

# Being God's People

– John Poole –

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***God's purposes are greater than merely "saving people from hell" - they are to restore a People who look like Him, loving the way He loves; People who declare the Kingdom by how they live with Him and one another.***

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God has a sovereign purpose for His creation, and He is steadily moving today to accomplish His objective among very common ordinary people like you and me. Before the world was, He planned that through His Son, there would be on this earth a people who, under no coercion, in the face of, an open choice, would choose to love and serve Him, allowing His glory to be reflected in their lives, as opposed to serving Satan and becoming the replica of all that is evil.

Because God desires such a people, everything, that has happened since creation has, been linked to the production of that kind of people. The calling of Abraham, – the raising up of Israel, delivering them to Egypt, bringing them out; the production of the Messiah; the rise of the early church, the falling away, the restoration, – all of this is geared to one end – that in every nation under heaven, God might have a company of people who would demonstrate by their lives that there is a quality of life under the reign of Jesus Christ far superior to anything else that can be found anywhere on this earth.

It is significant that God describes such a people in His Word as a nation, a Body, a Church, a generation. His purpose is not just for a *person*, but for a *people* – a company of individuals developing and maturing together as one unit. And that, in a word, means relationship. It is only in the context of close fellowship and community that God can cause us to check, strengthen and correct each other in order to come into full maturity. Relationship causes growth.

The purpose of becoming God's people begins with some preliminary measures that God requires us to undergo, to adjust and prepare us. There are three main scriptures that outline these initial steps: (1) Galatians 1:3-5 "Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: To whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." (2) Colossians 1: 13,14, "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his own dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins . . ." and (3) Romans 12:1,2, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living

sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

## **FREED FROM SIN**

We read first in Galatians chapter 1 about God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ *who gave himself for our sins*. That is a tremendous thing!. How many of you know something of the power of guilt, what it does to you physically, and the tension it brings into your body? Do you know something of the burden of shame that people carry when they have that kind of guilt inside and all of a sudden feel that they are probably the worst person in the world? That is the condition we were in because of sin.

God sent Jesus that He might give Himself for our sins. He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. Jesus became the answer for the sin question. He sacrificed Himself for our sins, and when a person accepts that and is willing to admit that there is nothing he can do about his sin, but there is something that Jesus has done about sin, guilt and shame can go and freedom can come. And what a psychiatrist may not be able to do in fifty visits at \$35.00 an hour, Jesus can do in a moment of time.

He can set you free from guilt and shame, because the Gospel, the Good News, is the power of God. In Romans 1: 16, Paul says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God." When the Good News is preached and that word is received, God's power is ministered to individuals, and there can be a breaking of chains, a destroying of yokes, a lifting of the burdens of guilt and shame. Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins.

Now the tragedy is that many of us have stopped there. The danger in Christianity is stopping anywhere! For anyone who has stopped at the principle of salvation, let me say that the idea that God saves You *only* to forgive your sins is something that deserves a very decent and proper burial. My brother and sister, that's not the stopping place: that's the beginning point. Paul told us in Philippians chapter 3 that God had a reason, a purpose, why He laid hold of us. From the time Paul met Jesus, his goal was to apprehend that for which he had been apprehended. Now that's a little play on words, but he said, "God laid hold of me for a reason. Now I want to lay hold of the reason why God laid hold of me."

## **THE REASON**

Galatians 1:4 says that Jesus was given "for our sins that He might deliver us out of this present evil age." This isn't the total picture of why God sacrificed His son, but it is certainly a part of it. Now I believe in the coming of the Lord, and I believe there are many scriptures that refer to the fact that Jesus will appear a second time. This scripture, however, has nothing to do with the coming of the Lord. Paul is not talking about the day when Jesus will come down and take us out of this present evil age, he is talking about a people who will be delivered out of this present evil age now. Now!

Jesus' prayer in John 17 was, "I don't pray that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them in it." Not that the Father might come and take them all out of it, but that He might keep them in the middle of it. That is where the glory is! The glory is being kept in the world. The glory is to be holy around unholy things. The glory is to be righteous when you are surrounded by unrighteousness. The glory is to live straight when everything else is crooked.

This is God's purpose in the here and now. You know, some people have an idea that it's either the sweet by and by or the sour here and now. I really don't think that's the way God wants it to be. Jesus gave himself that "he might deliver us out of this present evil age."

Now, to confirm that, let us again look at Paul's writing in Colossians 1:13, "For He delivered us" or "He hath delivered us." Galatians 1:4 was: "He gave himself for our sins that he might deliver us." That was the purpose, what God wanted to do. Colossians 1:13 looks at it from a past standpoint: "I want you to rejoice because the God who wanted to deliver us has delivered."

"He hath delivered us!" He has done it. It is something that He has accomplished, transferring us from the tyranny of darkness into the Kingdom of His own dear Son. Now, that is contingent on the fact that you have received the proper Gospel in a proper way. I don't want to split hairs, or minister any kind of doubt or condemnation. But I trust that you understand we are not talking about some kind of an emotional response to an emotional meeting or sonic kind of intellectual decision to an intellectual, philosophical presentation. A genuine response to the Word of God, the Gospel, which is the power of God to produce something, causes a person to know from the depths of his being, "He gave himself for our sins that He might deliver me, and He has delivered me out of the kingdom of darkness into His Kingdom." God's desire is to form a people who are living in a new Kingdom.

## **THE KINGDOM OF THE SON**

Christians are people who are living under the benevolent reign of good King Jesus. Aren't you glad you have a Sovereign like the Lord? This realization so gripped the hearts of early Christians that they even began to talk about themselves with terms

that are foreign to you and me. They became so conscious of that Kingdom that they described themselves as aliens in this kingdom. They called themselves foreigners, strangers, wayfarers, citizens of another land, some of them even stepped into a little higher rank of boldness and said, "I'm an ambassador of that land, seeking to reconcile you to the King."

But most of that is lacking from our ideas and our way of thinking. We are very comfortable where we are. Most of us feel that because we have made certain outer adjustments and changes in our lives, that this is basically all that God is looking for to mark us out as a different people.

In the epistles of Paul, as he talks about putting off the old and putting on the new, you will notice that very rarely, if at all, does he mention outer habits. He deals with inner attitudes. When God talks about a generation of people who are living in the Kingdom of His Son, He is not talking about a people who are merely distinguished by where they go, what they do, or how they dress, but a people who are distinguished by attitude – by something that's happening within the heart. That is why Paul says to the Colossians over in the 3rd chapter, put away immorality, impurity, passion, greed, abusive speech, anger, malice, slander, and put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, love, peace, thankfulness. When he distinguishes between old and new, that's where the distinction comes.

## DOING VERSUS BEING

God is interested in a people who *will be* something. Now, I am much more interested in *doing* than I am in *being*. It's much easier to be a doer, because that is when folks can see the good works you are performing. But who can see you when you are just being? Like one fellow said, "if you really want to know how a man is doing spiritually, ask his wife." At home is where he is *being*. In church is where he is *doing*.

If we go back to Exodus 19:3,4, God, speaking to Moses as he is bringing the people out of Egypt, says: "Thus shalt thou say to (the house of) Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: Ye have seen what I did to the Egyptians . . . Now if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant then you shall be. . . ." God said, "I'll do the doing, you do the being, and we'll get along fine," and from that day on, God's greatest concern for Israel was that they *be* His people. He said, "You just *be*, I'll *do*."

Who knocked down the walls of Jericho? Who opened up the river Jordan? If we will just be the people God wants us to be, He will do all the doing that needs to be done.

Throughout church history, we have relegated God's ability to do to the past. What has been uncovered today is that the God who used to, still does now. God's burden for us is that we simply become the people He is calling us to be. That means our attitudes have to be dealt with and deep inner changes have to take place. We are not talking simply about God cleaning up the outside, although that will undoubtedly happen. We are talking about God getting deep inside of us, right down where we live, so that our wives and our children and our closest friends begin to see that something is happening to us.

## DON'T BE CONFORMED

In Romans 12:1,2 Paul says, "Present yourselves a living sacrifice to God, which is your reasonable service, and don't be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." In our three scriptures, Galatians 1:3-5, Colossians 1:13, 14, and Romans 12:1, 2, there is a progression. Galatians 1 says Jesus gave himself for our sins that He might deliver us. Colossians 1:13 says that God has delivered us out of the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of his own dear Son. Romans 12:1,2, while not negating the fact that we have been delivered out of the world, urges us not to allow the influence of that from which we have been delivered to mold us into its particular form. Now I believe beyond any shadow of doubt that God meant exactly what He said in Romans 12:2, when He said, "Be on guard lest that from which you have **come** influence you and conform you to its mold."

A few weeks ago, our family had the privilege of going to England, and to the country of Wales where we are from. One of the things I try to avoid when I go to another country is to look like a tourist. I said to my wife, Lorraine, as we were packing, "I don't want to take any clothes that are extravagantly American. I don't want to look like some kind of American evangelist flying in from Hollywood, California with white shoes and a white suit. I just want to be me." How many of you know that you can be transferred to another kingdom and still be influenced by the one from which you came. I went to Buckingham Palace wearing white Levi's and sneakers, with a camera around my neck, and I somehow got the impression that everybody knew I was a tourist. There wasn't a whole lot I could do about it, because in being myself, the influence of where I had come from was upon me, even though I had transferred locations.

I think one of the most difficult places in all the world not to be influenced by the pressure of this world is Western civilization. Why? Because the pressures of this world as we see them are more subtle than they are in other cultures. If, for example, you go into a country of Asia or Africa, you might see there the absolute, bald-faced confrontation between the God of the universe and the gods of this world. In some countries, idols are publicly displayed, sometimes on the roadsides

or in homes. The gods are there and the choice is obvious: you either serve these gods or you serve the unseen God of the Christians.

But in our culture, not just America, but Western civilization in general, things are more subtle. For our gods, though they are just as real, are hidden gods. Our idols are more hidden. and they come with different names – names like Thunderbird or Mustang, or a certain section of suburbia, or the brand name on your suits, or the fact that you only buy the best in the best places. That kind of god or idol seems to us to be a little more acceptable.

But we forget that there is as much anti-Christ spirit in everything in this world that appears on the surface to be good as there is in those things that are overtly evil, for the whole world lies in the lap of the wicked one. And if he can't use drugs or booze, or any of those type things to snare you, he might try to get you with nice things, *anything* that will compete with your affections for the unadulterated pure worship of the living and true God.

When God talks about His people being delivered out of this present evil age, yet exhibiting in the midst of the world's corruption the quality of life lived under Jesus' lordship, He is talking about a people who must view themselves in exactly the same way as early Christians viewed themselves: aliens. strangers, foreigners, citizens of another land, who are not influenced or molded by the societies of the world.

What I am saying is that we must get back to a Gospel that is like the Gospel Peter preached. When they repented and were baptized and were filled with the Holy Ghost, Peter's first words to them were these: "Save yourself from this perverse generation." Not just the perverse boozers, nor the perverse cigarette industry, nor the perverse people in Hollywood. He said, "The whole thing is corrupt."

Paul told the Philippians in the second chapter of his epistle, verse 15, that the will and purpose of God is that you shine as lights in the middle of a wicked and perverse generation. He didn't just single out part of it. He said, "It's the whole thing you have to watch out for." Jesus said the same thing in Matthew 17:17: "How long will I be with you, faithless and unbelieving generation?" That is what we are dealing with, that is what God is dealing with. Out of that generation, God is going to produce a people whom He has delivered and released from the influence of the world in which they live. Released from the fear of what people think, released unto what God thinks. Released from the compulsion to do exactly the right thing at the right time in the right place. Released from the attitudes that surround us all over the world. Do you think that is possible? It has to be possible, because that is what God is after, that kind of a company of people.

**GROWING TOGETHER**

Now, here is the clincher. Here is the thing that God's Word says that all of us at one time or another are going to have to learn. I can never become the person that I have just described, the kind of person that has been delivered from the world and is being delivered from its influences past and present – I cannot become the kind of person God wants me to be alone. *Never!* I cannot become that kind of person in some nicey-nice, goody two-shoes fellowship.

*"How are you?"*

*"Fine."*

*"How's your wife?"*

*"Good."*

*"How are the kids?"*

*"Wonderful."*

*"How's the puppy dog?"*

*"Fine!"*

*"Isn't it grand that we can have this nice fellowship in the Lord?!"*

*"Yes. Amen."*

*"Well, I'll see you in church next Sunday."*

We are not going to make it alone, and we are certainly not going to make it in some kind of "I scratch your back, you scratch mine" kind of fellowship.

I'll tell you something else. We are not going to make it in some knock you-down, drag-you-out kind of legalistic fellowship either. "Well, we certainly are glad to see you in this fellowship, and in about four weeks we'll get you straightened out." As the Church of God, we have not been called to hurt, but to heal. We have not been called to injure, but to make whole. What we are talking about is a loving, supporting, yet honest, confronting kind of fellowship. That is essential if you and I are going to be the people that God wants us to be.

It has taken me a long time to learn that regenerate John Poole can't be fully trusted. I need people around me. There is something about being in relationship with God's people and being in their presence, that helps me to keep my heart and my mind fixed on Jesus. Fellowship with one another is supporting and helpful, but also that kind of confronting thing that causes us to grow.

Can't we begin to face up to the fact that Christianity was never meant as an experience with God to be enjoyed alone? I have heard Judson Cornwall say. "When you start to come into God's presence, one of the first things you cry out is, "Oh, magnify the Lord *with me*, and let us exalt His name and let us exalt His name *together*." You want somebody to join you. You want to be related to somebody. One of the most important things God is revealing to all of us today is that unless we are related to one another in Christ it is going to be impossible to stand in the immense pressure of the time in which we live. That is true of every member of the Body of Christ, whether they are in leadership or not, but especially if they are in leadership.

Can you imagine the Apostle Paul riding in on a white stallion into Ephesus holding a few meetings, leaving his forwarding address and riding on to Philippi?

Somebody asks, "*Who was that man, anyhow?*"

And some fellow answers. "*He's the lone apostle, and that was his faithful companion, Timothy with him.*"

Somebody else says, "*Where are his headquarters?*"

"*Nobody knows.*"

"*Who's he related to?*"

"*He never tells*"

*Where did he get his authority?*"

"*Nobody knows . . . I think he had a secret revelation while he was unconscious at the bottom of a canyon.*"

Paul wasn't a "lone apostle." He said, "I came from Antioch. The Church there sent me forth. The Holy Ghost spoke in a meeting of the brethren, we prayed and fasted, and then presented it to the whole Church. The whole Church said. 'It witnesses to us, brother.' They laid hands on us and sent us in the name of the Lord, and when we go back there. we're going to report to them all about the people we have contacted, and the Gentiles that have come to the Lord. And when we come to you again we will be sent from Antioch the same way." Do you see the development of order that is there? That's not a bondage, but protection and safety. We will never be the people God wants us to be alone.

Christianity is a religion of plurality. It is a life lived together. Mark the times in the second chapter of Acts that you find that word "together." They were together! They



loved to be together. Not because people were making them, but because they just wanted to be. It was a fellowship together. The will of God is going to be done, and no matter how things may appear to be on the surface right now, Jesus Christ is going to receive to himself a glorious Church without spot or blemish or any such thing. He is not coming back for a beat-up Bride. Hallelujah! He is coming back for a Bride that is gloriously at one within.

God's purpose is to have a unified Church. composed of a company of people who have been delivered out of the world to fit the mold of the Kingdom of God.

*John Poole wrote the above article while he was serving  
as the senior pastor of The Gospel Temple in Philadelphia.*

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