

Two False Doctrines Shepherding or Dictatorship? and Christian 'Possession'

by Chuck Smith

Chuck Smith warns against two false doctrines: shepherding or dictatorship, and Christian 'possession', emphasizing the importance of sound doctrine and the true shepherd.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:3

Topics: "Sound Doctrine", "Spiritual Authority"

Description

Chuck Smith addresses the dangers of two false doctrines: shepherding and the idea of Christian possession by demons. He emphasizes that sound doctrine must be rooted in God's Word, warning against the authority of elders who seek to control every aspect of believers' lives, which undermines the direct relationship each Christian has with God. Smith also refutes the notion that born-again Christians can be possessed by demons, asserting that the Holy Spirit dwells within them, making such possession impossible. He encourages believers to take personal responsibility for their actions and to rely on Christ as their true Shepherd.

Transcript

Sound Doctrine

Paul the apostle exhorted both Timothy and Titus about sound doctrine. To Timothy he said:

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (II Timothy 4:3,4; see I Timothy 1:10, Titus 1:9;2:1).

What is the only true criterion for sound doctrine? God's written Word. The words of spiritual teachers or "spiritual" experiences must never supersede the Word of God. Paul said,

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8).

The relating of experiences which are fables can never be the true basis for sound doctrine. The minute that we open the door and begin to teach from experience, we lose authority and introduce confusion. People have a great variety of experiences. If I accept one unscriptural experience as evidence for

doctrinal truth, then I am bound to accept all experiences - for each one would have equal authority as a basis for doctrine.

7a. "Shepherding"

The doctrine of submission, covering, apostleship, or shepherding (or any of the numerous terms by which it is known) basically teaches that you must submit yourself to an elder or a group of elders within the Body of Christ, oftentimes called "shepherds." You cannot make any major decision without their prior approval.

If you want to buy or sell your house, it's imperative that you first consult your elder. He will tell you whether or not you can buy or sell. The same is true if you want to buy or sell a car or TV, or if you want to change your job. If you want to go on a trip, these shepherds will tell you where you can go, how long you can stay, and when to be back. They seek to exercise complete authority and control over your life.

If you desire to move to another locality, they'll tell you whether or not you may have their blessings and permission. You must submit to the shepherds in all the areas of your life that they deem important and necessary. To refuse to do so is to be marked as a rebel.

The elders have set up an apostleship. The apostle has absolute and complete authority over those under his apostleship. Though he may have "elders" under his apostleship, he has the power to overrule any decision that they make individually or collectively.

On many occasions these shepherds have told a person exactly whom he or she was to marry, how much and when to give, what books to read, and which tapes to listen to. Your elder or shepherd becomes spiritually responsible for your life.

They teach that it is absolutely imperative to obey your elder - even if he is wrong. If you'll submit to and obey him, you'll be all right. What you do will be right, because you've done it in obedience to your elder. He is your covering: responsible to God for you and your actions.

In some areas this doctrine teaches that when you have led someone to Jesus Christ, you automatically become this person's shepherd. Therefore, you're not to witness or lead anybody to Christ until you're spiritually mature enough to shepherd them. Your shepherd will inform you when you have achieved that spiritual maturity. In the meantime, they emphasize that you should wait and get your act together - become perfected yourself. Once you're perfected, then you'll be able to witness.

As a result of this teaching, these elders have sterilized some who were formerly dynamic in their witness for Jesus Christ. Men who had a powerful ministry and were being used of God have been placed on the shelf. Their shepherds told them that they weren't mature enough to minister yet. They ought to stop and get their own marriages together, or get their own lives together, before seeking to serve the Lord in any capacity. I personally know of many who have been neutralized in their effectiveness for Christ as the result of this doctrine.

This shepherding doctrine also teaches that all your tithes belong to your shepherd. He, in turn, pays his tithes to his shepherd, who pays his tithes to his shepherd. It's a neat chain-letter - if you're sitting on top of the pile! Someone asked, "Where did this doctrine originate?" I'm sure it originated in hell, but it came out of Florida from the same group that teaches that Christians can be demon possessed and need exorcism. In some services they passed out Kleenexes so people could regurgitate their demons of gluttony, lust,

pride, anger, temper - all works of the flesh that they were calling demons.

Elder's Position

Let's see what God's Word has to say concerning "shepherding" or lordship within the Church. First of all, in his epistle to Philemon, Paul wrote:

Wherefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to order thee into that which is fitting, yet for love's sake, I rather beseech thee" (v. 8,9).

Philemon was Paul's own convert. He owed much to Paul. Yet, Paul didn't seek to exercise his authority over him (concerning the runaway slave Onesimus). Instead, Paul beseeches Philemon through the love of Jesus Christ.

In speaking to the Corinthian church, Paul said,

Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand" (II Corinthians 1:24).

Paul is declaring that he doesn't have and doesn't seek dominion over the faith of the believers.

There is one mediator between God and men - Jesus Christ. For any other person to take that position or role is scripturally wrong.

The apostle Peter wrote to the elders, the "shepherds" who are in some of the churches today seeking to exercise this lordship and authority: "The elders which are among you, I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed." Peter said, "I exhort" - not "I order."

Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint (that is, not by forcing them), but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage (the flock of God), but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fades not away. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves to the elder (I Peter 5:1-5).

You say, "There's scriptural support for the doctrine right there!" But notice what Peter says in the rest of the verse: "Yes, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility."

Peter is declaring that the elders aren't to lord over God's heritage. That particular Greek word for "lord" is used elsewhere in the New Testament. It means "to rule over, to bring into subjection or submission." Don't try to bring the flock into submission or subjection to the shepherd.

Priesthood

In Revelation 2, we find Jesus speaking to the Church of Ephesus. He had some heavy things to say about the problems in the church; basically, that they had left their first love. But in verse 6 Jesus had a word of commendation:

"But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate." The word "Nicolaitanes" in the Greek actually speaks of the establishment of a spiritual hierarchy. Nikao: to establish

a priesthood over, to conquer. Laos: the laity. The "deeds of the Nicolaitanes" was the establishment of the priesthood over the laity.

Establishing shepherds or elders who lord over the flock of God and make you responsible to them - who seek to take the spiritual responsibility for your actions by telling you what you can and can't do, when you can or can't do it, and have you come to them for guidance and direction - is, in reality, the doctrine of Nicolaitanes. In essence, these shepherds are saying, "You can't go to God for directions. You're not mature enough. You come to me, and I'll tell you what God says." And that is inserting someone between man and God.

Jesus Christ paid a tremendous price to open the door to God for every man. "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy" (Hebrews 4:16). Jesus, as our great High Priest, has entered into heaven for us, making the door open to each of us to have direct entrance to God. "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

The true shepherd of God is one who gives himself for the flock, not one who is demanding that the flock give themselves to him.

For any other person to take that position or role is scripturally wrong. The doctrine of the Nicolaitanes would put a man between you and God, and that is always wrong. God will deal with you directly, personally, and individually - and wants to deal with you directly, personally, and individually.

God will listen to you just as rapidly as He'll listen to me. God loves you just as much as He loves Billy Graham. He's just as concerned about you as He is anybody else. You have, through Jesus Christ, this glorious access to come directly to God. God will guide you, and God will show you His path and His way.

What Did Jesus Say?

In Mark 10 we find that James and John were seeking to establish something of an eldership:

And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him saying, Master we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? They said unto him, Grant that we may sit, one on thy right hand, the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. But Jesus said unto them, ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: but to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared. And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John (Mark 10:35-41).

Jesus called them to him and said, "Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them (that same Greek word as in 1 Peter 5:3, "to bring into submission, to exercise authority over"); and their great ones exercise authority upon them." Notice what Jesus said in Mark 10:43: "But so shall it not be among you." There is not to be the establishing of authority or the exercising of lordship.

Whosoever will be great among you, shall be your servant: whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:43-45).

Jesus didn't come to be ministered to but, rather, to minister and to give Himself. Thus, He is the True Shepherd. "I am the true shepherd and I give my life for my sheep." The true shepherd is one who gives himself for the flock, not one who is demanding that the flock give themselves to him. He is more interested in feeding the flock than fleecing the flock.

I think the most familiar passage in the Bible, outside of John 3:16, has the answer. David said:

The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures: he leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul: he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake (Psalm 23:1-3).

If you can have the Lord as your Shepherd, I don't know why you would want to settle for anything less. If David, under the old economy, could have the Lord as his Shepherd, how much more under the new relationship through Jesus Christ can we know and submit ourselves to the authority of God within our lives.

I would urge you to submit yourself to the authority of Jesus Christ. Submit yourself to the authority of God's Word. Realize that you're responsible to God. Every man must give an account of himself unto God (Romans 14:12). Learn to go to God for all your needs, for all your decisions, and for the guidance for your life. God is faithful. He will lead you and guide you.

7b. Christian "Possession"

The question has been forced upon us: "Can a born-again Christian be possessed by a demon?" The answer based on the Scriptures and on logic is an unequivocal no!

The proponents of this unscriptural doctrine use such terms as Christians being "invaded by demons" rather than demon possessed. This is nothing more than a word game and a smoke screen to hide the scriptural weakness of their position.

They also present an illogical supposition that demons can invade or control the mind or body but not the spirit. God's Word declares that the body is a temple of the Holy Ghost who is in us. We're told to glorify God in our bodies and in our spirits, which are His (I Corinthians 6:19,20). In II Corinthians 6:14-16 the question is asked:

What communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial... And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them.

To say that a Christian's body or mind can be possessed or invaded by demons is to contradict the Word of God and declare a communion of light and darkness, that God and Satan are dwelling together.

The Scriptures also teach us that Christ is seated in the heavenlies, far above all principalities and powers and mights and dominions (Ephesians 1:21,22). These are references to spirit beings - and Christ is far above them. Where am I as a believer? According to Ephesians 2:6, I am seated together with Christ in the heavenlies. As Christians we're in a warfare against these principalities and powers (Ephesians 6:12). We need the help of God to stand, for these rulers of the darkness can and do attack us in a variety of ways. But they cannot come in and take control of our lives.

The Scriptures also teach that we are in Christ, and that He is in us (John 14:20). It is Christ in us which is our hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). Christ said concerning Satan, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me" (John 14:30). If I'm in Christ and Satan has nothing in Him, Satan can have nothing in me - praise the Lord!

We also read in I John 5:18,

We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.

What about these experiences of Christians having demons cast out of them? What are the voices that name themselves, the writhing on the floor, and the regurgitation? I don't know. I'm thankful that, since I don't engage in these unscriptural practices, I don't have to explain them.

Some of the names given by these supposed demons which are more popular are lust, hatred, liar, gluttony, envy, fear, and jealousy. These things are classified in Galatians 5:19-21 as the works of the flesh. We're told to "put off all these" (Colossians 3:8), or by the Spirit to "mortify the deeds of the body" (Romans 8:13; 6:3-14). Not once are we commanded to have them cast out.

It seems to me that this whole Christian-and-demon trip is a cop-out for the flesh. I would like to find some easy way to get rid of my fleshly nature, and rather than the painful process of crucifixion, I'd just like to have it cast out. It's also a way of escaping the responsibility for my fleshly actions. How can I be blamed if "the devil made me do it"?

There doesn't exist one piece of evidence in the Scriptures that Jesus Christ, His apostles, or the early Church once sought to cast demons of the flesh out of anyone in the Body of Christ. The works of the flesh were recognized, and we're instructed in how to deal with them. Never are we taught that they're to be exorcised.

Even in the supposed cases from the Scriptures which would confirm that demons could inhabit a Christian - such as Ananias and Sapphira, "Why hath Satan filled thine heart" (Acts 5:3), or Simon the sorcerer, "Thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity" (Acts 8:23) - Peter didn't practice exorcism. Instead, there was instant judgment of death in the first case and a call to repentance in the other.

It is sad that many Christians and non-Christians seem to have a greater interest in Satan and being possessed by demons than they do in Christ and being possessed by His Holy Spirit. Those who fall into the practices of exorcism soon seem to be looking for and placing a greater emphasis on the power of Satan to attack than on the power of Christ to keep. Demons become the center of their conversations and teachings rather than Jesus Christ .

We can rejoice in God's Word, "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (I John 4:4). Thanks be to God Who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord! We as Christians are told in James 4:7 to "resist," not "cast out," the devil - and he will flee from us.

Three Things in Common

There are three interesting similarities in these two false doctrines:

1. Both doctrines have really divided the Body of Christ across the United States.
2. They both have sterilizing effects. If you become so involved in casting demons out of yourself, every time you gather together with the local body the whole emphasis is upon demons rather than upon the Lord. Soon, you become so inward that you're no longer effective in your witness for Jesus Christ. You're too preoccupied about some demon activity within your life.

The doctrine of shepherding is also sterilizing in its effects. Since you become spiritually responsible for everyone and anyone you lead to Christ, you shouldn't lead anyone to Christ until you're spiritually mature enough to accept that responsibility.

3. Both false doctrines appeal to people who are seeking to escape the responsibility of their own actions. This is where these doctrines actually have their appeal.

"It wasn't really me! A demon was responsible for that outburst of temper. A demon was responsible for that moment of lustful passion." It's throwing the responsibility for my actions over onto the demons, rather than accepting it as part of my old rotten flesh.

The shepherding doctrine relieves me of the obligation and responsibility of my conduct. "I don't have to be responsible for what I do. The shepherd tells me what to do." Thus, he is the one who is responsible for my actions - whether they're right or wrong, in the will of God or not. And I escape responsibility for my own deeds.

There are many people who don't want to be responsible for the things they do. Both of these false doctrines offer that escape from, and of, responsibility.

Source:

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