

# UNLEASHING GOD'S POWER IN YOU

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## UNLEASHING GOD'S POWER IN YOU

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## The Gospel of Liberation

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*Freedom ranks after life itself as the quintessence of the human experience. Freedom defines the man; it stamps the divine image upon him.*

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

SLAVERY IN THE UNITED STATES WAS ABOLISHED by the Thirteenth Amendment on December 18, 1865. How many slaves were there in the U.S. on December 19? In reality, none, but many still lived like slaves. They did so because they never learned the truth. Others knew and even believed they were free, but chose to continue living as they had always been taught.

Many plantation owners were devastated by the proclamation. “We’re ruined! Slavery has been abolished. We’ve lost the battle to keep our slaves.”

But their chief spokesman slyly responded, “Not necessarily. As long as these people think they’re still slaves, this proclamation of emancipation will have no practical effect. You don’t have a legal right over them anymore, but many of them don’t know it. Keep your slaves from learning the truth, and your control over them will not even be challenged.”

“But what if the news spreads?”

“Don’t panic. We have another barrel on our gun. We may not be able to keep them from hearing the news, but we can still keep them from understanding it. They don’t call me the ‘father of lies’ for nothing. We still have the potential to deceive the whole world. Just tell them that they misunderstood the Thirteenth Amendment. Tell them they are *going* to be free, not that they are free already. The truth they heard is just *positional* truth, not *actual* truth. Someday they may receive the benefits, but not now.”

“But they’ll expect me to say that. They won’t believe me.”

“Then pick out a few persuasive ones who are convinced they’re still slaves and let them do the talking for you. Remember, most of these newly freed people were born as slaves and have lived like slaves all their lives. All we have to do is deceive them so they still think like slaves. As long as they continue to do what slaves do, it won’t be hard to convince them they must still *be* slaves. They’ll maintain their slave identity because of the things they do. The moment they try to profess that they’re no longer slaves, just whisper in their ear, ‘How can you even think you’re no longer a slave when you are still doing the things slaves do?’ After all, we have the capacity to accuse the brethren day and night.”

Years later, many slaves have still not heard the wonderful news that they have been freed, so naturally they continue to live the way they’ve always lived. Some slaves have heard the good news, but they evaluate it by what they are presently doing and feeling. They reason, *I’m still living in bondage, doing the same things I have always done. My experience tells me I must not be free. I’m feeling the same way I was before the proclamation, so it must not be true. After all, your feelings always tell the truth.* So they continue to live according to how they feel, not wanting to be hypocrites!

One former slave, however, hears the good news and receives it with great joy. He checks out the validity of the proclamation and finds out that the highest of all authorities originated the decree. Not only that, but it personally cost that

authority a tremendous price, which he willingly paid so the slave could be free. As a result, the slave's life is transformed. He correctly reasons that it would be hypocritical to believe his feelings and not the truth. Determined to live by what he knows to be true, his experiences begin to change rather dramatically. He realizes that his old master has no authority over him and does not need to be obeyed. He gladly serves the one who set him free.<sup>1</sup>

THE GOSPEL IS THE "PROCLAMATION OF EMANCIPATION" for every sinner who is sold into the slavery of sin. We come into this world born dead in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1), by nature children of wrath (verse 3). The good news is that Christians are no longer slaves to sin. We are alive in Christ and dead to sin (Romans 6:11). We have been set free in Him. We are forgiven, justified, redeemed, and born-again children of God. But how many Christians are living liberated lives in Christ, and how many understand what it means to be a child of God?

When we were slaves to sin, we could not free ourselves. Likewise, as Christians we can never do for ourselves what Christ has already done for us. Not understanding what He has already accomplished has resulted in many believers desperately trying to become somebody they already are. On the other hand, some people are claiming a perfection that has not yet been realized. If we want to mature in our relationship with God, then we need to understand the difference between what Christ has already accomplished for us and what still needs to be done. We also need to know what part He plays in our sanctification, and what part we play.

## Understanding the Good News

The idea of freedom is part of the meaning of *salvation* in the Old Testament. The primary term in it for *salvation*—Hebrew, *yasa*—means "to be roomy or broad...Since this (the making

spacious for the one constricted) takes place through the saving intervention of a third party in favor of the oppressed and in opposition to his oppressor, we get the sense 'to come to the rescue' and 'to experience rescue.'"<sup>2</sup>

The idea of salvation in the New Testament carries over the meaning of deliverance and freedom. Paul said, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1). In other words, don't put yourself back under the law as a means by which you relate to God, because you have been set free in Christ.

The root Greek word for salvation—*sozo*—communicates the notion of wholeness, soundness, and health. Salvation is not just getting rid of sin. Rather, salvation frees us from all the hindrances that prevent us from being all we were created to be. Salvation, in its broadest sense, includes deliverance from all that hinders fallen humanity from becoming complete in Christ according to God's design in creating us.

### ***A Futile Existence***

In the Fall, what Adam and Eve lost as a result of their sin was *life*. They died spiritually—that is, they lost their relationship with God and became slaves to sin. Every person since that time has been born physically alive but spiritually dead. (Physical death was also a consequence of Adam and Eve's sin, but not for hundreds of years in their case.)

Having no relationship with God, Adam and Eve began a hopeless search for significance. They, as have all their descendants, tried to understand the purpose and meaning of life in their natural state of existence. Natural people are left to wonder, *Who are we, and why are we here?* In their attempts at self-verification they have, "exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator" (Roman 1:25). Lacking a divine perspective, people have "found" their identity and purpose for living in their physical

appearance, performance, social status, and the various roles they play.

Trying to make sense of life independently of God is futile, and nobody epitomized that more than Solomon. He appeared to have it all—power, position, status, wealth, and sex (he had 1000 wives and concubines). He owned the plantation! He had everything that people lust after, but something was missing. Like any natural man, he sought to find purpose and meaning in life independently of God. Not only did Solomon have the ultimate opportunity to pursue the meaning of life, but he also had more God-given wisdom than any other mortal to interpret his own findings. In the book of Ecclesiastes he registered his conclusion: “‘Meaningless! Meaningless!’ says the Teacher. ‘Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless’” (1:2).

### ***Antidote: The Whole Gospel***

The reason many believers still struggle with their own identity and purpose for living is because they have not understood the whole gospel. They have probably heard that Jesus is the Messiah who died for their sins. If they receive Him into their hearts, God will forgive them of their sins, and they will get to go to heaven when they die.

There are three things that are wrong or incomplete with that kind of gospel presentation. First, it gives the impression that eternal life is something we get when we die. That is not true—but no wonder it leaves Christians thinking they’re forgiven sinners instead of redeemed saints. No—every child of God has eternal life the moment he or she is born again. “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life” (1 John 5:12).

Second, if you were going to save dead people, what would you do? Cure the condition they died of? If that is all you did, they would still be dead. To save the dead, you would have to perform two functions: First, of course, you have to cure the disease that caused them to die. The Bible teaches that the “wages of

sin is death” (Romans 6:23). So Jesus went to the cross and died for our sins—but that is not the whole gospel. Second, you would have to *give them life*. The second half of the verse reads, “The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23b). What Jesus came to give us was spiritual—that is, eternal—life which means that you are a child of God and your soul is in union with Him.

Third, “the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work” (1 John 3:8). Satan had deceived Eve, and Adam sinned. Consequently the first couple lost their relationship with God, and Satan became the rebel holder of earthly authority. Jesus affirmed this when He referred to Satan as the “prince of this world” (John 14:30). Because of what Christ accomplished, “the prince of this world now stands condemned” (16:11). Jesus “has rescued us from the domain of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13-14).

Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). He was not talking about our present physical life, which people try to make full by an abundance of earthly pleasures and possessions. He was talking about our spiritual life, which is our relationship with God. Fullness of life is exemplified in the fruit of the Spirit, which is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). Jesus was talking about a redeemed human community that is fully alive in Christ.

## The Meaning of Sanctification

Our making this new life in Christ real in our experience is related to our becoming like Him, separated from sin. In Scripture, life is always related to righteousness. As physical life is robbed by toxic foreign substances in our body, so spiritual life is sapped by the presence of sin. Thus, in order that we might experience His

life, God commands us to “be holy, because I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16; Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7; see also Matthew 5:48).

*Sanctification* refers to our being made like God in His holiness. The Old Testament Hebrew word for *holy* and the corresponding Greek term in the New Testament have the basic meaning of *being set apart to God or the realm of the sacred as distinct from all other things*. These same terms stand behind the English words *sanctify*, *sanctification*, and *saint*. Because the realm of God is separate from sin, *sanctification* thus speaks of that aspect of our salvation in which we are separated *to* God’s holiness and *away from* sin.

### Salvation Is Past, Present, and Future

The concepts of salvation and sanctification can be a little confusing unless you understand that both are presented in Scripture as past, present, and future. The verb tenses used reflect this. In other words, the Bible says we *have been* saved, we *are presently being* saved, and we *will someday be fully* saved. Notice the past tenses in the following verses declaring that “in Christ” we “have been saved”:

Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you *have been saved*...It is by grace you *have been saved*, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:4-5,8).

Join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who *has saved* us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace (2 Timothy 1:8-9).

When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, *he saved us*, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:4-5).

These passages clearly teach that every child of God has experienced salvation. We have been born again; consequently, we are now spiritually alive. Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25). In other words, we will continue to live spiritually when we physically die.

Scripture also teaches that we are *presently* “being saved,” according to the following passages:

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are *being saved* it is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18).

We are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are *being saved* and those who are perishing (2 Corinthians 2:15).

My dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12).

We do not *work for* our salvation, but we have a responsibility to *work out* what God has born in us. As we will see later, there is also a progressive aspect of sanctification, which is similar in concept to the continuing process of salvation. That is, we *are* “being saved,” and we *are* presently being conformed to the image of God. Theologian Charles Hodge makes clear this connection between sanctification and salvation:

Salvation principally consists in...transformation of the heart. Jesus is a Savior because He saves His people from their sins...

A state of salvation is a state of holiness. The two things are inseparable because salvation is not mere redemption from the penalty of sin, but deliverance from its power. It is freedom from bondage to the appetites of the body and the evil passions of the heart; it is an introduction into the favor and fellowship of God, the restoration of the divine image to the soul, so that it loves God and delights in His service. Salvation, therefore, is always begun on earth.<sup>3</sup>

Salvation begins on earth, but it is completed in heaven. That is why Scripture speaks about a *future* aspect of salvation. The following passages teach that we “shall be saved”:

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more *shall we be saved* from God’s wrath (Romans 5:9-10).

The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because *our salvation is nearer* now than when we first believed (Romans 13:11).

We have not yet realized our salvation from the “coming wrath” (1 Thessalonians 1:10), but we have the assurance that when that wrath comes, we will be saved from it.

Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:13-14).

Just like salvation, the biblical concept of sanctification begins at our new birth in Christ and ends in the final perfection of glorification. Scripture speaks of the believer's sanctification as already accomplished, as being accomplished, and as finally being completed in the future. These are often referred to as the three tenses of sanctification. In the next chapter, we are going to identify and explain these three tenses, and then we'll devote the rest of the book to looking at how we as Christians conform to the image of God.

←————→  
**QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT  
AND DISCUSSION**  
←————→

1. How did the slavery metaphor speak to you?
2. After the Fall, what is the spiritual condition of all those who come into this world through natural birth? (See Ephesians 2:1.)
3. What would be your perception of yourself, and how would it affect the way you live, if all Christ had done was to die for your sins?
4. What did Adam and Eve lose in the Fall, and what did Christ come to give us? What does that mean to you?
5. What does it mean that Christ came to undo the works of Satan, and how does that affect you?
6. Explain the whole gospel.
7. Are Christians already sanctified, or are they being sanctified?