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THE POWER OF GOD

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"Lo, these are parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him? but the thunder of his power who can understand?" Job 26:14.

Job gives a few illustrations of the power of God, and then says that these are only parts of His ways: and notwithstanding His manifest greatness there is but little heard of Him. In Job's day men gave little attention to God; He was not in their thoughts and speech. And it is much the same today, for human nature never changes of itself. Man is ever the same proud, hateful, rebellious creature, apart from the inwrought grace of God. There is not much heard about God today, even in the average pulpit. And in most social gatherings the very name of God is taboo. Man is the theme of the popular discourses of the day; it is human virtues that are praised and human achievements that are celebrated. God is in His world provisionally, but the world knows Him not.

God's power takes two directions and has two objectives: salvation and judgment. God's power in salvation is gracious; His power in judgment is righteous. God's power in salvation is the expression of His love; His power in judgment is the expression of His holy wrath. And God's power in grace is equal to His power in wrath, for *"There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy,"* James 4:12. If God is unable to save (convert) "the vessels of mercy," He might also be unable to judge (punish) the "vessels of wrath." Those who deny irresistible grace cannot logically or consistently ask God to save (convert) sinners; they can only ask Him to try to convert them, or to spare sinners who convert themselves. They cannot ask Him to bring sinners to the Savior; they can only ask Him to try to draw them, or

deliver from punishment those who, of themselves, come to the Savior.

The popular view of God's power in grace is given by one writer after this fashion: "The banners of God's army halt outside the little fortress of our hearts inviting us to surrender; His mighty love and grace and power wait for our decision." This statement ignores the truth of the depravity of human nature, denies the need of any inward work of grace, and overlooks the truth of the power of the Holy Spirit. It is inconsistent in talking about the "little fortress of our hearts" and at the same time talking about "His mighty love and grace and power." To the same effect are the words of another popular preacher: "We are bidden to make a choice. No man can choose for us. God Almighty cannot choose for you and me. I can put God who made me, and who gives me the breath I breathe, at arm's length and say, "I will not; or I can turn to Him, through the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, and receive the gift of His salvation." What a strange medley of truth and error! We are bidden to choose and we ought to choose Christ as our Lord and Savior, but because of inherent depravity nobody makes such a choice apart from the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit in conviction and conversion. It is true that the sinner resists God until his resistance is overcome by the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit; an operation that makes the sinner willing to take Christ as Savior and Lord; an operation that imparts to the sinner a new mind and a new heart. As another has said: "It is simply preposterous to speak of God Almighty, and with the same breath to say, "I can put God at arm's length." But still another writer takes the prize for his description of a helpless God: "Omnipotence itself is powerless in the presence of rebellion. Even a child

can raise its hand and shake its tiny fist in the face of God Almighty, and God Almighty can do nothing." *"The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will,"* Proverbs 21:1. But the foregoing statement makes Him helpless in the face of a child.

The power of God is a truth that ought to give peace and joy to the heart of the believer, and strike terror in the heart of the unbeliever. Whether Savior or Judge, He is the Almighty. Both salvation and judgment call for a mighty God.

THE NATURE OF GOD'S POWER

1. God's power is absolute. There is nothing impossible with Him that is an object of power. He is able to do more than He does. The exercise of His power is limited only by His desire. *"And what his soul desireth, even that he doeth,"* Job 23:13. John the Baptist was preaching and said, *"Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham,"* Matthew 3:9. He could have kept Satan out of the garden and thereby spared our parents the temptation which resulted in the terrible ruin of the race, but He did not so desire it. Paul said that He *"is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think,"* Ephesians 3:20. *"But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible,"* Matthew 19:26.

2. God's power is original and essential. The power of man is a derived power, but power belongs inherently to God. The power of human government lies in their armies and natural resources of the country. It is God's nature to be Almighty. His power is not derivative, but creative and original. He gives

power to His creatures, but derives none from them.

3. God's power is the life and activity of all His other attributes. All other attributes would be worthless without His power. Without power His mercy would be feeble pity; His justice would be a slighted scarecrow; His promises would be but empty sound; and His love would be as helpless as was the love of Darius for Daniel. And vain would be all His eternal counsels if power did not step in to execute them.

THE MANIFESTATIONS OF GOD'S POWER

Whatever qualities or characteristics in the Divine nature will sooner or later be manifested or exercised, for there are no idle dispositions in God. His power has been marvelously exemplified in the past as it will be in the future.

1. Divine power appears in creation. "Ah Lord God! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee," Jeremiah 32:17. At God's word nothing began to be something. He spake and it was done. He willed and it came to pass. "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created," Revelation 4:11. The word for create means to make out of nothing. "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear," Hebrews 11:3. "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him," Colossians 1:16. And yet all this work of creation did not make Him tired, for He is the Almighty. "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?" Isaiah 40:28.

2. God's power is seen in the sustentation of all creation. "Upholding all things by the word of his power," Hebrews 1:3. "And he is before all things, and by him all things consist," (are held together) Colossians 1:17. "For in him we live, and move, and have our being," Acts 17:28. He "gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons," Acts 14:17. We are to look to Him. "Give us this day

our daily bread," Matthew 6:11. But somebody says that all things happen according to natural laws. But God created the law of nature and can use it or work beyond it, and without it. His hands are not tied with any rope of nature.

3. The power of God may be seen in human redemption.

(a) In the birth of the Redeemer. "And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God," Luke 1:35. What mighty power it took to bring a clean thing out of an unclean! But the Holy Spirit was equal to the task of the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity, who became God with us; yea, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh," I Timothy 3:16.

(b) In the miracles of Christ, they were all manifestations of Divine power. The blind see. "When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing," John 9:6, 7. The lame leaped. "And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them: Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel," Matthew 15:30, 31. The dead lived. "Then said Jesus unto them plainly. Lazarus is dead. And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go," John 11:14, 43, 44. All because he willed it so.

(c) Here is the greatest of all miracles; the death of Christ, the most stupendous and amazing act of power ever exercised: the power to die. "When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost," John

19:30. Our minds are staggered at this thought: the power to die! Death among men is the very emblem of helplessness. The lives of men are taken from them in the ordeal of death, but Christ had power to lay down His life. "No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again," John 10:18. The Lord Jesus Christ was the actor in the drama of the ages, "now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself," Hebrews 9:26. Let nobody think of Him as the helpless victim of human hate. In His death He was performing the task assigned Him by the Father, as He said, "This commandment have I received of my Father," John 10:18.

(d) In the resurrection of Christ. Jesus said, "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again," John 10:18. He triumphed over death, men, and demons. He who is life could not be holden of death. "For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption," Psalm 16:10. "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption," Acts 2:27.

(e) In His ascension. Our Savior had the power to overcome the law of gravitation and ascend bodily to the Father. "And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven," Luke 24:50, 51. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

4. Almighty power is manifested in the regeneration of sinners. In regeneration men have new hearts and new desires created in them; new principles imparted to them; they are turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, being made willing in the day of God's power. When we consider the natural blindness and opposition of the sinner, and the weakness of the human agent (the preacher), and the means used (the foolishness of preaching), the work of conversion appears to be the effect of the power of God. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us," II Corinthians 4:7. "And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power," Ephesians 1:19.

5. The final perseverance of every believer is proof of the power of God. *"He is able also to save them to the uttermost,"* Hebrews 7:25. *"Who are kept by the power of God,"* I Peter 1:5. *"And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."* John 10:28. *"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith,"* I John 5:4.

6. Divine power will be displayed in the resurrection. What but the voice of the Almighty will be able to awake the dead? *"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first,"* I Thessalonians 4:16. What but Almighty power can change this ugly, vile, humiliated, diseased body into a glorious, beautiful, and deathless body? *"The Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body,"* Philippians 3:21. What is it that can give us hope as we stand by the side of the open grave and see it swallow up the one so dear to our heart but the thought of an Almighty God who can and will raise the dead by the word of His power? *"Behold I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord,"* I Corinthians 15:51-58.

7. The power of God will be manifested in the day of judgment. In that day it will appear how pitifully weak man is, and how great is the power of God's anger. Think of the power necessary to put down the rebellion of innumerable men

and demons! But God will be equal to the task, *"when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth,"* Isaiah 2:21.

*"Great God, what do I see and hear?
The end of things created!
The judge of all men doth appear,
On clouds of glory seated:
The trumpet sounds; the graves restore
The dead which they contained before;
Prepare my soul to meet Him.*

*"The dead in Christ shall first arise
At the last trumpet's sounding--
Caught up to meet Him in the skies,
With joy their Lord surrounding:
No gloomy fears their soul's dismay,
His presence sheds eternal day
On those prepared to meet Him.*

"But sinners filled with guilty fears,

*Behold His wrath prevailing,
For they shall rise, and find their tears
And sighs are unavailing:
The day of grace is past and gone;
Trembling, they stand before the throne,
All unprepared to meet Him."*

"WHY BE A BAPTIST . . .

. . . There is much talk now-a-days about a community church. Why should not Baptists go in with all others and organize one church in every community? If it were left to us nothing would be more delightful. We like to agree and get along with other people. But it isn't left to us and to our consciences. The Master's plain command to the first church was 'to teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.'

Church membership is not left to your consciences or your whims or your reasonings; it is a matter of loyalty and obedience to Jesus Christ who bought us and saved us with His own precious blood. Conscience is not a standard of right or wrong for any man, for conscience is a creature of education and needs teaching. The conscience of the ignorant, or uninformed would say one church is right or none, and the conscience of the man who is taught would say another. So you see conscience cannot be a standard by which men are to regulate their church membership. A standard must be that to which all men con come, and which when submitted to will make all men do what the Lord, Himself, says do. That is why Jesus said, 'teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.' The Bible is the standard and men consciences never get right until they get right with the Bible and then they all agree.

The fundamental and distinguishing Baptist doctrine and the one underlying all other Baptist doctrines is this: 'The Bible, the Bible alone, is our only and all sufficient rule of faith and practice.' If you can't find it in the Bible it isn't Baptist doctrine; if it is Baptist doctrine you can find it in the Bible. That is the shibboleth of this message. Our authority for making this our distinguishing teaching is our marching orders, given us by the Lord Jesus, the Head and Founder of the First Baptist Church . . . "

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