



The Devil Made Me Do It

Part 8: Demonic Influence through the Flesh

We have been describing the broad continuum of effects that evil spiritual beings can have on man, starting with the most severe. I arbitrarily labeled various levels within this range as “demonic control,” “demonic attachment,” “demonic assignment,” “demonic contamination,” and “demonic influence.” Our discussion now turns to the latter.

By “demonic influence” I am referring to the effects that demons with no legal right for attachment can have on us just because we are human and caught in the spiritual battle of the cosmos. This would include what some call “demonic harassment” as well as the evil spiritual influence that comes through the flesh and the world system (Eph. 2:2-3). In this segment we will focus on the flesh, or “sin nature.”

The flesh is a powerful internal avenue through which Satan can exert his influence in man’s life. His victory in the Garden of Eden gave him access to this aspect of the soul that is integrally connected to man’s inner drives and passions and enabled him to leave his imprint on the very nature and character of man. This is when man’s heart became “desperately wicked” (Jer. 17:9 KJV). This is not how God created it but how Satan corrupted it (Gen. 1:31; Rom. 7:18, 21).

The descriptions of the flesh in Scripture leave no doubt concerning its Satanic affiliation. Its hostility towards God, its inability to subject itself to the law of God, its unwavering allegiance to the law of sin, its opposition to the Holy Spirit, and the destination of corruption and death to which it leads man do not reflect the inalienable freedom of choice given to man but the incorrigible nature of Satan, the enemy of our souls (Rom. 7:25; 8:6-7, 13; Gal. 5:17; 6:8).

The extent to which the flesh influences a person’s life, whether he is a believer or unbeliever, is seemingly determined by the mind. This is where man’s free will comes in. While the mind can be perverted to follow the corrupt desires of the flesh, it can also be changed (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23), whereas the flesh cannot.

After salvation the mind that has been naturally bent towards the flesh must be deliberately trained to bring it in line with the will of God and His righteousness, thus transforming the person’s life (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:22-24). The process of “renewing” the mind’s focus, motivations, and priorities occurs as the individual studies the Word, communes with God through prayer, fellowships with other godly Christians, and learns how to tune into the Holy Spirit, who now indwells his life.

The gift of the Holy Spirit to every believer (Rom. 8:9; Eph. 1:13-14) is a powerful asset in overcoming the desires of the flesh (Gal. 5:16). While man is virtually enslaved to the internal pulsations of the flesh before salvation (Rom. 6:6, 16-17, 20), the entrance of the Holy Spirit provides an alternative inner drumbeat with which he can synchronize his life. Even with this tremendous advantage, however, he must still choose which drumbeat to follow. He can set his mind on either the flesh or the Spirit, with drastically different results in his life (Rom. 8:5-7; Gal. 5:16, 19-23).

When the flesh is allowed to direct a person's life, it will lure him to indulge in self-centered, sensual pleasures and sexual improprieties, to engage in lawless behavior; to pursue occult interests; and to instigate divisive actions among his fellowman (Rom. 6:19; Gal. 5:19-21). In one sense a person can say, "The devil made me do it" when he succumbs to these kinds of behaviors because Satan truly is the instigator of the deeds of the flesh, but the person is still responsible for his own actions, as his mind is free to choose whether or not to follow the desires of the flesh.

Satan never gives up his efforts to turn man's mind towards the flesh and lead him into these patterns of sin. Only through Jesus Christ can the daily battle for the mind be won, and only through Him will we finally be delivered from the "body of this death" and its alliance with the flesh, which is enslaved to Satan and sin (Rom. 7:21-25).