



LIVING LIBERATED

**Are we bound forever to vices,
bad habits, addictions, and
other sins that shackle and put
us in bondage?**

**Today we can learn HOW to free
ourselves from that bondage by
the power of Jesus Christ!**

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SELF-CONTROL SET ME FREE

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Sometime back I received a piece of direct mail. It was colorful and on the outside of the envelope it said: "If you have ever felt fat, clumsy, or depressed, this letter is for you." Wow! I couldn't resist. I opened it up and "For only \$29.95 plus \$3 for shipping and handling," they would send you this kit that would take care of all your problems. Change your life for only \$29.95!

When I see that stuff, I wonder who buys those things. I know the answer. People like you and me, people who want to get things that are out of control in their lives and want them under control. Did you know that over 2,000 new self-help books flood the market each year? We just gobble those things up. Why? Because there are things and habits in our lives that are out of control, things like temper.

Do you have a problem with your temper? You may be like the wife who said: my husband is very temperamental. He's 90 percent temper and 10 percent mental. Does anybody have a problem with spending? Has anybody got spending out of control? If you do, you need this bumper sticker, "Anybody who says money can't buy happiness just doesn't know where to shop." Does anybody have a problem with mood swings, eating or procrastination, drinking, sexual desires, or some other addiction?

How can we really break free from these life-deforming habits and hurts and hang-ups?

The Problem

Why is it that we have these things and can't seem to get out of the cycle? Well, Paul tells us in Romans 7:15-8, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." Can you relate to what Paul is saying? Paul said all the things that I want to do, I don't seem to do, and all the things that I really want to refrain from doing, I just go ahead and do them.

Have you ever broken a bad habit only to have it return maybe within a matter of days? Let me give you an example. How many of you made New Year's resolutions? How many have kept all the resolutions you made? Probably none of us, because resolutions will not suffice. Good intentions are seldom good enough. It takes more to change.

How many times have you promised, "I'll never smoke another cigarette again"? How many times have you promised yourself, or your family, or God, "I'm not going to lose my temper anymore," or, "I'm never going to drink again," or, "I really am going to begin my diet tomorrow," or, "I'm going to be a better father, I'll never strike you again," only to drift right back into the behavior from which you came.

The Results

1. Frustration. The apostle Paul tells us three things. He said, "The first result is, it's frustrating." It's greatly frustrating. "I do not understand what I do." Why do I keep making the same mistakes? Why do I do what I don't want to do? Why do I do things that I know are bad for me?
2. Confusion. Paul said I had the desire to do what's right, but not the power. If you've ever been on a diet, you know that goes. You start out the morning with great resolution and intention, don't you? Then as the day begins to go on, do you watch that resolution begin to drift away? So, by the time you get home, you're so hungry you could eat almost

anything and everything. By that time, my idea of a balanced diet was a Big Mac in both hands. That's the way we are. I want to change, but I don't know how. I have the motivation, but I don't have the determination. I've got the desire, but I don't have the power.

The reason self-help books don't work is that they don't empower us to do it. They'll tell a negative person to stop being negative. I've known hundreds, perhaps thousands of negative people in my life. I've never known one to change by my saying to them, "Just stop being negative." Have you? The self-help books tell the procrastinators "Try to get there 10 minutes early." They know that that's why they bought the self-help book. They can't get there; they just keep putting things off.

3. Defeat and discouragement. "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24) Paul said, I'm losing the battle. I'm defeated. I just can't change. How many promises have I made to God and to myself that I've broken, often within a matter of a few hours? So, you just want to throw up your hands and say, "I'm tired of trying." If you have felt that way or if you feel that way today, do I have some great news for you. You can change, and the power is there. You don't have to stay in this cycle of failure/defeat, failure/defeat, failure/defeat, over and over. The Bible makes clear the principles of how you can gain control over that which is out of control.

The promise

Jesus said in John 8:32, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." The secret to personal change is not willpower. That's not enough. The secret to personal change isn't a pill. The secret to personal change isn't hypnosis, it's not a fat farm or some gimmick. Jesus said, the way to break free from the habits, hurts, and addictions in your life, is by knowing the truth.

But how can that be? How does knowing the truth set me free from my bad habits? To unlock the secret of Jesus' statement, you've got to remember a basic axiom. Your thoughts control your emotions, and your emotions control your decisions, and your decisions control your actions. Do you see that? That's the way it always flows. Have you ever said, "He makes me so mad"? He can't make you mad. She can't make you mad. They don't have that power. What you are really saying is "every time I look at him, I think negative thoughts". Those negative thoughts may result from remembering something that happened in the past. Consequently, I get a negative emotion which leads to negative decisions. These negative decisions may even lead you to a very negative action.

It all starts with the thought process. Solomon in Proverbs 23:7 stated, "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." If I'm acting depressed, it's because I'm feeling depressed. I'm feeling depressed because I am thinking depressed thoughts. Most of us try to work on the action, not the cause. We try to work on the external things. God says you've got to start with your thinking.

That's why Jesus says, if you know the truth, if you'll focus on the truth, it will set you free. Bad beliefs lead to bad behavior. Every behavior you have is based on a belief. It's based on a value in your life that you have either consciously or unconsciously. This is important: Behind every self-defeating behavior is a lie that I'm believing. If you are involved in a wrong behavior, the root cause is you are believing something that is not true. The devil is fooling and deceiving me.

The prescription 1.

Admit my problem.

Admit the root of my problem. That's the starting point for breaking free. Most of us have this vague feeling that something is wrong with me. We don't know what it is, and we can't put our finger on it, but something just doesn't seem to be right.

God put his finger on it. He says your basic problem is your basic attitude of life, regardless of your hang-up. This attitude has a name, it's a word that we don't hear much anymore, it's not hip, it's not cool, and one certainly won't hear it in the media. The word is disgusting and repulsive. It is SIN.

You and I have all kinds of wrong perceptions about sin. Sin is not, first and foremost, doing drugs, getting drunk, robbing a bank or running off with somebody's wife. Those things are really the second wave of sin. They are the result of the underlying sin. The root problem is an attitude that says, "I'm in charge, and I don't need God." That is the core of what Paul called in Romans 7, the sinful nature. It's man's oldest problem. It's been around since Adam and Eve. I'm going to ignore God, and I'm going to do my way, my own thing.

Every one of us is grappling daily with that basic response attitude of sin. We wrestle every day in that tug-of-war. Who's in charge, me or God?

John said "If we say we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us." (1 John 1:8) Put that together with what Jesus said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free." So, by denying your sin, you have no truth in you.

We act like we've got it all together. Who do you think you're trying to fool? If you're acting like nothing ever gets out of control in your life, are you trying to fool God? Are you trying to fool other people? You're only fooling yourself. Nobody has it all together. Every one of us every day has that tug-of-war. When you pretend you have everything together and that you're in charge, you're only hurting yourself.

2. Stop deceiving myself.

I have to stop deceiving myself. That's worth repeating. In order to stop defeating myself, I have to stop deceiving myself. The root problem is, I think I'm in charge and I don't need God. We are not made to live that way.

When an alcoholic goes to Alcoholics Anonymous the very first thing required of him is to admit, "I am powerless to control my situation and my life has become unmanageable." Too often we have to hit rock bottom before we admit anything, not when we feel a little heat, but when the fire is out of control. Then we begin to say "maybe I could use a little help."

Most people wait too late to seek help. They wait too late to admit the problem. I have men come into my office and say, "my wife dropped a bombshell on me. She said she's fed up with my neglect, my abuse, my vile tongue, my temper and she's walking out. What can I do? I need help." Down deep I'm sitting there thinking there's often very little that I can do, very little, because he has waited too long.

- a. Admit your problem. You have a hang-up in life, come clean with it in the mirror, and before the Almighty God.
- b. Believe that Christ can change me. Remember Romans 7:24, "Who can deliver me from this body of death? ... Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Paul said the answer to my problem is a person. Through Jesus Christ, God will provide the power that you are lacking. If you don't believe that, you won't get rid of your hang-ups. Because "through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit of life has set me free from the law of sin and death." (Romans 8:2) There's a way out folks. The law of the Spirit of Christ will set me free.

If I were to go outside and, on the grass, somewhere find a dead bird, pick that little bird up, that dead bird, throw it in the air and say, "Fly," what's going to happen? It's going to fall back down. I pick it up and throw it back up and say, "Fly!" It's going to fall back down. What is the only thing that's going to make that bird fly? The only thing that is going to make him fly is a new life, become a new creation. He doesn't need to turn over a new leaf, he needs a new life. He needs power under those wings. A new life is the only thing that's going to make him fly.

Why don't you try Jesus? I've seen him change hundreds and hundreds of lives. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; behold the old is gone, and the new has come." That's the truth for anyone who will let Christ do His transforming work. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

A few years ago, a letter was printed in Time magazine in response to its cover story, "Who is Jesus Christ?" Of course, the article had all these opinions from many scholars. Mike Mandel wrote "As far as I'm concerned, the liberal theologians can keep their historical Jesus and their cut-and-paste Bible. I'm a former alcoholic and adulterer set free by the power of the living Christ Jesus. Who cares about higher criticism when the resurrected Son of God can transform you here and now?" Amen, Mike, Amen!

Paul says, in 2 Timothy 1:7 "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline (selfcontrol)" Some of you who were baptized into Christ a long time ago are holding back. You're not committing all that you are to him, you're holding back, you're also holding on. You're holding on to your addictions, to your hang-ups, and to your perpetual sins.

You have bought the world's lie that if you've really committed all that you are to Jesus Christ, you'd become some kind of weird fanatic. You'd sell everything today. You would just be absolutely weird. Folks, that's a lie. You would be in selfcontrol because Christ is controlling you. You'd be powerful. You'd be loving. You'd be the person you've always dreamed of being. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom." (2 Corinthians 3:17) That's the foundation for our study.

Amazing Grace lesson #1196

Questions:

1. The reasons for lack of self-control are?
 - Frustration
 - Confusion
 - Defeat and discouragement
 - All the above
2. The secret to personal change is willpower
 - True
 - False
3. Your thoughts control your emotions
 - True
 - False
4. Your emotions control your decisions
 - True
 - False
5. Your decisions control your action
 - True

- False
- 6. As a man thinks in his heart (mind) so is he
 - True
 - False
- 7. One can overcome lack of self-control by
 - Stop deceiving self
 - Admit there is a problem
 - Commit your life to Christ
 - All the above
- 8. God gave us a spirit of
 - Power
 - Love
 - Self-discipline
 - All of the above

Answers to Questions

1. All the Above
2. False
3. True 4. True
5. True
6. True
7. All the Above
8. All the Above