

NEIL T. ANDERSON

THE  
BONDAGE  
BREAKER®



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## **THE BONDAGE BREAKER®**

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# You Don't Have to Live in the Shadows

## CHAPTER 1

**I**N MY EARLY YEARS OF understanding, I was asked by a local Christian counselor if I could provide some 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 counseling with no results, he finally considered the possibility that his client could be in some kind of spiritual bondage. During those early years of counseling, she wrote the following prayer to God, then ten minutes later tried unsuccessfully to kill herself with an overdose of pills:

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 20 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. And 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. I often warn people who make appointments to talk with me that they will "hear" messages such as "Don't go; he 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!"

Many other Christians I deal with don't complain about hearing voices as such, but their minds are filled with such confusion that their daily walk with Christ is unfulfilling and unproductive. When they try to pray, they begin thinking about a million other things they should be doing. When they sit down to read the Bible or a good Christian book, they can't concentrate, or they read for several minutes and suddenly realize that their thoughts have been a million miles away. When they have an opportunity to serve the Lord in some way, they are brought up short by discouraging thoughts of self-doubt: "I'm not a strong Christian"; "I don't know enough about the Bible"; "I'm still plagued by sinful thoughts"; or "I don't have many spiritual gifts." Instead of being victorious, productive, joy-filled Christians, they trudge through life under a cloud just trying to hang on until Jesus comes. Some of this is certainly because of lack of mental discipline and patterns of the flesh, but it can also reflect deception from the enemy. I have seen thousands of people freed from this kind of mental torment.

## **Common Misconceptions About 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. Moving from my Western worldview to a biblical worldview has required several paradigm shifts. I labored under a number of misconceptions about the spiritual world which 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.* Christians who hold this view are not embracing the whole counsel of God in light of what His Word says, nor are they facing reality. The New Testament clearly states that believers will wrestle “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). Paul goes on to itemize the pieces of spiritual armor that we are to put on in order to defend ourselves against “the flaming missiles of the evil one” (verses 13-17). In 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 Paul again specifies that believers are engaged in a spiritual battle against forces which stand against the knowledge of God. If dark spiritual powers are no longer attacking believers, why would Paul alert us to them and insist that we arm ourselves against them? Surely the armor of God is for the believer, not the unbeliever.

The powers and forces that Paul wrote about in the first century are still evident at the dawn of the twenty-first century. We still have the usual cults and occultic practices, but witness the rise of the New Age movement. There is nothing new about the 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 God is a major theme of the Bible, but it has to be understood in contrast to the kingdom of darkness. The battle from Genesis to Revelation is between those two kingdoms, 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 phenomenon, nor is it merely optional for the Christian today. 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 instructs 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. Divine revelation is infallible. The first demonically plagued Christian I counseled was diagnosed paranoid schizophrenic by medical doctors. 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, psychosis, and so on are merely labels classifying 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 explored. But what if no physical or psychological cause is found?

We should not be surprised when secular psychologists limited to 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 vociferously reject the scientific community's explanation for the origin of the species naively accept the secular psychologist's explanation of mental illness. Research based on the scientific method of investigation of human spiritual problems is not wrong; it's just incomplete. It ignores the influence of the spiritual world, because neither God nor the devil submit to our methods of investigation. To be effective Christian counselors, we have to learn to distinguish between organic or psychological mental illness and a spiritual battle for the mind. I have attempted to do this in my book on depression, *Finding Hope Again* (Regal Books). Depression is a body, soul, and spirit problem that requires a balanced body, soul, and spirit answer.

3. *Some problems are psychological and some are 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 which is not psychological, because there is never a time when your mind, emotions, and will are not involved. Similarly, there is no problem which is not spiritual. There is no time when God is not present. "He... upholds all things by the word of His power" (Hebrews 1:3). The Bible presents the unseen spiritual world just as real as the natural world which we see with our eyes, "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 refer to any time when 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, or 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 teaches 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.”<sup>1</sup>

4. *Christians cannot be affected by demons.* Some evangelicals believe that Christians cannot be affected or influenced by demons. Even the suggestion that demonic influence can be part of the problem prompts the hasty disclaimer, “Impossible! I’m 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 such people without hope, because we are the only ones who can help them.

Nothing has done greater damage to diagnosing spiritual problems than this untruth. If Satan can’t touch the church, why are we instructed to put on the armor of God, to resist the devil, to stand firm, and to 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. (Our vulnerability to demonic intrusion and influence is the subject of Part Two of this book.)

5. *Demonic influence is only evident in extreme or violent behavior and gross sin.* I labored under this 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 like the wild demoniac called “Legion” in Luke 8, most deceived Christians lead relatively normal lives while experiencing personal and interpersonal problems for which no cause or solution has been found.

Since they relegate satanic involvement only to the cases of mass murderers or violent sex criminals, these 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, but Satan's subtle deception and intrusion into the lives of "normal" believers. One Christian psychotherapist who attended my conference "Living Free in Christ" said, "I had never seen any evidence of demonism in my 15 years of counseling until I came to your conference. When I returned to my practice I discovered that two-thirds of my clients were being mentally deceived—and so was I."

6. *Freedom from spiritual bondage is the result of a power encounter with demonic forces.* Freedom from spiritual conflicts and bondage is not a power encounter; it's a truth encounter. Satan is a deceiver, and he will work undercover at all costs. But the truth of God's Word exposes him and his lie. 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 on the farm, my dad, my brother, and I would visit our neighbor's farm to share produce and labor. The 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.

Everyone except me could see that the little dog had no power over me except what I gave it. Furthermore, it had no inherent power to throw me up on the pickup; it was my *belief* that put me up there. Because I chose to believe a lie,

I essentially allowed that dog to use my mind, my emotions, my will, and my 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 counseling. Previously when I exposed a demonic influence in a counseling situation it would turn into a power encounter. With such a process, I saw counselees become catatonic, run out of the room, or become suddenly disoriented. 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 some progress was made, the episode would usually have to be repeated.

But I have learned 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 the pastor/counselor, but by what they choose to believe, confess, renounce, and forgive. Notice the progressive logic of Scripture:

You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free (John 8:32).

I am the way, and the truth, and the life (John 14:6).

But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth (John 16:13).

I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one....Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth (John 17:15,17).

Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth (Ephesians 6:14).

Finally, brethren, whatever is true...let your mind dwell on these things (Philippians 4:8).

When God first disciplined the early church in Acts 5, He did so in a dramatic way. What was the issue: drugs—sex? No, the issue was *truth* or the lack of it. Peter confronted Ananias and Sapphira: “Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?” (verse 3). God wanted the church to know Satan the deceiver can ruin us if he can get us to believe and live a lie. That’s why it is so important that we take “every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). If I could infiltrate a church, a committee, or a person undetected, and deceive them into believing a lie, I could exert some measure of control over their lives!

Can a good Christian be deceived? Eve had never previously sinned when she was deceived and believed a lie. The final book of the Bible depicts the struggle in the latter days. It is not a book about dysfunctional families, sexual addiction, drug abuse, crime, or any other corruption. In fact the word sin doesn’t even occur in the Book of Revelation. The battle between the Christ and the anti-Christ (Satan) is revealed again, and *deception* is the key strategy of the evil one. 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), and we the church have been called to preach the good news, and speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

## Setting Captives Free

One of the common objections to the ministry of setting captives free that was performed by Jesus and the apostles is the apparent lack of instruction on the subject in the epistles. To my knowledge there are no specific instructions in the epistles to cast demons out of someone else. Let me offer my perspective, which may help clarify the issue, and let me suggest how we should confront demonic influence in our own lives and minister to others in bondage.

Prior to the cross, divinely empowered agents—such as Jesus and His specifically appointed apostles—were necessary to take authority over demonic powers in the world. Notice the first thing Jesus said when He commissioned the twelve disciples to go on a training mission. “And 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 a defeated foe, and believers were not seated with Christ in the heavenlies.

But something radical happened at the cross and in the resurrection that changed the nature of spiritual conflicts forever. First, Jesus’ 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 to successfully stand against the enemy’s attempts to intimidate you.

Second, since you are alive in Christ and seated with Him in the heavenlies, you no longer need an outside agent to

effect 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 may 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. She was sitting in church

one Sunday four years after she wrote her desperate prayer when she sensed God's leading to write His response to her. 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