

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Spiritual Power: Spirit Against Flesh"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/23/2009

Page 1 of 11

Introduction

Today we continue our study of the book of Colossians at chapter one and verse eleven. And last time we began looking closely at the first part of verse eleven, where Paul prays that the Colossian believers will be “strengthened with all might, according to His [that is, God’s] glorious power.” Paul says that he and Timothy

do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.”

We said that as we look at verse eleven, we’re going to examine four aspects of spiritual power. First, we need to understand the *nature* of spiritual power. Second, we need to understand the *need* for spiritual power. Third, we need to understand the *magnitude* of spiritual power. And fourth, we need to understand the *purpose* of spiritual power.

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Spiritual Power: Spirit Against Flesh"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/23/2009

Page 2 of 11

Last time, we looked at the *nature* of spiritual power and strength. We saw that there are many misconceptions about spiritual power in the church today, and that is because there is a lot of focus on outward appearances. But we saw that while man looks on the outward appearance, God looks on the heart. God does not impart spiritual power according to outward human measurements. God isn't concerned about externals. God is concerned about the issues of the heart.

We saw that God alone is the source of genuine spiritual power – it is His glory and majesty, His dominion and power. We also saw that you can have no spiritual power apart from a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. A saving relationship with Christ, that Vine-and-branch relationship, is the conduit, if you will, of spiritual power. And we also saw that God the Holy Spirit, indwelling each and every blood-bought child of God, is the One who imparts spiritual power to the believer. We also saw that for these reasons, spiritual power is not a matter of mere outward appearances. It is not a matter of the flesh. Spiritual power has to do with the inner man, the saved man, the person who has been translated out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of the dear Son of God. Only such a person can have spiritual power and strength. Only such a person can be “strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power.”

Today we come to the second thing that we need to understand about spiritual power – and that second thing we need to understand is that we need it. Now that may sound like I'm just stating the obvious. You may say, “Of course the Christian needs spiritual power.” But I want to make sure that you understand *why* the Bible

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Spiritual Power: Spirit Against Flesh"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/23/2009

Page 3 of 11

says that you need it. People give lots of reasons why they think Christians need spiritual power. But I think a lot of the answers that are given today really confuse the issue. So I want to get us back to basics today.

Why Does the Christian Need Spiritual Power?

Why does the Christian need spiritual power? We can sum it up in one simple sentence: *We have no power of our own.* We have no power of our own. The Bible tells us over and over again that our flesh is inherently weak and sinful. The Bible constantly makes the distinction between that which is of the flesh, and that which is of the Spirit.

God has provided spiritual power for the believer to live the Christian life because, as we read in Psalm 103, verse 14, God "Knows our frame" – that is, He understands our constitution. He remembers, that verse says, "that we are dust." As Jesus said to His disciples in Matthew 26:41, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." The spirit of man indwelt by the Holy Spirit, is willing to do the will of God, but our sinful flesh is weak.

And there is a constant warfare within the believer between the sinful flesh and the Spirit of God. And that is why Paul says this in Galatians 5:16-18 –

I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh;

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Spiritual Power: Spirit Against Flesh"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/23/2009

Page 4 of 11

and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

And in Romans chapter seven, beginning at verse 18, Paul says this:

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God — through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

It is because of this ongoing weakness, the fact of the perpetual powerlessness of our sinful flesh, that we need the power of God. We need to rely totally upon God.

The Trap of Reliance on the Flesh

And we need to especially understand that this utter dependency is at the very heart of the way in which our salvation has come about. There was absolutely nothing that we could do to save ourselves. And as soon as we begin to think that

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Spiritual Power: Spirit Against Flesh"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/23/2009

Page 5 of 11

there is some power or inherent goodness in our sinful flesh, we are in danger of falling into the same kind of trap that the Colossians were in danger of falling into. It was the same trap that the churches over in Galatia had already fallen into by this time. Paul writes to the Galatians, in chapter three beginning at verse one:

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? — Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?

That is the danger when we start looking at externals, when we start thinking in terms of the flesh. That's the danger when we start thinking in terms of human power. The danger is that we will fall into a way of thinking that says that we need to add something to what Christ has done in order to be in right standing before God. The danger is that we will fall into a way of thinking that says that we are even *capable* of adding something to what Christ has done. Dear friend, you can add nothing. Christ has done everything. If you are a Christian today, you need to recognize the total weakness and condemnation of your flesh, and you need to recognize that you need spiritual power and strength from God because you have absolutely no strength and power of your own to live the Christian life.

As I said last time, I believe this is one of the most serious problems in the church today. Much of the church is operating in the flesh. It is trying to operate on its own

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Spiritual Power: Spirit Against Flesh"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/23/2009

Page 6 of 11

power. And from a human standpoint, from a fleshly standpoint, from the standpoint of externals, it may appear that all is going great. We just built a bigger building. It's packed every week. The people are enthusiastic. The level of emotion in the services is high. We have a charismatic, dynamic leadership. Every month we're adding new programs. And far too often, the focus is on these things. The power of an impressive building. The power of a large crowd. The power of emotion. The power of the leader's personality. The power of human competency and organization. All of it is focused on the flesh, the flesh, the flesh. The very thing that John warns of in his first epistle has taken possession of the church:

Do not love the world or the things in the world [he warns the church]. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life — is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

In far too many churches today, and in far too many individual Christians today, there is no broken-hearted seeking after the power of the Holy Spirit. There is only a sinful seeking after "the lust of the flesh" – the things that appeal to human flesh – "the lust of the eyes" – the things that appeal to the human eye – and "the pride of life" – the things that feed human pride. May God cause His people to repent of such things, and to seek His power with our whole hearts.

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Spiritual Power: Spirit Against Flesh"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/23/2009

Page 7 of 11

The Fact of Spiritual Warfare

Dear friends, we need to remember that we are in a perpetual spiritual war. If you are truly a born-again, blood-bought child of God, from the moment you receive Christ until the moment you are taken out of this world to glory, you are in a spiritual warfare every minute. And you are either standing firm for God, or you are giving up ground because of the flesh.

And the only way you are going to stand firm for God is to have genuine spiritual power and strength from God alone. We read of this in Ephesians chapter six. The Apostle Paul exhorts us, beginning at chapter six, verse ten:

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Spiritual Power: Spirit Against Flesh"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/23/2009

Page 8 of 11

salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.

At the end of the Gospel accounts we read that the Apostle Peter, who had been among the first to declare of Jesus, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" – we read that Peter fell into deep sin because he got his focus on the flesh. And so on the night that Jesus was betrayed, Peter denied his Savior – not once, not twice, but three times. And Jesus had predicted this. We read in Luke chapter 22, beginning at verse 31, that Jesus said to Peter, "Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat." The force of the original language is that Jesus was saying to Peter, "Satan wants to have his way with you, so that he can shake your faith to the point of overthrow."

Dear friend, that is spiritual warfare. That is what Satan tries to do. And as he did it to Peter, he will try to do it with you. If Satan cannot have you in the fires of Hell for eternity – and if you are truly a believer today, Satan cannot have you – Satan will do everything he can to cause you to give up ground in your Christian life. The last thing Satan wants you to do is walk worthy of the Lord. Satan wants to destroy your Christian testimony. Satan wants to keep you from doing good works to the glory of God. Satan wants to keep you from being a faithful witness to others. Satan wants to lead you into doctrinal error.

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Spiritual Power: Spirit Against Flesh"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/23/2009

Page 9 of 11

But also note what Jesus says to Peter in Luke chapter 22 at verse 32: "But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." Dear friend, when you are beaten up in the spiritual warfare, remember the encouragement that we find in the book of First John, at the beginning of chapter two:

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

Spiritual Power: Ours Because of the Cross

Remember that spiritual power is ours because of the cross. During the time when the sign-gifts of miracles were still present in the early church, Peter himself was among those who performed such miracles. In Acts chapter three, we read that Peter healed a lame beggar by saying to him, "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk." But Peter was quick to say this to those who were watching – Acts chapter 3, beginning at verse 12:

"Men of Israel, why do you marvel at this? Or why look so intently at us, as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But you denied the Holy

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Spiritual Power: Spirit Against Flesh"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/23/2009

Page 10 of 11

One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.”

Dear friend, spiritual power for the believer comes through the cross of Jesus Christ. “Be strong *in the Lord*, and in the power of *His* might” – not your own strength, not your own flesh.

Paul tells the Colossian believers, chapter one, verse eleven, that he is praying that they will be “strengthened with all might, according to *His* glorious power.” There is no other power like God’s power.

Don’t be ashamed to rely on God’s power, even when the world, or even other Christians, would ridicule you for doing so. To the world, the power of God appears weak and foolish. The early church at Corinth had a problem with this kind of wrong thinking, just as many Christians do today. But Paul told them, this, in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, beginning at verse 27 – and we need to keep this at the forefront of our thinking today:

But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Spiritual Power: Spirit Against Flesh"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/23/2009

Page 11 of 11

to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption— that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.”

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