

Releasing the Overcoming Power of the Holy Spirit

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Let me tell you about two men I knew. Both are converted drug addicts and alcoholics, and at one time they led horrible lives. Both are married with children – and while they were addicted, they had problems with lust, pornography and adultery. They were con artists, trying to fool their wives and families about everything, hustling and conning their way through life.

But both men came to Times Square Church and gave their lives to Jesus. They wept as they confessed their many sins and testified they were born again. Moreover, each man was willing to leave everything behind and enter our ministry's Christ-centered drug rehabilitation program for nine months.

Neither of these men had any past knowledge of the Lord. But as soon as they entered our program, one of them seemed to make great progress immediately. He was very cooperative and compliant with all the program's rules. And this man wore a smile continually. During chapel services, he eagerly entered into the worship. As I watched him during this period, I couldn't help thinking, "This one is becoming a true man of God. He's passing up the other fellow by leaps and bounds." Indeed, I was concerned about the other man. He always seemed down and depressed. And he had a terrible time obeying the program's rules. He struggled continually with his new faith, never coming to a place of peace. And he never smiled, appearing forever weighed down by heavy conviction. He wept through every chapel service, never even lifting his head.

Yet the Lord saw something in this poor, struggling addict that I didn't see. He saw within him a heart set on following God. As it turned out, the man struggled so heavily because he was determined to give his all to the Lord, yet he knew there was still a great deal in his heart that stood in the way. The reason he held his head down during worship was because the Holy Spirit was revealing the sin in his life, and he was deeply convicted. He couldn't be happy because what he saw in himself burdened him down.

After that experience, I prayed, "Lord, the changes you've worked in this struggling man are incredible. He has such power in his life. He's got victory over his habits – no more lust problems, no more cravings for drugs. Your Spirit has been released in him mightily! What did you see in him that qualified him for such a release of power to overcome sin?"

I've had a deep, burning hunger to know what it takes for the Holy Spirit to release his mighty power in our lives. If his promised power is not being released in us, what's hindering it? What does God want to see in us before such a release can take place?

I have come to believe three conditions are necessary before the power of the Holy Spirit is released in any believer. We'll never see the power of God's Spirit released in our lives until we meet these three qualifications.

The first prerequisite is a heart set wholly upon the Lord.

In Acts 8 we read of a man who qualified in all three of these prerequisites. He was an Ethiopian statesman who was returning home from a religious gathering in Jerusalem. When we first read about him, he's riding along in the Gaza desert in the back of a chariot. "...behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet" (Acts 8:27-28).

Apparently this man was a devoted student of God's word. Although he was spiritually blind, he hungered deeply for truth. And now, as he read chapter 53 of the book of Isaiah, he was desperate to know what the prophet was saying. I can say emphatically that this Ethiopian had a heart wholly given to God. How can I be sure of this? I know it because he was studying God's word – searching, probing, seeking after the Lamb of Life!

I ask you – what are you searching for in your walk with the Lord? Are you looking for some kind of experience? Are you seeking something a human can give you by laying hands on you – all to your neglect of God's word in

your life? There can be no release of the Holy Ghost's power in you until you develop a sincere desire for the milk and meat of the Bible. You have to be as hungry for God's word as the Ethiopian statesman was!

David wrote, "Direct my steps by Your word" (Psalm 119:133). "...my heart stands in awe of Your word" (verse 161). "...you have magnified Your word above all Your name" (138:2). You can't stand in awe of God's word, or have your steps ordered by him, unless you open your Bible! This is one reason why so many Christians today are still bound by sin, unable to gain freedom. They have very little knowledge of God's word.

In many churches, people merely endure the preaching of the word. They don't want to hear strong doctrine. They prefer wonders, miracles, excitement, and speak only about the power of God. You often hear them saying things like, "At Reverend So-and-so's meeting, there was such power. We need that kind of power in our church." But they know nothing about the true power of God because they don't know the Scriptures! Jesus said to the Saducees, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God" (Matthew 22:29).

The author of Hebrews describes the true power of God. He says it all rests in God's word: "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" (Hebrews 4:12). Here is true power – that the word of God is able to discern your very heart!

The second prerequisite is a desire to obey God in every area.

The Ethiopian statesman is a clear example of this. He was still blind to spiritual things because he didn't yet have a revelation of Jesus. But his later actions prove he had a heart set on full obedience to God.

As God searched the earth for a heart that was open to him, his eyes fell upon this lone figure in the Gaza desert. And when he saw this man diligently studying the scriptures, hungry to know God and prepared to obey his word, how quickly the Lord responded! Suddenly, we're told, an angel appeared to Philip in Jerusalem, instructing him to leave the revival in Samaria and go into the desert. "Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot" (Acts 8:29).

So Philip set out for the Gaza desert. And when the chariot came by, the Holy Ghost told him, "Get in the chariot, Philip. Introduce yourself!" So Philip climbed in – and immediately he asked the Ethiopian, "Do you understand what you're reading?"

The statesman answered, "How can I understand, unless somebody shows me the meaning?" "Oh, I can show you," Philip answered. Then he began preaching Christ under the unction of the Holy Spirit. He told the statesman that Jesus was the lamb – that Christ was crucified, buried and rose again – and that all who confess their sins, believe in him and are baptized will be saved from their sin and given everlasting life.

The statesman replied, "You're telling me Jesus was the lamb? And if I believe in him, obey him and am baptized, I'll be saved? Then I must be baptized, Philip. Look – there's a pond. What hinders me from obeying his word right now?"

The Ethiopian was saying, in essence, "Brother Philip, show me anything that hinders me from obeying God. Expose anything and everything. I want freedom from my sin and every bondage. I want all that the Lord has for me. I want nothing to hold me back from doing what he commands!"

Beloved, this is exactly the prerequisite God is looking for! It's what qualifies us for the release of Holy Ghost power: a readiness to obey the Lord right now! There is no putting off of obedience, no waiting for a better time, no halfhearted commitment. This kind of attitude is summed up in the words of the Ethiopian: "Lord, I want to obey you now! I want freedom now to enjoy victory now. I don't want to go through another day bound by sin. Remove all hindrances, Lord. I want to walk in your resurrection power!"

The third prerequisite is a stepping out in faith.

"So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him" (Acts 8:38). Philip gladly complied with the Ethiopian's request to baptize him. Yet, as soon as the two men came out of the water, Philip suddenly vanished. "The Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the

eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing” (verse 39).

As you read this, you may wonder, “Wait a minute! They’re in a desert. There’s no one in sight besides these two men. But when they walk out of the pond, suddenly one of them disappears. And yet all scripture has to say about this is, ‘The Ethiopian went his way’?”

Two points are being made in this passage. First, God wants us to keep our eyes on the main figure – the Ethiopian. After all, this story is about the work of the Holy Spirit in that hungry, seeking man. And, second, God wants to show us how he miraculously releases his Spirit’s power when he finds the kind of heart he found here.

The Holy Spirit knows your heart. He knows you want to be delivered and to obey him in all things. If you’ll simply believe him for direction, and faithfully act on his instructions one day at a time, he’ll continue to lead you.

I can assure you on the authority of the Scriptures: If you set your heart to search and study God’s word, and if you’re ready to obey his every command the moment it comes, his Spirit will give you clear direction for life. Then when the enemy’s army comes at you like a flood – when it appears you’ll be swept away by demonic powers – you can trust God to tell you exactly what to do. He knows every step ahead of you. And he will not let you down!

The Holy Ghost is ready to talk to you in his still, small voice. You don’t have to live in depression any longer. You don’t have to run from revival to revival looking for deliverance and crying the same tears year after year. The Holy Ghost has a word for you. And you don’t need a pastor, counselor, teacher or psychologist to deliver it to you. You only need the Holy Ghost!

He doesn’t give instructions for tomorrow but just for today. And if you obey his word today, he’ll speak to you again tomorrow. “Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left” (Isaiah 30:21). Get ready to hear the voice of God’s Spirit – speaking your word of deliverance!

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