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**THE BONDAGE MAKER:
EXAMINING THE MESSAGE AND METHOD
OF NEIL T. ANDERSON**

**Part Two:
Spiritual Warfare And The “Truth Encounter”**

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SUMMARY: THE PROBLEMS AT A GLANCE

Included among the problems with Neil T. Anderson’s spiritual warfare teachings are his overstatement of the devil’s authority, including his assertion that Satan has dominion over the earth and its creatures; his overstatement of the devil’s role in the believer’s life, including his claim that gaining victory over the devil requires learning how to verbally address and “bind” him.

Others of us are cowering in the corner pleading, “O God, please help us! The devil is roaring at us!” And God responds, “I’ve done all I’m going to do. I defeated and disarmed Satan at the cross. I conferred all authority on you in Christ. Now open your eyes. *Realize who you are* and start demonstrating the authority you already possess.” (emphasis added)¹

A lot of Christians I meet fear the dark side of the spiritual world. I’ve even had Talbot students tell me, “I’d like to take your class on spiritual conflicts, but I’m afraid to talk about demons.” ... “Typically, after a group of students has completed the course, a few will say, “I used to be afraid of that stuff, but *now I know who I am in Christ, and I’m not afraid anymore.*” That’s exactly the perception we should have. (emphasis added)²

With statements such as these, Freedom in Christ Ministries founder Neil T. Anderson grounds his message on spiritual warfare in his distinctive teachings on sanctification emphasizing the believer’s identity in Christ (see Part One). At the same time, he comes across as an unusually biblical and balanced spiritual warfare teacher, encouraging confidence in Christ and personal responsibility while discouraging an unhealthy preoccupation with, or fear of, the devil.

A good deal of Anderson’s teaching on the subject is biblically sound and helpful. For example, he stresses that believers responsible for what happens to them when they are overpowered by old sin patterns, because they fail to “take a tempting thought captive when it first appear[s] at the threshold of [their minds].”³ He emphasizes that Satan’s power is in deception, and when his lies are brought into the light of truth his power is broken. He counsels that Christians should not enter into dialogues with evil spirits or believe what they have to say, but rather ignore them.⁴

Such sound advice leads many evangelicals to trust Anderson as an authority on dealing with the devil. Unfortunately, however, his writings on the subject present an odd mixture of mature biblical insight and naive, uncritical, illogical, and unbiblical ideas.⁵ As noted in Part One, his responsible sounding statements disarm his audience so that they are slow to recognize the depth of the problems underlying his approach.

OVERSTATING SATAN'S ROLE

As we also saw in Part One, Anderson's belief that Christians do not have a sin nature leads him to overestimate the influence of Satan on their thought life (although he does recognize that sinful thoughts can come from other sources⁶). This can result in an attitude where the thoughts going on in one's own mind can never confidently be claimed as one's own: "Satan's perpetual aim is to infiltrate your thoughts with his thoughts and to promote his lie in the face of God's truth. He knows that if he can control your thoughts he can control your behavior....He can introduce his thoughts, tempting you to act independently of God, as if they were your own thoughts or even God's thoughts"⁷

Anderson demands very little evidence before concluding that Satan is the source of a problem. For example: "The confusion in Frances' mind [about whether the source of her personal problems was psychological, her own sin, or demonic] is a clear tip-off that her problem is the result of demonic influence."⁸ When people awake in a state of fear, Anderson automatically assumes they are under spiritual attack, if they find that they cannot speak, he concludes it is because they have not first submitted to God before resisting the devil — no neurophysiological explanation (e.g., not fully awakening out of REM sleep) is considered.⁹

After surveying 286 Christian high school students, Anderson arbitrarily tabulated the following "startling responses" as evidence of intrusion of the powers of darkness among our children":

Forty-five percent said they have experienced a "presence" (seen or heard) in their room that scared them.

Fifty-nine percent said they've harbored bad thoughts about God.

Forty-three percent said they find it mentally hard to pray and read their Bible.

Sixty-nine percent reported hearing "voices" in their heads, like there was a subconscious voice talking to them.

Twenty-two percent said they frequently entertain thoughts of suicide.

Seventy-four percent think they are different than others ("It works for others but not for me").¹⁰

While I would not dispute that Satan could have a hand in such experiences, so too might human imagination, sinfulness, and emotional/psychological maladjustment. Interestingly, in another survey 864 students who, unlike the above students, "checked 'no' on all inquiries regarding occult experiences" reported roughly the same frequency of these "demonic" experiences.¹¹ Instead of questioning his assumptions, Anderson speculates that these students were exposed to the demonic through other means not included in the survey questions (unforgiveness, generational sin, and worldly amusements and distractions).¹²

Many of the problems Anderson attributes to spirits seem rather to be rooted in the emotional instability and weak egos (senses of identity) of those who seek his help (e.g., people who are suggestible and experience out-of-control thoughts). Although he acknowledges that some mental problems are chemically induced, in practice he consistently opts for a spiritual (demonic) explanation when people come to him claiming that they hear voices speaking to them. Says Anderson, "I have counseled hundreds who were hearing voices, and every one of the voices was demonic" (emphasis added).¹³ He disparages the idea that chemical imbalances can produce "personal thoughts" (i.e., seemingly external voices speaking in one's mind) or thoughts that people are seemingly opposed to thinking.¹⁴ Moreover, he promises that within a few hours his approach can eliminate mental struggles and voices tormenting all but a few out of hundreds.¹⁵ Lack of long-term follow-up in many cases may mask the quick return of symptoms that would indicate a source and treatment other than those that Anderson proposes.

OVERSTATING SATAN'S AUTHORITY

One of the reasons Satan looms so large in Anderson's worldview is his misunderstanding of biblical teaching that Satan is the "god" and "ruler" of this world:

God created Adam and gave him a significant, divine purpose for being here: to rule over all his creatures. Was Satan on the scene at creation? Yes. Was he the god of this world at that time? Not at all. Who had the dominion in the garden? Adam did, that is until Satan usurped his dominion through deception. That's when Satan became the god of this world.

Do you realize that the significant dominion Adam exercised before the fall has been restored to you as a Christian? That's part of your inheritance in Christ. Satan has no authority over you, even though he will try to deceive you into believing that he has. Because of your position in Christ, you have, authority over him. It's part of your identity."¹⁶

During Jesus' temptation, the devil offered "all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory" (Matthew 4:8) in exchange for His worship, Satan's claim that the earth "has been handed over to me and I give it to whomever I wish" (Luke 4:6) was no lie. He took authority when Adam abdicated the throne of rulership over God's creation at the fall. Satan ruled from Adam until the Cross. The death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ secured forever the final authority for Jesus Himself (Matthew 28:18). That authority was extended to all believers in the Great Commission so that we may continue His work of destroying the works of the devil (1 John 3:8).

All of us were born spiritually dead and subject to the ruler that Paul called "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2). But when we received Christ, God "delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13). Our citizenship was changed from earth to heaven (Philippians 3:20). Satan is the ruler of this world, but he is no longer our ruler, for Christ is our ruler.

But as long as we live on the earth, we are still on Satan's turf. He will try to rule our lives by deceiving us into believing that we still belong to him.¹⁷

Anderson's exposition in the above quotations sounds close enough to what Christians commonly believe that it may not raise many eyebrows. Nonetheless, it contains several faulty interpretations that lead to an unbiblical view of both the authority of Satan and the authority of the believer:

1. Anderson states that Adam's authority was transferred to Satan, but the popular conception that Satan took possession of the "title deed to the earth" is without biblical warrant. Adam's rulership was over the natural world; Satan's rulership is over the fallen angels and lost humanity. The Bible does not say — as Anderson represents — that Satan is ruler over the earth (Greek: *ge*), but rather over this world (Greek: *kosmos*) or age (Greek: *aion*). As a theologian, Anderson should know that these terms, when used in relation to Satan, refer to the present dark spiritual system in which humanity blindly participates (e.g., 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2; 6:12). If Satan's offer to Jesus of the kingdoms of the world was genuine, it was because their rulers were under his behind-the-scenes direction (1 John 5:19). He could not, however, offer Him the physical earth, since that has always belonged to God (e.g., Exod. 19:5; Deut. 10:14; Ps. 24:1; 1 Cor. 10:26).
2. Anderson further equates the dominion given by God to Adam over the animals (Gen. 1:28) with the authority given by Christ to His disciples over evil spirits (Matt. 10:1; Luke 10:17-20), but there is no biblical reason to think they are the same authority. The "significant dominion Adam exercised before the fall" has *not* yet been restored to redeemed man (Heb. 2:8).
3. The idea that Satan has a legal claim to man is almost as difficult to prove biblically as the idea that he has a legal claim to the earth. It can be said that by inciting man to rebel against God's authority, Satan tricked him into falling prisoner to the law of sin and death. Then, as man plunged into darkness, he became easily manipulated by the prince of darkness — but this would seem to be a rule by default. Although Scripture indicates that Satan's authority over *angels* was once legitimate (Jude 8-9), it nowhere explicitly states that his rule over *man* is by legal right, and it is doubtful that it even implicitly does so.¹⁸

4. Although Jesus does say in Matthew 28:18 that all authority has been handed over to Him, He does not hand that authority *carte blanche* over to believers. Rather, on the basis of that authority, He commissions them to go and make disciples of all the nations, and for that work He delegates to them the authority to do a limited number of things (e.g., remit sins — John 20:21-23). Furthermore, 1 John 3:8 (“The Son of God appeared...to destroy the devil’s work”) does not speak of believers, as Anderson suggests. The devil’s work was destroyed once-and-for-all on the cross (John 12:31; Col. 2:15).

OVERSTATING THE BELIEVER’S AUTHORITY

Anderson’s entire approach to spiritual warfare is based on the authority of the believer over the devil. This is manifest particularly in his emphasis on “binding and loosing”:

God has granted us the authority to “bind what shall be bound in heaven” (Matthew 16:19; 18:18). In other words, we have the spiritual capacity to discern God’s will and then, confident in the finished work of Christ, proclaim it in the spiritual realm. We have authority over demons as long as we remain strong in the Lord and operate in His strength (see Ephesians 6:10)....The effectiveness of binding the strongman (see Matthew 12:20 [*sic*]) is dependent upon the leading of the Holy Spirit and subject to the scope and limits of the written Word of God.¹⁹

In his instruction on how to help others find freedom in Christ, Anderson writes that the goal:

is to avoid all demonic activity which would short-circuit their ability to participate in the process. With this in mind, I usually begin the steps to freedom with a prayer similar to this: Dear heavenly Father....I take my position with Christ, seated with Him in the heavenlies. Because all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him. I now claim that authority over all enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ in and around this room and especially (name). You have told us that where two or three are gathered in Your name You are in our midst, and that whatever is bound on earth is bound in heaven. We agree that every evil spirit that is in or around (name) be bound to silence. They cannot inflict any pain, speak to (names)’s mind, or prevent (names) from hearing, seeing, or speaking. Now in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ I command you, Satan, and all your hosts to release (names) and remain bound and gagged so that (names) will be able to obey God.²⁰

The biblical evidence suggesting that believers have been given direct authority over the demonic realm is scantier than is usually supposed. Anderson applies Matthew 12:29 (“first binds the strong man”) to believers,²¹ when it is obvious from the preceding seven verses that Jesus was referring to Himself alone. Matthew 18:18 (“bind” and “loose”) refers to church discipline, not spiritual warfare, as the larger context makes entirely clear, Anderson uses Ephesians 1:18-21 (Christ is seated above all authorities and powers) combined with Ephesians 2:5-6 (believers are seated with Him) as proof of the believer’s authority over the devil. But rather than dealing with spiritual warfare, these passages speak of Christ’s exaltation by the Father and the believer’s acceptance and exaltation before the Father in Christ.” One should therefore be careful not to infer too much from them.

Nowhere does Scripture state that believers have authority over Satan himself. Those biblical passages that do speak of believers’ authority over the demonic realm apply strictly to driving demons out of lost human beings (Matt. 10:1; Mark 6:7; Luke 10:19; Acts 8:7). They are never applied to pastoral counseling or the believer’s personal battle with the devil.

This does not mean Christians must accept defeat in spiritual warfare. Scripture clearly teaches that Jesus has won the victory over the devil and all authority has been given to Him (Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:20-22; Col. 2:15; 1 Pet. 3:22; etc.). While believers do not have the prerogative to say, “I command you, Satan (to do this or not do that),” Jesus does. Believers are indeed positionally seated with Him in heavenly places and are thus made partakers in His victory. They therefore can be confident that if they resist the devil, he will flee from them (James 4:7).

Putting Satan In His Place

The question remains, Exactly what is involved in resisting the devil? For Anderson, it requires a vocal confrontation — prayers that involve speaking to Satan²² and even protracted speeches to the devil.²³ He reasons that

the Word of God is the only offensive weapon mentioned in the list of armor. Since Paul used *rhema* instead of *logos* for “word” in Ephesians 6:17, I believe Paul is referring to the spoken Word of God instead of the Word of God personified in Jesus. We are to defend ourselves against the evil one by speaking aloud God’s truth.

...You can communicate with God in your mind and spirit because He knows the thoughts and intents of your heart (Hebrews 4:12). Your unspoken communion with God is your private sanctuary; Satan cannot, eavesdrop on you. But by the same token, if you only tell Satan to leave with your thoughts, he won’t leave because he can’t hear you. *You must defeat Satan by speaking out.* The good news is that most attacks occur at night or when you are alone [strange good news!], so resisting Satan aloud seldom results in you having to explain to other people a vocal command instructing Satan to leave. However, there may be times when you will need to take a public stand against the enemy, which may include confessing with your mouth that Jesus is Lord (Romans 10:9).²⁴ (emphases in original)

Anderson’s argument is disappointing, to say the least. First, the Greek word *rhema* in Ephesians 6:17 is clearly referring to the words that *God* spoke and therefore has no bearing on whether *believers* vocally or mentally repeat those words.

Second, Anderson’s argumentation leads to the astonishing conclusion that believers *should* be speaking to the devil aloud but *should not* exercise the same liberty when it comes to God — at least not when they are communicating sensitive information. This is implied by Anderson’s statement, “Your unspoken communion with God is your private sanctuary; Satan cannot eavesdrop on you.” It is further insinuated one paragraph down, where, in describing his response to a satanic attack, he recalls, “In the sanctuary of my heart, out of Satan’s earshot, I submitted to God by praying...” Then he addressed the devil out loud, and the attack was over.²⁵ Such biblically insupportable teaching inhibits a practice that has great biblical precedent and for many believers is the most comfortable and natural way to pray. Why not simply trust that God will not allow Satan to take advantage of something uttered to Him in the confidence of prayer?

On his web site Anderson attempts to provide further scriptural support for speaking to the devil: “In many New Testament examples, the confrontation between believers and Satan and his evil associates is verbal (see Matthew 4:10 and 17:18; Mark 5:2-8; Luke 9:42; Revelation 12:10,11).”²⁶ Most of the passages Anderson cites, however, involve Jesus verbally confronting the demons afflicting possessed individuals. Matthew 4 involves Jesus addressing the devil, who had in some way visually appeared to him, a situation none of us can expect to experience (thank God). Revelation 12 does say that Christians overcame Satan by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony, but this is best understood as their witness to Christ, not as their verbally addressing Satan.

The critical point to be observed in all New Testament cases where Jesus or His followers address Satan or his demons is that they are speaking to visible manifestations, typically demons possessing human beings. Biblically, invisible creatures — whether angels, saints, *or* demons — are never spoken to in a manner resembling prayer. This is a form of address reserved for God alone.

The most obvious biblical refutation of the practice of verbally rebuking Satan is Jude 8-9: “In the very same way, these dreamers pollute their own bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings. But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’” Anderson responds to this criticism directly in *Helping Others Find Freedom in Christ* (141-42):

Some have suggested that 2 Peter 2:10, 11 and Jude 8 teach that believers should not stand verbally against Satan or his spiritual forces. But a close look at the context of these passages reveals their true intent. The writers were referring to unbelievers trying to

exert an independent authority over the demonic realm. They were like the seven sons of Sceva, who were also unbelievers trying to cast out demons in Jesus' name, without His authority (see Acts 19:11-16)....

A look at the context of these passages *does* reveal their true intent. They are speaking against the behavior of a rebellious group of people who demonstrate their rebellion by slandering high-ranking angels. To demonstrate the utter unacceptability of this practice, Jude cites the example of Michael, an angelic authority himself who nonetheless did not dare rail against another angelic authority, despite the fact that that angel, Satan, is fallen and evil. The inclusion of the example of Michael should have prevented Anderson from misunderstanding Jude's point. The practice of directly rebuking Satan is wrong regardless of who does it, save the Lord Himself.

As Anderson proceeds, he acknowledges the reference to Michael and responds to it in this manner:

Two important points about this passage: First, we are not pronouncing a "railing judgment" against anybody. Only God can judge, and we are commanded *not* to judge. Resisting the devil and renouncing our involvements with him is not pronouncing a railing judgment. Every believer has the right and responsibility to exercise his or her authority in Christ by resisting the devil. Second, look at the context of Jude 1:9 [sic]. The passage refers back to the time of Moses when Satan was not yet a defeated foe and the Church was not seated with Christ in the heavenlies.

Believers are not being self-willed and despising authority when they obey the command to submit to God and choose to resist the devil, even in a verbal way (see Jas. 4:7)....

The example cited might have taken place prior to Satan's defeat, but the people for whom it was cited lived after his defeat, and Jude still thought the example was relevant. Michael, it should be pointed out, is neither a sinful human being nor a member of the church, and so Satan's defeat at the cross does not have the same application for him as it does for Christians. While believers do have the right and responsibility to resist the devil, Anderson begs the question if he wants us to accept that this is the same thing as verbally addressing Satan. What Anderson calls for is much more than simply resisting the devil and renouncing past involvement with him: it is a direct verbal rebuke that could indeed be considered a railing judgment. James 4:7 mentions nothing about *verbally* resisting the devil, so I am bewildered as to why Anderson would cite it as a proof text for that point. The larger context of James 4 clearly equates resisting the devil with the volitional acts of drawing near to God, denying oneself, and resisting temptation.

Scripture never instructs believers to speak to Satan, nor on the face of it does it seem a desirable or edifying practice. Instead of spiritual warfare being primarily a moral response to temptation that builds character, Anderson's interpretation makes it primarily a ritualistic response to the tempter that feeds a magical world view (i.e., that the devil can be overcome with the correct verbal formula rather than the correct moral choices).²⁷ The silliness that will result when a believer feels constrained to rebuke Satan out loud in a public place is the logical result of the false, unbiblical premise that it is necessary for believers to address the devil.

To resist the devil by verbally "binding" him rather than by simply resisting his temptation contradicts the very premillennial perspective that Anderson and his coauthor, Robert L. Saucy, hold, that it is not the will of God for Satan to be bound until the return of Christ (Rev. 20:1-3). According to classic premillennialism and other end-times views as well, God has ordained both that Satan should be free to move about tempting Christians and that Christians can make him go away only by standing firm in obedience to Christ. Thus, Satan's *not* being bound serves a divine purpose in the character development of Christians.

Delivering Oneself from the Devil

Anderson also confuses the authority Christ gave believers over demons inhabiting the lost with the freedom from sin's dominion He won for them on the cross. This leads to an unbiblical method for dealing with sin and temptation (rebuking and binding Satan):

When we boldly and humbly exercise the authority Christ has conferred upon us over the spiritual realm, we experience the freedom from bondage which Christ promised (John 8:32).²⁸

Most Christians today who cannot control their lives in some area wallow in self-blame instead of acting responsibly to solve the problem. They berate themselves and punish themselves for not having the willpower to break a bad habit, when instead they should be resisting Satan in an area where he has obviously robbed them of control. Anything bad which you cannot stop doing, or anything good which you cannot make yourself do, could be an area of demonic control.²⁹

As we saw in Part One, Anderson's denial that sin dwells in the believer forces him to resort to Satan as the primary explanation for failure, in the Christian life, resulting in a faulty solution. Scripture clearly teaches that believers can be overcome by sin (e.g., Rom. 7:14), and the solution to this is to "put off" the sinful old man that was crucified with Christ and "put on" the righteous new man that is created in His image (e.g., Eph. 4:22-24). Sin as a principle that can overpower believers is very real, and Satan will use it to his advantage. But if they want to be free from that power they must directly confront sin itself through the power of the cross, not Satan.

DEMONIZATION OF CHRISTIANS

When Anderson teaches that Christians can be controlled by demons, he places himself in a teaching lineage that can be traced from the turn-of-the-century Welsh revival writer Jessie Penn-Lewis to the late Dallas Seminary theologian Merrill F. Unger (*What Demons Can Do to Saints*, Moody Press, 1977) and Moody Bible Institute professor C. Fred Dickason (*Demon Possession and the Christian: A New Perspective*, Moody Press, 1987). In fact, Anderson calls Penn-Lewis's *War on the Saints* (The Overcomer Literature Trust, n.d.) a "Christian classic,"³⁰ and he approvingly quotes Dickason and Unger on the subject of Christian demonization and deliverance.³¹ Teaching this doctrine also puts Anderson in company with such controversial Pentecostal/charismatic teachers as Don Basham (*Can a Christian Have a Demon?* Whitaker Books, 1971), Frank and Ida Mae Hammond (*Pigs in the Parlor*, Impact Books, 1973), John Wimber (the recently deceased spiritual leader of the Vineyard "Third Wave" charismatic movement), and Bob Larson (*In the Name of Satan*, Thomas Nelson, 1996).³²

The term *demonized* (Greek: *daimonizomai*; usually translated "demon possessed" and used interchangeably in Scripture with the phrase, "have a demon") can be succinctly defined as the condition of being indwelt and controlled by an evil spirit. That Anderson believes Christians can be controlled by demons is evident not only from the quote cited above but throughout his works. One of his frequent refrains is, "If Satan can get you to believe a lie, he can control your life."³³ Furthermore, Anderson explicitly endorses the belief that Christians can be demonized, and he makes clear that by this he means not only control but also indwelling.³⁴

"Truth Encounters"

Anderson sends mixed messages about whether he accepts some of the more far out teachings that are common in deliverance circles.³⁵ What does differentiate him from the majority of deliverance teachers is not his ideas on *demonization* but rather his ideas on *deliverance*. The standard model for deliverance — what John Wimber termed the "power encounter" — is based on the Gospels and the Book of Acts, where Jesus and His disciples directly confronted the demons in possessed individuals and commanded them to depart. Drawing on the epistles rather than the Gospels for his model, Anderson advocates a different approach: "Since Satan's primary weapon is the lie, your defense against him is the truth. Dealing with Satan is not a power encounter; it's a truth encounter. When you expose Satan's lie with God's truth, his power is broken."³⁶ Anderson explains the effect that this concept has had on his counseling:

Previously when I exposed a demon influence in a counseling situation it would turn into a power encounter. Counselees would become catatonic, run out of the room, or become suddenly disoriented and I would attempt to take authority over the demon. My

first approach was to get the demon to expose itself, then I would command it to leave. This exchange often resulted in a great deal of trauma for the counselee. Although progress was made, the episode would usually have to be repeated.

But I have learned from the Scriptures and my experience that *truth* is the liberating agent. The power of Satan is in the lie, and the power of the believer is in knowing the truth. We are to pursue *truth*, not power.

Furthermore, persons in bondage are not liberated by what I do as the pastor/counselor, but what they do with my help. It's not what *I* believe that breaks the bonds, it's what *they* believe, confess, renounce, and forgive.³⁷

Anderson is to be commended for instructing believers that they are responsible for resisting the devil — no one else can do it for them. Furthermore, he is correct that Satan's only power where believers are concerned is in deception, and they can overcome him with truth (although there is more to the Christian's defense than just this — see Ephesians 6:11-18). He is to be criticized, however, for framing this battle in the context of demonization and deliverance. Biblically, deliverance from demonization *is* a "power encounter." In the rare cases where it would occur today, it would simply and exclusively involve a Christian exercising the authority of Jesus' name to cast a demon out of someone who is not a Christian and therefore is not capable of conducting a "truth encounter."

To better understand Anderson's reasoning, and the errors therein, it will help to see how he answers one of the key arguments of those who reject demonization and deliverance for Christians: "One of the common objections to the ministry of setting captives free performed by Jesus and the apostles is the apparent lack of instruction on the subject in the epistles. Let me offer another perspective which may help clarify the issue...."³⁸ He proceeds to explain that prior to the Atonement of Christ on the cross divinely appointed agents such as Jesus and the apostles were needed to take authority over and expel demons. But after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, the demonic rulers and authorities were disarmed (Col. 2:15), and all authority was given to Jesus (Matt. 28:18). According to Ephesians 2:5-6, every believer is now seated with Christ in the heavenlies far above all rule and authority, and thus

you no longer need an outside agent to effect authority for you.... In order to resist the devil, you need to understand and appropriate your position and authority in Christ.... When Satan harasses you, you may be prone to...cry out for God to deliver you, like Jesus miraculously and instantaneously delivered the demonized people in the Gospels. But when you read through the epistles it is obvious that your deliverance has already been accomplished in Christ's work on the cross and His resurrection.³⁹

There are at least three problems with this argument: First, it fails to make the critical distinction between the severe affliction of demonization (demon possession) that is always dealt with by deliverance, and the harassment of the devil experienced by every believer that is always dealt with by personal resistance. Anderson consistently blurs these two biblically distinct phenomena together until they become gradations in a continuum; that is, varying degrees of the *same* affliction.⁴⁰

It is true, as Anderson and Saucy argue in *The Common Made Holy*,⁴¹ that there are degrees of severity in demonization cases. Nonetheless, in Scripture it is always a malady that involves an inhabiting demon that can only be expelled by an external agent. Instead of seeing that the saved and the unsaved are in two different categories, with their own distinctive spectrums of possible demonic influence, Anderson treats all demonic assaults on humans as one spectrum. Thus, according to Anderson, Christians who allow themselves to be influenced by the devil long enough could potentially wind up in a state like the Gadarene demoniac!⁴²

The second problem with Anderson's argument is that instances of demonization are also recorded in the Book of Acts, and, as in the Gospels, they are dealt with by interventions from God's authorized agents — despite the fact that Christ's death and resurrection had already occurred (Acts 5:16; 8:5-7; 16:18; 19:12). This contravening fact should have discouraged Anderson from advancing such an argument in the first place.

Third, Anderson assumes that the subject of deliverance is often believers, both before and after the cross. In fact, a strong case can be made that the subject of deliverance is always nonbelievers, both before and

after the cross.⁴³ Since believers cannot be demonized, the subject does not come up when they are instructed on how to resist the devil in the epistles. Rather, it quite naturally appears in the narrative accounts of the Gospels and Acts, where unbelievers are encountered in evangelistic situations.

To derive one's theology on demonization in the church age from the epistles is to assume that the epistles are discussing demonization. A thoughtful inventory of the Gospels and Acts would show, however, that the phenomenon of demonization described in those books is a separate activity of demons altogether from what the epistles describe as spiritual warfare waged against believers. Anderson inconsistently *derives* the concept of demonization from the Gospels (since it is not mentioned in the epistles) but then partially *defines* it by what the epistles do say about the devil's assault on believers. As primary as the epistles may be for doing theology, it is nothing more than an evasion tactic to dismiss the narrative portions of Scripture when they seem to contradict one's preferred view, for "all Scripture is God-breathed and is *useful for teaching...*" (2Tim. 3:16).

Later in the same book,⁴⁴ Anderson does acknowledge that there are examples of demonic expulsion in the Book of Acts, but argues that Acts records "the period of transition between the cross and the completion of the canon of Scripture. There is a great deal of disagreement among Christians about how much method and theology we should extract from this important book. Therefore I stress caution in translating examples of demonic expulsion from Acts into doctrinal absolutes."

The statement that Acts records the transition between the cross and the completion of Scripture is meaningless. There is no transition between the two events relevant to demonization and deliverance. Acts does record some transition in terms of the church's break from Judaism and acceptance of the Gentiles into its fold, but this has no bearing on the proper method for dealing with demons. The examples of demonic expulsion in Acts are clearly presented as signs of the power of God with not only the apostles but also ordinary disciples (Acts 8:5-7), not as an obsolete practice that the church was slow in giving up.

By arguing in this fashion Anderson effectively removes from consideration *all* biblical examples of deliverance, *including* those that occurred after the cross (i.e., those that would refute his very argument). Acts clearly shows Jesus' style of deliverance continues in the church age. The "disarming" of the rulers and authorities at the cross (Col. 2:15) does not mean that believers are now able to deliver themselves from demons, since, as a result of that disarming, they can't be possessed by demons in the first place! It rather refers to Christ's providing believers with a firm basis for victory in spiritual warfare, since he canceled the claims of the Law against them (v. 14) and thus rendered powerless "him who holds the power of death" (Heb. 2:14).

Buried in Anderson's arguments is the assumption that there is no essential difference between dealing with demons afflicting unbelievers and those attacking believers. Yet these very verses illustrate what that difference is — hence, he begs the question. *As a direct consequence of his failure to distinguish between the two in his interpretation of Scripture, Anderson inappropriately merges them (incorporating elements of exorcism and traditional spiritual warfare) in his teaching and practice as well.* The result of this error is that believers are left feeling vulnerable to invasion and control by evil spirits.

Semantic Smoke Screens

It might seem self-evident that such invasion and control is equivalent to possession. But like a host of deliverance teachers before him, Anderson has found a way to deny that Christians can be demon possessed *even while affirming* that whatever happen to people whom our Bibles call "demon possessed" can happen to Christians:

Can believers be demon "possessed"? The simple answer to the question as asked is "no." But the relationship of believers to the demonic is not that simple. In the original language, "demon possession" is only one word. Some have suggested that it would have been better to have transliterated it as "demonized." If we did, then a demonized person could be defined as "one who is under the influence of one or more demons."...

The answer also hinges on how you define “possessed.” We have a tendency to think that if we possess something, we own it (as in “possession is nine-tenths of the law”). With that understanding of the word, the question becomes “Can a Christian be owned by the evil one?” The answer: Absolutely not! Every Christian has been bought by the blood of the Lamb (1 Peter 1:18, 19)...Despite what some of our critics charge, I (Neil) have never taught that believers can be “demon possessed.”⁴⁵

This clarification that demons cannot *own* Christians is nothing more than a red herring. Few if any critics of the doctrine that Christians can be demon possessed understand “possession” to mean *ownership*, but rather *control*⁴⁶ – something Anderson clearly teaches.

On another occasion Anderson answered the question, “Can believers be demon ‘possessed?’” with unequivocal equivocation: “Even though Christ has secured our victory over our spiritual enemies (see Colossians 2:15), please don’t conclude that Christians can’t have spiritual problems. Some believers seem to think they are immune to spiritual attack, but the Bible clearly teaches that Satan’s primary attack has always been on God’s people, hoping to thwart God’s plan. The Bible clearly teaches that temptation, accusation and deception are constant possibilities for believers.”⁴⁷ That’s true enough, but no one who argues against Christians being demonized denies that Christians have spiritual problems, nor that Satan attacks them through temptation, accusation, and deception.

Furthermore, no one denies that believers can yield themselves to sin and thus come under the influence of Satan. But *influence* and *control* are not synonymous. The American Heritage Dictionary defines influence in its verbal form first as, “To produce an effect on by imperceptible or intangible means; sway,” and second as, “To affect the nature, development, or condition of; modify.” Its definition of control includes the meaning of influence, but takes it much further: “To exercise authoritative or dominating influence over; direct,” and, “To hold in restraint; check.” The word *check*, in turn, means, “To deprive of freedom.” Anderson’s interchangeable use of influence and control clouds the distinctions between them and allows him to smuggle in the controversial implications of *control* under cover of the noncontroversial implications of *influence*.⁴⁸

Biblically, demonization or demon possession = demonic control of a lost soul from within = no ability to resist. Thus, deliverance for the possessed can only come from intervention by an outside agent. On the other hand, spiritual warfare = demonic attack (influence) on a believer from without = ability to resist. Thus, lasting victory for the Christian can only come when he or she assumes responsibility to stand against the onslaught of the devil.⁴⁹

Proof Texts for Demonization of Christians

Anderson, of course, would like to prove that Scripture does not maintain such clear distinctions. He brings out his arsenal of proof texts for demonization of Christians in *Bondage Breaker*, pages 175-79. In almost every case he reads the word *control* into the text where influence (or assault or afflict⁵⁰) is much better suited to explain what is being described.

Space will not allow us to examine each example, but it will be instructive to consider his treatment of what he considers to be “perhaps the most definitive passage on Satan’s ability to control believers.”⁵¹ In Acts 5:1-11, the apostle Peter confronts a disciple (I agree with Anderson he was probably a true believer) who had lied about the percentage of the proceeds from the sale of his property that he had given to the church. Peter said to him, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit...?” Anderson comments: “Ananias’ problem was that he had allowed Satan’s deception to fill (control) his heart, The word ‘filled’ in Acts 5:3 (*pleroō*) is the same word used in Ephesians 5:18: ‘Be filled with the Spirit.’ It is possible for the believer to be filled with satanic deception or filled by the Spirit. To whichever source you yield, by that source you shall be filled and controlled.”⁵²

Anderson is correct that Acts 5:3 is the most important verse used by advocates of the view that Christians can have demons. And this very fact underscores how weak the scriptural support for this view is. Peter in no way states that Ananias is either *inhabited* or *controlled* by Satan. By citing the

corresponding usage of the word *pleroō* (“fill”), Anderson proves too much. There is a consistent distinction between the New Testament usage of the words *indwell* and *fill* when speaking of the Holy Spirit’s relationship to believers. When Scripture speaks of the indwelling of the Spirit, it refers to the sealing of the believer unto salvation as God’s own possession. When it speaks of the filling of the Spirit, or the Spirit coming *upon* the believer, it speaks of the Holy Spirit’s influence on, or empowerment of, the believer for service to God. Scripture never indicates that believers are *coercively* directed by the Spirit. Rather, they are *led* by Him. Thus, the use of the word *control* is inappropriate.

Like others that teach that Christians can have demons, Anderson takes Scriptures that seem to state categorically that Christians are protected from demonic invasion and applies them only to spiritual Christians:

When we put on Christ we take ourselves out of the realm of the flesh, where we are vulnerable to attack, and we place ourselves within the dominion of Christ, where the evil one cannot touch us. Satan has nothing in Christ (John 14:30), and to the extent that we put on Christ, the evil one cannot touch us (1 John 5:18). He can only touch that which is on his own level. That’s why we are commanded, “Make no provision for the flesh” (Romans 13:14), meaning “Don’t live on Satan’s level.”⁵³ This protection [in the face of demonic attack] is not something you can take for granted irrespective of how you behave. God’s protection is conditional on your willingness to respond to God’s provision.

In Romans 13:14 we are instructed to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.” But what if we *do* make provision for the flesh by giving Satan an opportunity in our life through sin? Do we have blanket immunity from Satan’s invasion? No, that protection is conditional on our responsible participation in God’s plan for our protection.⁵⁴

At first, Anderson’s reasoning may seem convincing. Certainly, God’s promise of protection for believers does not license them to live a life of sin. The more a believer sins, the more he or she is open to Satan’s influence. But Anderson sneaks the conclusion he wants us to accept into the premise of his argument; that is, he begs the question or argues in a circle by using the word *invasion* (synonymous with *demonization*) to describe that influence. Once again he assumes without proving that passages dealing with spiritual warfare in the life of the believer and passages dealing with demon possession are part of a continuum, thus glossing over the critical differences that actually can be found between them. If believers persist in sin, they definitely increase their vulnerability to Satan’s deception and oppression, but not to his inhabitation and control, because these are things that cannot happen to believers. The presence of the Holy Spirit within believers — which is not conditioned on their obedience — guarantees this (2 Cor. 6:14-18; cf. Matt. 12:43-45; 1 John 4:4; 5:18).

In response to the argument that “believers are indwelt by the Spirit, who, by virtue of His holiness, cannot share residence with a sinful demon,” Anderson and Saucy first reply: “This objection, however, is undermined when we realize that the Spirit lives with our own human spirit, which can still commit grievous sins that bring deep grief and hurt to the Holy Spirit, but not His departure (see Ephesians 4:30).”⁵⁵ Anderson’s own definition of believers as “saints who occasionally sin” should cause him to see that this argument misses the mark. Whether or not Christians have a sin nature, it seems we all can agree there is a qualitative difference between a demon and a Christian — one is an enemy of God and the other is His friend, child, and possession. Furthermore, the sin of believers is covered by the blood of Christ. These differences are decisive when it comes to the question at hand.

Anderson and Saucy offer a second response to this objection: “Demons need not be conceived as dwelling in the same place and in the same way as the Holy Spirit. Even in cases where a demon takes control of a person’s body and uses it to express his own will, the demon need not be seen as residing in the very center of the person.”⁵⁶ To this I reply that Scripture defines the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as inhabitation of the human *body* (e.g., 1 Cor. 6:19). Under Anderson’s view we would still have demons and the Holy Spirit cohabiting the same body. Any further distinctions are scripturally irrelevant.

Ironically, Anderson agrees that, no matter what sins they become entangled in, true believers are assured that they can never again become lost and experience the condemnation of the lost (i.e., he believes in eternal security),⁵⁷ but he denies that sinning believers have similar protection from the worst ravages inflicted by the devil on the most lost people recorded in the Bible (i.e., he believes in temporal insecurity). Once more, Anderson's promise that his message brings freedom in Christ is rendered hollow, for if these terrible things can happen to believers they must always live with a measure of insecurity and fear. Even if they think they've done everything right, there could always be some part of the armor of God they forgot to don, or some past sin they never knew they needed to renounce. Furthermore, if believers grant Anderson his premises, how do they know his seven steps to freedom are exhaustive? Was he inspired when he laid them out? They could be doing everything he says, but still be missing some preventive measure against the invasion of the enemy.

Finally, although Anderson's emphasis that Christians can and must resist the devil is a refreshing departure from typical deliverance teaching, the manner in which he teaches them to resist presents additional causes for concern. These include his unbiblical emphasis on believing in one's own identity (see Part One) and the superstitious formulae for dealing with the devil embodied in his steps to freedom (see Part Three).

In Parts Three and Four: The Seven Steps to Freedom and Satanic Ritual Abuse.

NOTES

1. Neil T. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1990), 67-68.
2. *Ibid.*, 71.
3. Neil T. Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness: Realizing the Power of Your Identity in Christ* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), 164.
4. *Bondage Breaker*, 109.
5. No Christian teacher is above criticism, but the extent and seriousness of the flaws in Anderson's teaching make it impossible for the Christian Research Institute to recommend him even to the mature and discerning reader.
6. Neil T. Anderson and Steve Russo, *The Seduction of Our Children* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1991), 9.
7. *Bondage Breaker*, 53.
8. *Ibid.*, 76.
9. Neil T. Anderson, *Helping Others Find Freedom in Christ* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1995), 52.
10. Sedactinn, 33.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, 36-38.
13. *Ibid.*, 25. See also Dr. Neil Anderson, *Released from Bondage* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), 12-13; *Helping*, 44-45, 47.
14. Neil T. Anderson and Robert L. Saucy, *The Common Made Holy* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1997), 64-67, 170.
15. *Helping*, 47.
16. *Victory*, 26-27.
17. *Bondage Breaker*, 98-99.
18. The teaching that Satan has a legal claim to man seems to be rooted in the ancient and long-discarded ransom-to-Satan theory of the Atonement, which held that Christ's death was a payment to Satan necessary to free man from his grasp. Although there are several contemporary views of the Atonement, evangelical theologians generally hold that Christ's death was a ransom that satisfied man's debt to God's law and holiness.
19. "Twenty-Five Most Popular Questions," Freedom in Christ web site, <http://www.ficm.org>.
20. *Bondage Breaker*, 227.
21. See also *ibid.*, 88-91. Anderson teaches that evangelism will be ineffective if we do not first "bind the strong man."
22. See, e.g., *Seduction*, 209.
23. See, e.g., *Bondage Breaker*, 144.
24. *Ibid.*, 84-85.
25. *Ibid.*, 85.
26. "Twenty-Five Most Popular Questions."
27. See e.g., *Bondage Breaker*, 193-94.
28. *Ibid.*, 72.
29. *Ibid.*, 180.
30. *Victory*, 101.
31. *Bondage Breaker*, 31, 88-89, 173, 181.
32. See the sidebar for more background on the development and variations of this teaching. For a biblical critique see Brent Grimsley and Elliot Miller, "Can a Christian Be 'Demonized'?" *Christian Research Journal*, Summer 1993, 16-19, 37-38. (Photocopies available on request from CRI.)
33. *Victory*, 169.

34. *Bondage Breaker*, 228.
35. For example: after stating that he does not believe “in a specific demon of homosexuality,” he proceeds to indicate that he allows for such a possibility. (*Released*, 126.) After making noncommittal statements about the concept of “demonic transference” (the transmission of demonic influence from one person to another), he makes it clear that he subscribes to that biblically unsupported idea after all. (*Bondage Breaker*, 137; cf. 149.)
36. *Victory*, 170.
37. *Bondage Breaker*, 23.
38. *Ibid.*, 24.
39. *Ibid.*, 25-26.
40. See, e.g., *Helping*, 116; *Bondage Breaker.*, 103-4;107.
41. *Common*, 349-50.
42. *Bondage Breaker*, 108.
43. See Grimsley and Miller, 16-19, 37-38.
44. *Bondage Breaker*, 217,
45. “Twenty-Five Most Popular Questions.”
46. See Grimsley and Miller, 17.
47. “Twenty-Five Most Popular Questions.”
48. For a further example see *Bondage Breaker*, 174,
49. In *ibid.*, 99, he writes: “If we give in to [Satan’s accusations, temptations, and deceptions], we can be influenced by Satan’s wishes (Galatians 5:1). And if we remain under his influence long enough, we can lose control. Yes, believers can be controlled by Satan if they fail to stand against him.” What Anderson fails to recognize is that if people are truly controlled by Satan they are incapable of standing against him — they could only be delivered by an outside agent. He also wrongly applies Galatians 5:1 to demonic bondage when it is clearly referring only to legalistic bondage.
50. Anderson asserts that the woman bent over double in Luke 13:10-18 was under “demonic control” (*ibid.*, 175), whereas Scripture only describes her as being physically (not behaviorally) afflicted by the devil.
51. *Ibid.*, 178.
52. *Ibid.*, 179.
53. *Ibid.*, 79.
54. *Ibid.*, 180-81.
55. *Common*, 350.
56. *Ibid.*