

# **Deliverance and Spiritual Warfare**

**A Biblical examination of the  
deliverance model of spiritual warfare**

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# DELIVERANCE AND SPIRITUAL WARFARE

A Biblical examination of the deliverance model of spiritual warfare

## Introduction

A new ministry model has hit the mainstream Evangelical Church. It is the deliverance model of spiritual warfare. It purports to have recovered the biblical teaching that enables the church to effectively deal with Satan and his demons. I refer to it as the deliverance model because its main teaching is that many Christians are, in some degree, in bondage to Satan, and need deliverance by direct confrontation with Satan and the kingdom of darkness. It involves “taking authority” over the devil by identifying, commanding and rebuking demons. It is based on the assumption that a true believer can be demon possessed. While this type of deliverance model has been held in some circles in the past, for the first time it is coming like a flood into many mainline evangelical churches.

There are many proponents of this theology of spiritual warfare and deliverance. Among these are Peter Wagner and Charles Kraft of Fuller Seminary, and John Wimber of the Vineyard Church International. Perhaps the most influential is Neil Anderson, associate professor of practical theology at Talbot Theological Seminary in La Mirada, California. Dr. Anderson has written a number of books and conducts large seminars in churches across America. His books related to the subject include: *The Bondage Breaker* and *The Seduction of Our Children* (Harvest House Publishers), *Victory Over Darkness* (Regal Books), *Release from Bondage* and *Walking Through the Darkness* (Campus Crusade for Christ, Here's Life Publishers).

The deliverance model of spiritual warfare makes grandiose claims. In fact, Dr. Anderson's teaching centers around what he calls “steps to freedom,” which promise instant freedom from bondage, a result that (this is the impression he gives) normal ministry up to now could not achieve.

This study intends to measure the deliverance model in light of Scripture. Its purpose is to show that, while it is well-intended, it does not lead to a balanced, biblically-based philosophy of spiritual warfare and Christian living. It is one more example of a tendency, in American evangelicalism, away from the sufficiency of Scripture toward an experience-based theology.

I want to make two preliminary statements that may help set the stage. First, I realize that some have said they have been helped by this teaching. I am not saying that they have not. There are some good biblical principles taught amidst the error. The reality of spiritual warfare is emphasized, and that is helpful. The possibility of satanic deception and the need to guard ourselves from it is also a key biblical truth that is emphasized. The believer's identity in Christ is also stressed, together with the believer's complete acceptance in Christ. This is particularly emphasized in Dr. Anderson's book *Victory Over Darkness*. Because there is some biblical truth presented, people are helped. Having said that, the problem still remains that the overall paradigm of the believer's authority and the nature of spiritual warfare go beyond what Scripture teaches. It gives an undue emphasis on demons that minimizes personal sin and responsibility. It unwittingly undermines the sufficiency of Scripture and exalts experience as the basis of belief and practice. These concerns will be addressed later in this article. J.I. Packer speaks about the danger of teaching that contains truth mixed with error when discussing the Keswick view of sanctification. It is appropriate here. He says,

It is not much of a recommendation when all you can say is that this teaching may help you if you do not take its details too seriously. It is utterly damning to have to say, as in this case I think we must, that if you do take its details seriously, it will tend not to help you but to destroy you. Manufacturers publicly recall cars that have been built with faulty parts, because defective parts spell danger. One wishes that teachers and institutions that have in the past spread Keswick teaching would recognize the pastoral danger inherent in its defective parts and recall it in the same explicit way.<sup>1</sup>

I believe this same analysis can also be made of the deliverance model of spiritual warfare. It also needs to be said that the issue does not concern the reality of Satan and demons and their direct influence in the lives of believers. In other words, the issue is not whether or not believers are involved in spiritual warfare. They are! Dr. Anderson tends to convey the idea that only those who hold his deliverance model take spiritual warfare seriously. He says,

We have not been taught that the spiritual world does impinge on the natural world. We have been brought into the secular world view of the West. Many Christians either exclude the supernatural from their world view altogether, or consign it to the transcendent tier where it will have no effect on their lives. By doing so they not only exclude God's power from their theology and practice, but they also explain all human failure...as the result of psychological or natural causes.<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Anderson implies that those who deny his deliverance model are not in touch with God's power. Church history would disagree. Martin Luther, for example, did not hold to Dr. Anderson's views, and he certainly knew something of spiritual warfare and the power of God. He wrote in his hymn "A Mighty Fortress is Our God":

A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing; our helper He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.

For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe,  
His craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate. On earth is not his equal.

And though this world with devils filled, should threaten to undo us. We will not fear, for God hath willed his truth to triumph through us.

The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him. His rage we can endure, for lo his doom is sure. One little word shall fell him.<sup>3</sup>

Would anyone venture to say that Luther knew nothing of spiritual warfare? He was the primary human instrument raised up by God to oppose the diabolical darkness of medieval superstition and religious corruption. Whether or not we appreciate it, we stand on his shoulders and others like him. The fact is Luther, the other reformers, and the leaders of the great movements of God in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries practiced nothing of what Dr. Anderson advocates, yet God moved mightily. The power of God was demonstrated greatly. The issue, then, is not the demonstration of God's power, or the reality of spiritual warfare, or the stratagems of Satan. The issue is how we deal with them. The issue is how the power of God is demonstrated, where our resources lie, and to what extent a true believer can be influenced by Satan and demons. With that in mind, we will now go on to look at the distinctive theological features of the deliverance model of spiritual warfare.

# **The Distinctives of the Deliverance Model**

There are three central theological distinctives of the deliverance model of spiritual warfare. They are the authority of the believer, the demon possession of the believer, and the commanding, or binding, of Satan. Each one will be described and then examined in light of Scripture.

## **The Believer's Authority**

The first distinctive involves the believer's authority in Christ. According to Dr. Anderson, the believer must come to understand and exercise the authority he has in Christ over the demonic realm. The lack of knowledge and practice in this area is a primary reason for much of the spiritual defeat and lack of power amongst Christians today. Anderson says, "And as long as we fail to perceive our access to Christ's authority over the kingdom of darkness, we will fail to exercise that authority in our lives, and we will live in bondage."<sup>4</sup> According to Dr. Anderson, the believer has the same authority, not only as the Apostles, but even of Christ. He writes, "Do we enjoy the same claim to authority in the spiritual realm as those who were personally sent out by Him? Absolutely!"<sup>5</sup> He then goes on to say further that our authority is the same as Christ's. He says, "Build your faith in your authority by studying how Jesus operated against the power of darkness in the Gospels and how we are commanded to do so in the epistles."<sup>6</sup> He builds his case from Ephesians 1:22 and 2:6 which says, "And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church ... and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Commenting on these verses he says, "Furthermore, when God seated Christ at His right hand and conferred on Him all authority (Ephesians 1:20, 21), He also seated us at His right hand and conferred on us, through Christ, all authority (2:6) because we are 'together with Christ' (2:5)."<sup>7</sup> Amazingly, Anderson, without any qualification, says that all of Christ's authority has been conferred on the believer. He must simply learn to exercise it. The believer exercises his authority by confronting and commanding Satan and his demons. For example, he advises one woman, who says she is terrorized by snakes that "crawl" on her at night: "'I'll tell you what to do,' I continued. 'When you're in bed and the snakes come, say out loud, 'In the name of Christ I command you to leave' .... The next week when Daisy walked in she said, 'the snakes are gone.'"<sup>8</sup>

The first element, then, in waging spiritual warfare, is recognizing and exercising your authority in Christ. This authority is equal to Christ's and the Apostles'. Exercising this authority involves commanding the demons in a direct confrontation.

Dr. Anderson's thinking is fraught with faulty biblical exegesis. He draws conclusions from faulty premises, and develops his methods and practices from them. He jumps from the false premise of the believer's supposed equal authority with Christ into his deliverance doctrine and practice, which involves "taking authority over" Satan and binding him.

It is true that the believer is identified with Christ and positionally seated with Him in heaven (Ephesians 2:6). It is also true that Christ has been given as head over all things to the church (Ephesians 1:22). Having said that, it does not follow that the believer is equal in authority to Christ, neither does it follow that the believer is to confront demons as Christ did. Christ's authority is unique. He is the Lord of glory. Every knee will bow to Him (Philippians 2:10), not to believers. Christ will judge the living and the dead (1 Peter 4:5), not us. "God has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof ... by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). We are under the umbrella of Christ's authority. We

benefit from it, and in that sense we share it. However, the direct display of it over nature and the demonic realm was His unique prerogative. It clearly demarcated Him as the Messiah. Mark records that “Whenever the unclean spirits saw Him, they would fall down before Him and cry out, saying ‘You are the Son of God!’” (Mark 3:11). Mark also records that an unclean spirit cried out, “What do we have to do with You Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!” (Mark 1:24). After Christ directly and openly rebuked the spirit, Mark says that people were “amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, ‘What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him!’” (Mark 1:27). The terrified response of the demons was to Christ’s unique authority. He was the Son of God and as such He could destroy them. He could consign them to eternal torment. It simply is not accurate to say we have Christ’s authority conferred on us. The Ephesians passage speaks of Christ’s enthronement in heaven and His headship over the church. It says nothing of the authority of His headship being directly conferred on us. Even less can it be deduced from these texts that Christ prescribes His authority be used by directly confronting demons. To do so is to go beyond what is written. It is to read an assumption into the text.

Apostolic authority was also unique. The authority of the Apostles was something delegated by Christ specifically to them (Mark 3:15; Luke 9:2-3) and to those working closely in conjunction with them (Luke 10:17-19). They were given unique authority as those who would deposit binding revelation on the entire church. They were divine legislators. That is, Christ’s authoritative will and law, by which He would govern and instruct His church, were committed and imposed on His people by the Apostles. Their direct power over the demonic directly identified them with Christ. It confirmed their role as revelators of Christ’s will and word to His people (Hebrews 2:4). Their ministry was unique. Who else has such authority? Who also can say that they are revelators of God’s will and word, binding on all churches for all time? This was their foundational ministry, never to be repeated (Ephesians 2:20-3:3). If we have the same authority as the Apostles, does it extend to revealing final authoritative revelation on the church? If not, then we do not have equal authority, nor the accompanying works that verify it.

The Apostle Paul understood his unique role as an agent of divine legislation. He demanded compliance to what he wrote. He wrote to the Corinthians, “If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord’s commandment. But, if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized” (1 Corinthians 14:37-38). The Apostles were in relation to the New Covenant as Moses was to the old. Miriam and Aaron sought to assume the same authority as Moses, and the Lord Himself defended Moses’ unique position. He struck Miriam with leprosy (Numbers 12:1-6)! Just as no Israelite would be tolerated who claimed equal authority with Moses, neither should someone who claims equal authority with the Apostles. The Apostles’ direct authority over the demonic was part of their credentials as Christ’s personal, authorized spokesmen (I Corinthians 9:1) who impose Christ’s law on the church for all time. Speaking of this, Paul said, “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles” (2 Corinthians 12:12).

## **Christians and Demon Possession**

The central feature of the deliverance model of spiritual warfare is the belief that a true believer can be demon possessed. The proponents, however, do not prefer to use the terminology “demon-possessed.” They instead refer to it as “demonic control,” which can, if not resisted, become control from within. In fact, the chapter that deals with demonic indwelling in Dr. Anderson’s book *The Bondage Breaker* is called “The Danger of Losing Control.” Dr. Anderson writes, “In New Testament Greek the term ‘demon-possessed’ does not exist. It is only one word—*daimonizomai* (verb), or

*daimonizomenos* (participle)—which is best translated ‘demonized.’”<sup>9</sup> The fact is the verb *daimonizomai* does refer to demon-possession. Its meaning is derived, not merely from its etymology or root meaning, but from its usage in context. Every occurrence of the term indicates that, either in the immediate context or in the parallel accounts, a demon resides within the person. This is seen by the reference to the demon being cast out, or coming out of the victim. For example, Matthew records,

A Canaanite woman from that region came out and began to cry out, saying, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed” [demonized] ... Then Jesus said to her, “O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed at once (Matthew 15:22, 28).

The parallel passage in Mark gives full explanation of what the term “demonized” meant. He says,

A woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately came and fell at His feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of the Syrophenician race. And she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter ... And He said to her, “Because of this answer go; the demon has gone out of your daughter” (Mark 7:25-26, 29).

Clearly, the term “demonized” was a technical term describing someone who was indwelt by a demon. Every usage in comparison with a parallel passage bears this out. It is significant to point out that this terminology is never used of believers, and it is never used when describing Satan’s attacks on believers.

The insistence of making this unfounded distinction is, in the end, a semantic smoke screen. Irrespective of the terminology, Dr. Anderson clearly teaches that a believer can be indwelt by a demon. He writes,

Perhaps we should state the question this way: Can an evil spirit and the Holy Spirit occupy the same space in a human life? The god of this world occupies a place in our atmosphere, and so does the Holy Spirit, and Satan presently has access to our Father in heaven. So it should not be thought impossible that demonic influence can partially control the life of one in whom the Holy Spirit also dwells.<sup>10</sup>

Once again, Dr. Anderson shows his aversion to actually saying “demon-possessed,” but his meaning is clear: a believer can be indwelt by a demon.

### *An Experience Based Position*

Astoundingly, the basis for concluding that believers can be demon-possessed is not Scripture, but what is referred to as “clinical experience.” The primary authority to which Dr. Anderson and other proponents of deliverance ministry appeal is the book *Demon Possession and the Christian* by C. Fred Dickason. Dr. Anderson indicates his support of Dr. Dickason’s views when, after stating his belief that Christians can be demon-possessed, he writes, “If this possibility is difficult for you to swallow, I encourage you to read *Demon Possession and the Christian* by C. Fred Dickason.”<sup>11</sup> In this book, Dr. Dickason goes from passage to passage seeking to support his view. After looking at every pertinent verse, Dr. Dickason acknowledges that a solid biblical basis simply cannot be built to prove that believers can be indwelt by demons.

Charles Craft, commenting on Dickason’s conclusion, writes,

He exhaustively examined every Scripture reference that could relate to the issue and found none to prove conclusively either that a Christian can or cannot be demonized. Without a clear scriptural position then, we need to consult those with experience in dealing with the problem under consideration. Those who



work with cancer patients know that Christians can and do develop cancer. Likewise, those with “clinical” experience with Christians having demonic symptoms have overcome their doubts and concluded that Christians can and regularly do carry demons.<sup>12</sup>

Incredibly, Craft says that “clinical experience,” is the final basis for concluding a Christian can be demon-possessed! This is Dr. Anderson’s final appeal as well, as his reference to Dickason shows. Dr. Dickason himself states,

I have encountered, from 1974 to 1987, at least 400 cases of those who were genuine Christians who were also demonized ... I would not claim infallible judgment, but I know the marks of a Christian and the marks of a demonized person. I might have been wrong in a case or so, but I cannot conceive that I would be wrong in more than 400 cases.<sup>13</sup>

So here we have it. Clinical experience is the final basis for theology, and from this we build an entire system of practice and technique!

The Scriptures to which Dr. Anderson appeals to support his case refer either to nonbelievers or to external attacks from Satan. None even remotely concerns demonic indwelling in a Christian. The following are two of his examples. He refers to Luke 13:11-18 which says, “And there was a woman who for eighteen years had had a sickness caused by a spirit; and she was bent double, and could not straighten up at all.” She is referred to as a “daughter of Abraham” in verse 16. Dr. Anderson says, “This woman was not an unbeliever. She was ‘a daughter of Abraham,’ a God fearing woman of faith with a spiritual problem.”<sup>14</sup> This type of hasty conclusion and reading into the text is a common practice of Dr. Anderson’s. The phrase “daughter of Abraham” was simply a term for a female descendent of Abraham, not necessarily a saved woman. Not all Israel is Israel (Romans 9:6). Jesus said to the Pharisees, “I know you are Abraham’s offspring” (John 8:37). He also said, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day” (John 8:56). No one would venture to say the Pharisees were saved. Yet Christ said their father was Abraham in a physical sense. Referring to this woman as a daughter of Abraham is a general reference to her physical lineage, not that she was necessarily saved. Dr. Anderson also reads far more into the text when he refers to the armor of God in Ephesians 6:10-17. Dr. Anderson says, “What is the purpose of armor? To prevent the enemies’ arrows from penetrating the body and injuring the soldier. If it is impossible for Satan’s arrows to penetrate us, there would be no need for us to put on armor.”<sup>15</sup> How someone can deduce, from an arrow penetrating the flesh and causing injury, that a demon can, therefore, indwell a Christian, I do not know. If a gunman shoots at me and a bullet lodges in my body, you may conclude that he has injured me, but you cannot conclude that he indwells me! According to Dr. Anderson, somehow you can!

Dr. Anderson, following Dickason and Merrill Unger before him, builds his case on his “clinical experience” of demon-possessed people. He narrates case after case of “Christians” who are demon-possessed. Story after story is recounted of people that he regards as Christians who, among other things, are drunkards, drug addicts, schizophrenics, Darvon® junkies, and in general, people in “bondage to sin.” One example is of a young woman named Janelle. Dr. Anderson writes,

Janelle was a Christian woman, with severe emotional problems, who was brought to me by her elderly pastor. Janelle’s fiancé, Curt, came with them ... as Janelle told me her story, I realized that the accuser of the brethren had really done a number on her. She had been the victim of one abuse after another as a child and adolescent. Her background also included a sick relationship with a previous boy friend who was involved in the occult. Over the years, she had come to believe Satan’s lies that she was the cause of her troubles, and that she was of no value to God or, anybody else. Her self-perception was down in the mud. Recognizing Satan’s familiar strategy, I said, “Janelle, we can help you with your problem, because there is a battle going on for your mind, which God has given us authority to win.” As soon as I spoke these words Janelle suddenly went catatonic. She sat as still as a stone, eyes glazed over and staring into space. [After

enlisting the prayers of her fiancé and the pastor, Dr. Anderson continues] ... as soon as Curt began to read the prayer, Janelle snapped to life. She let out a menacing growl, then lashed out and slapped the paper out of Curt's hand ... I addressed the demonic influence in Janelle, "In the name of Christ and by His authority, I bind you to that chair and I command you to sit there."<sup>16</sup>

This case is representative. Here we have a woman living in immorality, filled with hatred with a demon speaking out of her. Dr. Anderson, as he does regularly, assumes the person is regenerated. If a profession of faith is made and the facts of the gospel can be stated, then the person is categorized as a Christian. Nowhere is the biblical warning of false believers or the possibility of a deceived faith addressed. Jesus' warning about the many who will say, "Lord, Lord" (Matthew 7:23) does not enter in. The Lord's warning of "rocky soil conversions" (Matthew 13:4, 20) is not taken into consideration. The Apostle James' warning that there is a faith in Christ and in God (James 2:1, 14-26) that is non-saving does not enter into his analysis. At the heart of his analysis of a person's salvation is a concept of faith that is purely intellectual. Biblically, true faith in Christ is a repentant faith (Acts 20:21). It is a faith that has come to see the gravity of sin and idolatry (1 Thessalonians 1:10). It is a faith that has received Christ, and as such no longer loves darkness, but comes to the light (John 3:19). What Dr. Anderson has done is to give credence to easy believism. Apparently Dr. Dickason's comment "I know the marks of a Christian!" and Dr. Anderson's recognition of a Christian has nothing to do with a changed life. In those cases where Anderson sees change, repentance is demanded, and the renouncing of Satan and turning to Christ is involved. Biblically, this would indicate a true conversion, not a defeated Christian who finds victory (1 Thessalonians 1:10). Biblically and historically it described not a true Christian delivered, but a sinner repenting and trusting Christ in true conversion. The entire deliverance theology is built on the false premise that believers can be demon-possessed, and this, in turn, is based on a faulty view of faith and the work of the Spirit that occurs in conversion.

This experience-centered approach to theology and practice is the most dangerous aspect of this deliverance model. There has been a subtle unwitting shift from Scripture to external authority. Dr. Dickason writes,

The burden of proof lies with those who deny Christians can be demonized. They must adduce clinical evidence that clearly eliminates any possibility in any case, past or present, that a believer can have a demon ... We must note that those who deny that Christians can be demonized generally are those who have not had counseling experience with the demonized. Their stance is largely theoretical.<sup>17</sup>

His appeal to experience as the final authority is alarming. The proof of the doctrine, he says, is "clinical evidence." Moreover, the reason some doubt that Christians can be demon-possessed is that, in Dickason's words, "they have not had the experience!" Their position is "largely theoretical"! Could we not say largely biblical! The undercurrent here is that Scripture is not sufficient when it comes to this critical area. The authority now is experience, and those who have this experience are to be regarded as experts.

We have come full circle in the Evangelical Church. Luther stood before the Diet of Worms and declared, "Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—my conscience is captive to the word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything."<sup>18</sup> Luther refused to bow to the experts and "clinicians" of the Roman Catholic Church. Today large numbers of evangelicals have gone beyond Scripture and allowed their "expert clinical experience" to decide theological positions, and to determine practice. Is the new Evangelical position, "Unless I am convicted by conscience and my 'expert clinical experience,' I will not recant!" If this is so, we have left the moorings of the Reformation. We will find ourselves adrift in a sea of relativism and mysticism, far from the rock of "Thus saith the Lord."

## *The Biblical Case Against Christian Demon-Possession*

Having said that, it remains to look at what the Scripture actually does say about whether a Christian can be demon-possessed. Contrary to what Dr. Anderson or Dr. Dickason may say, the Scriptures clearly indicate a believer cannot be indwelt by a demon.

The New Testament repeatedly asserts the believer's new relation to Satan. There has been a decisive break from his dominion and power. The Lord Jesus Christ stated in His high priestly prayer, "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15). Christ prayed that we would be kept from the "evil one." The preposition "from" is *ek*, which is a strong term of separation and removal. The literal meaning is "out of." Joseph H. Thayer says of the preposition, that the fundamental idea is "separation from something with which there has been close connection."<sup>19</sup> The thought involved is that while Satan may attack the believer, it will be from an external stance "out of," or "away from," the believer. Leon Morris writes, "Jesus recognizes the power of the evil one and prays for His own to be kept from him. They are to be 'in Christ' (John 16:33; 1 John 5:20), and therefore 'out of the evil one.'"<sup>20</sup> The believer cannot be kept from the evil one and yet be indwelt by him. The two concepts are mutually exclusive. Such thinking removes normal meaning from language.

The Apostle John reiterated Christ's teaching when he stated the believer's new relation to Satan. He writes, "You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). The immediate context is false teachers and the spirits that influence them (4:1). John ascribes the believer's victory over false teachers to the superiority of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. According to John there are two spheres in which reside two powers. The one is the world in which reside Satan and evil spirits. The other is believers in which resides the indwelling Spirit of God. He does not envision a situation in which they overlap. The Holy Spirit is in the believer; Satan is in the world. Clear lines are drawn. There is no commingling. The clear principle that assures victory is the separate spheres of power. A believer indwelt by a demon is, therefore, excluded. Being "of God" makes it an impossibility. The superiority of the Holy Spirit rules it out. Professing believers, out of whom demons speak, must be re-categorized to fit Scripture. Scripture must not be stretched and distorted to accommodate them. John Calvin, on this impossibility, writes, "The Apostle reminds us that we become strong, not by our own power, but by that of God. He hence concludes that we can no more be conquered than God Himself, who has armed us with His power to the end of the world."<sup>21</sup> The application is obvious. The believer can no more be overcome by demonic indwelling than God Himself who resides within could be overcome.

John, later in his epistle, makes a further comment on the believer's new relationship to Satan. He writes, "We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him" (1 John 5:18). John declares that Satan is not allowed unrestricted access to the believer. God limits what he can do. The issue is not how far the believer allows himself to go into sin. The issue is what Christ permits. John says, "He who was born of God keeps him." Christ keeps His people. Specifically in relation to Satan, or "the evil one," the believer will not be "touched." The translation "touch" does not adequately convey the meaning of the Greek term *haptetai*. Brooke F. Westcott writes, "It describes a 'laying hold on' more than a mere superficial 'touch.' Even when it is used of simple physical contact, a deeper connection is indicated, as when the Lord 'touched the sick'"<sup>22</sup>

While John is not inferring that the believer will not be assaulted by Satan, he categorically states that the devil will never "lay hold" of him; that is, he will never have dominion and control over the believer. Calvin writes,

For when he says that he is not touched by the wicked one, reference is made to a deadly wound: for the children of God do not remain untouched by the assaults of Satan, but they ward off his strokes by the

shield of faith, so that they do not penetrate into the heart.<sup>23</sup>

This statement of John is consistent with God's sovereign use of Satan in the lives of believers as described elsewhere in Scripture. Satan sifted Peter (Luke 22:34), attacked Job (Job 1, 2), and buffeted Paul (2 Corinthians 12:6-9). From outward appearances, an observer would say Satan had some measure of control. Yet always his activity was restricted by Christ. He accomplished God's sovereign purposes. To claim that a true believer can be indwelt by a demon denies God's sovereignty and unduly magnifies Satan's power. More than that, it goes contrary to what both Jesus and John state. It goes beyond Scripture.

There are many other verses which could be discussed concerning the believer's new relationship to Satan. For example, there is Paul's rhetorical questions: "What harmony has Christ with Belial ... or, what agreement has the temple of God with idols?" The expected answer is nothing! God's temple is for God's presence, and idols dwell in pagan temples. Therefore, Paul concludes, "For we are the temple of the living God" (2 Corinthians 6:15-16). Commingling in God's temple is an impossibility! There are also Paul's statements that the Father "delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved son" (Colossians 1:13), and that conversion involves "opening their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins" (Acts 26:18). The believer is under the authority and dominion of the Son of God. This authority is not diminished or shared by Satan. Satan may incite and oppress, but Christ rules, and under His rule the believer will be "kept from the evil one" (John 17:15). To advocate that Satan can somehow sneak behind lines to indwell a believer is to minimize Christ's dominion over the believer. It ascribes authority to Satan that he does not possess. It unduly exalts Satan at the expense of Christ.

One last verse warrants attention, for I believe it settles the issue. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself describes demonic indwelling in His confrontation with the Pharisees. He says,

Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find it. Then it says, "I will return to my house from which I came"; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go and live there (Matthew 12:43-45).

Christ pictures demonic indwelling as analogous to someone dwelling in a house. When seeking a "home" to inhabit, the demon settles in a place described as "unoccupied."<sup>24</sup> In other words, only unoccupied people, that is unbelievers, can be indwelt. The true believer is already occupied. There is already a tenant. The Holy Spirit resides within (Roman 5:5). If repossession is attempted, He who is greater (1 John 4:4) does not allow the believer to be touched (1 John 5:18). Clearly, Christ's teaching rules out the possibility of a demon indwelling a Christian.

## **Binding and Commanding Satan**

The third distinctive of the deliverance model is the practice of "taking authority over the devil" by identifying, commanding and binding demons. This is where the theology works itself out in practice. In step two of his "steps to freedom," Dr. Anderson advises people to pray the following: "Since by faith I have received you into my life, and am now seated with Christ in the heavenlies (Ephesians 2:6), I command all deceiving spirits to depart from me."<sup>25</sup> In explaining his methodology in dealing with difficult people, he writes, "I often stop and take authority, again, commanding Satan to release them."<sup>26</sup> This methodology is rooted in the unsubstantiated belief that we possess the full authority of Christ. This has already been dealt with earlier. It is enough to say here that believers are never advised to use Jesus as their model in this regard to deal with Satan.

Neither are there any examples of it being used by the Apostles in the book of Acts when they deal with believers. Moreover, Paul, Peter, James and John each give instruction on how to resist the devil, and they never counsel believers to bind or command Satan. Paul specifically instructs believers to put on the “full armor” of God with no mention of binding or commanding Satan (Ephesians 6:11). The practice is based primarily upon a faulty understanding and application of Christ’s words in Matthew 12:29 and Luke 11:1, 22. Christ says, “Or how can anyone enter the strong man’s house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house” (Matthew 12:29). Christ explains to the Pharisees that His ability to cast out demons was proof of his superiority to Satan. He is able to bind Satan, and thus to plunder Satan’s house. In Luke’s account, Christ refers to Himself as “someone stronger” (Luke 11:22). His sheer superiority in power is all that is required. F. Godet writes, concerning this binding, or (as Luke 11:22 says) “overpowering” of Satan:

The citadel of Satan is plundered: this fact proves the kingdom of God is come ... a warrior, superior in strength, has appeared on the world’s stage, and from that moment all is changed. This stronger man is Jesus ... He alone can really plunder the citadel of the prince of the world. Why? Because He alone began by conquering him in single combat ... as soon as a man can tell the prince of this world to his face, “Thou hast nothing in me” (John 14:30), the strong man, the vanquisher of the strong man is come; and the plundering of the house begins.<sup>27</sup>

This “single combat” was Christ’s victory over Satan in the desert temptation, but his vanquishing continues. Henry Alford writes,

The work was not fully completed yet, till the Lord, by and in His death overcame him who had the power of death, and that His great victory is still proceeding: He is still taking from him one and another — rescuing the sons of man by the power of his gospel ...<sup>28</sup>

This final victory over Satan was accomplished at the cross and is described by Paul. He writes, “When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him” (Colossians 2:15). Speaking of Colossians 2:15, William Hendrickson writes,

Now in the midst of this terrific struggle (cf. Ephesians 6:12) the Colossians receive a word of comfort. Says Paul, as it were, You need not be afraid of these hosts of evil, for in principle, the battle has already been won. It has been won for you, and God, Himself, has disarmed these principalities and powers ... Yes, in and through this Son of His love, this triumphant Christ, God has achieved the victory over Satan and all his hosts: and that victory is your life and your joy. Whatever you need is in Christ.<sup>29</sup>

Christ has already vanquished Satan. It is His work to bind Satan, not ours. Ours is simply to preach the gospel (2 Corinthians 4:5), put on the armor (Ephesians 6:10-12), and resist, firm in the faith (1 Peter 5:7). The Scripture nowhere tells us to command, or bind, Satan. We do not have to tell Satan he has been overpowered. We simply must act like it! Evangelism does not involve commanding Satan to remove his blindness as Anderson claims. He writes concerning the relation of binding Satan and evangelism: “He will hold on to these people until we demand their release on the basis of our authority in Christ. Once Satan is bound through prayer, he must let go.”<sup>30</sup> This puts the sovereignty in our hands and not God’s! In contrast to Anderson, notice Paul’s description of how satanic blindness and power is removed in salvation. He says, “For God who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus” (2 Corinthians 4:6). It is God’s sovereign work to bind Satan in the accomplishing of salvation and the opening of a sinner’s eyes. We preach the gospel and appeal to the sinner to receive Christ as Lord. Paul says, “For we do not preach

ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord" (2 Corinthians 4:5). It is God who sovereignly deals with the forces that bind the sinner. It is God "who commands the light to shine." Nowhere does Scripture indicate that a sinner cannot turn to Christ until Satan is bound by believers. We are only commanded to pray, preach and appeal. God Himself sovereignly commands the light of the gospel to shine.

As mentioned, believers are never instructed to identify or command demons. Paul, instructing on spiritual warfare, specifically refers to the believers armor (Ephesians 6:11-12) as "the full armor of God." In the Greek, the term "full armor" is a compound made up of *pan* (all) and *pleion* (armor). In other words it is comprehensive and complete. Every provision necessary is included. This armor is designed to enable the believer to stand firm (verses 11 and 14), and to resist (verse 13). As such, it is all encompassing, envisioning every contingency against any and all schemes (verse 11) of the devil. Conspicuous in its absence is any instruction on identifying, commanding, or binding Satan. In Peter's instructions to Christians on how to deal with Satan, he writes, "But resist him firm in your faith" (1 Peter 5:9). His counsel is also complete. This is evident in light of his concern that believers do not become vulnerable to Satan, who, Peter says, "is seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). In spite of the spiritual stakes involved, Peter makes no mention of identifying or commanding demons. James, also in speaking of spiritual warfare, writes, "Submit therefore, to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double minded" (James 4:7-8). To James, resisting involves submitting and drawing near to God, cleansing our hands and purifying our hearts (verse 8). Once again, binding and rebuking the devil is not involved. All three authors give the same indication of what resisting Satan means. Peter says it is being "firm in the faith," which Paul calls "putting on the full armor of God," and which James calls "submitting to God and purifying our hearts." In the terms of Ephesians 6:14-18, it is truth, righteousness, readiness to make peace, faith, a resting in our salvation and the word of God, all saturated with persevering prayer. It is, in essence, battling Satan with daily repentance, obedience to the truth, righteousness, and the application of the word of God and prayer. It is following Christ's example displayed in his victorious combat with Satan in the desert temptation (Matthew 4:1-11).

The deliverance model has gone beyond Scripture. It begins with faulty exegesis, influenced by an unhealthy, unbiblical reliance on experience. An entire model of ministry, not based in Scripture, is then developed and presented as a cure for defeated Christians.

## **The Dangers of the Deliverance Model**

I would like to conclude by summarizing where the deliverance model is defective in its theology and how it poses a serious concern to the church. The deliverance model is more than a shift in practice. It is a paradigm shift, a subtle move away from the believer's sufficiency in Christ and the sufficiency and authority of Scripture.

### **A Diminished View of Conversion**

As was mentioned earlier, the concept that a believer can be indwelt by a demon is rooted in a defective view of conversion. Those who live a "life of bondage" to sin are too readily categorized as Christians. Anderson's theology of conversion is such that apparently regeneration effects nothing. In his accounts, people become Christians who continue on in drunkenness, immorality, with continued indwelling by demons. In what is a typical account, Anderson writes concerning a

young lady named Nancy who after her conversion continued to be indwelt by demons: "In her high school years, she trusted Christ as her Savior. But instead of leaving her, her 'guardians' continued to harass her."<sup>31</sup> Where in Scripture do we find such an understanding of the saving power of God? Does not Paul report of the Thessalonians: "how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." Does not he say to believers that because of their union with Christ and death to sin, "though you were slaves to sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness" (Romans 6:17-18). The New Testament envisions no such thing as people who come to Christ and remain fundamentally unchanged. It envisions struggles and falling into sin, yes, but not the bondage that Anderson describes. What the deliverance model is teaching is a second blessing view of sanctification. It is in a different form and under a different guise, but it is nonetheless a two-stage view of salvation and sanctification that minimizes the transforming nature of a Spirit-produced conversion.

### **A Minimizing of Sin and Personal Responsibility**

There is an undercurrent to the teaching that subtly removes personal responsibility and places the blame on Satan. Anderson writes,

It is critical that Christians understand their vulnerability to demonic influence. Those who say a demon cannot 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 helpless, because we cannot do anything to stop what we are doing.<sup>32</sup>

Incredibly, Anderson says we may blame Satan and not ourselves for our sinful behavior! What? Are we to conclude that we are not to blame? Is not this the blame shifting philosophy rooted in Freudianism that has infected our culture and now the church? Satan may entice and influence, but we are indeed to blame when we sin! We make the choice and no one else. James writes, "Each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin" (James 1:14-15). Speaking concerning a counselee, Anderson writes, "Over the years she had come to believe Satan's lies, that she was the cause of her troubles, and that she was of no value to God or anybody else."<sup>33</sup> Are we to conclude from this that a person has a justifiable excuse to not follow the commands of Christ? Can someone be excused from loving the brothers, forgiving, submitting to authority, or whatever Scripture requires, because Satan has deceived them? Anderson says his counselee wrongly concluded "she was the cause of her troubles." It sounds much like Adam when he retorted, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate" (Genesis 3:12). The deliverance model gives new meaning to the phrase "the devil made me do it." It unwittingly permits a blame shifting rationale that finds a welcome response in the sinful heart of man. Perhaps this, in part, explains its ready acceptance in a church that is becoming more and more self-absorbed and resistant to dealing with sin.

### **A Misdirecting of the Believer's Focus**

The essence of spiritual warfare is described by Paul as "taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Defeating Satan is positive. It involves repentance, submission, and giving the rightful place to the Word of God on a regular basis. When this is done, then Satan's activity will cease. James says, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

In the context, resisting Satan is described as drawing near to God, cleansing our hands, and humbling ourselves (verses 8-10). As light dispels darkness, repentance and submission to Christ's authority automatically dispels the enemy. Defeating Satan involves instituting biblically based mindsets and attitudes where there has been demonically influenced thoughts about God and ourselves. Victory over demonic strongholds occurs when the Holy Spirit produces a repentant heart that commits itself to obedience. Demons no longer have any room to work. The "flaming missiles of the evil one are extinguished" (Ephesians 6:16).

To become concerned about identifying and commanding demons misdirects the believer's focus. In doing this, it minimizes the resources God has provided for victory, which is prayer, obedience, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the word of God; in short, the "full armor" of God.

## **A Denial of the Sufficiency of Scripture**

The last concern underlies all the others. The deliverance model is fundamentally an experience-based theology. Its primary proponents claim that (in their thinking) the Scriptures do not clearly speak on the issue of demon-indwelt believers. From this they develop a theology and practice from "clinical experience."

Paul instructs Timothy concerning Scripture that "all Scripture is inspired and profitable" (2 Timothy 3:16). This inspired body of truth is, Paul says, "that the man of God may be adequate for every good work" (verse 17). This is the same Timothy to whom Paul said, "Fight the good fight of faith" (2 Timothy 6:2). Paul clearly affirms the sufficiency of Scripture for every contingency of ministry. This would obviously include waging spiritual warfare. No issue as critical as whether a believer can be indwelt by demons would be left to experts and their subjective "clinical experience." Therefore, as we have seen, the Scriptures do, in fact, teach that believers cannot be indwelt by demons. The Scripture, "adequate for every good work," gives no instruction nor one example related to their views of spiritual warfare and believers. They have gone beyond the Word. They have drawn conclusions and devised techniques not found in the all-sufficient adequate word of God.

I will close with the words of John Calvin who waged war against the experience- and tradition-based theology of Catholicism. His appeal was that the church bind itself to the Scripture, never going against it, and particularly never going beyond it. May we heed his words in this time, when a return to the full sufficiency and power of Scripture is so desperately needed. He writes,

Suppose we ponder how slippery is the fall of the human mind into forgetfulness of God, how great the tendency to every kind of error, how great the lust to fashion constantly new and artificial religions.... We must come, I say, to the Word, where God is truly and vividly described to us from His works, while these very works are appraised, not by our depraved judgment, but by the rule of eternal truth. If we turn aside from the Word, as I have now said, though we may strive with strenuous haste, yet since we have got off the track, we shall never reach the goal...so it's better to limp along this path than to dash with all speed outside it.<sup>34</sup>



# NOTES

1. J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step With the Spirit* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1984), 159.
2. Neil Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1990), 31.
3. *Hymns for the Family of God* (Nashville, TN: Paragon Associates, Inc., 1976), 118.
4. Anderson, 64.
5. *Ibid.*, 62.
6. *Ibid.*, 69-70.
7. *Ibid.*, 66.
8. *Ibid.*, 57.
9. *Ibid.*, 173.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. Charles Craft, *Defeating Dark Angels* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1992), 64-65.
13. C. Fred Dickason, *Demon Possession and the Christian* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1987), 175.
14. Anderson, 174.
15. *Ibid.*, 175.
16. *Ibid.*, 148-149.
17. Dickason, 175-176.
18. Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand* (Nashville, TN: Festival Books, 1980), 144.
19. Joseph H. Thayer, D.D., *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), 189.
20. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1977), 730.
21. John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1981), Vol. 22, 234.
22. Brooke F. Westcott, D.D., D.C. L., *The Epistles of St. John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1986), 195.
23. Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, 271.
24. A word needs to be said regarding the casting out of demons by non-believers, such as Priests, or by believers who have been involved in exorcism with supposedly true Christians. Christ acknowledged that the Pharisee's sons cast out demons in Matthew 12:27. He says, "And if I cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? Consequently they shall be your judges?" Later He makes reference to demons which, after "going out of a man" (verse 43), look for a new abode, and eventually return with seven others to their original "house." Here we have a situation where the casting out is apparently of no avail. The Pharisees and their sons are in league with Satan. Jesus says in John 8:44, "You are of your father the devil and you want to do the desires of your father." Evidently Satan permits the non-believing Pharisees to cast out his demons in what is a display of mock spiritual power. In other words, Satan permits the relocating and rearranging of his subordinates to further his deceptive hold.

Dabbling with demons is dangerous business. Not every demon exorcism is from God. Christ affirms that false believers cast out demons. He says, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'" Christ's response is amazing. He does not deny they did it, He simply denies they did it in His power. He says, "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:22, 23). If Christians begin to dabble with demons, if they go on the offensive, then Satan will allow mock displays of power to deceive them. Godet writes, "The seeming allies, who have the appearance of fighting for the same cause as he does, but who, in reality, scatter abroad with Satan, are the exorcists...it is only in appearance that they drive out his underlings: in reality, they serve no end by those alleged exploits, except to strengthen the previous state of things, and to keep up the reign of the ancient master of the world. The exorcist has plied his art; the impure spirit has let go his prey, quitted his dwelling, which, for the time, has become intolerable to him. But two things are wanting to the cure to make it real and durable. First of all, the enemy has not been conquered, bound; he has only been expelled, and he is free to take his course in the world, perhaps to return" [*Commentary on St. Luke's Gospel* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), Vol. 2, 67, 68]. The supernatural displayed and described by the people in deliverance ministry is not necessarily to be denied. However, it very well could be a mock display of power where Satan relocates demons to increase his deceptive hold. It is a ploy to subtly divert people from Christ, all the while claiming Christ's power. Are those who are the supposed experts in deception, in

reality, the most deceived? The least we can state is that the admitted experience-based theology and practice of deliverance ministry leaves an open door for satanic manipulation and deception.

25. Anderson, 190.
26. Ibid., 218.
27. F. Godet, *Commentaries on St. Luke's Gospel* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), Vol. 2, 66.
28. Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament, The Four Gospels* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1968), Vol. 1 553-554.
29. William Hendrickson, *New Testament Commentary, The Epistle to the Colossians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1964), 122-123.
30. Anderson, 88.
31. Ibid., 10.
32. Ibid., 174.
33. Ibid., 149.
34. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977), Vol. 1, 72-73.

