
God's Principle of Power

by Ronald Ball

I had not been a student at Asbury College for long before I developed a driving fascination for Dr. Henry Clay Morrison. Dr. Morrison was a president of Asbury College, the founder of Asbury Theological Seminary and, from all I could gather, an extraordinary man.

As my freshman year in 1968 progressed, I searched for and found several biographies of Morrison and spoke with a number of persons who had known him and heard him preach. I began to see a man whose walk with God was decidedly different from the average, and whose public ministry was, in itself, phenomenal. One man with whom I spoke related his recollection of the reaction on the college campus when Morrison would return after having been away for evangelistic services or possibly on a fund-raising campaign. He remembered how everyone would know Morrison was back because the entire atmosphere would suddenly and wonderfully be charged with the presence and power of God.

The information I was gathering about this exceptional man was intriguing. What was his secret? Why did he exercise such a powerful spiritual influence? His preaching eloquence was legendary and the results of his administrative skills are still obvious in the forms of the institutions he was so instrumental in either founding or maintaining. Yet, these factors failed to explain this man of God, with his life so filled with a supernatural dynamic.

My searching for the clue or clues that would point to the secret of Dr. Morrison's influence finally ended during a chapel of my senior year at the college in 1972. An associate of Morrison, Dr. J. C. McPheeters, was conducting a memorial service on the thirtieth anniversary of Morrison's death. Dr. McPheeters shared a little-known incident that took place not long before Morrison died. The two men were involved in a revival meeting in a small church not far from Wilmore and were preparing to enjoy a meal in the simple farmhouse home of a church family. After the food had been served, Morrison rose from his chair and called

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everyone to a special time of prayer. He knelt and prayed the prayer that gave me the clue to the secret of his power. Morrison, after having prayed for several other concerns, began to intercede for the family with whom the two were staying. His words became unusually intense as he said to God, “. . . and Lord, please save us from being ordinary Christians!” Dr. McPheeters affirmed that for years he had been unable to escape the implications of that brief prayer.

Morrison had power with people because he refused to be ordinary or merely mediocre in his relationship to Christ. He drew on the power supply of His Lord and found that supply more than adequate in every situation.

It is, however, one thing to examine a man like Morrison and be warmed and inspired. But it is often quite another matter to discover in our own lives the means of appropriating this same divine power to the same life-altering degree. The extremity of our times and the dangerous desperateness of the hour demands persons of this same spiritual caliber. God wants to produce outstanding spiritual leaders and has given us in His Word the divine principle of power that *must* be learned if we are to be at all effective in our frustrated, fragmented age. This principle of power is clearly expressed in chapter four of Zechariah.

To adequately grasp what this passage communicates, one must first understand the larger environmental context of verse six and then the immediate context. The sixth verse reads, “. . . this is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel, Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit says the Lord of Hosts.”

The larger environmental context has to do with the disaster that had befallen the nation of Israel. Their stubborn sin had finally resulted in the judgment of God. Their land had been razed, their beloved city of Jerusalem devastated, and the majority of the population carried away in slavery to Babylon. The nation had been stunned by the severity of God’s punishment but had breathlessly clung to the faint hope of a restoration. When Zechariah was recording his words, this faint hope was beginning to be realized as a tiny remnant of the people were trickling back to their homeland.

The people struggled to raise again the walls of their city and lay a foundation for renewal. They were under the religious leadership of Haggai and Zechariah the prophets (and Joshua the high priest) and the political-military guidance of Zerubbabel. They obviously had competent leadership and were possessed of a commendable goal, but they were also surrounded by hostile and vindictive opponents. The odds

were against them and, at the point Zechariah was recording, the mass morale of the city-builders was low. They were depressed and discouraged and wondered if the job could ever be completed.

God then broke into the situation as He always does when His people are helpless against their enemies. An angel was commissioned and sent to Zechariah, who was caused to experience a series of important visions which contained needed messages for the harassed workers.

The most significant vision for our purposes is the fifth of a series of eight. Zechariah was asleep and was nudged awake by the angel-messenger, who showed him a golden lampstand with seven branches or candle-holders. It is here that the more immediate context of verse six enters into consideration. The lampstand represented the nation of Israel, yet the lampstand gave no light; it was completely dark. The angel asked Zechariah, "Do you understand what you see?" "No," replied the prophet, "I do not." The angel then offered an explanation of the vision by stating the words found in verse six which showed that only God's power could light again the lamp of Israel. He then continued,

What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain; and he shall bring forward the top stone with shouts of Grace, grace to it! Moreover the word of the Lord came to me saying, the hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house, his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the Lord of Hosts has sent me to you – (vv. 7-8, R.S.V.).

The meaning for God's small group of tired builders was stupendous. It did not matter how limited their resources were, nor how meager their abilities were. The angel had made it clear. It is not by might nor by power but by My Spirit says the Lord of Hosts. The mountain of perplexities and difficulties which they faced would be leveled to a plain. God's promise was unmistakably clear. Zerubbabel's hands had begun the work and by Almighty God's decree, his hands would finish it! Zerubbabel would bring forward the top building stone and everyone would shout, "God's grace has done this!" What encouragement to these frightened people. God Himself had pledged His aid.

The terminology of the angel is particularly significant. "Not by might." The Hebrew word used here for might carries the idea of armed might or a well-equipped military force. In fact, it is translated "army" many times in the Old Testament. "Nor by power." The word used here for power tends more to convey the thought of a single, intense,

resolute force. The angel may have had some noted hero in mind from Israel's past. "Nor by David, nor Moses, nor Elijah, nor Joshua." "Nor by power."

God's message was to the point. He was telling Zechariah that deliverance would not come by a well-trained, heavily equipped army – "Not by might" – and it would not come by the heroic actions of an outstanding individual – "nor by power." Victory would come ". . . by My Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts."

This then is a burning, challenging enunciation of God's principle of power. "By My Spirit" is God's promise that through His infinite resources we can fulfill His purposes. It is also His sober warning that following any other avenue will end in dismal failure.

A memorable illustration of the vital importance of this principle of power took place in the interim period between Jesus' death and resurrection at the close of the Gospels, and the day of Pentecost at the beginning of the Acts.

The disciples apparently were sufficiently prepared to launch their mission of spreading the good news about Jesus. They had just completed the most incredible three year education a human could ever have experienced. They had learned intimately from Incarnate Deity, Jesus Christ Himself. It is impossible to measure what the steady influence of the Son of God must have accomplished within them. They also had witnessed the most dramatically important event in human history – the bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus. It would be only logical to assume that now they were ready to march and take the world by storm. What more could possibly be needed? They were seemingly ready, but Jesus said no. He stopped them cold. It was not time to go. They lacked the most integrally important ingredient in spiritual success. They were not filled with and anointed by the Holy Spirit.

"You need to wait in Jerusalem," Jesus told them. "You need to wait for the promise of the Father. Don't leave, don't dare to mount an offensive against the kingdom of darkness unless you are first filled with the Holy Spirit." Jesus, in actuality, was telling them, "This is the word of the Lord . . . saying, it is not by might nor by power but by My Spirit says the Lord of Hosts!"

So they obeyed and waited. Then it happened! Pentecost! The sound of a rushing mighty wind filled the house where they were sitting, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. From then on nothing could halt the force God had unleashed through this tiny, obscure group. They preached Jesus that very day and thousands were stung,

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stirred, smitten and swept into God's kingdom. They witnessed in the same city where their bitter enemies had murdered their Lord, and those very enemies could not withstand them. Some of them traveled to Samaria and preached Jesus there in spite of the generations-old Jewish prejudice that regarded the Samaritans as the most spiritually dull and unresponsive persons on earth. They went to Samaria and one of the greatest revivals of the early church erupted. Jesus was right; without God's principle of power operating within them, their influence would have been feeble, and their efforts futile.

This group of disciples before Pentecost was so similar to our class of graduating seniors. We have prepared three or four years in a quality institution dedicated to Biblically-oriented, evangelical teaching. We have been well-trained and have developed backgrounds that will prove valuable in our varied ministries. We have experienced the resurrection-reality of Jesus Christ being born within us by faith. Yet we will fail if we have not learned this principle of power for ourselves. Let God speak to us again: "It is not by academic expertise, nor by counseling competence, nor by solid education, nor by ecclesiastical friendship with a high denominational official, district superintendent nor bishop. It is by My Spirit says the Lord of Hosts!" As the words of a contemporary Christian song states it, "O, once again we need that holy flame to meet the challenge of today."

It is at this junction that I am going to shift the focus of this message. Thus far we have been in the realm of what is often the theoretical. How can all we have considered be translated into life? People want to see a person's convictions in his conduct, and his beliefs in his behavior, and will be watching his ministry for power and consistency. How can you and I be the kind of persons through whom God can channel such power as we have been discussing?

There are a number of elements that could be suggested here, but I am going to restrict myself to the three that I consider most essential for inwardly appropriating God's principle of power.

If you are going to have a cutting edge for the Gospel and be anointed with such power as I have spoken of, then you must make commitment to Christ your constant concern. You must continually cultivate your relationship with Him. Your first loyalty is not to a denomination, a school or another person, but to the Savior, who freely died for you. Learn to love Him, to grow in appreciation of His splendid character, and to be enraptured by His delightful presence.

I still recall my deep spiritual hunger for an intimate walk with the

Lord Jesus during my freshman year in college. One evening a close friend brought me a recording made by some friends of his in Pennsylvania. I had been praying and longing for the richer communion with God I found promised in the Scriptures, and one song from his record greatly affected me as it touched this need. The music was simple and the lyrics far from profound. They sang, "To know Him, to know Him, to know Him is to love Him and to love Him is to walk with Him, my Jesus, my Savior, my Friend" This is what I am saying: make knowing Him your wholehearted goal.

You also should place humility high on your personal list of desires. Repent and forsake all jealousy, envy and any quarreling or selfishly ambitious spirit. These negative, destructive attitudes are not worthy of a Christian minister. Make John the Baptist your model in this area. Personally apply his selfless prayer to your own life and performance. "He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn. 3:30).

If you are going to be the Spirit-filled productive minister God wills you to be, then you must also make prayer your top spiritual priority. This is the connecting link among all your spiritual disciplines and habits. Through this medium your experience of Christ is deepened and the fruit of humility is enabled to flourish. Learn more about private prayer where your heart contacts God through our Lord Jesus. The devil fears your prayers far more than your pulpit outreach or your counseling contribution. It is only as a man or woman of prayer, that any of us can genuinely realize the meaning of the phrase, "By My Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts."

When I was pursuing my first year of studies at Asbury Theological Seminary, Dr. Robert Coleman began having a positive influence upon me. I remember a man once telling me that when he and Dr. Coleman were classmates, the characteristic that was most prominent about Dr. Coleman was that he was a man of prayer. What an impression that statement made on a young seminarian! Lord, teach us to pray!

This semester I have been doing research on the great revival of the eighteenth century. This awakening came to be known as the Wesleyan Revival in England and the First Great Awakening in the American Colonies. The purpose of the project was to discover a clue leading to an understanding of God's pattern of reviving His people that would be applicable to today. I had read a number of works but still was unable to clearly determine a unifying, contributing factor until toward the end of the term. In a book entitled *The Christian Leaders of the Last Century* by J. C. Ryle, a nineteenth century Anglican bishop of Liver-

pool, England, I found the clue I needed.

Ryle also wanted to discover how his day could know revival as the eighteenth century had. In the book he examined 11 leaders whom he considered the most significant of the awakening. Among them were such men as John Wesley, George Whitefield and John Fletcher. In his final chapter he summarized the common elements among the men and sought to answer the question, "Why are we not experiencing like revival in England today?" His conclusion should jolt us awake to the need of our times as well as his. Ryle decided that the problem centered in two simple areas. His lament was that his day had neither the men nor the message of the eighteenth century.

Neither the men nor the message. We have no difficulty understanding his meaning when he mentions the message. Although there was sharp disagreement among the 11 concerning the doctrines of Calvinism and Arminianism, they all mutually agreed and preached the utter lostness of man, the substitutionary atonement of Christ, the new birth and the need and privilege of a holy life. It is not Ryle's comment on the message that is disturbing. It is his statement about the absence of the kind of men needed. Do we have men today as in that previous time? Do we have men with the determined intensity of Wesley, or the flaming, Spirit-anointed passion of Whitefield or even the calm, transparent purity and holiness of Fletcher? One biographer of Whitefield, Stuart C. Henry, said of him that he possessed that rare quality of the prophet in that he preached what he already practiced instead of trying to practice what he preached.

The question is a stubborn one that refuses to leave without an adequate answer. Do we have men and women who know the fullness of the Spirit of God as did these revival leaders of this past movement? This is the burden of this message. We can have men and women who experience God's principle of power if we can have men and women who will willingly pay the crucial price of sacrificial, dedicated, Christ-centered living. May we learn and learn well that "It is not by might nor by power but by my Spirit says the Lord of Hosts." This is God's principle of power.