

CHAPTER 10

SPIRIT: EMPOWERS & INFLUENCES

I transferred to Florida State University and changed my major in the middle of my junior year. At that time I had no idea of the significance of that decision. Good friends from my hometown were students there and one of them encouraged me to go to a meeting sponsored by Campus Crusade for Christ. Having a Mormon background, I was leery but, rather than stuffy and boring, I was surprised by the joyful atmosphere and genuineness of everyone I met. As I attended more meetings, I didn't find the legalistic environment to which I was accustomed. There wasn't a "got to" live in a certain way agenda, rather I found people who "wanted to" praise and live for God. Over time and through the ministry of friends and the campus staff, God worked in my life to bring me to faith in Jesus for eternal life. In addition, I came to understand the Christian life was not to be lived legalistically, but rather to be lived out of love for Christ and for others. You might believe, as I do, that God had a reason for it all. The decision to change schools as well as the life changing invitation from a good friend God used to alter my life and the way I live.

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Example of God's Working

In both the Old and New Testaments, God worked to bring His people into conformity to His will. While God's work may be rebuffed and ignored, He is relentless in the pursuit of His own.¹ He moves to affect results or to shape decisions to bring those He loves in line with His purposes. An Old Testament example is found in Exodus 13–17.

Content of Exodus 13–17

Following the Nation of Israel's freedom from Egyptian bondage, God did not lead the nation directly by the shortest northeast route along the Mediterranean to the land that was promised to Abraham (Ex 13:17). Rather, He led them on a southern route into the wilderness that would take them to Mt. Sinai (v 18). Why that direction? Verse 17 gives the answer.

God did not lead them by the way of the land of the Philistines, even though it was near; for God said, "The people might change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt."

While the redeemed Nation left Egypt based on faith, signified by placing blood on their doorposts (12:13), their faith, like our own, needed further development. The direct route would have resulted in an immediate confrontation with the warlike Philistines. Israel was not prepared for a test of faith by facing the Philistines. Consequently, God led them in a different direction because "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able" (1 Cor 10:13). Nevertheless, faith's growth process began when the Egyptian's chariots came into view. "Then they said to Moses, 'Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness?'" (Ex 14:11). But when God caused the waters of the Red Sea to engulfed the Egyptians (v 26) and "Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore" (v 30), "the people...believed [trusted even more] in the Lord and in His servant Moses" (v 31).

Testing of their faith continued through Exodus 15–17 particularly with Israel's dissatisfaction with the availability of both food and water

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as they marched through the wilderness. With respect to manna, they were to gather each day's portion except on the sixth day a double portion was to be gathered in order to prepare for Sabbath observance. God set forth these exact requirements for a reason. He said, "that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction" (16:4).² For those who did not follow His instructions, manna left over until the next morning, except for the Sabbath, was spoiled and no manna was available at all on the seventh day. There were consequences for disobedience and God showed His displeasure with those who refused to comply (v 28). Each test provided a learning experience to rely further on God's faithfulness. Just as James 1:2 teaches, "the testing of your faith produces endurance [steadfastness]" and these tests culminated in Israel placing ever-increasing trust in God.

Israel was then ready for another test when "Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim" (17:8). In Exodus 13:17, their faith in God had not been developed to the extent of being combat ready. But their faith now had grown and with God's provision they "overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword" (17:13). Following the battle, "Moses built an altar and named it The Lord is My Banner" as a memorial of God's deliverance.

Context of Exodus 13–17

Look again at this section of Exodus. While God worked mightily "through" Moses with miracles to deliver them from Egypt, each individual Israelite was required to respond to God's will. First by walking away from their captors and then by following Moses right through the Red Sea. In their trek through the wilderness, they complied with God's instructions. Notice, however, that their responses were their own. They had no special empowerment.

Moses, likewise, lived in the same manner as everyone else. Yet Moses was different in respect to his ministry. He was empowered with the ability to perform miracles that authenticated God's message through him to both Pharaoh and Israel. As God's spokesman, Moses informed Israel of God's directives and will, which they were to obey. Moses was both different from and yet the same as those in Israel.

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What does this have to do with you and me? God continues to give instructions to believers today through His written Word (2 Tim 3:16-17). Our responsibility is to live in harmony with them, just like each Israelite. Our task is to grow in faith and in obedience to God. Our assignment is to faithfully walk away from any and all spiritual captors and to continually move forward in maturity on the journey through whatever God sets before us. While it is true that God empowers every believer with a spiritual gift(s) to serve the body of Christ, do not confuse your gift for ministry with your walk in obedience.

Supplement Growing Faith

The notion of a growing faith should not be confused with an expanding balloon or a maturing tree. Instead the biblical imagery is likened to building a wall, one stone at a time. Faith grows with each obedient step taken in reliance on God's trustworthiness, piling-up one faith-stone upon the next.

Accumulation of faith-stones was at the heart of the appeal of James in James 1:1-4:

1 To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.
2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, **3** knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance [steadfastness]. **4** And let endurance have *its* perfect result [work], so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

James addressed Jewish believers who had been driven from their homeland and faced persecution (v 1). In a foreign environment they faced trial after trial. Nevertheless, James taught that they should be joyful — obviously not enjoy trials — in their trials because of the results found in verses 3 and 4. First, the adversities faced proved the character of the one being tested, providing the opportunity to trust in God. With each test comes the possibility to stack another faith-stone on

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the faith-wall, which in turn results in ever-increasing trust in God. As the individual's faith-wall grows, the believer becomes increasingly aligned with God's Word, experiencing progressive intimacy and maturity.

James did not teach of an expanding, persevering faith. Rather he taught of persevering faithful obedience resulting from stacking faith-stones upon a growing faith-wall. That piling-up of stones through continual obedience relates to the application of faith to each and every life situation the believer encounters. Consequently, Christian maturity is an *ever-expanding application of faith* in life's everyday events, *not an ever-expanding faith*.

God's Influencing Work for Living

As was illustrated from both the Old and New Testaments in the prior chapter, God gifted the leadership who were responsible to guide His people. Beyond the leaders all in the Church were gifted for their particular ministries in the Body, unlike the saints of old. Nevertheless, in each case God worked through the gifts of believers to enable them to fulfill the purpose for which each gift was intended. God's causal power was at work in and for ministry. His power provided spiritual enablement for spiritual service.

Not to confuse provision for ministry either in Old or New Testament times, every believer was responsible to live faithfully and obediently before God. Any other way of life was not acceptable in God's eyes. Some will say, "In the Old Testament the Mosaic Law never provided the power to walk in obedience," referring to "causal" power. I absolutely agree, but providing power was never the purpose of the Law. The Law's intent was only to enumerate God's desired way of life for His people, a subject that will be discussed in detail in chapters 12 and 13. Causal power was never the issue for obedient living. Each believer had to decide to live according to God's Word. The illustration of Exodus 13-17 mentioned above, even prior to the Law, made this evident.

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Unlike the saints of old who relied on the Spirit indwelling their leaders for guidance, each Christian has the Spirit, who is continually ready to fill, lead, and teach if the believer makes himself available to the Spirit's influence. Having the unprecedented opportunity to walk obediently to God's commands found in the "law of Christ" (Gal 5:2; Jam 1:25), it is the Christian's responsibility to faithfully obey.

In the previous chapter we considered how God accomplishes this influencing ministry in the life the Christian. Now let's turn to *how* each believer can actually experience it personally. We will once again see that living the Christian life is an ongoing collaboration between God and the believer. Since God has provided the resource for our walk, what is our part in the equation? What is our responsibility?

Filling by the Spirit

The central passage for the filling of the Spirit is found in Ephesians 5:15-18. But before we consider the text we need to address two different issues that may be confusing. *First*, baptism by the Spirit differs from filling by the Spirit.³ Baptism involves the Spirit's indwelling and the believer's placement into the Body of Christ. Filling refers to the Spirit's work in the believer for ministry and living. *Second*, involuntary fillings by the Spirit differ from voluntary fillings.⁴ Involuntary fillings are limited to certain believers to whom God empowers for ministry and service. On the other hand, voluntary fillings are universally available to all believers based on obedience to God's Word. The former relates to service, while the latter concerns the walk or character of the believer. Of the fourteen times Luke used the expression *filled with the Spirit*, the phrase emphasized either service/ministry (involuntary filling) nine times in both Luke and Acts or character/walk (voluntary filling) five times in Acts. Nevertheless, Luke never explained how voluntary filling occurred, only that it occurred. This phrase is used only one other time by Paul in Ephesians 5:18, referring to voluntary filling. There Paul clarified *filling by the Spirit* in reference to the Christian's walk.

As Paul penned Ephesians 5:1-18, he gave the believer a behavior blueprint. Three times he addressed believers' conduct. *First*, he commanded believers to "walk in love, just as Christ

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also loved you” (v 2), followed by some do’s and don’ts in verses 3 and 4. Christ’s life should be our pattern. *Second*, using the contrasting imagery of light and darkness Paul wrote, “Therefore, do not be partakers [partners] with them [sons of disobedience]; for you were formally darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light” (vv 7-8). Believers should “walk as children of light” since now in God’s eyes they are children of the light. The believer’s conduct should match and reflect his position in Christ (v 9). Such an appropriate lifestyle will prove “what is pleasing to the Lord” (v 10)... this is the identical concept found in Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is.” “Proving the will of God” (Rom. 12:2) and “[proving] what is pleasing to the Lord” (Eph. 5:10) are the result of making correct choices. The believer’s conduct should reveal intimacy with Christ that comes from fellowship with Him and conformity to His Word. On the other hand believers can walk in darkness. That is why Paul immediately warned, “Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them” (v 11). Even though the believer is a child of light, his choices determine if his lifestyle will expose the darkness.

In the next portion of Ephesians 5 Paul continued the theme of walking. Verses 15-18 present three contrasts.

15 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, **16** making the most of your time, because the days are evil. **17** So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. **18** And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit.

Here in verse 15 Paul made his *third* reference to the believer’s walk (vv 2, 8). A more emphatic translation for “be careful,” would be “take notice.” Christians are to “take notice” as to how they walk. Why? Because one’s life can exhibit either wisdom or folly (v 15). This wise-versus-unwise contrast mimics verses 8-11 as well as 1 John 1:6-7. To walk unwisely

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is to walk in darkness, and to walk wisely is to walk in the light. A wise Christian walk results in intimacy with Christ. Living skillfully according to biblical principles results in wise living and making the most of opportunities to reflect Christ to the lost world (Eph 5:11-13; Col 4:5). On the other hand a believer can have fellowship with darkness (Eph 5:11) as the result of worldly choices, yielding lost opportunities in this life and future heavenly rewards.

Paul then turned to the basis for a careful walk. *First*, he gave two commands: one negative and the other positive. “Do not be foolish, but understand” (v. 17). The emphasis is on the will of God to which the believer can be either dismissive or attentive. This verse is an echo of verses 9-10, “Walk as children of light...[proving] what is pleasing to the Lord.” An obedient walk results in living out the will of God in the believer’s life. On the other hand foolish living dismisses God’s Word. Then in verse 18 Paul stated a second reason for a wise walk. Again a negative command is followed by a positive one. “Do not get drunk...but be filled,” emphasizing control either by spirits or by the Spirit. When someone drinks an alcoholic beverage, each glass brings him closer to being intoxicated. This process depends on the will of the person. Since filling is contrasted with the influence of strong drink, the filling of the Spirit must also refer to influence. The case Paul presented is that living wisely depends on the believer allowing the Spirit to influence his thoughts and actions. If the believer walks in obedience to the Word of God, he is walking wisely (vv 15-16), living out the will of God (v 17) and allowing the influence of the Spirit in his life (v 18).⁵

Leading by the Spirit

Only two verses in the New Testament address the subject of the leading or guiding of the Spirit: Romans 8:14 and Galatians 5:18. To understand how God leads the believer, we must consider these two texts.

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12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— **13** for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. **14** For all who are being *led by the Spirit* of God, these are sons of God (Rom 8:12-14, italics added).

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. **17** For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. **18** But if you are *led by the Spirit*, you are not under the Law (Gal 5:16-18, italics added).

In [chapter 2] the present author argued that Romans 8 presents a contrast between *life* and *death* (vv 2, 6, 10, 11, 13), representing the two realms of existence in which the believer can choose to live. Paul explained that the two spheres in which the believer can live are *according to the Spirit* or *according to the flesh* (vv 4-5, 12-13). While some understand the life-and-death theme in Romans 8 to refer to heaven and hell, the context indicates that a believer has the potential to live in the sphere of life or the sphere of death, that is, he can choose to live in disobedience to God (resulting in death—loss of fellowship) or he can live in obedience and fellowship with God (resulting in life—enjoyment of fellowship). The two forces—the flesh and the Spirit—are presently vying for influence over the believer’s walk. The result of living according to the flesh is death, a separation from fellowship with God. On the other hand to live according to the Spirit leads to enriched, abundant living (John 10:10b) in which the believer experiences intimacy with Christ. A believer’s choices have consequences. One outcome is stated in verse 14. “All who are being *led by the Spirit*...are sons of God.” Those who are being led by the Spirit belong to God, and they also experience intimacy with God, in the realm of abundant living.

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The context of Galatians 5:18 is identical to that of Romans 8:14. The same choices confront the believer: the flesh and the Spirit. Choosing to walk in a manner pleasing to God gives visual evidence of the character of God in the believer's life (Gal 5:22-23). On the other hand the influence of the flesh in the believer's life leads to behavior that does not reflect God (vv 19-21). The "deeds of the flesh" in Galatians 5:19 are identical to the "deeds of the body" in Romans 8:13. In Galatians 5 the clauses "walk by the Spirit" (v 16), being "led by the Spirit" (v 18), "live by the Spirit" (v 25), and "walk [together] by the Spirit" (v 25) are essentially synonymous terms. To be led by the Spirit is equivalent to walking by the Spirit; it can be experienced, or on the other hand it can be forfeited, depending on the believer's choice.

In both passages the antithesis between flesh and Spirit presents two opposing forces that seek to influence the thoughts and behavior of each Christian. In fact both are competing to lead the believer in one of two different directions: one toward God and the other away from God. First John 1:6-7 gives us perspective.

6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; **7** but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

The flesh, the capacity to sin, is in conflict with the Spirit. Each believer must choose which one he will follow — whether led by the flesh into darkness or by the Spirit into light. Christ is the Light and since He is revealed through the Word of God, only as we walk in the light of God's Word can we experience intimacy in fellowship with Him. To walk according to the Spirit or to be led by the Spirit concerns the alignment of our thoughts and actions to the instructions of God's Word, the very words the Spirit inspired. As we renew our minds through the Word and live it out in obedient behavior, we are being led by

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and walking according to the Spirit into the Light. On the other hand, if we dismiss the Word of God and pursue a self-seeking agenda, we move into darkness and are led by the flesh, not the Spirit. Both forces rival to influence the believer, with the Word being the constant to which or from which the believer vacillates. Exclusion from intimacy with God is a reality for the believer when he sins just as it was true for Adam and Eve. The Spirit, however, leads us by the Word to the light and encourages us to continue to choose intimacy with Christ.⁶

Teaching by the Spirit

God communicates with believers primarily through His Word. Six theological concepts shed light on God's revealed truth:

Revelation—Content of the Word (2 Tim. 3:16)

Inspiration—Recording the Word (2 Pet. 1:20-21)

Illumination—Meaning of the Word (1 John 2:27)

Interpretation—Understanding the Word (2 Tim. 2:15)

Explanation—Explaining the Word (Eph. 4:11)

Application—Living the Word (James 1:22-25)

The *content* of revealed truth in the Scriptures is God-breathed. The source is God, while its *recording* is through the Spirit's moving of human authors. The Spirit utilized recorded truth to teach its *meaning* to believers. This is where assumptions produce confusion. While illumination or enlightenment is the unending ministry of the Spirit in which He assists believers in understanding the truth, that understanding is not guaranteed. Though *understanding* of the Scriptures can be spiritually appraised only by a believer (1 Cor 2:9-3:2), it is directly related to diligent study of the truth. Illumination by the Spirit and interpretation by the student of the Word are inextricably linked. However, illumination should not be confused with an act of

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anointing. John wrote that believers “have an anointing from the Holy One” (1 John 2:20) and that “His anointing teaches you about all things” (v 27). In both instances the anointing refers to the indwelling Spirit. The Spirit is “the anointing” Who teaches. One should not confuse “the anointing” with an endowment of fresh revelation to an individual, teacher, or preacher. That concept is foreign to the New Testament. Even though God has given teachers to the church, they must be “workmen...accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). Their responsibility is to *explain* the recorded Word; not to give new revelation. As we increasingly understand God’s truth, we are to integrate the truth into our behavior. We are to *live* the truth.⁷

The Pattern

In the texts addressed above there are three common factors: the Word of God, the Spirit of God, and the choices of the believer.

Do you see the reoccurring pattern? Whether considering the filling, leading, or teaching by the Spirit, how receptive the believer is to His influencing ministry depends on the believer. The Spirit is always available, but He is accessible only as the Christian submits to His influence. That is a matter of choice.⁸

Resurrection Power in Perspective

Paul links the power of God and the resurrection of Christ four times: Romans 1:4; 1 Corinthians 6:14; Ephesians 1:19-20; and Philippians 3:10-11.⁹ Since these texts have been used to suggest the notion that each believer can experience this same resurrection power for living the Christian life, we should address this issue in order to confirm its legitimacy.

Romans 1:4

[Christ] was declared the Son of God with power by the

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resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom 1:4).

In Romans 1:4, Christ's physical resurrection is a demonstration of God's power and a declaration of Christ as the Son of God. Unfortunately, commentators extrapolate God's "resurrection power" from Romans 1:4 as "power to live" or "power for resurrection living" into 1:16-17 and further into 6:4, 9-10 and 8:10-13.¹⁰ This conclusion is based on the use of "power" in 1:16, affecting the interpretation of Roman's theme verses (vv 16-17).

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power [*dunamis*] of God for salvation [*deliverance*] to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. **17** For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "But the righteous *man* shall live by faith [or alternatively "righteous by faith shall live"]" (Rom 1:16-17, underlines for emphasis).

Power in Context

From this text one must decide if "power" in verse 16 concerns the believer's position (salvation or state) or practice (sanctification or walk). In order to make that determination, first a clear understanding of "gospel" and then of "salvation" must be considered. While gospel means good news, the context determines to that which the good news refers. Many automatically assume God's "good news" always concerns salvation—meaning the placing of one's faith in Christ for eternal life. They then readily translate Romans 1:16 as *the gospel that is the power of God for [actual] deliverance from eternal death to eternal life*, assuming that salvation refers to one's eternal destiny. Nevertheless the "gospel" or "good new" can refer to Christ's birth (Luke 2:11b) and to Christ's birthplace (v 11a). Christ's birthplace in fact was a fulfillment of prophecy (Micah 5:2). If Christ died, isn't it just as important that He was born? That is good news and that is what Christmas is all about. In addition, Jesus Himself spoke of the gospel of the kingdom of God (e.g., Luke 3:18; 4:43). Many also believe that Christ's virgin birth and His deity must also be considered good news.

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Before you make in an incorrect assumption concerning Romans 1:16, let's consider another alternative. In fact, consider the following translation for verse 16: *the gospel that is the power of God for deliverance [potential deliverance] from wrath due to sin.*¹¹ The good news is that God's power provides deliverance, a potential deliverance from judgment (wrath) due to sin in the Christian's life. Rather than salvation from eternal judgment in the future, the primary issue for Christians in Roman is salvation from temporal judgment in present time.

Verse 17 works in concert with verse 16's alternative view. Paul concluded the theme verses of Romans with the quote from Habakkuk 2:4: "But the righteous *man* shall live by faith" or "the righteous by faith shall live."¹² Notice that there are two approaches to the translation of that verse. Since Paul develops the argument of Romans by first addressing justification, becoming righteous (3:21-5:11), and then sanctification, living righteously (5:12-8:29), the second translation provides the better approach. *The righteous man by faith* possesses a new position in Christ so that he can potentially (*shall*) live abundantly (6:6, 11; John 10:10b). God's work in justification *provides* the believer with a new position, but God's work in sanctification is *not to produce* abundant living. Rather, the new status *makes available the opportunity* for the believer to experience enriched living through obedience, as influenced by the Spirit (Rom 8:5-6, 13).

Imposing Power on Christian Living

In the important section on Christian living (Rom 5-8), Paul does *not* use the term "power." Unless you import "power" from Romans 1:4 and 1:16 into Romans 5-8, there is no epic clash between a supposed "power of sin" and an alleged "power to live" in the Christian life. Nevertheless, for many causal power is imposed on Christian living to undergird the idea of the "power of the Spirit," as incorrectly understood from Acts 1:8, counteracting the assumed "power of sin."

As previously addressed in chapter 3, sin is *not* a power; rather it is a result of wrong thoughts and choices (Jam 1:14-15). While some understand the "capacity to sin" within the believer to be a power that can overwhelm the believer and must be counteracted with the power

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of the Spirit, the sin capacity is the natural inclination, disposition, or propensity to sin, but it is *not* a power. Granted believers can be overwhelmed by sin, even resulting in a “sin leading to death” (1 John 5:16; 1 Cor 11:30), but that is the result of continual sinful lifestyle that disregards God. That outcome leads to death (not only loss of fellowship but also a possible shortness of physical life).

Causational and Influential Power

While causational power physically raised Christ (Rom 1:4) and spiritually raises those who place their faith in Christ to eternal life (6:4), this power is not the issue in the theme verses of Romans (1:16-17) and certainly not in the section dealing with Christian living (Rom 5–8). The following question is crucial to your understanding of the Christian life. Does God’s power actually produce abundant living or only provide the potential opportunity? The former corresponds to the “empowering model,” while the latter is the “influencing model.”

First Corinthians 6:14

Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power (1 Cor 6:14).

This verse obviously addressed causational power in the physical resurrection of Christ and the future physical resurrection of Christians. Resurrection power in this verse does not concern Christian living.

Ephesians 1:19-20

19 [A]nd what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. *These are* in accordance with the working of the strength of His might **20** which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly *places* (Eph 1:19-20).

While we previously addressed Paul’s second prayer (Eph 3:16-19) in the last chapter, our interest here is Paul’s first prayer for the Christians in Ephesus. Paul taught that the source for the believer’s knowledge of

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God is through God's demonstrated power. While resurrection power provides knowledge of God and therefore a basis for living the Christian life, it did not reveal how the Christian life is lived.

Philippians 3:10-11

10 [T]hat I may know Him and the power [*dunamin*] of His resurrection [*anastaseon*] and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that [if somehow] I may attain to the resurrection [*exanastasin*] from the dead (Phil 3:10-11, underlines for emphasis).

Paul's Must Haves

Beginning from 3:7, Paul stated that his past accomplishments are worthless when compared to "knowing Christ." In verse 10, he stated three goals in life that he expected would lead to the desired outcome found in verse 11. The *first* goal was to "know Him (Christ)" not in a mere factual or theoretical manner, but rather in an experiential or intimate way.¹³ Even having personally met Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6) and experienced being "caught up to the third heaven" in God's presence to receive revelation (2 Cor 12:2-4), Paul's desired to know Christ in personal, intimate fellowship.

"Know the power of His resurrection" was Paul's *second* goal. There are two primary ways to understand the manner this goal could be realized. It either refers to an experiential knowledge (1) of the Spirit producing obedience in and through the believer or (2) of the Spirit's influential work available for making daily choices by the believer in life. Remember, the Spirit causing or producing good works is based on Acts 1:8, while His influential work concerns the Spirit's filling, leading and teaching. It is unlikely Paul had in mind the former view of power. Paul had already experienced the Spirit's causational power in his ministry as he performed many miraculous acts. Here his second goal concerns the benefit of his own spiritual resurrection expressed in Roman 8:11.

[I]f the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in

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you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through [on account of] His Spirit who dwells in you.¹⁴

In Romans 8, Paul addressed believers who had experienced their own spiritual resurrection and who possessed the indwelling Spirit of God. Those are the ones to whom Paul wrote to explain that they could experience “abundant life” because of the Spirit within them. The context shows how this “newness of life” (6:4) is available to each Christian if they choose to “walk in respect to the Spirit” (8:4-5, 13). Roman 5–8 addresses the work of the Spirit, referring to His influencing ministry of filling, leading and teaching. Experiencing this ministry of the Spirit personally and intimately was Paul’s second goal.

Paul’s *third* goal was to “know the fellowship of His sufferings.” A commentator captured the intent of this goal when he wrote, “There is a third thing Paul wants to experience—that is the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings or the fellowship with Christ that suffering produces.”¹⁵ In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 concerning Paul’s “thorn in the flesh,” his weakness amidst a physical infirmity ultimately resulted in the experience of contentment. Paul had come to understand and embraced the purpose of his infirmity. He wrote, “I am well content with weakness, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong” (v 10). Notice, however, why he came to that conclusion and could then boast in his weakness—God said, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness” (v 9). Paul’s reorientation in his thinking related to His understanding of God. Rather than an instantaneous event, it concerned a process involving not just one, or two, but three prayers to have his infirmity removed that led up to knowing contentment regarding his situation. It seems Paul was “strengthened with power through the Spirit in the inner man” (Eph 3:16). Notice that Paul’s suffering for Christ’s sake also brought forth a change in himself.

Paul’s Ultimate Desire

Striving to fulfill his three goals, Paul anticipated that he might “attain to the resurrection from the dead” (v 11). Many suggestions

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have been offered to explain what “resurrection from the dead” Paul had in mind. One writer provided six different views.¹⁶ The solution is tied to the particular, only onetime use in the New Testament, word *resurrection* in verse 11. Notice in the above quotation of verses 10-11 that the bracketed words for “resurrection” differ. The preceding “*ex*” inserted in the Greek word (v 11) has the idea of “out from,” indicating an “out-resurrection” or a “resurrection out from the dead.”¹⁷ Some understand this “out resurrection” to represent either (1) the resurrection of believers out from non-believers or (2) a resurrection of faithful believers out from less faithful believers. This author believes those views miss the intent of this context. Rather, Paul desired to attain “a resurrection out from a life of deadness.” Paul’s thoughts revert back to his writings in Romans 6. “Do not go on presenting [making available] the members of your body to sin *as* instruments of unrighteousness; but present [making available] yourselves to God as those alive from the dead” (v 13), “so we too might walk in newness of life” (v 4). His desire was an ever increasing intimacy with Christ by “walking with respect to the Spirit,” leading to abundant living, rather than “walking with respect to the flesh,” leading to a living death (8:4, 13).

Paul’s “out-resurrection” refers to “resurrection living,” which is the result of godly choices by Christians who have already been spiritually resurrected when they placed their faith in Christ for eternal life. For the Christian, “resurrection power” was operating spiritually at conversion and will operate physically at the second coming of Christ. In the meantime “resurrection living,” which is never guaranteed, is the Christian potential when life is lived in harmony and intimately with Christ. If Paul himself strived to experience such intimacy with Christ, mustn’t we?

Distinguishing God’s Influential from Causational Work

The words of a business axiom come to mind. “The way we choose to look at things can be as significant as the thing we are trying to see.” This is certainly true in the study of God’s Word. Being able to distinguish the Spirit’s *empowering work for ministry* from the Spirit’s *influencing work for living* is a stumbling block for many students of

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the Word (see chart 10-1). Rather than continuing to put on the same blinders that limit our vision, a new look, a different perspective, can be extremely helpful. If not “resurrection living” will remain a mystery for the Church and believers will continue to seek for an imaginary special power from God to live the Christian life.



