

Feature Article: DA081

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

### Part One: Sanctification and the Believer's Identity in Christ

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#### SUMMARY: THE PROBLEMS AT A GLANCE

Through his influential ministry, *Freedom in Christ*, Neil T. Anderson brings his so-called captive-freeing message on sanctification and spiritual warfare to Christians worldwide. Although some of his teachings are helpful, many others would be more aptly described as bondage making than as bondage breaking. These are some of the troubling teachings that will be documented in this series:

- Christians no longer possess a sin nature.
- The believer's correct understanding of his or her identity in Christ is the critical issue in Christian sanctification. Christians continue to sin not so much for moral reasons as perceptual: they view themselves as sinners rather than as saints.
- Christians can be and often are *demonized* (indwelt and controlled by demons).
- In order to have victory over the devil, Christians must learn to address him directly, and to do so out loud (since he can't read their minds) — even in public places. By the same token, Christians should be careful about what they say to God out loud, since Satan is listening and could use that information against them.
- Every time one commits certain kinds of sin (e.g., sexual), Satan may gain entrance into one's life. A general repentance of that sin may bring forgiveness, but it will not break any Satanic stronghold. In order to get Satan out of one's life, *every* instance of that sin must be identified and vocally renounced.
- The need to identify and renounce past sins to be free of them is not limited to one's own life but extends back to one's ancestors, which makes adopted children especially vulnerable to demonic strongholds. Anderson assures us, however, that "even an adopted child can become a new creation in Christ."
- Satanic ritual abuse and multiple personality disorder are common problems caused by a vast satanic conspiracy. Anderson claims to have first-hand knowledge that our churches have been infiltrated: "There are breeders out there. We've encountered people who are doctors and lawyers and pastors who are Satanists."

- Satan is so enraged by Anderson’s ministry that he has launched fantastic physical attacks against him, such as biting Anderson on the hand and scrawling a message on his bathroom mirror.
- Although in the Bible curses are strictly the prerogative of God, Anderson attributes real power to satanic curses and teaches they must be canceled through formulaic prayers.
- Among many additional unbiblical, sensational, and fear-instilling ideas found in his books, he teaches that (1) evil spirits often attach themselves to the spaces and furnishings of a home, (2) parents should warn their children that the monsters they fear in their rooms at night are not only real but are demons that must be rebuked in the name of Jesus, and (3) the medieval belief in spirits that have sexual relations with humans (*incubi and succubi*) is not only valid but an experience common enough to be included in the first of his seven “steps of freedom” as a possible past sin to be renounced.

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By the authority I have in Jesus Christ, I now command every familiar spirit and every enemy of the Lord Jesus Christ that is in or around me to leave my presence. (emphasis added)<sup>1</sup>

Can a Christian have a demon? In 1993 I coauthored an article for the *Christian Research Journal* that hoped to answer this question once and for all in the negative.<sup>2</sup> It set forth a positive case for the protection of Christians from demonic invasion and answered several of the best arguments for the demonization of Christians advanced by such deliverance teachers as C. Fred Dickason, Jack Deere, and Mark Bubeck.

The article did *not* address the teachings of Neil T. Anderson, whose ministry — called Freedom in Christ — had been launched only a few years before. While sharing some common assumptions with other deliverance teachers, Anderson took a unique approach to dealing with demons that would have made it difficult to include him in that article. As in the prayer reproduced above (taken from one of his seven “steps to freedom”), Anderson teaches that Christians can have demons, but he also stresses that demonized believers have the authority and responsibility to resist the devil personally rather than relying on other Christians to cast the demons out of them. If Freedom in Christ continued to grow, we recognized that one day we would need to devote an entire article or more to Anderson’s teachings and approach.

That day has come — with a vengeance. Anderson has become one of evangelicalism’s most popular and influential teachers on spiritual warfare. His many books sell briskly in Christian book stores, and at some time in the past few years your local Christian community has likely hosted at least one of his conferences.

While equipping Christians to have victory over the devil is a central goal of Anderson’s teaching, it is far from the only goal. The focus of his ministry is discipleship and pastoral counseling.<sup>3</sup> He succinctly sums up the emphases of his message in the following statement: “Exposing the lie [of Satan] and understanding the battle [with Satan] for the mind is to win half the battle. The other half is having a true knowledge of God and knowing who you are as a child of God.”<sup>4</sup>

In many ways Neil Anderson is a respectable personality and teacher. Formerly the chairman of the Practical Theology department at Talbot School of Theology, he holds doctorates in ministry and education and served as a church pastor for 15 years prior to joining the Talbot faculty. His books — including his foundational works, *Victory over the Darkness* and *The Bondage Breaker* — contain much sound theology, spiritual insight, and practical wisdom. In some respects they have no doubt benefited many who have read them. Nonetheless, as we shall see in this and the two subsequent installments of this series, they also are riddled with seriously flawed assumptions that can lead uncritical Christians into various kinds of bondage — an ironic effect for a ministry whose purpose is to set Christians free.

Anderson’s interest in helping Christians find freedom in Christ was stimulated as he encountered spiritually troubled students at Talbot. In well-attended classes on spiritual conflict resolution he

explored the subjects of spiritual warfare and the believer's identity in Christ. Having developed his ideas and approach in that academic setting, Anderson founded Freedom in Christ Ministries in 1989 to reach a wider public with his message.

### **FREEDOM IN CHRIST MINISTRIES**

The mission of Freedom in Christ is "to boldly and strategically resource leaders world-wide to establish the Church free in Christ. Since its inception, Freedom in Christ Ministries has had the privilege of seeing thousands of changed lives around the world. Priority is given to resourcing pastors, church leaders, missionaries, and those in parachurch ministry in all parts of the world so they may be able to teach others. Churches, mission groups, ministries, Bible colleges, and entire denominations have been equipped and encouraged."<sup>5</sup>

Freedom in Christ has made especially deep inroads into Campus Crusade for Christ and the Conservative Baptists, but their conferences are hosted by churches across the evangelical spectrum, including both Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal. In 1998 conferences are being held throughout North and South America as well as in several locations in Asia and Europe.

On their Web site, 19 staff members are pictured for their international office, and there are regional offices and resource centers throughout the U.S. and in Canada, Australia, England, Europe, Africa, Asia, and the South Pacific that distribute Anderson's books, study guides, and audio and videotaped conferences. There are also people pictured who head "Youth Ministries," "Young Adult Ministries," and "Recovery Ministries."

Anderson is at the head of what he calls "a captive-freeing movement of God which is beginning to grow in the church."<sup>6</sup> He is clearly intent on institutionalizing his distinctive approach to sanctification (growth in holiness) and spiritual warfare into the life of the evangelical church at large — with all the accompanying resource materials, including his books and study guides.<sup>7</sup> To the extent his mission succeeds he will also bring serious polarization and division, since many of his teachings are unconventional and controversial within evangelical circles.

### **THE NATURE OF THE CONTROVERSY**

Controversial components in Anderson's message include not only his teaching that Christians can have demons but also his belief that Christians should speak to the devil, that they must specifically identify and renounce past sins in order to be free of them, that they do not possess a sin nature, that correct self-perception is the key to sanctified living, and that satanic ritual abuse and multiple personality disorder are common problems caused by a vast satanic conspiracy. Also subject to criticism are his methods for finding scriptural, historical, and contemporary support for his claims. This three-part series will address these concerns and will consider both the negative practical consequences of his ministry and positive alternative approaches to dealing with spiritual conflicts.

Anderson is bound to provoke controversy wherever he goes because he combines in one person numerous conflicting elements in today's Christianity. He has one foot planted firmly in conservative Protestant theology, with the other just as firmly planted in the sensationalism, speculation, and subjectivism that have come to characterize significant sectors of the evangelical church. In the same church, therefore, some members likely will be attracted to his message while others probably will be repelled by it.

This mixture of multifarious contemporary Christian components also helps explain Anderson's appeal: there is something in his message for almost everyone. Furthermore, he has charted virtually the entire spiritual life, making it intellectually apprehendable and laying out practical steps to victory over a wide range of psychospiritual problems. This appeals to pastors as well as to struggling Christians, for they don't have to sit there feeling helpless when confronted with a difficult counseling situation — they can lead the counselee through the steps to freedom. Add to this the fact that Anderson appears to be balanced: recognizing the reality and role of the supernatural in today's world without abdicating

personal responsibility for one's actions; recognizing the truths uncovered by modern psychology without abdicating a biblical frame of reference.

Those mainstream evangelicals who resonate with these and other aspects of his message tend to overlook, rationalize, or minimize the elements that conflict with their traditional views. Thus many Christian leaders have endorsed his message without fully understanding its controversial dimensions.

Anderson himself is a master at perpetuating this uncritical attitude. Not only do the many good things he has to say tend to create the impression that he is a reliable teacher, but he also preempts criticism by frequently speaking against the very excesses that might be linked to him. For example, since he warns his readers to avoid fear of, or preoccupation with, demons,<sup>8</sup> it is easy to assume he must not be a promoter of that very error. It is not enough to warn against an excess in one place, however, if in another place one's teachings naturally lead to that excess, and in this case his do.<sup>9</sup> Although Anderson persuasively projects *the image* of a responsible, balanced teacher, he often does not deliver on the *substance* of the same.

I do not mean to suggest that Anderson deliberately lulls his audience into a state of passive acceptance and then slips in his controversial teachings. The root problem with his teaching appears rather to be logical inconsistency. In other words, it seems that, to his credit, he has a sense for what balanced theology should look like and sincerely tries to stay within those parameters, thus inspiring confidence in his hearers. Unfortunately, he then proceeds to engage in logical fallacies, such as equivocation and question-begging,<sup>10</sup> that cause him to contradict his professions of balance in ways that neither he nor many of his audience apparently recognize. Anderson thus provides an object lesson that even when a teacher introduces a subject by saying all the right things, it remains important to keep one's critical faculties in gear.

The problems with Anderson's message and method are not merely extraneous but fundamental; they are not isolated but show up frequently in each of his books. His message is essentially comprised of his teachings on sanctification (as originally set forth in *Victory over the Darkness*) and spiritual warfare (as originally set forth in *The Bondage Breaker*). The two theologies are logically related and interdependent. Flawed assumptions lie at the heart of both.

Anderson's teaching on sanctification (the subject of this installment) centers on the believer's identity in Christ. It is unusual and troubling in two respects: (1) it denies that the Christian still possesses a sin nature; (2) it teaches that correct self-perception is *the* critical issue for holy and victorious Christian living.

### SAINTS WHO OCCASIONALLY SIN

Anderson's most foundational teaching is that Christians are "saints who occasionally sin": "Many Christians refer to themselves as sinners saved by grace. But are you really a sinner? Is that your scriptural identity? Not at all. God doesn't call you a sinner, He calls you a saint — a holy one."<sup>11</sup> If Christians are saints rather than sinners, does that mean they do not have a sin nature? Anderson answers *yes*:

The moment you said yes to Christ your old self was gone.<sup>12</sup>

I have been spiritually circumcised. My old unregenerate nature has been removed" (Col. 2:11).<sup>13</sup>

When you came into spiritual union with God through your new birth, you didn't *add* a new, divine nature to your old, sinful nature. You *exchanged* natures. (emphases in original)<sup>14</sup>

At salvation God changed our very essence; we became "partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust" (2 Peter 1:4).<sup>15</sup>

Anderson takes forensic (legal) language from Romans 6 and related passages (the crucifixion of the "old man" with Christ) as describing the literal abolishing of the believer's sin nature: "As a child of God, a

saint, you are no longer under the authority of your old Old Man [sic]. He is dead, buried, gone forever.... When you were born again, your old self died and your new self came to life, and you were made a partaker of Christ's divine nature."<sup>16</sup> He also interprets New Testament references to Christians as *saints* (holy ones) more as referring to an *imparted* (actual) holiness than to an *imputed* (legally transferred from Christ's account) holiness: "A saint is literally a holy person....You were 'sanctified in Christ' — made a saint by *participating in the life* of the only true holy one, Jesus Christ" (emphasis added).<sup>17</sup>

One almost feels one is reading a Roman Catholic writer at times because of the lack of emphasis on the legal or positional basis for believers being called saints or holy. In *Walking in the Light* he writes: "It isn't what we do for God externally that gets us into heaven. It's what God has done for us internally."<sup>18</sup> In *Victory* he explicitly states that "the inner change, justification, is effected at the moment of salvation," and then adds that "the progressive work of sanctification is only fully effective when the *radical, inner transformation* of justification is realized and appropriated by faith" (emphases added).<sup>19</sup> In these and other places,<sup>20</sup> he seems to fuse the extrinsic act of God called justification (on which the Christian's relationship with God is based) with the intrinsic act of God called regeneration (in which the Christian's relationship with God is empirically established). This allows him to reason that since Christians are declared to be perfectly righteous in God's sight they must actually be perfectly righteous in their true nature.<sup>21</sup>

Like many Catholics, Anderson seems to believe that one's inner transformation adds to one's justification before God: "The reason Satan's accusations [of unworthiness] are groundless is because God has solved the problem of our filthy garments....God has not only declared us righteous, but He has removed our filthy garments of unrighteousness and clothed us with His righteousness....In ourselves we don't have any garments of righteousness to put on that will *satisfy* God. He must *change us* in response to our submission to Him in faith" (emphases added).<sup>22</sup>

### The Flesh: Sinful or Sin-Trained?

It is important to clarify that Anderson does *not* deny the ongoing reality of sin in the life of the believer: "The New Testament clearly states that we are saints who sin. Any child of God who says he doesn't sin is called a liar (1 John 1:8). But we are not to focus on one another's sins. Instead we are called to perceive the Christlike nature in each other, believe in each other as saints and build each other up."<sup>23</sup>

To explain how there can be sin where there is only a Christlike nature, Anderson makes a distinction between the concepts of the sin nature and the *flesh*:

Where does sin mount its attack to keep me from doing what I really want to do? My flesh, my *learned independence*, continues to promote rebellion against God (Jas. 4:1). (emphasis added)<sup>24</sup>

Some have equated the terms "old nature" and "flesh." The *New International Version* (NIV) sometimes translates the word for flesh (*sarx*) as "old nature," then footnotes the literal translation as "flesh." I understand why the translators have done this, since flesh describes how I used to behave as a natural person. And since the flesh remains after salvation, it seems logical that the old nature also remains.

But I am no longer a natural person. I am a spiritual person in Christ. That is my true nature. When I choose to walk according to the old way in which I was *trained* before conversion, such behavior violates my new nature....

If you want to refer to your flesh as your old nature, I won't wrangle with you over terms. But I will contend for the biblical truth that the *residual* effects of who I was in Adam are no longer part of my true identity in Christ (emphases added).<sup>25</sup>

Your flesh, that part of you which was trained to live independently of God before you met Christ, did not die either. You still have memories, habits, conditioned responses, and thought patterns ingrained in your brain which prompt you to focus on your own interests. You are no longer *in the flesh as your old self* was; you are now in Christ. But you can still choose to *walk according to the flesh* (Romans 8:12, 13), complying with those old urges to serve yourself instead of God. It is your responsibility to crucify the flesh

(Romans 8:13) on a daily basis by learning to walk according to the Spirit (Galatians 5:16) and by repatterning your old thoughts by allowing your mind to be renewed (Romans 12:2).

Even though you are dead to sin, sin's strong appeal may still cause you to struggle with feeling that you are more alive to sin than you are to Christ. (emphases in original)<sup>26</sup>

Anderson employs language never found in Scripture when he writes of the fleshly man indulging "his physical appetites at the whim of his *sin-trained* flesh" (emphasis added),<sup>27</sup> and later comments that the new Christian "is still the unwitting victim of a *thoroughly-trained* flesh which only knows how to operate independent of God" (emphasis added).<sup>28</sup> If the flesh is merely a part of our brains that has been trained to live independently from God, then we are left with the prospect that the flesh is redeemable: that same part of our brains could and should be Spirit-trained to live according to God's will. Scripture, however, tells us that the flesh is inherently hostile to God and the things of the Spirit (Gal. 5:17; Rom. 8:7). The flesh is sinful, not sin-trained. Given Anderson's definition of the flesh, it is no wonder that in teaching on sanctification his central emphasis is the "renewing of the mind" (see below). Despite his verbal assent to crucifying the flesh, he does not truly call for crucifying it but rather reforming (i.e., reprogramming) it.

When Anderson refers to the "residual" effects of the bygone Adamic nature and optimistically states that saints only *occasionally* sin, he demonstrates a surprising lack of appreciation for the scope of sin (it includes the thoughts of the heart as well as deeds; acts of omission as well as commission; indeed, anything that falls short of God's perfect holiness — Gen. 6:5; Matt. 5:21–22, 27–28; 15:18–20; James 4:17; Rom. 3:23), its depth — even within the Christian's heart, and the frequency with which it manifests itself (e.g., Rom. 7:21; James 3:2). Certainly, a mere residual mindset and lifestyle from the past is insufficient to account for the intractable bent toward corruption with which not only the apostle Paul in Romans 7 but I daresay every Christian on the face of the earth contends (in one form or another).

Despite such minimizing statements on sin's place and power in the Christian's life, Anderson turns around and acknowledges that sin has a "strong appeal." In a chart on "The Fleshly Person," he cites Romans 8:8 and says of the flesh: "The ingrained habit patterns still appeal to the mind to live independent of God."<sup>29</sup> If Christians only had a Christlike nature, however, there would be nothing to which those ingrained habit patterns could appeal (see sidebar).

### What Happened at the Fall?

At a more fundamental level, the defect in Anderson's doctrines of man and sin lies in his understanding of what happened to human nature at the Fall. According to Anderson,<sup>30</sup> the result of Adam's sin was that he died spiritually. This spiritual condition was passed on to his descendants, and so each human being is born separated from God. Lacking the presence and wisdom of God in their lives, humans must learn to live and meet their legitimate needs independent of Him. They seek to find purpose and meaning in the natural world because that's all they have, and as a result their minds are programmed by it. Furthermore, their necessary preoccupation with the interests of self (how else can they survive?) conditions them to be self-centered. Sinfulness is thus a behavior man *learns* as a result of the condition (separation from God) into which he is born.

Notice how Anderson describes the difference between the old and the new self: "Your old self — the sinner — and your old nature — characterized by the sin which was inevitable since you were separated from God — are gone forever because you are no longer separated from God."<sup>31</sup> Later he adds that "sin is living our lives independent of God."<sup>32</sup> Throughout his books, this is the way he prefers to describe sin, rather than describing it, say, as lawlessness (1 John 3:4) or unrighteousness (1 John 5:17). According to Anderson, all desires are inherently good (even the desire for knowledge and power that drives occultism<sup>33</sup>), but evil emerges when people look to the wrong resource to meet those needs. He doesn't seem to recognize that some desires are inherently evil (e.g., prideful ambition and the desires to sexually exploit, have power over, or harm others).

If the sin nature is understood in terms of depravity (inclination toward evil), then by this view not only does the Christian lack a sin nature — so does fallen man! Anderson takes one aspect of man’s fallen nature, separation from God, and makes it the sole defining feature. As a result fallen man is primarily *deprived* rather than *depraved*.<sup>34</sup> He is not positively evil to begin with; he lacks a relationship with God, and things just keep going downhill from there. Scripture, however, teaches the inherent depravity — the positive evil — of the human heart from the moment of conception (Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Ps. 51:5; Eccl. 9:3; Jer. 17:9<sup>35</sup>; Eph. 2:3).

### **“Be Transformed by the Reprogramming of Your Minds”**

Anderson’s simplistic understanding of the old and new natures (relationship with God or lack thereof being the only essential features) explains why he believes that Christians no longer have sin natures — they now have a relationship with God. They must only contend with the “residue” of their old sin natures: the ingrained patterns of thought and behavior he identifies as the flesh. Thus his most central answer to the problem of the flesh is to “renew the mind.” Given his belief that sinful behavior is rooted in conditioning,<sup>36</sup> the extrabiblical, computer-age concept of programming (which appeals to him as a former aerospace engineer<sup>37</sup>) becomes the *essence* of sanctification:

Paul...admonishes us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds ([Rom.]12:2) because, before we came to Christ, our minds were programmed to live independent of God. In progressive sanctification, we have to assume our responsibility to reprogram our minds to the truth of God’s Word.

Like a computer, our brains record the experiences we have in life. Newborn babies come into this world with a clean slate. The only world they know is what they can see, hear, feel, taste, and smell. Nothing has been programmed into their computer....They have neither the presence of God in their lives nor the knowledge of His ways. So during their early and formative years, they learn to live independent of God. In later years, when these individuals come to Christ, their minds are still programmed to live independent of God. There is no “delete” or “clear” button, that can be pushed to get rid of old thinking patterns; hence, the need to renew (reprogram) their minds.<sup>38</sup>

If the strongholds in your mind are the result of conditioning, then you can be reconditioned by the renewing of your mind. *Anything that has been learned can be unlearned.* Certainly this is the major path of renewal in the New Testament. Through the preaching of God’s Word, Bible study and personal discipleship you stop being conformed to this world and experience the transformation of the renewing of your mind (Rom. 12:2). (emphasis added)<sup>39</sup>

The problem with Anderson’s view is not his emphasis on internalizing Scripture, which certainly does play a critical role in Christian sanctification (see Scriptures cited in the sidebar; also John 17:17; 1 Pet. 2:2). The problem is rather that it is a simplistic view of sanctification, derived from his simplistic view of the Fall. If the flesh is not merely residual conditioning but an ongoing natural, powerful drive toward evil, then renewing the mind with positive scriptural affirmations — as Anderson teaches — will eventually prove inadequate. If one does not recognize the depth of one’s problem one cannot be expected to overcome it. The biblical answer to the flesh is far more radical: it needs to be put to death (see sidebar).

### **CORRECT SELF-PERCEPTION**

Having laid the foundation that Christians are not sinners but saints who occasionally sin, Anderson proceeds to build his ministry on that premise. His key emphasis is that believers need to understand who they really are in Christ. Correct self-perception is the linchpin of Anderson’s approach to sanctification: “I believe wholeheartedly that your hope for growth, meaning and fulfillment as a Christian is based on understanding who you are — specifically your identity in Christ as a child of God. Your understanding of who you are is the critical foundation for your belief structure and your behavior patterns as a Christian.”<sup>40</sup>

Indeed, Anderson has introduced a new essential into the core objects of Christian faith. Again and again, one's own identity is listed right alongside the character of God or the saving work of Jesus Christ.<sup>41</sup> In his system, self-perception becomes the central problem in the spiritual life. Spiritual warfare is primarily engaged over this subject.<sup>42</sup> The good news is on that point.<sup>43</sup> Thus, self-interest lies at the core of his theology.

Why should self-perception be so important? In *Victory*, Anderson lays out his theory in great detail:

Understanding your identity in Christ is absolutely essential to your success at living the Christian life. No person can consistently behave in a way that's inconsistent with the way he perceives himself. If you think you're a no-good bum, you'll probably live like a no-good bum. But if you see yourself as a child of God who is spiritually alive in Christ, you'll begin to live in victory and freedom as He lived. Next to a knowledge of God, a knowledge of who you are is by far the most important truth you can possess....

Satan's deception concerning your identity is his major weapon against your growth and maturity in Christ.<sup>44</sup>

You must see yourself as a child of God in order to live like a child of God.<sup>45</sup>

If you see yourself as a sinner you will sin; what would you expect a sinner to do?...We become saints at the moment of salvation (justification) and live as saints in our daily experience (sanctification) as we continue to believe what God has done and as we continue to affirm who we really are in Christ.<sup>46</sup>

Anderson does believe that sanctification is a supernatural work of God. But, despite occasional attempts to bring balance,<sup>47</sup> his *emphasis* on self-perception could allow the skeptic to argue that the power of positive thinking (or "positive believing," as he puts it<sup>48</sup>) is sufficient to explain the changes in Christians' lives. Whether or not one *is* a child of God could seem immaterial — if one *believes* this to be the case, his or her behavior will conform to that belief.<sup>49</sup>

Anderson would no doubt respond that if Christians did not have a new nature, no amount of positive thinking could change their behavior. But this reply would raise an additional concern. Although I do not mean to suggest that Anderson is a New Ager, his view of self-perception is uncomfortably similar to New Age philosophy. For New Agers, each person is a god or perfect by nature, but he or she is blocked from experiencing the benefits of that fact by ignorance. For Anderson, each Christian is a saint or holy by nature, but he or she is blocked from experiencing the benefits of that fact by ignorance. For both, correct self-perception is the answer — a cognitive rather than a volitional (moral) solution.

### "I'm Special"

Not only does Anderson believe that *self*-perception determines one's behavior, he also maintains that one's perception of *others* greatly determines their behavior: "If we see people as losers we will begin to believe that they are losers. And if we believe they are losers we will treat them like losers and they will mirror our behavior and act like losers. But if we perceive our brothers and sisters in Christ as redeemed, righteous saints, we will treat them as saints and they will be greatly helped in behaving as saints."<sup>50</sup> Again, psychological reinforcement is made to sound more important than moral appeal.

"Once accepted and affirmed, people will make themselves accountable to authority," Anderson assures us.<sup>51</sup> At times he is reminiscent of Robert Schuller, who teaches that "by nature we are fearful, not bad."<sup>52</sup> Anderson's emphasis on identity is basically a self-esteem emphasis, as is Schuller's. When he preaches self-esteem based on being a Christian ("You're beginning to think you're someone special as a Christian, you're thinking right — you *are* special!"<sup>53</sup>), Anderson sounds like Robert Schuller with a more biblical orientation. But is placing such a premium on self-esteem — which began with the theories of humanistic psychologists such as Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and Rollo May — itself biblical?

Anderson, of course, would answer yes. He provides a series of positive self-affirmations based on Scripture to boost the believer's self-image and feelings of worth (e.g., "I am the light of the world....I am a child of God....I am a joint heir with Christ, sharing His inheritance with Him....I am chosen of God, holy and dearly



loved”<sup>54</sup>). Clearly, Anderson has no qualms about incorporating into Christian discipleship pop psychology’s debatable proposition that repeating positive affirmations improves self-image and confidence:

One of the greatest ways to help yourself grow into maturity in Christ is to continually remind yourself who you are in Him. In my conferences we do this by reading the Who Am I? list aloud together. I suggest that you go back and read it aloud to yourself right now. Read the list once or twice a day for a week or two. Read it when you think that Satan is trying to deceive you into believing you are a worthless failure. The more you reaffirm who you are in Christ, the more your behavior will begin to reflect your true identity.<sup>55</sup>

No doubt one’s perception of oneself or others will to some extent influence behavior, and there is a place for affirming one’s own identity in Christ (properly understood) and being affirmative with others. But the Bible appeals much more to one’s conscience (sense of obligation to do what is right in God’s sight) and spiritual need as incentives for behavioral change (e.g., Eph. 4:17–5:17; 1 Thess. 4:1–12; Titus 3:14; 2 Pet. 1:3–11). Under the rationale of providing a balanced, holistic approach to Christian development that takes into consideration both natural and supernatural factors (“all truth is God’s truth”), Anderson has to a large extent psychologized the Christian life. His emphases on mental conditioning (i.e., programming), self-perception, self-esteem, affirmations, and so forth all employ a twentieth century psychological grid for interpreting biblical teaching on sanctification and discipleship.

The field of psychology offers some valid insights into human behavior, but its grid is fundamentally different from biblical teaching on the spiritual life.<sup>56</sup> It’s a matter of emphasis. Anderson repeatedly puts the cognitive ahead of the volitional and thus ends up doing to the gospel something not unlike what Schuller<sup>57</sup> and Norman Vincent Peale did before him, even if in doing so he more strictly employs evangelical terminology and motifs.

### In Search of a Good Proof Text

Anderson’s “Who Am I?” and “Since I Am in Christ” lists convey many helpful truths about God and His covenant relationship with His people. But his *emphasis* on the believer’s identity — as though that is the key aspect — orientates everything around a subjective, self-centered perspective. This leads to a distorted understanding of the Christian’s relationship with God.

He writes,

Being “in Christ” is the core theological foundation for discipleship and counseling.... Because human life is lived according to what we believe, this essential truth of who we are in Christ is tremendously important. Our attitudes, responses and reactions to the circumstances of life are determined by our conscious or subconscious self-perceptions. No one can consistently behave in a way that is inconsistent with how he or she perceives himself to be. If Christians are no different inwardly from non-Christians, or if they *perceive* themselves to be no different, then life will be lived at best in a mediocre manner, with very little distinction between Christians and non-Christians. (emphasis in original)<sup>58</sup>

Anderson is correct that being “in Christ” is the core theological foundation for discipleship and counseling. For Paul, however, this phrase does not so much speak about who we *are* as who we are *in*. Self-perception is not the key issue, but rather relationship. Anderson takes this truth and slants it so that it becomes a “biblical” form of self-esteem psychology.

As a logical extension of Anderson’s theology, simple Christian discipleship becomes a psychotherapeutic task: “Paul explains why [the carnal Christians in 1 Corinthians 3:1–3] could not receive [the solid food of the Word of God]. They *were getting their identities from men* and walking like mere men with conflicts of jealousies and strifes. Until we *help people resolve these conflicts and establish their identities in Christ*, they will not be able to receive solid food no matter how well we preach or teach” (emphases added).<sup>59</sup>

Almost invariably, the biblical proof texts (e.g., Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:16; Col. 1:27; Eph. 1:18–19) that Anderson cites in support of the importance of the believer’s *identity*<sup>60</sup> actually refer to the believer’s *relationship*

with Christ — he shifts the Bible’s emphasis on God or Christ to an emphasis on self. After quoting 2 Peter 1:3–10 he comments, “According to Peter, they have forgotten who they are. They are out of touch with their true identity and purpose in Christ.”<sup>61</sup> Actually, Peter says the problem with these individuals is that they’ve forgotten what *God* has done for them in cleansing their past sins (v. 9).

He seemingly comes closer to finding a proof text for his view in 1 John ch. 3. Concerning v. 3, “Every one who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure,”<sup>62</sup> Anderson comments: “No person can consistently behave in a way that is inconsistent with how he perceives himself.”<sup>63</sup> Although he fails to note it, the previous two verses do speak about believers’ identities as children of God. Nonetheless, this verse also fails to establish Anderson’s case. It does not state that believers are moved to purity through the *correct perception* of their saintly identities in the *here and now* but rather through the *confident hope* that they will partake in *Christ’s* perfect moral *nature* in the *future*. Although John does speak about the believer’s identity as a child of God, he simply does not give this fact the psychological application on which Anderson has built his entire ministry.

Not only do Anderson’s proof texts fail to show that seeing oneself as a sinner produces sinful behavior, but many other Bible passages pointedly contradict such a notion. Both in the Old and New Testaments, great saints often expressed an acute consciousness of being great sinners (especially on those clarity-producing occasions when they came face-to-face with the Holy One of Israel):

Job: “I am unworthy — how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth.”  
(Job 40:4)

Isaiah: “Woe to me!”...“I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.”  
(Isa. 6:5)

Peter: “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” (Luke 5:8)

Paul: “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”  
(Rom. 7:24)  
“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners — of whom I am the worst”  
(1 Tim. 1:15)

Almost 100 years ago, theologian A. H. Strong offered an explanation for this arresting phenomenon that might seem disconcerting at the present time, when the siren song of self-esteem psychology is so alluring that even the church is not immune. Nonetheless, it has the ring of biblical and experiential truth: “It is a remarkable fact that, while those who are enlightened by the Holy Spirit and who are actually overcoming their sins see more and more of the evil of their hearts and lives, those who are the slaves of sin see less and less of that evil, and often deny that they are sinners at all.”<sup>64</sup>

I do not mean to imply that Neil Anderson is a “slave of sin.” But I do mean to warn that those who embrace his teaching on the believer’s identity risk developing a dangerous dullness to their true spiritual condition.

Next issue, in Part Two: Spiritual Warfare and the Seven Steps to Freedom.

## NOTES

1. Neil T. Anderson, *Helping Others Find Freedom in Christ* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1995), 234–35.
2. Brent Grimsley and Elliot Miller, “Can a Christian Be ‘Demonized’?” *Christian Research Journal*, Summer 1993, 16–19, 37–38. (Photocopies available on request from CRI.)
3. Neil T. Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness: Realizing the Power of Your Identity in Christ* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), 10.
4. Dr. Neil Anderson, *Released from Bondage* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), 14.
5. “About Freedom in Christ Ministries,” Freedom in Christ web site, <http://www.freedominchrist.com>.
6. *Released*, 10.
7. Anderson discusses this goal in *Helping*, 247–48.
8. As he does in, e.g., *The Bondage Breaker* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1990), 71, 77.
9. Examples of Anderson inciting fear of demons will be found in Part Two and especially in Part Three.
10. Examples will be provided throughout this series.

11. *Victory*, 44-45.
12. *Ibid.*, 42-43.
13. *Ibid.*, 59. This is the 22d among 29 otherwise perfectly biblical affirmations.
14. *Ibid.*, 73.
15. *Bondage Breaker*, 45.
16. *Victory*, 79-80.
17. *Ibid.*, 44.
18. Dr. Neil Anderson, *Walking in the Light* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), 48.
19. *Victory*, 71-72.
20. See, e.g., *ibid.*, 84-85.
21. An unambiguous statement of forensic justification is set forth in his *The Common Made Holy*. ([Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1997], 64-67.) But since the book is coauthored with theologian Robert L. Saucy (who may well be responsible for the improved theology), and since the problematic statements noted in Anderson's other books have not been revised, Anderson's teaching on justification remains a cause for concern.
22. *Bondage Breaker*, 144.
23. *Victory*, 63-64.
24. *Ibid.*, 83-84.
25. *Ibid.*, 75.
26. *Bondage Breaker*, 45-46.
27. *Victory*, 95.
28. *Ibid.*, 98.
29. *Ibid.*, 94.
30. Documentation for the assertions made in this paragraph can be found in *Bondage Breaker*, 43; *Walking*, 72; *Common*, 327; *Helping*, 68.
31. *Victory*, 77.
32. *Ibid.*, 81.
33. *Bondage Breaker*, 114.
34. In *Walking* (90), Anderson attempts to clarify his position: "Do I believe in the depravity of man? I certainly do. I believe I was utterly dead in my trespasses and sins, separated from God, and there was nothing I could do about it." Note however that his definition of depravity does not include the essential characteristic of a positive inclination toward evil, but is rather basically characterized as "separation from God." This only underscores my point that, for Anderson, fallenness is essentially a state of deprivation and not depravity.
35. In *Common*, Anderson and Saucy acknowledge this verse in a discussion of the human heart. Although their comments sound more like the traditional view of human depravity than do Anderson's other works, they are ambiguous enough to be compatible with those works. They still affirm that the heart "has been conditioned, from the time of birth, by the deceitfulness of a fallen world rather than by the truth of God's Word." (79; emphasis added.)
36. Scripture teaches instead that it is rooted in the human heart (e.g., Mark 7:21-23), and thus its primary solution is a new heart (Ezek. 36:26-27; Heb. 8:10) rather than a program of mental reconditioning.
37. Anderson admitted as much in a January 1998 teaching on "Mental Strongholds" at a "Teaching Directors Conference" (tape on file).
38. *Common*, 150-51.
39. *Victory*, 166-67.
40. *Ibid.*, 18.
41. See, e.g., *Bondage Breaker*, 83; Neil T. Anderson and Steve Russo, *The Seduction of Our Children* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1991), 123.
42. *Victory*, 71. See also *Bondage Breaker*, 42.
43. See, e.g., *Bondage Breaker*, 153-54.
44. *Victory*, 43-44.
45. *Ibid.*, 50.
46. *Bondage Breaker*, 44.
47. E.g., *ibid.*, 192.
48. *Victory*, ch. 6.
49. Another good example of teaching that could be construed this way is found in *Seduction*, 20.
50. *Ibid.*, 63.
51. *Ibid.*, 234-35.
52. Robert H. Schuller, *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1982), 66.
53. *Victory*, 49.
54. *Ibid.*, 45-47.
55. *Ibid.*, 47-48.
56. See the four-part series by Bob and Gretchen Passantino, "Psychology and the Church," that appeared in the *Christian Research Journal* (Winter 1993-Fall 1995).
57. See Joseph P. Gudel, "A New Reformation? The Faulty Gospel of Robert Schuller," *Forward*, Spring 1985, 16-25. (Photocopies available on request from CRI.)
58. *Helping*, 71.
59. *Ibid.*, 112.

60. *Ibid.*, 14, 17.
61. *Victory*, 144.
62. Scripture quotations in this article and sidebar are taken either from the New International Version or the New American Standard Bible.
63. *Walking*, 178.
64. Augustus Hopkins Strong, D.D. LL D., *Systematic Theology* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1907), 576.

## **SIDEBAR: How to Win the War Within**

The apostle Paul says that the law of sin dwells “in [our] members” (Rom. 7:23) and further exhorts us not to let it reign in our mortal bodies (Rom. 6:12), suggesting that it is present there. If the *principle* of sin remains with us, and the term *sin nature* refers to this principle, then how can Neil Anderson maintain that Christians no longer have a sin nature?

Anderson gets into theological trouble because of his inadequate understanding of what the term *nature* means. Nature here refers to one’s disposition, inclination, or bent — the principle or law that governs one’s behavior. When Anderson writes that “no person can consistently behave in a way that is inconsistent with how he perceives himself,”<sup>1</sup> he fails to recognize that it is not one’s *self-perception* but rather one’s *nature* with which one cannot behave inconsistently. If Christians had only a Christlike nature they could only behave like Christ.

The reason Christians are capable of *both* righteousness *and* sin is that they have two natures from which to draw. Now, there is another, larger sense in which the term *nature* is used that refers to an entity’s collection of defining attributes. In this sense, all human beings have only *one* nature that includes one moral faculty that is capable of *both* good and evil. Using the narrower sense of the term *nature* (disposition determined by principle or law), this moral faculty takes the form of the *sin nature* when it is governed by evil and the *new nature* when it is governed by good.

In addition to the orientation around the interests of self that all mortals possess, Christians are given an additional orientation around the interests of God. The new orientation inclines them toward good and thus wages war with their original orientation, which inclines them toward evil. The New Testament clearly describes Christians in a state of inner conflict in which they must deny one set of natural inclinations or the other (see Gal. 5:16–17; Rom. 7:15–25; James 4:1–3; 1 Pet. 2:11).

It isn’t as though Christians start out with three-fourths of the original nature and one-fourth of the new and must work to decrease and increase the respective percentages. The old nature is still there in its full strength and ugliness — but they are no longer slaves to it. They can and must choose daily which orientation they are going to “clothe” themselves with or “put on” (Rom. 13:14; Eph. 4:22–24; Col 3:1–14). Sanctification consists of increasingly learning to live according to the new capacity, which is accomplished as the Word of God is applied to every area of one’s life<sup>2</sup> (e.g., Ps. 119:11, 105; James 1:22–27; Heb. 4:2; 5:12–14; 1 John 2:4–5).

The Bible calls the old nature *sin* or the *flesh*. The new nature is referred to as the *spirit*, and the individual as determined by these natures is identified either as the *old man* (*self*: NIV, NASB) or the *new man*. The spirit is the moral nature of Christ, just as the flesh is the moral nature of Adam after the Fall that he passed on to his descendants. Christ is the second man, the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:42–50). All human beings are identified with Adam by birth and thus do by nature the things that Adam would do. Those who are identified with Christ by faith and second birth have transferred from the headship of Adam to that of Christ (Rom. 5:12–21), and now, by the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ, have a second nature to do what He would do. In the next world, this will be the only possibility. But in this world, sin remains “in my members.” By this, Scripture is teaching that the very fact of human mortality carries with it not only physical corruptibility, but moral corruptibility as well.

It is because of the spiritual corruptibility that is inseparable from the mortal body that Paul cries, “Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Rom. 7:24), and that believers, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, “groan inwardly” as they eagerly await the redemption of their bodies from mortality to immortality (Rom. 8:23). As long as we remain in our mortal state we will also remain vulnerable to the tendencies to corruption that define mortality.<sup>3</sup> Anderson’s insistence that mortal believers no longer have a sin nature is therefore as much a non sequitur as the insistence of “faith” teachers that mortal believers should live perfectly free of sickness and physical deterioration.

This inextricable relationship of the sinful nature to our mortal bodies is why Paul calls the sin nature the “flesh.” It is human nature apart from the redeeming influence of the Spirit of God, and thus Paul can say, “I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh” (Rom. 7:19). Since sin remains “right there with” every believer (Rom. 7:21), he or she must make a conscious choice to walk according to the new nature and mortify in his or her day-to-day life that which forensically and ultimately was put to death on the cross (Rom. 8:13; Gal. 5:24; Col. 3:5).

1 John 1:8 specifically states, “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.” Note that John speaks of *having* sin, not *committing* sin. The term *sin* in its singular form is frequently used in the New Testament to refer to a principle or law that results in acts of disobedience rather than specific acts of disobedience themselves (John 8:34; Acts 8:23; Rom. 5:12–21; 6:2, 6–7, 10–23; 7:7–27; 8:2; Gal. 3:22; Heb. 12:1, 4).

Anderson responds to this observation by arguing, “‘Having’ sin and ‘being’ sin are two totally different concepts.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, they are. But those who argue that Christians still have a sin nature do not claim that Christians are sin. If Christians *were* sin they would be incapable of anything but evil. But if they *have* sin it means that they possess a disposition toward evil that must be counteracted by the new disposition toward good they’ve received in Christ. Only if sinning is rooted in natures they will continue to possess for the rest of their lives does the apostle John’s statement make sense. If, as Anderson teaches, sin is merely rooted in conditioning that can be changed, it is theoretically possible to stop sinning permanently – which would contradict 1 John 1:8.

The Bible does generally call Christians saints and not sinners (believers are called sinners in 1 Timothy 1:15, James 4:1–9, 5:19–20, and Galatians 2:17) because the term *sinner* usually connotes someone whose life is *characterized* by unrepentant sin (e.g., 1 Tim. 1: 9; 1 Pet. 4:18). The apostle John referred to this kind of sin when he affirmed that someone who is born of God does not sin (1 John 3:9). But it is no more unbiblical for us to say we are sinners than it was for Paul in 1 Timothy 1:15,<sup>5</sup> for “nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh.”

Anderson makes a gallant attempt to reconcile his doctrine of sin to one of its most difficult biblical challenges – Romans 7: “Notice that there is only one player in these two verses [15-16] – the ‘I,’ mentioned nine times. Notice also that this person has a good heart; he agrees with the law of God. But this good-hearted Christian has a behavior problem....He agrees with God but ends up doing the very things he hates.” After quoting vv. 17–21 Anderson asks, “How many players are involved now? Two: sin and me. But sin is clearly not me; it’s only dwelling in me....Do these verses say that I am no good, that I am evil or that I am sin? Absolutely not. They say that I have something dwelling in me which is no good, evil and sinful, but it’s not me.”<sup>6</sup>

Paul’s dissociation of himself from the evil within him is not to deny that that evil is part of his own nature (see, e.g., vv. 14, 17, 18, 21). His point in Romans 7 is rather to illustrate the crisis the child of God eventually reaches where, even after his or her mind has become fully possessed by desire for the things of God, *still* he or she cannot break the shackles of sin (see, e.g., v. 18). Such experiences demonstrate the principle that sin is fused into his or her very mortality and, therefore, will power is insufficient to bring deliverance. Paul discusses the Christian’s only recourse in the larger context of Romans 6:1–8:4: to identify by faith with Christ. Because they have judicially been executed for their sin in the person of Christ and are therefore no longer under the law of God (which excites the sin nature into action), their lives need and should no longer be dominated by sin, but rather by the grace of God (Rom. 6:1–8:4). As Paul triumphantly concludes, “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death” (Rom. 8:2).

In *Victory* Anderson never explains exactly who this second “player” that is not “me,” but dwells “in me,” is. His answer is provided in *Released from Bondage*:

I personally believe that the word *sin* in Romans 6:12 is personified, referring to the person of Satan . . . Satan is sin: the epitome of evil, the prince of darkness, the father of lies. I would have a hard time understanding how only a principle (as opposed to an evil personal influence) would reign in my mortal body in such a way that I would have no control over it.

Even more difficult to understand is how I could get a principle out of my body. Paul says, “I find then the principle that *evil* is present in me, *the one* who wishes to do good” (Romans 7:21). What is present in me is evil — the person, not the principle — and it is present in me because at some time I used my body as an instrument of unrighteousness. (emphases in original)<sup>7</sup>

When we examine the previously cited New Testament passages referring to sin in the singular, we see that it is implausible to interpret them as referring to Satan. In fact, the word *sin* is sometimes used interchangeably with the phrase *law of sin*, showing that the subject is a principle and not a person.

The fact that Anderson has a hard time understanding this is exactly the heart of his problem. Whether we are dealing with impersonal sin or the personal devil determines our response. If we are combating an inner disposition toward evil, we respond to it by identifying ourselves with the crucified and risen Christ and aligning ourselves with His will (Rom. 6:5–14). On the other hand, if we are combating an alien personality working within our very beings, we will focus our response directly on him — as does Anderson’s entire approach to spiritual warfare. But the former response is the biblical response, for although Satan uses the world and the flesh to tempt us, it is our own sinful choices that actually get us into trouble. Our own tendency toward sin therefore is what needs to be dealt with directly, not the devil. As will become painfully clear in Part Two, Anderson’s inadequate view of the flesh has led him to an exaggerated view of the devil.

It’s not that Anderson denies that sin can originate from the Christian’s own mind. But his definition of the flesh as merely the “residue of your negative conditioning”<sup>8</sup> is inadequate to account for the *gross* evil Christians often encounter within themselves. To explain this, only the devil will do.<sup>9</sup> In fact, Anderson reasons that it is harmful for Christians to attribute truly evil thoughts to themselves:

Assure the counselee that any thoughts which do not “joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man” (Romans 7:22) are from Satan.<sup>10</sup>

She replied, “Sometimes, when I go to church, I think these awful thoughts about God and dirty thoughts go through my mind.” “That’s not you,” I assured her. Half an hour later she understood the origin of those thoughts and Satan’s tactics; the thoughts were gone and so was her fear. *If those thoughts had been her thoughts, then what could she have concluded about her nature? “How can I be a Christian and have those kinds of thoughts?”* she reasoned, and so do millions of other well-meaning Christians.<sup>11</sup> (emphasis added)

Those who say a demon cannot influence [read: control] an area of a believer’s life have left us with only two possible culprits for the problems we face: ourselves or God. If we blame ourselves we feel hopeless because we can’t do anything to stop what we’re doing. If we blame God our confidence in Him as our benevolent Father is shattered. Either way, we have no chance to gain the victory which the Bible promises us.<sup>12</sup>

[A woman named Anne wrote to Anderson in the middle of one of his conferences:] “I didn’t know what it meant to take every thought captive. I tried to do this once, but I was unsuccessful because I blamed myself for all this stuff. I thought all those thoughts were mine and that I was the one who was doing it. There has always been a terrible cloud hanging over my head because of these issues. I never could accept the fact that I was really righteous because I didn’t feel like it. Praise God it was only Satan — not me. I have worth!”<sup>13</sup>

There is a biblical basis for saying some of our evil thoughts are provoked by Satan (e.g., 1 Chron. 21:1; Matt. 16:23; John 13:2; Acts 5:3), but there is no biblical basis for saying all of them do (James 1:14; 4:1; Rom. 8:7;

1 Pet. 2:11; Gal. 5:17). Anderson fails to recognize that evil can originate from ourselves (our flesh) and yet we can still gain victory over the power and guilt of sin through Christ's cross and indwelling Spirit (see, e.g., Heb. 9:13-14; Gal. 5:16-25). His desire to protect us from responsibility for the evil in our hearts contradicts his own emphasis that we should *take* responsibility and not fall into a "devil made me do it" mentality.

This is a serious error. The biblical answer to what Anne was experiencing is *first* to agree with Paul that "nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh" (Rom. 7:18) and *then* to see that her righteousness is entirely in Jesus Christ. Only after one reaches the point of utter self-despair that cries out with Paul, "What a wretched man I am! Who will set me free from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24) can one experience the deliverance that also proclaims with Paul, "Thanks be to God — through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Rom. 7:25). So, Anderson inadvertently perpetuates the very bondage he wants to free people from by feeding rather than confronting that fleshly concern to feel worthy in and of oneself.

Christians can never stand before God with total confidence until they find their righteousness strictly outside of themselves, in the *imputed* righteousness of Jesus Christ ( Phil. 3:3-9; 1 Cor. 1:30; Rom. 10:3-4). Only then will Christ's imparted righteousness take shape in their lives (Gal. 6:14-15; Rom. 8:1-4). As soon as they begin to consider that *imparted* righteousness as their *own* righteousness they will find themselves walking after the flesh again (Gal. 1:18-2:14; 2 Cor. 3:5; 1 Cor. 10:12; Prov. 16:18; Rev. 3:17-18). Therefore, it really does not matter whether a thought originates from Satan or the Christian, because the Christian should not be making any claims to personal righteousness before God in the first place.

— Elliot Miller

## NOTES

1. Dr. Neil Anderson, *Walking in the Light* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), 178-79.
2. This is primarily a spiritual exercise of faith and obedience rather than a psychological reconditioning process, as Anderson portrays sanctification (see accompanying article).
3. Nonetheless, in the true believer the new nature ultimately prevails over the old (e.g., 1 John 3:9; 5:18; Phil. 1:6).
4. Neil T. Anderson, *Helping Others Find Freedom in Christ* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1995), 72.
5. Anderson argues that Paul "was referring to his nature before his conversion to Christ." (Neil T. Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness: Realizing the Power of Your Identity in Christ* [Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990], 72; emphasis in original.) Paul's exact words, however, were "I am (Greek: *eimi*, present tense) the chief of sinners." No doubt Paul's preconversion sins qualified him to be chief among sinners, but it was his ongoing possession of a sin nature that qualified him to be presently ranked in that category.
6. *Victory*, 82-83.
7. Dr. Neil Anderson, *Released from Bondage* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), 123-24.
8. See, e.g., *Victory*, 167.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Neil T. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1990), 227-28.
11. *Released*, 13-14.
12. *Bondage Breaker*, 174.
13. *Released*, 41.