THE IMMEASURABLE GREATNESS OF GOD'S MAJESTY & POWER

Introduction

Over the past five weeks, I have sought to demonstrate from Scripture that the sovereign LORD of the universe is absolutely, wonderfully, and immeasurably Almighty. The reality of His essence, I argued, cannot be discovered by reason, science, or intuition. The only way we may know who God is (His attributes) and what He has done (His mighty acts) is through general revelation (creation), special revelation (the Word of God written), and, in these last days, through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (the Word of God incarnate). God's promise is, and remains, sure: Anyone who approaches the triune God with a humble and inquisitive mind bent on asking, seeking, and knocking (Mt. 7:7-8) will find Him – if they seek for Him with all of their heart (Jer. 29:13).

Introduction

Over time, true seekers will grow in their awe of God's mighty power and realize that He is able to accomplish everything which is in agreement with His character and His truth, that none of His plans can be thwarted, and that He is able to do all His holy will.

Having one's eyes opened to the reality of God's almightiness is the first step in coming to terms with our own sense of power. By His grace, He irresistibly pursues us (*The Hound of Heaven*), reveals Himself to us, regenerates our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit, justifies us, adopts us into His forever family, and begins to make us into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. Thus begins the process of sanctification whereby "we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God."

Introduction

One area of our lives that must be transformed by His grace is **our own** attribute of power. Having been made in His image (*imago Dei*) and given "dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (the *Cultural Mandate*), God gave us royal status and commanded us to be His vicegerents during our stay upon the earth and to exercise the powers we have been given by Him for His glory and for the good of all creation. The Fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, however, was a "catastrophic personality shock" (Carl F.H. Henry) and infected and affected our First Parents with sin. Therefore, their use of power, once holy and God-honoring, became corrupt and self-centered.



The Temptation & Fall

"So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked."

- Genesis 3:6-7

The Nature of Power

Through Adam's disobedience, we were made sinners (Rom. 5:19). Therefore, our sense and use of human power has been grossly **distorted**. This can be clearly seen in the diverse and extensive ways that we use the word *power*. The Oxford English Dictionary, for instance, carries 72 pages of definitions, usages, and quotations beginning from the Middle Ages. Consider the following phrases: the quest for power; the illusion of power; blind power; powers of imagination; political power; transition of power; power structure; power struggle; power mower; power tools; power of life and death; power-crazy; power-grab; power outage; power nap; power steering; power tie; and, power pack – to name just a few.

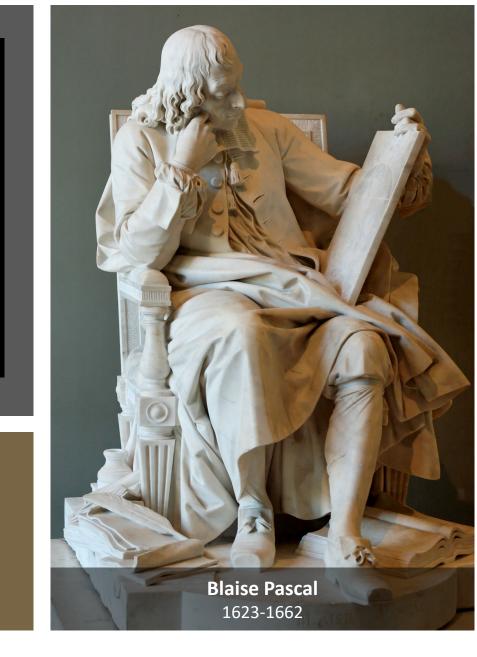


SpaceX

Power

On lift-off, the Falcon 9 put out just over 1.3 million pounds of thrust at sea level, rising to 1.5 million pounds of thrust as it climbed out of the Earth's atmosphere. This is equal to approximately eighteen 747 aircraft.

Blaise Pascal



"Power rules the world, not opinion; but it is opinion that exploits power" (§554).

How Do You Exercise Power?

We use the word *power* so often and in so many ways that we may not even be aware of **how we actually exercise power in our own lives.** It is probable that we are rarely conscious about our use of power (and we all have certain kinds of power) and how it impacts other people, institutions, or situations.

In his book, *Finishing* Well, the late Bob Buford (1939-2018), author and founder of the Halftime Institute, made the observation that "the greatest case of mistaken identity in modern society relates to **the four marks of public success: money, power, fame, and status.**" He further noted that "success should never be confused with wealth or power. Rather, success should be linked to excellence and fulfillment."

What Is Power?

- The Greek word for power is **dunamis** (cf. dynamite), *n.*, and means "power, might, strength, force."
- According to Kittel, "the term *dunamis* can be applied over the whole range of life." This includes physical and physiological powers, as well as spiritual and intellectual powers.
- The OED defines it as the "ability to act or affect something strongly; physical or mental strength; might; vigor, energy; effectiveness."
- Power can also be understood as control or authority over others; dominion; rule; command; capacity.
- Once again, how do you tend to use power in your own life?

Two Illustrations From the N.T.

- 1. Satan Tempts Jesus: "And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and said to him, 'To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours'" (Lk. 4:5-7).
- 2. Pilate's Claim to Authority: "Pilate said to him, 'You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?' Jesus answered him, 'You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin'" (Jn. 19:10-11).

The Root of Power

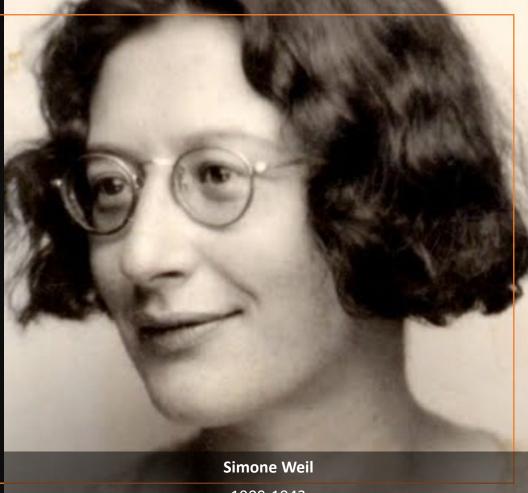
"What is it that makes a man with £10,000 a year anxious to get £20,000 a year?...It is Pride – the wish to be richer than some other rich man, and (still more) the wish for power. For, of course, power is what Pride really enjoys: there is nothing makes a man feel so superior to others as being able to move them about like toy soldiers....Pride is competitive by its very nature: that is why it goes on and on. If I am a proud man, then, as long as there is one man in the whole world more powerful, or richer, or cleverer than I, he is my rival and my enemy."



- C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

Enticement and Capture

"We are drawn towards a thing because we believe it is good. We end by being chained to it because it has become necessary."



1909-1943

A Few Manifestations of Power

- Elegance: "The more hands (people) one employs the more powerful one is. Elegance is a means of showing one's power" (Pascal, §95).
- Intelligence: "All the splendor of greatness lacks luster for those engaged in pursuits of the mind. The greatness of intellectual people is not visible to kings, rich men, captains, who are all great in a carnal sense...Great geniuses have their power, their splendor, their greatness, their victory and their luster, and do not need carnal greatness, which has no relevance for them. They are recognized not with the eyes but with the mind, and that is enough." (Pascal, §308).
- Position, status, title, or fame. How one likes to be perceived.

A Few Manifestations of Power

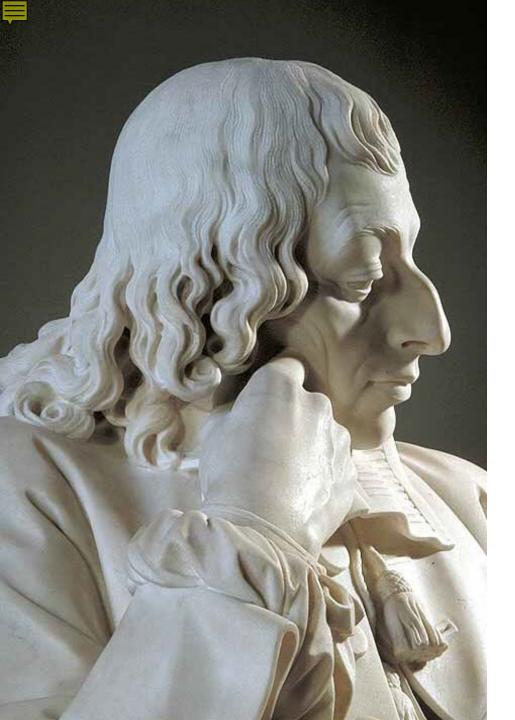
- **Control:** "Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; **not domineering over those in your charge**, but being examples to the flock" (I Pt. 5:2-3).
- "But Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt. 20:25-28; cf. Mk. 10:42-45).

C.S. Lewis on *The Illusion of Power*

"For all the time this illusion to which nature clings as her last treasure, this pretense that we have anything of our own or could for one hour retain by our own strength any goodness that God may pour into us, has kept us from being happy....We have been like bathers who want to keep their feet – or one foot – or one toe – on the bottom, when to lose that foothold would be to surrender themselves to a glorious tumble in the surf. The consequences of parting with our last claim to intrinsic freedom, power, or worth, are real freedom, power, and worth, really ours just because God gives them and because we know them to be (in another sense) not 'ours.'"

The Way From Below

- In their book, *The Way of the Dragon or the Way of the Lamb*, Jamin Goggin and Kyle Strobel write: "The way from below is power for the sake of being powerful, for the sake of control."
- Goggin and Strobel add: "Our feet are trained to find paths of selfachievement and self-glorification. We use our vocations to build significance. We use our relationships to get ahead. We spend our money and our time trying to gain more power."
- The doctrine of omnipotence "warns us against governing our lives by our own expectations of what is possible, leaving God out of account" (John Frame).



The Consequences of Seeking Personal Power

"The will itself will never bring satisfaction, even if it had power over everything it wanted, but we are satisfied the moment we give it up. Without it we can never be discontented, with it we can never be content."

- Blaise Pascal, Pensées, §362



"There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind: a man to whom "God gives wealth, possessions, and honor, so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them" (Eccl. 6:1-2).

An Alternative Path: The Way of the Lamb

- "And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (II Cor. 12:9-10).
- "Divine power is brilliantly displayed when human weakness is noticeably evident" (Simon Kistemaker).
- John Calvin: "God's strength is made perfect only when it shines out clearly enough to win the praise that is its due."

Power Through Weakness

- Weakness and limitation are the necessary presuppositions for the operation of divine power.
- Weakness is the pledge of the presence of the power of Christ abiding in Paul. In the power of Christ, he found the freedom from self and reliance on Christ. The power concealed in weakness is the power of the resurrection.

Simone Weil

"All that man vainly desires here below is perfectly realized in God."

Billy Graham

"God measures people by the small dimensions of humility and not by the bigness of their achievements or the size of their capabilities."

