

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "The Magnitude of Spiritual Power"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/30/2009

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Introduction

As we begin today I want to read for you once again the verse that we're focusing upon right now, Colossians chapter one, verse eleven. And so I want to read those words in context for you once again, beginning at verse nine. Paul says that

we [Paul and Timothy] 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 right now we're focusing in particular on the first part of verse eleven: "strengthened with all might, according to His [that is, God's] glorious power."

When we began looking at this verse, I said that there are four things that every Christian needs to understand about spiritual power. You need to understand the nature of spiritual power, the need for spiritual power, the magnitude of spiritual power, and the purpose for spiritual power. Thus far in our study of this verse, we've looked at the first two aspects of spiritual power.

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Review: The Nature of Spiritual Power

First of all, we've seen the *nature* of spiritual strength and power. We've seen that it is supernatural power. We've seen that God is the only source of that power. We've seen that spiritual power is intimately connected with the glory of God. Literally, in verse eleven, it is "the power of His glory." The connection is that direct. And we've seen that the One who has made it possible for believers to have spiritual power is Jesus Christ. And we've seen that One who imparts spiritual power to the believer is God the Holy Spirit.

And in connection with the nature of genuine spiritual power, we also spoke of the fact that there are many counterfeits for spiritual power in the church today. People are focusing on externals, on all kinds of outward appearances. The church is using the wrong yardstick to measure spiritual power today, and as a result it's measuring the wrong things. But genuine spiritual power is a matter not of mere externals. It is a focused on what God through Christ is doing in the *inner* man, by the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit. So first of all, we saw the *nature* of genuine spiritual power.

Review: The Need for Spiritual Power

And in our last message we saw the reason why Christians *need* spiritual power from God. And the simple reason is that we have no power of our own. We must have the *righteousness* of another in order to be justified before God, in order to be saved, because we have no righteousness of our own. We must have the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ in order to be saved. And likewise, we must have the

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power of another in order to live the Christian life after we are saved, because we have no power of our own. We need the power of God through Jesus Christ.

Colossians chapter one, verse eleven assumes the inherent weakness of our own sinful flesh. And it also assumes, as we have seen, that the presence and the demonstration of genuine spiritual power are necessary because there are so many counterfeits. And the flesh, our sinful flesh, goes after these counterfeits. That was true in New Testament times, and it is equally true today.

So far Paul has told the Colossians about four things that he prays for, for them: First, he prays that they might know God's will. Second, he prays that they would walk worthy of the Lord, in a way that would please God. Third, he prays that they would work to bear spiritual fruit. And fourth, he prays that they would increase in their knowledge of the Scriptures. And now we are looking at the fifth thing that he prays for, for them: that they would be "strengthened with all might, according to God's glorious power."

All of these were things that the Gnostic philosophers and the Jewish legalizers falsely promised to their followers in the first century. But all they could offer were counterfeits. They could not deliver the genuine article in any of these areas. And the reason was because the focus of their teachings was on the flesh – on human power, on human wisdom, on human authority.

Paul is declaring to the Colossian believers of the first century, and to us as Christians in the 21st century, that the blessings of which he speaks in Colossians

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chapter one, verses nine through eleven, can be found only in Jesus Christ. He is preeminent! Beware lest anyone cheat you out of the blessings and riches that are to be found only in Jesus Christ! Only through Christ can you have genuine, full knowledge of God's will. Only through Christ can you walk in a way that truly pleases God. Only through that Vine-and-branch relationship to Christ can you bear genuine spiritual fruit to the glory of God. Only through the indwelling Holy Spirit, who lives within you because of Christ – only through Him can you understand the Scriptures, and increase in your knowledge of the Bible. And only through Christ can you be strengthened with all might, for living the Christian life.

And we've also seen that the principal way that genuine spiritual power is imparted to you as a believer is through the Word of God, illuminated by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

So thus far we've seen the *nature* of genuine spiritual power in the Christian life, and we've seen the *need* for spiritual power.

Dunamis: Inherent Power

We come today to a third point that every Christian needs to understand about spiritual power. And that is the *magnitude* of genuine spiritual power. The magnitude of it. The vastness of it. Genuine spiritual power is not power on a human scale, or by human measurements. Because it is God's power, it is infinite power. It is limitless power. And it is sovereign power. In other words, it is power that God makes available to Christians according to our need as He alone in His perfect wisdom

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knows our need. It is power that operates not for our selfish, fleshly interests, but for the glory of God.

Here in Colossians chapter one and verse eleven the Apostle Paul by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit uses two different words for power. He uses one of those words twice, in two different forms. The phrase "strengthened with all might" uses the Greek word *dunamis* twice – once as a noun, and once as a verb. This word *dunamis* is an interesting word. It's the word from which we get our English word *dynamite*. And it's a word that signifies *inherent* power – in other words, the kind of power that something or someone has because of its nature. And a stick of dynamite is a good basic example of that kind of power. Because of the chemical makeup of the material that is in that stick of dynamite, it has the inherent power to act as an explosive under the right conditions – that is, when heat or fire is applied to it.

And Paul uses this word *dunamis* with good reason. It was a word that the Colossian believers had heard often. For the pagan Greeks and Romans of New Testament times, the word *dunamis* was one of the words they most often used to describe their gods, their false deities. They would ascribe power to Cybele as the goddess of the earth; or Apollo as the god of health; or Athena as the goddess of wisdom; or Zeus or Jupiter as the ruler of the gods; or Mars as the god of war. All of these gods, the Greeks said, had *dunamis*, inherent power, in their various realms. And so their worship of these deities was a way of accessing or appropriating the power, the *dunamis*, that these pagan deities supposedly possessed.

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And I believe that we stand on firm Biblical ground in saying that these pagan deities did possess *dunamis*, or power – but it was and is demonic power, Satanic power, the power of the kingdom of darkness. And dear friends, I believe that we are also on firm Biblical ground in saying that the counterfeit power that is in operation in so many churches today is also Satanic power. It is from the realm of the evil one. It is *his* deception. It is *his* counterfeit. Jesus said in John 8, verse 44 that Satan is a liar and the father of lies, and Jesus told the unbelieving religious rulers during His days on earth that they were of their father the devil. And it is the same with the spiritual charlatans that we find among us today. They are of their father the devil.

But Paul says to the Colossian believers: my prayer is that you will have the *true dunamis*, the true power of God through Jesus Christ. Because of what Christ has done for you on the cross, and by His resurrection from the dead, you have been delivered from the power of darkness, verse twelve. You have been translated, or conveyed, or transferred, out of that dark kingdom and into the kingdom of Jesus Christ, the dear Son of God.

So don't walk in the old ways. Don't seek after the old power. Don't seek after the old, fleshly wisdom. Don't let anyone cheat you by taking you back into the false things that you left behind when you came to Christ. My prayer, Paul says, is that you will be empowered with the *genuine dunamis*, the power of the one true and living God.

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***Kratos*: Demonstrated Power**

And then Paul uses a second word for power in verse eleven. "Strengthened with all might" – those words are two uses of *dunamis*. But then we come to this: "according to His glorious power" – literally, "in accordance with the power of His glory." The word for power in that phrase is the Greek word *kratos*, and it means *demonstrated* power. *Dunamis* means *inherent* power. *Kratos* means *demonstrated* power.

That stick of dynamite, sitting in the box, has *dunamis*. It has *inherent* power because of its nature, its makeup and composition. But when you apply a match or a spark to that dynamite, and the explosion happens, you have *demonstrated* power. Now you really know it was a stick of dynamite, and not just a stick of wood that somebody painted red and put in the box.

The pagans also used this word *kratos*, demonstrated power. In secular Greek literature we find this term being used to describe the power of earthly rulers, and in particular at the time of the book of Colossians it was a term that was used to denote the power of the Roman Empire and the Roman emperor. But the thing that the pagans did not understand was that any power that earthly rulers have is only theirs because God has given it to them, and we're going to look at that in particular when we come to Colossians chapter one, verse 16. Christ is the One who governs all thrones, and dominions, and principalities, and powers. He is the One who sets up one earthly ruler, and puts down another. The power that is above and behind the

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temporal powers that we see here on earth is spiritual power, the glorious power of God in Christ.

Genuine spiritual power, God's power, is the *kratos* kind of power – it is *demonstrated* power. It's not something that we can only talk about in the abstract. It's not just theoretical power. It is *actual* power. It is *demonstrated* power. It is power at work. It is "the power of His glory" – the power that is inherent in the glory of God, the power that is demonstrated in His glorious acts.

The Demonstrated Power of God

The power by which the believer lives the Christian life is God's glorious power. It is demonstrated power. And I want to mention just three things that we find in God's Word that tell us about the magnitude, the vastness, of that power.

First of all, the power of God that is available to believers for living the Christian life is the power that created and sustains the universe. Revelation 4:11 – "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created." John chapter one, verses one and two: "In the beginning was the Word [Jesus Christ], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made."

And right here in Colossians chapter one, beginning a few verses down at verse 15: "He [Jesus Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all

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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 by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist" – literally, all things "hang together" – the creation, the principalities and powers, the laws that govern the operation of the realms both seen and unseen – all of it. The power of God that is available to believers for living the Christian life is the power that created and sustains the universe.

Secondly, the power of God that is available to believers for living the Christian life is the power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead. First Corinthians 6:14 – "And God both raised up the Lord [Jesus Christ] and will also raise us up by His power." Romans chapter one, verse four: Jesus was "declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." Colossians chapter two, verse 15 tells us that in being nailed to the cross Jesus "disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in [the cross and in the resurrection]." The power of God that is available to believers for living the Christian life is the power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

Thirdly, the power of God that is available to believers for living the Christian life here and now is the same power that will raise us from the dead at the Last Day. Psalm 49, verse 15: "But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me." And Paul prays for the Ephesian believers in chapter one of that epistle, much as he prays here for the Colossians. Ephesians one, beginning at verse 18: Paul prays "that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are

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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 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." The power of God that is available to believers for living the Christian life here and now is the same power that will raise us from the dead to enter into a glorious inheritance at the Last Day.

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