

God's power in the church

The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies! Your people *shall be* volunteers in the day of Your power. Ps 110:2-3

And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Eph 1:22-23

Introduction

It is not materialistic, occult, worldly or pagan.

Many church leaders today talk about power, especially in the Charismatic denominations. However, all I see in these is paganism warmed over; some of the supposed expressions of power are outright occultism. For example, getting people to fall over backwards is not a Biblical expression of God's power in the church and was not something the apostles were interested in, but it is common in pagan religions and occult sects. Other forms of fake power are all those directed at making church members more materialistically wealthy, happy, prosperous and hedonistic through making faith claims; this is little different from magic spells.

Thus many supposed forms of church power are superficial, occult and materialistic.

Despite this, God's word tells us, in many places, that his power will be worked out through the church; but this is not according to man's ideas or worldly expressions.

Zion

Before we progress, we must answer the rather facile question of those who claim that the promises regarding Zion and Jerusalem only apply to physical Jews not the church. Such people insist that the OT promises must be taken literally and not spiritually.

Firstly, Jesus and the apostles very often interpreted OT prophecies and promises in spiritual ways that are not easily obvious from the OT quote. They frequently interpreted the OT in unexpected ways and applied it to Christ and the church.¹ Thus Joel's outpouring is a spiritual event on the church at Pentecost; the land of promise is heavenly (Heb 11:8-16); Isaiah's stone of stumbling is Christ.²

Secondly, literal interpretations of the OT often end up in nonsense that cannot be applied today; such as those that apply to a physical temple or a materialistic priesthood that is no longer in existence.

Thirdly, if you insist that promises regarding Zion or Jerusalem (such as Ps 110:2) must be taken literally, then it would mean that for centuries God's source of blessing would be the sinful nations that occupied Israel, such as Jebusites, Greeks, Romans, Persians, Muslims, Ottomans and British. Jerusalem was only occupied by Israelites for less than 500 years.³

Finally, Paul directly applies the promises about Jerusalem and Zion to the church:

¹ For example Zech 12:10 in Jn 19:37; Zech 13:7 in Matt 26:31; Gen 17:5 in Rm 4:17.

² Isa 8:14, 'He will be as a sanctuary, But a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, as a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem'. Cf. 1 Pt 2:7-8.

³ Between the conquest of Jerusalem by David sometime after 1000 BC and the Babylonian exile in 586 BC. The returning Jews after the exile only lived there under the suzerainty of Medo-Persians.

You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven. Heb 12:22-23

Note also:

And it shall come to pass *that* whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the remnant whom the LORD calls. Joel 2:32

Paul applies this to the church in Gentile Rome (Jew and Gentile).

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For 'whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved'. Rm 10:12-13

In fact, Paul distinguishes between physical Jerusalem, which is in bondage, and heavenly Jerusalem, which is the elect of all nations (the church; Gal 4:25-31).

Thus the salvation that is in Mt Zion and Jerusalem is now in the church [see later].

Therefore, the apostles constantly apply titles formerly given to Israel to the church, such as the temple of God, the flock of God, the priesthood, the holy nation, sonship etc. (1 Cor 3:16; 1 Pt 2:9 etc.).

So, having dealt with that matter, we can now apply both OT and NT texts to the issue before us – the power of God expressed through the church. This needs wisdom.

The starting point

And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Eph 1:22-23

As with all things, the starting point and centre of our exposition is Christ.

The power and authority are in Christ and not in the church; the church is only involved through spiritual union with Christ, being his body on earth. It is Christ that exercises power, by right of his sovereignty and governorship, through the church as he pleases.

The church has no authority of itself, only as it is in Christ, who is all authority. Thus the idea that certain men have innate power and authority by virtue of their ministry is blasphemy. The power does not reside in men at all.

Yet God gives men delegated authority for ministry; that is, certain jobs to serve the church. Thus an apostle is sent by Christ as his ambassador to new areas where a church can be established. Elders are under-shepherds under Christ to provide leadership and protection to the Lord's people in a local assembly.

Any expression of power in the church is an extension of the ministry of Christ.

This is most vividly illustrated by the words the ascended Christ used when rebuking Saul the persecutor of the church on the Damascus road.

Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord ... As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' Acts 9:1-4

Notice this: Saul has been persecuting the church but Christ accuses him of persecuting him. The church, as the body of Christ, carries the authority of Christ. Persecuting the body

is persecution of Christ. In a similar manner, when the body exercises ministry this is the outworking of Christ through his body.

The basis of power in the church is union with Christ.

In turn this also necessitates all the doctrines allied to this which must be in place. These include understanding identification with Christ (Rm 6). Understanding the true meaning of being baptised into Christ's body (1 Cor 12:13). Knowing how to put off the old man and put on the new (Eph 4:22-24). Being filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18). Abiding in Christ (Jn 15:4). Bearing the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23). To name but a few. [For information on such see my paper, 'A powerful testimony'.]

Only when a disciple is in the good of these doctrines related to sanctification can anyone hope to have any power at all.

Power does not come from claiming a certain promise in isolation; it comes from character that has had dealings with God and understands what sanctification is. Only by walking in the Spirit can we bear spiritual fruit. This does not arise from some mystical experience but from learning and suffering. It is the pruned vine branch that bears much fruit.

Illustrations of the power of God in the church

Having understood the need for spiritual development and character, we can now examine some aspects of power in the church from the example given us of Israel in the OT, with some application of apostolic teaching.

The throne of God

You *are* holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel. Ps 22:3

Praise is awaiting You, O God, in Zion; and to You the vow shall be performed. Ps 65:1

Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God will shine forth. Ps 50:2

Cry out and shout, O inhabitant of Zion, for great *is* the Holy One of Israel in your midst! Isa 12:6

This is the beginning of our consideration – enthroning God in praise; it all starts here.

Where is the praise of God now? It is in the church and nowhere else. Any suggestion that it is in modern Israel is facile. Israel is the home of Talmudic Judaism and this religion hates Christ and constantly blasphemes him and works against all God's purposes. There is no praise for God coming out of the hills of Israel today.

In fact the OT prophets, Jesus himself and his disciples and apostles explain that even during Israel's history there was rarely true praise emanating from Zion. Israel continually rebelled against the Lord and committed spiritual adultery; committing idolatry over and over again. Only the remnant of the faithful elect truly praised God in Judah as the prophets condemned both Israel and Judah for its harlotry.⁴

⁴ For details see my paper, 'The true position of Jews'.

True praise comes out of the body of Christ. Only those in Christ, those with eternal life, those in the New Covenant, can offer praise to God in Spirit and truth. Only those who have been cleansed by the blood of Christ can approach the Holiest in worship:

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and *having* a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Heb 10:19-22

This only applies to Christians and no one else. Only Christians enter by the new living way of Christ. Only Christians have Christ as their High Priest. Only Christians have a true heart in full assurance of faith. Only Christians have had hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience. Only Christians have boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus. Therefore, only Christians can approach the Holiest.

To worship God you must draw near to him. To draw near to him your need forgiveness of sins and a new heart. Only Christians have a way made for them to God by the blood of Jesus.

We have already explained that the writer to the Hebrews makes it plain that Zion and Jerusalem are now the church:

You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect. Heb 12:22-23

Paul also explains that there are two Jerusalem's; the earthly, fleshly, material nation that is in bondage and condemnation and the spiritual, heavenly, glorious city that is the home of the elect in Christ:

For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar -- for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children -- but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. ... Now we, brethren, as Isaac *was*, are children of promise. Gal 4:24-28

The material Jews are the persecutors of the church and are cast out by God:⁵

As he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him *who was born* according to the Spirit, even so *it is* now. Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? 'Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman'. Gal 4:29-30

We can table this as follows:

Material, physical Israel and Jerusalem	The church
Physical Mt Sinai	Heaven
Old covenant	New Covenant
Bondage	Freedom
According to the flesh	According to the Spirit
Symbolised by Hagar	The real Jerusalem above
Children of bondage	The heirs of Isaac, the children of promise in Christ
Persecutors of the true church	The people of God who are persecuted by Jews
Cast out by God	Heirs with Christ the Son

⁵ For more information on this matter see my papers, 'The true position of Jews'; 'The Veil of Moses' and others.

So, as already stated and according to the apostles, Zion is now the church. The chosen generation is the church. The people of God is the church. The holy nation of royal priests is the church:

You *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light; who once *were* not a people but *are* now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. 1 Pt 2:9-10

What the church needs to do is to understand how to fulfil her vow; how to worship God in Christ. How to reverence and honour God in Spirit and truth. What passes for worship in so many modern churches is a charade and a shame; it is selfish emotional indulgence. The church needs to learn true worship if it is ever to know God's power. Let me give you a clue – it is about submission above everything else.

When God is truly worshipped in humility and fear in a local church, he is enthroned. Where he is enthroned his authority is seen. Where his authority is seen, people know God's power.

The rod of strength ruling over enemies

The LORD shall send the rod of your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of your enemies! Your people *shall be* volunteers in the day of your power. Ps 110:2-3

This has nothing to do with materialism whatsoever, or actually ruling over nations. Our warfare is not physical but spiritual; our enemies are not earthly but demonic (Eph 6:12).

'Rod' can mean: rod, staff, branch, shaft or even tribe. Combined with 'strength', some translations give us 'mighty sceptre', but 'rod' does not mean sceptre.

God has used men with rods many times.

God gave Moses power to use his rod (staff) to demonstrate his authority from God to the Egyptian court (Ex 4:2ff). Moses used the rod as the expression of divine authority to initiate the plagues (Ex 7:17, 8:5, 8:16, 9:23, 10:13). The rod was used in dividing the Red Sea (Ex 14:16). Moses later used this rod to split the rock to gain water (Ex 17:5-6).

Aaron's rod swallowed up the serpents (Ex 7:12). As proof of his divine authority Aaron's rod budded and bore almonds (Num 17:8).

The rod of the man of God was simply a focal point for the expression of God's miraculous power to achieve something. It was like a lightning conductor for divine power from heaven to earth.

So, this rod will be a means of divine authority being expressed in the church.

It is also a symbol of the strength of the church. What is the church's strength? It is Christ himself. So this rod is a symbol of the authority of Christ.

Now in NT times we are not talking about a material rod but something that is the symbol and focal point of the activity of God through Christ.

What does this rod do? It is a symbol involved in ruling over enemies. More than that, it is ruling in the midst of enemies. Moreover, the people of God are volunteers in this ruling over enemies in the day of God's power. Willing people in the church become expressions of the power of God ruling in the midst of God's enemies.

The apostles apply this when they call upon Christians to resist the devil.

Nor give place to the devil. Eph 4:27

Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ... Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Eph 6:11, 13

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Jm 4:7

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. 1 Pt 5:8-9

The promise in Psalms has to do with the power of God being expressed in disciples that resist the devil, even when surrounded by him and his hordes. Thus some churches were said to be in the devil's area of control:

I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne *is*. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas *was* My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. Rev 2:13

Thus Christians must rule in the midst of their enemies. David had comfort for people in this situation:

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You *are* with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Ps 23:4-5

Again we have a mention of a rod in connection with enemy action. The rod is the authority of God. Here it is the figure of the rod of God as a shepherd leading his people and defending them like sheep.

The rod of strength is the authority of God in the church giving it power to rule in the midst of her enemies; just like Moses ruled with power in the midst of Egypt, the mightiest civilisation in the then world.

So, standing against the powers of the devil is possible with the rod of God's strength. The church is called to stand, not collapse in the face of opposition.

When faced with enemy action the church must rule, must have dominion, over her enemies by using the rod of God's power, which becomes the church's power to rule.

Now this rule is expressed in many different ways. In some cases it allows for believers to flee unexpectedly, such as Paul escaping in a basket over a wall. In other cases it enables saints to suffer with joy, such as Paul in the Philippian prison singing psalms. In other cases it enables a testimony of martyrdom, such as James being the first apostle to be killed in persecution. In some cases it is deliverance from prison miraculously, such as Peter being released by an angel. In other cases it is the destruction of the enemies, such as Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea.

What is important is to know what God requires of us and to trust him for his power to be expressed in his way. On some occasions Paul fled from persecution, but on other occasions he walked straight into it knowing beforehand that he would be chained up.

The source of divine knowledge

Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths'. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. Isa 2:3 and Mic 4:2

- The mountain of the Lord is the kingdom of God.
- The House of God is the dwelling place of God.
- The ways and paths of God are the practical direction of God's will for man in his walk on earth.
- The law of God is the expression of God's mind in statutes for human righteousness.
- The word of the Lord is God's Fatherly heart expressed in written words containing: instruction (doctrine, teaching, knowledge), exhortation, encouragement, admonition, rebuke, foretelling, and comfort.
- Zion, Jacob and Jerusalem represent the elect of God, the church. Mount Zion represents the general kingdom of God. Jerusalem equals the more specific place where God dwells in the centre. Jacob speaks of election and choosing.

All these things are what men (deep down) search for in this life, but rarely find. The amazing thing is that today they are all found in the church.

Knowledge is power and the power of God is seen in those who know God; 'the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits' (Dan 11:32).

God's mountain is above the normal level of the earth; his kingdom is over all. This kingdom is the church, the house of the God of Jacob. Jacob represents the elect people who have had dealings with God and have been changed as a result and made into a blessing.

It is these people that know God who know God's ways and his paths. Therefore, it is out of Zion, out of the church, that knowledge of God is spread.

Warning: the church is the centre of divine knowledge and when that is expressed in wisdom for life people seek after it ('Many people shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD'). When the church ignores this and becomes a centre for other things (emotionalism, mysticism, experiences, a social centre etc.) then the power is lost; the testimony is lost and people stop coming. This is what is happening today as church numbers are declining rapidly because the modern church has largely abandoned God's word and centred upon the aforementioned items.

What is it that the church knows? According to our text it is chiefly these things which are all fundamental to expressions of God's power:

The ways of God

He will teach us His ways.

The ways of God are about character. It is centred in knowing the attributes of God – what God is like.

The great saints of God know his ways; they know God. Note the difference between the children of Israel and Moses:

He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel. Ps 103:7

The Israelites only saw God's acts of power; they did not understand God's character or purpose and consequently could not do his will. They died in the wilderness in rebellion.

For forty years I was grieved with *that* generation, and said, 'It *is* a people who go astray in their hearts, and they do not know My ways.' So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.' Ps 95:10-11

This should be a very severe warning to all churchgoers. Those Israelites had seen God's mighty deliverance from Egypt; something that scared the Canaanite nations for centuries. They had seen God's mighty provision of help and food. They had the benefit of having God's law. They had the privilege of having one of the greatest ever saints of God as a prophet and leader (Moses). They could meet with God via a priesthood and a worship system; something no other nation had. And yet that generation was all lost except Joshua and Caleb. No wonder Hebrews warns us:

Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard *it*. Heb 4:1-2

It is possible to be fully involved in a church, having expressed a confession of the Gospel, and having a good standing with all for many years – only for it all to be useless and without faith and the person goes to hell. I have seen this with my own eyes many times. Sometimes even great leaders, who had a good testimony, eventually fell away, denied Christ and led a worldly life.

Thus the heart longing of true saints is to know God's ways:

Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You. Exod 33:13

Show me Your ways, O LORD. Ps 25:4

Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways. Isa 2:3

Moses' desire was to know God's ways; and as a result of that he did great acts of power.

The paths of God

We shall walk in His paths.

Note how these headings morph into one another!

The paths of God refer to knowing the will of God; it is knowing the direction that God is going in and following him. Those who know God's paths are those who are being led by God:

Teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me. Ps 25:4-5

Life is a constant choice of going one way or another. Those who know God's paths will go the right way.

The law of God

Out of Zion shall go forth the law.

The law of God is the expression of God's mind laid down in written words inspired by him to teach men his will for moral action. God's moral law is never rescinded.⁶

God's law is guidance and instruction for human behaviour. In the OT after Sinai this was an external code of statutes closely connected to the Tabernacle and sacrificial system. This was the realm of shadows. Under the New Covenant, when the Mosaic Law has been cancelled (Heb 8:13), the moral law of God is internalised in the new man and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be obeyed implicitly.

Obeying God's law does not restrict a person (as claimed by antinomians) but empowers him to do God's will intelligently. Those who understand God's law have power; and this law is only known in the church.

The word of God

And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

The church is a vessel; it is the body of Christ and Christ is God's appointed King of the Universe. The church is thus delegated to serve the king.

The purpose of the church on earth at this time is thus to be a testimony to the glory of God. It fulfils this purpose by knowing the truth, which sets people free to do God's will intelligently and purposely.

This is what is meant by the word of the Lord going out from Jerusalem. The church is the repository of the word, which is the very ideas of God put into rational language. Christ is the full expression of that word (which is why he is called both the word and the truth) but the church as the body of Christ is also the vessel called to represent the Head in heaven.

Where the testimony of God is there is power; indeed God's authority and power are necessary in order to have a good testimony.

The modern deception

Note that all these things are the opposite of what is considered to be power in the church today, especially Charismatic and Pentecostal churches. The problem is that power in these denominations is viewed as one of two things: either occultism⁷ or materialism⁸. Both these things are centred upon selfishness.

This is not an accident, or even the mistakes of men; it is a direct strategy of the devil to confuse and destroy the spiritual effectiveness of Christians. The more he can twist men's thinking to his demonic ideas (materialism, occultism, self-centredness, control) the more he can ruin lives and oppose God's will.

⁶ Only the Old Covenant, the Mosaic Law (intended as a temporary measure for Israel alone) is cancelled, The eternal moral law, known to the patriarchs, continues as the Law of Christ in the New Covenant.

⁷ Gaining power to change the world around you through supernatural means.

⁸ Gaining power to get what you want in the world; what satisfies you.

The end will be a time when Satan has universally convinced people, in the church and the world, to follow his ideas and not God's. This is the basis of spiritual warfare. The main problem in modern churches is that they are following a satanic agenda without realising it. This is deception.

The power of the Spirit to bring fruitfulness

Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar ... *and it was* a river that I could not cross; for the water was too deep, water in which one must swim, a river that could not be crossed. ...

Along the bank of the river, *were* very many trees on one side and the other.

Then he said to me: 'This water flows toward the eastern region, goes down into the valley, and enters the sea. *When it reaches the sea, its waters are healed.* And it shall be *that* every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes. It shall be *that* fishermen will stand by it from En Gedi to En Eglaim; they will be *places* for spreading their nets. Their fish will be of the same kinds as the fish of the Great Sea, exceedingly many.

But its swamps and marshes will not be healed; they will be given over to salt.

Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all *kinds of* trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine.' Ezek 47:1-12

First we need to make some observations:

- The temple is the church; the dwelling place of God today.
- The door of the temple is Christ.
- The water is the Holy Spirit.
- The temple facing east refers to the power of Christ's resurrection. Access is by new life.
- The water flowing eastwards refers to the Spirit's work pointing to Christ's resurrection.
- The water flowing south of the altar refers to grace and power flowing from the cross, Christ's atonement.
- The river is the Holy Spirit flowing out of the church. The river that can't be crossed because it is too deep is the irresistible power of the Spirit.
- The many trees along the bank is the fruit of the Spirit's work – new life.
- The sea refers to human populations. The healing by the river is the regenerating work of the Spirit in people.
- Every living thing that moves, wherever the river goes, will live - is conversion. Multitudes will be saved by the Spirit's work in history.
- Engedi ('fountain of the deep') is a place in the wilderness of Judah on the western shore of the Dead Sea (Jos 15:62). A fountain from the mountainside provides luxuriant fertility to plants such as vines. En-eglaim ('fountain of two calves'), only mentioned here, is a barren place near the Dead Sea.
- The many fish caught by fishermen between Engedi and En-Eglaim points to a supernatural work of fruitfulness in the saving of men (fish being caught in the barren

Dead Sea). Whether a barren place (En-eglaim) or a fruitful place (Engedi), the Spirit's work will bring conversion.

- The swamps and marshes given over to salt is the doctrine of reprobation. Those not called by God will not be saved but will be condemned.
- The trees along the banks of the river, whose leaves will not wither and their fruit will not fail, refers to the fruitfulness of the Spirit's work in believers.

This is a very important symbolic piece of Scripture and one that prefigures the time under the New Covenant and the outpouring of the Spirit.

These observations of what this symbolises, even in bullet points, are sufficient for you to understand the power of the Spirit working from and through the church (temple) without further exposition. [However, a book could be written on this (some have done so) and I may write a paper on this eventually to gather up various notes.]

The salvation of the elect

For out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant, and those who escape from Mount Zion. 2 Kg 19:31

For out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant, and those who escape from Mount Zion. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. Isa 37:32

Salvation is in the church.

This salvation is not in an institution that calls itself 'church' but salvation is in Christ who is the Head of the body. Churches that claim that only they can dispense salvation from their authoritative offices and human institutions are false. Such are cults.

Since Christ is salvation, then salvation is only in those who are united with Christ. The Bible calls these 'the elect', and 'the body of Christ'. The church is the body of Christ, the actual members of Christ's body.⁹ The church is not an organisation or a building; it is the people of God; God's holy nation.¹⁰

All God's power and authority is centred in the Son of his love.¹¹ There is no power anywhere else in the whole universe. Anything that has power has only derived it from Christ in a delegated, temporary form, whether men, the laws of nature or angels. Thus even the power that holds atoms together comes from Christ.¹²

Therefore, any power in the church is in Christ and nowhere else.

However, the Lord delegates power to his people according to his wisdom and gifting. Thus elders have the power to govern the people in the local church as a father leads his family.

But the greatest power that God gives his people is the message of the Gospel. This is not just a message, it is a message with power.

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes. Rm 1:16

⁹ Eph 1:22-23, 'And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all'. Col 1:18, 'He is the head of the body, the church'.

¹⁰ 1 Pt 2:9, 'But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people'.

¹¹ Matt 28:18, 'And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore ..."'

¹² Col 1:18, 'He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.' Consist = to hold together, to adhere.

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. 1 Cor 1:18

My speech and my preaching *were* not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. 1 Cor 2:4-5

I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved. 1 Cor 15:1-2

Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance. 1 Thess 1:5

The word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Heb 4:12

'*Is* not My word like a fire?' says the LORD, 'And like a hammer *that* breaks the rock in pieces?' Jer 23:29

By speaking the words of the truth of God's Gospel, in the power of the Spirit, an ordinary member of the church can change a sinner's life and bring eternal life and everlasting hope. True, the sinner believes (as God gives faith) but that faith comes from the preached word: 'faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God' (Rm 10:17).

So, the source of power for the salvation of men, though residing in Christ, is mediated by the church, the people of God.

The church is a place of help and strength

May He send you help from the sanctuary, and strengthen you out of Zion. Ps 20:2

All the resources of God for his people on earth are centred in the church. It is true that God gives grace through other means, such as private prayer or private faith, but the pre-eminent means of grace are found in the church. It is the church that is the place of comfort and strength for the saints. The strength that God gives is not an external form of power but glorious authority in the new nature.

That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man. Eph 3:16

This doctrine is mentioned hundreds of times in the NT; I will give just a few examples.

Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. 1 Cor 14:26

The church is the place where we are edified, or built up.

Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing. 1 Thess 5:11

The church is the place of comfort.

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. 1 Thess 5:14

The church is the place where the weak are upheld.

Strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be *dislocated*, but rather be healed. Heb 12:12-13

The church is the place where folk are strengthened and healed. ['Your' is plural; the writer is talking to the church not an individual.]

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. Gal 6:2

The church is the place where our burdens are shared.

***Be* hospitable to one another. 1 Pt 4:9**

The church is the place where we share food and feed one another.

Distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Rm 12:13

The church is the place where we meet each other's practical needs.

Love one another. 2 Jn 1:5

The church is the place of brotherly love.

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 1 Pt 4:10

The church is the place where our gifts and talents are used for the good of each other.

We could literally continue in this vein for page after page, but the point has been made. The church is a place of help and strength

The church is the only place of blessing

The LORD bless you out of Zion. Ps 128:5

The LORD who made heaven and earth bless you from Zion! Ps 134:3

There is no blessing outside the church – none at all.

Why? Because all God's blessing is placed on Christ and there is only blessing where Christ is. Christ is in the church, which is his body.

In the world there is no divine blessing. Now people may have comforts and great wealth and very advantaged lives; but this will all pass in a moment and their lives on earth are as a vapour that dissipates.¹³ Then they will face eternal damnation for not obeying God. This is not a blessed life.

Blessing is not only in Christ but also in his people, who obtain blessing by being placed in Christ.

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ. Eph 1:3

So every individual believer is blessed in Christ.

Those who *are* of faith are blessed. Gal 3:9

¹³ Ps 39:5, 'certainly every man at his best state is but vapour'. Jm 4:14, 'For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away'.

Therefore, when you gather believers together in the local church there is great blessing indeed. There is no blessing anywhere else.

Blessing is where the life of God is. Where is the life of God? It is in the church; the body of Christ. Blessing is in the light. Where is the light? The light is in Christ, and in the body of Christ, the church.

In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. Jn 1:4-5

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. Matt 5:14-16

As a result of the blessing we have received by being in Christ, we can bless one another:

Finally, all *of you be* of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, *be* tender-hearted, *be* courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. 1 Pt 3:8-9

The church is the only place of blessing.

Conclusion

The church is full of glory because it is the body of Christ.¹⁴ It is the place of salvation, holiness, life, light, blessing, fruitfulness, knowledge, power and many other things.

God's power is in the church in a personal way. His power is seen in the universe in a general, obscure way through creation, upholding all things, and by supervising human history according to his predestinating providence. However, in the church God's power is known personally through Christ.

There is no other place in the universe where such divine power is known in this way. Individual believers are even called to enter into the holy presence of God, the very throne room of God.¹⁵ No one else has access to God, the source of all power.

This means that saints need to wake up to their privileged position.

In general today there are two extremes. On the one hand there are multiple claims of Charismatic power in the church; but these claims are based on materialism, emotionalism, mysticism and the occult. All of these can be dismissed as unbiblical and fleshly. These are not divine power.

On the other hand is the genuine church. However, this church has been bowed down in recent decades by the general apostasy in the churches and the fight for faith in the world. Rarely does a true church seem to manifest any power at all; in fact many evangelical churches are struggling to survive. Congregations are dwindling and leaders are quitting. Faithful members of many true churches number a handful of old women plus a few others.

¹⁴ Col 1:27, 'To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory'. Eph 1:18, 'that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints'.

¹⁵ Heb 4:16, 'Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need'.

But this should not be so. The church is strong. It is the place where God dwells in Christ. It is the home of the Holy Spirit. The church is a place of power.

It is time that the true church woke up and made itself strong in Christ and began to aggressively preach the true Gospel and witness to the Lord. This does not need Charismatic nonsense; it just needs faithful workers who will proclaim the truth of the salvation in Jesus.

God wake the church up to glorify him.

God raise up willing workers who know the power of God.

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