

The Power of God

Introduction

Charnock begins his discourse on God's power by examining chapter 26 of the book of Job. This provides context for contemplation on God's power. Bildad, in chapter 25, has just laid down a heavy view of God's power against man's moral impurity and leaves God's power as a crushing force against human rebellion.

v1-4 – Job sarcastically responds to Bildad because Bildad did not provide an answer to Job's inquiry. Job was perplexed by his own suffering and Bildad simply told him he was a maggot.

v5-13 – Job, in further response, gives his own treatment of God's power in creation, preservation, and governance.

v14 – In verse 14 Job rightly recognizes that these incredible displays of power are “but the outskirts of his ways”, “a whisper”, and beyond our full comprehension.

It is important that we recognize God has manifest His power in visible ways. As much as we are only seeing the “outskirts of his ways” we must recognize that these outskirts have been given to us that we might know Him, fear Him, and love Him. At the same time, the very fact that He is infinitely capable of so much more than we can possibly imagine should fill us with awe, humility, and affection.

The Power of God

The Nature of God's Power

Can God do all things? (Q 13 Catechism for Young Children)

What are biblical words and phrases that we hear used to describe God's power? Strength, Power, "all things are possible", "is anything is too hard?", "nothing is too hard", "arm of the Lord", "inexhaustible", "Almighty", ...?

Eight Observations of the Nature of God's Power:

God's strength is not derived or measured by anything he has authority over. He contains within himself the ability and strength to act. He is not to be recognized as powerful based on how much he rules over.

"I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God;" - Isaiah 45:5

"The power of God is not to be understood of his authority and dominion, but his strength to act." – Stephen Charnock"

God's power can be considered from a couple different vantage points. Namely, as John Frame states it, "God can do anything he pleases" (Job 23:13) and "Nothing is too hard for God". Charnock refers to these as "Ordinate" and "Absolute". We must keep in mind that these are not two different powers. These are two different ideas that describe God's power.

God can do anything he pleases (Ordinate):

"But he is unchangeable, and who can turn him back? What he desires, that he does." - Job 23:13

"For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?" - Isaiah 14:27

Nothing is too hard for God (Absolute):

*"I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted."
- Job 42:2*

The Power of God

“Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” - Mark 14:36

He is able to act. Given God’s power is ordinate and absolute it paints the whole picture which we previously considered. God can do all his holy will. He is able to act. His power is the strength that makes it possible to bring about what He wills. We are not speaking in terms of the end result of His power. We are speaking of the fact that he is inherently able to act from His power to bring something about. This may sound subtle from our previous point. This emphasizes his inherent capability as made certain by His infinite power. He is able.

“I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’” - Isaiah 46:9-10

God’s power is directed by other attributes. It is important to consider God’s power in relationship to His other attributes. When we consider knowledge, wisdom, will, and power we should understand their relationships to one another.

“The knowledge of God regards a thing as possible, and as it may be done; the wisdom of God regards a thing as fit and convenient to be done; the will of God resolves that it shall be done; the power of God is the application of his will to effect what it hath resolved.” – Stephen Charnock

Given that God’s power is not separate from God or His other attributes. All of His attributes are conceptions of Him. It shouldn’t surprise us that God’s power is directed by His knowledge, wisdom, and will.

“In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,” - Ephesians 1:11

God’s power provides “activity to all the other perfections of his nature”. In the same way that God’s knowledge, wisdom, and will direct His power. Attributes such as wrath, mercy, and grace find their effectiveness by God’s power. Even God’s knowledge, wisdom, and will would be ineffective without His power.

The Power of God

“How vain would be his eternal counsels, if power did not step in to execute them? His mercy would be a feeble pity, if he were destitute of power to relieve; and his justice a slighted scare-crow, without power to punish; his promises an empty sound, without power to accomplish them.” – Stephen Charnock

God’s power is not distinct from Him. His power is not an ingredient that contributes to His whole. His power is a conception that aids us in understanding His nature. He is power. He is entirely and fully power.

“Jesus said to him, ‘You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.’” - Matthew 26:64

“This power is originally and essentially in the nature of God, and not distinct from his essence. It is originally and essentially in God.” – Stephen Charnock

“... his whole nature should be defined as power; for power is not ultimately something abstract, but a concrete divine person. God’s power is everything that he is; all his attributes manifest his power.” – John Frame

God’s power is infinite as He is infinite

“Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.” - Psalms 90:2

God’s power is infinite in its productive capability. God can produce infinite objects beyond what he has already created.

God’s power is infinite in its ability to fashion increasing excellence. If God is able to make more excellent things from a rock that exists (Matt 3:9). He can certainly make more perfect things without limit.

“for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.” - Matthew 3:9

The Power of God

God's power is infinite in its endurance. Simply put, God's power has no end. There is nothing that can exhaust His power. His power is suitable to amply and endlessly sustain all He wills without the slightest dip in its potency.

"Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary;" - Isaiah 40:28

It is impossible for God to do some things. This does not mean that God is weak and not able to express His power freely. This underscores a strength in God in that He is consistent with all His other attributes. As John Frame says, "God can do anything compatible with His attributes". Charnock provides a tidy list of some things that are not possible for God's power to accomplish.

"Some things are impossible in their own nature." – There are things that God has stated as true. He will not contradict these. Light cannot be dark. Death cannot be life.

"Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water?" - James 3:11

"Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God;" - 2 Corinthians 6:14-16

"Some things are impossible to the nature and being of God." – God cannot cease to exist. He cannot grow stronger. He cannot walk somewhere. He cannot be anything that diminishes his nature. Even incarnate he was fully God AND man. He was not diminished in his Godhead.

"To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." - 1 Timothy 1:17

"Some things are impossible to the glorious perfections of God." – God does not violate his holiness and goodness. He is not a tempter. He cannot lie.

The Power of God

"Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one." - James 1:13

"So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us." - Hebrews 6:17-18

"if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself." - 2 Timothy 2:13

"Some things are impossible to be done, because of God's ordination. Some things are impossible, not in their own nature, but in regard of the determined will of God." – God was capable of destroying the world when man sinned. He would have been just in that response. By his own will and counsel He determined to bring about man's redemption. He will not violate that determined will.

"he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will," - Ephesians 1:5

God's Power in...

Creation

"Let there be" - Genesis 1

God's word begins with the testimony of His power. From nothing his power brings about all that we can sense and more. All in the span of seven days. His power brings about creation from the wisdom, knowledge, and will of God. An observation that may elude us is that His power brings forth light before he creates the Sun to be the source of light. He sustains light by his word without a source other than Himself.

Preservation – maintaining orderliness of this world.

"While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and

The Power of God

winter, day and night, shall not cease." - Genesis 8:22

"Bless our God, O peoples; let the sound of his praise be heard, who has kept our soul among the living and has not let our feet slip." - Psalms 66:8-9

"Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps. He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth, who makes lightnings for the rain and brings forth the wind from his storehouses." - Psalms 135:6-7

"Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" - Matthew 6:26

"And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together." - Colossians 1:17

One thing that scripture is clear on is that God's power is not operating impersonally to sustain His creation. It is intentional and thoughtfully driven by His wisdom and will. So much so that it is a clear testimony of His faithfulness towards His creation and makes men guilty (Romans 1:20) of willful rebellion. As His children, our hearts are warmed as we consider the order of the world around us. We see God proactively operating to sustain it.

"For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse." - Romans 1:20

Governance

"The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will." - Proverbs 21:1

"The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples." - Psalms 33:10

We see in many places in scripture where God acts sovereignly to restrain the wickedness of men and the devil. In Genesis 20 we see God intervene with Abimelech in a dream so that he did not sin against the Lord with Sarah. We see

The Power of God

Satan restrained by God's command in Job 1. The testimony of scripture is that God's restraining and promoting power works to restrain evil and uphold righteousness.

Judgement

"Can your courage endure, or can your hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with you? I the Lord have spoken, and I will do it." - Ezekiel 22:14

God's power exerting judgement against sin is a sobering reality to consider. We have many examples to consider in regard to the power of his wrath. The flood made manifest by God's power causing the "fountains of the great deep [to] burst forth" and "the windows of the heavens [being] opened" to the point that "all flesh died" save those in the ark. The testimony of Sodom and Gomorrah as God rained down sulfur and fire. We have the testimony of God's judgement against the unrepentant and their entire being (body and soul) preserved by God's power in Hell to receive His just wrath for eternity.

Salvation, Sanctification, and Glorification

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." - Romans 1:16

"And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." - Philippians 1:6

"But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself." - Philippians 3:20-21

The call that goes out and raises us from death to life is the command of the gospel. The testimony of God's powerful working on behalf of His people. The gospel is the power of God that is effective towards our salvation. When the call of the gospel reaches the ears of His chosen people the Holy Spirit uses this to raise us from spiritual death to life. This gospel is our first foundation of faith and the continued strengthening of our faith. This continues until we are glorified. This all by the working of God's power in us.

The Power of God

Conclusion

We could camp out on God's power and just be enthralled by endless contemplations of what God is able to do. This would be to miss the point of scriptures testimony of God's power. We should see the infinite magnitude of God's power and His ability to act towards the ends that he has promised. This should fill our prayers with full confidence and humility. He is THE God who formed the universe, overcomes his foes, makes His people able to approach through the giving of Himself, and preserves His people until the end.

"Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen." - Ephesians 3:20-21