. Although persecuted, the church will continue until the end. The other way is to take the offensive position: the power of evil and its hold on people will not be able to stand up against the power of the gospel. Both of these are possible, but perhaps the second option finds more support with v. 19: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” We have the power to influence people’s eternal destinies. Evil will not have the last say, we will!

C. Our battle is against the principalities of this world.

In Ephesians 6:10-18, Paul gives some advice to believers on how to live victorious lives. In this passage he describes the armor of God that will help the believer hold up against the schemes of the devil. The believer’s real battle is deeper than “flesh and blood” but is a spiritual battle with the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil in the spiritual world. Paul’s answer to this battle sounds like a litany of spiritual gifts: truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, the word of God, and

prayer. Although the forces of evil can oppress believers (2 Tim 2:25-26), especially through ungodly people, believers need not fear because we are on the side of the sovereign God. In Ephesians 2:1-2, Paul describes victory over the devil in individual believers. He describes the devil here as “ruler of the kingdom of the air who works in the disobedient.” The devil apparently works through the power of the “flesh” (*sarx*, a term for Paul which has the connotation of living to satisfy the fallen, sinful condition, without reference to God) to defeat us (2:3). The logic of this passage suggests that by gaining victory over the flesh, one also gains victory over the devil. The way victory is gained is by dependence in faith upon the grace of God in Christ Jesus. James says something similar in James 4:7: “Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil and it will flee from you.” The two ideas expressed here go together. Submitting to God in humility, repentance and purity causes us to go God’s way, thus resisting the devil’s tool of the flesh and its temptations and forcing the devil to flee. This is a powerful message for a denomination “called unto holiness” to proclaim. 1 Pet 5:8-9 says something similar, that the way to overcome the devil is to be self-controlled and alert.

E. Victory over the temptation is victory over Satan

By following Jesus’ example of victory over temptation, the believer can also gain victory over Satan. Giving in to temptation is a victory for Satan because Satan has essentially created a rift between us and God. Temptations are as varied as numerous as the situations we face (see Matt 13:19; 2 Cor 4:4; Rev 12:12). God gives us victory over temptation through the presence of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 10:13). The obedience of submission allows the Holy Spirit to guide us and reveal to our consciences God’s will for us. Giving in to the temptation to sin gives the devil a foothold (Eph 4:27; 1 John 3:8-10). Satan need not and cannot have any victory when we say “yes” to God. The Holy Spirit is God’s assurance of victory in this life (1 John 4:4).

V. The Victory of the Cross Event

A. The Power of Christ’s Resurrection (1 Cor 15)

The place to begin to construct a biblical understanding of Jesus’ victory over Satan and the forces of evil is with Jesus’ death and resurrection. By His death and resurrection, Jesus took care of the debt we owe God for our sin and disarmed the “rulers and authorities” (Col 2:15). The sequence in 1 Cor 15:20-29 is noteworthy. First, this passage shows that Jesus’ resurrection reverses the effect of Adam’s sin (vv. 21-22), especially the penalty of death. By conquering the power of sin, Jesus essentially cut off Satan’s one tool—the propensity of humans towards sin. Jesus reversed the curse of Adam, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Gen 3:15. Second, the hope of the resurrection of believers in v. 23 actualizes Jesus’ own resurrection for each of us. We become participants in Jesus’ resurrection by our submission to Him (Rom 6:4). Next will come the destruction of all dominion, power and authority (v. 24; “all His enemies under his feet,” v. 25). According to Heb 1:13 and 10:12, Jesus is now seated at the right hand of the Father, waiting until His enemies will be made His footstool. The enemies still wage war against God’s people, but this will end when Jesus comes again. When Jesus comes again, He will hand the conquered kingdom to God the Father (v. 24). The last enemy is death. Jesus’ own resurrection proves His power over death, therefore, the end of the story has already been written—Jesus and those who are in Him win.

B. Fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 10:14-22)

Jesus' claim upon His followers is exclusive, much like the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and Israel in the Old Testament (see the book of Hosea). The significant confession in the NT is, "Jesus is Lord" (Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 12:3; Phil 2:11). This is both a religious decision and a cosmic confession. To say "Jesus is Lord" is to exclude any other claim on our lives (1 Cor 8:6). Paul's discussion in 1 Cor 10 reveals an important concept for understanding our disrelationship with demons. In the context, Paul is trying guide the Corinthians in matters related to eating food sacrificed to idols. Paul recognizes that idols are nothing but man-made objects (8:4), but there is a demonic power behind them (10:20). Critical for Paul is the idea of "fellowship" (*koinonia*). Participating in idol worship violates fellowship with Christ. Communion with and in Christ is vital for the Christian community. Participating in the cup and loaf binds us to Christ because we allow Him to be Lord. Our bond with Christ enables us to be "church" because of the presence of the Holy Spirit (10:17; 3:16). Paul makes a significant statement about the Eucharist in the context of idolatry and demonization. What would a holiness sermon about the Lord's Supper look like if given in a context where people are conscious of the spirit world? One note from Paul is helpful as we formulate this theology: "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons" (10:21). This sounds like the need for a consecrated and sanctified heart.

C. Cosmic Victory

One final note—we know how the story ends. The Book of Revelation gives the conclusion to the matter. Believers can expect to experience persecution instigated by the devil, but if we hold strong, we can expect the crown of life (Rev 2:10). The way believers can hold strong is by "the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death" (12:10). Revelation indicates the end days will not be easy for Christians, with many losing their lives in persecution. Satan will be bound for "a thousand years," let free from a time to deceive the nations, and finally cast for eternity into the lake of burning sulfur (20:1-3, 7-10). This symbolic language is impossible to interpret with certainty, but the message is clear: the Lamb wins and Satan is forever defeated. This all came about because of the sacrifice of the Lamb who is proclaimed "King of kings and Lord of lords" (19:16).

Conclusion

As people who believe in the divine inspiration of the Bible, we should take seriously the concepts expressed in the Bible, not with naive simplicity, but with openness and careful consideration. With the premise of divine inspiration, how then do we consider the cultural conditioning of the Bible? The challenge is separate the eternal and the temporal aspects of the Bible. Perhaps some of the Bible's descriptions of Satan and demons are "culturally" conditioned (synchronic); hence, interpretation is confined to a specific point in history. Yet, other descriptions of Satan and demons are more "timeless" and valid for all cultures and times (diachronic).

Methodologically, one could ask the question about the cultural conditioning of the authors of the New Testament. If the authors were men of their time, they saw their world through first-century eyes. They were part of a world where the spirit world was common experience, not too unlike many under-developed countries today. A critic might say that the disciples, early church, and authors of the NT saw and re-interpreted aspects of Jesus' story that were relevant to their own situations, hence, they

“contextualized” their messages to meet the needs of a world dominated to a great extent by the supernatural. Even if this view were true, and it is difficult or impossible to prove or disprove it, it actually supports the need to contextualize our own interpretation of the Jesus story to meet the needs of the non-believers and believers in many parts of the world today. We are faced with the same difficulty that the early church faced—how can we take a timeless message given in a moment of time and make it relevant to people influenced by diverse world-views? Is there actually something numinous about the mortal? The first step that serious interpreters of Scripture must take is to recognize both the humanity of the Bible and themselves and the supernatural in the Bible and the world around us. There is a whole realm of existence of which we only get rare glimpses.

In our effort to make the timeless message of Jesus Christ relevant, we can make one of two errors. One, we can become so absorbed with the supernatural that our theology loses out in the incarnate, transformative power of the gospel. We can become too caught up in the fine articulations of our doctrine as to become irrelevant, or preoccupied with trying to figure out the problem of evil resulting in the neglect of the good. The other error is that we can focus so much on things conditioned by time, such as culture, that we cannot see the greater movement of the Spirit. We could run around putting out “fires” of the devil and never experience the cleansing *Fire of God*. If I could say it all simply, we need to approach this topic with great care, putting it all under the hermeneutical umbrella of the optimism in God’s grace to change those who were once lost, alienated, and in enmity towards God, into saved, sanctified, and empowered vessels of the Holy Spirit.

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