

CHAPTER 4

POWER: REALITY CHECK PART TWO

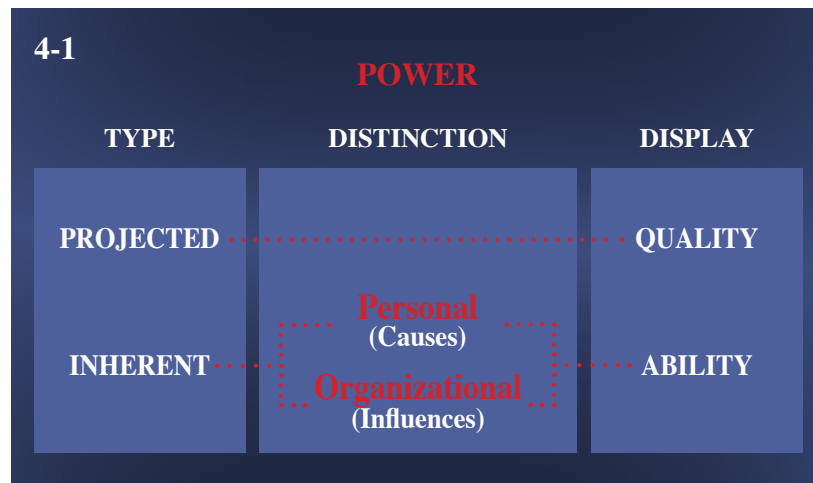
A word can have a wide range of meanings. *Power* is such a word. In a typical conversation “power” becomes an alternative word used to convey or represent a variety of ideas.¹ In the business world, power is associated with ties and lunches. You’ve familiar with the expressions “power tie” and “power lunch.” Obviously ties have no inherent power. Lunches may be hot or cold, but they certainly do not possess innate power. Nevertheless, power linked with these suggests intimidation and confidence. With regard to public speaking, you have heard it said, “He spoke with power” or “That was a powerful message.” Power is used to describe the effectiveness, forcefulness, and persuasiveness of the individual, rather than the actual intrinsic power of the person.

All Power Is Not Created Equal

While power can be defined as (1) “possession of control, authority, or influence over others” or (2) “ability to act or produce an effect,” the definition used is critical to understanding a context.² A distinction must be made between *projected power* (displaying a quality) by a

ESCAPE

person and *inherent power* (an embodied ability to produce an effect) *in* a person or position held by a person (see chart 4-1). Ties, lunches, and speeches can be enhanced by projected power. Inherent power is another matter altogether. Leadership positions within organizations (e.g., business, school, government, etc.) all possess the means to compel those under their authority to conform to specific practices, standards, or laws. In each instance, the ability is embodied in the organization itself, not with the individual in leadership. They have intrinsic power attributed to them by their position—*organizational-inherent power*. But to have *personal-inherent power* means to have an innate ability to actually produce effects and actions, to cause or change behavior. While personal-inherent power can come in the form of *physical ability*, such as that of a body builder or professional football player, the primary concern of this book is a person's *spiritual ability* that comes from the Spirit.



When my daughter was a teenager, she played competitive tennis in northern California, becoming highly ranked. Prior to the start of one quarterfinal match at a tournament, she and I were making our

POWER: REALITY CHECK, PART TWO

way to the court. At one spot two walking trails intersected beneath a cluster of shade trees where some forty or more players were mingling. As we approached, they began to separate in order to allow us to pass through unimpeded. Without even changing our stride, we walked between the players. Why did they do that? Her involvement with the tennis organization granted her the intrinsic power of a player who had recognized tennis status. Out of respect for her ranking they made room. On a grander scale, this identical thing takes place in Congress as Senators or dignitaries make their way through halls. Is this personal-inherent power? No! Is it power inherent to an organization? Absolutely!

When we turn to Acts 1:8, God promised personal-inherent power to the Eleven in order to accomplish their mission as God's witnesses. Through signs and miracles, which authenticated their message from God, they established the early Church. Paul confirmed their God-given *power for ministry* when he wrote, "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles" (2 Cor 12:12). The Apostles' miracles were manifestations of God's enablement for their particular ministry. They possessed power to heal the sick and give sight to the blind. Unfortunately many see a parallel between the Apostles' power to minister and the believer's ability to walk with Christ—an assumed power for living. This alleged parallel is based on a misunderstanding of both Acts 1:8 and Romans 5:12-8:39. In chapter 9, *Spirit: Shades of Power*, the biblical view of Acts 1:8 is addressed. Below we lay out the right perspective from Romans 5:12-8:39.

Use of *Power* in Romans 5:12–8:39

When we come to the Scripture, the various uses of power must be considered in order to understand their particular meaning in different biblical texts. If not, the result of mixing apples with oranges will produce confusion and interpretative error. One place where misunderstanding is typically found is in the critical section of Romans regarding *how Christians are to live* (Rom 5:12-8:39) having already obtained righteousness by faith through Christ (Rom 3:21-5:11).³ It is

ESCAPE

significant in this section of Romans that *power* is used *only once*, yet it has become a major topic in Christian books and commentaries referring to the presumed *power of sin*.⁴ That singular usage in Romans is found at the end of the section in Romans 8:38 and references demonic beings that are at work in the world in order to thwart God's purposes.

With the obvious lack of references to *power* in this section of Romans, we must naturally ask, "Why is such emphasis placed on the *power of sin* if the text doesn't address it?" This is an important question since this portion of Romans concerns Christian living. There are two primary reasons. *First*, as discussed in the previous chapter, most commentators perceive the Christian life to be a conflict between the power of sin and the power of the Spirit with the believer constantly being pulled in two directions. *Second*, the power-of-sin teaching is supported by the typical understanding of the word *reign* in Romans 5–6.

Use of *Reign* in Romans 5:12–8:39

When we think of the reign of kings or world leaders, we tend to think they can do anything they please since they have the "power" to do so. But is this the typical way "reigning" is used in Scripture?⁵

Reigning Observations

Understanding the meaning of the verb *to reign* (*basileuw*) is critical. It is an encompassing, umbrella word inclusive of the following:

- Sovereign—king, monarch, or ruler with supreme authority
- Realm—kingdom or territory subject to the control of a ruler
- Authority—ruler's right to exact obedience
- Servitude—subjects in bondage to a ruler
- Subjection—submission to the authority of a ruler

Reigning is usually understood to relate to a sovereign who has the right to rule over a kingdom, decreeing what is acceptable for those

POWER: REALITY CHECK, PART TWO

subject to his authority. Assuming an earthly ruler can create uniform behavior throughout his realm is an overstatement since in reality he cannot actually “produce” in others the behavior he desires. He may coerce, provide incentives, and even issue death threats, but his authority is limited in that he cannot actually make anyone obey. Compliance is a choice made by each person under authority.

Being in the U.S. Army during the “conflict” in Southeast Asia, orders issued from those in authority were not recommendations or suggestions, but commands. Not to follow those commands resulted in heavy penalties for those who chose not to fall in line. I know what authority looks like. So does the peasant in Cuba, in North Korea, or in China. Nevertheless those with clout cannot actually create the behavior they seek; rather they encourage, persuade, or even threaten in order to foster conformity. [Note: how motivation affects behavior is develop further in chapter 11.]

As we discussed above, power is inherent in and derived from authority in an organization or a kingdom. A ruler does possess organizational-intrinsic power, but he is *never* endowed with personal-inherent power. Let me repeat: a king can only influence or persuade but his subject’s must choose to either conform or resist. Obviously being under a tyrannical king with authority over your physical life incentivizes obedience.⁶ A threat of death does have a way of motivating a person to shape up. On the other hand, a magnanimous ruler wants the best for those under his authority, encouraging compliance by means of influence and persuasion through organizational-inherent power.

Reigning in Context

A review of the twenty-one times the term *reign* occurs in the New Testament is necessary to establish the use of the word. It is important to notice that reigning occurs fifteen times outside of the book of Romans with the six remaining references found in Romans.⁷ Outside of Romans, the context is *always* associated with a ruler reigning over a physical, earthly kingdom. But in Romans (see below), Paul moves the concept of reigning from the physical to the spiritual realm (italics added):

ESCAPE

- 5:14** Nevertheless *death reigned* from Adam until Moses
- 5:17** For if by the transgression of the one, *death reigned* through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness [“the *gracious gift of righteousness*”] *will reign* in life through the One, Jesus Christ⁸
- 5:21** As *sin reigned* in death, even so *grace would reign* through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord
- 6:12** Therefore do not let *sin reign* in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts

Non-believers are spiritually separated from God and are completely in servitude to sin and have no choice but to be subjected to sin’s reign. For Christians, it is typically believed that sin continues to reign as a power responsible for producing the “deeds of the flesh.” With that understanding as we previously stated, most conclude that the indwelling Holy Spirit provides the necessary counteracting power for believers to walk in fellowship with Christ and to produce the “fruit of the Spirit.” This working of the Spirit then is understood as the grace of God reigning in the believer’s life. But is this the correct, biblical picture of the reign either for sin or grace?

I believe that view misses the point. Reigning understood from the perspective of an organization, with a ruler and subjects, is the best approach. Rather than personal-inherent power causing obedience, an organizational viewpoint emphasizes power that influences. So let’s see which view the texts above support.

While *non-believers* can do good things, nothing they do is pleasing to God meriting salvation since they are spiritually dead, held under the bondage to sin. Being made spiritually alive the *believer* must continually choose between two masters and ways of living. Paul planted the seed of these two configurations in Romans 5. “Sin reigns in death, but grace reigns in life.”⁹ The contrast between sin and grace is paralleled with the contrast between death and life. Sin and grace are pictured as two conflicting spiritual rulers with authority over their subjects. As a

POWER: REALITY CHECK, PART TWO

result, there are two potential spheres of experience for Christians: life or death. As addressed in chapter 2, *life* should be understood in this context as here-and-now, a present enriched life, involving intimacy or fellowship with Christ.¹⁰ On the other hand, *death* is the loss of intimacy with Christ when the Christian chooses sinful behavior.¹¹ *Actions have consequences!*

Now notice Romans 5:15-16.

15 But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. **16** The gift is not like *that which came* through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment *arose* from one *transgression* resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift *arose* from many transgressions resulting in justification.

We are told in Romans 5:15-16 not only that Jesus' work on the cross provided for the free gift (gift of righteousness), establishing a right relationship with God for those who believe in Christ,¹² but also that when received that gift liberates the believer from sin's bondage in order to experience righteous living.¹³ In verse 17 (see above), the recipients of the free gift "will reign in life," while verse 21 states the identical principle from a different perspective, indicating that "grace would reign...to eternal life." Notice the ruler that reigns in this kingdom is both the recipient of grace and grace itself. Obviously as the believer, who has been given the free gift of salvation, embraces and relies on that reality of God's gracious work, his secure position in Christ should motivate him to increased intimacy with Christ and righteous living. Grace, therefore, reigns as the Christian reigns,¹⁴ allowing God to influence his choices. Otherwise the believer allows sin's constant pull to influence him, leading to behavior contrary to God's Word.

The believer's options for experiencing either life or death are in both verse 17 and 21. Each verb form in "[recipients] can/may reign" (v 17) and in "grace would/might reign" (v 21) indicates the

ESCAPE

potential of grace reigning and leading to life, but also the possibility of sin reigning and resulting in death.¹⁵ These verses are a precursor to Romans 6:12-13 where Paul commands Christians not to be controlled by sin and to be “instruments of unrighteousness,” but instead to make themselves available to God and to be “instruments of righteousness.” Righteousness granted by a gracious-king should motivate believers to godly living, overthrowing sin’s tyranny.¹⁶ The issue of Romans isn’t power but rather wise choices based on the Word, allowing God, rather than sin, to have a dominating influence. Christians do have choices. Decisions determine one’s daily experiences to live either in a kingdom ruled by sin leading to a living death, lost fellowship, or in a kingdom ruled by grace leading to abundant living.

Influence, Not Personal Power

The word *reign* can be easily misapplied. The emphasis of Romans is sin’s “control over” or “mastery over” the believer if his fleshly desires are allowed to sway and then dictate his behavior. Yet, most commentators insert “power” into the context of Romans 5–8. *Sin’s power, rather than sin’s influence, unfortunately becomes inextricably linked with sin’s reign.* Like an automatic default on a computer, “sin’s reign” always reverts to “sin’s power.” Not only does the context of Romans indicate that reigning corresponds to influence, but the following Scriptures likewise lend support.

Interchangeable Words

Christ died for our sins and was raised to life. As a result “death no longer is master over (*kurieuw*) Him” (Rom 6:8-9).¹⁷ Since each believer positionally died with Christ and was raised with Him so that he “might walk in newness of life” (vv 3-4), Paul appealed, “Therefore do not let sin reign (*basileuw*) in your mortal body” (v 12). He then gave the basis for his plea, “For sin shall not be master over (*kurieuw*) you” (v 14). Paul set forth the choice the believer faces: whether or not to submit to sin’s sovereign authority. With wise discernment, the believer is able to walk in newness of life by allowing the reality of

POWER: REALITY CHECK, PART TWO

the gift of life in Christ to reign (*basileuw*) in his everyday experiences (Rom 5:17, 21). Now notice that the interchange in word usage between *master over* (*kurieww*) to *reign* (*basileuw*) indicates that they have equivalent meanings, with variation only for variety. *Authority or influence, not personal power, is the emphasis of “reigning” in each instance in Romans, whether the issue is sin or “the gracious gift of righteousness.”*¹⁸

What Power?

As discussed earlier, Paul does *not* use the term *power* (*duvamis*) in regard to Christian living in this important section of the book of Romans (ch 5–8). The one time mentioned is in reference to demonic beings. The omission of a “power” to live the Christian life lends strong credence to the authority (influencing and controlling) or organizational view of reigning.

Choice, not Power

The command, “Do not let sin reign in your mortal body” (Rom 6:12), tells us that believers should, and can, choose to pursue righteousness, rather than sin. With the absence of “power” in Romans 5–8, believers can decide to be obedient without the necessity of “special power.”

Law and Sin Are Powerless

The use of “master over” with sin (6:14), “Sin shall not be master over (*kurieww*) you,” and the Law (7:1), “the law has jurisdiction over (*kurieww*) a person,” indicates that either can have authority over a Christian. If *to reign* (*basileuw*) and *to be master over* (*kurieww*) have equivalent meanings as discussed above, then both sin and Law possess “power” to affect behavior or neither do. Since most conclude from Galatians 3:21, “For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law,” that the Law has no power in itself, the same would be true for sin.¹⁹ Consequently, the need for empowerment of the Spirit to live

ESCAPE

the Christian life in order to counteract sin's alleged power would not be necessary.

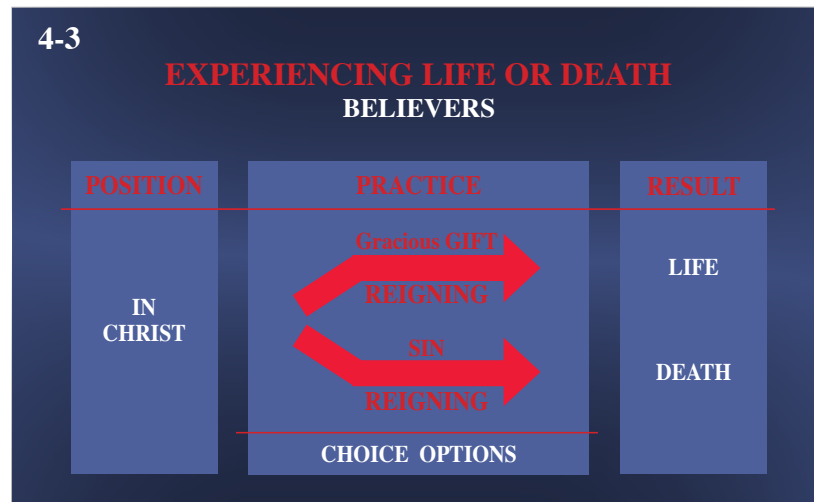
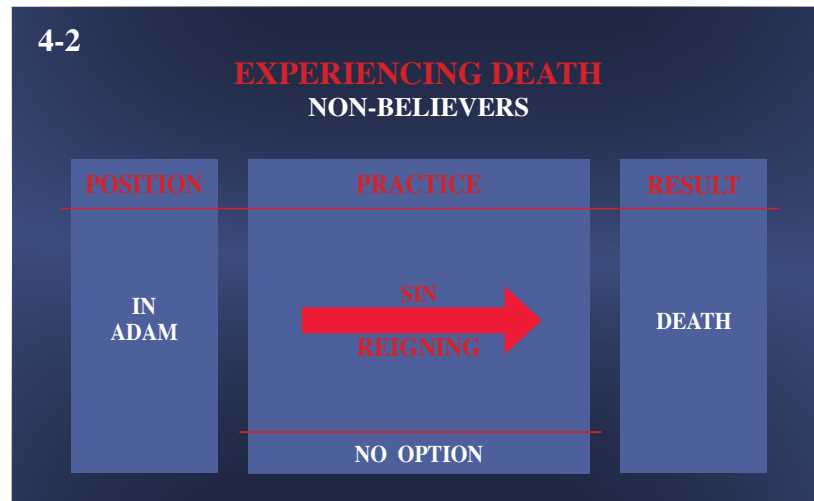
Organizational-Inherent Influence

When Romans 6:14, "Sin shall not be master over (*kurieuw*) you," is compared to 1 Peter 5:1-3 that concerns elders who are to "shepherd the flock of God...not under compulsion...not for sordid gain...nor yet as lording it over (*katakurieuw*) those allotted to your charge," it is evident that both *to be master over (kurieuw)* and *to lord it over (katakurieuw)* have equivalent meanings, with the later one including the prefix *kata*, emphasizing "to hold down" a person. In fact, *kurieuw* and *katakurieuw* are used interchangeably in Matthew 20:25 (using *katakurieuw*) and Luke 22:25 (using *kurieuw*) regarding Jesus' instruction to His disciples in the Upper Room. There Jesus taught His disciples that the one who would be greatest in the kingdom was the one serving rather than lording it over others. In the Matthew 20, Luke 22 and 1 Peter 5, leadership is associated with "authority," referring to influence, being the emphasis rather than "personal-inherent power." The context of "reigning" in Romans 5 likewise relates to authority or influence, not personal power.

Reigning in Life or Death

The next two charts distinguish *reigning* from the perspective of non-believers and believers. Unbelievers, being "in Adam" (1 Cor. 15:22), can only experience sin reigning in their lives (see chart 4-2). They are spiritually dead (separated from God). Dead because of sin, they continue to sin (Eph 2:1-3). As slaves to sin (Rom. 6:17, 20), it is their natural inclination to live out the ways of the world. On the other hand, Christians are "in Christ" (see chart 4-3) with the ability to live for God (1 Cor. 15:22; Rom. 6:11). Made spiritually alive at salvation (Eph 2:4-5), believers are released from the claim of sin and death, being liberated from sin's control over them. Having been set free from sin's control (Rom. 6:6, 18), the believer can now choose either to be a slave "of sin resulting in death or of obedience resulting in righteousness" and life (Rom. 6:16). The gift of righteousness, the

POWER: REALITY CHECK, PART TWO



new life in Christ, reigns in life experiences as the Christian allows the Spirit to influence his walk (Rom 5:15, 17, 21; 6:23). As addressed in the previous chapter, the result for believers concerns spiritual life and death, a fellowship issue rather than heaven-and-hell.

ESCAPE

Take Off The Mask

When the mask is removed, it becomes obvious that “*sin reigning*” has masqueraded as the “*power of sin.*” Don’t lose sight of another masking problem: “*grace reigning*” has masqueraded as the “*power of the Spirit.*” This masquerade makes supernatural power the sole “cause” behind the walk of the Christian, either the “power of the Spirit” for obedience or the “power of sin” as the reason for failure. Unfortunately, Bible teachers continue to perpetuate this deception.

Romans 5 exposes this faulty position. Looking at this from an organizational viewpoint, a kingdom in which the ruler seeks loyalty from its subjects gives us an entirely different perspective. The believer’s inclination to sin can reign if allowed to influence him through the lure of the world system. On the other hand, the Spirit can reign if allowed to influence the believer through filling, leading and teaching (see chapter 10).²⁰ Rather than producing behavior, these two spiritual rulers vie for authority over the choices of their subjects, leading to either sinful or righteous behavior.

No wonder Paul continued the “reign” theme into Romans 6 when he wrote:

12 Therefore *do not let sin reign* in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, **13** and *do not go on presenting* the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but *present* yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God (Rom 6:12-13, italics added).

Where your loyalties lie will determine what you allow to influence your choices, becoming an instrument of either righteousness or unrighteousness. *Choosing to obey is the key to sin’s defeat and spiritual success!*