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Chapter One

IT'S TIME FOR YOUR LIBERATION

A special lady stands in New York Harbor. She's called "Lady Liberty," the Statue of Liberty, a symbol of freedom for the whole world. Everything about this great statue speaks of freedom. The poet Emma Lazarus wrote the famous poem found on the pedestal, which invites the world to bring its "huddled masses yearning to breathe free" to these shores.

The lady holds high a lamp to light the way for those seeking freedom. Her crown has seven points beckoning to the seven seas and the seven continents, inviting every part of the earth to bring their oppressed to America. The tablet in her hand is inscribed with the date of the Declaration of Independence. And at her feet lies a chain representing tyranny that has been broken.

This image of freedom reaching out to those in bondage beckons to the people of God in this age, because many among us are in bondage.

I believe God is holding high the lamp of His Word and saying, "Bring Me your pain, your depression, your guilt, your failure, your

discouragement, and your addictions. Bring Me your broken homes, your rebellious children, and your messed-up marriages. Bring Me your sin and your circumstances, from every ocean or continent of your existence.”

God is calling His people to break the chains of tyranny because bondage is totally incongruous with our life in Jesus Christ—the One who said, “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free,” and “So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:32, 36).

The thesis of this book is very simple: God wants to set His people free. I’m not talking about salvation here, because this book is addressed primarily to Christians. By freedom I mean being free from anyone or anything other than Christ that is controlling your life. Free from the need to pop that pill, take that drink, look at that pornography, buy that lottery ticket, or do anything else to deaden the pain of a life held in spiritual bondage.

Therefore, my goal for this book is also simple. I hope, by the power of the Holy Spirit’s illuminating ministry, to light a lamp and hold it up to God’s Word. My prayer is that as you understand and apply the truth of who you are in Jesus Christ, you will be liberated. Chains will lie broken at your feet.

That’s a tall order, which is why only God can do it. But I have accepted the challenge of discovering biblical freedom, and so I say bring your need to the foot of the cross, where chains are broken. You can enjoy a new freedom in your daily Christian life.

THE REALITY OF SPIRITUAL BONDAGE

Why is it that we try so hard and don’t go very far in our spiritual lives? Why do we leave church Sunday on a spiritual high, only to return to the pits on Monday? And why, at other times, do we do the very things we don’t want to do? What is holding us hostage to problems like these?

These issues, and a host of others like them, speak to the reality of spiritual bondage. Most people who are being held captive want to be set free. But in order to be set free, a person must first realize that he is in bondage. In order to break the chains that hold us, we

must understand who put those chains on us and how they got there in the first place.

I want to go to a passage of Scripture that addresses this root issue. The apostle Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth, “I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3).

Paul knew that the same crafty serpent that had duped Eve in the Garden of Eden was messing with the Corinthians’ minds. What scared Paul was not that the serpent was in control of their circumstances, but that he was in their heads. He had coiled himself around their thinking processes and their emotions.

Now that’s bad because we’re talking about “the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9). If Satan ever coils himself around your mind, there aren’t enough pills in the world that you can take to fix the problem. There is no number of seminars you can attend, or vacations you can take, to get free if he’s messing with your mind. Paul said the Corinthians were being deceived.

The Deceiver’s Work

What is the nature of Satan’s deception? What is this trickery he has brought about? Paul pointed his readers back to Satan’s deception of Eve—but he didn’t bring up Eve just to teach a history or a theology lesson.

Paul was saying to his spiritual children at Corinth, “Understand what the deceiver did to Eve, and you’ll understand what he’s trying to do to you.” That’s what the Holy Spirit is saying to us too. What happened to Eve is important because the serpent is still hissing today, thousands of years later.

Since this is true, we need to review the temptation that plunged first Eve and then Adam into sin. I also want to talk about the results of their sin, because in this we can trace the roots of the problems Christians struggle with today.

You’ll recall God’s prohibition against eating any fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 2:17). When the

serpent came to Eve, this was the issue he wanted to discuss with her (Genesis 3:1–3).

Eve knew exactly what God had commanded, but then the serpent hit her with this: “You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it [the forbidden tree] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (vv. 4–5).

The deception worked. Being like God had a nice ring to it for Eve. She not only ate the fruit, but she served some to Adam, and he ate it too (v. 6). And God’s judgment fell on them.

Satan used the same temptation on Eve that he himself had fallen for when he was in heaven—the desire to be independent of God, to be self-sufficient, to be his own god. Five times in Isaiah 14:13–14, Satan had said, “I will . . .” Now he was saying to Eve, “You can . . .” We could call this the sin of self-sufficiency.

Satan’s reply to Eve planted his own evil thoughts in her mind. “Eat this fruit, and you’ll be as wise as God. You’ll have His knowledge base. He doesn’t want that because He’s jealous of you. But you don’t need God. You can do it yourself. This can be your Independence Day from God!”

“Do-It-Yourself” Christianity

We live in a do-it-yourself world, but I hate going to our local “handyman” store. It’s part of a large national chain of such stores, and one reason I don’t like it is because of those endless, huge aisles. I can never seem to find the item I need.

But the real reason I don’t like going to this particular store is that it means I have something I’ve got to do myself. Something at home needs either to be fixed or installed. And I have to come up with a way to get the job done because stores like this have empowered people to think they can do it themselves.

Why call a plumber or an electrician when you can buy all the plumbing or electrical stuff you need and do the job yourself? Just roam those big aisles at the handyman store long enough, and you’ll find the materials to do anything.

The problem with many of us is that we have transferred this same kind of thinking to our Christian lives. We have become so

used to doing it ourselves that, although we know Jesus said we can't do anything apart from Him (John 15:5), we've just been self-sufficient for too long.

We may have the right spiritual verbiage, but self takes over and soon we are trying to be like the "Most High," which was Satan's original sin. That's why he wants to get us operating independently of God.

Satan's goal is to keep sinners from going to heaven and to keep saints from enjoying the trip to heaven by tying them up in spiritual bondage and defeat. When a Christian lives in perpetual defeat, Satan wins. Every time the Enemy gets us in a position where our lifestyle contradicts what God says is true, he wins by deception.

Confusing Your Identity

Of all the tricks Satan has in his bag to promote self-sufficiency and independence from God, he has one that's a favorite because it is so effective. Satan wants to keep you spiritually off balance and defeated by confusing your identity.

The devil wants sinners to think they're saints and saints to think they're sinners. If he can confuse your identity, you won't know who you are, and once that happens you won't know how to act.

I've been learning to use a computer, which is a real surprise to the people who know me. I've learned enough to know that you need a device called an emulator to run otherwise incompatible programs on the same computer.

The emulator can make one program look and perform like the other, but it doesn't change the basic nature of either program. Satan is the great emulator. He has sinners who act more saintly than saints even though they are on their way to hell, and he likes to see saints who act more sinful than sinners even though they are on their way to heaven.

The identity of both groups remains the same, but they have plugged into an emulator so they think they're the opposite of what they actually are, and they act that way. They've been deceived, and

so they live in their deception as if it were the real deal when it is not.

THE DECEIVER'S METHOD

As we suggested above, the method Satan uses to work his deception is to get to our minds.

His concern is not a person's circumstances. Whether you're poor, middle class, or rich doesn't matter to him, because if he gets your mind he has everything.

Messing with Your Mind

When I say Satan likes to mess with your mind, I'm talking about your thoughts. What he does is plant his thoughts in your mind until his thoughts become your thoughts. Satan repeats them over and over until you begin to believe they are your thoughts.

When Satan said to Eve, "You will be like God," whose thought was that? Eve didn't come up with it. That came from the mouth of the one who said, "I will make myself like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:14).

That was Satan's thought, but he planted it in Eve's mind until she began to think all of this was her idea. You can see the shift in thinking in Genesis 3:6, when Eve looked at the tree and began to desire it. It took the serpent five verses to think his thoughts in Eve's mind. But by the time we get to verse 6, his thoughts have become her thoughts.

When a believer says, "I can't make this marriage work," whose thought is that? "I can't get rid of this habit." Really? Who told you that? "I'm a nobody. I'm nothing, and I always will be nothing." Who's doing the talking here?

Satan has been programming his thoughts into the minds of many Christians for so long they can't tell the difference anymore. The old serpent is crafty. He wraps himself around a person's mind, and then like a python he puts the squeeze on until that person can't break the serpent's hold.

The devil has been at this deception for a long time. He got to King David's mind one day. "Then Satan stood up against Israel and

moved David to number Israel" (1 Chronicles 21:1). Satan told David, "Count your people to see how strong you are."

But David thought it was his own idea, so he said, "I think I'll take a census of the people." That was a sinful action because it demonstrated reliance on human strength rather than God, and God judged Israel severely for David's sin.

The Bible says Satan also "put [it] into the heart" of Judas to betray Jesus (John 13:2). Peter said to Ananias, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" (Acts 5:3).

Satan convinced Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, to hold back some of the money they got for selling a piece of land and to pretend that they were giving the full amount to the church in Jerusalem. We can imagine the conversation these two had as they discussed what they thought was their plan, which cost them their lives.

The devil even convinced Peter that it was a good idea to try to keep Jesus from going to the cross. When Jesus announced He was going to be crucified, Peter blurted out, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You" (Matthew 16:22).

But Jesus stunned Peter by telling him, "Get behind Me, Satan!" (v. 23). The words were Peter's, but the thoughts came from Satan. When the devil gets our minds, we start thinking his thoughts without even being aware that he's in the vicinity.

Capturing Your Emotions

Once Satan gets your mind, he will transfer those thoughts to your emotions. Our thoughts don't simply stay on the intellectual level, because we are emotional beings. We begin to feel what we think.

The devil wants to capture our emotions because feelings are so dominating. Most people live and make decisions by their feelings. There's nothing wrong with our emotions, but they can lead us in the wrong direction.

"I don't feel love for my wife anymore." "I've lost all feelings for my husband." Emotions are very real, even when they're wrong. After Satan gets us to think his thoughts, he wants us to *feel* that these thoughts are right.

Guiding Your Actions

This is the next logical step in the deceiver's method. Along with our minds and emotions come our hands and feet—our actions.

The process is so clear in the case of Eve. Once the serpent got Eve thinking that being like God was a pretty good idea, the Bible says she *desired* the fruit of the forbidden tree. Now Eve's emotions were being stirred. She was getting excited about the idea of being as wise as God. So with her thoughts in gear and her emotions engaged, she reached out for the fruit and acted on her wrong thinking and wrong emotions. Adam joined her in buying Satan's lie, although Adam wasn't directly deceived (1 Timothy 2:14), and the human race was plunged into sin.

Jesus called Satan "the father of lies" (John 8:44). Fathers produce children who bear their image, so Satan's job is to produce lies that look and sound just like him. Anytime a lie is conceived and born, Satan is behind the process. So when we start believing that his thoughts are our thoughts, we are believing lies.

THE RESULT OF SATAN'S DECEPTION

Once Eve disobeyed God and Adam followed, the rest of Genesis 3 explains all that they lost as a result of Satan's deception. These losses are important to understand because the human race is still suffering from them.

Before Satan entered the picture, Adam and Eve had everything, all of it given to them by God. Adam didn't have to break into a sweat, because God gave him the perfect job. He didn't have to go looking for a wife; God *made* him a wife. The two didn't even have to struggle over their spiritual life, because they had perfect fellowship with God.

But after our first parents became self-sufficient and decided they didn't need God anymore, look how much they lost.

A String of Devastating Losses

The biggest loss Adam and Eve suffered was spiritual—the loss of intimacy and communication with God. They died spiritually the

moment they disobeyed God, and according to Genesis 3:8 they hid from God's presence for the first time. Instead of running to God, they were running from God. Every person since then has been born spiritually dead.

Adam and Eve also suffered a devastating physical loss. The curse God pronounced on each of them involved pain, sweat, and hard labor. And of course both of them eventually died. Sickness and death, as well as economic hardships, became their portion because they had rebelled against God.

Fear was another result of Satan's deception. Adam and Eve hid from God because, according to Adam, "I was afraid" (Genesis 3:10). In other words, their emotions were messed up. They had never been afraid before. Are you living in fear today? You need to know that the root of fear is the desire to be self-sufficient and independent from God. When Adam was in right relationship with God, he was secure. But when that intimacy was lost, fear replaced security.

Here's another big loss. Adam and Eve were messed up relationally because from then on men and women would be engaged in a "battle of the sexes." The story of man-woman relationships under the curse of sin is a story of the struggle for control and independence. Married couples don't get along because of "personality differences." That originated in the Garden.

Given all of this, it's not surprising that Satan's deception of our first parents also led to the loss of their psychological wholeness.

*Satan robbed the human race
blind when he tempted
Adam and Eve in Eden.*

A lot of Christians get nervous when someone mentions psychology. But psychology is simply a study of the soul. It comes from the Greek word *psyche*, which means "soul." Your soul is made up of

three parts: your intellect, the ability to think; your will, the ability to choose; and your emotions, the ability to feel. It's your personality.

Psychology is a valid discipline when it is rooted in good theology. Psychology that is rooted in a biblical view of mankind can analyze the soul and help us understand why we are the way we are and why we do the things we do.

It's one thing to identify a problem, but it's another thing altogether to tell a person how to fix it. That's where the problem usually comes in. Psychotherapy, for example, is often rooted in a non-Christian view of the human personality. So the patient gets treatment that totally ignores his spiritual makeup and leaves him more messed up than when he started.

When God created Adam, He breathed life into him and Adam became "a living being," which literally means "a living soul" (Genesis 2:7). This gave Adam the capacity for fellowship with God, which was destroyed by sin. Any analysis of human nature that doesn't take this into account is bound to lead to mistaken conclusions.

Our Distorted Souls

I'm going to talk about this again in a later chapter, but let me introduce it now because it is a key element to experiencing lasting freedom. When you came to Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, God saved you for heaven completely. But He saves you on earth progressively. It is possible to be delivered for heaven and be experientially undelivered in history.

This is because our souls are defective at birth due to inherited sin. They continue to be defective as we grow based on our experiences—the information we take in and the pain or positives that we experience. Every soul is distorted. Like a television unable to get a reception, the picture of our souls is fuzzy and distorted.

The problem is that most people settle for what I call soul management. They try to make their souls better through commitments, seminars, New Year's resolutions, attending church, serving in ministries, and any number of things. They are well meaning. But just like that television without a reception, the soul cannot fix the soul.

The soul has been damaged by this thing called sin. We have all been damaged. Some of us worse than others. Maybe you can manage your soul better than your neighbor, your spouse, a friend, or a co-worker. Maybe you have better self-control or discipline. But maybe you didn't have the negative experiences that the other person had. So it's not really a fair comparison.

Maybe you didn't have an abusive or absent father. Maybe you didn't experience racial discrimination. Maybe you never went hungry. Maybe you never had perfectionist expectations put on you. The extent of our distortion varies among all of us. But we are all dealing with a distorted soul because the bacteria of sin was distributed within the context of our lives as we grew.

The soul needs fixing, but in order for it to be fixed, it needs to be brought to the cross. It needs to die. We'll talk more about this later, but it's so fundamental to understanding the need for our identity to be found in Christ that I wanted to bring it up now.

Identifying with Christ involves much more than just a mental assent. It means abiding in His suffering, His mind, His words, and His viewpoint on a matter. Without this abiding identity in Jesus, we are bound by Satan's schemes.

Robbed of God's Gifts

To borrow a common expression, Satan robbed the human race blind when he tempted Adam and Eve in Eden. Jesus described Satan as a thief whose only purpose is "to steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10).

Satan is still doing his thing, robbing God's people of the gifts He wants us to have, including our joy, peace, and purpose. Are you ever stumped about what to do or where to go next? That confusion is the result of Satan's work. Before their fall, the only wrong choice Scripture tells us that Adam and Eve could make was to eat the forbidden fruit. Every other option they had was a good one. But after they sinned, they had all kinds of good and bad choices to make.

The devil is also stealing our financial blessings by tying us up in debt that's often the result of a greedy desire for more. We get those letters congratulating us on our outstanding credit and offering us

another shiny card that will give us the buying power and financial independence we so richly deserve. But the back end of that deal is financial bondage that could take us years to get out of.

Even more tragically than all of this, the devil is stealing our marriages and our families. We're told that divorce among Christians has now caught up with, and is surpassing, the national average. I'll have a lot more to say about this area. One reason Satan is so successful is that he never tells you the real deal up front. If a thief with a gun and a mask knocked on your front door and asked to come in, what would you do? You'd slam the door and lock it and call 911 right away.

But thieves don't do that. They're deceptive, sneaking into the house when no one is looking. Since Satan is a master deceiver, we need to be on the alert for his approach.

OUR RESPONSE TO SATAN'S DECEPTION

How should we respond to Satan's deception? Becoming more aware of his wiles and being on guard against them is a good place to start.

But more than that, I'm convinced that Christians will never be truly free until we understand who we are in Christ and start living like who we really are. We need to get our identity back.

Someone may be saying, "Tony, that sounds great. But what about the problem I'm already in? How do I begin getting free from the chains that are holding me in bondage?"

Good question. Let me answer it this way. In the 1800s, many Asians were brought to America as indentured servants. Their hope was to work and earn enough to eventually buy their way out of servitude.

But there was a problem. The people who employed these Asian immigrants didn't pay them enough to keep up with what it cost them to live, let alone to save any money toward purchasing their freedom.

You don't have to be an accountant to know that if you're making less money than it costs you to live, you aren't going to make any

progress. The overseers of these indentured servants paid them just enough to keep them in perpetual bondage.

A person in that situation only has one hope for freedom. Someone else is going to have to pay the bill to set him or her free. Jesus Christ did that for us when He died on the cross to forgive us of our sins.

If you aren't sure of your relationship to Christ, you need to be set free from your sins, because you can never work your way into being right with God. This is accomplished by placing your faith in Christ alone as your Sin-Bearer.

But the freedom Christ purchased for us goes further than our salvation. Not only is it impossible to work your way to heaven by your own effort, but it's impossible for you to work your way out of spiritual bondage by self-effort. That's why so many Christians are not enjoying their freedom. They're like Adam and Eve, saying to God, "I can do this myself."

Too many of us are like hamsters on treadmills in their cages. We can see freedom and we want freedom, but after spending endless hours running faster and faster on our spiritual treadmills, all we manage to do is exhaust ourselves. True freedom for a hamster only comes when its owner reaches down and lifts it out of its cage, while still keeping the hamster in the owner's protective care.

The route to spiritual freedom as a Christian is the same route you took to become a Christian: complete dependence on Christ. Jesus did the work for your salvation on the cross. He will also do the work for your freedom when you receive Him and His words and allow Him to replace the distortions within your soul with the expansion of the seed of His Spirit. As you read on in this book, ask Him to show you your true identity as a believer, and then ask Him to empower you to live out that identity by the Holy Spirit's presence in your life.