

God's Power is With Us Now

Because the Bible is full of references to power and spiritual warfare, we must not be reluctant to talk about power. We recognize that God's power in Christ reigns now and forever. We praise God for the promise that Christ will come again. Daniel 7 provides us with an OT vision of the end times; however, these end times start with Christ's first coming and his reign now and his empowering of God's holy people.

1. Read Daniel 7:15-27. What does God hand "over to the saints (v. 27), the people of the Most high?" Is that power for us now or just at the end times (see below)?

2. Read Mark 9:1. The Kingdom of God, in our midst, comes with power. How did God's power come to the faithful in Mark? How does God's power come now? Comment on the kingdom, power and the Holy Spirit..

3. Read 1 Chronicles 29:11-12 and Psalms 68:34-35. We often think of power as evil. How might we be wrong? (see below)

"The Son of Man is a literalistic rendering in Daniel 7:13. Christ ... (is the) one who was to come in human likeness, and the one still to come in human likeness on the clouds of heaven. ... Thus the Christ event initiates the reign of God on earth that Dan 7 promises. ... the mystery of God's plan (Eph 3:1-12) John E. Goldingay in Daniel, WORD, 1989, p. 192.

"Power is good, not basically tainted, because it is an expression of divine being. ... Conceptions that start with power as a hindrance to a recipient's capacity to act have difficulty justifying power beyond the principle of the lesser evil." Stephen C. Mott, A Christian Perspective of Political Thought. Oxford, 1993, p. 15, 23ft21.

The Use of Power Challenging Systems

Jesus and Paul use their influence and power to resist institutions for the sake of the justice and the gospel. So, too, are we mandated to proclaim a gospel which includes fighting larger than human evil (Ephesians 6:12), (yet including the powers-that-be), "by putting on the full armor of God." (Eph 6:11) As we sit (Eph 2:6 KJV), walk (4:1, 17 KJV), so stand (6:11, 13, 14) firm with the breastplate of justice by exposing evil (5:11).

1. Read Mt 21:12-13, 23:13-33, Jn 5:10-11, 18:22-23, Mk 2:23-28, 3:4-6. Jesus uses of power to resist institutions (Pharisees, officials - police brutality, temple corruption, and even unjust laws. Compare this resistance with Mt:5:39 (see below).

2. Read Acts 22:25-29; 23:6; 23:17-22; 24:25-27; 25:8-12; 26:29-32; 27:1-2a; 28:14c-16. Robert Linthicum writes, "Paul knew how to utilize power to protect himself, advance the gospel, and position the church to influence profoundly both the present and the future empires."* Note the institutions Paul confronted. Should we confront also (see below)?

3. Read Ephesians 6:10-18. What does it mean to "stand your ground?" (v. 13) Should we organize for this warfare now?

**"The apostle Paul's Acts of Power" Mission in Acts, ed, R. Gallagher & P. Hertig, Orbis, 2004, p. 310-11) "The trials and imprisonments of Paul remind the church of its call to engage in the political, economic and religious powers. The church is not called by Christ to ignore the systems of the world. ... 1 Cor 4:20."*

On Matthew 5:39 - "Jesus says ... , as we learn from the context, do not render evil for evil." Donald Wagner, Matthew 1-13, WORD, 1993, 130.

"There are many kinds of force or coercion. Force is present when a parent disciplines a child. It is present in every social setting. ... Love must also be the goal or end of acceptable forms of coercion. ... It is not wrong to use nonlethal forms of coercion if the end and means are love for all parties." Ron Sider, "Christ and Power," Int Review of Mission, Jan 1980, p. 9

The Spirit, Healing and Exorcism

"Exorcisms played a large role in Jesus' career. In the Gospels there are more stories (five in all) of Jesus performing exorcisms than any other specific kind of healing."* In the encounters with the Pharisees and scribes (Mt 12:2, 14, 24) and even with Herod (Lk 13:31-32), we see a culmination of the threat of Jesus' power and justice shown especially in exorcism (Mt 12:18-23). Jesus' power (*dynamis*) and authority (*exousia*) are supreme over all competitive forces throughout the gospels. When we add healing and baptism of the Holy Spirit in Acts (1:8; 4:7-8, 25, 28, 31, 33; 6:5-8; 8:10-13, 15-16; 10:38-39) we see that God infuses us with power to proclaim Christ as Lord over all people, nature, and institutions. It is amazing!

1. Read Acts 10:34-38 Comment on the relation of baptism, Holy Spirit, power (v. 38a - *dynamis*), power/oppressed (v. 38b - *katadynasteuo*) and healing. Is healing more than physical healing? (v. 38)
2. Read Acts 8:9-24. What dangers do Christians face when they are empowered by God? (v. 19-21) Simon had power (v. 10 - *dynamis*) before his baptism (v. 13) but then Simon offered money for apostolic power (v. 18-9). Peter's response - no, no! Puzzling? Comment (see below).
3. Read Matthew 12:9-28 and Luke 13:31-32. Why was Herod upset and threatened by Jesus' healing through exorcism? (see below) Relate your answer to institutional social healing and to the Kingdom of God (Mt 12:28).

** Paul Hollenbach, "Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities," J Amer Acad Relig, 1981, p. 568. "In contrast to Simon, Philip seemed prepared to deal with power. He focused on the kingdom rather than on himself. ... Rooted in Stephen's strong words against the Temple, his martyrdom, and the ensuing persecution, Philip's Samaritan mission widened the church's activity beyond the borders of Judaism. ... When God's people are guided into unfamiliar territory, God empowers them with fresh experiences of the Holy Spirit." Paul Hertig in Mission in Acts, Robert L Gallagher and Paul Hertig, Editors, 2004, p. 109*

"We can understand the opposition by public authorities to Jesus' exorcism ... In another situation Jesus' immediate reference to his exorcism when warned about Herod indicates that exorcism was Herod's concern ... Jesus was an exorcist committed to the value of social healing over the dominant value of social stability." Stephen Charles Mott, "Our Biblical Call to Healing," unpublished, click for article.

God's Power and Economy For Us

It may come as a surprise to you that when ephesians uses *oikonomia* (economy comes from this word), God's economy and household laws for the universe are being discussed. If we recognize that politics is driven by economic considerations, we will see the integration of power and economy. We are called to "make known" God's mysterious created economy (world order) in our witness (Ephesians 3:10).

1. Read Ephesians 1:15-21. See note below on v. 19. Why is it proper for us to both appropriate and use power? Why is it proper to use power in community organizing?

2. Read Ephesians 1:19b - 23. It is said that Caesar put all conquered leaders under his feet. If so, comment on the power of Caesar and Christ. (v. 22) See note below.

3. Read Ephesians 3:7-13. We have Christ's power in us (v. 7) to proclaim this mysterious economy in God (v. 9). What dynamic is at work between power and economy (translated administration in NIV)?

on Eph 1:10 - "In the Greek world oikonomia was regularly used for God's ordering and administration of the universe. Here in 1:10 it appears to have that active force. (cf also 3:9)"
on Eph 1:19 - "The writer also desires believers to know the greatness of God's power ... by piling up four synonyms for power. ... Some commentators nuance dunamis to denote ability to accomplish something, energeia as inherent strength or power, kratos as the power to overcome what stands in the way, and ischus for the exercise of power. ... The immense power of God is exercised 'toward us who believe' ... the power available now for the people of God ... the prayer is that believers should know and appropriate such power' (v. 16). Andrew T. Lincoln, Ephesians, WORD, 1990, (p. 31-2, 60-1)
on Eph 1:22 - "'Put under' is hupotasso, a military term, 'to put in subjection under one' ... absolute dominion ... sovereign over all." Kenneth S. Wuest, Ephesians and Colossians, EERDMANNS, 1953, p. 56.

The Bible on the word "Power"

Hebrew and Greek words which at times can be translated as "power" appear 4279 times in the Bible. The NIV translates these words as power 276 times. Should translators use power more? Perhaps. One of these verses where the English translations exclude power is Leviticus 25:35. Stephen Mott, an evangelical with a political theory background, translates the verse as "If members of your community become poor in that their power slips with you, you shall make them strong ... that they may live with you."* The translation of original words is very significant. As we study Lev 25:35 and 1 Corinthians 13, we need to investigate the true Biblical meanings. In this case, does the translator give us the true meaning of the Word of God as charitable work or should there be more emphasis on power, a form of love?

1. Read Leviticus 25:35 in numerous translations. Note that the action words used are all charity oriented - "support" (NIV), "help" (NKJV), "support" (NLT), "relieve" (KJV), "uphold" (ASV). The NSRV says "meaning of Hebrew uncertain." Many biblical scholars have had no training in the social sciences has been noticed. What bearing might that fact have on why a social term like power is not used more?

2. Look up "unable" (yad) and "help (hazaq) in you NIV concordance for Lev 25:35. Yad is translated "unable" once and as "power" 34 times! Hazaq is translated "help" twice and as "strong" 41 times! How does the translators' choice of words obscure the original text?

3. Read 1 Corinthians 13 in the KJV and the NIV. Count the number of times charity or love is used. Even though most Bible-believing Christians recognize charity means love, how might the KJV's use of charity obscure the original message? Why do you think society tells the church to do mainly charity work and castigates the church when it strives to empower people?

** p. 14; "In Leviticus 25:35 a person who is poor is one whose 'power slips' ... The divine mandate is to empower that person (literally, 'cause him to be strong') ... Sodom did not make strong (hazaq in the Hiphil) the power (yad) of the poor and needy when it had the power to do it. (Ezek 16:49) Stephen Charles Mott, A Christian Perspective on Political Thought, Oxford, 1993, p. 23.*

"Most Christian leaders are suspicious of power. They have been taught that Jesus was a loving, gentle and mild person. ... So Christian leaders see power as inconsistent with behavior that is loving gentle and mild. They ... have experienced the abuse of power ... It is true that power has its dark side. ... very ruthless and destructive. But it also has its bright side. ... very strengthening and liberating." Robert Linthicum, Transforming Power, InterVarsity, 2003, p. 11-12.

What Types of Power Are There?

Political theorists of power divide it into defensive, oppressive (exploitive) or intervening power. This study considers verses that appear to fit these divisions. God in Christ provides us defensive power (Colossians 1:11, 13) for endurance and with the Kingdom of God's presence. In Egypt the Israelites suffered and were subject to oppressive power (Exodus 3:7-8) but they had God's promise of an intervening rescue. Such intervening power also is found in Christ's healing exorcism of Beelzebub, thus empowering us in the Kingdom to rob the strong man's house (Matthew 12:22-30).

1. Read John 10:29 and Matthew 16:18. Spell out the defensive power (see Matthew note below).

2. Read Psalm 106:42. Oppressors attempted subjection of Jesus. What are your thoughts on the oppression of Jesus and the Psalm?

3. Read Colossians 2:15 and 1 Corinthians 4:19-20. How do you deal with arrogant people having power? How do God and we intervene with power?

"Defensive power includes a power of mutuality. We share power with others in establishing and maintaining a community that is just. Christ on the cross is the great exemplar, as he defends helpless humanity from sin, death, and Satanic power. Intervening power stands in the gap between oppressor and oppressed." Stephen C. Mott, A Christian Perspective of Political Thought. Oxford, 1993, p. 21)

"The main point is again Christological. Jesus is stronger than the strong one (cf. Isa 53:12) and is hence able to raid his kingdom at will and deliver those who are oppressed in a variety of ways. ... the beginning of eschatological deliverance." Donald A. Hagner, Matthew 1-13, WORD, 1993, p. 344.