

Neil Anderson's Approach to the Spiritual Life

—
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Through his popular writing and conference ministry, Neil Anderson, president of Freedom in Christ Ministries, has helped many believers gain a sense of confidence and an increased measure of consistency in the spiritual life. He and others who provide instruction in “spiritual warfare” and “victorious living” have found a warm welcome among evangelicals longing for clear answers and a solid emphasis on biblical truth.

While many individuals seem to have benefited from Anderson's work, some aspects of his teachings may ultimately bring harm even to those who are presently being helped. This article describes those potential problems while offering some suggestions for dialogue. Many other teachers have held and do hold positions similar to Anderson's, but he is highlighted here because of his present popularity and because of the need to limit the field of inquiry. In other words Anderson is not the source of these ideas, but he is a prominent and popular exponent of them.

Anderson's Understanding of Sin

The Saint's Core Identity

Anderson's anthropology focuses on the believer's “core identity,” which he says is so transformed in conversion that the “real you” should be described not as a sinner but as a saint. Believers are “saints who occasionally sin” rather than “sinners saved by grace.”¹ He writes, “Nowhere are believers referred to

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as sinners, not even as sinners saved by grace. If a true Christian accepts himself as a sinner, then his core identity is sin.”²

What is this “core identity?” It seems to be something stronger than self-image, as Anderson contends that the believer's core identity has been changed “from sinner to saint” as a fact that now needs only to be appropriated through

¹ 1. Neil T. Anderson and Steve Russo, *The Seduction of Our Children* (Eugene, OR: Harvest, 1991), 19, 21.

² 2. Neil T. Anderson, *Living Free in Christ* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1993), 72.

faith.³ At the same time the statement quoted above suggests that it varies with one's self-perception. Anderson applies it elsewhere to respond to an "identity crisis," or the inability to know how to view oneself. Theologians often speak of a person's "nature" as his or her genuine essence, and this term seems ambiguous.⁴ Anderson has substituted an even more ambiguous phrase when he speaks of the "core identity" and uses the term to describe both one's genuine essence and one's perceived inner character or self-image. This seems to be a case of psychological jargon getting in the way of theological precision.⁵

By moving from "identity crisis" as a personal quandary to "core identity" as a fact to be accepted by faith, Anderson tells readers that many of their personal struggles may be resolved by viewing themselves differently.

Have you ever heard a Christian refer to himself as "just a sinner saved by grace"? Have you referred to yourself that way? If you see yourself as a sinner you will sin; what would you expect a sinner to do? Your Christian life will be mediocre at best, with little to distinguish you from a non-Christian, thereby riddling you with feelings of defeat.... The Bible doesn't refer to believers as sinners, not even sinners saved by grace. Believers are called saints—holy ones—who occasionally sin. 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. If you fail to see yourself as a child of God, you will struggle vainly to live like one, and Satan will have little trouble convincing you that you are no different from who you were before Christ and that you have no value to God or anyone else. But appropriating by faith the radical transformation of your core identity from sinner to saint will have a powerful, positive effect on your daily resistance to sin and Satan.⁶

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Anderson correctly observes that the New Testament describes believers as "saints" and does not generally speak of them as "sinners." (A possible exception may be found in 1 Timothy 1:15, in which Paul wrote, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all." The present indicative

³ 3. Neil T. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker* (Eugene, OR: Harvest, 1990), 44.

⁴ 4. See further discussion of this in Robert A. Pyne, "Dispensationalism and Antinomianism," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, forthcoming (April-June 1996).

⁵ 5. The same criticism may be made in response to Robert L. Saucy, who refers to the believer's "identity" ("Sinners' Who Are Forgiven or 'Saints' Who Sin?" (*Bibliotheca Sacra* 152 [October-December 1995]: 400-412). Saucy's presentation is more nuanced than Anderson's, however, and he is not as vulnerable to the implications discussed below.

⁶ 6. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker*, 44.

“I am” refers to the apostle as a sinner, though his primary emphasis is on his conversion instead of his present state or behavior.) The problem with this approach is not Anderson’s emphasis that believers are called saints; the problem is with the incorrect implications he draws from that fact.

Implications

The first incorrect implication is that the Scriptures answer the modern psychological question Anderson is posing. By addressing believers as “saints,” Paul was making a statement not about their core identity, but about God’s declaration that they are righteous in Christ. Taylor has argued persuasively that the concept of self-identity, particularly that the inner nature is opposed to the outer nature, did not begin to develop until the time of Augustine and did not reach its present form until the modern era.⁷ Anderson anachronistically applies the modern question of self-identity to biblical vocabulary. That leads to another problem.

The second incorrect implication Anderson draws is that spiritual “victory” depends on self-perception. While Paul’s commands to believers are built on the facts of salvation—those facts pertain not to the believers themselves but to their relationship to God. Romans 6, for example, articulates that believers have been freed from their obligation to sin and have been given a new obligation to obey God. Here Paul did not offer a secret as to how Christians are to obey; instead he explained why they are to obey. His focus was not on what is now true of their nature but on what Christ has done for them.⁸

Anderson’s third incorrect implication is that believers have only two options when confronted with the question of self-perception. Either they see themselves as sinners, even sinners saved by grace, and continue to sin as a result, or they see themselves as saints and gain victory over sin at an experiential level. This is a false dichotomy in reference to self-perception and in reference

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to the result. Regarding self-perception it is false to say that one is either a saint or a sinner because, to use Luther’s phrase, the Christian remains “righteous and yet a sinner”—righteous by way of the imputed righteousness of Christ and yet a sinner experientially, still looking forward to glorification (Rom 8:23–25). Anderson does not deny that Christians still sin,⁹ but by asking a modern

⁷ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989).

⁸ Cf. Robert A. Pyne, “Dependence and Duty: The Spiritual Life in [Galatians 5](#) and [Romans 6](#),” in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands: Biblical and Leadership Studies in Honor of Donald K. Campbell*, ed. Charles H. Dyer and Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 149–55.

⁹ Even in his acknowledgment of sin in the life of the believer, Anderson seems overly optimistic as to its prominence. “Winning the battle for our minds is often two steps forward and one step back. Eventually, it is three steps forward and one back. Then it’s five steps forward and one back, until there are so many positive steps forward that the

psychological question that the text is not addressing he misuses both that text and statements like Luther's.

This false dichotomy between self-perceived sinners and self-perceived saints leads to a similar false distinction with regard to the results of one's self-perception. Anderson neglects the fact that a deep understanding of sin, coupled with the knowledge of God's grace, has traditionally brought assurance and security, not lawlessness.¹⁰ At the same time one must question whether some of the "freedom" Anderson describes is self-deceptive.¹¹ For example Anderson writes about a man who was freed from lust at the end of one of Anderson's conferences.¹² Without questioning unusual experiences from the Holy Spirit, one can ask, how could this individual know at the end of the conference that he was free? Further, a consideration of the pernicious nature of sin calls for a healthy sense of respect for one's liabilities and a greater sense of dependence on God. While Anderson's emphases may give some believers at least an initial sense of optimism, his distinction between the lifestyles of self-perceived "sinners" and "saints" amounts to little more than a straw man.

A fifth incorrect implication from Anderson's argument about the biblical identification of believers as "saints" is that sin should be treated as something external to the believer. While he recognizes that believers are opposed by the world, the flesh, and the devil,¹³ Anderson's removal of sin from the "core identity" of the believer causes him to give Satan even more prominence than one might expect.

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I personally believe that the word sin in Romans 6:12 is personified, referring to the person of Satan: "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts." *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.¹⁴

'one back' is a fading memory" (Neil T. Anderson, *Released from Bondage* [San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1991], 155).

¹⁰ 10. In spite of his emphasis on indwelling sin, one could never see John Owen as antinomian. See, for example, his *On the Mortification of Sin in Believers*, vol. 6 of *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (reprint, Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991).

¹¹ 11. Even Paul knew well his own capacity for self-deceit (1 Cor 4:4).

¹² 12. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker*, 137.

¹³ 13. Neil T. Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), 13, 115, 135.

¹⁴ 14. Anderson, *Released from Bondage*, 123 (italics added). "That's why we are commanded, 'Make no provision for the flesh' (Romans 13:14), meaning 'Don't live on Satan's level'" (idem, *The Bondage Breaker*, 79).

Anderson not only sees the personal agency of Satan where most would see an internal tendency toward sin,¹⁵ but he also speaks of Satan's activity when most would more naturally focus on human responsibility. When some people from his church incorrectly said that a dying man would live, he concluded that the lies had come from Satan through the agency of deceiving spirits who were trying to destroy the congregation's faith.¹⁶ Is it not possible that the people were simply presumptuous? Does not the human heart have a remarkable capacity for such deceit (Jer 17:9; Heb 3:13)? Anderson would not deny the possibility of self-deception,¹⁷ but he seems to appeal too quickly to external causes. A woman wrote a note in which she described her drug abuse, suicidal thoughts, frustration, and confusion, to which Anderson replied, "The confusion in Frances' mind is a clear tip-off that her problem is the result of demonic influence."¹⁸ Anderson suggests that about 65 percent of all Christians experience foul thoughts of demonic origin while mistakenly believing these thoughts come from within themselves.¹⁹ When he speaks of a

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man caught up in homosexuality, he notes that the feelings were "not from his natural self" but were demonic.²⁰ In the same way he elsewhere speaks of sins ranging from hostility to homosexuality as "strongholds,"²¹ implying that they result from demonic agency. By contrast, Guelich rightly observes, "Jesus never names or addresses a demon by name. Nor does he ever attribute even by

¹⁵ 15. Most treat the personification of sin as a ruling power in [Romans 6:12](#) without additional comment, but Stählin notes that this poetic image may be standing in the place of Satan (Gustav Stählin, "amartai" in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1:296). Anderson's suggestion is not inconceivable, but it is unusual and it typifies his externalization of sin.

¹⁶ 16. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker*, 133.

¹⁷ 17. *Ibid.*, 190.

¹⁸ 18. *Ibid.*, 75-76.

¹⁹ 19. *Ibid.*, 107, 154. "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. Exposing the lie and understanding the battle for the mind is to win half the battle" (Anderson, *Released from Bondage*, 14). "One of my former students has a prison ministry. He regularly tells the prisoners about the truth of God's freedom, sharing with them many of the statements and verses contained in this book. Somehow the message is getting through to them. They aren't just a bunch of thieves, thugs, derelicts, perverts, sex addicts or alcoholic bums. They are children of God, created in His image, but damaged by the worldly system in which they were raised" (Anderson, *Living Free in Christ*, 226).

²⁰ 20. Anderson, *Released from Bondage*, 205.

²¹ 21. Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness*, 165-66.

implication sinful behavior like anger, lust, broken marriages, murder, and greed to the demonic.”²²

It is gripping to read of people being delivered from “bondage,” but things such as “negative thoughts,”²³ wanting to atone for one’s own sin,²⁴ comparing oneself to others,²⁵ inadequacy,²⁶ and eating disorders²⁷ do not necessarily involve an external, demonic source. Believers themselves are a major part of the problem.²⁸ Anderson’s perception of the New Testament references to believers as saints does not cause him to deny human responsibility, but it comes close. A more appropriate view sees the New Testament language as more external (forensic) than internal (psychological) and the believer’s struggle as more internal (personal sin) than external (demonic).

Anderson’s Approach to Spiritual Conflict

As Neil Anderson’s approach to sin and human nature reflects several themes that are common to “exchanged life”

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teachers, so his approach to spiritual conflict bears similarities to the recent works of others in this field.²⁹

²² 22. Robert Guelich, “Spiritual Warfare: Jesus, Paul and Peretti,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 13 (Spring 1991): 41.

²³ 23. Anderson, *Living Free in Christ*, 22.

²⁴ 24. *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁵ 25. *Ibid.*, 259.

²⁶ 26. *Ibid.*, 265.

²⁷ 27. “When she was home alone she would be captivated by Satan’s lies about food, her appearance and her self-worth for hours at a time. She was so fearful that, when her husband was gone for a night, she slept on the couch with all the house lights on. She had submitted to counseling without success. *All the while she believed that the thoughts prompting her to induce vomiting were her own based on a traumatic experience from her childhood.* When I was talking during the conference about destroying strongholds, I happened to be looking at Jeannie—quite unintentionally—when I said, ‘*Every person I know with an eating disorder has been the victim of a stronghold based on the lies of Satan*’” (Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness*, 172 [italics added]).

²⁸ 28. This is not to say that problems are never demonic or that believers do not face demonic opposition; nor are personal choices necessarily the sole source of an individual’s problems, even when demonic activity is not an issue.

²⁹ 29. Some of the more popular works include C. Fred Dickason, *Demon Possession and the Christian* (Chicago: Moody, 1987); Charles H. Kraft, *Defeating Dark Angels: Breaking Demonic Oppression in the Believer’s Life* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant, 1992); Ed Murphy, *The Handbook for Spiritual Warfare* (Nashville: Nelson, 1992); C. Peter Wagner and F. Douglas Pennoyer, *Wrestling with Dark Angels* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1990); and Timothy M. Warner, *Spiritual Warfare: Victory over the Powers of This Dark World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991). Several of these titles demonstrate that the field

As already noted, Anderson's view of the believer's core identity as a saint causes him to look elsewhere when considering the root of personal sin. This "devil-made-me-do-it" perspective is countered to some degree by Anderson's emphasis on the authority each believer brings into spiritual conflict. Though Christians may not be the source of sinful attitudes or behaviors, they do have the capacity by the Holy Spirit to avoid being victims. While this emphasis is potentially helpful, it may also lead to problems.

Resisting and Rebuking Satan

Anderson speaks of "rebuking,"³⁰ "commanding,"³¹ "resisting,"³² or "renouncing"³³ Satan. While the meaning of these terms often remains unclear, only one is used in the Bible with reference to the actions of believers, namely, resistance (James 4:7). The others are potentially troublesome not only because of Anderson's lack of precision in using them, but because of his lack of biblical precedent in practicing them. More significantly, Anderson does not explain how one can follow his prescriptions while still avoiding the bold rebuke of angelic majesties denounced by both Peter and Jude (Jude 8–9; 2 Pet 2:10).

However one rebukes or renounces Satan, Anderson contends that the communication must be spoken aloud, because demons cannot read individuals' minds.³⁴ Jesus, however, did

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not always address demons directly in delivering people (Matt 15:21–29; Mark 7:25–30), and requests to Him bypassed direct communication with the demons altogether. This last point seems especially important with regard to children. While Anderson argues that parents should teach their children to look for and speak out against demonic attack,³⁵ a practice that may frighten them

has tended to emphasize or even exploit the "warfare" motif of [Ephesians 6](#). As Guelich observes, it would seem that a metaphor has now become a movement. "Based on [Eph 6:10–17](#) one can speak of a 'spiritual warfare' but only as one of several metaphors for describing the believers' continued adversarial relationship with Satan and the spiritual forces of evil" ("Spiritual Warfare: Jesus, Paul, and Peretti," 51).

³⁰ 30. Anderson, *Released from Bondage*, 32, and idem, *Walking through the Darkness*, 185.

³¹ 31. Anderson, *Living Free in Christ*, 52, 310.

³² 32. Ibid., 292.

³³ 33. Anderson, *Released from Bondage*, 45.

³⁴ 34. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker*, 84–85.

³⁵ 35. Anderson writes, "We warn children about strangers in the streets. Don't you think we should warn them about 'strangers' in their rooms?" Further, "If your child can't say anything because of fear, let him know that he can always talk to God in his mind, and God will help him say what he needs to say. Encourage him to memorize this paraphrase of [1 John 5:18](#): 'I am a child of God, and the evil one cannot touch me.' If nothing else,

unnecessarily, the Gospel accounts show that parents themselves went to Jesus on behalf of their children (Matt 17:14–18).

Generational Transference of Demons

The possibility that Anderson’s teachings may frighten individuals unnecessarily becomes even more acute when he suggests that demonic affliction may be passed within a family from one generation to the next.³⁶ With this in mind Anderson uses a “confidential personal inventory” with counselees to uncover possible “occultic, cultic, or non-Christian religious practices” of “parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents.”³⁷ Since he believes little children (particularly adopted ones)³⁸ are “especially vulnerable to Satan’s access through this avenue,” Anderson counsels parents to have them pray the following prayer aloud:

I am spiritually alive in Christ and united with Him in the spiritual world. Jesus has broken all ties with and workings of Satan that were passed on to me from my ancestors. I therefore renounce and reject all the sins of my ancestors. Because I am owned by Jesus, I reject any and all ways Satan may claim ownership of me.³⁹

The prayer itself raises the question of how a believing child who is “owned by Jesus” would need to reject “any and all ways Satan may claim ownership,” but that criticism seems minor compared to the fact that Anderson’s teaching here is more animistic than biblical. Though the doctrine of generational

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transference is widely held,⁴⁰ it lacks biblical support. Anderson appeals to Exodus 20:4–5, but the reference there to “visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and fourth generations” should be understood as a description of severe judgment in which an individual’s line is cut off, not a transference (demonic or otherwise) of particular sins to the next generation. Actually even the idea of judgment is overshadowed by the grace of God when this formula is repeated elsewhere. Exodus 34:6–7 and Deuteronomy 7:9 demonstrate that God may bring judgment for three or four generations, but His covenant faithfulness extends for a thousand. This promise, coupled with the

all he really needs to say is ‘Jesus’” (Anderson and Russo, *The Seduction of Our Children*, 27, 207).

³⁶ 36. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker*, 201.

³⁷ 37. Ibid., 237. Also see his *Living Free in Christ*, 304, and *Released from Bondage*, 239-40.

³⁸ 38. Anderson and Russo, *The Seduction of Our Children*, 205.

³⁹ 39. Ibid., 227.

⁴⁰ 40. For example Dickason, *Demon Possession and the Christian*, 219-21; Kraft, *Defeating Dark Angels*, 73-75; Murphy, *The Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*, 437-38; and Warner, *Spiritual Warfare*, 106-9.

focus on individual responsibility in Ezekiel 18:18–22, seems incompatible with the idea of inherited demonic affliction.⁴¹

Priest and others have argued that this concept of generational transference of demons occurs occasionally in animistic religions and that its present popularity may result from unwitting acceptance of that world view.

This doctrine...rests on the assumption that our vulnerability to demonic influence derives from physical or symbolic contact or contiguity with some object, word, or person rather than on moral, spiritual and doctrinal grounds—an assumption which is at the heart of magic and animism—but which Biblical Christianity nowhere propagates.⁴²

To summarize what has been said to this point, Anderson's view of sin encourages him to find an external focus for spiritual conflict. In his discussion of demonic conflict he calls for inappropriate boldness in rebuking Satan while opening the door to inappropriate fear in his comments about children and the generational transference of demons. A more balanced perspective would demand a healthy sense of respect for the power and influence of demons along with appreciation for divine protection. Several passages suggest that obedient Christians have little to fear (John 17:15; 2 Thess 3:3; James 4:7; 1 John 5:18); yet the idea of passive demonic transference suggests precisely the opposite.

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Anderson's Theological Method

Anderson's primary support for the concept of generational demonic transfer is that it is "well-attested by those who counsel the afflicted."⁴³ Other writers on spiritual warfare also rely heavily on anecdotal evidence, which the reader is expected to accept without much documentation. This unverifiability presents a problem when different writers' anecdotes disagree. For example Anderson and several others cite the work of Fred Dickason to support the idea that Christians can be demonized. Dickason's anecdotes, however, are often so anticharismatic (speaking of "tongues spirits" and demons that counterfeit miraculous gifts) that they are incompatible with those of noncessationists within the movement.⁴⁴

⁴¹ 41. In addition since the text speaks of judgment against those who "hate" God ([Exod 20:5](#); [Deut 7:10](#)), believers are apparently excluded even if one did interpret this as demonic affliction.

⁴² 42. Robert J. Priest, Thomas Campbell, and Bradford A. Mullen, "Missiologial Syncretism: The New Animistic Paradigm," Paper read at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Missiologial Society, Chicago, November 17–19, 1994, 22. It should be noted that Anderson elsewhere suggests that demons may be passed from one adult to another, perhaps through sex (*The Bondage Breaker*, 137, 149, and *Released from Bondage*, 110).

⁴³ 43. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker*, 201.

⁴⁴ 44. Dickason, *Demon Possession and the Christian*, 144, 189, 194–97, 221, 226–27.

Anecdotes are generally unverifiable, sometimes contradictory and given from the perspective of a clearly biased observer.

Much has been written recently concerning claims of ritual abuse and the possibility of recovered memories.⁴⁵ Most of these studies have concluded that counselors may at times be too aggressive in soliciting what they believe to be repressed memories. While the following account reported by Anderson does not deal with recovered memories as such, it does provide a good example of counselor bias.

Christy, a young woman, came to my friend Barry because of the horrible abuse she suffered growing up. Barry dealt with Christy on family and social issues, and Christy complied with his suggestions, but she didn't get any better. After working with Christy for nearly four years, Barry brought her to me.

"Tell me about your childhood friends, Christy," I probed.

"The only other girl on our block lived across the street from me, so we were friends."

"What was her family like?"

Christy lowered her eyes. "Her mother did strange things in their home," she almost whispered.

"Did these things involve candles and sacrifices, sometimes even killing animals?"

"Yeah..."

"Were you ever required to take off your clothes during these

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rituals?" Christy nodded. "And were there others there, men and women, who took off their clothes and performed sexual acts with you and each other?" Again she nodded.⁴⁶

Christy may have been involved in rituals of that nature, but it may also be that a young woman in pain told her counselor what he wanted to hear.

Since even observable events must be filtered through the preunderstanding of the observer, anecdotal evidence should not constitute too large a portion of one's argument. By making such evidence primary, Anderson presents a case that is emotionally attractive but logically (and biblically) weak.

Implications of Anderson's Approach to the Spiritual Life

⁴⁵ 45. For example see the special issue on this topic in the *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 20 (Fall 1992): 175-339; Karen Leigh Stroup, "An Object Relations Approach to the Satanic Ritual Abuse Phenomenon," Paper read at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL, November 20, 1994; Robin D. Perrin and Les Parrott III, "Memories of Satanic Ritual Abuse: The Truth behind the Panic," *Christianity Today*, June 21, 1993, 18-23; and Sharon Begley, "You Must Remember This," *Newsweek*, September 20, 1994, 68-69.

⁴⁶ 46. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker*, 72.

Anderson's writings offer practical solutions, but these solutions may lead to problems. His formulaic approach to spirituality could easily breed elitism, false expectations, and disillusionment.

In Anderson's approach to spirituality, "freedom" depends primarily on one's own self-perception. If believers recognize who *they* really are, Anderson anticipates they will experience greater fulfillment, joy, and consistency in their Christian lives. Ironically the self-centeredness of this motivation demonstrates the pervasiveness of sin. Pride reveals itself even in one's quest for holiness.⁴⁷ It may also demonstrate itself in elitism as individuals believe they have discovered the secret to being more spiritual than most other believers.⁴⁸

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The "secret" takes the shape of "seven steps to freedom in Christ," prescribed prayers, and authoritative counsel. Though he acknowledges the danger of any "magic formula,"⁴⁹ Anderson's prayers (to be read aloud in various situations) and his "seven steps" are remarkably formulaic.⁵⁰ Would a child's public dedication still prevent Satan from "claiming ownership" of that child (an unusual idea itself) if the individual praying does not specifically "reject any claim Satan

⁴⁷ 47. A rather remarkable example of this principle may be found in Anderson's argument that Christians forgive others not for the sake of the others, but for their own sake in order to experience personal freedom (Anderson, *Released from Bondage*, 48, 235). Forgiving others may bring freedom from bitterness, but the primary motivation should not be one's own personal benefit.

⁴⁸ 48. Of course elitism among a teacher's followers is not necessarily the fault of the teacher (1 Cor 1:11-17). At the same time Anderson's anecdotal approach does at times suggest that he is offering Gnostic secrets: "There was not one area of the Scriptures in these books that I had not studied in depth, yet Neil brought a fresh perspective to it all" (Anderson, *Released from Bondage*, 164). "I saw that there was something more I needed to learn, that deliverance was much broader than I had thought, and it excited me. I went home and told my wife, 'This guy [Anderson] has really got something, and I'd like to know more about it'" (ibid., 188). "My mind was bombarded by hostile, angry thoughts. I felt guilty and wondered what was wrong with me. I didn't understand how much bondage I was in until I came to your class" (*Victory over the Darkness*, 156). "A father pulled me aside after a speaking engagement. 'Neil, I have a problem with my 14-year-old daughter, Mindy,' he began. 'There's a barrier between us to the point that we can hardly talk. What should I do?' I suggested that he read my book, *The Bondage Breaker*, to become informed enough to help her" (*The Seduction of Our Children*, 135).

⁴⁹ 49. "If you are hoping for a magic formula or a list of foolproof steps for walking in the Spirit, you will be disappointed. There's a degree of mystery to walking in the Spirit which cannot be captured in an equation. In fact, the moment you think you have reduced the Spirit-filled walk to a formula, it probably isn't Spirit-filled anymore" (Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness*, 98).

⁵⁰ 50. Anderson, *The Bondage Breaker*, 185-204; Anderson and Russo, *The Seduction of Our Children*, 195-230.

may have on him?”⁵¹ Does the exercise of real power depend on the presence of the correct words? Does that power reside in Satan, who, though he is not addressed in the second person, remains a primary focus of the statement as it is read aloud for his hearing, or does it reside in the authority-laden believer who prays the prayer? Does not the entire situation actually depend on God, who alone can answer the prayer? Though the answer should be obvious, the fact that Anderson’s approach yields these other genuine options suggests an overly formulaic model.

Another problem may arise as believers follow these directions. Those who come to believe they are “saints, not sinners,” whose prayers will protect them from oppression, are primed for spiritual disillusionment as they face opposition from both within and without.

Believers should not be surprised by suffering in this world (John 16:33; Rom 8:18–25; Heb 12:4–13; 1 Pet 4:12–19). Through faithfulness and humble dependence on God in the midst of such trials, however, believers can “resist” the devil—not with recited formulas but with a lifestyle of perseverance that does not succumb to the pressure to quit (1 Pet 5:6–11).¹

⁵¹ Anderson and Russo, *The Seduction of Our Children*, 196-98.

¹Dallas Theological Seminary. *Bibliotheca Sacra* Volume 153, Vol. 153, Page 75, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1996; 2002.