

The Power of God

Ephesians 1:19-23

Introduction

Author Langdon Gilkey shares how he was struck by a revelation of human sinfulness during WW II in a Japanese prison camp in China. Before the war – he had been indoctrinated in the views of liberal theology. His father was the dean of Rockefeller Chapel at the liberal University of Chicago and Langdon had attended Harvard University. But – his observations of human nature during his 2 ½ years in an internment camp – opened his eyes to see a more biblical view of human sin.

One incident that struck him was an arrival of a large number of Red Cross parcels that contained canned goods, warm clothing, dried foods, other survival items. There were 1500 parcels delivered to the camp – and there were roughly 1500 people living at the Shantung compound. Previously a shipment arrived designated for the American citizens in the camp – who took their parcels – and shared some of the goods with others.

When everyone noticed the arrival of these parcels – they began discussing who they would go to. Non-Americans thought it seemed right that everyone get a parcel. But – some Americans responded that these were shipments from the American Red Cross – therefore - for American citizens.

The Japanese made the call - - - since there were 1550 parcels for a camp of 1450 people – 200 of whom were American - - - everyone gets a parcel – and the Americans get 1 ½ to divide up the extra hundred.

Gilkey said that seemed very satisfactory to most of the camp. But – before the distribution took place – a contingent of 7 Americans protested the plan – and insisted that the parcels belonged to the American citizens – they were the rightful owners and – they should each get 7 parcels to do with as they saw fit.

The result: the Japanese let the parcels sit for ten days – filled with foodstuffs / warm clothing – things people living on a bare subsistence diet were desperately in need of.

Those ten days – tensions grew – threatened to break apart the community that had developed there. Then finally a decision arrived from Tokyo: every internee would get one parcel – the extra 100 would be sent away to other camps. The Americans who demanded 7 parcels – now got one – instead of the 1 ½ they were originally going to receive!

For Gilkey – that was just one incident among many that exposed the fallacy of liberal humanism

i.e. - - - The liberal humanist wants to believe that man is basically good and moral / etc.

If you just show man what is the right thing to do – give him a little education – so he can see that such a course of action is right – then he will do what is right

Gilkey said – that's not what he saw in camp life

He saw – instead – That apart from grace – human nature is bent towards sin / enslaved to sin - -
- things like pride / greed / selfishness / immorality are the regular products of the human heart

Jeremiah 17:9 - 'The heart is deceitful above all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?'

Rom. 10:12 - 'There is none who does good, there is not even one.'

But the good news of the bible is that man can be changed / he can be transformed - but only thru the power of God in the gospel

The bible gives us a dark picture of human nature – but it also presents a gloriously bright reality in the gospel

MLJ: 'There is only one truly optimistic view of life, and that is the one which tells us that, though man is down in the depths of sin, the power of God can come and take hold of him and can raise him to the heights, and that it has done so in Jesus Christ our Lord.'

John Stott: 'If there are two powers which man cannot control, but which hold him in bondage, they are death and evil. Man is mortal; he cannot avoid death. Man is fallen; he cannot overcome evil. But God in Christ has conquered both, and therefore can rescue us from both.'

In this passage – Paul speaks to us about the power of God

The God who raised Jesus from the dead is now at work in the lives of the Ephesians for their salvation and sanctification / preservation

The regeneration of a sinner – into a new creature in Christ – is a display of the power of God

Paul wants them to come to see this great truth – so that it will bolster them in their faith

We come to the third of Paul's prayer requests

He has prayed that the Ephesians would grow in their knowledge of God
He has prayed that their eyes would be opened to see the riches of their inheritance – the glory of heaven

He now prays that they would come to recognize the great power of God at work in their life – for their salvation – and for their sanctification – for their preservation

I. Resurrection Power - vv. 19-20

Paul is praying for the Ephesians – he moves to this issue of the power of God at work in their lives

Power = δυναμις – dynamite

When man wants to blast thru rock – whether to make a tunnel / or make room for a structure - - - he reaches for something like dynamite – other explosives

When God wants to change a heart – He reaches for His δυναμις [His power] / His gospel

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

When the gospel falls upon a heart – that receives it – it is like a stick of dynamite – blasting away the old man

This is God's power to transform a sinner – to make Him a new creation

II Cor. 5:17 - 'Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.'

MLJ: 'A Christian is not merely a member of a church He is not merely a good man, he is not merely a man who has made a decision. A person can do all that and still not be a Christian. A Christian is one who has been created anew; and there is only one who can create, namely, God. It takes the power of God to make a Christian.'

When we think of human power – we might think of raw strength

Winner of the World's Strongest Man contest – Eddie Hall once dead lifted over 1100 pounds.

Samson once dead lifted the gates to a city

When Paul wants to talk about God's power here with the Ephesians – he points to the resurrection of Christ

i.e. – if someone thinks they are powerful

We might here Paul saying: 'Can you raise the dead?' - - - that is power

George Findlay: 'Look at Jesus where He was - the poor, tortured, wounded body, slain by our sins, lying cold and still in Joseph's grave; then lift up your

eyes and see Him where He is - enthroned in the worship and wonder of heaven! Measure by that distance, by the sweep and lift of that almighty arm, the strength of the forces engaged to your salvation, the might of the powers at work through the ages for the redemption of humanity.'

There is your power - - - the resurrection from the dead

This power is at work – is operational towards the believer

Paul is not simply pointing forward to our own resurrection – but to pointing to God's power at work in our lives now

This is a prayer for divine awareness of the power that is at work in us

What does this power do? [5 things]

I) This Power is involved in our salvation, sanctification and preservation -
Rom. 1:16

John Wesley: 'God's power is at work both in quickening our dead souls, and preserving them in spiritual life - by the very same almighty power whereby He raised Christ.'

v. 19 - - - Working - - - Paul uses the term ενεργειαν = work - - - we get our word energy from this

There is the energy of God at work in our lives

MLJ: 'A Christian is the result of the operation of God, nothing less, nothing else.'

Paul adds two more power words – 'strength of His might'

He wants us to see that God's power is involved in our salvation

The fact that you have left behind old patterns of sin – is evidence of God's power

If you have a desire to obey God / forsake sin – to read His Word – to pray – to fellowship with others – to worship God with other believers - - - If you care about others / you try to do unto others – you love God / hate sin - - - then praise God - - - because that is evidence that the power of God is at work in your life!

This power is at work in us – energizing our faith

Jesus prayed for this power with Peter – ‘I have prayed for you that your faith not fail’ [Luke 22:32]

How can he prevent Peter’s faith from failure?

The operation of God – the energy of God at work in the soul – it’s a done deal – nothing is too difficult for God

This power will keep us and bring us all the way to glory

Jude 24 - 'Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy.'

1) This Power is involved in our salvation, sanctification and preservation -
Rom. 1:16

2) This power will support us when we are weak / or low in faith - II Cor. 12:9

II Cor. 12:9 - 'My grace is sufficient for you for power [δυναμις] is perfected in weakness.'

Paul was weakened by this thorn in the flesh – he wanted it removed [whatever it was]

When the Christian feels like he is just about out of gas – nothing left in the tank

He hears the words: ‘My grace is sufficient for you for power is perfected in weakness.’

He finds God’s wind at his back propelling him forward in the faith

Alexander Maclaren: 'There are two methods of lightening a burden - one is to diminish the load, the other is to strengthen the shoulders that carry it. The latter is often the more blessed - and often the shape in which God answers our prayer.'

We want to say, ‘God – why don’t you use your power to remove this burden / fix this problem / crush this obstacle / etc.?’

God says, ‘No – my purpose is to make you stronger – as you rely upon my grace’ – power is perfected in weakness

1) This Power is involved in our salvation, sanctification and preservation -
Rom. 1:16

2) This power will support us when we are weak / or low in faith - II Cor. 12:9

3) This power is there to meet temptation - I Cor. 10:13

Satan cannot make you sin

There is no temptation that comes to you that is too great to bear

Why? / How? God won't allow it

Satan is a defeated foe

Thomas Brooks: 'He may tempt us, but without ourselves he cannot conquer us; he may entice us, but without ourselves he cannot hurt us. Our hearts carry the greatest stroke in every sin. Satan can never undo a man without himself; but a man may easily undo himself without Satan.' [Precious Remedies, p. 235]

One writer compared Satan to being like a mad dog on a chain – he can only do so much on that chain.

If a kid walks by a dog on a chain – and the dog is barking and lunging– as long as the kid keeps his distance [stays on the right path] – he is safe

But – suppose this kid gets the idea to taunt the dog – to come closer to him – he stumbles and falls and ends up getting bit - then it's the kid's fault

Now – we can choose to leave the safe path of obedience and fellowship with Christ and go near the mad dog – when sin bites us - - it is our own fault

We have the means of victory by virtue of our union with Christ

I John 4:4 - 'Greater is He who is within you than He who is in the world.'

1) This Power is involved in our salvation, sanctification and preservation - Rom. 1:16

2) This power will support us when we are weak / or low in faith - II Cor. 12:9

3) This power is there to meet temptation - I Cor. 10:13

4) This power will not allow the light of the church be put out - Matt. 16:18

If Satan had his way – the light of the church would have been extinguished long ago

When error and heresy darkened the institutional church [RCC] – God brought about the Reformation - - - and the light of the gospel flamed brightly once again

MLJ: 'You have but to read the history of the Church to see that the Christian Church would have lasted probably not more than a century were it dependent upon man. But these things do not depend upon man, they depend upon God Himself. He has planned it all before the foundation of the world, and therefore it is absolutely certain.'

God raised up men like William Tyndale / Martin Luther to translate the Bible into the language of the people – fueling the spiritual revival of the Reformation

Luther wanted no credit for the Reformation – He knew where the power lay

"I opposed indulgences and all papists, but never by force. I simply taught, preached, wrote God's Word: otherwise I did nothing. And then, while I slept or drank Wittenberg beer with my Philip of Amsdorf the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that never a prince or emperor did such damage to it. I did nothing: the Word did it all.'

The Word of God is mighty

When you open your Bible – you are entering into a power zone – there is power to change your life in these pages [there is δύναμις here!]

Heb. 4:12 - 'For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.'

- 1) This Power is involved in our salvation, sanctification and preservation - Rom. 1:16
- 2) This power will support us when we are weak / or low in faith - II Cor. 12:9
- 3) This power is there to meet temptation - I Cor. 10:13
- 4) This power will not allow the light of the church be put out - Matt. 16:18
- 5) This power of God guarantees our own resurrection - Rom. 8:11

Rom. 8:11

He has raised Jesus – He will raise us

Jesus said: ‘I am the resurrection and the life – He who believes in Me shall live even if He dies.’ [John 11:25]

Do you believe that? / Does God have that kind of power?

Richard Coekin: ‘Christ’s victorious resurrection guarantees our resurrection and our place in heaven is secured. We could say that God has practice resurrecting us in raising Jesus. He’s done it before so we know He can do it again.’

What kind of body will we have?

It will be like the body of Jesus - - - He is the firstfruits of the resurrection
We will be conformed to His image

Paul – as he has made reference to the resurrection of Christ - - - moves on to another grand topic

The exalted status and position of Christ

He was resurrected – and seated at the Father’s right hand in the heavenlies

Heaven is a real place – located in space and time – Jesus ascended bodily

Where this is leading is that our resurrection is certain because of Christ’s exalted nature / His dominion - - - He rules over all

II. Above all Powers - vv. 21-23

Christ’s power is shown by His exalted status – He is the One on the throne

His Name is above all names

Powers / dominions / authorities - - - this is a reference to Christ’s victory over Satan and the demonic beings

We see the same terms show up in Eph. 6:12 – referring to the Christian’s struggle

This is Paul’s way of saying – your struggles – ‘God’s got this’ – just look to Him

Jesus has been exalted – Satan and the demons are no match - - - so be strong in the Lord and the power of His might

We also find Christ's headship for the benefit of the church here

This is one of the great images Paul uses for the church

We are the body of Christ – He is the head

The church is in union with Christ – He is our head

If our body does not take orders from our head – that is paralysis

If we are separated from our head – then there is no life

As the body of Christ – we operate under His authority – He is our head

He tells us how to live / what to do / etc. [forgive / love / share with / teach / witness / etc.]

Paul presents a theology of victory and exaltation in reference to Christ

Conclusion

The Apostle Paul believed in the power of God

It transformed His life

II Tim. 2:8, 9 - 'Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned.'

He knew God's power was not something mere man could stop

In fact – the letter to the Ephesians was penned during Paul's first imprisonment

Paul was bound – but the power of God was flowing thru His pen – to the blessing and benefit of countless Christians down thru the centuries

That same power is now at work in our lives – propelling us forward in faith and obedience / sanctification - - - all the way to glorification and resurrection