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CHAPTER

1

Spiritual Power

“**Y**E SHALL RECEIVE POWER . . .” (ACTS 1:8). Those four words are the promise our Lord Jesus Christ gave to His waiting disciples. The word “power” in our English language may mean a number of things; particularly, it may mean one of two: *authority to do* or *ability to do*. When our Lord used the word “power,” He meant “Ye shall receive ability to do.” So what our Lord actually promised to His disciples was a spiritual potency enabling them to do *something*—He did not say what. “Ye shall receive ability to do”—the sentence dangles; we have to piece it out by the rest of the Scriptures and by the rest of the truth our Lord taught us.

This spiritual potency, this supernatural visitation which He said was to come upon them, was to be an invasion from beyond them. It was to come into their personalities from outside, from somewhere beyond and above, from a realm in which they had not previously lived and with which they had not been previously experientially acquainted. Here is the great gulf that separates Christianity from every quasi-religion.

We have, God knows, a world of them: Bahaimism, New Thought, Unity, yoga, various forms of applied psychology, auto-suggestion and all the rest. And they all say the same thing and attempt the same thing: to wake up something, to tap the hidden powers inside of us. In their books they popularize their doctrines by

such silly phrases as “wake the sleeping giant within you” and “tune in to your hidden potentials.” Since nobody knows what any of those things mean, they buy their books, of course, and join their religions.

They tell us also to “learn to think creatively.” All you have to do these days in order to make a lot of money is to write a book on any of these topics: “How to Quiet Your Mind,” “How to Wake Your Solar Plexus” or “How to Arouse the Giant That Lies Dormant within You.”

All these concepts are based upon the assumption that man is all right to start with—he’s simply asleep; he needs to be awakened. Somewhere there is a terrific reservoir of moral power; if he can only get that awake somehow, if he can tune into it, if he can plug into his potentialities, he will be a wonderful fellow.

I do not say that these things do not help some. I suppose a poor little henpecked man on his way home from work does need a bit of a jacking up like that. For a man who has been pushed around all day and is on his way home to get pushed around some more, anything that will make that man feel he is somebody—I suppose it does him some human good.

But that is the great gulf that separates true biblical Christianity from any other teaching in the wide world. Christianity says, “Ye shall receive power,” that is, moral ability to do. There is a potency to enter your nature from another world, a moral and spiritual force which is to come to you through faith. And it is to enable you to be not what the books say you should be, but what God says you should be, and to enable you to be what you want to be.

This invasion of our weakness from without is the beating heart of the moral side of Christianity. And

that is the reason that all forms of ethical Christianity are inadequate. There are really many forms of ethical Christianity, humanism being one of them; they all assume, I repeat, the same thing. The assumption is that we are all right if we only think so.

A man came to this country years ago, and he got a lot of publicity and many followers by having a little sort of a homemade rosary. This little string with knots on it was all you had to have, and you woke in the morning and said five or ten times, "Every day in every way I am getting better and better."

Christianity knows nothing about this at all. We go beyond that; we go deeper than that. Jesus says, "Ye shall receive power"—a potent force from another world, invading your life by your consent, getting to the roots of your life and transforming you into His likeness. That is the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What is this power? "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you. . . ." This is the power of the Holy Spirit. This is not like the occult. I wish I could make all of God's children understand that there is nothing weird or uncanny about the Holy Spirit, nothing strange, nothing abnormal, nothing that sends shivers up your spine or makes you feel you've seen a ghost; nothing of that eeriness about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus; the Holy Spirit is exactly like Jesus, for what Jesus was, He was by the power of the Spirit, so that when we have the Holy Spirit, we have Jesus Christ.

I might say, claiming no theological or metaphysical accuracy, that the Holy Ghost is deity in solution. All that God the Father is, and all that God the Son is, the Holy Ghost is; He is nothing more and nothing less.

So that when Jesus said, "Ye shall receive power," He simply meant that "All that my Father is and all that I am, by spiritual potency, is to be made available to you in the person of the Holy Ghost."

The Spirit of God is greatly neglected in our times; He's crowded into a paragraph in the books on systematic theology, or He is carefully apologized for by people who are afraid of fanaticism. That is a trick of the devil to frighten people away from this potency which is the essence of Christianity.

How does this power operate? I do not know that I can tell you, but I might help you understand by saying that the power of the Holy Spirit operating in the human heart is an unmediating force applied directly to the spirit of the individual—the human spirit.

You and I are spirits. We are spirits that have bodies. We are different from the beasts in that they just have bodies. We are different from angels in that they are spirits without bodies (I presume they are; I know little about them, but I have guessed that much). But you and I are spirits to whom God has given a body.

William Jennings Bryan,¹ in his great oration on the Prince of Peace, referred to the fact that our souls are simply "guest royal come from afar to inhabit a little while" what he called this "tenement of clay." And thus, we are spirits. Beyond your mentality, beyond your soul where aesthetic beauty such as Bach and Beethoven are felt and appreciated, beyond all this and even deeper is where the Spirit of God wants to go.

It is my conviction that we are overdue for a revival of inwardness—not a revival of sitting around looking at our thumbs or sitting like a statue of Buddha, but a revival of appreciation of the inwardness of true spiritual Christianity. The Spirit of power that comes from

God to redeemed men's hearts is a power that operates directly and unmediated upon us from Spirit to spirit.

A wrestler achieves his success by pressure of body upon body, and a teacher achieves his success by the pressure of ideas on the mind. The moralist achieves his success by the pressure of obligation upon conscience, but the Spirit of God achieves His end by the pressure of Himself deep within the spirit of man.

There is an old word used by some of the writers of medieval times—you do not hear it anymore, although it is still found in the dictionary—it is the word *penetralia*. They talked about God in the *penetralia*. I do not know all the word means, but I would assume it would mean that place which you must *penetrate* to—that deep place within you, deeper even than the mind can go. And it is there that the Spirit of God works. He works in the *penetralia*, in the *sanctum* deep within, that which is merely of our bodies or souls or minds.

I do not say that the Holy Ghost does not make use of other means because, after all, we are physical. I do not say that He does not make use of our minds, because He most certainly does. God has equipped us with minds, and I for one belong to that company of fundamentalists who are not adverse to thinking. I do not believe that there is any basic incompatibility between a good mind and a good heart. I do not believe that we must be dumb to be happy. I do not mean, necessarily, that intellectuality makes you good, but it does not hurt you any if you know what to do with it. But I do say that the Spirit of God does use the human mind. I believe that one of the most beautiful things in the world is a sanctified mentality, a good, sharp mind, broad and high and noble and lofty and yet keen as a

razor, that is anointed with the Spirit of God to give it tenderness, love, purity and fineness.

Someone said the other day in one of our newspapers, "Why is it that Alexander Pope is unquestionably one of the most skillful of all the English poets, yet is one of the least loved of all the English poets?" Then he answered his own question; he said it is because he lacked that one essential element—love. He had a tremendous intellect, but nobody liked the man somehow. You read and quote what he has to say, sort of at arm's length; there are never any pulsations there, never any warm attraction because the man lacked love.

An intellect without this inward potency to lay hold of it may be a very destructive thing and something that we do not take much pleasure in. The company of a fine mind may be a very embarrassing matter unless that mind has been anointed with the soft, sweet oil of the Holy Ghost so there is love and charity and understanding. So I do not say that the Spirit of God never makes use of these means. I most assuredly say that He does, but the deep inner sanctuary is beyond all means.

When Jesus said, "Ye shall receive power," He meant you shall receive the pressure of the Spirit of God upon the heart, upon the spirit. How the Spirit works, again I say I do not know, I cannot tell you. I can only describe an experience, but I can never explain it.

There are those who shy away from Christianity because of what they call its mystic element; they say it cannot be explained. My stock answer to all such objectors is that all of us live habitually all the time. All of us—from the horse meat manufacturers on up to the saints—we live by things that we do not understand. Up and down the scale—every gangster, every mother, every simple person in the woods

of Kentucky—everybody lives by things we cannot understand. We cannot understand life; we cannot understand love; we cannot understand light. We just take it all for granted and live by it.

So when they tell me, “Aw, get away with it; I do not believe in any mystic element in Christianity, any of that mysterious power you are talking about because I cannot understand it,” I reply, “I cannot understand life, but I am alive. I cannot understand love, but I love a lot of people. I cannot understand all this, but I can only know how it works and I can experience it.”

This power that comes to the human breast by faith does not create objects. That is where imagination and all sorts of weird, occult religions come in. They create things that do not exist, but the Holy Spirit never creates anything that does not exist. He simply lifts the fog off it and shows it to us. He does not create the mountain; He takes away the shroud from the mountain so that it stands clear and bright in the sunshine. The Holy Spirit comes giving us inward understanding so that in one sense, “Ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things . . .” (1 John 2:27).

By that He does not exclude teachers; that same Holy Ghost creates teachers, makes them and sets them in the Church. But He did say that He was going to teach us at a deeper level than our human intellect; He is going to inform us farther in than we can be informed by the words of a man or by a book; He’s going into the *penetralia*. “Ye shall receive power,” and that is ability to do and power to perform.

Therein lies the throbbing powerhouse of Christianity. It is the invasion; it is the Person that has come in from beyond us, lost as we were in sin, and has

brought that potency, that ability to achieve moral ends, inside of us. After that, Christianity ceases to be an ethical thing at all and it becomes a spiritual reality. Then it lays hold of ethics; it lays hold of these external things, transforms them and glorifies them.

The Holy Ghost reveals objects present, things unknown and unseen. Above all things the business of the Spirit of God in its fullest effectiveness is to remove the veil from the soul and show us Jesus Christ. "He shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you" (John 16:15). Jesus Christ may simply be a historical Jesus, a theological Jesus or a philosophical Jesus until the Holy Spirit, that potency that enables within, reveals Him for what He is. Then we throw up our hands and cry, "My Lord and my God!"

He is the Jesus of history, most surely He is, but He is more than the Jesus of history. He is the Jesus of my heart; He is the present Christ. But He will never be known as that until it is by the power of the Spirit, for Paul says that no man can even call Jesus Lord except by the power of the Holy Ghost (1 Corinthians 12:3).

I would suppose Paul means to call Jesus Lord so as to be acceptable before God. Anybody can call Jesus "Lord" and not be saved—He said so Himself. But the power to know Jesus Christ Himself, the second Person of the Trinity, the divine Christ, depends upon the enabling of the Spirit of God within us.

It is my belief that the forgotten, or at least neglected, doctrine of our day, the most important one of them all after atonement itself, is that we, as God's redeemed people, have a right to expect and receive from Him by faith a power that will do in us what all the poor religions of the world can never do. This power will bring to us the shining face of Jesus and make Him

real within us, so that not only the moral, theological and ethical qualities are present, but also the *mystical* quality—the sight of the face of Jesus Christ within the human breast.

There is not a lovelier sight. May God grant that we may understand this, believe it and enter into it.

[This message was delivered at a Wheaton College chapel service on February 28, 1952.]