

THE BONDAGE BREAKER[®]

NEIL T. ANDERSON



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS
EUGENE, OREGON

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The Bondage Breaker®

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Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97408

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

ISBN 978-0-7369-7591-9 (pbk.)

ISBN 978-0-7369-7592-6 (eBook)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is on file at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

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Printed in the United States of America

19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 / BP-SK / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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INTRODUCTION

FREE AT LAST!

Years ago I was speaking in a Southern California church on the subject of the New Age movement. My text was 1 Timothy 4:1: “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons” (NIV). After my message, I was surrounded at the front of the sanctuary by a mob of people.

Sitting halfway back in the auditorium was a 22-year-old woman who had been weeping uncontrollably since the service ended. Several people had tried to comfort her, but she wouldn’t allow anyone to get near her. Finally, a church staff member cut through the crowd around me and said, “I’m sorry, folks, but we need Dr. Anderson back here right away.”

As I approached the young woman, I could hear her sobbing, “He understands! He understands!” We were able to get her out of the sanctuary and into a private office. After she calmed down, I scheduled an appointment to meet with her the next week.

When Nancy arrived for her appointment, her face was covered with open wounds. “I’ve been scratching myself like this ever since last week, and I can’t control it,” she admitted sheepishly.

Nancy described her horrible childhood, which included an abusive father and a grandmother who identified herself as a black witch.

“When I was three years old, I received my guardians—spirit guides,” she continued. “They were my companions, telling me how to live and what to say. I never questioned whether having spirit guides was anything but normal until my mother took me to Sunday school. Then I began to suspect that my spirit guides might not be good for me. When I asked my parents about it, my father beat me. I never asked again!”

In order to cope with the increasing torment that her spirit guides brought to her life, Nancy resorted to rigid personal discipline. In her high school years, she decided to believe in God. But instead of leaving, her “guardians” continued to harass her.

After high school, Nancy turned to the epitome of discipline: the Marines. Determined to become the toughest of the lady leather-necks, she won awards for her discipline. But her spiritual torment kept pushing her mind and emotions to the edge. She refused to tell anyone about her mental battles for fear that she would be labeled insane. Finally, the pressure overcame her, and she snapped. Nancy quietly accepted a medical discharge and retreated to a lonely existence of inner turmoil and pain. This was Nancy’s condition when she came to church that day and heard me talk about deceiving spirits.

“Finally, someone understands me!” Nancy concluded tearfully.

“Would you like to get rid of your spirit guides?” I asked.

There was a long pause. “Will they really leave, or will I go home and be thrashed by them again?”

“You will be free,” I assured her.

Two hours later Nancy *was* free—and was hugging us with an openness she had never known before. “Now I can have people over to my house!” she exclaimed joyfully.

THE REALITY OF THE DARK SIDE

There was a time when I thought Nancy’s experience was an unusual exception to the norm. Although the degree of her problem was somewhat exceptional, I have come to realize that the apostle Paul had in

mind every believer when he wrote, “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). After more than 45 years of ministry as a pastor, seminary professor, and conference speaker, I have ministered to thousands of Christians all over the world who are being deceived and living defeated lives. This is a real tragedy, because their heavenly Father desires for them to live a free and productive life in Christ.

My own journey into this realm of ministry did not come by choice. I was a left-brained aerospace engineer before God called me into ministry. Even as a Christian layman I wasn’t curious about demonic activity or the occult. The lure of esoteric knowledge and occultic power never appealed to me. I never played with a Ouija board, Tarot cards, a Magic 8-Ball, or had my palms read or fortune told, and I don’t know what my astrological sign is to this day.

On the other hand, I have never doubted what the Bible says about the spiritual world, even when it seemed to conflict with my Western worldview. Initially I understood pastoral ministry as the application of sanctified common sense. I would try to speak the truth in love and encourage Christians to live accordingly by faith. It didn’t take me long to realize that giving good advice wasn’t enough for those in bondage and struggling with anger, fear, anxiety, and depression. These dear people had no mental peace, and I slowly began to understand the battle that was going on in their minds. I kept going back again and again to Scripture, looking for the truth that would set them free. In the process, I discovered who I was in Christ, how to resolve personal and spiritual conflicts, and then I started to see God set His children free and heal their wounds.

GOD WANTS YOU FREE AND GROWING IN CHRIST

The apostle Paul wrote that “we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ...to a mature man, to the measure

of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:15,13). If God has given us everything we need to mature in Christ (2 Peter 1:3), then why aren’t more Christians growing in Christ? Some are no more like Him now than they were 20 years ago. Paul said, “The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Timothy 1:5). We should be able to say, every year, “I am more loving, patient, and kind and experiencing more joy, peace, and self-control than I was last year.” If we can’t say that, then we are not growing.

Part of the reason for this carnality is given in 1 Corinthians 3:2-3: “I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?” According to Paul, some Christians are not even able to receive good biblical instruction because of unresolved personal and spiritual conflicts in their lives. What is needed is some way to resolve these personal and spiritual conflicts through genuine repentance and faith in God. That is the purpose of this book.

My first book, *Victory Over the Darkness* (Bethany House Publishers), focuses on the believer’s life in Christ and walk by faith. The book deals with the foundational issues of our identity in Christ and outlines practical steps on how to live by faith, walk according to the Spirit, renew our mind, manage our emotions, and resolve the emotional traumas of our past through faith and forgiveness.

Before we received Christ, we were slaves to sin. Now because of Christ’s work on the cross, sin’s power over us has been broken. Satan has no right of ownership or authority over us. He is a defeated foe, but he is committed to keeping us from realizing that. The father of lies can block your effectiveness as a Christian if he can deceive you into believing that you are nothing but a product of your past—subject to sin, prone to failure, and controlled by your habits.

Paul said, “It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery”

(Galatians 5:1). You are free in Christ, but you will be defeated if the devil can deceive you into believing you are nothing more than a sin-sick product of your past. Nor can Satan do anything about your position in Christ, but if he can deceive you into believing that what Scripture says isn't true, you will live as though it isn't. People are in bondage to the lies they believe. That is why Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32).

I don't believe in instant maturity. It will take us the rest of our lives to renew our minds and become like Christ. But it doesn't take long to help people resolve their personal and spiritual conflicts and find their freedom in Christ. Being alive and free in Christ is part of positional sanctification, which is the basis for progressive sanctification. In other words, we are not trying to *become* children of God, we *are* children of God who are becoming like Christ. Once people are established alive and free in Christ through genuine repentance and faith in God, watch them grow! They have a new thirst for the Word of God, and they know who they are in Christ because "the Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God" (Romans 8:16).

In this book, I have attempted to clarify the nature of spiritual conflicts and outline how they can be resolved in Christ. Part One explains your position, protection, and authority in Christ. Part Two warns of your vulnerability to temptation, accusation, and deception. Part Three shares how we can help others experience their freedom in Christ.

Since the publication of the first edition, there have been several exploratory studies that have shown promising results regarding the effectiveness of *The Steps to Freedom in Christ*. Judith King, a Christian therapist, did several pilot studies in 1996. All three of these studies were performed on participants who attended a Living Free in Christ conference and were led through *The Steps to Freedom in Christ* during the conference.

The first study involved 30 participants who took a 10-item questionnaire before completing the Steps. The questionnaire was re-administered 3 months after their participation. The purpose was to assess them for levels of depression, anxiety, inner conflict, tormenting

thoughts, and addictive behaviors. The second study involved 55 participants who took a 12-item questionnaire before completing the Steps, and it was then readministered 3 months later. The third pilot study involved 21 participants who also took a 12-item questionnaire before receiving the Steps, and then again 3 months afterwards. The following table illustrates the percentage of improvement for each category.

	DEPRESSION	ANXIETY	INNER CONFLICT	TORMENTING THOUGHTS	ADDICTIVE BEHAVIOR
Pilot Study 1	64%	58%	63%	82%	52%
Pilot Study 2	47%	44%	51%	58%	43%
Pilot Study 3	52%	47%	48%	57%	39%

The Living Free in Christ conference is now available as a curriculum entitled *Freedom in Christ: A 10-Week Life-Changing Discipleship Course* (Bethany House Publishers, 2017). It has a leader's guide with all the messages written out, which leaders can teach themselves, a participant's guide for each person that includes the Steps to Freedom, and a DVD with messages presented by the staff of Freedom in Christ Ministries, should a leader prefer the course to be taught that way.

Research was also conducted by the board of the Ministry of Healing, which is based in Tyler, Texas. The study completed there was done in cooperation with a doctoral student at Regent University under the supervision of Dr. Fernando Garzon (Doctor of Psychology). Most people attending a Living Free in Christ conference can work through the repentance process on their own using The Steps to Freedom in Christ. In our experience, about 15 percent can't do so because of difficulties they have experienced. A personal session was offered to them with a trained encourager. They were given a pretest before a Step session and a posttest three months later, with the following results given in percentage of improvement:

	OKLAHOMA CITY, OK	TYLER, TX
Depression	44%	52%
Anxiety	45%	44%
Fear	48%	49%
Anger	36%	55%
Tormenting Thoughts	51%	27%
Negative Habits	48%	43%
Sense of Self-Worth	52%	40%

The contrast between bondage and freedom in a believer's life is powerfully illustrated in the following letter from a professional man. Unlike Nancy, by all appearances, this man was a normal, churchgoing Christian who appeared to be living a very successful life in both his family and career. But he wasn't experiencing his freedom in Christ.

Dear Neil,

I contacted you because I had been experiencing a host of seemingly inexplicable "psychologically related" attacks. My emotional troubles were probably rooted in my childhood experiences with horror movies, Ouija boards, and so on. I clearly remember fearing a visit from devilish forces after I saw the movie titled *The Blood of Dracula*.

My father had a pretty hot temper and was given to emotional outbursts. My survival response was to sulk and blame myself for upsetting him. Bottling my emotions inside became a way of life. As I grew into adulthood, I continued to blame myself for any and all personal shortcomings and misfortunes.

Then I accepted Christ as my personal Lord and Savior. I grew spiritually over the next several years, but I never enjoyed complete peace. There was always a lingering doubt about my relationship with God, whom I saw as distant and stern. I had difficulty praying, reading the

Bible, and paying attention to the pastor's sermons. I seriously questioned the purpose of life. I experienced horrible nightmares that woke me up screaming.

It was during my time of prayer with you that I finally found freedom in Christ. I realized that God is not a harsh, aloof disciplinarian, but a loving Father who takes joy in my accomplishments. I experienced a great release when I prayed through the final Step.

Now when I read God's Word, I understand it like never before. I have developed a more positive attitude, and my relationship with my Lord has completely changed. Since our meeting, I haven't had one nightmare.

Neil, I'm afraid there are many Christians like me out there leading lives of "quiet desperation" due to the attack of demonic forces. If I can fall prey to these forces and seem all right, so can others.

Are you one of those Christians who lives in bondage to fear, depression, habits you can't break, thoughts or inner voices you can't elude, or sinful behavior you can't escape? God has made every provision for you to be alive and free in Christ. In the pages that follow, I want to introduce you to the One who has already overcome the darkness and secured your freedom: Jesus Christ, the Bondage Breaker!

PART ONE

TAKE COURAGE!

Furthermore, we are instructed by our sacred books how from certain angels, who fell of their own free will, there sprang a more wicked demon brood, condemned by God... Their great business is the ruin of mankind. Accordingly, they inflict upon our bodies diseases and other grievous calamities. And by violent assaults, they hurry the soul into sudden and extraordinary excesses...By an influence equally obscure, demons...breathe into the soul, and rouse up its corruptions with furious passions and vile excesses.

TERTULLIAN (AD 160-220)

CHAPTER ONE

YOU DON'T HAVE TO LIVE IN THE SHADOWS

Paul also says, "The unspiritual man does not know the things which come from the Spirit of God." Contentious and proud wisdom is rightly described as earthy, unspiritual and devilish because as long as the soul seeks earthly glory it is deprived of spiritual grace and remains cut off from God. For now it thinks only what comes naturally to it since it originally fell. It is persuaded by the delusion of an evil spirit to do things which are wicked and harmful.

BEDE (AD 673-735)

I was asked by a local Christian counselor if I could provide a spiritual assessment of one of his clients. He had given her several psychological tests, but never got to the root of her problem. After four years of professional counseling with no results, he finally considered the possibility that his client could be in some kind of spiritual bondage. Because there was a pentagram cut into her skin, it didn't take me long to give an assessment. I explained the spiritual battle going on for her mind, and she said, "Finally, someone understands." Although she had been struggling for years, she never sought out counseling until she tried unsuccessfully to commit suicide with an overdose of pills ten minutes after writing the following prayer:

Dear God,

Where are You? How can You watch and not help me? I hurt so bad, and You don't even care. If You cared, You'd make it stop or let me die. I love You, but You seem so far away. I can't hear You or feel You or see You, but I'm supposed to believe You're here. Lord, I feel them and hear them. They are here. I know You're real, God, but they are more real to me right now. Please make someone believe me, Lord. Why won't You make it stop? Please, Lord, please! If You love me, You'll let me die.

A Lost Sheep

The kingdom of darkness was far more real to her than the presence of God. Over the past 40 years, I have encountered hundreds of Christians like the woman who wrote this heartrending note. Most of them didn't attempt suicide, but many of them talked about dark impressions to do so. Nearly all of them admitted to the presence of "them"—inner urges or voices which badgered them, tempted and taunted them, accused them, or threatened them. We often tell people who come to our ministry for help that they will struggle with thoughts such as, *Don't go; they can't help you*—or they will think disruptive thoughts in first-person singular, like *I don't want to go*, or *I've tried this before, and it didn't work*. One person wrote: "Every time I try to talk to you, or even think about talking to you, I completely shut down. Voices inside literally yell at me: 'No!' I've even considered killing myself to end this terrible battle going on inside. I need help!"

Others may not be hearing voices, but their minds are so distracted that their daily walk with Christ is unfulfilling and unproductive. When they try to pray, they are tempted and bombarded by all sorts of things around them. When they attempt to read the Bible, they can't concentrate, and when they finish a chapter, they can't remember any of what they read. The same thing happens when they try rereading the chapter. Instead of being victorious, productive, joy-filled Christians, they trudge through life under a cloud, trying to hang on until

the rapture. It could be a lack of mental discipline or stubborn flesh patterns, but if they go through The Steps to Freedom in Christ and the interference stops, then it can't be either one. I have seen thousands of people freed from this kind of mental torment, and most experience for the first time "the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension" because now their hearts and their minds are being guarded in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT SPIRITUAL BONDAGE

Where do these voices come from, and what is the cause of all the mental confusion that plagues so many lives? One of the main reasons I fumbled and failed in my early days of ministering to people in bondage was because I didn't know the answers to these questions. Transitioning from my Western worldview to a biblical worldview has required several paradigm shifts. I labored under a number of misconceptions about the spiritual world that had to be dispelled. Perhaps you are struggling with some of these same faulty ideas that keep Christians in darkness.

1. *Demons were active when Christ was on earth, but their activity has subsided.* The Bible teaches just the opposite. False prophets, false messiahs, and spiritual deception will become more prevalent before the second coming of the Lord. Believers have wrestled "against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12) throughout the church age. Ephesians 6 then goes on to itemize the pieces of spiritual armor that we are to put on in order to defend ourselves against "the flaming arrows of the evil one" (verses 13-17). In 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, Paul declared that believers are engaged in a spiritual battle against forces that are raised up against the knowledge of God. If dark spiritual powers are no longer attacking believers, why would Paul alert us to them and encourage us to arm ourselves against them? The armor of God is for the believer, not the unbeliever.

Late-night television is dominated by psychic hotlines. Cable channels on history and science offer a variety of paranormal programs and push the concept of ancient aliens and UFOs, but offer no historic Christian commentary. Numerous cults and occultic practices seduce a gullible public, and the New Age movement is thoroughly entrenched in our college campuses. There is nothing new about New Age, of course. People are practicing the same old spiritism mentioned in the Old Testament. All they have done is change terms from *medium* to *channeler*, and from *demon* to *spirit guide*.

The kingdom of darkness was established at the fall of humanity and is still ruling this world. The battle from Genesis to Revelation is between good and evil, between the Christ and the Antichrist, between the Spirit of Truth and the father of lies, between the prophets of God and the false prophets, between the wheat (sons of the kingdom) and the tares (sons of the evil one—see Matthew 13:38). Wrestling against dark spiritual forces is not a first-century phenomena. The kingdom of darkness is still present, and the devil still “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). In light of this, Peter instructed us to “be of sober spirit, be on the alert . . . resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world” (1 Peter 5:8-9). If your biblical worldview does not include the kingdom of darkness, then either God or you will have to take a bum rap for all the corruption Satan is foisting on you and the rest of the world.

2. *What the early church called demonic activity we now understand to be mental illness.* Such statements undermine the credibility of Scripture. The first demonically plagued Christian I counseled was diagnosed by medical doctors as a paranoid schizophrenic. After several attempts at medication and many hospitalizations, the medical establishment finally gave up on her. The diagnosis was based on her symptoms. She was nearly paralyzed by fear and was plagued by condemning thoughts, as is almost anybody who is under spiritual attack.

Any diagnosis based on observed or client-revealed symptoms offers by itself no explanation for the cause. Terms such as *schizophrenia*,

paranoia, and *psychosis* are labels based on the classification of symptoms. But what or who is causing the symptoms? Is the cause spiritual, psychological, hormonal, or a neurological chemical imbalance? Certainly all these options must be considered. Consider this email I received:

For years, ever since I was a teenager (I am 36 now), I had these voices in my head. There were four in particular, and sometimes what seemed loud choruses of them. When the subject of schizophrenia would come up, I would think to myself, *I know I am not schizophrenic, but what is this in my head?* I was tortured, mocked and jeered. Every single thought I had was second-guessed; consequently, I had zero self-esteem. I often wished the voices would be quiet, and I always wondered if other people had this as well, and if it was common.

When I learned from you about taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, and read about people's experiences with these voices, I came to recognize them for what they are, and I was able to make them leave. That was an amazing and beautiful thing. To be fully quiet in my mind, after years of torment. I do not need to explain further all the wonderful things that come with this freedom of the mind; it is a blessing you seem to know well.

We should not be surprised when secular psychologists and psychiatrists espousing a natural worldview attempt to offer natural explanations for mental problems. Their worldview does not include God or the god of this world. Even many Christians who reject the scientific community's explanation for the origin of the species naïvely accept the secular psychologist's and psychiatrist's explanation of mental illness. Research based on the scientific method of investigation of mental health problems is not necessarily wrong; it's just incomplete. It ignores the influence of the spiritual world because neither God nor the devil submit to our methods of verification. To be effective, we

have to acknowledge the neurological and biological basis for mental illness *and* a spiritual battle for the mind. I have attempted to do this in my books *Overcoming Depression* (Bethany House Publishers), and *Managing Anger* and *Letting Go of Fear* (Harvest House Publishers). I am certainly not against psychology, which by definition is a study of the soul. But I am not in agreement with secular psychology, just like I am not in agreement with liberal theology. What is needed is a truly biblical psychology.

3. *Some problems are only psychological, and some are only spiritual.* I believe such thinking creates a false dichotomy that implies a distinct division between the human soul and spirit. There is no inner conflict that is not psychological because there is never a time when your mind, emotions, and will are not part of the equation. Similarly, there is a spiritual component to every problem. There is no time when God is not present. “He...upholds all things by the word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3). The unseen spiritual world is just as real as the natural world that we observe through our physical senses, “for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18). Nor does the Bible designate any time or place when and where it is safe to take off the armor of God. As long as we are living on planet Earth, the possibility of being tempted, accused, and deceived is continuous. If we can accept that reasoning, we will stop polarizing toward medical answers only, or psychological answers only, or spiritual answers only.

Dr. Paul Hiebert, who taught at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, contends that as long as believers accept “a two-tier worldview with God confined to the supernatural and the natural world operating for all practical purposes according to autonomous scientific laws, Christianity will continue to be a secularizing force in the world.”¹

4. *Christians cannot be affected by demons.* There are some who believe that Christians cannot be afflicted by Satan. Even the suggestion that demonic influence can be part of the problem prompts the hasty disclaimer, “Impossible! That person is a Christian!” Such thinking removes the church from the position of having an adequate answer

and helping those who are under attack, and it leaves people without hope. Yet we must remember that we are the only ones who can help them.

Nothing has done greater damage to arriving at a proper diagnosis and treatment than this unbiblical assertion. If Satan can't touch the church, why are we instructed to put on the armor of God, resist the devil, stand firm, and be alert? If we aren't susceptible to being wounded or trapped by Satan, why does Paul describe our relationship to the powers of darkness as a wrestling match? Those who deny the enemy's potential for destruction are the most vulnerable to it and are actually aiding his clandestine role. (Our vulnerability to demonic intrusion and influence is the subject of Part Two of this book.)

5. Demonic influence is evident only in extreme or violent behavior and gross sin. I labored under that kind of thinking for years when I was a pastor and therefore missed the subtle deceptions that rendered many Christians fruitless. Although there are some cases today that are similar to the wild demoniac called "Legion" in Luke 8, most deceived Christians lead relatively normal lives while experiencing personal and interpersonal problems. Because they view satanic involvement as being limited to the cases of mass murderers or violent sex criminals, these seemingly ordinary problem-plagued individuals wonder what's wrong with them and why they can't just "do better."

Satan's first and foremost strategy is deception. Paul warned, "Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness" (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). It is not the few raving demoniacs who are causing the church to be ineffective. It is Satan's subtle deception and intrusion into the lives of seemingly normal believers. One Christian psychotherapist who attended my conference said, "I had never seen any evidence of demonism in my fifteen years of counseling until I came to your conference. When I returned to my practice, I discovered that my clients were being mentally deceived—and so was I."

Why didn't he see this before? If all that counselors are doing is listening to their clients, offering an explanation for their difficulties, and

suggesting ways to change, they will probably never see the opposition. Only when you work toward resolution through prayer do you see what's really happening. The same holds for pastors. If all they are doing is preaching and teaching, they probably won't see evidence of demonism either. Most pastors don't have a clue as to what is going on in the minds of their congregants, and most congregants are not likely to tell them. During my first ten years of ministry, I didn't understand the battle for their minds either. One man did come up to me and say, "Pastor, I have this voice in my head." But I had no idea what he was talking about, and even if I had, I wouldn't have known what to do about it. I watched his marriage and family fall apart, and they left the church.

6. *Freedom from spiritual bondage is the result of a power encounter with demonic forces.* Freedom from spiritual bondage and conflicts is not a power encounter; it's a truth encounter. Satan is a deceiver, and he will work undercover at all costs. His demons are like cockroaches that scurry for the shadows when the light comes on. Satan's power is in the lie, and when his lie is exposed by the truth, his plans are foiled.

When I was a boy, we lived on a farm. My dad, my brother, and I would visit our neighbor's farm to share produce and help with chores. This neighbor had a yappy little dog that scared the socks off me. When it came barking around the corner, my dad and brother stood their ground, but I ran. Guess who the dog chased! I escaped to the top of our pickup truck while the little dog yapped at me from the ground.

That little dog had no power over me except for what I gave it. Furthermore, it had no inherent power to get me onto the pickup; it was my *belief* that put me there. Because I chose to believe a lie, I essentially allowed that dog to use my mind, emotions, will, and muscles, all of which were motivated by fear. Finally, I gathered up my courage, jumped off the pickup, and kicked a small rock at the mutt. Lo and behold, it ran!

Satan is like that yappy little dog, deceiving people into fearing him more than God. His power is in the lie. He is the father of lies (John 8:44) who deceives the whole world (Revelation 12:9), and

consequently, the whole world is under the influence of the evil one (1 John 5:19). He can do nothing about your position in Christ, but if he can deceive you into believing his lies about you and God, you will spend a lot of time on top of the pickup truck! You don't have to outshout him or outmuscle him to be free of his influence. You just have to *out-truth* him. *Believe, declare, and act upon the truth of God's Word*, and you will thwart Satan's strategy.

This concept has had a dramatic effect on my ability to help struggling Christians. Prior to this, when I exposed a demonic influence, it would turn into what looked like a power encounter. With such a process, I saw counselees become catatonic, run out of the room, or become disoriented. One person jumped across my lap to grab a pencil and rake it across her wrist. I thought, *Dear God, there must be a better way*. 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 some progress was made, the episode would usually have to be repeated.

I have learned since from the Scriptures that *truth* is the liberating agent, and that has proven to be the case in every successful counseling session. Jesus is the Truth, and He is the One who sets the captive free. Power for the believer comes in knowing and choosing the truth. We are to pursue *truth* because we already have all the power we need in Christ (see Ephesians 1:18-19). Furthermore, people in bondage are not liberated by what I do as a pastor, but by what they choose to believe, confess, renounce, and forgive. Notice the prominence of truth in the following passages:

- You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free (John 8:32).
- I am the way, and the truth, and the life (John 14:6).
- When He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth (John 16:13).
- I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep

them from the evil one...Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth (John 17:15,17).

- Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth (Ephesians 6:14).
- Finally, brethren, whatever is true...dwell on these things (Philippians 4:8).

God sent a powerful message to the early church in Acts 5 when Peter confronted Ananias and Sapphira: “Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?” (verse 3). They were struck dead! Why the severity of discipline? God wanted the church to know that Satan, the deceiver, can ruin us if he can get us to believe and live a lie. If Satan could secretly infiltrate a church, a committee, or a person and deceive them into believing a lie, he could exert some measure of control over their lives! You may be tempted to dismiss Ananias and Sapphira as unbelievers, but that is not the case. F.F. Bruce, a New Testament scholar, wrote that Ananias was a believer² and Ernest Haenchen wrote that he [Ananias] was a Jewish Christian and commented, “Satan has filled his heart. Ananias has lied to the Holy Spirit, inasmuch as the Spirit is present in Peter (and in the community). Hence in the last resort it is not simply two men who confront one another, but in them the Holy Spirit and Satan, whose instruments they are.”³

Some people say, “But I am a good Christian. How can I be deceived?” You are probably not as good as Eve was before the fall. She was sinless when she was deceived and believed a lie. Good people can be deceived, and if they are deceived, they don’t know it. The battle began in the Garden of Eden and continues throughout the Bible. The contest depicted in the book of Revelation is not about dysfunctional families, sexual addiction, drug abuse, crime, or any other corruption. In fact, the word “sin” doesn’t even appear in the book of Revelation. In the end, the battle between Christ and the Antichrist (Satan) is finally resolved. In between these two periods of history is “the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).

SETTING CAPTIVES FREE

To my knowledge, there are no specific instructions in the epistles to cast demons out of someone else. That has led some to conclude that such a ministry is unwarranted. That is unfortunate, because the need is just as great, but the means by which we establish believers alive and free in Christ has changed under the new covenant.

Prior to the cross, divinely empowered agents—such as Jesus and His appointed apostles—were necessary to take authority over demonic powers in the world. Notice what Jesus did when He commissioned the 12 disciples to go on a training mission: “He called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases” (Luke 9:1). At that time Satan was not disarmed, and believers were not seated with Christ in the heavenlies.

A radical transformation took place at the cross and in the resurrection that changed the nature of spiritual conflicts forever. First, Jesus’s death and resurrection triumphed over and disarmed the rulers and authorities of the kingdom of darkness (Colossians 2:15). Jesus proclaimed, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). Because of the cross, Satan is a defeated foe, and he has no authority over those who are alive together with Christ and seated with Him in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:5-6). Affirming the truth of Christ’s victory and Satan’s defeat is the primary step toward successfully standing against the enemy’s attempts to intimidate you.

Second, because you are alive in Christ and seated with Him in the heavenlies, you no longer need an outside agent to exercise authority for you. You now reside “in Christ,” who has all authority. In order to resist the devil, you first need to understand and appropriate your identity, position, and authority in Christ. Freedom in Christ is your inheritance as a Christian. That’s why Paul wrote,

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what

are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come (Ephesians 1:18-21).

There is no need for the Christian to defeat the devil. Christ has already accomplished that. We just need to believe it. When we read through the epistles, it is obvious that Jesus has already delivered us from Satan and sin. That was the good news Paul conveyed in his prayer. God has done all He needs to do for us to live a victorious life in Christ. Now we have to assume our responsibility.

It is your individual responsibility as a believer to repent and believe the truth that will set you free. Nobody else can do that for you. I can't put on the armor of God for you, believe for you, repent for you, forgive others for you, and take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ for you, but I can help you. Finding your own freedom in Christ and helping others do the same is the focus of Part Three of this book.

The woman who called herself "A Lost Sheep" finally gained some measure of freedom. Four years after she wrote her desperate prayer, she was sitting in church on Sunday when she sensed God leading her to write His response. This is what she wrote:

My Dear Lost Sheep,

You ask Me where I am. My child, I am with you and I always will be. You are weak, but in Me you are strong. I love you so much that I can't let you die. I am so close that I feel everything you feel.

I know what you are going through, for I am going through it with you. But I have set you free and you must stand firm. You do not need to die physically for My enemies to be

gone, but be crucified with Me and I will live in you, and you shall live with Me. I will direct you in paths of righteousness. My child, I love you and I will never forsake you, for you are truly Mine.

Love, God