

Feature Article: DA083

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

**Part Three:
Spiritual Warfare And The Seven "Steps To Freedom"**

by Elliot Miller

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SUMMARY: THE PROBLEMS AT A GLANCE

Further problems with Neil T. Anderson's spiritual warfare teachings include his emphasis on his seven "steps to freedom" to the extent that they become a virtual "second work of grace"; his assertion that satanic curses and "assignments" have real power that must be warded off with repeated formulaic prayers; his insistence that it is necessary to remember and renounce *every instance* of certain kinds of sin in order to cancel Satan's influence in one's life; and his further insistence that such satanic strongholds can be passed on generationally and thus to be free one may also need to identify and renounce the sins of one's ancestors.

"Many Christians have said that after going through the Steps to Freedom they felt just like they did when they first received Christ, and they earnestly desire to maintain their freedom. As with new Christians, these renewed Christians need a place where they can be nurtured. It's difficult to overemphasize the value of a small group discipleship experience to establish them in truth and freedom"¹

"Going through the Steps must be a personal choice, and people should not be coerced into it. Those who have found freedom will often want their spouses or friends to experience the same joy. But taking people through the Steps because others want them to do it is usually not advisable.... Therefore, we encourage those who have been freed to pray for their loved ones and allow the Holy Spirit to prepare their hearts for "an appointment."²

"One church put together a 'freedom ministry' after I had conducted a conference in its facilities. A year and a half later, they had led more than 500 people to freedom in Christ, and 95 percent of it was done by lay people."³

In Parts One and Two of this series we examined two critical components of the message and method of Freedom in Christ Ministries founder Neil T. Anderson: his teachings on the believer's identity in Christ and his strategy for dealing with the devil that he labels the "truth encounter." As central as these emphases are to Anderson's ministry, they only support and supplement what he apparently views as his most significant contribution to the body of Christ at large. This contribution — conveyed not only in his books but also in conferences held around the globe — is his approach to spiritual conflict resolution called the steps to freedom.

“SECOND BLESSING” THEOLOGY

As can be seen in Anderson’s pronouncements quoted above, the steps to freedom are described in the same kind of language most evangelicals reserve for salvation, or as some Christian traditions use for a “second work of grace” (e.g., sanctification or the baptism in the Holy Spirit). Anderson even compares the effect in the spiritual realm that transpires when someone sincerely recites the printed prayers of the steps with that which transpires when one prays to accept Christ as Savior.⁴

The steps to freedom have therefore become a Second Blessing essential to victorious Christian living, yet never quite formulated until Anderson came along. As Anderson states in *Released from Bondage*, Christ purchased our victory on the cross, but only as we walk through the seven steps can that freedom be realized.⁵ In his various books, Anderson repeatedly advises his readers that they should also read several of his other books so that they will be fully equipped to walk effectively through the steps.⁶ He seldom recommends books by other authors. Thus, although Anderson is not given to making boastful claims about himself,⁷ the implications of what he does say about the steps to freedom and his own books certainly do cast his ministry in a uniquely important role in the historical and contemporary church.⁸ He would have us believe that he has recovered and explicitly outlined the steps to freedom that were only implicitly revealed in Scripture — steps necessary for Victorious Christian living.

VALIDATION THROUGH TESTIMONY?

Anderson’s books are laden with testimonials of people who have applied his teachings and found freedom in Christ. The reactions from his counselees and conference participants included in his books always conform to and confirm his theology and expectations.⁹ He clearly thinks that these testimonies go a long way toward validating his ministry.

The value of some of these testimonies immediately seems questionable. For example, one woman proclaims: “I suffered from unexplainable rashes, hives, and welts all over my body. I lost my joy and closeness to the Lord. I could no longer sing or quote Scripture. I turned to food as my comfort and security. The demons attacked my sense of right and wrong, and I became involved in immorality in my search for identity and love. *But that all ended yesterday* when I renounced Satan’s control in my life” (emphasis added).¹⁰ In another place, Anderson recounts that a college student who had been threatening to kill him came to his apartment and Anderson “walked him through the Steps. He left being free in Christ.”¹¹ While we rejoice if the changes in these people’s lives were authentic, experience abundantly teaches that it is unwise to print such testimonies before they’ve stood the test of time.

No doubt some people *have* been helped because they have applied the biblical components of Anderson’s teaching noted elsewhere in this article and series. The question remains whether even these positive aspects of his ministry might not lead to a greater negative effect in the long run. For instance, if people conclude that because Anderson’s teachings helped them to deal with negative thoughts, everything he has to say about demons must be true, they might spend the rest of their lives in bondage to a ritualistic, legalistic, and superstitious approach to spiritual warfare that could have more negative consequences than they would have experienced from their negative thoughts — which they might have eventually learned to deal with apart from Anderson. Of course, we might not expect Anderson to look for, let alone include, testimonials of people who have been *hurt* through his teachings, but we have such testimonials in our files.

Anderson’s stories have fairly consistent characteristics: (1) they include wild or highly unusual and unsubstantiated supernatural events or human behaviors that support his views; (2) the protagonists in the stories are well-intentioned but have done, or had done to them, terrible things; (3) his approach always fits the situation and provides the answer.

WALKING THROUGH THE SEVEN STEPS

The steps to freedom are usually completed in one appointment that takes from three to five hours. The process is typically facilitated by a “committed Christian” (in the company of a “prayer partner”) who

has gone through the steps himself (or herself) and has been trained by Anderson's book *Helping Others Find Freedom in Christ* and/or advanced workshops provided at Freedom in Christ events. The leader walks the Christian seeking freedom through a series of personal inventories and prescribed prayers and declarations in which Satan's lies are *renounced* and God's truth is *announced*. Anderson considers such renunciation and annunciation key to finding freedom.

Anderson gives each of the seven steps a title that counterposes the desirable quality or condition into which he is seeking to lead his followers against the unbiblical quality or condition from which he is seeking to free them. The goal is for the counselee to identify his or her personal struggles and sins openly and to recite the various prayers and declarations from the heart, resulting in a life-changing transaction with the spiritual realm. In the process, it is not uncommon for emotional upheavals, bizarre behaviors, and shocking outbursts to occur. The latter two manifestations are considered forms of "demonic interference" with the deliverance process that can be overcome by a "truth encounter" with the Enemy (see Part Two).

Step One: Counterfeit vs. Real

The first step to freedom involves renouncing "your previous or current involvements with satanically inspired occultic practices or false religions."¹² Central to Anderson's concept of renunciation is the idea that once one engages in a forbidden practice, Satan gains a foothold in one's life that will never be broken until that sin is identified and rejected:

What right did Satan have to control Janelle as he did? Only the right that she gave him by yielding to his lies...once Janelle renounced her involvement with sin and Satan, his hold on her was canceled, and he had to leave.¹³

Write down everything God brings to mind. After you are sure your list is complete, pray the following for each practice, religion, and teacher: "Lord, I confess that I have participated in _____. I ask your forgiveness and I renounce _____ as a counterfeit to true Christianity."¹⁴

This principle of renunciation is so absolute for Anderson that he would rather be safe than sorry, even if it means renouncing sins one has not actually committed: "Some hesitate to complete the inventory because they don't believe they actually participated in these activities. But if anyone in your family was involved, you may want to put it on your list of activities to renounce just in case you unknowingly gave Satan a foothold."¹⁵

Step Two: Deception vs. Truth

Step two involves "acknowledging the truth in the inner self."¹⁶ In his explanation of this rather vague step, Anderson states that Christians previously lived their lives in deception as a defense mechanism arising from having to live independent of God, but now that they are alive in Him and forgiven, they can afford to face the truth. This again illustrates his fundamentally nonmoral understanding of fallenness and redemption (See Part One). For Anderson, sin is not the essence of fallenness (which he defines solely as separation from God) but rather a survival response to it, which is no longer necessary after fellowship with God is restored.¹⁷

Step Three: Bitterness vs. Forgiveness

The general proposition that learning how to forgive the sins of others is a step to experiencing freedom in Christ is not a claim I wish to dispute. Unfortunately, in step three Anderson takes this basic biblical truth and develops it in biblically unwarranted ways:

The major decision you are making in forgiveness is to bear the penalty of the other person's sin. All forgiveness is efficacious, if we are to forgive as Christ forgave us, how then did He forgive? He took the sins of the world on Himself; He suffered the consequences of our sin. When we forgive the sin of another, we are agreeing to live with

the consequences of his or her sin. You say, "That's not fair!" Well, the fact is that you will have to anyway, whether you forgive or not. Everybody is living with the consequences of somebody else's sin.... The only real choice is whether we will do it in the freedom of forgiveness or the bondage of bitterness.¹⁸

While Anderson says that forgiveness is required regardless of the attitude of the offending party,¹⁹ the Bible teaches that forgiveness is predicated on the repentance of the offender, even as God's forgiveness of sinners is predicated on their repentance (Luke 17:3-4). There is, however, a degree of truth in what Anderson is saying: rather than remaining angry or becoming bitter when offending parties fail to repent, Christians should bless them and release their fate into the hands of God (Eph. 4:26; Rom. 12:14, 17-21). But Anderson's teaching on the substitutionary, efficacious value of forgiveness takes Christ's suffering for sin, which is unique, and without biblical basis extends it to all Christians. This confusing emphasis raises questions about whether the Christian's own suffering has atoning value and, consequently, whether there is something lacking in the atonement of Christ. Since Anderson seemingly would not make such a claim, this odd emphasis is unfortunate.

Anderson writes: "You say, 'You don't understand how much this person hurt me!' But don't you see, they are still hurting you! How do you stop the pain? *You don't forgive someone for their sake; you do it for your sake, so you can be free*" (emphasis in original).²⁰ It may be true that unforgiveness generally hurts the one holding on to it more than it does the one who is its object. Nonetheless, forgiveness from such a self-centered motive sounds a lot more like pop psychology than anything found in the Bible. The only reasons Scripture ever supplies for forgiving others is either to receive God's forgiveness or *because* God's forgiveness has been received (e.g., Matt. 6:12-15; Mark 11:25; Luke 6:37; Eph. 4:32; Col 3:13). In other words, forgiving others is the *morally appropriate* thing to do, given that God has made provision to forgive one's own sins (which generally turn out to be greater than the sins one is being called onto forgive; Matt. 18:21-35).

After defining forgiveness as "agreeing to live with the consequences of *another person's sin*" (emphasis added),²¹ Anderson contradictorily goes on to teach that it is important that we learn to forgive both God and ourselves! "Once the counselee has prayed the prayer in Step 3, record the names of the people that God brings to his or her mind. If he doesn't mention himself or God, I will ask him if those names need to be on his list. He usually agrees."²²

Step Four: Rebellion vs. Submission

Step four seeks to cancel all satanic ground gained in an individual's life by a rebellious attitude toward God and human authorities, for "rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft" (1 Sam. 15:23). It contains a prayer of repentance and submission.

Step Five: Pride vs. Humility

Step five is similar to step four, only it addresses the related sin of pride. "I now renounce the self-life and by so doing cancel all the ground that has been gained in my members by the enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ."²³

Step Six: Bondage vs. Freedom

Step six seeks freedom from the bondage of habitual sin through confession and accountability to God and sometimes to a mature Christian as well. The principle set forth here is certainly sound, and the formulae prayer Anderson provides for this step is basically biblical, except for the statement, "I have transgressed your holy law and given the enemy an opportunity to wage war in my members (Romans 5:12, 13; James 4:1; 1 Peter 5:8)."²⁴ The first two passages cited actually speak about sin or lust waging war in a Christian's members. The third mentions the devil prowling around like a roaring lion, but says nothing about him operating within the believer. Through such illegitimate proof texting Anderson once again derives from Scripture something it never actually teaches (see Parts One and Two). But how many

Christians reading his books take the time to check such references? Many no doubt simply assume that with all these proof texts he must have plenty of biblical support for what he teaches.

Anderson maintains that Satan's entrance into people's "members" through sexual sin can only be reversed as they renounce every sin.

I have found it necessary for all sexual sins to be renounced. I usually have such people pray, asking the Lord to reveal to their minds all the sexual sins and partners with whom they have been involved, whether they were the victim or the perpetrator.²⁵ If you are in sexual bondage, what can you do?... ask the Lord to reveal to your mind every time you used your body as an instrument of unrighteousness, including all sexual sins....verbally respond to each offense as it is recalled by saying, "I confess (whatever the sin was), and I renounce that use of my body."...If you think this process might take too long, try not doing it and see how long the rest of your life will seem as you drag on in defeat!²⁶

Anderson instructs his followers, "After you have confessed all known sin, pray: 'I now confess these sins to You and claim through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ my forgiveness and cleansing. I cancel all ground that evil spirits have gained through my willful involvement in sin.'²⁷ While forgiveness is certainly obtained instantaneously through repentant confession, it is presumptuous to think that after having willfully indulged in sin over a long period of time, the believer can, through a verbal proclamation, instantly cancel all ground that the enemy gained (properly understood as external influence and not internal presence or control). According to Scripture, deliverance from the power of sin and restoration to a right relationship with God essentially take place in the realm of the heart (e.g., Prov. 4:23; Isa. 29:13; Joel 2:12-13; Matt. 15:19). Deliverance and restoration involve a transaction between the believer and God, not Satan (see, e.g., Ps. 51) — a turning of the will prompted by His Spirit (2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2; John 16:8) that is deepened and confirmed over time (e.g., Phil. 2:12; 1 Pet. 5:8-10; 2 Pet. 1:3-11). Anderson's instantaneous verbal solution amounts to magical thinking, a defect in his approach that becomes even more apparent in step seven.

Step Seven: Acquiescence vs. Renunciation

Following the lead of many other spiritual warfare teachers, Anderson not only believes in territorial spirits,²⁸ but in generational spirits as well:

The last step to freedom is to renounce the sins of your ancestors and any curses which may have been placed on you. In giving the Ten Commandments, God said: "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me" (Exodus 20:4, 5).

Familiar spirits can be passed on from one generation to the next if not renounced and your new spiritual heritage in Christ is not proclaimed. You are not guilty for the sin of any ancestor, but because of their sin, Satan has gained access to your family...In addition, deceived people may try to curse you, or Satanic groups may try to target you.²⁹ Some Christian leaders respond negatively to the teaching that we can inherit spiritual problems from our ancestors. Let me respond by saying that we are not guilty for our parents' sins, but because they sinned we are vulnerable to their areas of weakness. Jeremiah 32 offers more insight: "Ah Lord God!... who showest lovingkindness to thousands, but repayest the iniquity of fathers *into the bosom* of their children after them..." (emphasis in original)³⁰

This last Step to Freedom...is a crucial turning point for those people who come from dysfunctional families or families involved in cults or the occult. It is breaking the final links of bondage that have chained them to their past.³¹ The fact that demonic strongholds can be passed on from one generation to the next is well-attested by those who counsel the afflicted.³²

This experiential “validation” must be the true basis for Anderson’s doctrine, for it is difficult to imagine that he came to this belief from a serious study of the Scripture passages he quotes. One need only examine the wording of Exodus 20:4-5 to note its complete lack of reference to evil spirits. The natural interpretation is that God would visit circumstantial punishments (not evil spirits) on those who hate Him. In the same sense, just because Jeremiah said the Lord would repay the parents’ iniquities “into the bosom” of their children, it does not follow that the parents’ areas of moral weakness would be passed on to their children. Rather, this phrase is simply an idiomatic way of saying that the punishment of the parents would be visited on the children (note the word “repay”), *if* the children do not repent of their parents’ sins.³³ By confusing the punishment for sin with the sin itself, Anderson makes God the transmitter of sin from one generation to the next.

Carrying this unbiblical teaching to its logical conclusion, Anderson makes an astounding statement: “Adopted children can be especially subject to demonic strongholds because of their natural parentage. But *even an adopted child can become a new creation in Christ*, and must actively renounce old strongholds and embrace his or her inheritance as God’s child” (emphasis added).³⁴ Adopted children who do not know their genealogical history *are* at a disadvantage when it comes to anticipating inherited *physical* vulnerabilities. But Anderson has needlessly burdened them with additional concern about inherited *demonic* vulnerabilities, in a sense making them second-class citizens spiritually and thus adding to the prejudice with which they already have to deal.

As a partial consequence of his incorrect view that Satan once had ownership over the earth (see Part Two), Anderson’s demonology has taken a decidedly magical turn:

I here and now reject and disown all the sins of my ancestors. As one who has been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son, I cancel out all demonic working that may have been passed on to me from my ancestors...I renounce all satanic assignments that are directed toward me and my ministry, and I cancel every curse that Satan and his workers have put on me. I announce to Satan and all his forces that Christ became a curse for me.... I reject any and every way in which Satan may claim ownership of me. I belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, who purchased me with His own blood. I reject all of the blood sacrifices whereby Satan may claim ownership of me. I declare myself to be eternally and completely signed over and committed to the Lord Jesus Christ.³⁵

Contrary to Anderson, there is absolutely no relationship between superstitious occult curses and the very real curse of God that was laid on Christ for our sins. There is therefore no point in even making a comparison between them. In fact, in the Bible curses are strictly the prerogative of God and so there is no scriptural validation whatsoever for the pagan belief that there is real power in satanic curses, “assignments,” and blood sacrifices. Furthermore, the idea that by reciting prescribed prayers believers can cancel the workings of evil spirits is far more reminiscent of traditional magic doctrine, which holds that humans can control the spirit world through correct verbal formulae and ritual, than anything found in the Bible. Christians are already the property of the Lord Jesus Christ and do not need to declare themselves to be so for this reality to take effect (see below).

THE ROLE OF RENUNCIATION

Our brief survey of the seven steps makes it clear that renunciation plays a central role in Anderson’s approach to obtaining freedom from spiritual bondages. For Anderson, it is absolutely essential to confess and renounce past sins if one wants to be free of them. He describes renunciation as

a greater concept of repentance. The problem is, “Oh, I’ve confessed it.” Well, that deals with your relationship with God but it doesn’t deal with the entrapment of sin. It really doesn’t. Now, that’s not to put down confession, that’s an honest agreement before God, but all that’s in terms of reality isn’t there [*sic*]. You haven’t dealt with the entrapment of sin. Repentance is a broader concept. I renounce that, I accept this. And we found the necessity to do that with every lie we exposed.³⁶

Anderson finds legitimation for this practice in church history: “The early church included in its public declaration of faith, ‘I renounce you, Satan, all your works and ways.’ The Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and many other liturgical churches still require this renunciation as part of confirmation. For some reason it has disappeared from most evangelical churches. You must not only choose the truth but disavow Satan and his lies.”³⁷ Anderson stresses that “*all* [Satan’s] works and *all* his ways need to be renounced as God brings them to our memory” (emphasis in original).³⁸

It is no mystery that most evangelical churches have not retained this rite, since — unlike baptism or communion — it cannot be derived from Scripture alone. But even the traditions that do ritually practice renunciation do not hold that every past sin must be specifically named and renounced.

Clearly, it is Anderson’s counseling experience that provides the true basis for this teaching: “To be completely free from the past, we *have found it necessary* for each person to specifically renounce every false religion, false teacher, false practice and every means of false guidance that he or she has participated in” (emphasis added).³⁹ We are supposed to accept this practice, then, on the basis of Anderson’s experience — even though there is no biblical warrant for it, there are (as we shall see) biblical reasons to question it, and the experiences of other counselors do not lead to Anderson’s conclusion.

The Bible does make a place for disowning past involvements in forbidden activities (Acts 19:18-20). If those activities remain a factor in one’s life, renunciation can be a way of closing doors that had previously been opened. What gives a legalistic, ritualistic, and even magical character to Anderson’s understanding of renunciation is the principle that *every* past involvement (not only of oneself but also of one’s ancestors) must be identified and renounced for one to be free.

Rather than seeing a past involvement in occultism as a *possible* problem in the present because some of the beliefs or practices may be retained (e.g., an ongoing curiosity about horoscopes), Anderson sees it as a definite problem in the present. He insists that Satan gained a foothold in the individual’s life through that involvement that will not be released until the sin is *specifically* identified and renounced. This belief undermines the efficacy of one’s conversion: the initial general repentance from a life of sin and the cleansing of that sin through the blood of Christ are not good enough to free the believer from the power of Satan.

Anderson answers this objection by arguing that although through Christ’s cross, resurrection, and ascension new believers automatically receive all the forgiveness, life, and authority they need, Romans 12:2 tells us that their *minds* are not automatically renewed.⁴⁰ This is true (properly understood), but the point of renunciation as Anderson teaches it is not so much mind renewal as breaking down Satan’s strongholds, something his critics would maintain *was* accomplished at the Cross (Col. 2:14-15; John 12:31; Heb. 2:14). Thus, he has not truly answered their concern.

This is one of many ironies in Anderson’s teaching. His doctrine that Christians no longer have a sin nature is an overstatement of their newness in Christ. But his emphasis that they cannot “break the links of bondage that have chained them to the past” without revisiting and renouncing *every* sin (at least of certain kinds) actually binds them to their old selves ongoingly. For who can exhaust *all* the sins of their past, let alone those of their ancestors? An additional irony is that the entire mission of Anderson’s ministry is to set Christians free, and yet, as we’ve seen, he instead binds them to a superstitious worldview where Satan is not only present on every front,⁴¹ but he must repeatedly be renounced on each and every one of those fronts or he will control them.

STEPPING BACK FURTHER INTO BONDAGE

After laying out his seven steps, Anderson suggests a series of prayers and affirmations that are intended to help his followers maintain their freedom in Christ, but that actually lead them a step further into superstition and fear. His belief that the curses and spells of occultism have real power that can harm Christians plays no small role in this. In his prayer for “Cleansing Home/Apartment,” Anderson instructs

his adherents to pray: "We claim this home for our family as a place of spiritual safety and protection from all the attacks of the enemy. As children of God seated with Christ in the heavenly realm, we command every evil spirit, claiming ground in the structures and furnishings of this place based on the activities of previous occupants to leave and never to return. We renounce all curses and spells utilized against this place."⁴²

In Anderson's worldview, spirits are everywhere. If you have the misfortune of living in a home occupied by nonbelievers, watch out! It's not just the worldly influence such nonbelievers might exert, but, as he makes clear in the above prayer and in his prayer for "Living in a Non-Christian Environment,"⁴³ spirits may have seized the opening provided by nonbelievers to attach themselves to the very spaces and objects of the home. You may be their victim if you don't use prayers like those Anderson suggests to cleanse the home of their influence.

What about when you stay in a hotel where thousands of people with thousands of spiritual histories have slept before you? Anderson observes the following formulae:

When I rent a room in a hotel, it is under my stewardship. I have no idea what occurred in that room before I rent it, so I renounce any previous use of the room that would not please my heavenly Father....Next, I commit the room and all that is in it to the Lord and command Satan and all his evil workers to leave the room in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. Finally, I ask for the Lord's protection while I sleep.⁴⁴

If Anderson cannot even stay in a hotel room without taking such magical and paranoid precautions, how much more superstitious can we expect his less mature and less stable followers to be?

Even in his own home, Anderson is apparently not safe from frightening demonic attacks. One morning when he was getting ready to "expose the strategies of Satan" in a chapel service, Anderson stepped out of the shower to notice "several strange symbols traced on the fogged-up mirror." Suspicious that this was a diabolical attempt to dissuade him from delivering his chapel message, he went down to eat breakfast alone. "Suddenly I felt a slight pain on my hand that made me flinch. I looked down to see what appeared to be two little bite-marks on my hand. 'Is that your best shot?' I said aloud to the powers of darkness attacking me. 'Do you think symbols on the mirror and a little bite are going keep me from giving my message in chapel today? Get out of here.' The nuisance left, and my message in chapel went off without a hitch."⁴⁵ I think it would be fair to say that many of us have had strange experiences that for a moment seemed to be supernatural manifestations of evil. But in the cold light of day, how many of us would print them in a book discussing what Christians might expect to encounter in spiritual warfare?

Anderson also teaches without biblical basis that the medieval Catholic and pagan belief in spirits having sexual relations with humans (*incubi* and *sucubi*) is valid, and, as if it were a common occurrence, he includes it in step one on his check list of possible past sins to be renounced. Showing no concern for the power of suggestion, he encourages his followers to check "sexual spirits" on the list even if they only recall "vivid sexual dreams or fantasies" (who has not at some time had these?).⁴⁶ He instructs his counselors, "Let the Holy Spirit bring those thoughts to their minds, and as He does, let them note the thoughts on the page."⁴⁷ By assuming that the Holy Spirit is supporting his program, he is more likely to accept the product of his counselees' imaginations as the work of the Spirit.

Although Anderson says his teachings are an antidote to fear,⁴⁸ one of the most frequent complaints the Christian Research Institute and similar ministries have received about his ministry is that it instills fear in Christians where none existed before. Many of us have had to reassure Christians terrified of being demonized or molested by spirits while they sleep.

Even some of Anderson's recommended prayers for protection from demonic attack suggest frightening possibilities. In his "Bedtime Prayer," for instance, Anderson has his adherents reciting, "I commit myself to You for Your protection from every attempt of Satan or his emissaries to attack me during sleep."⁴⁹

He assures his readers that Satanists meet from 12:00-3:00 a.m., and "part of their ritual is to summon and send demons. Three in the morning is prime time for demon activity, and if you have awakened at that

time it may be that you have been targeted....You are only vulnerable when you are walking by sight instead of by faith or walking in the flesh instead of in the Spirit.”⁵⁰ Rather than focusing Christians’ attention on Christ and His finished work. Anderson directs them to make a subjective and therefore uncertain judgment as to the quality of their faith and spiritual walk. This only serves to leave them feeling vulnerable to these frightening attacks. Anderson even warns that Christians whose motives are impure for entering into spiritual service can end up demonized?⁵¹

Anderson solemnly advises parents that the creatures their children imagine in their rooms at night are real: “I have traced the origin of many adult problems to childhood fantasies, imaginary friends, games, the occult and abuses. *It is not enough to warn our children about the stranger in the street. What about the one who may appear in their room?* Our research indicates that half of our professing Christian teenagers have had some experience in their room that frightened them” (emphasis added).⁵² To the frustrated mother who checked under the bed and in the closet and found nothing, Anderson answers that something real was there nonetheless.⁵³ “Most of my students at seminary have had such an experience,” he affirms, “and *by the time they complete my class on resolving spiritual conflicts, several tell about having such an experience that semester*” (emphasis added).⁵⁴ Once again, the power he exerts through his own suggestions seems to elude Anderson’s notice.

As we’ve seen, much of the fear and superstition engendered by Anderson’s teachings is related to his central emphasis on renunciation. One additional manifestation of this is the subject of our final installment of this series (which will appear in the next CHRISTIAN RESEARCH JOURNAL). Because the counselee cannot become free in Christ until he or she has renounced every past instance of unforgiveness, involvement in occultism, sexual sin, and so forth, Anderson’s counseling approach invariably leads to a pursuit of lost or repressed memories.⁵⁵ This pursuit of repressed memories has in turn led Anderson down the rabbit hole into a world where things do indeed become “curiouser and curiouser.” It is a world teeming with satanic conspirators who infiltrate churches, ritually abuse children, breed other children for human sacrifice, breed still others to create a satanic “super race,” and — let us not forget — send demons to attack Christians at 3:00 a.m.

NOTES

1. Neil T. Anderson, *Helping Others Find Freedom in Christ* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1995), 247.
2. *Ibid.*, 122.
3. *Ibid.*, 248.
4. *Ibid.*, 143.
5. Dr. Neil Anderson, *Released from Bondage* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), 232.
6. Not to the exclusion of Bible study, of course.
7. For example, Anderson states: “It’s not ‘Neil’s method,’ It is simply God working through the truth of His Word to release people. Thousands of pastors and lay men and women around the world are using the Steps to Freedom to do just that.” (*Released*, 184.) If it’s not ‘Neil’s method.’ where in the Bible or in prior church history do we find the seven steps to freedom identified and laid out?
8. See, e.g., *ibid.*, 10.
9. On the contrary, over the past three decades (as the director of a Christian counseling center and then as a church pastor and a researcher at Christian Research Institute), I have counseled hundreds of Christians experiencing spiritual conflicts without finding corroboration for Anderson’s more controversial methods and claims. Even if we accept that Anderson has accurately reported these stories, we must still ask to what extent his overtly or subtly conveyed expectations condition his counselees’ responses (see Part Four).
10. Neil T. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1990), 172.
11. *Helping*, 115-16.
12. *Bondage Breaker*, 188.
13. *Ibid.*, 150-51.
14. *Ibid.*, 189.
15. *Ibid.*, 100.
16. *Released*, 236.
17. For example: “Now that you are alive in Christ and forgiven, you never have to live a lie or defend yourself. Christ is your defense.” (*Ibid.*, 237.)
18. *Ibid.*, 49-50. See also Neil T. Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness: Realizing the Power of Your Identity in Christ* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), 204.

19. "Twenty-Five Most Popular Questions," Freedom in Christ website, <http://www.ficm.org>.
20. *Released*, 242.
21. *Bondage Breaker*, 196.
22. *Ibid.*, 230.
23. *Released*, 246.
24. *Ibid.*, 247.
25. *Ibid.*, 112.
26. *Ibid.*, 127.
27. *Ibid.*, 250.
28. "These spirits may take territorial rights and associate with certain geographical locations which have been used for satanic purposes." (*Bondage Breaker*, 103.)
29. *Released*, 250-51.
30. *Helping*, 231.
31. *Ibid.*, 229.
32. *Bondage Breaker*, 205-6.
33. In every passage cited by Anderson, the punishment is passed on only if the children perpetuate their parents' sin. In Jeremiah 32 we find the clarification that God rewards "everyone according to his conduct and as his deeds deserve" (v. 19; emphases added). This truth is explicitly and exhaustively explained in Ezekiel ch. 18.
34. *Bondage Breaker*, 207.
35. *Ibid.*, 207-8.
36. Neil Anderson, *Spiritual Conflicts and Biblical Counseling* (videotape on file at Christian Research Institute).
37. *Bondage Breaker*, 188.
38. *Released*, 70.
39. *Helping*, 140.
40. *Ibid.*
41. This is not to say that belief in Satan itself is superstitious. Superstition can be defined as irrationally attributing supernatural causes to events that have natural explanations, and this is what Anderson does through his exaggerated view of Satan's activity (see Part Two).
42. *Bondage Breaker*, 211-12.
43. *Ibid.*, 212.
44. *Helping*, 110.
45. *Bondage Breaker*, 85-86.
46. *Ibid.*, 144-45.
47. *Ibid.*, 145.
48. Dr. Neil Anderson, *Walking in the Light* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), ch. 5.
49. *Bondage Breaker*, 211.
50. *Ibid.*, 102.
51. *Walking*, 164.
52. *Released*, 69.
53. *Helping*, 49.
54. Neil T. Anderson and Steve Russo, *The Seduction of Our Children* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1991), 27.
55. See, e.g., *Helping*, 98.