

## Eye-Opening Grace to God's Immeasurable Power (Ephesians 1:19-21)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on February 6, 2011

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We just sang there's power in the blood, wonder-working power, in the blood of the Lamb.

Would you do service for Jesus your King? ...  
 Would you live daily His praises to sing? ...  
 Would you be free from the burden of sin? ...  
 Would you over evil a victory win? ...  
 Would you be free from your passion and pride? ...

The power for all that and more flows from the precious blood of the Lamb, Jesus, who humbly lived for *prideful people*, selflessly served disciples who were *as selfish as us*, willingly laid down His life for His friends who were initially *unwilling*, died for those *not living for Him* at the time or even still with Him at the cross. Jesus rose again for many who were still *spiritually dead*. God made us alive, saved us and changed us to be willing to love and live for Him, to deny self, to gain victory over sin, freedom from sin. And His power didn't stop there for us; He ascends to heaven, reigns in heaven, and represents us before the throne, by His merit, not ours.

And He empowers and enables us so we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us, by His power not ours. The Almighty power of King Jesus is sustaining all things, reigning in all things, because the Lamb is also the Lion on the Throne of the universe, the throne above every throne, and name above every name, the Lord whose mighty power is working in those who bow to Him. Paul prays in 1:19 we would have eyes to see and hearts to know:

<sup>19</sup> *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* <sup>20</sup> *which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,* <sup>21</sup> *far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.* <sup>22</sup> *And He put all things in subjection under His feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church*

Verse 19 is the 3<sup>rd</sup> part of Paul's 3-part prayer request from v. 18, that the eyes of our heart would be enlightened to 3 great realities:

1. Incredible hope (v. 18b "...*what is the hope of His calling*")
2. Inherited riches ("*the riches of His glorious inheritance*")
3. Immeasurable power (v. 19-22, our study and focus today)

### OUTLINE:

Explanations of God's Power (v. 19)

Examples of God's Power (v. 20-22)

Exhortations from God's Power (we'll at least begin today, D.V.)

### Explanations of God's Power (v. 19)

#### 1. It is Immeasurably Great Power

My translation of v. 19 has *the surpassing greatness of His power*. Others have *immeasurable greatness* (I used that for sermon title). Other versions say it is *incomparably great, incredible greatness, exceeding greatness, superabounding greatness of his power*, etc. Literally excelling extraordinarily; modern vernacular: *over the top*

The NT only uses this word translated “surpassing” 5x (3 in Eph.). Paul’s other prayer in 3:19 prays they would know “*the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.*”<sup>20</sup> *Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us*

You get the idea that language is not enough to contain His power. In Paul’s prayer in Eph. 1:19, he uses similar terms of God’s power to us who believe, it’s God’s surpassing cup-filling-to-overflowing exceedingly immeasurably far-more-abundantly-beyond-all-we-can-ask-or-think-or-imagine power at work in us. Can we see it? Paul prays in Eph 1:18-19 that Christians see it. They don’t have to live in powerlessness, defeat, discouragement, depression, despair. There is hope in Christ, v. 18, glorious riches in Christ, power in Christ (v. 19). In Christ we have His all-surpassing, all-sufficient, all-Sovereign power available, far bigger than all of our problems.

In v. 19, Paul speaks in present tense: it *is continuously* surpassing, it *keeps* superabounding, it’s *constantly* sufficient, it’s *continually* supreme power. One says ‘transcendent, immeasurable, more-than-sufficient greatness ... Paul heaps up terms that defy description’<sup>1</sup>

The 19<sup>th</sup> century Scottish preacher Alexander MacLaren said here Paul’s ‘language swells and peals and becomes exuberant and noble with his theme. He catches fire, as it were, as he thinks about this power that work[s] in us. It is 'exceeding ... exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think.' The power which is really at work in Christian men to-day is in its nature ... immeasurable, and passes thought and desire and knowledge.’<sup>2</sup>

Another describes the intensity of the language in v. 19 as ‘the greatest collection of “power” and “greatness” words found anywhere in the Bible. “Incomparably” means “going far beyond; exceeding.” “Great” has a stem recognizable in English [*mega*].’<sup>3</sup>

## 2. It is Dynamic Power

In fact, the English word “power” in v. 19 is Grk word *dunamis* that we get the English word “dynamic” from. The *Oxford English Dictionary* says another resulting modern word is “dynamometer” = ‘an instrument which measures the power input from an engine.’ The word “dynasty,” also from this Grk root, it defines as ‘a succession of **powerful** or prominent people’ and it lists a number of other words having to do with force or power or energy.<sup>4</sup>

In the NT, this is a word that speaks of power of ability, capacity.

God is able, **more than able**, to accomplish what concerns me today.

He is able, **more than able**, to handle **anything** that comes my way.

He is able, more than able, to do **much more than I can ever dream**.

He is able, **more than able**, to make me what He wants me to be.

We need to really believe that, and see that, Paul prays. When Paul speaks of God's dynamic power to you who believe, remember it's by His power that you believe. Don't sing "I was able, I was able." He is able, that's the only reason you were able or are able to love Him or live for Him, because He is able to do what you and I can't, and He is more than able to do much more than we can even think!

Rom. 8:7-8 says unsaved man lacks the *power/dunamis* to submit to or please God. We had no *power, no ability, no capability* to please God. But God came, saved, changed us to people who can now please God, all because of God's omnipotence overcoming man's impotence, God's total ability meeting man's total inability, God's Almighty capability overpowering man's incapability. God saved us by His power, as Rom 5:6 says, *while we were powerless*.

### 3. It is Working Power

Middle of 1:19 says "*like / according to the working of,*" or some of the other versions have "*as displayed in the exercise of*" (NET), or "*by the operative energy of*" (Wuest). The English word *energy* comes from this Grk root *energe*. This is an energetic power, or an energizing power that's effectual (KJV "*effectual working*" in 3:7).

God not only has the power of capability, He is carrying it out. If you look back at v. 11 Paul uses this same word for God's power, in the middle of v. 11: "... *having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will*"

That phrase could be its own sermon, God's power in providence.

"All things" includes rolling dice (Prov. 16:33), falling sparrows (Matt. 10:29), failing sight (Ex. 4:11), financial loss (1 Sam. 2:7), the decisions of kings (Prov. 21:1), the sickness of children (2 Sam. 12:15), the suffering [and dying] of saints (1 Pet. 4:19; Ps. 44:11), the completion of travel (James 4:15) ... spiritual growth (Heb. 6:3), life and death (1 Sam. 2:6) ... From the smallest thing to the greatest, good and evil, happy and sad, pagan and Christian, pain and pleasure--God governs all for his...purposes (Isa 46:10).<sup>5</sup>

It's so important that the eyes of our heart see and know that God is *actually working*, in all things, for His purpose and for our good. His power is not just able; it's *actually effectually working always*. "actual" power as opposed to "potential" power. It's not man's strength; it's 'supernatural power in actual operation. It is the active exercise of supernatural power.'<sup>6</sup>

### 4. It is Almighty Power

The last explanation of God's power in v. 19 is "*mighty power*" (NKJV), or "*mighty strength*" (NIV), or "*great might*" (ESV), or "*the strength of His might*" (NASB) or "*immense strength*" (NET).

The first of these last 2 Greek words in this phrase, *kratos* includes the ideas of authority and rule, and it's part of the word *theo-cracy* (*theo* = God, i.e., "rule by God"). This word is manifested power in governing, determining, ruling over, restraining all opposition. It is used by the ancient Greek writer Homer, in his book *Ilias*, to describe military strength, mastery over, or victory, as in warfare.<sup>7</sup> It's domination, dominion, supreme authority, almighty power.

Translators struggle to convey the combination of these last 2 words together. The first is ‘authoritative power which overcomes whatever stands in the way, [the second] the personal exercise of strength ... Paul virtually exhausts the resources of the Greek language to describe something of the magnitude of divine might.’<sup>8</sup>

An illustration putting it all together: A ‘bulldozer has the ability, capacity, and potential ... (*dunamis*). By looking at it one senses its inherent strength (*iskus*) but when its engine roars and it begins to move, its power of mastery becomes obvious (*kratos*). However, when it comes to a tree and knocks it over one sees the activity of its power (*energeia*). Similarly, [John] Calvin illustrates the use of these words by stating that *iskus* is like the root, *kratos* the tree, and *energeia* the fruit. It seems that *dunamis* is the more general term and the other terms support it ... these words overlap and the point of using all of these words is not so much to emphasize their distinctiveness but to enforce the idea of God’s abundant power’<sup>9</sup>

Kenneth Wuest’s Greek NT, v. 19: “*the superabounding greatness of His inherent power to us who are believing ones as measured by the operative energy of the manifested strength of His might.*”

Words can’t exhaust the inexhaustible power of God, the inherent strength, the infinite might, the immeasurable energy, indisputable dominion, God’s invincible arm exercising irresistible sovereignty. It’s almost un-definable, yet undeniable and absolutely unrivaled. In the words of Chris Tomlin, it’s “indescribable, uncontainable ... all-powerful, untameable ... unchangeable, awe-struck we fall ...” or another musician’s words, power “incomparable, unconquerable ... unstoppable ... phenomenal ... it’s impossible to exaggerate...”

Paul is ransacking the theological thesaurus here, piling phrase upon phrase, every possible word he thinks of in his vocabulary to try to express the inexpressible illimitable power of Almighty God. Paul’s explanations aren’t enough, so in v. 20 he switches to give:

### **Examples of God’s Power (v. 20-22)**

#### **1. Christ’s Resurrection (v. 20a)**

<sup>20</sup>*He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead*

Paul moves now from explanation to illustration. The first example of power he gives here is the resurrection of Christ from the dead. He doesn’t highlight God’s power to create first, but God’s power to raise from the grave, specifically power in resurrecting Christ.

Rom. 1:16 says the gospel that is the power of God unto salvation. This gospel isn’t just Christ died for us, but He rose and He reigns. The message of the cross seems foolish to the world, and if Jesus didn’t rise, it is foolish. The world says “what, your power source is some bloody leader dying in weakness on some wooden poles?”

But Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 1 “*the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God ... to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God (1:17-18, 24 NIV)*

Christ is the power of God to those He calls/saves. Paul illustrates God's power here in v. 20, not by a dead Jesus on a cross, but in a triumphant living Jesus conquering death in His resurrection for all time for all who repent of all their sins and trust in Christ as all their hope for heaven. It's not in the tomb, it's in the empty tomb!

*“he was crucified in weakness yet he lives by God's power”* (2 Cor 13:4)

We need our eyes opened to know “the power of His resurrection.” Philippians 3:10 “... *that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection.*”

## 2. Christ's Ascension and Exaltation (Eph. 1:20-21)

<sup>20</sup>*which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places ...*

Paul takes it up another level now, taking us even higher because the highest point of Christ's ministry doesn't end at resurrection. It is what happened 40 days later, Christ's ascension and exaltation. Eph. 4:10 *He who descended [that's Jesus] is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.*”

He came as low as His possible on earth and as a result He is now ascended to the highest possible place far above all the heavens. No one ever went any lower, and no one was ever lifted higher. It says in 1:20 God “*seated Him at His right hand in the heavens.*”<sup>21</sup> *far above all rule and authority and power and dominion ...*”

The Christian faith rightly puts much emphasis on the death of our Lord on the cross. We took communion earlier in remembrance of it, rightly so. But sometimes the resurrection of Jesus doesn't get the focus it deserves, and I'm certain this next point doesn't get the focus it deserves or that the NT gives it: *the ascension of Jesus and the activity of Jesus since then*. Paul spends much more time on this than even the resurrection of Jesus in this passage. He talks far more about what Jesus is doing in heaven now than what He did on earth. All of the work of Christ is important, but when Paul wants to talk about power, he passes over fairly quickly God's raising the Lord Jesus from the dead in a few words, and then spends several verses using several phrases for the power of God in the ascended, exalted, enthroned Christ who is seated at the Father's right hand.

What would “sitting at God's right hand” mean to a Jewish writer?

Psalm 110:1 *The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand Until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.”* [place of honor and power, v. 3 calls that day “*the day of Your power*”]

<sup>2</sup> *The LORD will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, saying, “Rule in the midst of Your enemies.” ...* <sup>5</sup> *The Lord is at Your right hand; He will shatter kings in the day of His wrath.*

Hebrews 10:12 says Jesus “*SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD ... UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET.*”

Jesus at God's right hand = deity, power. Jesus said in Mark 14:62 "*You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power.*" That was enough to make the high priests come unglued and their clothes come unseamed as they ripped their garments; blasphemy! They understood Jesus was claiming to be the very power of God! He was claiming to be the Lord of Ps. 110, King of the universe! And 2 chapters later, after His resurrection, Mark 16:19: "*He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.*"

The first Christian sermon in the book of Acts culminates here:

Acts 2:32 "*This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses.*"<sup>33</sup> "*Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God ... He has poured forth this which you both see and hear.* [and then he quotes Ps. 110 of Jesus] '*THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, "SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND,*<sup>35</sup>*UNTIL I MAKE YOUR ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET."*'<sup>36</sup> "*Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ ...*

And because of Christ's position of power Peter commands *repent!* If you have never repented and bowed the knee to Jesus as Lord, remember this Jesus warned while He was on earth "*You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven*" (Mt 26:64). His Almighty power and wrath is coming on all who do not repent and bow down and worship. If you haven't yet, the Emperor of the Universe commands "repent!" Turn from your sins, surrender, fall on your face, plead for grace.

Jesus might have come in weakness the first time, but He comes in power the next time. He won't ride into Jerusalem on a lowly little donkey, He'll come as the Warrior-King on a white horse with His cavalry as Commander and Conqueror of all who haven't bowed. He wore a crown of thorns the first time ... next time He comes, they'll bring forth the royal diadem and crown Him Lord of all, as angels prostrate fall, kings casting crowns before Him, crowning Him with many crowns. His hand once nailed to a cross will now hold the scepter of undisputable unlimited sovereignty. The one beaten with rods will now rule the nations with a rod of iron. The mouth that didn't open the first time in His unjust trial will now open with a double-edged sword of justice coming out. But if you bow the knee to the Lord in this life His power protects in the next. The One at the right hand of power also alone has power to forgive sin, as the Jews recognized "*who can forgive sins but God alone?*"

Hebrews 1:3 says the power of Jesus "*upholds all things by the word of His power.* [and adds re: right hand] *When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of... Majesty*" Hebrews 8:1 adds He sits there always as our all-powerful High Priest "*who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne ...*"

Crown Him with many crowns, the Lamb upon His throne.  
Hark! How the heavenly anthem drowns all music but its own.  
Awake, my soul, and sing of Him who died for thee,  
And hail Him as thy matchless King through all eternity.

Crown Him the Lord of life, who triumphed over the grave,  
And rose victorious in the strife for those He came to save.  
His glories now we sing, who died, and rose on high,  
Who died eternal life to bring, and lives that death may die.

Crown Him the Lord of peace, whose power a scepter sways  
From pole to pole, that wars may cease, and all be prayer and praise ...

Crown Him the Lord of Heaven, enthroned in worlds above,  
Crown Him the King to Whom is given the wondrous name of Love.  
Crown Him with many crowns, as thrones before Him fall;  
Crown Him, ye kings, with many crowns, for He is King of all.

Rom 8:34: ***Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us*** [that place of power gives powerful security] ... <sup>38</sup> *For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers* <sup>39</sup> *nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord ...*

The same words for powers, principalities, angels are in Eph 1:21:  
**1:21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion ...**

There are 4 explanations and examples of power; here 4 “powers.” Some of the 4 terms are sometimes used of human principalities or powers, but commonly and contextually in Eph., it includes angels and even or especially *fallen* angels, princes / powers of darkness. The first word *arche* is the root for arch-angel, highest rank, prince

Eph 2:2 uses this root for Satan: “***prince of the power of the air.***” Eph. 6:12, using the same first 2 words in the same order as 1:21: “***our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness[evil], against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.***”

But for Christians, far greater is Christ in you than any in the world. Believers can resist the world, flesh, and the devil, by the Lord’s power. Eph. 6:10 says “***Finally, be strong [root dunamis] in the Lord and in the strength [kratos] of His might [iskus].*** <sup>11</sup> *Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able (root **dunamis**—have the ability or power) to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.*

The language of Ephesians exalts God’s power over all powers. All hail the power of Jesus’ name; let fallen angels prostrate fall. James 2 says devils tremble when they think of God. When Jesus was on earth, every demon He encounters cowers before Him or cries out or screams or shrieks or begs for mercy from Jesus. Even Satan is powerless without permission of Christ who’s <sup>21</sup>***far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.***

All hail the power of Jesus’ name, Jesus, name above all names. This exaltation of Christ is described climactically in Phil. 2:9-11: ***God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord***

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<sup>1</sup> *KJV Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994), p. 2408.

<sup>2</sup> [http://preceptaustin.org/ephesians\\_1\\_maclaren.htm#tmoip](http://preceptaustin.org/ephesians_1_maclaren.htm#tmoip)

<sup>3</sup> K. L. Boles, K. L. *Galatians & Ephesians*. The College Press NIV Commentary. Joplin, Mo.: College Press.

<sup>4</sup> C. Soanes, A. Stevenson, *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> John Piper, Justin Taylor, eds., *Beyond the bounds : Open theism and the undermining of biblical Christianity* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books), p. 380.

<sup>6</sup> Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 269-70.

<sup>7</sup> Ilias, 1.509, 6.387, cited by Hoehner, 270.

<sup>8</sup> Boles, *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Hoehner, 271.