

CHAPTER 9

SPIRIT: SHADES OF POWER

In his book *The Future of Power*, Joseph Nye, an authority on international affairs, wrote, “Like many basic ideas, power is a contested concept.”¹ Turning to the dictionary as “a commonsense place to start,” he stated, “[It] tells us that power is the capacity to do things and in social situations to affect others to get outcomes we want.”² Nevertheless he continued, “Some people call this influence, and distinguish power from influence, but that is confusing because the dictionary defines the two terms as interchangeable.”³ From that basis Nye sets forth the case that power comes in two forms: *hard power* and *soft power*.⁴ He concluded that hard power related to “coercion and payment,” corresponding to military or economic power to produce an outcome, and soft power referred to “persuasion and attraction,” appealing to facts, values, and beliefs to affect an outcome.⁵ Nye considered both to be equal. “Hard power is *push*; soft power is *pull*.”⁶ *The former imposes; the latter influences.*

Most would agree with Nye’s inclusion of influence, as soft power, under a power umbrella. The contention of this chapter is that the Church has missed the biblical idea of power. Already in chapter 4, we discussed the distinction between *projected* power and *inherent* power in relation to “reigning” in Romans 5–6. Here the author will support

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that the biblical, power umbrella likewise includes *influencing*, as well as *causing*. Influencing power does not need to be added; it only needs to be understood and recognized. Unfortunately every time power is used in the New Testament it is invariably understood as causal power. Hopefully this chapter will allow you to peek under the canopy in order to understand the entire power spectrum.

Causal Power for Ministry

Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, the Scriptures set forth the case for God working *through* individuals for ministry to and for others.

Old Testament

God's ministry *through* individuals in the Old Testament was not limited to those with leadership responsibilities.

Leadership

In the Old Testament, God communicated to and guided His people through specific men and women. As God's chosen people, Israel was liberated from Egypt through the leadership of Moses, who performed miracles authenticating God's power and authority. It was through Moses God delivered the Law. While the Kings did not perform miracles, they were fully aware that they were God's representatives and as Israel's leaders were responsible for the Nation's welfare and protection. That is the reason David pleaded to God following his sin with Bathsheba that the Spirit, which temporarily indwelt the Kings for service, would not be taken away from him (Ps 51:11). David knew that the withdrawal of the Spirit would result in his removal as king, just as occurred with his predecessor Saul (1 Sam 16:14). The Judges also experienced the Spirit's presence for carrying out their leadership and deliverance of the nation from oppressors (Judg 3:10). As a judge, Samson's exploits and flaws were memorable. Nevertheless, his powerful abilities should not be confused with his choices in life. The final Old Testament leaders

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were the Prophets. They were God's spokesmen to Israel, with warnings and instructions. Peter taught that they were "men moved by the Holy Spirit" and "spoke from God" (1 Pet 1:21). In each and every case, God ministered to Israel through these servant/leaders.

Others

At particular times, God worked through those who were not leaders to accomplish His purposes. In Exodus 31, God filled the craftsmen who were to build the Tabernacle with the Spirit of God (v 3). We cannot forget that God even "opened the mouth of [a] donkey" to confront Balaam's disobedience (Num 22:28-30). In these instances, God moved to provide skills and abilities above and beyond the norm.

New Testament

Likewise, God's ministry *through* individuals in the New Testament was not limited to those with positions of authority.

Leadership

Following the departure of Christ and His return to the Father, the establishment of the early church became the responsibility of the Eleven. They were to be Christ's "eye witnesses" of His teaching, miracles and life. Taking the gospel to the Gentiles, Paul's missions produced the Church's further expansion. To authenticate their message and ministry, "the signs of a true apostle" were made evident through "signs and wonders and miracles" (2 Cor 12:12). The book of Acts is filled with their miraculous activities.

Others

Not only were the apostles gifted with special abilities, but also with the coming of the indwelling Spirit others experienced similar capabilities. Following Pentecost each individual believer was given spiritual gift(s) for ministry, primarily to be used within the church. Each was to use his or her gift(s) for the spiritual growth of the Church.

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New Testament gifts are not limited to leaders. All gifts come from God and are the work of God expressed in the church from one person to another.

Promise of Power

We know God works through believers using their gifts in ministry but what about the Christian life? Some may say, “The way I live is His ministry to the lost! They see Christ through me!” That goes to the heart of the issue. *The way I live is my ministry* to the lost. Notice that the *way I live is not His ministry* to the lost. There is a profound difference! His ministry to the lost is convicting, wooing, and saving.⁷

The problem is the way it’s typically stated: “The lost see Christ living *through me!*” As discussed in the last chapter, biblically Christians live *through Christ*, not the other way around. Unfortunately, the expression “Christ lives through me” refers to being empowered by the Spirit causing me to live as a Christian. On the other hand, “I live through Christ” is the Christian living obediently to Christ as influenced by the Spirit. Seen another way, *Christian gifts are for God’s ministry through you*, while the *Christian life is your walk through Christ*. In the former, the *Spirit provides for your ministry*; in the latter, the *Spirit influences your decisions* and thus *behavior*.

Regrettably, much has been said and written concerning the promise of power in the Christian life. There are two primary texts at the heart of this issue.

Promise of Power in Old Testament

Ezekiel 36:24-28, which parallels Jeremiah 31:31-34, addressed the new covenant (Jer 31:31) that God made with Israel.⁸

24 For I will take you [nation of Israel] from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land.
25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. **26** Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone

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from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. **27** I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. **28** You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God (Ezek 36:24-28).

Because Israel strayed from following God, both prophets addressed the coming judgment when Israel is taken into exile and then God's future restoration of His covenant people. The context of Ezekiel 36 and Jeremiah 31 addresses God's promise of restoring Israel to the land (Ezek 36:24, 28a) and the promise of blessings: to be cleansed (v 25), to be given a new heart and spirit (v 26), to put the Spirit within them (v 27a), to cause them to walk in obedience (v 27b) and to be His people (v 28b).

Your understanding of future biblical events determines your interpretation of this portion of Ezekiel 36 (see chart 9-1). If you hold the *amillennial* position, believing that there is no future 1,000-year

9-1

THREE VIEWS COMPARED
Causing the Believer to Obey
Fulfillment of Ezek 36:27

	<i>Already</i>	<i>Not Yet</i>
Amillennial	Fulfilled	
Premillennial One	Partially Fulfilled	Fully Fulfilled
Premillennial Two		Fulfilled

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kingdom period prior to the eternal state with the new heaven and new earth, then you would understand that this prophecy has already been fulfilled with the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost and with the Church being the new Israel. Consequently, the Spirit produces good works in and through the Christian—*causing the believer to obey*. This Spirit-causes-obedience view typically understands that the believer's perseverance in good works proves they are saved.

On the other hand, others adhere to the *premillennial* view, believing in a 1,000-year kingdom period at Jesus' physically return prior to the eternal state. Some premillennialist see two historical events. Since the New Covenant was instituted at Pentecost the Spirit currently and *already* works in and through believers to "enable" them to walk obediently. During the future (*not yet*) millennial-kingdom period when God restores Israel, the New Covenant will be completely fulfilled and Spirit will "cause" Israel's obedience. Other premillennialists, with whom the author agrees, understand that this promise of God in Ezekiel 36 awaits fulfillment only during the establishment of the future millennial kingdom with Israel. The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost is seen as foreshadowing this future promise to Israel. While the Church currently experiences the ministry of the Spirit, the promises of Ezekiel 36 exclusively concern Israel and the future millennial kingdom.

Different interpretations of the same text are obviously used to either substantiate or invalidate a particular position. How you understand Ezekiel 36:27, "I will put My Spirit within you and *cause you to walk* in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances" (italics added), leads to either (1) a Spirit-causes-obedience position or (2) a Spirit-influences-obedience position. Both cannot be biblically accurate. This book supports position two that the promise of Ezekiel 36 relates to a future, earthly kingdom where Christ reigns for 1,000 years before establishing the eternal state with the new heaven and new earth.⁹

Promise of Power in New Testament

Acts 1:8 is the second scripture used to validate the teaching on power necessary for living the Christian life. "You *will receive*

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power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you *shall be My witnesses* both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (italics added). Acts 1:8 usually tips the scales toward assuming that believers possess a special empowerment for the Christian life.

In determining if, in fact, this is so, textual considerations must be addressed (see chart 9-2). Notice the progressive development of the five verses of Acts 1:4-8.

The two promises in Acts 1 are separated by time, whether by actual different gatherings or different discussions during the same

9-2		
TEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS TWO PROMISES of ACTS 1		
VERSE	CONTENT	PROMISE
4-5	Gathering them together , He commanded them...to wait for what the Father had promised... you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.	First
	(Transition)	
6	So when they had come together , they were asking Him, saying, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?”	
	(Transition)	
7-8	He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.	Second

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occasion. The “gathering them together” (v 4) is a different Greek word from that used in “when they had come together” (v 6). Either Luke was clumsy in his communicating skills or he was purposeful, indicating a change in the discussion, if not occurrences as well. The intervening questioning about the kingdom’s restoration separates the promise of the Holy Spirit (v 5) from the promise of power (v 8) even if they occurred during the same extended event.

While the *first promise*, baptism of the Spirit, was for all believers in Christ, notice that the *second promise*, the promise of power, was directed toward a particular group, the Eleven, and for a particular task, to be Witnesses of Christ.¹⁰ Consequently, the issue of power in Acts 1:8 *does not concern power to live the Christian life but only power for service or ministry*. The promise of power was given to the Eleven as “eye witnesses” (Luke 24:48) of Christ (obviously Paul claimed to also be an “eye witness,” Acts 9:3-6; 2 Cor 12:2-4) to accomplish their mission of taking the message of Christ to the world. This power was evidenced in “signs,” “wonders,” and “miracles,” which authenticated the apostles and their message (2 Cor 12:12).¹¹ Luke consistently uses “witnesses” throughout Acts to indicate that the apostles were Christ’s “eye witnesses.”¹²

[**Note:** While empowerment for service is not exclusively to the Eleven in the New Testament, empowerment is *never* for living the Christian life. Empowerment for the Eleven was purposely given for ministry.]

How you understand Acts 1:8 affects your perception of the Spirit’s work today. Either all believers receive power to live the Christian life (v 8) when they receive the gift of the Spirit (v 5) or all believers receive the gift of the Spirit (v 5), but only the “Witnesses” received power regarding their unique ministry (v 8). If you understand Acts 1 addressed a special ability for Christian living that would reinforce both an empowerment understanding from Ezekiel 36 and the teaching that God *works in and through the believer* to produce good works. On the other hand, if empowerment in Acts 1 only concerned the Apostles’ ministry, then each Christian is responsible for choosing to live in obedience to the Word in collaboration with the influencing ministry of the Spirit. The biblical evidence supports the latter interpretation.

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Influential Power for Living

By now you should be asking the following question: “If God’s *causing power* enables believers to minister to others through God’s giftedness, how is God’s *influencing power* experienced in the believer’s walk?” The answer to that question is directly addressed in the next chapter. Here in this chapter, the issue is the nature of God’s work to influence the believer’s walk. While God came upon or temporarily indwelt Old Testament saints and permanently indwells New Testament believers for an expressed ministry, the basic feature of God’s work throughout the ages concerning the believer’s everyday life has always been to influence his or her choices and thus behavior. In fact, a question to consider: “How did the Old Testament saints obey God without the power of the Spirit?” Your answer to that question is telling if you assume the Spirit’s power is now required in order for Christians to live obediently.

How God’s influencing ministry is *experienced* is left for your consideration in the next chapter. *How* this ministry is *accomplished* by God is our focus here, as we consider the various texts that address the New Testament word *working*, which is used eight times in the noun form (*energeia*) and twenty times in the verb form (*energeo*). These words are “derived from the noun [*energōs*] from which we get our English word ‘energy.’”¹³ In each text, there is always an agent “at work” for a specific recipient and for a particular purpose. For example, God was at work and physically raised Christ from the dead (Eph 1:20) and likewise spiritually raised believers with Christ (Eph 2:6; Col 2:12). These referred to causal power. On the other hand, we will now consider three texts that shed light in reference to influential power: Roman 7:5; Philippians 2:13; and Ephesians 3:20. While each text addresses “working in the believer” in regard to living, notice that the agent at work differs.

Sin at Work

Romans 7:5 provides our first hint of the nature of influencing power.

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5 For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were *aroused* by the Law, were at work [*energeo*] in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. 6 But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter (Rom. 7:5-6, underlines for emphasis).

Falling right in the middle of the sanctification section of Romans (Rom 6–8), Paul moved from the teaching of being positionally dead to sin (Rom 6) to also being positionally dead to the Mosaic Law (Rom 7). Nevertheless, new spiritual standing becomes an experienced reality only if the Christian responds appropriately: being available to God (cf. 6:12-13) and serving the law of God with one's mind (cf. 7:25).

With this possibility in view we turn to Romans 7:5. Notice that the agent at work in the person's body was his "sinful passions." But, before we address the issue at hand, it is important that we determine to whom the phrase "while we were in the flesh" referred: believers or unbelievers. The answer becomes evident through the use of the adversative *but* which introduces verse 6. It expressed a contrast between "For while" (v 5) and "but now" (v 6), referencing a change in a state of being. Previously as non-believers, being "in the flesh," we served sin, but now as believers "by virtue of our union with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection,"¹⁴ we can "serve in newness of the Spirit" (v 6) and, therefore, can "walk in newness of life" (6:4).¹⁵ Consequently, Romans 7:5 speaks to the sinful passions of non-believers, describing Paul's pre-conversion experience.¹⁶ Nevertheless, Romans 8:12-13 confirmed that believers can likewise serve sin by giving in to the inner inclination to sin. We then must conclude that sin is at work in believers as well as in non-believers.

Looking at Romans 7:5 we can understand the way this principle works in a Christian. The agent under consideration was sinful passions or yearnings, which are stirred up by the Law.¹⁷ As previous noted, the inclination to sin possess no power. Consequently, sin's *work* or *activity* in a person is by some other means.¹⁸ Since sin cannot cause or produce an action or behavior, it operates through *influential power* persuading, swaying, and imploring a person to choose actions or reasoning displeasing to God.¹⁹ This influence is brought to bear as

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the Christian places “the members of [his] body” at the disposal of sin (cf. Rom 6:13). Consequently as covered in chapter 2, sinful behavior leads to loss of fellowship.

God at Work

The second text (Phil 2:13) to consider sheds light on the way God works in the believer through influencing power.

12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out [“bring about,” *katergazomai*] your salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work [*energeo*] in you, both to will and to work [*energeo*] for *His* good pleasure (Phil 2:12-13, underlines for emphasis).

In Philippians 2:5-11, Paul spoke of Christ’s obedience. “Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him” (vv 8-9). Using Christ as the ultimate illustration of obedience, Paul introduced verse 12 with “so then,” appealing to believers to follow Christ in obedience.

Notice that the phrase “work out your salvation” (v 12) does not refer to initial salvation or salvation from hell. If that were the case, “obedient works are a *condition* for that [salvation].”²⁰ Rather, salvation is a free gift (Eph 2:8). Actually, the phrase refers to those who are already believers who “bring about or produce” their daily deliverance through ongoing obedience to God.²¹ This temporal salvation can refer to either (1) a release from one’s trials occurring in the Christian life (e.g., 1:19) or (2) a demonstration of one’s new position in Christ or sanctification.²² Whichever the case, verse 13 confirms the reason for the Christian’s assurance that his deliverance is possible—“For it is God who is at work in you.”

Once again the student of the Scriptures must determine the way God is *at work* in the believer. Help in our understanding comes from the preceding section regarding Christ’s obedience to the Father (vv 5-11). Paul commands these believers in Philippi to continue in

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their obedience since God always and without fail will work in their life. Nevertheless, the choice to obey was theirs alone, and God's resources, particularly the Spirit's ministry, are always available to assist them.

Just as Christ was "highly exalted" (v 9) as a result of His obedience, this text indicates that the responsibility to obey rests with each Christian and that each will be held accountable and rewarded appropriately. As the believer makes available "the members of [his] body" to God "as instruments of righteousness" (cf. Rom 6:13), God is at work persuading and swaying his choices so that they align with His desires. While God displays both *causational power* and *influential power*, the context of Philippians 2, which parallels Romans 7:5, supports the work of God regarding daily living as *only* using influential power.

Power at Work

Ephesians 3:20

The text, which is principally used to support the claim that Acts 1:8 refers to the Spirit's causational power in and through the Christian for living, is Ephesians 3:16-21. Included in this text is Paul's prayer for believers to grow in maturity (vv 16-19) and a doxology (vv 20-21). In the doxology, we find the phrase "according to the power that works within us" (v 20b), which parallels the grammatical structure in both Romans 7:5 and Philippians 2:13.

Now to Him who is able to do [*dunamai*] far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power [*dunamis*] that works [*energeo*] within us (Eph 3:20, underlines for emphasis).

In Ephesians 2:11-3:13, Paul revealed the mystery of the Church, being comprised of both Jews and Gentiles, united as equal heirs. In Ephesians 4:1-16, church unity through the use of gift(s) by each individual believer was addressed. In between these "coming together into the Church" and "working together within the Church" bookends, we find Paul's prayer for the Church (3:14-19). While all commentators do not agree on the thought progression in this long prayer, they concur that the doxology at the conclusion of the prayer (vv 20-21) is the transition

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from the previous positional section (Eph 1–3) to the practical section (Eph 4–6). Do not lose sight of the fact that the positional section concerned Paul’s *hope* for the Christians in Ephesus, while the practical section addressed their potential *walk* through faithful obedience.

As in the texts discussed above, there is an agent at work in the believer. Since “power” is the agent, our immediate question would be “To what power did Paul refer?” Christian writers typically point to Ephesians 3:16 for the answer.²³ It is the “Spirit’s power” that works in and through each believer, overlaying Acts 1:8 and indicating that believers are “strengthened with the Spirit’s power” (Eph 3:16). The power they assume concerns an energizing by the Spirit that causes obedient living. When this typical approach is embraced, the means by which the Spirit’s power works in and through the believer is never indicated. Rather, the assumption is that the believer is mystically zapped with special energy, causing him to do God’s will.

Nevertheless, the answer is readily found thirteen verses earlier in Ephesians 3:7. There Paul explained that God had gifted him for ministry “according to the working [*energeia*] of His power [*dunamis*].” The readers would readily associate verse 7 with “according to the power that works within us” (v 20b), as Paul concludes the first section of his letter. See the shift in God’s power for ministry from relating to Paul (v 7) to relating to them (“within us,” v 20). Particularly this would be reinforced as Paul then turned to the practical section and addressed their very own individual gifts for ministry within the Church (cf. 4:7-16). Certainly God is the One “who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think” (3:20a). His power is at work both in and through the Christian, both Jew and Gentile, in a causative manner for ministry.

Ephesians 3:16

While verse 20 does address *causational power*, working in and through each Christian’s gift(s) *for ministry*, the contention of this author is that Paul’s prayer (vv 16-19) and in particular verse 16 refers rather to *influential power* in believers *for living*. Understanding Paul’s prayer request is critical.

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16 [T]hat He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power [*dunamis*] through His Spirit in the inner man 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts [minds] through faith (Eph 3:16-17, underlines for emphasis).

Appealing to “the wealth of [God’s] essential being,”²⁴ Paul requests that believers “be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man” (v 16). Notice first that the recipient of the request is the believer’s “inner man,” the heart or mind of the Christian, as distinguished from the “outer man,” the physical body (cf. 2 Cor 4:16).²⁵ “In this context it is the innermost being of the believer which is to be strengthened,”²⁶ indicating that Paul’s concern was for “an inner strength as opposed to a physical strength”²⁷ or ministry ability. While outward behavior is the result of choices made, inner values that determine Christians’ decisions are central to Paul’s prayer. Ephesians 3:17 provided the desired result of being strengthened. “So that Christ may dwell in your hearts [minds] through faith,” referring to Christian maturity, a growing knowledge of and intimacy with Christ. Paul desired that Christians would ultimately experience the “love of Christ” and the “fullness of God” in their lives (vv 17-19).

Having identified the object of strengthening, the inner man, and the result of strengthening, intimacy with Christ, our focus now is how to understand the actual means strengthening can be experienced. We are told that “strengthening or becoming strong in the inner man” is through the Spirit, but how is that experienced?

Three factors clarify verse 16 and explain the way “strengthening” occurs without violating the content by inserting Acts 1:8.

The *first factor* is contextual. While verse 16 is typically used to explain power in verse 20, verse 20 is then turned around to interpret verse 16’s power. Let’s concede that God’s causal power for ministry is in view in verse 20, but verse 16 concerns living the Christian life, dealing with influential power. I submit there are three contextual considerations supporting this assertion: (1) the actual verb form of the request, (2) the identical verb form used in other prayers by Paul, and (3) the use of “power” in the New Testament.

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It is helpful to recognize Paul's request, "that He would grant you... to be strengthened," includes a verb form indicating the possibility of an outcome based upon a particular condition or circumstance.²⁸ More appropriately the verb "would grant" can be translated "may grant," clearly conveying potential. In his letters Paul always assumes a positive or hopeful outcome. Nevertheless, this verb form each time indicates the possibility of negative results. Let's remember that God is continually "working *in* believers" both for ministry and for living, but the actual "living *through* Christ" is dependent on believers choosing to access God's available resources, His Word and the Spirit's filling, leading, and teaching ministries.

Paul praying for believers to grow in maturity is found in Philippians 1:9-11 and Colossians 1:9-14, as well as here in Ephesians 3:14-19. In each instance the same potential verb form is used: "may abound" (Phil 1:9) and "may be filled" (Col 1:9). On every occasion the fulfillment of the prayer depended on the response and openness of those believers to God's provisions already present in their lives. They would experience what Paul prayed only if they chose to follow Christ and matured. On the other hand, they could also choose not to obey, forfeiting fellowship and maturity.

The last contextual consideration is the actual use of the word *power* in the New Testament. As would be expected of the 120 times *power* (*dunamis*) occurs, the majority of the time it relates to miracles, the Second Coming, and God. In those instances causational power is obviously in view. Nevertheless, a closer look at other instances where either causational power or influential power is a factor depends on the individual circumstances. Notice in reference to our present concern Paul's hope was for believers to experience "strengthening" that was contingent on the right response by those believers to the truth found in the practical section of the book (Eph 4-6). This lends credence to the fact that influential power, rather than causational power, is the issue in 3:16. Otherwise, Paul was expecting God to automatically and instantaneously impart inner strengthening for these Christians regardless of any response on their part.

The *second factor* is structural. To properly explain how "strengthening" occurs, the grammatical structure of Ephesians 3:16

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gives insight into what is necessary for strengthening to take place (see chart 9-3).

9-3			
GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURE EPHESIANS 3:16			
PROCEDURE			
HOPE	Means	Agency	FOCUS
Strengthened	<i>by Power</i>	<i>through Spirit</i>	in Inner Man
(Spiritual Growth)	(Allowing Spirit to Influence)		(Illumined Mind)

The hope of being “strengthened” comes with a description of how it was to be accomplished, “*by power*”²⁹ and “*through His Spirit*.”³⁰ The text also reveals the focus of this strengthening—the believer’s inner person, which includes the Christian’s new human spirit and illumined mind (see Appendix B). As mentioned above, verse 17 stated the result of “becoming strong” in the inner man—“That Christ may ‘be at home in,’ that is, at the very center of or deeply rooted in believers’ lives.”³¹ Consequently, “acquiring strength...in the inner man” means that “Christ must become the controlling factor in attitudes and conduct.”³²

Unless you understand “becoming strong” in this text to involve an instantaneous zapping of power in which the individual is caused to be strengthened, the only other option is for the believer to continually choose to be available to God, His Word and the Spirit’s ministries. In that case spiritual strengthening (growth) in the inner man is experienced over time through the ministry of the Spirit’s influential power. The inner man, the new man in Christ (Col 3:10), requires daily renewal and development (2 Cor 4:16) by the renewing of the his mind through the Word (Rom 12:2).

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Rather than God bestowing strength, the Christian will experience strengthening through the Spirit's working within him. Remember, God is always at work *in* us for living. Only as we allow His Spirit to continually influence our minds and motives will our choices and our walk be in harmony with God's will.

You've probably seen the bumper sticker *God Is My Co-Pilot*. The implication is that God is always with me and involved in every decision and activity of my life. The rub comes in one's understanding of the way that is actually worked out in the Christian life. Many perceive this means God taking hold of the controls, suggesting a godly autopilot. Taking the controls, God causes and produces behavior in and through the believer, while the Christian is passive and just along for the ride.

Let me suggest another scenario, a better perspective that fits with the context of Ephesians 3:16. One in which the Christian remains in manual control and continues to fly the plane. Rather than picturing causal control and power, only the Spirit's influencing power is in view. In this case, the Spirit of Christ is likened to a flight instructor, sitting with you and, if you allow Him, He will be involved in your every decision and action. You already have the instruction manual for flying, His Word. Second Timothy 3:16 states, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness." When we fly or live with respect to the Spirit's influence in light of God's handbook, the believer is "equipped for every good work" (v 17). The Christian's responsibility is to live the Christian life in obedience to the Word, but this only happens as he allows the Spirit to influence every decision and action.

The *third factor* is theological. The inner man, particularly the believer's mind, is the recipient of the Spirit's influence.³³ Paul's prayer request was that believers might acquire spiritual strength (v 16) so they would know Christ intimately (v 17). As a result, they would comprehend the magnitude of His love (vv 18-19a) and experience His fullness in their lives (v 19b).

Paul addressed the concept of acquiring spiritual strength in light of one's weakness. We encountered this weakness-to-strength exchange in two other texts in the prior chapter. Philippians 4:10-13 pictured this exchange, which led to Paul gaining a godly perspective amidst

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his situation or circumstance. Consequently, Paul wrote, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (v 13). Likewise, Paul came to understand through his thorn in the flesh (2 Cor 12:7-10) that one’s lack of physical strength actually develops inward strength in light of the sufficiency of God’s provision. He concluded, “When I am weak, then I am strong” (v 10).³⁴ In each instance, an inward change of perspective toward God and His provisions yielded strength for living. Needless to say, unless driven by an agenda, the Spirit’s causational power is not needed or required in Paul’s request of “strength” for the believers in Ephesus.

Shades of Power

If you come to the Scriptures with a viewpoint that God’s power can be either causational and influential, you will realize that Christians can experience power for ministry and power for living (see chart 9-4).

9-4		
POWER		
TYPE	GOD WORKING	PURPOSE
CAUSATIONAL	“In and Through”	MINISTRY
INFLUENTIAL	“In”	LIVING