

The Greatness Of God'S Power

Made Alive by His Holy Spirit

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Power is something that a lot of people in this world desire. Athletes desire power and the ability to accomplish the things that they want to accomplish. Leaders of the nations will sell their souls for power, as we are seeing in the North American Union, as well as other unions around the world. Satan himself desires power above all else. On a radio program, one interviewer asked a Satan worshipper, "Why would you become a Satan worshipper?" He said, "Power," and he said it with a horribly demonic voice.

True power, which is the ability to exercise authority effectively, belongs to God alone. In scripture, the only true strength is the omnipotent sovereignty exercised by God, or ability that finds its source in God. No one has power unless God allows it. Jesus Christ shares this power, and members of God's church do too.

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

In the Old Testament, power and might are attributed above all to God. His power is shown both in the fact that He created the world, and that He sustains it as well; and He remains more powerful than all the forces within it. His power is also seen in His mighty acts of salvation which, of course, is the most important power to us.

Some of the names of God point to His power: *El Shaddai* (God Almighty); *Abhir* (Mighty One or Strong One); Omnipotent (All Powerful), and so on.

Revelation 19:6 And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!"

When God delegates His authority to human beings there is a certain power that it provides. And so, mankind has a great deal of God-given power over the earth to care for and properly use it.

Genesis 1:26-28 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion [authority, power] over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over

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every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Although God has given limited authority and power to mankind, He still often actively intervenes showing His power in miraculous works, especially of deliverance. It was with a "mighty hand and outstretched arm" that He brought His people out of Egypt and demonstrated His power in giving them the Promised Land.

As we see in the New Testament, the emphasis of God's use of His power shifts more to the spiritual. Christ had all authority given him by His Father, and He used it to forgive sins, and to cast out evil spirits. He gives authority to His disciples to become sons of God and to share in His work. God's power is constantly flowing.

The greatest show of His power of deliverance is in the area of our individual calling and conversion to His truth, to His way of life. Just before His ascension to heaven, Christ told the apostles,

Luke 24:46 Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.

This was to happen on the Day of Pentecost, when the power of God's Spirit would become operative in the life of the church. Even after the great demonstration of God's powerful Holy Spirit on that first Pentecost of the first church era, the apostle Paul found it necessary to encourage the church with regard to the "exceeding greatness of God's power."

He prayed for knowledge to be given to the Ephesian members so they could know the power of God that was already working in them. He wanted to assure them that true Christians can always be confident in God's promises.

Ephesians 1:18-23 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty

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power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Paul looks back to the resurrection as the primary evidence of God's power, and sees the gospel as the means by which that power comes to work in people's lives.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes [or has faith], for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

In Ephesians 1, Paul is emphasizing the power of God *in* the saints, rather than the power which God gives the saints. It is important to realize that this letter to the Ephesians does not say that salvation is the result of something we do, plus the power that is given to us by God. It is not a matter of "I plus the power of God." Salvation is the result of God's power at work—in us and through us.

Verse 19 tells us, ". . . what is the immeasurable greatness of His power in us who believe." Paul is emphasizing the power of God in us. Of course, it is true to say that God gives us strength and power; and we need that power constantly. But, scripture seems to say that God's power resides in us.

Paul is trying to make the Ephesians (and us too) see and realize—that the greatness of God's power is in us, what He is doing is in us. The result should be that our fears vanish, and we should have a new confidence and assurance with respect to our salvation.

Paul is very clear in his letter about the nature of the call itself and how it is founded on the character of God. He gives us a glimpse into the glory for which we are destined. And then, in verse 19, he emphasizes the power of God working in us.

Paul is very concerned about the Ephesian members (and us as well). He knows that they have believed, that they have trusted in Jesus Christ, and that they have been sealed by the Holy Spirit. Even still, he is praying for them without ceasing, and praying that they will advance into greater knowledge and understanding of what God is working

out in us, and the potential that that opens up.

No one can have any conception at all of that inheritance, that glory, to which we are going, without immediately becoming conscious of certain things. The greatness of the glory on the one hand, and our weak human state and condition on the other, tend to create doubts within us. When we turn to Revelation 21 and read of the Lamb in the midst and all the glory, and that outside are dogs and all that is evil, we have our doubts. "Is that really possible for us?" To the weak human mind, it seems impossible.

When we consider our frail bodies with seeds of decay in them, we know that they are susceptible to illnesses, and we find it almost impossible to believe, or even to imagine, that we could enjoy a state of glory.

And then, added to this, there is life as we know it in this world, with its changing circumstances. There is the world and its influence, friends, and others enticing us and tempting us to pursue earthly lusts. There is a preoccupation with worldly things, business affairs, and the need to make a living in order to maintain ourselves and our families. The list of distractions that we have is unlimited. All these things, the pressures of life and of circumstances, conspire together to make it seem impossible for us to find time for preparation for this glory.

Finally, behind it all, we know that we are confronted by a powerful adversary, a subtle spiritual enemy, "as a roaring lion roaming about seeking whom he may devour," confronting us at every weakness and who in his subtlety is constantly enticing, attracting and luring us into sin, failure and lethargy.

In addition, we realize that between us and that glory there lays the fact of death (the last enemy) and the power of death and the grave.

These are the thoughts that crowd into our minds, and they come especially to those who see most clearly "the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints." We know that God is great and powerful, but we do not have a clue as to how He is going to do that. We have an inkling, but we do not have a true vision or picture of it.

In Ephesians 1, Paul deals with our problems and our difficulties. He prays that we may know "the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places."

We will look at two main principles that Paul emphasizes here in Ephesians 1. First, the

greatness of the power in and of itself, and second, how we can be sure that this great power is working in us.

Principle 1: The process of Christian conversion and ultimate salvation is a demonstration of the power of God in us.

The eventual trouble with those who spend so much of their Christian lives in "the shadows and miseries" of doubt and vagueness and hesitancy, is that they have never really understood this first essential principle. No human can make himself a Christian; God alone makes Christians. Let us consider several supporting statements in Paul's epistles that show this spiritual power in us.

I Corinthians 1:22-24 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

It was not on human terms and initiative by seeking a sign or wisdom, but on God's terms that man found what he needed, the power of God and the wisdom of God. In the preaching of Christ crucified, God called people by opening their eyes of faith to believe the gospel. That is the first step to seeing and believing God's power.

In Paul's eyes, preaching is of no value unless it is in "demonstration of the Spirit and of power."

I Thessalonians 1:5-6 For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit.

The response of the Thessalonian converts was a supernatural work of God, not a natural response to a clearly delivered sermon. When Paul preached to them, he did not just share human opinion and philosophy. Rather, his message was discernible by the power of God. The Holy Spirit brought it into their hearts with deep conviction. That is why it is so important for each and every one of us to pray for the messages that we are going to receive on the Sabbath. It is not by eloquence, and it is not by philosophy or human reasoning that we receive the message, but by the Spirit, the inspiration and the

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power of God that opens those things to our minds. If we do not pray for the messages, then we will not receive all that is meant for us.

Paul also tells us that Christians are God's workmanship.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

This truth is fundamental to an understanding of the Christian. Again, in writing to the Philippians, Paul says in Philippians 1:6, "being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." This is God's power at work.

Again, in the same epistle we find:

Philippians 2:13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

Also referring to his own preaching, Paul tells the Colossian members:

Colossians 1:29 To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

Paul is speaking of the power of God working in him. Paul did not want the saints remaining spiritual babies; he wanted them to become spiritually mature. Elsewhere Paul prayed for complete sanctification of the saints. Paul preached the "fullness" of the gospel so that they could have the fullness of life that Jesus promised them.

Paul expended all his God-given strength for this purpose. Developing maturity in the church members took a lot of work which was extremely tiring. He struggled and agonized like an athlete in an arena would. The power for this struggle came from God through Christ by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Paul explains that what makes us Christian is that we are a new creation. We are not a remake; we are a new creation. We are nothing less than that. We are not merely a member of a church, we are not merely good people, and we are not merely people who have made a decision to become a member of God's church. A person can do all that,

and still not be a true Christian.

When we are called we have our responsibility to obey and overcome, but the entire teaching of the New Testament emphasizes above all else that we can do nothing until God has first done something in us. We are all spiritually dead by nature, and nobody can do anything until he has been given life and created new. And so we are regenerated with new life. The power of God is the beginning and the end of salvation; everything is of Him and of His power.

Principle 2: How we can be sure that this great power is working in us?

In describing the power of God, Paul seems to struggle with human language to describe the power God uses. It will always be totally inadequate, but he tries.

Ephesians 1:19 and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power

He prays here, that the Ephesians will know what is the "exceeding greatness"—not only the greatness, but the exceeding greatness. The word used by Paul that is translated into English as "exceeding" can also be translated "surpassing." God's power not only surpasses our power of expression, it surpasses our power of comprehension! For example, take all the dictionaries of the world, exhaust all the vocabularies, and when you have added them all together, you still have not begun to describe the greatness of God's power. There are no human words to describe it.

Paul uses the best terms available, the surpassing greatness, the "exceeding greatness," but they are not a sufficient description, so he adds to them by saying, "according to the working of His mighty power."

Let us analyze this new phrase, because it is one of the greatest that Paul uses. We have to know "the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power."

A better word than "working" would be "energy." Energy is a much stronger word because it gives the impression of something that is effective or, valuable and successful. It is not mere static or potential power; energy is power that has been liberated, and is actually working to accomplish something. It is kinetic power, manifested power, the energy working itself out and permeating everything.

Then take this second word "mighty" which stands for "strength"—strength in a very special way. Paul's word suggests a strength that overcomes, that prevails, that conquers, a strength that when it comes up against resistance, overcomes it. It is the kind of strength that can take down every high mountain, or it can raise every valley; there is nothing that can resist it. Paul is describing this power of God as "the energy of the strength" of the God to whom nothing is impossible.

The third word that appears in the New King James Version and King James Version as "power" really stands for "might"—the might of God, God's own essential might and inherent power. Paul is not using words here in a haphazard manner; there is a definite gradation in their use.

Paul first speaks of energy, a power in action; and then says that it comes from a force that is overwhelming and overpowering, that energetic force comes from the ocean of God's might, which is limitless and infinite.

A similar description of God's power is given by Isaiah in his prophecy. He expresses it by asking a series of rhetorical questions: To whom can we liken God? With whom can we compare Him? Once that is said, all comparisons are useless.

Isaiah 40:22 It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.

No idols, political or governmental powers, presidents, prime ministers or governors, scholars or philosophers of the wisdom this world; nothing can compare with God's power. No one is able to advise Him or give Him anything; He is everything in and of Himself; He is everlasting in might and strength and power.

So, why do we doubt Him? Because we are human and we still have a great deal of human nature in us.

In Ephesians 1, Paul emphasizes that this eternal might and strength of God's power is exerting itself in us and overcoming all obstacles and resistances. In other words, Paul is telling the Ephesian Christians that he is praying for them to know the effectiveness of the force of God's strength, or for them to know the energy of the might of His strength towards them.

The making of a Christian is the result of the manifestation of the might of God exerting

itself. And that is what is happening to us; this eternal, illimitable might of God has been working energetically in us. As members of God's church we are not static members. It is not as though nothing is happening. We are dynamic members because of the dynamic nature of God and His power.

When we talk about the energy of the strength of the might of God's power, our minds short-circuit at the awesome magnificence and the majesty of it all. So Paul continues to help us with an illustration of it.

The energy of the strength of God's might has already been manifested in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Ephesians 1:20-21 which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

It is interesting that Paul illustrates the might of God by the resurrection of Christ rather than by the Creation. The Creation was a significant manifestation of the power of God, because all He had to do was have Christ, the Spokesman of His Father, say, "Let there be light," and there was light. His Word was enough; and He made everything out of nothing. But what did He make? He made physical things; it was not spiritual things that He was making.

Or why did Paul not use the comparison of God's power and might as exercised in the design of the universe? All these spinning spheres in the heavens are maintained and sustained by God's power; everything is ordered by Him.

The world would collapse if God, by His supernatural power, ceased to sustain it and keep it going; that has even been proven scientifically. The universe is dying, and it is only God who can sustain it. All things work, and work together, because God has made them that way. And He did not merely make them and then leave them; He is still energizing them. The power of God is manifested in Divine intervention and in the whole ordering of the life of the planet on which we stand.

Or why did Paul not refer to the might of God as manifested in some of the great judgments of history? Has there been anything more momentous than a manifestation of God's power in the flood, when God opened the windows of heaven and the mountains were all covered with water? Again, they were all physical things.

Or why did Paul not use the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, or the amazing miracles in connection with the Exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt—the dividing of the Red Sea, and the dividing of the Jordan River? Or why did Paul not choose one of these or other similar events; but instead, he chose the raising of Jesus Christ from the dead?

Christ's resurrection was an objective demonstration of the power of God. It is a perfect analogy of what happens to us spiritually. It also helps to show our spiritual union with Christ. When Christ was raised, we were raised with Him (in a manner of speaking).

Ephesians 2:1-5 And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

Something must happen before we who were dead and under the anger of God could ever be made alive. We cannot receive any benefit until something has been done to satisfy the wrath of God, because we were not only dead and a creature of lusts and controlled by the ruler of this world, but were by nature the children of wrath. People are by nature destitute of holiness and exposed to destruction.

God used His power to make something happen to change our previous state. Jesus Christ has paid the penalty for our guilt in how we lived our sinful lives before. Christ not only died and was buried, God "raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion and every name that is named."

All of that involved exaltation and making Him alive. Paul says the same thing is true of us, because we are in Christ —"made us alive together with Christ." This has happened to everybody who is truly a Christian. It is God's action.

What can the person who is dead in sin and under the wrath of God do for himself? What power does he have? None! God has to make him alive. As He made His dead Son in the grave alive, He makes us alive spiritually. "To make alive," means "to impart

life.

The first thing then that is true of us when we receive the Holy Spirit at baptism is that we came to the end of our death—we were dead in trespasses and sins. And although we are all given a human spirit when born into this world, there was no divine spark in anybody because we are born children of Adam, born without God's Holy Spirit.

I Corinthians 15:22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

We cannot be Christians without being in Christ. It follows then that if we are in Christ, then, in a way, what is true of Him is also true of us. He died to sin once, and we have died to sin once, in Him. He has made us alive; and if we are alive we are no longer dead. It must be one or the other. We cannot hope to become alive; we are either alive or else we are dead. If we are alive spiritually, it means that God has put a new Spirit of life in us.

Romans 8:1-5 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

"The law of the Spirit of life in Christ" is in every true Christian. This is the opposite of death. Before this new Spirit of life in Christ came into us, we were dead in trespasses and sins and subject to a very different spirit—"the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience." But that is no longer true of us; we have a new Spirit of life.

God has made us alive. He has renewed us. This is an ongoing daily process. Paul told the Corinthian Christians:

II Corinthians 4:16-17 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our

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outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,

The keeping of the Day of Pentecost is meant to remind us every year that we are only the first small harvest of God. He has called people for salvation out of a world that is completely (except for us) cut off from God since Adam. The world as a whole is still cut off.

We have been predestined to be called now. We have been called to receive the Holy Spirit. It is the second Spirit a person needs to go with the human spirit in every human. We are heirs, but not yet inheritors. We are a part of the Family of God.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of understanding, imparting to the physical brain spiritual intellect, the ability to comprehend spiritual knowledge. It is the love of God placed within us. It is the faith of Christ, the same faith with which Christ performed miracles, now given to us—placed within us.

The Holy Spirit is also God-given spiritual power to overcome. It is the spiritual power to help us turn from and resist self-centered living, and turn to and embrace God-centered living. It is the power by which we can develop the holy, righteous, perfect character, which is God's purpose for having put humanity on the earth, so that He could reproduce Himself.

God has given us new life. By a powerful act of God, He has imparted in us a principle of new life that has become the governing disposition of our being. God, by His mighty action, puts a new disposition into our mind and heart.

What is a disposition? It is the prevailing tendency of something to act in a certain manner under given circumstances. It is the dominant quality, or qualities, distinguishing a person. Disposition involves customary moods and attitudes toward the life around one.

A Christian's spiritual disposition is the automatic character action, or reaction, that comes from a righteous heart and a mind, led by the Holy Spirit.

What a person in sin needs is not new faculties, but a new disposition. What is the difference between faculties and disposition? The disposition is the thing that determines how the faculties are to be used. The disposition is the thing that governs

and organizes the use of the faculties, which makes one man a musician, and another a poet, and another something else.

So the difference between the sinner and the Christian, between the unbeliever and the believer, is not that the believer, the Christian, has certain faculties which the other person lacks. No, what happens is that this new disposition given to the Christian directs his faculties in an entirely different way. He is not given a new brain; he is not given a new intelligence, or anything else. He has always had these; they are his servants, his instruments, and his members, as Paul calls them in the sixth chapter of Romans. What is new is a new disposition. He has turned in a different direction. There is a new power working in him and guiding his faculties.

Romans 6:11-13 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

Romans 6:19 I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.

It affects our hearts, it affects our minds, and it affects our will. We are in a spiritual relationship with Christ because we believe the message of the gospel and are identified by faith with Him. This new life of devotion to God and Christ means that we have new attitudes and actions.

II Corinthians 5:14-17 For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

A Christian is a new creation; and there is only One who can create, namely God. God

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is the author of creation, and Christ is the Word or the instrument by which He does it.

Becoming a new creation and being in Christ is something that happens spiritually, in a sense, in our subconscious. We do not notice it on a minute by minute basis. We may generally understand it, but we cannot fully explain it.

We cannot explain it physiologically, anatomically, or in any other way. All we know is that we were blind to understanding God's truth, and now we can understand it. We know that it has happened. We were dead; now we are alive. It is mysterious, it is miraculous, and it is incomprehensible, but we know the effects, we appreciate the results, and we are aware of the fact that it has taken place.

It is a creative act of God. This is why we often find Paul and the other apostles referring to it as "a new creation"—"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

When God uses His power to call us into His church, we keep the same eyes and we look at the same things that we looked at before, but we do not see them as we used to see them.

Let me illustrate this. When God calls an alcoholic who had eyes and could look at a bottle of beer, wine or hard liquor, and see certain things, and then he receives the Holy Spirit, he still has eyes. He still sees the same bottle, yet it is not the same. It is completely different. He is looking at the same thing, but he sees something absolutely different. Why is that? It is not the bottle or the liquid that has changed. The alcoholic has changed, or rather has been changed—he is a new creation, a new disposition, a new governing principle, a new life—as the result of the power of God.

You and I were dead, lifeless. We could not move ourselves spiritually. We had no appetite spiritually, no understanding spiritually. But if we are Christians that is no longer true; we have been made alive together with Christ, the life principle has come in, and we have been, and are being, renewed.

The life of the Head goes through the members. "You are the body of Christ, and members individually." Are we able to say the same thing Paul said? "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me . . ."

It is not that we should not be striving. Of course we have to strive: to study, pray, fast, obey, and to overcome. We have to do all of these things. But the first thing that happens is that the power of God provides this knowledge of life.

Sometimes God withholds His strengthening of us until we do something. What can we do to remove any obstacles of weakness that we tend to inadvertently place in our own way? Here are seven things to advance God's strengthening of us:

1. We can advance spiritual strengthening by dependence on God.

In David's absence from Ziklag, Amalekite raiding parties had burned the town and carried off his family and everyone else as prisoners. After great lament and his men's threat to stone him, David inquired of the Lord through Abiathar the priest concerning His will in the matter.

I Samuel 30:6 Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.

2. We can advance spiritual strengthening by having the joy of God.

Assisted by the Levites, Nehemiah convinced the people to stop mourning and start celebrating.

Nehemiah 8:10 Then he said to them, 'Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.'

As God's children, we carry burdens and know what it is to weep; but we also experience power that transforms sorrow into joy. The secret of Christian joy is to believe what God says in His Word, and act on it. Faith that is not based on the Word is not faith at all; it is presumption or superstition. Joy that is not the result of faith, is not joy at all; it is only a "good feeling" that will soon disappear. Faith based on the Word will produce joy that will weather the storms of life.

3. We can advance spiritual strengthening by prayer, in accordance with God's Word.

Throughout Psalm 119, the writer makes it clear that he is suffering because of his commitment to God and His Word. He was actually risking his life to obey the Lord. Yet he did not rant and rave against his enemies, and seek to destroy them; rather, he wept for them, and turned them over to God. All he wanted was strength to keep on living for

God and magnifying His Word.

Psalm 119:28 My soul melts from heaviness; strengthen me according to Your word.

The psalmist discovered that God's grace was all that he needed. He would walk in the way of God's truth and avoid the enemy's way of deception. When we find ourselves pressured by the enemy, our first response is usually to pray that God will change them, when our best response would be that God would change us and enable us to overcome.

4. We can advance spiritual strengthening by gaining wisdom.

Wisdom helps us face life stronger. The wise person fears God, and therefore does not fear anyone or anything else. He walks with God, and has adequate spiritual strength to face the challenges of life, including war.

Ecclesiastes 7:19 Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten rulers of the city.

5. We can advance spiritual strengthening by quietness and confidence in response to God.

Isaiah prophesied during the decline of Israel. He spoke the Word of God to the Israelites who refused to listen to his warnings of looming disaster. The design of Isaiah 30:15 is to give a reason for the destruction that should come upon the Israelites. That reason was that God had indicated to them the path of truth and safety, but they chose not to follow it, and refused to put confidence in Him.

Isaiah 30:15 For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: 'In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength.'

Consider "quietness" of mind. It means strength of purpose, combined with calm collectedness of thought as well as of word and action. Consider "confidence" as another feature of true Christian character. Confidence is something more than a dead theory of belief; it is faith in exercise—active faith.

6. We can advance spiritual strengthening by waiting on God.

David believed that God's goodness followed him and also anticipated him. He looked at it as God storing up goodness to use when it was needed. God's goodness never ran out, because David could go to God in prayer and receive all he needed. The key was faith in God.

Psalm 27:14 Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord.

Instead of rushing ahead, David calmly waited on God, because faith and patience always go together. Hundreds of years later, Isaiah reminded the doubting Israelites about the same principle.

Isaiah 40:31 But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

7. We can advance spiritual strengthening by dependence on God's grace.

As you recall, God gave the apostle Paul a constant reminder of his weakness. Countless explanations concerning the nature of his thorn in the flesh have been offered, among them chronic problems (such as malaria, migraine headaches, and epilepsy), or perhaps a disability in speech. No one can say for sure what his thorn was, but it probably was a physical affliction of some sort.

II Corinthians 12:7-10 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

It is understandable that Paul would consider his thorn in the flesh a hindrance to his

performing of a more effective ministry, and that he would repeatedly appeal to God for its removal. But he learned from this experience the lesson that pervades his letter: divine power is best demonstrated against the backdrop of human weaknesses, so that only God is praised. Rather than removing the problem, God gave Paul grace in it. This grace is sufficient; it is adequate in the sense of providing contentment.

The power of God, the principle of life that is working within us, in a sense, in spite of ourselves is influencing us, molding us, guiding us, convicting us, and leading us. In this sense, we are "made alive together with Christ."

Ephesians 2:4-7 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Paul uses Christ's resurrection to illustrate God's might because it is the proof of the fact that every obstacle, hindrance, and enemy set in our path will be overcome. The raising of Jesus Christ from the dead is proof positive and absolute—that even the "last enemy" has been conquered and defeated.

The apostle Peter, in the first sermon delivered under the auspices of the Christian church on that first Day of Pentecost at Jerusalem, says in Acts 2:24, "whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it."

It was not possible because God's mighty power cannot be overcome, conquered, or prevailed over by anything. In addition to all our own weaknesses and disobedience, our last enemy is death. If we fail to realize the greatness of God's power in us, we will never quite realize the power of death. Without the power of God in us, the power of death is absolute.

It is not surprising that the Old Testament writers refer so frequently to death and its terrible power. They trembled and feared as they thought of this power that was there waiting to receive them. The power of death and Hades is the power exercised by Satan himself. That is why the author of the epistle to the Hebrews takes comfort in the fact that Jesus Christ came, and lived and died, in order to destroy the devil—who has the power of death.

Hebrews 2:14-15 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

By raising Jesus Christ from death and the grave, God has given us this public demonstration and manifestation that the enemy has been conquered.

I Corinthians 15:26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.

I Corinthians 15:54-57 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Whatever may be true of our experience, whatever may be true of the world and its darkness, whatever may be true of the seeds of decay and of illness and of death that are in our bodies, and however great is the power of the enemy, we can be certain and confident that nothing can prevent the carrying out of God's purpose with respect to us.

There is no power that can withstand Him; there is no might or influence that can match Him, there is no possible antagonist that can equal Him. The strongest enemies, Satan and death, have already been vanquished, and the resurrection of Christ is the proof of it.

We have positive proof that there is nothing too hard for God, and that nothing is impossible for Him. So, if when we think of the glory and the perfection and the wonder of what is awaiting us, and then feel that we are so unworthy and so weak that we have no hope of enjoying it, here is the answer: The God who is working in us will keep us while still here, and make us fit for the future indescribable glory. It is He who is doing this, not we ourselves.

Romans 8:38-39 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us

The Greatness of God's Power by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)
from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Do we truly realize the exceeding greatness of His power in us? Do we realize the energy of the strength of His might that is already working in us? And, do we realize that because it has begun it will continue until we find ourselves faultless and blameless, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing in the presence of God in the glory?

Please do not get in God's way. Do not limit His working out of His ultimate purpose in you!

May God, by His Spirit, enlighten the eyes of our understanding so that we can begin to comprehend this mighty working of God's power in us!