

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Spiritual Power: Real and Counterfeit" (Colossians 1:11)

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/16/2009

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Introduction

Today as we continue in our study of the book of Colossians, we come to chapter one, verse eleven. We have before us a very short verse that says a very great deal about the matter of spiritual strength in the life of the believer, and in the life of the church. And as we begin today I want to read that verse for you, and once again I want to begin at verse nine to pick up the context. Colossians chapter one, beginning at verse nine:

"For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins."

And today I want to draw your attention in particular to that first phrase of verse eleven: "strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power." God the Holy Spirit speaks to us in this verse about the issue of spiritual power.

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Misconceptions About Spiritual Power

Today there's a good deal of misunderstanding, misinformation, and even disinformation in the Christian church about the nature and purpose of spiritual power. Let me give you a few examples.

Some people think that God gives spiritual power so that you can have the material things you want in this life – that health and wealth, in and of themselves, are primary signs that the power of God is upon you, and working in you and through you.

Some people think that numerical church growth, in and of itself, is a sign of spiritual power. The equation that many people set up in their minds goes like this: The larger the building, the greater the size of the congregation, the bigger the offering, the larger the budget, the larger and longer the list of church activities and programs, the greater the spiritual power must be.

Some people think that a church leader who has a dynamic personality – someone who is a charismatic leader, or an eloquent speaker, or has a particularly attention-getting and attention-holding platform presence – some people think that these things, in and of themselves, are evidences of spiritual power.

Some people think that certain kinds of externals in worship are signs of spiritual power. On the one hand, there are those who think that ornate clerical robes, and golden crosses and other religious symbols held aloft, and impressive processions,

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and so on, are signs of spiritual power. On the other hand, some think that a congregation whipped up into a frenzy of emotion by so-called worship leaders is a sign that spiritual power is present.

We could name many other things that people in churches often equate with spiritual power. But the problem with all of these things is that they miss the point, and they are based on unsound and un-Biblical reasoning. And this is easy for us to demonstrate. There are many unbelievers – people completely lacking in any kind of spiritual power – who have health and wealth. And today, sadly, many of those people are in Evangelical churches, because all they are hearing is a health-and-wealth false gospel – but they remain apart from Christ, they don't understand the one true Gospel. But at the same time, there are many people in churches who from all outward appearances are in the deepest need – people with serious financial struggles, people with difficult health problems – but some of these people who from all outward appearances lack health and wealth possess spiritual power that most of the world, and even much of the church, knows nothing about.

It's the same with looking at church growth as a measurement of spiritual power. There are churches where thousands and even tens of thousands come together every Sunday, but where the spiritual temperature is about thirty degrees below zero. Despite the big numbers, despite the big facility, despite the long and ever-growing list of programs, despite all of the high-sounding purpose statements, despite the outward professionalism and competency, there is no spiritual power. And yet there are other churches, both large and small, where the power of God is at work in

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marvelous ways – and often without a big budget, or a big facility, and even in very humble circumstances.

It's the same when we look at the dynamic personality as a supposed evidence of spiritual power. Throughout all of its history, the church has had more than its share of charlatans and imposters. The New Testament warns us repeatedly about such people. And yes, there are men of great outward personal gifts who are indeed used of God in mighty ways. But beyond those men are many, many more who are not so gifted as the world sees things, but they are also vessels into which the power of God has been poured, in astounding ways that the unsaved human eye cannot begin to fathom.

And it's the same problem with the externals of worship. Most of the churches that are steeped in the pomp and ceremony of religious formalism are absolutely cold spiritually. And the same is true for most of the contemporary churches where so-called worship leaders employ the world's methods to whip the crowd into an emotional frenzy each week. Beyond the emotionalism lies shallowness and weakness, there's no spiritual depth, there's no no spiritual power.

You see, there are two problems with all of these things as measurements of spiritual power. The first problem is that they use the wrong yardstick. And the second problem is that not only are we so often these days using the wrong yardstick, we're measuring the wrong things in the church. And the two problems go hand in hand. The only yardstick that counts when it comes to spiritual things is the inspired,

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infallible, uniquely authoritative Word of God. And the only measurements that matter are the ones that God Himself makes – the ones that the Lord Jesus Christ, the righteous judge, makes.

God's Yardstick, God's Measurements

Today as we come to Colossians chapter one, verse eleven, we need to understand the nature of God's measurements. God does not *impart* spiritual power, and God does not *measure* spiritual power, by outward measurements. God isn't concerned about externals. God is concerned with the issues of the heart.

In the Old Testament, in First Samuel chapter 16, we read that when God sent the prophet Samuel to anoint the man of God's choosing to be the new king of Israel, Samuel came to a man named Eliab. And he said, "Surely this must be the man that God has chosen as king! Look at him – he's a tall man, a man of impressive appearance." But God said to Samuel, in chapter 16, verse 7, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

And as we come to the New Testament, we find the Lord Jesus Christ addressing those kinds of problems many, many times with the chief priests and the scribes and the Pharisees, the religious leaders of His days on earth. Jesus told them in no uncertain terms that they were very clever and well-practiced at making a good

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religious show, but there was no power. He said to them, in Matthew chapter 23, beginning at verse 25:

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

And so beginning today I want us to look carefully at this issue of spiritual power as we find it in Colossians chapter one, verse eleven, and elsewhere in the Word of God. Christians need to understand several things.

First of all, we need to understand what the Bible says about the *nature* of spiritual power. We need to understand that it is *supernatural* power.

Secondly, we need to understand the *need* for spiritual power, as individual Christians and in the church corporately. And that has to do with the fact that in our flesh we are weak, and it has to do with the fact that there are many counterfeits that claim to be spiritual power but are not.

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Thirdly, we need to understand the *magnitude* of the spiritual power that is at work when genuine spiritual power is operating within Christians individually and in the church corporately. It is the same power that created the universe. It is the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead. It is the same power that saved us from eternal death, and it is the same power that will raise the dead in Christ, and will take them up, along with those who are alive and remain, to meet the Lord when He comes again.

And fourthly, we need to understand the *purpose* for spiritual power. The reason that God imparts spiritual power is not so that Christians individually or the church corporately can do our will, have our way, but so that we can do God's will, and do it God's way. So we're going to be looking at these four things: The nature of spiritual power, the need for spiritual power, the magnitude of spiritual power, and the purpose for spiritual power.

The Nature of Spiritual Power

And so in the time remaining today, I want to focus our attention on the nature of spiritual power.

The very first thing that we note here in Colossians chapter one, verse eleven is that genuine spiritual power is supernatural power. "Strengthened with all might, according to *His* glorious power." A more literal translation of this phrase from the original language would be like this: "With all power being strengthened according to the might of His glory." And as I often do, I'm going to give you an even more

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literal translation that expresses some further elements of the meaning of the Greek words, and it would be like this: "Enabled with all power by resting in the instrumentality of the power that is inherent in the glory of God." The force of the original language is that the very *essence* of God is power. That is the kind of power that Paul is speaking of here. The nature of genuine spiritual power is that it is supernatural power. It has the very God of the universe as its source.

And, God alone is the source of genuine spiritual power. We read of this throughout God's Word, but let me mention just a few passages at this point.

Psalm 136, verses 3 and 4: "Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords! For His mercy endures forever: to Him who alone does great wonders, for His mercy endures forever." God is the only source of genuine power.

In John chapter 15, verse 15, Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." You can have no spiritual power apart from a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then we have that great benediction at the end of the book of Jude: "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen."

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The glory and majesty of God, and the dominion and power of God, go hand in hand. They are inseparable, because they are both bound up in His very nature as God. Genuine spiritual power is supernatural power.

God is the source of genuine spiritual power – it is His glory and majesty, His dominion and power. A saving relationship with Christ, that Vine-and-branch relationship, is the conduit, if you will, of spiritual power. And God the Holy Spirit, indwelling each and every blood-bought child of God, is the One who imparts spiritual power to the believer. Paul writes this in Ephesians chapter 3, beginning at verse 14:

"For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height — to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

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Notice all the themes being brought together in these verses, the themes that we've already seen here in Colossians chapter one. All of this is made possible because our belief on the Lord Jesus Christ through our understanding and belief of the Gospel has changed everything for us. The family identity that we have in Christ. The glorious riches that are ours in Christ. The surpassing knowledge of God and of His will that comes through His Word. The fullness of God in Christ, the power of God, all wrapped up in the glory of God, who is "able to do exceedingly above all that we ask or think" – "according to the power that works in us."

Christian, are you getting hold of this today? Does this increase your confidence today? Not confidence in yourself, not confidence in your sinful flesh, but confidence in the glorious and majestic God who has saved you, and indwells you, and has connected you to the very source of His power? These are marvelous truths, and they are indeed beyond human comprehension. And these are not matters of mere outward appearances. They are not matters of the flesh. They are matters of the inner man, the saved man who has been translated out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of the dear Son of God.

And if you are listening today and you are not a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ, is God impressing upon you this day the fact that you are powerless? That you have no genuine power to deal with the problems of this life, much less do you have a share and a place in the realm of the power of God to deliver you from the penalty of eternal death for your sins? If God is bringing you to an understanding of those things today, do you see that you need to act upon that understanding by receiving

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the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin and eternal death? If God is speaking to you through this message today, we would count it a great privilege to help you understand more about what it means to be saved.

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