The background of the cover is a dramatic sky with soft, white and pinkish clouds. A large, pale hand is visible in the upper left, pointing its index finger downwards. The word 'THE' is in small, red, serif capital letters. 'FINGER' is in large, red, serif capital letters with a slight shadow. 'of' is in a smaller, red, cursive script. 'GOD' is in large, bold, serif capital letters with a gradient from red to yellow and a bright, multi-rayed light effect emanating from the center of the 'O'.

THE
FINGER
of
GOD

*A study in the demanding ministry of deliverance—
leading God's people from spiritual bondage to
divinely intended freedom.*

JACK HAYFORD

THE FINGER OF GOD

by Jack W. Hayford

Essence: *A brief study in the demanding ministry of deliverance—the pastoral ministry of leading God’s people from spiritual bondage to divinely intended freedom.*

INTRODUCTION

I have been asked to prepare this paper on what is probably as difficult an arena of ministry as any of us face. The very nature of the subject of the demonic seems, somehow, to place us all at a more vulnerable position of being distracted by their own dealings. It is as though with our beginning to unveil their vulnerability, they kick dust of confusion into the air. Consequently, otherwise discerning minds become either distracted, irritated, blocked or argumentative rather than teachably receptive.

I take no special delight in writing on this theme. It is crucial, so I am willing to do it, and it is fruitful, as decades of personal ministry have verified, so I am ready to respond to the request which occasions what follows. Yet I still know there is a peculiar readiness of some to nitpick and debate over issues that are mere gnats, when the adversary with which we deal is a roaring lion devouring the hopes and potential of many dear saints. While we yield to temptations to dabble with theological word games, he succeeds in ravaging souls.

What follows is submitted in a pastoral spirit of devotion to pastoral leaders and to the flocks we all serve. I was moved to title this article with words from the lips of Jesus, where in confronting the Pharisees’ resistance to His deliverance ministry, He said:

*“But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.”
(Luke 11:20)*

My final remarks, concluding the paper, give further dimension to that text, but until then may you, my dear reader, be patient with the imperfect effort at outlining an aspect of ministry we would all prefer to avoid, but which the times—joined to Jesus’ commission to His Church—disallow our neglecting. God bless you.

JWH

A PASTORAL REFLECTION

It takes little imagination to conjure the dramatic moment to mind, for David’s words to King Saul are so graphic that both his shepherd’s heart for the sheep and his boldness of action against the wild creatures he mentions, create a vivid picture. Saul, having asked the young man why he felt he could confront Goliath with confidence, is answered with these words from a pastor-shepherd: protector of a flock of sheep:

“When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it, and delivered the lamb from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught it by its beard, and struck and killed it.” (1 Samuel 17:34, 35)

I begin with this “shepherd’s testimony” because I am writing these words primarily for those who have been called and qualified to serve the flock of God as pastor-shepherds to the sheep of our Master, Jesus Christ. And I am wanting to note how realistically David’s words depict three things that are as applicable in the spiritual realm today as they were in the natural realm of David’s shepherd-task.

First, the sheep were always at risk. Besides the obvious need to assure their diet and general guardianship from weather and dangerous terrain, there were the sporadic efforts of wild animals to lie in wait, to stalk and to attempt to steal and kill members of the flock. The timeless fact applies to shepherding today as well: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Demonic workings, orchestrated by the prince of hell, are still relentless in their attack against the flock of God.

Second, the shepherd must always be alert. Jacob’s words to Laban come to mind, at the time the former was arguing a case to affirm his fidelity and constancy in serving his shepherd role: “There I was! In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes.” (Genesis 31:40) The ministry of pastoring requires a tireless attentiveness to the fact that even though cultural winds of weather shift, and the demands with our shepherd task may weary us, we still exist, first and foremost, to serve the interest and needs of the sheep, whatever the cost to our own convenience.

Third, the invader must be confronted—boldly! When David describes his head-on action in grabbing the lion and bear by the hair around their snout, a model is clearly displayed. The shepherd whose heart is for the sheep's deliverance from the lion is not concerned with his own safety or appearance! There's no way to sweet-talk a lion. There isn't time to consult with the opinion of others as to whether it's safe or not to deal directly with the intruder. Similarly, in the context of relating His role as the Great Shepherd, Jesus describes the devil as a thief who comes to steal, to kill and to destroy; He shatters any notion that shepherding is anything else than of life or death importance (John 10:7-15). The wolf He describes is an enemy He's passionate about opposing, and His own stance is declared: He's ready to lay down His life for the sheep! (vs. 15) Today's shepherd faces the same choice—to seek to save/preserve the flock, or to seek to save/preserve one's own "face."

FEAR OF DELIVERANCE MINISTRY

There are few words more compelling as we open this study because I am writing you, dear pastor-shepherd, about the demanding ministry of deliverance; about the call and the cost of freeing human souls from demonic oppression and bondage. And I am fully aware every shepherd takes a risk when he or she determines to open to, learn of and enter into this aspect of Gospel ministry. It can cost your life!

I don't mean you or I need to fear this ministry because it makes us any more vulnerable to the adversary's reprisals than any other facet of our service for Jesus. No! We can be assured that there's nothing we do in our service to the King that isn't hated by our common Enemy. However, it is a peculiar fact that hosts of pastor-shepherds withdraw from, or choose disbelief toward, the ministry of confronting the demonic in either prayer's spiritual warfare or in the personal ministry of deliverance, usually as much due to fear of professional criticism as to doubts about the need of these ministries. The possibility that one may be "laying down his life" is very real. There is a definite potential of losing status in the eyes of ecclesiastical critics or of fellow-servants, who are so trapped by the materialistic mind-set of a non-discerning, demon-denying society that such ministry is deemed archaic or superstitious.

But there are other reasons why a reluctance may halt a pastor-shepherd's pursuit of or availability to the ministry

of deliverance, beginning with his or her never having been taught of it. And this is intended to address those who, as I, over the period of nearly three decades in exercising such ministry, have come to discover these inhibiting reasons and resolve them. In the light of God's Word, and with practical wisdom distilled through some small experience at applying that Word, let's remove obstacles and resolve fears by dealing with facts like these:

- Deliverance ministry is too seldom defined clearly.
- Demonic matters seem to incite some to fanaticism.
- The nature of "spiritual bondage" is often confused and poorly expressed.
- The means to spiritual freedom from demonic oppression are too often stereotyped in a way that removes many leaders from even imagining their own involvement.
- There too often arises a preoccupation with this aspect of ministry as a "cure all," or as being "superior" to other ministry areas, or as being only the ministry of a "gifted few."

But, pastor friend, we aren't dealing with a subject for only a "few" of us. In virtually every instance of sending out disciples, as well as in His commissioning His Church, Jesus directs: "...cast out demons!" (Matthew 10:8; Mark 3:15; 16:17; Luke 9:1)

In short, it is practical and desirable that spiritual leaders (1) be introduced to this facet of ministry; (2) be disciplined in the exercise of this ministry; and (3) be equipped to cultivate ways and means by which pastoral leadership may transmit this ministry to mature, trained and sensible spiritual members within their congregations.

OPPOSITION TO DELIVERANCE MINISTRY

Approaching this subject as directly as I am in this paper, it is important that no reader suppose me ignorant of the fact that there are some writers who oppose this matter altogether. The irony in even addressing that fact is that, most likely, in another decade it will not even be necessary to make this observation. The number of opponents—Christian writers and leaders who are either reticent or resistant to the "question" (fact) of demonic bondage and its relationship to believers in Christ—is steadily diminishing. This is not because people are rejecting the Scriptures, but because they are subjecting them to a closer look. Many are examining the Word of God and discovering how prejudice and blind presupposition have obstructed a clearer view of the reality of this

problem. They're finding how the Holy Spirit reveals His solutions to human bondage.

This matter is not "some new doctrine," nor is it a fringe area of arcane preoccupation. The doctrine of exorcism is as old as the Scriptures and the ministry thereof as ancient as the Church. That sectors of the Church have largely neglected or denied this ministry certainly should not be accepted as an argument against its place or validity. Church history reveals that there has always been an ecclesiastical inclination to retreat from the most demanding realms of spiritual pursuit; such as the passion of prayer, the evangelistic spread of the Gospel, the welcome of the Holy Spirit's fullness for all ministry, the acceptance of the gifts of the Spirit, the expectation of signs and wonders—and as well, the willingness to confront the dark powers of hell oppressing a believer.

Common arguments for attempting to preempt this aspect of ministry are usually made in a vacuum, outside the circle either (1) of conversation with sound-minded ministers of "deliverance," or (2) of confrontation with the fact that such "deliverance" is regularly being ministered by Christian leaders without foolishness or fanaticism. The proposal made by a few, that to acknowledge such oppression or bondage in a Christian is to demean, diminish, or deny the power of the reigning Christ indwelling the believer, is dishonest. Further, they beg the real question; the fact that "bound believers" do exist and that theological pretensions or arguments aren't going to free them.

Further, some have suggested that distinguishing between the human soul and spirit is to meaninglessly "fragment" the personality. A few propose it to be unscriptural to distinguish between (1) the realm of uncontestable strength and stability in Christ (i.e. the redeemed human spirit) and (2) the place where instances of bondage or oppression by our Enemy may be occurring (i.e. in the soul of some believers). But the truth is unmistakably clear. The Bible not only teaches the distinction between the soul and spirit, but God's Word Itself is the instrument of discerning this separateness.

"For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked

and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." (Hebrews 4:12,13)

It is worthy of note also, that the context of this quotation from the Book of Hebrews is an exhortation which issues a call to every believer to "enter into the believer's rest." The passage draws a parallel between us today, and Israel during its wilderness journey. And it is no strain of the text to note that those who fell in the wilderness—did so because they never really gained inner freedom from the thought and life patterns related to their former bondage in Egypt. The lesson is a graphic, instructive and contributive insight regarding the need for today's believer to find all that brings the soul to rest in Christ. Another effort at negating the place of deliverance ministry in the current life of the Church is rooted in the suggestion that to acknowledge demonic oppression or bondage is to provide some Christians with an excuse from responsibility for their own actions: "The devil made me do it! I couldn't help it!" But no biblical believer would support this notion, and no escape from personal responsibility is being argued in these pages. We affirm that each of us who sins is completely responsible, whatever the motivation or energy behind it. Dealing with this issue is not to suggest an exit from responsibility, but is to assist finding an escape for bound souls; "and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will." (2 Timothy 2:26)

Bondage always exists because of disobedience and sin. However, some instances bringing bondage to human souls were not consciously perceived at the time the evil became locked into place. For example, enormous implications flow from such childhood encounters as battering, other child abuses, involuntary exposure to the crude or corrupt, innocent involvement with the occult, etc. Though the youth may be relatively innocent, such things give place to and may leave bondage strongly ensconced in the violated party. Similarly, many bondages have been put into place during the years of a person's worldly blindedness to God's ways; things either entrenched in habit or attitude, but which Christ, as the Light of the world within them, is now proceeding to burn away through the processes of their sanctification. So please note: to acknowledge the force of these bondages, and the behavior they produce at times, is not to remove the individual from responsibility for their sinning. But sound, discerning counsel will often help tormented or bewildered souls see how they can move

with discernment toward release, unto their fullest liberty in Christ. It is, however, very important to note the following (which will yet be elaborated later).

Much of the deliverance we're discussing often occurs in other ways than by power encounters with the evil spirit involved. While some only focus on this approach, the fact is that much, much deliverance is being processed in multitudes of believers' lives in a no less supernatural, but a more apparently "common" way. God's truth is so dynamic—that with many Christians—every day they feed on God's Word, every sermon-lesson they submit to as they hear the preaching-teaching of the Word, every time they heed the Holy Spirit's instruction-correction at seemingly "minor points" of detail in their lives, deliverance is occurring! Yet this doesn't remove the fact that there was or has been satanically entrenched bondage, and that the individual has or is being "delivered" from that snare. Such "snare" may vary widely in their access to or hold on people.

The Bible makes specific mention of various oppressive spirits of darkness. Besides giving the specific names of more than a dozen demon deities in the Word (virtually all these designated being "gods," which were worshipped by the idolatrous nations surrounding Israel) a more generic order of demon spirits is referenced. Frequent mention occurs in such terms as: "familiar spirits" (Leviticus 14:13; 1 Samuel 28:7,8); "a lying spirit" (1 Kings 22:22; 2 Chronicles 18:21); "a perverse spirit" (Isaiah 19:14); "a spirit of whoredoms" (Hosea 4:12; 5:4); "seducing spirits" (1 Timothy 4:1). These are included precisely in that order of beings against which we are instructed to wage war, doing battle at every point they seek to sustain their hold or advance their evil cause:

"For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against persons without bodies—the evil rulers of the unseen world, those mighty satanic beings and great evil princes of darkness who rule the world; and against huge numbers of wicked spirits in the spirit world." (Ephesians 6:12, Living Bible, emphasis mine.)

Beside these mentioned above, every Bible student knows how often "evil spirits" and "unclean spirits" are mentioned, which beings are those with which we war in the ministry of deliverance. Some writers (usually ones who have experience in actually dealing with people

oppressed by such spirits) have noted biblical references to other spirits:

"a haughty spirit" (Proverbs 16:18); "a spirit of jealousy" (Numbers 5:4); "a sorrowful spirit" (1 Samuel 1:15); "a spirit of fear" (2 Timothy 1:7). It is indeed likely that these may identify specific "ministries" of evil spirits, even though some regard them solely as designations of human emotions. One writer, in opposing this idea, argues that to identify these "spirits" as demons, rather than only as human feelings, would logically require describing all the workings of the Holy Spirit—Spirit of love, power, grace, etc.—as manifestations of "many spirits" rather than of the one Holy Spirit of God. But that line of argument is biblically unfounded. It breaks down when we simply acknowledge the vast difference between the limited capacities of Satan and the omnipotence and omnipresence of the Holy Spirit. Satan needs a host of various spirits to carry out his will, because he is not omnipresent. But the Holy Spirit of God, by wide contrast, administers everything of Himself everywhere He wishes without requiring multiple expressions of His Person or nature.

Finally, in regard to common questions, objections or concerns which sometime preempt even the discussion of the ministry of deliverance, let it be asserted: The CROSS OF JESUS CHRIST is the centerpiece of this and all ministry! Elsewhere I will further elaborate this foundational fact, but early let it be affirmed with vigor: The Person of Christ, the perfect work of the Cross and the all-sufficiency of redemption's power are in no wise minimized by our facing the matter at hand, acknowledging it and seeking to minister to it. The power of hell and every demon were broken at Calvary, but the activity of demons did not cease there. Their power to sustain human control still survives to the degree that the Cross's victory is unapplied. All Calvary's triumph must be ministered to become actively effective in each human being. Just as surely as Jesus' victory over sin and death needs to be received at a personal level by each person, so the persistence of hell's efforts at oppression often need to be confronted with truth personally—and banished. And this often is needed where clear cases of oppression or bondage torment Christians.

THE NEED OF THIS MINISTRY

The rapid and rabid increase of pagan thought and practice in North America has removed us who labor here from a formerly assumed presumption. Earlier in

the twentieth century, it was common to regard preparation for confrontation with the demonic as solely a need when ministering in foreign countries. While that was a delusion even then, it is all the more crucial today that recognition of this need and preparation for ministering to it become a settled matter. No spiritually sensitive leader can afford the academic or self-preserving luxury of supposing himself or herself beyond the call to deliverance ministry, and thereby outside the need for holy and healthy preparation for it. There are multitudinous factors contributing to the increase of demonic strongholds becoming entrenched in human personalities.

So much of contemporary pop-theology, presently termed “New Age” (although terms change from season to season) is laden with self-glorifying, demon-trafficking notions, that a spiritually naive population has almost totally opened itself to an inrush of demon activity and bondage. Mantras are chanted, naming, extolling and inviting demon entry, while heavy-metal and acid-rock groups dedicate their albums to invisible beings whom they acknowledge as their source of light, life, and guidance. A greediness for sensuality and an abandonment to a mood of sexual promiscuity has invoked the ancient demigods (demons all) of Venus, Aphrodite, and Diana. Added to this, a host of other demons are sweeping in—veiled by the ignorance of the spiritual implications as many dabble in the astrological, the demon “war games,” the supposedly “fun time” with the palmist, the fortune teller or the mind-science “therapy” weekend. Further, the satanically ritualistic and other occult practices compound the clutter on the spiritual landscape. Activities which used to be feared as inappropriate or psychologically dangerous are now pursued as pleasures, as adventures in curiosity or as the worship of devotees to the demonic. All the walls have been breached, and a flood of hellish workings has overwhelmed the multitudes. Consequently, a battery of new problems confronts many North American shepherds to the flock of God:

- New dimensions of prayer warfare are clearly needed today in order to penetrate strongholds and plant churches in communities.
- Days of easier dissemination of the Word are behind, and every discerning leader knows it.

Further, it is an entirely new challenge today to deal with many converts who come from so broken a past—crushed by parentlessness, wounded by social abuse,

bruised and fractured in relationships, tormented by the psychological residue from past exposure with evil spirits, bound to habits which have been ensconced as much by demonic ties as by mere repeated exercise. Many come to salvation, but soon discover that a distinct ministry is needed to confront the darkness of their past.

We are in no way demeaning of the power of the Gospel in regeneration when we acknowledge that oftentimes a further “deliverance” is needed in a person’s Christian experience. The instantaneous impact of Jesus Christ’s entry into a human personality by the power of the Holy Spirit, when a life opens to God’s saving grace through faith, is not being denied or minimized when we discuss this subject. But at the same time, the totality of the instant spiritual reality, that “if anyone is in Christ he is a new creature,” should never be confused with the fact that the psychological (emotional/mental) transformation of a new believer is not instantaneous. This is the reason the Scriptures refer to both the progressive processes of our sanctification as well as to the instant reality of our regeneration through the new birth. The ministry of deliverance, while not to be seen as the sum of the process of one’s personal sanctification, is very often a significant part of that development of God’s grace in their soul.

WHAT WE MEAN BY “DELIVERANCE”

Everything of salvation entails deliverance! The first fact regarding this glorious word of the Gospel is that it is not a separate commodity—not a peculiar oddity. “Deliverance” is the essence of our salvation, not only a feature within it.

- We are delivered from the penalty of sin—its shame, guilt, stain and condemnation!
- We are delivered from the power of sin—its grip, its rule, its habit, its disease, its dominion!
- We shall also be delivered from the presence of sin—death, destruction and all that is in the world—at the coming of Jesus, forever!!

The Word of God declares this threefold deliverance in many ways, but none so succinctly as in Paul’s words to the Corinthians:

“Who (God) delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us.” (2 Corinthians 1:10, emphasis added)

Further, both the foundational words for “to save” in Hebrew and Greek entail the concept of deliverance: yawshah (Heb.), “save, to open, to free, to rescue”; sodzo (Greek), “save, to deliver, to protect.” With these basic words of salvation, others are added in both Testaments, as illustrated by the following examples:

- **pawlat** (Hebrew, in Psalm 18:2)
“The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust.”
- **pelaytaw** (Hebrew, in Obadiah 17)
“But on Mount Zion there shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.”
- **rhomai** (Greek, in Matthew 6:13; Luke 11:4)
“And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”
- **exkairo** (Greek, in Galatians 1:4,5)
“Who (our Lord Jesus Christ) gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Still, to focus the breadth of our deliverance is not to withdraw from the more specific use of the word as it bears on the breaking of demonic bondage and the freeing of individuals from torment, suffering, affliction and inhibiting, restrictive bonds of thought, attitude and practices. These points of bondage occur or exist in a number of ways. Deliverance, in the specific sense of “breaking the bonds of demonic oppression,” is needed in such situations as these illustrated in the Bible.

- Where the source of a sickness or affliction is demonic. (The Lord said) “So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound—think of it—for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?” (Luke 13:16) The text speaks of “a spirit of infirmity” (v. 11) and thus designates this specific activity of the devil. Of course, this neither teaches nor should we conclude that all sickness is demonic in origin, or either that it is a direct result of an individual’s sinning.
- Where a residue of the past life-style is still dominant. (Peter said) “Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity.” (Acts 8:22-23)

The context (8:13) reveals that Simon had believed and been baptized, but that the spirits which enabled his past involvement in sorcery were now seeking to sustain their control through him, by extending his former self-serving, control-of-others life-style.

- Where a believer may consciously open himself to satanic influence through willful disobedience, indulgence or rebellion. “Therefore putting away lying...be angry and do not sin...nor give place to the devil.” (Ephesians 4:25-27) The entire context is a summons away from the traits of worldly indulgence. The word “place” (topos) clearly indicates a specific possibility of a location being surrendered in the soul of a believer, which may come under the influence of that world-spirit which fosters the behavior willfully given place to in the believer’s life.
- Where an regression to past attitudes and practice is allowed. “But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?” (Galatians 4:9)

The **stokeia** (Greek for “elements”) refers to more than merely the patterns or “abc’s” of the world’s way or philosophy. Translators and other scholars probe the depths of this word which refers to demons who energize any culture’s animistic or folk religions; activities which substitute or detract from the worship of the One, True and Living God.

Examples: “The elemental spirits of the universe” (Galatians 4:3, New English Bible); “The weak and helpless elemental false gods” (Galatians 4:9, Norlie Translation); “The elemental spirits of the world” (Colossians 2:8, Moffat Translation). Further, note that such scholars as Lenski (Galatians, p. 213) and Bengel (Vol. 2, pg. 363) link stoikeia with the practices of the Galatians’ past idolatry. In Paul’s thinking, this clearly would relate to demonism, as he says in 1 Corinthians 10:19-20. Kittel also acknowledges stokeia as including “the world of false gods (demons) whom the recipients once served” (Vol. VIII, pg. 684, parenthesis, mine). Even though some argue that, in stoikeia, Paul is referencing “an impersonal agent,” this assertion is solely a matter of interpretive opinion; assertions which often characterize commentators not enlightened by or open to the contemporary works of the Holy Spirit with power, and the New Testament order of signs, wonders, and manifestations of power over all the works of the devil. (Pastors, beware of too quickly bowing to opinion that is

born of an era or a setting where such spiritual conflict as we engage today was unknown or is studiously avoided!)

Thus, by “deliverance” as we employ it in this paper, we are defining and dealing with it as:

- (1) that aspect of the finished work of Jesus Christ’s Cross,
- (2) by which He has broken the power of the Evil One, and
- (3) by which any work or entrenchment of his dark kingdom,
- (4) in oppressing or tormenting one of the Lord’s redeemed,
- (5) may be vanquished, dissolved or expelled,
- (6) by the ministry of the believer,
- (7) extending the authority of the Name of Jesus and the Blood of His Cross.

This applies to that order of problems of bondage, torment, sickness or affliction, and any such related oppression as outlined in the four earlier points. Jesus, the anointed Messiah, has announced His objective and transmitted His anointing to His people by the power of the Holy Spirit that His ministry might be continued:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.” (Luke 4:18-19)

ATTITUDES TOWARD DELIVERANCE MINISTRY

There are two essential attitudes which ought to govern our thinking about this specific expression of gospel ministry: conviction and humility.

- A. Conviction: First, we ought to hold convictions about this ministry because this was a primary ministry of our Lord Jesus and was repeatedly in evidence as He ministered.

The clear testimony of the Word of God shows that Jesus regarded demons as real, destructive, hellish and to be expelled. Because Jesus pointedly acknowledges error when He confronts it (e.g., Matthew 22:29), it is obvious that he did not simply accept the reality of demons as a diplomatic courtesy or concession to contemporary superstition or social convention. No! He knew they

were real, and they knew He was God! (Matthew 8:29) In this light, it is essential that thoughtful leaders today not be dissuaded from the conviction that these evil powers are real, and presently active in tormenting humankind. They hate all that even remotely characterizes God, and the smashed image of the Father in mankind still reminds them of the One they defy. Further, they delight in blocking any efforts bent on rescuing mankind, and do all possible to kill (war, murder, suicide, substance abuse, accidents) or diminish life (sickness, poverty, domestic strife, marital stress, etc.)

These beings are real, and discerning leaders must arrive at this conviction. Social definitions and scientific discoveries sometime distract from deeper, underlying spiritual root possibilities behind much human dilemma. For example, whatever has been or may yet be discovered concerning either the neuro-biological or chemical source of many human disorders or causes of suffering (which discoveries we do not deny or deprecate), it still would be unbiblical and unwise to categorize all biological or psychological diseases or disorders under these natural explanations. There are natural sources of much human dilemma and disease, but there are also supernatural sources of the same. The Holy Spirit, on the basis of the Holy Word of God, has given us both the grounds for discernment as well as the gift of discernment, along with the functional power of the Spirit’s presence to extend God’s Kingdom. By these resources we are sent to evict all dark, evil and destructive powers of hellish origin, and not to concede to naturalistic excuses for doing less than this.

Convictions about this ministry as being primary essential features of Christ’s ministry, and similarly as essential in His call to us, are deepened by examining His ministry. Look how regularly the casting out of demons is coupled with His preaching, teaching, and healing works. Examine the following references which show Him in action, and also note how He discipled his followers in this same work): Read Luke 4:40-41; 6:17-19; 7:20-21; 9:1-2; 10:17-21; 11:19-22; 13:32. While only these few references from Luke are cited (for convenience in tracing the track yourself), each of the synoptic gospels is equally abounding with evidence of this emphasis.

Further, specific cases of Jesus’ personal ministry of deliverance to individuals demonstrate the range of this ministry; a breadth noted by the different verbs used describing the “deliverance” in the following texts:

- Luke 8:26-34, sodzo — Deliverance is saving, restoring, and freeing. The setting at liberty of the Gadarene demoniac from his compoundedly horrible condition shows the “saving” work of deliverance.
- Luke 8:1-3, therapeuo — Deliverance is therapeutic treatment, caring, and healing. The seven demons cast out of Mary Magdalene accomplished a completely healed personality. We are not told here or anywhere how her bondage manifested in previous behavior, but we are told she was completely freed and healed. This starkly contrasts with the totally non-biblical folklore (often preserved even in Christian tradition) which suggests that Mary had not only been a harlot but that she was also an alluring distraction to Jesus, if not as some drama would have it, a successful seductress. No! The Bible shows her to be totally delivered—healed of her past.
- Luke 9:37-42, iaomai — Deliverance is curative of illness and/or of terrible suffering. This is the definition of the verb employed when the boy near Caesarea-Phillipi is delivered.
- Luke 4:31-37; 13:10-17, apoluo — Deliverance is the result of a confrontive conflict with satanic beings which torment, invade or manipulate the human personality, and which looses the individual from that oppressive, compulsive control. The two cases show a man (apparently normal in terms of social acceptability) and a woman (obviously crippled by drastic deformity) both in attendance at regular synagogue gatherings. The text shows how that even though they were in an environment of religious orthodoxy, their condition was not known to be one of demonic bondage until Christ’s presence (a) excites the demon’s response, or (b) occasions His discernment of the need. (This might serve as a prompting to any spiritual leader to invite the Holy Spirit’s giftings that we not be similarly ignorant or passive when such hell-begotten pain, problem or bondage is in our midst.)

A study of Jesus’ life focuses all the reason necessary for us to move with conviction that His ministry be extended in continuum through us and those we lead today.

“How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.” (Acts 10:38)

Thus it is with reason we underscore the first essential: conviction. But it is equally crucial to any effective ministry in deliverance that we add a second grace:

B. Humility. The second attitude that ought to characterize our approach to deliverance is humility. This should be precisely because the source of our authority is not in our wisdom, discernment or gifting, but in the Cross. Please take note: Our adversary’s greatest retaliatory weapon against our invading his dark kingdom is to seek to infect us with the very thing which occasioned his downfall—pride.

It is tragic when an awakening of a New Testament truth of vital life-stirring power becomes distorted or abused. Sometimes it is due to genuine ignorance; simply the result of the untrained suddenly coming upon a valid experience but pursuing it without the foundation of understanding through teaching and the knowledge of God’s Word. Other times, however, a genuine demonstration of divine grace in deliverance ministry will occasion the rise of human pride. Such pride seems to succeed in its progressive, snakelike entwining within the soul for either or both of two reasons:

- (1) The individual begins to see himself or herself as superior to others of apparently less enlightenment about this ministry than they are; or,
- (2) The adulation of people who have been helped, whose gratitude turns to dependency, and eventually to sectarian idolizing of the leader.

Often, confusion unto pride is forwarded by either the leader or those helped by him or her, as they become duped by the notion that “deliverance ministry” is somehow “more advanced,” or “really deep,” or “where the action really is.” The frequency of such delusions besetting this ministry both teach and warn us. It teaches us that our adversary will focus his deceptive efforts in this arena, because it does cut to the core of so much otherwise undealt with pain and problem among people God loves. And it warns us that a distinct caution must be sustained—continually. Early triumph over pride does not guarantee total immunity. This sinister spirit will seek endlessly creative ways at tripping up any whom the Holy Spirit uses to drive back the oppressor and to extend the Kingdom of God with power.

“Deliverance ministry” ought never to be isolated, adulated or separated from all gospel ministry. Otherwise, too easily a kind of cultish or elitist group

of the “initiated” will submit to a pathetic sense of superiority for having gained some small insight into this great truth. Becoming inflated with an overactive ego, such blinded ones proceed to the supposition that they have somehow gained a superiority and dimension of authority that has now negated their need to walk with that childlike simplicity that is always to characterize Kingdom people (Matthew 8:1-4; 1Cor. 14:20).

Jesus warned the disciples of this Himself. When they returned from a time of deputized ministry, they were so absolutely overwhelmed with their authority in “deliverance ministry,” they exclaimed, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us!” Our Lord didn’t deny or discourage their exercise of that authority He had given them and which they were learning to exercise. But He did caution and instruct, “Don’t rejoice in that...Rather, rejoice because your names are registered in heaven” (see Luke 10:17-24). The truth of that exchange underscores and forever reminds us of what clear-headed disciples/servants/leaders will always remember: Our authority is derived NOT from our knowledge but from our relationship with Jesus!

Our names have been “registered in heaven.” First, we have the hope of eternal life and the assurance of full forgiveness of sins. And, thus, it is that now—and solely by reason of the fact our names are registered there in His book—when we address demons we have the credentials to do so! Don’t even let a moment’s thought suggest, that power over demons is a domain gained by our own brilliance. Jesus alone is Lord, and our submission to Him in life and in spirit is the grounds for our authority! Let’s bow and worship Him—again and again!!

In concluding the matter as to our attitude in deliverance ministry, let me share a communique I wrote to my own congregation under the heading, “How We Seek To Minister Deliverance”:

1. We minister with sound-minded, scriptural teaching, with entreaty (not pressure), and with understanding. We avoid the instilling of fear by explaining God’s Word with wisdom and with sensitivity—only approaching those who request ministry, and never imposing this ministry on anyone. 1Timothy 5:22 enjoins against “sudden” action in ministry; a point of counsel that argues against “jumping into” or pushing one’s way into a deliverance ministry situation.

2. We minister with humility, recognizing the vulnerability of those who minister in this realm; guarding against independence, self-deception as to “importance,” and always resisting elitism and pride (which will at first separate and ultimately will destroy health and fellowship in the Body).
3. We minister with patience and love, and never in an air of judging those whom anyone may “discern” (in truth or in imagination) to be “bound.” Romans 12:3-16 and Hebrews 13:3 are graciously and abundantly clear: minister all gifts with grace and loving understanding of your own weakness and of every other saint’s preciousness as a person.
4. We minister with authority. Given the above cautions, we do not intend to be reticent or cautious about answering the call to move in boldness. We function in the authority (a) given by the Word of God, (b) sustained in the spirit of worship and exaltation of our Lord Jesus Christ, and (c) quickened by the anointing and presence of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 10:3-5; Philippians 2:8-11; 2 Timothy 1:7).

THE NATURE OF “SPIRITUAL BONDAGE”

Every preacher of God’s Word readily acknowledges that the message of the Gospel does indeed translate the new convert “out of the kingdom of darkness” and “into the Kingdom of God’s dear Son” (Colossians 1:13).

However, whenever the subject of spiritual oppression is discussed, especially when direct mention is made asserting the activities of demons in perpetrating that torment of bondage in a believer’s life, concern, if not consternation, often arises. There often seems to be a blocking preoccupation with theology, at the expense of a blessed pursuit of ministry born of a concern for the spiritual liberation of those being tormented.

Years ago a widely disseminated tract raised the question, “Can A Christian Have A Demon?” I like the response of one pastor who answered that question with another: “Who wants one!?!?” However, the subject requires more than a quip for an answer. Let us seek to answer the question: “Exactly what is the nature of spiritual bondage when it is experienced by a born-again, blood-washed believer?”

Usually, the primary concerns are first, technical and theological, and second, practical and ministry oriented. Theologically, leaders want to know, “Is it scriptural to think a demon could be in a person in whom Jesus Christ already dwells by the power of the Holy Spirit?”

Pragmatically, they ask, “If this is even remotely the case, how can a pastor/counselor relate this to a person without throwing that individual into a complete state of panic?”

First, fullest honesty requires the admission that the theological answer is, “No one knows.” Whatever can be asserted as a philosophical proposition, either for or against the internal location of the demonic problem, breaks down when honesty with the limits of our understanding is admitted. There is no human being who can perfectly define, describe or diagram the structure and interrelationship of the component parts of our human nature. Soul, spirit, mind, emotions, and heart—all are mentioned in the Scriptures, but not in a systematic way that allows for a conclusive arrangement or a “provable” structure. Consequently, it is difficult to say in what sense an evil spirit may be “in” a person. But one thing is certain: where bondage exists, that spirit IS “in control!” Though it may not be found to be “in control” most of the time, it will be found that the bondage will manifest at certain times and in ways that occasionally defy the ability of the one who is bound to either explain or to overcome.

Notwithstanding my above admission, that no one can conclusively “prove” a given structure of the human personality, I offer the accompanying Diagram I. This has generally met with agreement among Bible teachers and scholars, and proposes a suggested, working description of the structure of the invisible aspects of our humanness.

Following, related diagrams are integrated into this text in an effort to help us see:

- Diagram I: what the basic structure of our human nature is like, and what is going on in the invisible aspects of a human being...
- Diagram II: when they are lost, and when they are saved;
- Diagram III: when spiritual (demonic) attack occurs; and,
- Diagram IV: how our spiritual defenses are constructed.

Fundamental to this presentation is the proposition that, whatever the dimension of bondage, the redeemed SPIRIT of a believer not only IS not but CANNOT be indwelt by an evil spirit.

DIAGRAM I

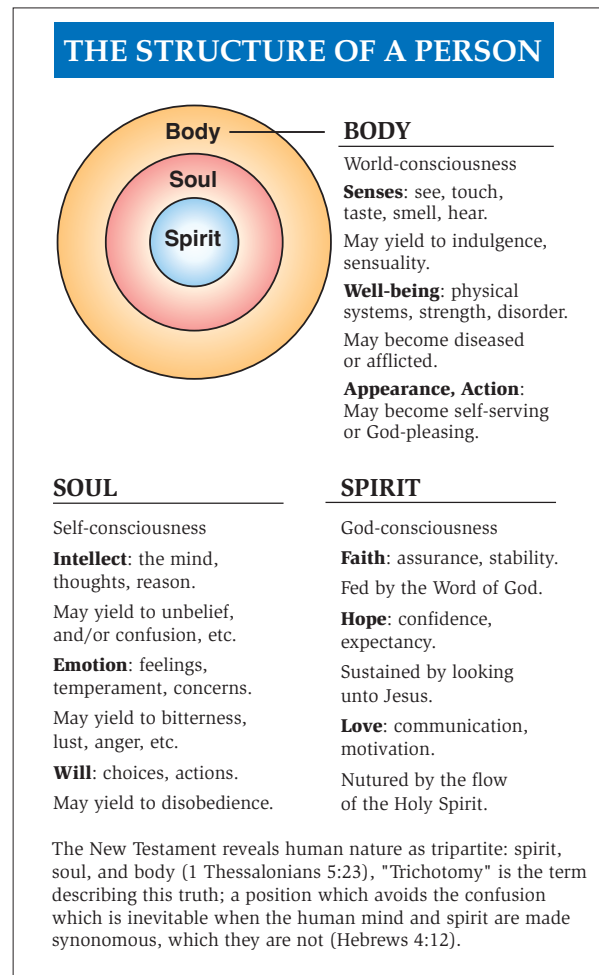


DIAGRAM II

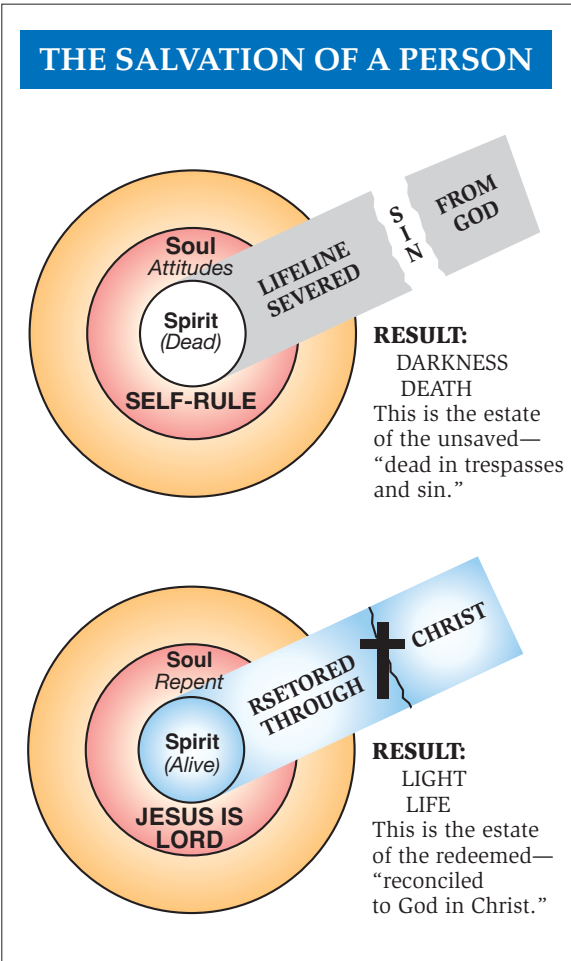


DIAGRAM III

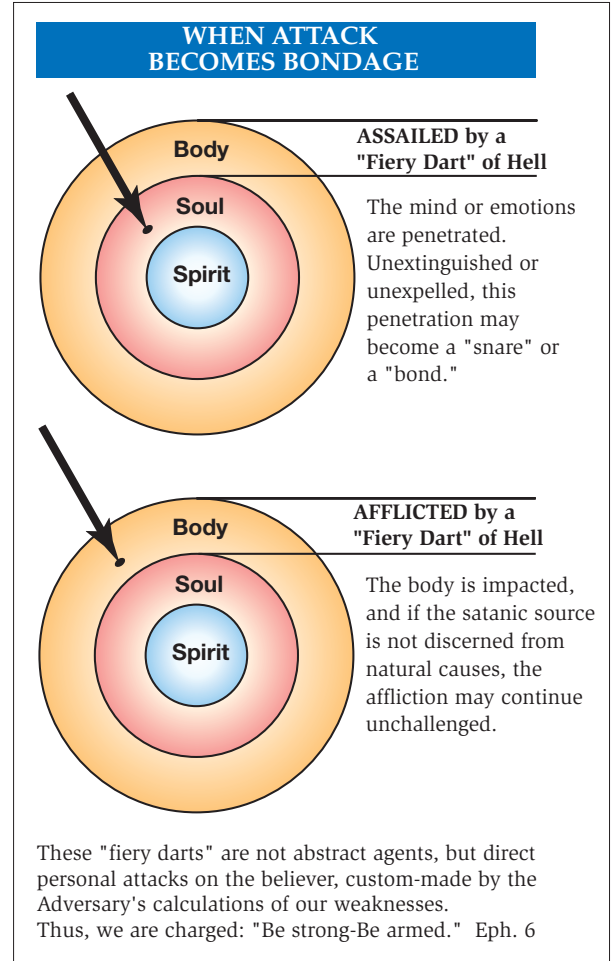
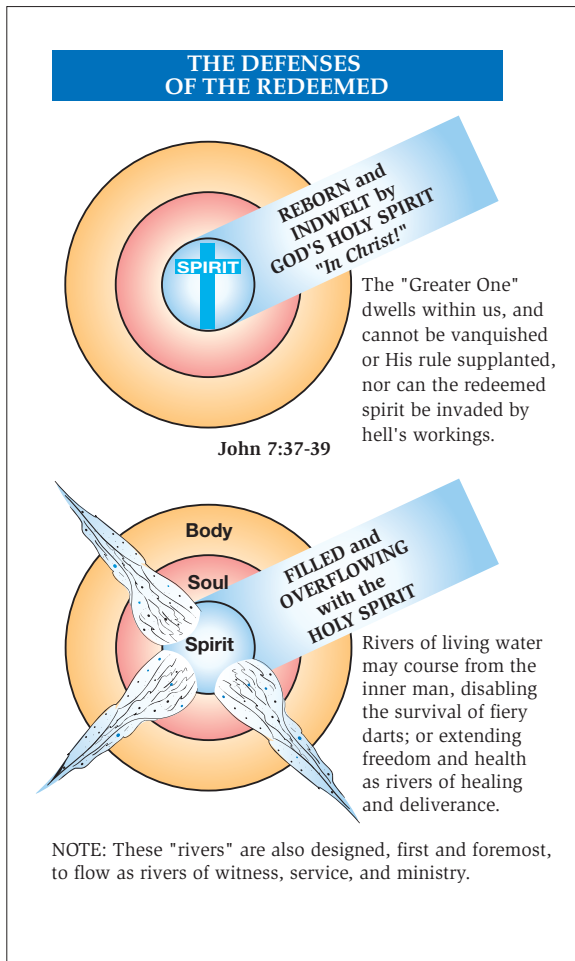


DIAGRAM IV



As Diagram I suggests, the nature of spiritual bondage (unless only manifest in a physical affliction), seems essentially to be psychological (that is, "soul" level—*psuche*), and not with the spirit (*pneuma*) of a redeemed human being. This means that the mind or the emotions (or both) are frequently assailed. When that successfully occurs, the will is crippled with regard to whatever feature of the person's thoughts, attitudes, or conduct over which the evil spirit has penetrated and gained temporary control. Thereby, on occasion the individual will manifest behavior or responses that are reflective of their bondage; explosions of temper, incursions of lust, horrible depression, biting criticism, vicious cruelty, etc.

The description of this "control" should never be termed "possession." The expression "demon-possessed" is not biblical. Rather, the Greek verb used consistently in the New Testament is diamonidzo which means "to be

demonized." In the Bible it describes people of widely varied circumstance; from ones who may be generally normal in behavior (except when the demon manifests, as the man in the Capernaum synagogue), or as horrendously abnormal (as the extreme case of the Gadarene demoniac). These words, with the four Diagrams' explanations, offer an attempt at answering the question: "Where is the demon?" The answer: "It is in" that is, "in partial control of the personality." But having answered that, we also face the very practical question of "How?" How is this bondage—this demon-at-work—to be discussed with a person whom I sense may be bound?"

In most cases, it is not necessary to elaborate the subject of "demon power" when talking to a person about their need for freedom of oppression. The ministry of deliverance is more dynamic than academic. It centers in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring together (1) a person who acknowledges his need of break-through, and who is willing to confess any sin related to the matter; and (2) a person prepared to minister that freedom in the power of the Holy Spirit.

However, when I have felt any need to describe or explain a person's bondage to them, I have usually described it as either a "kind of a leech" or as a "spiritual sunburn." The figure of the leech defines the action of the evil spirit in "sucking spiritual vitality and strength" from a person's soul, at the same time suggesting to the hearer's mind an external contact. I apply the figure of a "spiritual sunburn," by saying that the "burn" has come from exposure to the "fiery darts" of hell's efforts to inflict its hurt upon them (using Ephesians 6 as the picture of the struggle wherein the "darts" are fired at us). These figures of speech, sometimes accompanied by a simple use of parts of the accompanying diagrams, suggest a more external manipulation than an inner infestation. The practical wisdom of this approach has seemed to be proven over the years.

While not denying the fact that the soul has been assailed, this type of approach removes the conversation from a preoccupation with the work of demons. It allows me to make the primary focus on the holiness, health, healing and freedom, "which Jesus our Lord is present to bring about at this moment!"

Let us remember, when engaged in this or any ministry, our greatest strength—and glory!—will always be directly proportional to our ability to exalt Jesus, not the devil,

and to welcome the sweet and joyous presence of the Holy Spirit (as opposed to being concerned with the temporary works of evil spirits).

STEPS IN PURSUING DELIVERANCE MINISTRY

So brief an article as this cannot include illustrations from experience or elaboration of various circumstances one encounters in opening to the ministry of deliverance. But perhaps the two most essential things to learn are:

- (1) That your willingness to minister according to the Word of God gives the Holy Spirit a new access to your availability. In other words, He'll bring situations and individuals to you, because you have chosen to allow Him to teach, equip, and prepare you—making you “sufficient unto every good work.” (2 Corinthians 3:5-6) Principle: You don't need to stir up business or parade your ministry in this area. Don't talk about it, just do it.
- (2) That each situation is unique. Handbooks on deliverance, if born of wisdom, will not teach techniques or methods: They will help with principles. But most essentially, learn not to depend upon past experiences. It will keep you from imposing presumptions on any case, and increases your dependency on the Holy Spirit. Principle: Fresh anointing and fresh discernment flow from keeping your walk with Jesus fresh and alive. All power and wisdom flows from Him, through that relationship.

DISCERNING THE ARENAS OF DELIVERANCE

As we have earlier noted, all salvations' operations are a “deliverance.” But within the broad spectrum of that fullness of grace, there are four basic arenas of deliverance from sin, from sickness, from Satan and from self.

Chart A, on the right, is a simple arrangement of biblical truth designed to emphasize the basic and different aspects of human bondage and the way the Word describes the “deliverance” available. There is, for example, a vast difference between that ministry which bears witness to the saving gospel through preaching or personal evangelism, (by which a soul is “born again”), and that ministry by which a believer, tormented by the devil, is “restored” or “recovered” from their oppression by the personal ministry of loving, servant-shepherds or fellow-believers.

Please notice that ministries to the unsaved, the sick, the demonically oppressed and/or the self-ruled, or the undisciplined-through-the-Cross believer are distinguished as separate arenas. However, there are any number of combinations of these problems. For example, a person may, as we've seen in the Bible, be both sick and satanically oppressed—the one related to the other.

Thus, the chart itself is not a ministry guide, but simply a means of distinguishing general areas of the human circumstance that ought to be kept in perspective as distinct, even if they overlap at times.

Chart A

| CHART A — DISCERNING THE DIFFERENCE | | | | | |
|--|-------------|---------------|--|--------------------|---|
| BOUND IN | CONDITION | CAUSED BY | DESCRIBED AS | ACTION TO TAKE | DELIVERANCE EXPERIENCED BY |
| Sin | Dead | Penalty | W ages of Sin” <i>Romans 6:23</i> | Preach Gospel | Receiving Christ <i>James 1:12</i> |
| Satan | Driven | Slavery | “Servants of Sin” <i>Romans 6:17, 20</i> | Counsel/ Admonish | Resisting the Devil <i>James 4:7</i> |
| Sickness | Diseased | Vulnerability | “Resultant from the impact of the fall” <i>Genesis 2:17</i> | Cure, Make Whole | Prayer of Faith <i>James 5:15</i> |
| Self | Disobedient | Immaturity | “Body of Sin” <i>Romans 6:6</i> | Teach Discipleship | Obedience <i>Romans 6:11-12</i> |

The second chart (B,) shown below, is intended to demonstrate that the grounds for all ministry are always the same. There is not a separate gospel for one order of human need, and a different one for another. ALL LIFE, HEALTH, SALVATION, DELIVERANCE and GRACE flows by the same means: (1) from the Cross (the Blood); (2) from the Savior (in Jesus' Name); (3) from the Promises (the Word of God); and (4) from the River (the stream of the Holy Spirit's power). The texts noted are only introductory and by no means exhaustive. They simply evidence how each area of human suffering has been addressed through the mighty resources of salvation's provision.

Chart B

| CHART B — DISCERNING THE DIFFERENCE (Con't.) | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------|-------------------------------|
| GAINING DELIVERANCE FROM | SIN | SATAN | SICKNESS | SELF |
| Blood of Christ | Eph. 1:17 Col. 1:14 | Rev. 12:11 | 1 Peter 2:24 | Galatians 2:20 |
| Jesus' Name | Acts 4:12 | Mark 16:17 | James 5:14-15 | Romans 7:24-25 |
| God's Word | Romans 10:8-10, 17 | Eph. 6:17 1 Peter 1:23 | Matthew 8:8 | Psalms 119:11 Psalm 107:20 |
| Holy Spirit | John 16:82 1 Cor. 12:3 | Cor. 10:4 | Romans 8:11 | Romans 8:13 |

PATHWAYS TO DELIVERANCE

Just as there are specific things that are most frequently done in seeing people brought to Christ in mass evangelism, and similarly certain ministry approaches have been developed for personal witness and soul-winning, so there are basic patterns by which deliverance is ministered. Just as with evangelism, those approaches vary from group or public service settings to personal encounter or counselling situations. So in my pastoral ministry, I seek to see both public and private situations bear the fruit of people freed unto new liberty and fulfillment in Christ.

Public Services: At least once each month we will conduct a service dedicated to healing of the sick and freeing of the bound; a gathering usually set in a Sunday evening context when members of the Body gather in

the advance knowledge that this focus will characterize the meeting. In another approach, a recent pre-Easter midweek series dealt with “the power of the Cross in breaking all bondage.” Record midweek attendances were registered, and great blessing filled these occasions, with many delivered and a sizeable number of others being baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Personal Ministry: In our pastoral counselling ministry, we move with the conviction that ours is not to be a clinical approach, whereby psychiatric techniques and extended numbers of repeat sessions are utilized and expected. (This is not a criticism of those approaches used by many dedicated professional Christian counselors, of which a number are a part of our congregation. We value the ministry, skill and dedication of these people, and when dealing with cases which would be better served by this approach we are quick to refer these believers to such professional ministries.)

This differentiating between clinical counselling and pastoral ministry as related to deliverance, is based on our conviction that ours is a “crisis-oriented” teaching/freeing mission, rather than an extended “clinical care” approach. Our “counselling” focuses on the wisdom of biblical instruction and advice—the resource we give within our mission as pastor-teachers. When bondage is present, and discernment joined to repentance is manifest, we invoke the power of the Holy Spirit to set the captive free and to open up new vistas of life—now!

However, we are quick to note that deliverance from demonic oppression or torment is not always the result of such a power encounter. Let me note at least two other ways by which we regularly witness people experiencing deliverance from encrusted bondage points inflicted by hell's minions:

1. Growth in the Truth — *John 8:32*

Jesus said, “You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.” In contrast to this, Isaiah spoke the word of the Lord when he announced, “Therefore my people have gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge...Sheol has enlarged itself and opened its mouth beyond measure.” (Isaiah 5:13-14)

A great deal of human bondage is simply due to the blindness and ignorance so prevalent regarding God's truth. Accordingly, we have discovered that if people

simply submit themselves to regular attendance in the atmosphere where God's Word is being faithfully taught, a process of ongoing deliverance is set in motion. There is great deliverance simply through the preaching and teaching of the anointed Word of God.

2. Ministry of God's Love — 1 John 4:18

The Bible explains, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear." It is unquestionable that a profound degree of human bondage in our present society is the product of a prevailing spirit of fear: fear of life, fear of death, fear of want, fear of non-acceptance, fear of sickness, fear of people, fear engendered during childhood, fear ingrained through exposure to horrible things from personal events to horror films...and the list goes on. But of an entirely different Kingdom is the Spirit of Love: "The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." (Romans 5:5) Just as ongoing exposure to God's Word may bring release from personal torment, so immersion in the Body of a local assembly, where the love of God is manifest among the membership, has awesome power to break chains of fear and produce newfound freedom, faith, and joy.

In this conjunction we ought also to note that a body of evidence from Early Church history (2nd/3rd Century) strongly argues that the occasion of water baptism was a mighty time of deliverance. Our experience agrees with this concept, and we minister to those who come for baptism (1) that they should expect these waters (as with Israel's passage through the Red Sea) to sever all connections with the slavery of the past, and (2) that they may believe (as with Egypt's hosts being drowned) that the Lord will break the back of any residual bonds administered by any tormenting spirits or circumstances from their past (1 Corinthians 10:1-2; Colossians 2:11-15; Romans 6:1-14).

THE ATMOSPHERE OF DELIVERANCE

"Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty...yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, NOR ANGELS NOR PRINCIPALITIES NOR POWERS nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, NOR ANY OTHER CREATED THING, shall be able to separate us

from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (2 Corinthians 3:17, Romans 8:37-39)

The atmosphere of deliverance is a climate of faith and power. It is created anywhere that the Holy Spirit is given the privilege of extending the releasing ministry Jesus proclaimed (Luke 4:18-19). Certain elements foster this atmosphere:

- **The Spirit of Praise** — *Psalm 149:6*
This whole Psalm breathes of the authority of believers who confront the enemy with "the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand." Praise based in the promises and provisions of the Word and the Cross are mighty in breaking down strongholds.
- **The Song of the Lord** — *Psalm 32:7*
David understood and sang of a distinct order of music ministry: "You are my hiding place; you shall preserve me from trouble; YOU SHALL SURROUND ME WITH SONGS OF DELIVERANCE. Selah." Many leaders have discovered that when believers focus "spiritual songs" (i.e., singing by means of Holy Spirit enabled language as in 1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:18-19 and Colossians 3:16) that a sometime unique liberating process unfolds in the midst of that gathering. This is not a formula to be manufactured, but it is a fact to be understood and responded to as the Holy Spirit may prompt a leader.
- **The Power of Repentance** — *Matthew 4:17*
The entry of the Kingdom of God, which systematically will overthrow any entrenchment of the kingdom of darkness, always manifests where a repentant spirit abides. This is not only basic to the individuals being freed, but it is important that such a teachable, correctable, humble spirit abides among the constituency of a congregation. Whenever religious pride or the presumption of achievement dominates a people, an eventual arrogance will hinder the flow of spiritual liberation in that setting. "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (and please note the context: 1 Peter 5:5-9).
- **The Heart of Forgiveness** — *Matthew 18:34-35*
Perhaps no more profound responsibility rests upon each one of us who have received God's forgiveness than that we be faithful relayers of that same spirit of forgiveness. The two verses cited are absolutely stunning in their implications: Where small hearts, though forgiven, refuse to be forgiving of any other,

Jesus Himself has declared that Father God will invoke a battery of tormenting spirits who will plague the unforgiving. If that sounds too difficult to accept, study the whole passage of Matthew, chapter 18, until the duty of the forgiven to forgive penetrates your soul.

Psychologists, psychiatrists, and physicians almost uniformly suggest that as much as 80-90% of human afflictions are at least indirectly resultant from internalized bitterness, resentment, anger, and hatred—all expressions of unforgiveness. The spiritual leader of an assembly needs to lead the way in assuring his own heart is free in this regard, then he or she must lead his people in rising above the pettiness of human smallness that so tempts us all. The motive: “(Since) I forgave you all that debt... should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?” (Matthew 18:32-33)

TO CONCLUDE...

I have titled this article “The Finger of God.” As I conclude my sharing of these thoughts with you, fellow-shepherd, let me relate a testimony. I was seated on the platform, about to address 1200 Christian leaders who had gathered specifically to inquire into the subject of this paper. As we were worshipping, I prayed, “Lord, please give me a picture of what You’re wanting to do and say today.”

Almost instantly a book appeared to my mind’s vision, and my heart heard the words, “You are all living epistles” (see 2 Corinthians 3:2-3 where this idea occurs). As instantly as the picture was given to me in the next instant the picture revealed a finger reaching down to insert itself within the book...then I understood the meaning.

I knew the finger to be the finger of God. I knew the book to represent the inscriptions that have been written upon human lives and experiences. And I knew there were many books where blank pages were waiting to have inscribed upon them the next stage of the Lord’s purpose in their lives...except; except there was a blockage where pages had been stuck together. We’ve all had the experience of reading a book and have come to pages which had not been trimmed; pages which, until they are cut free will obstruct the progress of the unfolding story. And I knew...

So many of God’s precious people are halted or hindered in the advance of God’s “writing” what He wants to, “unfolding” His will in “the story” of their lives. But at some point, through the enterprise of hell’s workings, there has come a sealing off of sectors of their potential, through events in their past. In some cases, these “sealed off” events are happenings that are unremembered even by the person himself/herself, because the human mind has “sealed off” that “page” as too painful to think about. And then the words of Jesus came to mind:

“IF I BY THE FINGER OF GOD, CAST OUT DEMONS, THEN YOU KNOW THE KINGDOM OF GOD HAS COME UPON YOU!”

There are only four times in the Bible that “the finger of God” is mentioned, twice in the Old Testament and twice in the New. The first is in Egypt, as the Lord displayed His power and high hand of mightiness over and above the demon deities of Egypt (Exodus 8:19). As the sorcerers in Pharaoh’s court were unable to match the power displayed through Moses’ ministry, they said to the King: “This is finger of God.” It was their admission that God was not only working, He was pointing directly to their set of gods and proving Himself mightier. This is almost precisely the way Jesus uses the above statement. He is in conflict with the Pharisees who are arguing about the source of His power in ministry. His assertion did not go beyond their understanding: they recognized the might of His ministry and the barrenness of theirs, and that “the Kingdom” was being verified in their midst whether they would admit it or not.

The other two mentions of “God’s finger” relate to His writing His own Word—at Sinai, on engraved stones (Exodus 31:18), and when Jesus stooped to write in the sand, an occasion when most Bible commentators agree that His probable words were a repeating of the Ten Commandments. (The context seems strongly to suggest this, seeing the question He asks following His writing, John 8:5-9.)

Between the four references we have two relating the POWER OF THE SPIRIT and two which relate the POWER OF GOD’S WORD. And in all references the process in motion is liberation; of a people from slavery; of a nation unto its destiny; of a ministry breaking demonic bondage; of a woman finding freeing forgiveness!!

It's the ministry of the Kingdom of God—the overthrow of hell's efforts at dominating human beings through sin, sickness, selfish or satanic bondage! And as God's finger reaches to touch through us, it will open sealed pages in human souls which have been trapped by their past, unlocking the possibilities of redemption's advancing purposes in them—each one. It's salvation's promise through the Cross:

“(God has) wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.” (Colossians 2:14,15)

Because His Cross has ruined all dark powers in their efforts at sustaining their kingdom's control, the blessings of God's Kingdom are opened to us and the life-book Father God wants to write through each of us can be advanced by The Author. And all of this is true, we know—

because it is written!

“If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.” (John 8:36)

“And the yoke will be destroyed because of the anointing.” (Isaiah 10:27)

STUDY GUIDE

1. List the four major points of teaching for you from this chapter. Tell why each had special significance.
2. Has there been a time in your life/ministry when God had brought about “deliverance?” Recount that time in light of the teaching of this chapter. Has this teaching brought further clarity or definition to that situation?
3. As a result of this teaching how are you changed? In attitude, understanding, convictions, etc? How do you think this may affect your ministry?
4. As you studied this chapter, did the Spirit speak to you regarding any personal bondage? Examine that in light of Charts A and B. Ask the Spirit to guide you in the next steps for receiving freedom in this area. Find a trusted friend to share this with and to pray with you.
5. List any questions you have regarding the teaching in this chapter. Share these with others who may be studying this same teaching.

The Finger of God

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