

## Power Belongs To God (Part Two)

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Since we believe this world is headed toward the worst time of violent warfare, the upheaval of all nations, and worldwide spiritual confusion—including the prophesied shattering of the Christian church—we must consider and take steps now to ensure we fully understand where real power and strength resides. Growth and safety also reside there. Deep-seated faith in God's reality, understanding of His promises, and trust in His powers and willingness to save are absolute essentials for the Christian. Any other means we might have opportunity to rely upon will be useless before the onslaught of the full fury of Satan's efforts to destroy God's people and plan.

The *Reader's Digest Complete Oxford Word Finder Dictionary* defines *power* as "having the ability to act; influence; a particular faculty of body or mind; capability." As explained in Part One, two of David's psalms provide a foundation for faith, showing that God's power is the very reason we can trust Him.

His power is not limited to brute strength, but also includes qualities such as love, mercy, wisdom, foresight, discernment, intellectual genius—among other things—combined with His willingness to use it in behalf of those called according to His purpose. Through the continuing fulfillment of His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He demonstrates that He acts for the benefit of the Israelitish people. He has given many powers to them.

Jesus says, "Without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). He intends, of course, for us to understand this in a spiritual sense. He is our salvation, and He alone is able to save us. We are involved in a cooperative effort with Him, and the goal is to grow into His likeness and enter the Kingdom of God. His power enables these efforts to be accomplished. Now is the time, before the major social, cultural, and military storms hit us, to get into the habit of cooperating with Him.

### A Critical Issue

A critical issue for the children of God—one that can potentially destroy our cooperation with God through making wrong choices—is our innate fear that, at times, He will not provide for us. Human beings can always fall prey to a nagging fear that, somehow, sometime, He will not respond to our prayerful appeals. In essence, we fear the consequences of a right choice.

Romans 8:18-25 provides a preface and foundation for Paul's encouraging exhortation beginning in verse 28:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the

redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

Notice how he lays the foundation by turning our attention to our hope. He reminds us that God purposefully made life subject to futility. Futility is a frustrating quality that wears away at one's confidence. It can produce a sense of hopelessness that leads us to think that nothing will work out. Sometimes our pilgrimage seems so long and arduous that we take our eyes from our Savior, and hopelessness builds. However, Paul reminds us that God does everything in love and wisdom and for our good. Futility is an obstacle that we must overcome through faith in God. Yet, He has willed that futility be present, intending that we use it as a prod to use our faith in cooperation with Him despite its presence.

Paul continues building to a triumphant, encouraging crescendo:

Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Romans 8:27-30)

With such positive statements about our salvation, why should we be hopeless and fearfully doubt that God will supply all our needs? Does He ever fail to succeed in whatever He undertakes? These verses flatly and dogmatically state that, if we want to cooperate in faith to bring God's purpose for us to its intended conclusion, we *must*, I repeat, *must*, believe that His watchfulness over us involves every circumstance of our lives.

Verses 31 and 32 put a cap on this issue: "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

In verse 30, note that the term "sanctified" is missing from the list of the general stages of God's purpose. Sanctification is the only part of the salvation process in which our cooperation plays a major, consistent, and daily role. Why does Paul exclude it? This was not an oversight; he deliberately leaves "sanctified" out because he wants, for the remainder of this section of this epistle, to focus entirely on the *absolute certainty* of God's providence, not on any works we may perform in cooperation with Him during the sanctification process.

Paul is not saying that God will always do what we might want Him to do; he is reminding us that He will always do what is right according to His purpose. God has the necessary powers to do as He sees fit for His purpose and us. He is watching, which is even more reason for us to draw on that power.

Nobody can successfully stand in His way of completing that purpose in each of us, but based on our knowledge of those powers, are we willing to accept His providence? Do we accept what He provides in any given circumstance, even though what He provides might not be what we would like to have?

All of the things Paul writes here are wonderful, but the key to this particular subject is the answer to the question he asks in verse 30: "If God be for us who can be against us?" God has the power and the will, and He does not make mistakes or empty promises. Paul then lists what God has already done for all concerned. Our responsibility is to choose to put these facts to work in our specific circumstances.

The handwriting on the wall for us is this: Terribly difficult times are coming, and they will affect all of us to varying degrees. The *only* successful way to complete our minute part in God's purpose is to choose to draw on His power. We must begin at once to cultivate the habit of cooperating by faith, accepting whatever He chooses to provide in our circumstances. If this habit is in place through long practice, we will be ready when the pressure really mounts.

### **Who Have the Enemies Been?**

Because He is the Source of our deliverance in every circumstance, it is crucial for us to know God as well as we can. Our relationship with Him through Jesus Christ is the key that gives us access to the deliverance He provides. He has the power, and it is His will to meet our every need. It is incumbent upon us, therefore, to use our time now to build on our present relationship with Him, making it stronger and more intimate.

History shows that the primary enemies of the church arise from humans influenced by Satan and his demons—and history continually repeats itself. The clearest examples of where these enemies lie are shown in the lives and ministries of Jesus Christ and the apostles. Did not the established religious and governmental leaders of their day, such as Caiaphas, the Pharisees and Sadducees, Pilate, the Herods, etc., willingly cooperate in persecuting them?

Searching into God's authority over these enemies will help us to see how complete and all-encompassing is His power over everything. Past events show that civil governments and false churches are always the true church's most dangerous adversaries. John 19:10-11 says:

Then Pilate said to Him, "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and the power to release You?" Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin."

Here, "power" refers to civil authority, and Jesus informs us that Pilate, a powerful Roman governor of Judea, who had authority over life and death, derived his authority from God. The authority would not be his if God had not given it to him directly. We can infer that Pilate was specifically given his particular civil authority. Why is this important for us to know and believe?

Proverbs 21:1 adds an important truth: "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes." *The Living Bible* paraphrases this as, "Just as water is turned into irrigation ditches, so the Lord directs the king's thoughts, He turns them wherever He wants to."

This fact helps us understand God's sovereignty and much of history too. If the thoughts of a king—representing the highest, most influential, and most powerful person in the nation—are in God's hand, and He has the power to influence his decisions toward the outcome that pleases Him, are not

all human governors completely under the Almighty's sovereign control? Clearly, God has the power to move all history in the direction He wishes it to go. His desire will always be done. Romans 13:1-2 makes this deduction certain:

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

Not only does God have the power to move those already in office, but He appointed them in the first place! Since Paul writes this directly to Christians, and Christians have lived throughout history and in virtually every place on earth, the wording suggests that this command has timeless, universal application. Thus, God reveals that, in the final analysis, all civil magistrates, from the emperor on down to the lower authorities—and religious authorities as well—owe to God their appointments and rights to govern.

This explains why, in Numbers 16:11, Moses immediately declares that the actions of Korah and his group were rebellion against God Himself. Moses says, "Therefore you and all your company are gathered together against the Lord. And what is Aaron that you complain against him?" Moses perceived that God Himself had appointed him and Aaron to their respective responsibilities. Thus, to rebel against them was in reality rebelling against God.

This also explains why Jesus teaches in Luke 10:16, "He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me." To reject His apostle—one sent by God bearing a message—is to reject Christ, and to reject Him is to reject the Father who sent Him.

In John 5:17, Jesus provides insight into God's activity throughout the millennia of this creation: "Jesus answered them, 'My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.'" God's labors are the continuous managing and ruling over the affairs of men. He has not gone "way off somewhere," but is actively involved in bringing His purpose to pass at all times. By His will and in His providence, authorities are appointed to maintain order, to encourage good conduct, and to punish wrongdoing.

Thus, anyone who believes God is confronted by a matter of biblical truth and clear logic. How will any of our enemies "get around," deflect, or nullify the real unseen Power who stands behind and above the visible powers that be? His will *will* stand. So, to whom do we turn in time of need?

## **Jesus Christ and Power**

Let us consider the issue of power with respect to Jesus Christ. He says of Himself in Matthew 28:18, "All authority [*power*, KJV] has been given to Me in heaven and earth." "Authority" is translated from *exousia*, which has wide usage in the Greek language. It can be used to indicate jurisdiction, privilege, capacity, freedom, influence, force, and right, besides authority and power. Obviously, its usage is not restricted to sheer, brute strength. Jesus, then, is perfectly equipped to handle our needs in the widest variety of situations.

Notice that Jesus says authority has been given to Him. For this to be true, a greater Being must be the Giver. In this vein, I Corinthians 15:25-28 transports us into the future, revealing the source of His powers:

For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

The Giver in Matthew 28:18 must be the Father, so the word "all" in that verse excludes the Father, who is supreme in authority. The resurrected Son is the channel through which the Father's every purpose and plan are being worked out.

How extensive is Jesus' given authority? Colossians 1:14-19 explains some of His authority more specifically:

. . . in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell. . . .

Paul stresses Christ's positional authority, that is, where Christ stands in relation to all other beings, whether human or spirit. "Firstborn" in verses 15 and 18 does not refer to His being created, as other verses clearly show that He has eternally existed. Here, the word indicates primacy of rank, since the apostle is showing Christ's status in relation to all other beings and institutions. Establishing this is important to what he writes in the rest of the epistle, as a foundation for passages like Colossians 2:6-10:

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the [divine nature] bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

In verse 8, the word translated as "basic principles of the world" refers to elementary things. Compared to Christ, in terms of being, every other being is lesser because he or she is created. In terms of teaching, every other instruction is elementary, basic, even demonic. In terms of salvation, no other is able to save human beings.

In verses 9-10, Paul again emphasizes Christ's primacy and superiority, including the facts that He is divine and over demons in authority. He adds in verses 11-15 that, for Christians, Jesus has already defeated the principalities and powers, along with their purposes, through their conversion.

As Colossians 1:16 states, Christ's rank extends back to the very beginning, as the One used to create all things. Thus, He is the God (John 1:1) referred to in nearly every place in the Old Testament where God is mentioned. This is especially important to grasp.

John 14:10 aids us in understanding His operations as a man: "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works." Matthew 26:52-53 clarifies this through an example: "But Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?'"

While He was human, His power as a God-Being was suspended as part of His emptying Himself to become a man (Philippians 2:5-8). He thus operated on the same level as all other men, except for the innate power He possessed due to His divine nature, enabling Him to live by faith sinlessly. Better than all other men, He understood the purpose God is working out, and He believed it. Notice to whom He said He could turn in time of need.

In terms of power, Hebrews 1:1-3 informs us that His similarity to man ended upon His resurrection:

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

The apostle is extolling the *present* power of the One we worship. His authority and abilities have returned to what they were before He became a man. One of the ideas we are to take from this statement is that, if God were somehow to die, everything would shortly fly apart, so that even the physical life we now possess would end. Thus, anyone who believes God is confronted with an issue of clear, biblical logic about who sits at the controls of the universe under the Father.

### **What About Satan's Powers?**

We also need to consider Satan's powers and operations, which become important to us in relation to the practical use of our faith. We know from passages like Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 that he is a magnificent, mighty being, possessing innate powers far beyond those of any fleshly creation. For example, as far as we know he lives forever. Notice Job 1:6-12:

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. And the Lord said to Satan, "From where do you come?" So Satan answered the Lord and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it." Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?" So Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!" And the Lord said to Satan, "Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person." So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

This clearly illustrates that, despite having far greater natural powers than a man, Satan can do nothing against any of God's children that God does not permit. God is overseeing our preparation for His Kingdom, and the Devil is, in reality, a dupe in God's hands to that end. Verse 10 shows that God puts, as it were, a protective wall around us, commanding Satan, "This far and no farther."

Revelation 20:1-3, 7 adds:

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while. . . . Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison.

Like everybody else, Satan has only the power God created in him and the latitude to use it only as He permits and no more. The power given to him is meted out for what God wants him to accomplish for *His* purposes. Seeing all of the horrible things happening on earth, we may suppose that his power is unlimited, but it most assuredly is not.

### **Bringing It Around to Us**

Consider this: We all know Jesus did wonderful things in healing people, preaching, and working miracles—even walking on water—yet John 14:10-11 declares that the works He performed were done by the Father. It will help to make this personally applicable to our Christian lives.

Jesus says to His disciples in John 15:5, "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." He speaks directly to us, stating a principle we must learn to live with. The power to do spiritual works, to overcome, to produce the fruit of God's Spirit, to be used by God in any righteous manner comes from above. Israel's journey through the wilderness illustrates this. Every step of the way was physically empowered by the manna and water God provided.

Understanding God's hand in our preparation for the Kingdom of God is also advanced by remembering that we are the clay sculpture our Creator is molding and shaping (Isaiah 64:8). Does any work of art—any painting, carving, drawing, tapestry, work of literature, or fine meal for that matter—have inherent power to shape itself?

The natural man, even apart from God's purpose, is a magnificent work of art. David writes in Psalm 139:14, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Yet, when we have put on incorruption and immortality, and have inherited the Kingdom of God, we will be the most magnificent masterpieces there are, far superior to what we are now. To mold and shape us into God's image requires love, wisdom, and multiple other powers far beyond anything any person—even Jesus as a human being—has.

We must explore this subject even more specifically so that we can grasp the importance of doing everything we can to protect and to make our relationship with God ever better. What we will find indicates how much God empowers us in our salvation and preparation for His Kingdom.

Jesus says in John 6:44, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day." God summons us to reveal Himself to us. Paul adds in Romans 2:4, "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" God gifts us with repentance. Ephesians 2:8 advances us another step farther: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." God gives us grace and faith to perform what He requires of us (verse 10).

Acts 5:30-32 declares more of God's gifts:

The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit which God has given to those who obey Him.

These verses contain three more things God provides:

1. He provides our Savior through the perfect life and death of Jesus of Nazareth;
2. He resurrected that Savior following His death; and
3. He gives us His Spirit.

Beyond these are many more gifts, as Romans 4:25—5:2 explains:

. . . who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification. Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

God justifies us, grants us peace with Him, and gives us access into His very presence. Romans 5:5 then tells us His love comes to us by His Spirit. Verses 9-11 show God provides us with the resurrected Christ as our High Priest, and it is He who saves us because, as the living Head of the church, it is His job to save us prepared for His Kingdom.

Hebrews 2:10-11 adds another gift:

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.

God sanctifies us through Jesus Christ and graciously justifies us by means of Christ's blood, providing us with His Son's righteousness and granting us entrance into a relationship with Him. The sanctification process writes the laws of God in our hearts and minds, making His righteousness real and practical to daily life. During this process, which requires our cooperation with Him in His purpose, we literally become conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. The overwhelming majority of Christian works come to the fore within this process as part of the preparation for God's Kingdom.



In I Corinthians 12:4-11, Paul identifies a multitude of gifts beyond the love that God provides for His people by means of His Spirit. Ephesians 4:7, 11-14 gives more specifics as to why the gifts are given:

But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. . . . And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive. . . .

God gives gifts to each of us to enable us to perform our functions in the church and in His purpose. His gifts aid us in doing the works of sanctification. Additionally, He provides the ministry to supply human guidance as well.

John the Baptist says in John 3:27, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven." He responded in this manner because others had told him how Jesus' fame was eclipsing his own, thinking he would be jealous. But John understood and submitted to God's governance. God does not gift everybody in the same manner but according to His purpose for him or her. In Philippians 4:19, Paul supplies an overall guideline: "And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Do we trust the apostle's statement?

This is why our relationship with God must be protected at all costs. James instructs:

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. (James 1:17-18)

This relationship is the source of everything pertaining to salvation. God asks of us to give Him our lives as living sacrifices in cooperation with His will so that His purpose for us can be completed.

What appears in these two articles can significantly impact our lives both now and especially in the future as the pressure of the time of the end intensifies. Virtually everything hinges on what we choose to devote ourselves to in becoming prepared. The articles that follow will address what we must do now.