

Study One

The Power of God, Celestial Creatures and Man

INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

In this Term we will have nine Studies on this subject. If we ask, ‘Why should we have such a Course?’, then the answer must be ‘All power belongs to God’;

- 1) whilst God has no “raw power”, yet he rules properly over his universe by means of that power;
- 2) those to whom power has been delegated—both human and celestial creatures—often use that power wrongly;
- 3) God’s power will bring his plan and purpose to its fullness and completion;
- 4) history is a struggle between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of evil: the greatest power will win; and
- 5) true power is love’. Knowledge concerning this power will be most practical.

We know that we need the power God gives us, for by it we live, fight evil, and share with God in his plan. Our knowledge must be down-to-earth and involve such practical living. It is not just a theological fact. Human beings come to know that power in the action of life, and even in weakness since God’s power is made perfect in our weakness.

ASCRPTIONS OF POWER TO GOD

In I Chronicles 29:10–13, we read:

Therefore David blessed the LORD in the presence of all the assembly; and David said: ‘Blessed art thou, O LORD, the God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from thee, and thou rulest over all. In thy hand are power and might; and in thy hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. And now we thank thee, our God, and praise thy glorious name’.

There are similar ascriptions in Revelation 4:6–11; 5:11–14; 11:15–18; 13:5–8; 19:1–4. These are worth reading because they tell us that God’s power is linked with some practical action. In I Chronicles 29:12 we see, ‘In thy hand are power and might; and in thy hand it is to make great and to give strength to all’. The Revelation passages show God’s power in the following connections:

- (a) In Revelation 4:7–11, it is about God’s holiness and power and glory that are to do with his initial and continuing act of creation. Power is needed along with honour and glory, for this task, as we will later see.

- (b) In Revelation 11:15–18, there is a pre-run (a proleptic view) of the ultimate taking of all power overtly, and reigning over the nations (note v. 19, where the power of the ark is displayed and the judgments given).
- (c) In Revelation 13:5–8, we have a picture of evil being given power (authority), and what it does with it. Does this link with the temptations, and is the suggestion that the devil has authority over the nations partly valid? The outcome of power (glory, holiness) is worship, either to God from the creation, or to the Devil or the Beast (etc.) from its followers.
- (d) In Revelation 19:1–4, it is said that salvation and glory and power belong only to our God (see Ps. 62:11–12).

The ascribing of power to God is not the *giving* of power to him by the worshippers, but the recognition that it is his by his nature and is now seen to be working in various ways. It is worth noting that in the above ascriptions, holiness, love and righteousness are not attributed to God, since they are his very Being.

THE RIGHT USE OF POWER

Power both attracts and repels us. We are repelled by the cruel and tyrannical use of power, and delighted by its good uses. Of course most humans desire power for the advantage it gives them over others. As we suggested, God only uses his power in a right way. Two references show us the truth of this, namely, Psalms 59:16–17 and 62:11–12:

But I will sing of thy might;
 I will sing aloud of thy steadfast love in the morning.
 For thou hast been to me a fortress
 and a refuge in the day of my distress.
 O my Strength, I will sing praises to thee,
 for thou, O God, art my fortress,
 the God who shows me steadfast love.

Once God has spoken;
 twice have I heard this:
 that power belongs to God;
 and that to thee, O Lord, belongs steadfast love.
 For thou dost requite a man
 according to his work.

Notice the recurrence of ‘steadfast love’ in both quotations. Both passages are very beautiful and we see from them that the attributes of God, such as power, might, strength, glory—and so on—are determined in their quality and use by God’s *Being* of holiness, righteousness and love.

Conclusion: The Mindset We Should Have Towards Power

We have scarcely touched the matter of power of God and Man, but have some indication of its nature and its appropriate use. Without power nothing would work: everything would be static. God's power catches up the ideas of creative and sustaining energy, might, strength, and even authority. We will explore these matters in our next Study, but we do well to keep in mind all the time that 'all power belongs to God', and whenever it is exercised it should be thus used in 'steadfast love'.

Added Excursus on 'Not Knowing the Power of God' to Study One of the Monday Night NCTM Course, 1st Term, 1997

EXCURSUS ON NOT KNOWING THE POWER OF GOD, EVEN THOUGH IT IS ASCRIBED

We will also see in later Studies that power and authority are generally linked together by nature of the case. The indications of this principle are plentiful in both Old and New Testaments, and some of these we will come to discuss. For example, the four Gospels are filled with references to the power of God, and Christ manifests great power in his acts, deeds, works, and signs and wonders. The apostles and others manifest great power in their ministry. In amazement people often marvel at such power and voluntarily ascribe power to God through Christ and his servants. Perhaps one of the most confronting incidents regarding power is found in Mark 12:18–27. Here the Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection posed a situation of a woman having had seven levirate marriages in succession as one after the other of the first six brothers died. They ask who in the resurrection will be the true husband, inferring that the other six will be virtually incestuous. Jesus' answer is strong. 'You know neither the scriptures nor the power of God.' In this case the Scriptures—as Jesus shows—will raise all to life, something the Sadducees did not believe. Such raising will be by the power of God. The state of the resurrected is not as it had been in this life, since the question of marriage will have been completed. All will be as the angels. However, it is the confronting, 'You know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God', which question comes to us too. We may think we know both when, at depth, this may not be the case. Not even a Study Course such as this one can, of itself, impart that experience and knowledge of the power of God. God himself, through his Spirit, his word, and his Son, can—and does—impart such knowing of God's power. We need humility and godly fear and trembling to seek out such knowledge of God's power. The point I am making is that we can easily pass over the reality of power in our reading and accepting of the Scriptures. At every point power is to be ascribed to God, but only those who know it, genuinely ascribe it.

NCTM Thursday Morning. 4th Term. G. Bingham
THE POWER OF GOD AND MAN
Study Two

POWER AND AUTHORITY

THE SIGNIFICANCE AND PURPOSE OF POWER AND AUTHORITY

In Study 1 we made no attempt to describe either power or authority. To see both we simply need to look at the presence of both in the life, person and work of Jesus.¹ There could be no other example in history so strong and compelling as this. His life shows powerfully meanings of the two words ‘power’ and ‘authority’. The primary purpose for regarding Jesus is to show that a certain point in history this man came into human affairs exercising both power and authority. The question is ‘Why?’ and we need to answer that question clearly. It must have been uniquely significant that he should have come into human history. This unique significance we will seek to know. In fact we need to know the point of both power and authority for all of history. One thing is clear: it is only he who has power and authority over all things, who is the one who can be said to have their destiny in his hands.

Old Testament Use of the Words for ‘Power’

The words used for power in the Old Testament are *geburah*, which is ‘might’; *chayil*, which is ‘force’ or ‘valour’; *yad*, which is simply ‘power’; and *koach*, which is the most used of all synonyms. Lastly there is *oz*, which is ‘strength’ or ‘hardness’. *Geburah* is used by David in his ascription to God in I Chronicles 29:10–12:

Therefore David blessed the LORD in the presence of all the assembly; and David said: ‘Blessed art thou, O LORD, the God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from thee, and thou rulest over all. In thy hand are power and might; and in thy hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. And now we thank thee, our God, and praise thy glorious name’.

It is interesting that ‘power’ and ‘kingdom’ are linked, as indeed they are in Psalm 145: 10–13:

All thy works shall give thanks to thee, O Lord
and all thy saints shall bless thee!
They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom,
and tell of thy power,
to make known to the sons of men thy mighty deeds,
and the glorious splendor of thy kingdom.
Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and thy dominion endures throughout all generations.

¹ One of our Studies will be ‘The Man of Power’, and it will cover the life and ministry of Jesus as ‘The Man of Weakness and of Power’.

Chayil is mainly used for human or earthly power, though it is used in Psalm 59:11, ‘Make them totter by thy power, and bring them down, O Lord our shield’. *Koach* we have said is the most used of all the synonyms and it is used mainly for God’s power. This use is to show that God alone has power. This same power was shown in bringing Israel out from Egypt and it is greater than the opposing gods—a point we need to keep in mind since all history is a struggle between the great powers opposed to God and God himself. David uses it in his ascription in I Chronicles 29:12, ‘In thy hand are power and might’, and in II Chronicles 20:6, Jehoshaphat repeats this in the face of the great army which comes to destroy Judah: God has power to destroy the enemy. It is said that it is by his *koach* that the Lord has made heaven and earth (Jer. 10:12; 51:15) and in both cases it is linked with wisdom. In the beautiful panegyric of God in Psalm 147—verse 5—the Lord is said to be ‘abundant in power’.

The word *oz* is used more in the Psalms than any of the terms for power. So Psalm 59:16 says, ‘I will sing of thy might [*oz*]’ and continues, ‘I will sing aloud of thy steadfast love in the morning. For thou hast been to me a fortress and a refuge in the day of my distress.’ Psalm 62:11–12 has a parallel thought, and makes the famous statement regarding all power belonging to God but links it with *chesed*—‘steadfast love’ or ‘grace’:

Once God has spoken; twice I have heard this: that power belongs to God; and that to thee, O Lord, belongs steadfast love. For thou dost requite a man according to his work.

What we will see more and more in the New Testament is that power and grace are closely linked. Arthur Weiser comments on these two verses:

The whole content of the revelation of God in . . . the Covenant is contained in the two statements in which that knowledge is expressed: for power without grace does not admit of any trust, and grace without power is deprived of its ultimate seriousness.²

In Psalm 63:2, the worshipper longs for God and says, ‘So have I looked upon thee in thy sanctuary, beholding thy power [*oz*] and glory’.

Gibbor, a cognate of *geburah*, means ‘mighty one’ or ‘mighty man (Gen. 6:4), or ‘mighty men’ (II Sam. 10:7) such as those who fight. David danced before the ark with all his might (*oz*; II Sam. 6:14), and the substantive *abir* is used only of God as in ‘Mighty One of Jacob’ (Gen. 49:24). Others of the synonyms named above have the idea of power of things and animals, such as of a sword, the sun ‘who rises in his might’, a horse, a lion and the waters of the sea. We get the idea of ‘might’ and ‘strength’ and ability of power in both the user and the thing used. God’s acts of salvation are called *geburot* (Ps 150:2). By showing his power God reveals himself as Yahweh (*gebura*; Jer. 16:21).

It is not difficult, then, to catch up the idea that power is might, strength, ability, capacity to act, and that all power belongs to God and derives from him. Whatever human beings, animals, nature and things have power, they could have none apart from God. God has power as Creator, as Redeemer and as Judge. By such power he himself rules over Israel and all nations (*oz*; Ps. 77:14), and does his acts of salvation (Ps. 74:13; 78:4). He empowers judges (Judg. 2:16), kings (I Sam. 2:10), and prophets (Micah 3:8, ‘I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD’). Power and authority go together, even though the term ‘authority’ is rarely used as such (*toqeph*, Esther 9:29; *rabah*, Prov. 29:2), and only of Man. Of course the *idea* of God’s authority is very strong.

² *The Psalms* by Arthur Weiser, Old Testament Library (SCM, 1962), p. 452.

The New Testament Use of the Words for Power

In the New Testament we see that the noun *dynamis* is the primary word for power, deriving from the verb *dunamai*—‘to be able’. Works of power are known as *dunameis*. The adjective *dunatos* is translated by ‘mighty’ (Luke 1:49³) or ‘powerful’ (I Cor. 1:26). The noun *dunastes* (plural) is translated as ‘the mighty’ in Luke 1:52. Other words involving power capacity are *ischus*, which means ‘strength’ (II Thess. 1:9), and *kratos*, which means ‘might’ (Heb. 2:14; Rev. 5:13). These two words are often used together as in Ephesians 1:19, Colossians 1:11, and II Peter 2:11. There is also the adjective *ischuros*, as in Hebrews 11:34, ‘mighty in war’.

We also see that although *exousia* is often translated by the word ‘power’, yet it is distinct from *dynamis*. It carries the idea of the right or freedom to act by virtue of the position into which one has been put. Thus power that is ability (*dynamis*) is often associated with the coming or enablement of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35; 4:14; 24:49; Acts 1:8; 10:38, etc.). Being delegated to be and do something because commissioned requires the word *exousia*, as in Luke 12:5 and John 1:12. *Exousia*, when authentic, is always delegated from above. Jesus is declared to be the Father’s Son both at his baptism and transfiguration, which is delegating him the authority of the ‘Son’ of Psalm 2, especially verses 6–7. Twice the Father is said to have given ‘all things’ into his hands (John 3:35; cf. Matt. 11; 27:28:18), and ‘all things’ means that nothing is left outside his hands.

AN INTRODUCTION INTO THE STORY OF POWER AND AUTHORITY

With all the talk of ‘power’ and ‘authority’ in both Old and New Testaments we are shown that ‘all power belongs to God’. Just from this simple Study of the two words we are convinced that something of great importance lies in these words and their synonyms. We do not seek, at this point, to work out a rationale of power and authority, but leave that for future Studies. If we have a general idea of the meanings of the two elements, then that will help us to discern the mystery as it is set before us throughout the Scriptures.

³ ‘He who is mighty’—*ho dunatos*—is the term used for God. Likewise in Matthew 26:64, ‘the right hand of Power’ is likewise a term for God.

NCTM Monday Night Studies. 1st Term. 17th February 1997. G. Bingham

THE POWER OF GOD AND MAN

Study Three

Power And Authority In The Beginning

GOD'S INTENTION BEFORE THE BEGINNING OF THE WORLD

The whole of the first chapter of the Letter to the Ephesians shows what God's intention was for his creation, even before he began to create it. When we take the Christian Scriptures as a whole, then we can see the whole nature of God's plan. The Old Testament is not without its pointing to a goal God has appointed. It is not without prophecy for the ultimate glorification of God's people, for the Lord's glory to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, for there to be a new heavens and a new earth, and in one sense the New Testament repeats and confirms these goals. The Ephesian passage shows that God has planned the sanctification of his people, the adoption of them as his sons, and that Christ's people shall be

- (i) to the praise of the glory of his grace, and
 - (ii) to the praise of his glory: the former being of salvation, the latter of man's recreation.
- It also shows that Christ will sum up all things, and states that he has been made head over all things, the Chief One not only in this age but also of the age which is to come.

It makes it clear that the sons of God shall come into a great inheritance and speaks of it as God's 'glorious inheritance in the saints'. The remainder of the Epistle is speaking of all things being filled up—as though without this filling they would remain empty. It speaks of the life of the church and its ministry which is to aid it to grow up into the fullness of the measure of the stature of Christ, to grow up to this fullness by means of practical love.

Ephesians is not the only book of the New Testament which speaks of 'the mystery of his will . . . as a plan for the fulness of time', and 'the counsel of his will', and 'the eternal purpose which he has realized in Christ Jesus', as also 'the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things'. When we go on to discern Paul's, Peter's and John's eschatology, then we know the early church lived in the expectancy of 'things to come', and these things would be definitive and climactic, and that history would be realised with their happening.

The little phrase above, 'who created all things', brings us back to the basis of everything, namely creation. Paul tells us all things were planned *before* creation, and he is telling us that they were to be *for* creation and *in* creation. Thus when we come to a book like that of *The Revelation*, we find it to be a prophecy which covers all things from the beginning to the end of time. We do not have the details of such a survey of history, but we do have the plan and the intent of it, and much of the working out of it via the action of Christ and his church.

All of which brings us to ask, 'What was God's purpose in creating all things?', the answer to which is, 'That he might ultimately fill all things, sum them up in Christ, reconcile them, harmonise them, and establish all things *in* and *as* the new heavens and the new earth'.⁴ It is clear that his initial creating of all things was not an end in itself, but a step towards that end.

⁴ See Ephesians 4:10; 1:10; Colossians 1:19–21; 3:15.

It will not be mere curiosity, then, which will urge us to investigate the structure of creation with its celestial and terrestrial spheres, its inhabitants of both, the relationship between celestial and terrestrial, and the functional nature of them both in themselves, and together as a whole. As far as we can, then, we seek to discover what is necessary for our understanding as fellow-workers with God in his plan, in the mystery of his will.

A VIEW OF POWER, POWERS, AUTHORITY AND AUTHORITIES IN THE CREATION

It is clear from the accounts of creation in Genesis chapters 1 and 2 that the creation was satisfactory to God who pronounced it as ‘very good’. It is clear also that God set Man over the creation as his regent. Man was a male–female entity designed to fulfil the functional plan given to him by God. For him a garden—Eden, ‘the place of delight’—was established, and he, Man, was to fan out across the earth, presumably enlarging Eden until it filled all the earth. Also there was provided for him an era of God’s own rest,⁵ by which he could be at peace with God, himself, and the creation.

We are told in Job chapter 38 that God was sovereign over all creation, and that as he was occupied with this work, ‘the mornings stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.’ Their view of creation must have been a glorious one. If we can take this rhetorical utterance to be an indication of the sequence of creation, then celestial creatures were created prior to what we call ‘the universe’.⁶

We are given indications that there is a council of holy creatures in heaven,⁷ perhaps the ones we call ‘angels’, and that God held council with these divine ones. Even so, God did not disclose all the plan of his intentions as the New Testament tells us lofty divine creatures—perhaps along with similar ones who fell—that these beings watch God’s plan working out through the Church and have intimations of his wisdom via this medium.⁸

THE GREAT CREATIONAL STRUCTURE

What we have to understand is that the whole of creation, both heavenly and earthly has a structure that is functional. We will see that there are celestial creatures all of whom have a function to perform, and that all functions constitute a unity. We will also see there are terrestrial creatures—particularly meaning Man—which have a relationship with creation and are part of a functional unity. Thirdly we will see that celestial or heavenly creatures have their relationship not only with God—upwards so to speak—but also with terrestrial or earthly creatures. All together form the one unitary whole.

As we have suggested above, the creation of heaven and earth has been with a goal in mind, namely that ultimately all creation will be one in Christ, and through the works of the Father, the Son and the Spirit all things will be sanctified, glorified and perfected. If we ask ‘Why was not this done at the beginning?’ the answer must be that it required a special process in time and of time to do this; that it was not advisable and possible to do it otherwise. The question of divine and human authority would need to be worked out. At the end of time as we know it, there would need to be a voluntary unity of all things. What we must keep in mind is that, historically, there was a disturbance amongst celestial creatures and a rebellion

⁵ See Genesis 2:1–3; cf. Exodus 20:8–11.

⁶ If indeed this passage is historical then one way of understanding the angelic presence of ‘the sons of God’, i.e. the ‘mornings stars’, is to see them as the first part of creation—the celestial—so that they view the second phase of the creation—the terrestrial.

⁷ See Job 15:7–9; Jeremiah 23:18, 22.

⁸ See Ephesians 3:10.

of Man against his Creator.

The Structure at the Beginning

One thing we can discover is that the Creator, because he made all things—‘authored them’, we might say—is Head over all things. He is in charge, all things are subject to him. He has *power* innately to accomplish all things, and he has *authority* which substantiates this power.

There are a number of ways we can state the matter of authority and structure. All authorities virtually have thrones, and we mean that centre from which they operate their power. The idea of a throne thus becomes the concept of ruling authority. At the same time authority must always be understood properly as operating for the good of those whom it governs. In biblical terms authority should, correctly speaking, be understood as love.

In the Psalms the throne of God is in the heavens; ‘The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD’S throne is in heaven’. ‘The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.’⁹ This was the throne Isaiah was later to see in the temple (Isa. 6:1), and Ezekiel (Ezek. 43:6–7) also in the temple of Jerusalem, ‘Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the people of Israel for ever’. Thus although the throne is in heaven (Isa. 66:1), yet God is ‘enthroned on the cherubim’ of the ark of the covenant and so is in Israel. In the Messianic age, ‘Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD’ (Jer. 3:17), the same as being ‘enthroned on the praises of Israel’ (Ps. 22:3).

The throne is also described as being in the temple, in the Book of the Revelation, where it is linked with God’s action and ultimately from it flows forth a river of life. It is said to be a throne *from* eternity, and is *to* all eternity.¹⁰ The throne denotes the fact that God is King over all things.¹¹ The throne can never be doubted, for it is founded on righteousness, justice, steadfast love and faithfulness (Ps. 9:4; 89:14; 97:2), and for this reason must be regarded as the seat of total integrity, that Divine power and authority are unquestionable in probity and equity. It is from his throne that all action proceeds, so that God is not partially but wholly Ruler of all things.¹² In the Revelation the whole action proceeds from the throne.¹³ This prophetic book shows the place of power and authority as being surrounded by the four living creatures¹⁴ and the twenty-four elders. Also the seven-fold torches of the Spirit burn before it, as before it also is the sea that is like glass. The elders also have thrones—that is, situations of authority.

In regard to God being over all, we see that his reigning prior to the fall of Man must have been in the heavens, but also that his Presence was in Eden, in which Man was given his throne, to rule over the earth in accordance with Genesis 1:28, et al, and Psalm 8:3–8. Whatever the throne in heaven is over, there is also a closeness of that authority to Man to whom also a certain authority is delegated. That the throne can be over Israel is a revelation of both the Kingdom and Covenant ruling of God, as also his Presence with his people. Within Israel, and so within the Kingdom of God, the power and the glory are present. So we

⁹ Psalms 11:4 and 103:19)

¹⁰ Psalm 93:2; Lamentations 5:19)

¹¹ Psalm 97:2; 93:1; cf. Zechariah 14:9.

¹² I Kings 22:19; Isaiah 6:1; Ezekiel 1:22–28; Daniel 7:9–10; cf. Job 1:6; 2:1.

¹³ In Revelation 6:1, 3, 5, 7 the 4 living creatures have to do with the action of the Four Horseman, that is the action operates from the throne. In chapter 7 the great multitude stand before the throne, and also before the Lamb. In some cases it seems difficult to distinguish between what is the altar and what is the throne. Either directly or indirectly everything issues from God, and the seals, the trumpets and the bowls are all linked with the altar, the throne and the temple. Indeed these three seem to be inseparable.

¹⁴ See Ezekiel 1:5f for a parallel with Revelation 4:6–9.

are brought back to David's utterance in I Chronicles 29:10–13:

Therefore David blessed the Lord in the presence of all the assembly; and David said: 'Blessed art thou, O Lord, the God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from thee, and thou rulest over all. In thy hand are power and might; and in thy hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. And now we thank thee, our God, and praise thy glorious name'.

We will have occasion to see more regarding this throne when we see what has happened regarding it in history by the incarnation and atonement of Christ. We now have to introduce a Christological way of looking at creation's structure and its functional creatures.

THE POWER OF GOD AND MAN
NCTM Monday Night Studies. 1st Term. 24th February 1997. G. Bingham

Study Four

Power And Authority In The Beginning (Cont.)

THE GREAT CREATIONAL STRUCTURE (CONT.)

The Origin and Action of ‘Throne’, ‘Dominions’, ‘Principalities’, and ‘Authorities’

It is from the New Testament that we gain insight into what happened at creation. In Colossians 1:15–17 we read:

He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

We are here looking at the pre-incarnate Son of God. We see that the terms ‘thrones’, ‘dominions’, ‘principalities’, ‘authorities’, all relate to God and his place over creation. In this case what are God’s rule and power now become invested in creatures—as those who are to share in the rule and plan of God. Each is not synonymous with the others, but all share the delegated power and authority of God. God delegates them to these positions which are functional. In Romans 8:38–39 we read of ‘angels’, ‘principalities’ and ‘powers’. We also read of ‘heights’ and ‘depths’ and ‘things present’ and ‘things to come’. In I Corinthians 3:22, we also read of ‘the present’ and ‘the future’. In Colossians 2:15, we read that some ‘principalities and powers’ are demeaned by Christ’s death. Galatians 4:3 and 9 speaks of ‘elemental spirits of the universe’ and ‘beggarly elemental spirits’.¹⁵ Colossians 2:20 also speaks of ‘the elemental spirits of the universe’. Ephesians 3:10 also speaks of ‘principalities and powers’, and in 6:10 talks of ‘principalities’, ‘powers’, ‘the world rulers of this present darkness’, and ‘the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places’. Jude 6 and II Peter 2:4, 9, talk of angels who ‘did not keep their own position but left their proper dwelling’, saying that they are kept in prison for the ultimate judgment. These could well be ‘the spirits [which are] in prison’ of I Peter 3:19.¹⁶

Without any doubt we are faced with special creatures—all of whom seem to be supranatural, and quite celestial, who have undoubtedly been given certain delegations to authority, reigning and ruling, though doubtless under God by whom they are commissioned. In Daniel chapters 10 and 11, we read of certain ‘princes’ which we take to be angels, one being ‘the prince of Persia’ and another ‘the prince of Greece’, who are opposed to the angel who comes to Daniel. Michael is nominated as Daniel’s angel, and he had helped the angel

¹⁵ To be fair, some commentators do not see these ‘elemental spirits’ as actual creatures, but rather as the primary principles on which creation functions, the ABC of nature, so to speak.

¹⁶ For this sort of material see my two books, *The Clash of the Kingdoms* (NCPI, 1989), and *The Dominion of Darkness and the Victory of God* (NCPI, 1977).

when on his way to speak to Daniel. We take it that there are powers over the various nations—perhaps some good and some not good. Some see a reference to this in Deuteronomy 32:8–9, where God set the nations apart from one another and ‘fixed the bounds of the people according to the number of the sons of God’, going on to say that God himself was Israel’s special ‘angel’ or ‘authority’, and the point is well taken when covenant and Kingdom are brought into consideration.¹⁷

The Prince of This World: Satan, the Devil

Again we have the matter of the Devil’s claim that he has at his disposal all the kingdoms of the earth. ‘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.’ Christ did not dispute this claim with the Devil, but answered him with Scripture, defeating the temptation. If we equate the crimson dragon of Revelation 12–13 with the Devil—and we have every indication from the text that this is the case since the description of him is ‘that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world’—then a certain authority is allowed to him, since ‘the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority’ to the beast. The beast then ‘was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and tongue and nation.’ Satan has his cohorts in what we have called thrones and dominions, principalities and powers, all of which we take to be the powers we would call ‘demonic’. Revelation 12 says that the red dragon took a third of the stars of heaven, that is, a third of the angels, and possibly the course of angels which had been under him as he was ‘Lucifer, son of the morning’. These celestial creatures which have taken sides with Satan in his rebellion against God are set to contend God’s plan. They ‘did not keep their own position but left their proper dwelling’ (Jude 6; cf. II Pet. 2:4). That is, they are working against God and not for him.

This brings us to the point where we can speak about Satan’s throne. In our previous Studies we have seen that all power belongs to God and that his throne is above all other delegated or filched ‘thrones’. Jesus spoke of ‘the devil; and his angels’, giving us more than a hint that Satan seeks to have his own equivalents to the power, authority and action of God the Creator. We saw that as the red dragon he gave ‘his power and throne’ to the beast. The beast seeks to emulate Christ, when he appears to die and come to life again. In the Book of Revelation there is talk of ‘Satan’s throne’, and it is thought that Satan has even specified localities, perhaps an imitation of God’s throne being in Israel. There is also talk of ‘Satan’s synagogue’ (Rev. 2:9; 3:9).

Satan as ‘God’s Ape’

This is what Luther called the Devil. In fact we might as well consider one or two ‘ape things’ here, although they more properly belong to later comments on God’s course of history. It is that Satan seeks to emulate everything that God is and does. Thus we have in Revelation 2:24, mention of ‘the deep things of Satan’ as a counterpart to I Corinthians 2:10, where we read of the deep things of God. In Revelation 13, we have a foul trinity of the dragon, the beast, and the second beast sometimes known as the false prophet. We also have the mother of harlots, the woman called Babylon who is the unholy city and is the counterpart of the true Woman of Revelation 12, the Bride of Christ, the ‘mother of us all us’, ‘the true Jerusalem which is above’—and so on.

¹⁷ Israel has much to do with ‘the angel of the Lord’, that one who puzzles many as to his identity. Is he in fact God, or his special angel so identified with him that he is almost as him? Is he the Son of God? In the New Testament it is said that the Lord gave the law through an angel, or angels. It does not matter much, but it shows that the angel of the Lord worked directly from God’s throne.

The Place of Supranatural Angelic Powers¹⁸

To come back to examination of the ‘great creational structure’ we see that all the celestial powers are every one of them functional, all cooperating with the Creator in his plan for history. He is ‘the Lord of hosts’ which means that these heavenly creatures do his will. We are told in Hebrews 1:7 that he ‘makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire’ (cf. Ps. 104:4). Again, of the angels it is asked, ‘Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation?’ We know that angels came and ministered to Jesus in the temptation and almost certainly in Gesthemene. Jesus talked about the angels of the ‘little ones’ who ‘always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven’. In Revelation 22:16 he says, ‘I have sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches’, and this would appear to be the angel sent to John with the entire prophecy.

In the Gospels we have numerous references to angels, one appearing to Zechariah the father of John the Baptist, to Joseph the husband of Mary, the angel Gabriel to Mary at the Annunciation, a multitude of them at the birth of Jesus when the shepherds were in the field at night-time. Angels ministered to Jesus during the temptation, and an old manuscript says an angel appeared from heaven to Jesus in Gesthemene and strengthened him. Jesus taught that there is always joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. Jesus spoke of his own coming (*parousia*) in the presence of many angels. Angels appear for various acts at the time of the resurrection. One of the most important sayings by Jesus was to Nathanael, when he talked about angels ascending and descending upon him, a statement which we will look at later in depth.

In the Acts of the Apostles there are various appearances of angels, including the one who twice delivered Peter from imprisonments. Philip, after the event of Samaria, was directed by an angel who directed him to where he would meet the Ethiopian eunuch. An angel appeared to Cornelius as that man and his friends were prepared for a visit to Caesarea by Peter. Herod was smitten by an angel for his arrogant boasting. Paul told the men on board ship that an angel had stood by him during the night and given him a message of assurance that the ship would not be wrecked. In all these events we see the angels as ministers to the heirs of salvation.

The Book of Revelation has over seventy references to angels, and all of them are to do with some work and function they are to fulfil. So we have a vast array of different angels and different functions. We have the seven angels of the sevenfold church. Angels often cry with loud voices, even voices like thunder claps, and their messages are important—voices from God himself! There are angels of winds, angels who blow trumpets for the judgments, and angels who are there for the pouring out of the bowls of wrath. At least one angel uses the sickle of judgment. The four horsemen of the Apocalypse may well be angels. Humanity is warned by an angel against receiving the mark of the beast. An angel takes John to show and explain the mystery of Babylon, and another proclaims this city’s fall. One angel is seen flying through the heavens proclaiming the eternal gospel. Another angel has the key to the abyss and has authority to seize the Devil and lock him in that pit for 1,000 years. A more pleasant task is for an angel to invite those eligible to come to the supper of the bridal feast of the Lamb. He showed John the Holy City, its dimensions and its nature, and lastly the same angel speaks of the time being near for the fulfilment of the prophecies John has seen and heard.

¹⁸ See my booklet, *What’s All This About Angels?* (NCPI, 1982).

All of this should lead us to some conclusion about the structure of the celestial sphere, but we need to see the position of Man at that main creational time of structuring, and wed both the celestial and terrestrial together.

THE POWER OF GOD AND MAN
NCTM. Monday Night. 1st Term. 3rd March 1997. G. Bingham

Study Five

The Man of Power

MAN OF WEAKNESS: MAN OF POWER

There can be no doubt that human beings are interested in power. Many are not only interested in this element, but for them their interest goes on to become fascination. We are dazzled by the power of athletes and other sports heroes. We look at the strength of their bodies, the beauty of their actions, and the triumph of their use of the will to win. In spite of ourselves we sometimes rise to applaud them. We are also gripped by power-displays in intellectual and artistic brilliance. We watch with wonder those who have power in the world of commerce and politics. We envy those who have power over others by reason of position or ability. We do not have to go far abroad to see power battles: they are with us, in our own homes, our families and the society in which we move. With some apprehension we watch the moves and machinations of nations, as they operate in power conflicts.

Perhaps, more than anything, we admire a person of power, one who is quickly recognised as having both ability (Greek: *dunamis*) and authority (Greek: *exousia*). If someone argues that power is an abstract idea, and is not present at the centre of our thinking, then that claim seems lame and weak when we are actually faced with persons of power, and especially if we are weak persons. History has its accounts of men of ability and authority who have left their mark on the human scene, either for good or for ill. Even at a long distance in time we have some sort of admiration for them.

That is why, when we are faced with Jesus Christ, son of the woman Mary and acclaimed to be the Son of God, we are surprised when we are told that in some ways he was, in fact, weak; weak, that is, as our world understands weakness. Paul, Christ's apostle, but formerly his persecutor, spoke of Christ's weakness. He said, 'He was crucified in weakness', meaning surely that in the circumstances there was nothing the man Jesus could do to prevent the crucifixion. Paul was correct: the man Jesus had to submit to the authorities of the day and go to a malefactor's Cross. Paul also spoke of the weakness of God, Christ's Father, when he used the term, 'the weakness of God'. It is true that he talked of God's weakness, but affirmed so by adding that that weakness was stronger than the power of men.

To outward appearances, Jesus was a weak man in that he could not overcome his enemies along the lines we call 'ability' and 'authority'. It is also true that Jesus' calm silence seemed to unnerve Pilate, the Roman Governor of Jerusalem at the time of the judgment of Jesus. 'You will not speak to me? Do you not know I have power [*exousia*; authority] to release you, and power to crucify you?' Jesus answered, 'You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore he who delivered me to you has the greater sin'. In this statement Jesus revealed a principle regarding power (*exousia*; authority). All power resides in God and all authority exercised in the universe is by delegation of that power to human beings, and—as we have seen—also to celestial creatures, those invisible to us, but real nevertheless, and highly functional in what we may call universal operations.

So then, Jesus' weakness is an apparent one rather than an intrinsic one. When all things

will be revealed at the end of human history we will see that what critics called his ‘weakness’ was in fact power of a remarkable nature.

The Being of Jesus of Nazareth and the Matter of Power

In Luke 1:35 we read that the angel who appeared to Mary said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God’. Whatever remarkable elements there are to be studied in this event one thing is clear, namely that the man Jesus was conceived in Mary’s womb by the power of God, the exceptional strength of the Holy Spirit.

It is evident to all that this person—Mary’s baby—was not born into high, influential society. Nor was he a prodigy of sorts. He was a normal baby, boy, youth, young man and a person who was like us in flesh and blood, akin to our humanity.

Some apocryphal Gospels suggest that as a child, and even before birth, he had the powers of a prodigy, but these claims can easily be discounted. Time and again the Gospels and the Epistles argue against the later Docetists who said he was not human, but only had the *appearance* of being human. Against this heresy we are told that he was tempted (tested) in all points as we, too, are tested, so no temptation was unknown to him. His refusal to accede to temptation marks him out as remarkable but it does not take his humanity from him, since falling into temptation—whilst a regular part of the fallen human scene—is not of the *essence* of true humanity. Man was created with the *possibility* of sinning because he was made a free creature, but the *propensity* to sin was not part of his created being since he was in the image of God.

Jesus Becomes a Man of Power

In history there have been innumerable men and women of power; of this there can be no doubt. All, however, have come to death so that their power has then ceased. Jesus’ coming into Jewish society as a man was preceded by John the Baptist whose father had been told that he—John, his son—would go before the Lord ‘in the spirit and *power* of Elijah’. By this we understand *prophetic* power.

This John, a cousin of Jesus, was baptising repentant Jews in the River Jordan when Jesus presented himself to him for baptism, desiring to be identified with his compatriots, and, indeed, with all human beings. John was at that point clearly aware of the nature and calling of Jesus and declined to baptise him, but Jesus insisted on the significant ritual, as he was to be *the* man of Israel and wholly identified with his nation.

The baptism, as we have said, was a significant event. John the Baptist had been told that the one on whom the Spirit would alight and remain would be the one who would be Messiah, the one taking away the sin of the world. Jesus, then, was baptised in the Spirit and at that point received both power (*dunamis*) and authority (*exousia*). Peter later described the event, ‘God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with *power*; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him’.

We note the reason for the power (*dunamis*). It was to be able to do good, and to liberate those oppressed by the devil. The authority came in the attesting words of God the Father, ‘This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased’. We are obliged to link this pronouncement with Psalm 2:7 (et al), and with Isaiah 42:1ff., by which we arrive at the conclusion that Jesus was the Messiah, God’s anointed King and destined to preach righteousness to the nations.

Jesus Operating in Power

‘Jesus of Nazareth, whom God anointed with the Holy Spirit and power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed of the devil.’ This is quite a description of Jesus. Kings in Israel were anointed but this anointing took place amid talk of the coming Kingdom of God. John had enjoined people to be baptised for repentance with a view to the coming of the Kingdom, and also the forgiveness of sins. Jesus, when he began his ministry, said the time appointed for the coming of the Kingdom was now ripe, and Israel should repent and believe the gospel, which would have to be called ‘the gospel of the Kingdom’. The Kingdom was best understood as God’s reign and rule, and Jesus was probably reminding his hearers of Isaiah 52:7:

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him, who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’.

By pointing his hearers to Isaiah 52:7, and especially ‘Your God reigns’, Jesus was assuring them that in spite of their long history of oppression by other nations, and the present rule over them by Rome, that their God—Yahweh—was reigning. Such assurance is easy to give by lip, but it requires the support and affirmation of God’s power and authority, and this was what Jesus was about to show them. A little later in Jesus’ ministry, Herod the Tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus, and he said to his servants, ‘This is John the Baptist, he has been raised from the dead; that is why these powers [*dunameis*] are at work in him’. John had not done any miracles or signs, so that it must have been the power of his hortatory ministry which had affected Herod, but he would see no reason why one such as John should not—being raised—effect such powers. Jesus’ signs, then, were widely known.

We are told that his baptism in the Spirit brought the powers of the Spirit to bear in his life. One of the crises of his earthly life was the three temptations in the wilderness. The Devil sought his worship and his allegiance, promising Jesus authority (*exousia*) over the kingdoms. Jesus, of course, would not give such worship. The forty days in which temptation took place were of such nature that he required strengthening by angels, for his humanity was hard-pressed. Yet, we are told that Jesus returned from this testing ‘in the *power* of the Spirit’. We might as well acknowledge here that Jesus had no innate power of his own humanity which could do signs and wonders and proclaim the Kingdom: these were all derived from the Spirit.

That such was the case is shown by the event when a woman who had a chronic haemorrhage touched him with faith, and she was healed. Jesus asked, ‘Who was it that touched me?’ He added, ‘Some one touched me; for I perceive that *power*¹⁹ [*dunamis*] has gone forth from me’.

We are also told that on another occasion when a crowd comprised of people who had diseases, and who were oppressed by the Devil came to him, ‘all the crowd sought to touch him, for *power* came forth from him and healed them all’. Quite early in his ministry at Capernaum he cast out an unclean spirit and, perceiving the power of Jesus’ command, the crowd said, ‘What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out’.

Quite famous was the case of the paralytic man who was lowered on his bed by his friend in a house where Jesus was teaching. In Luke’s Gospel the incident is introduced by the statement, ‘The power of the Lord was with him to heal’. This does not say explicitly that

¹⁹ Some translations have ‘virtue’ for the word ‘power’.

only on some occasions was the power present, but there is room for thinking that certain situations were more potent than others. For example, when he was at Nazareth we are told, ‘And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief’. This in spite of the fact that they had asked on that occasion, ‘Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works?’ The account tells us his power did not come into action ‘because of their unbelief’. Later we will need to see that active power and responsive faith have a close connection.

Jesus also had the authority to delegate that power by which he worked. We are told, ‘And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal’. We note that on one occasion he said, ‘But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you’. We are justified, then, in seeing that the power he exercised, through the Spirit, was that of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom was itself dynamic. That was why Jesus, when sending seventy disciples on a similar mission, could tell them to tell the folk whom they healed, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you’.

The rest of the story of Jesus can be told in terms of power that at the time seemed to be weakness, namely, ‘He was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God’. The act of seeming weakness—being crucified—led to being ‘designated Son of God in power [*en dunamei*] according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead’ (Rom. 1:4). We are told by Paul of:

the immeasurable greatness of his [God’s] power [*dunamis*] . . . which he [God] accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

Just as in his earthly ministry he had delegated power and authority to his disciples, so following the resurrection he claimed that all authority (*exousia*) had been given to him and he delegated them to go in the work of proclaiming the Kingdom of God. He said, ‘you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit coming upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and to Samaria and to the end of the earth’. That is why he told them on the night of his resurrection, ‘Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you;²⁰ but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power [*dunamis*] from on high’.

CONCLUSION REGARDING JESUS AND THE MATTER OF POWER

It is clear from the above gathering of references to Jesus and power that he was indeed a man of power. Indeed he was *the* man of power. He was also *the* man of authority, since—after his work on the Cross and his Resurrection—all authority in heaven and earth was given to him and to none other.

In this Study we have simply put together references regarding his power and authority, but we need to do more than this. This was not a ‘by the way’ matter, an unusual happening to be taken calmly, but it was a cause for great wonderment and amazement. People asked, ‘What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out’; ‘Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?’; ‘Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works?’; and it was said of him, ‘And they were astonished at his

²⁰ That is, ‘the Holy Spirit’, for time and again in the New Testament the Holy Spirit is called ‘the promised Holy Spirit’, or ‘the Spirit of promise’.

teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes'; 'Never was anything seen like this in Israel'; and 'Never man spoke like this man'.

He was indeed *the* man of power. In our next Study we will examine more closely the significance, modes and purpose of this power and authority.

THE POWER OF GOD AND MAN
NCTM Monday Night Studies. 1st Term, 10th March 1997. G. Bingham

Study Six

The Man and the Plan

SECURING THE PLOT IN OUR MIND

To this point we have seen that power as strength and ability is very important, and that it cannot be considered apart from authority. Both act to bring the purposes of God to their fulfilment in what we call the *telos* or final goal. Both power and authority also are used actively by the devised—that is, not created—system biblically called ‘the world’. God’s ape, Satan, seeks to thwart the plan of God and establish his own. The pure system of creation and the devised one of Satan both utilise power and authority. The first system is ontological, and the second being devisary, apes the first. Deceit is the hallmark of the latter system, and this is how it would have to be since it is not a created structure. Thus we have the Devil as the deceiver of persons and nations. We have the deceitful lusts of the flesh, and the innate deceit of sin. Another hallmark of this counterpart ‘world’ is tyranny, the subjecting of all things to its bondage and its devised hierarchies.

God’s plan—or story plot—is to create all things so that having commenced their work and being in creation, their created order might come to its climax in perfection. By this we mean that Man, his Eden, along with its worship, delights and intimacy with God, might one day encompass the whole earth, and that Man would be glorified, sanctified and perfected. Likewise all creation would be glorified, sanctified and perfected. We mean that it would eventually become eternalised in the Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier, Glorifier and Perfecter. Stated this way it may not seem extraordinary to our minds, but it encompasses a wonderful story, an exquisite, unbelievable plot. We have to shake ourselves—so to speak—to see how thrilling it is.

ACTIONS AND INTIMATIONS OF THE STORY PLOT

I believe that if we read history aright from the biblical perspective we will find that God’s covenant began its action and operations in creation, and that the ontological order had within itself the drive or energy²¹ to fulfil the mandate of Genesis 1:28 and all other elements contained within the first two chapters of Genesis. The Fall certainly put Man off track, involving him in serpentine wisdom—worldly wisdom—and so in fulfilling what Satan plans. What Satan plans is to effect the same goal as God’s but by his—Satan’s—power and authority. The problem here is that those who follow ‘the course of this world’ and follow ‘the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work [is now energising] in the sons of disobedience’,²² are misled in thinking they can accomplish the goal that Satan determines for his own work. This is part of the deceit of the evil system.

²¹ A Bible concordance should not only be used to see the many references to ‘power’ and ‘authority’, but also to see the words ‘might’ and ‘mighty’. The latter are numerous in the Old Testament. ‘Might’, ‘energy’ and ‘working’ are also significant in the New Testament.

²² See Ephesians 2:1–3.

Man seeks to be fruitful, to multiply, to replenish the earth, and have dominion over it. He seeks to build his own paradise, to have his own kind of worship, his own kind of garden, and the other elements which typified Eden ‘the place of delights’. The cherubim keeps ever alert against Man securing the true Paradise for himself, but Man’s actions intimate his desire for an ontological perfection. At best those who refuse to live in covenant have but glimpses of what is true and ultimately pleasurable.

On the Godward side the Creator–Covenant Maker has his people who have faith in him and see him as their Father. They are those who are glad to be under God’s covenant—whatever form that covenant may take at the various points of history in which the faithful may be living. The outcome of history is imprinted upon the hearts of the faithful.²³ The people of God always move in covenant, which means that they move in grace. Thus they live in the freedom of God, although ever persecuted by the forms and powers of evil, including the rejection of their fellow human creatures who espouse the kingdom of this world.

A powerful case can be made out biblically for the assertion that men and women of faith, through covenant, have tastings and intimations of the Eden to come, the fulfilment of the covenant of God and the climaxing of the Kingdom of God as it finally comes in its sovereign, irresistible power.

THE USE AND MISUSE OF POWER AND AUTHORITY

We need to understand that the law of God is the law *of* God, the law of torah of himself. To celestial creatures and Man, it is the law God gives innately to their creation. The rebellion of angels and Man-in-Adam is against the Being of the ‘Three Personed God’—‘against thee, thee only, have I sinned’. It is thus a breaking of God’s law. All power and authority should be exercised in conformity with God’s law. To break trust with that law is to go against God’s plan. It is thus we find the two systems—the faithful angels and men, and the rebellious angels and humanity; the first with God as their Head and the second with Satan as their king.

God’s determination for his elect—as we read in Ephesians chapter 1—is to rescue human sinners and transform them into people of faith and children of God. God has no ‘raw power’ by which he can accomplish this. He has no metaphysical power which forces human beings against their will to surrender to him. God’s wise plan requires that a human being should be such a one who renders full obedience to God’s law and makes atonement for all other human beings, thus erasing their guilt and in abolishing their death for sin, brings life and immortality to light. This one is the person of whom we spoke in our last Study, namely Jesus of Nazareth. We do not here have the time and space to discuss this Man of whom the Old Testament Scriptures spoke in such detail. There what may have seemed to be more than one particular person, such as ‘the Bruiser’, ‘the Son of Man’, ‘Shiloh’, ‘the Stump of Jesse’, ‘the Messiah’, ‘the Son of God’, ‘the Suffering Servant’ and other such names, proves in the New Testament to be Jesus of Nazareth who fulfils all these categories of wonderfully active humanity. He who was truly Man, was found to be ‘Immanuel’ or God with us. He was God before he became Man, and his humanity was genuine.

²³ By this we mean that what we call the eschatological things—the things which will complete history—are found in protological form in the first two chapters of Genesis. Indeed they—the faithful—know that God is fulfilling his plan, whatever strange, terrible and unpromising situations may arise. Thus Abraham looked for a city to come—the Holy City. Thus all men and women of faith looked to ‘the recompense of the reward’, the fulfilment of God’s plan. These things were the substance of hope, built on the basis of God’s promises. I Corinthians 2:6–10 shows that God has always revealed the things to come to his people by means of the Holy Spirit.

CHRIST'S POWER TO TRANSFORM HUMAN BEINGS

We saw that 'God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all those that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him'. We traced some of this ministry of power which was exercised under the authority given by God—'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased: listen to him'. Ministering in Galilee he had authority to forgive sins, authority over all evil spirits, authority to heal, and to command natural elements such as the wind and the waves. Yet his ministry was not primarily in such things, although were essential to his whole obedience to God. It was primarily to save people from their sins, that is, to save them from the effects of their committed sins, from the power, pollution and penalty of the same.²⁴ This aim is stated several times in different ways but they all add to the one purpose, that sinners might be forgiven, cleansed, justified, adopted, sanctified and ultimately perfected and glorified.

THE POWER OF THE CROSS

This matter of the Cross is the heart of all the power we seek to comprehend. It is set out in very simple terms, easy to be understood by those who will to hear. In Romans 1:16 Paul says he is not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God. In I Corinthians 1:17 he says he refuses to preach that gospel with 'eloquent wisdom' lest the Cross be robbed of its power. He then says (1:18) that the word of the Cross is the power of God to them that are being saved. Having shown that 'the gospel' or 'the word of the Cross' is powerful, he goes on to show that in fact the preaching of the word is 'Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ [crucified] the power of God and the wisdom of God'.

That Christ crucified is the power of God and the wisdom of God is a strange assertion, an extraordinary claim. How can a Man crucified on a criminal's gallows be the wisdom of God?. It is not simply that Christ is the power and wisdom of God, but him crucified which is the power and wisdom. That all God's power and all God's wisdom should be summed up in the act of the Cross is an amazing claim. When we think of God's power in raising a people like Israel to world-stature as a nation, and his reducing world-stature nations to rubble, this is surely a greater demonstration of his power than a criminal's Cross.

No scandalised Jew or contemptuous Greek is going to accept a rationale of that Cross. The gospel of Christ is not going to appear as 'all-power', nor is 'the word of the Cross'—the preaching of the gospel—going to convince the intellectual Greek. How then, is the Cross *the* power and *the* wisdom of God? Part of the answer must be in the historical fact that many Jews and many Greeks were gripped by the power of that Cross and their lives transformed by it. Yet this is not the whole answer, for Paul admitted a certain kind of preaching of Christ crucified could win adherents but 'rob the Cross of its power'.

It must be what happened on the Cross which is the power and wisdom of God. We can assuredly claim that no other act but that of the Cross could be God's power and God's wisdom. He chose that way before he created the world. This, at least, is what the apostolic teaching claimed in the many statements we now refer to immediately below. The reader needs to examine all these references and understand them. They are Matthew 1:21; 26:27–28; Luke 1:77; 24:47; Acts 2:28; 3:19; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; Romans 3:24; 4:1–6; 5:8, 12–21; I Corinthians 15:1–3; II Corinthians 5:14–15; Galatians 2:20; 3:10; 4:4–7; 5:24; 6:14; Hebrews

²⁴ Read my *Christ's Cross Over Man's Abyss, Beyond the Cross* and *The Clash of the Kingdoms* (all published by NCPI), to see a rationale of the Atonement.

9:26; 10:10–22; I Peter 2:24; 3:18; Revelation 1:5; cf. 5:9–10; 7:9–14. Note that only a few of the references relating to the Cross and Resurrection have been quoted, but all similar references support that central statement of the purpose of the Cross.

In our previous text we have already claimed to show that God does not use ‘raw power’ to achieve his purposes, as would say, a dictator. In the references of Psalms 59:9–10, 16–17, and 62:11–12, we saw that God works his power in steadfast love. The Cross is that same power worked in steadfast love. Indeed the whole of the Cross is *the* act of love of God in history, as I John 3:16, 4:9–10, and others of the references above assert. The writer of Hebrews makes it clear that the blood of animals could never have destroyed the guilt and pollution of sin, but that the High Priestly offering by Jesus of his own body and life was the powerful means by which sins were forgiven ‘once for all’, and this is the purport of all the references quoted above. One Man (Jesus) died for all and so all died. When all died it was a penal death, a death which brought forgiveness of sins and justification of the person. They died to the power and condemnation of the law. Christ bore their sins in his body on the Tree, which means the guilt and pollution of all sins was borne by him—to exhaustion and extinction. The conscience was wholly cleansed, opening the way to worship God, and entrance was made for them into the Holy of Holies where they could now have access to God.

This was God’s way of crucifying the world to Man and Man to the world, so setting them ‘free indeed’ as Christ had promised before his death. This seals the fact beyond alteration that God’s power is love, and God’s wisdom resides in this love and expresses it. Many wonderful works have been written on the work of the Cross, just as many have also written against it decrying it as not really being a great act of love. The ‘scandal’ to the Jew—or religious person—and the ‘foolishness’ to the Greek, the intellectual, still stand today.

There is a statement in I Corinthians 2:7–8 where Paul says:

But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

If ‘the rulers of this world’ means the principalities and authorities which are under Satan, then we can understand the thought to be that they recognised the act of the Cross was truly God’s one of power and wisdom. If it means Pilate, Herod and the chief priests, then it surely means they recognised that in some way the Cross was not their victory, but Christ’s.

CONCLUSION: THE PLAN OF THE MAN AND THE TRUE PLOT OF GOD’S STORY

We are led, then, to see that ‘the seed of the woman’ as promised in Genesis 3:15, is ‘the Man of the Plan’, Jesus. No other form of power can win and transform the human heart. Much of the Cross must remain a mystery, but enough of the mystery is revealed to us to assure us that not only for our redemption, but also for the final salvation, sanctification, glorification and perfection of creation, this Cross was God’s way of completing his plan. In following Studies we will see how the power of the Cross works triumphantly in all history.

THE POWER OF GOD AND MAN

NCTM Monday Night Studies. 1st Term, 17th March 1997. G. Bingham

Study Seven

Jesus' Power in Defeating Evil Powers

THE NATURE OF THE EVIL POWERS

In Ephesians 6:12 Paul states, 'We are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places'. It can be seen that very powerful forces are against us, and these are said to be 'in heavenly places', that is, they are not earthly powers though they may well use human beings who are under their sway. In Ephesians 2:2, Paul speaks of 'the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience'. That he is the prince of the power of the air means he is above the level of earth and coordinates all the evil powers.

We have already suggested that these are angelic creatures given principedoms, and systems of authority by God, but they, like Man, are using their given powers to fight against God and his Kingdom, especially as God has planned its ultimate victory. They constitute the kingdom of darkness. In the Old Testament we gather from Daniel chapters 10 and 11 that all peoples—clans or nations—have at least one angelic prince over each of them, working the destiny of such nations. It may be to this Jesus refers to when speaking to Nathanael, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man'. This obviously refers to Jacob's dream of angels ascending and descending upon a ladder, which in turn meant the ascension and descension of the nations, Jacob being shown this for his comfort, since Jewish tradition had it that God himself was the Angel of Israel. That rising and falling of nations will now depend upon Jesus.²⁵ A passage in Isaiah 24:21–23 may also give us a clue as to these 'hosts of heaven':

On that day the Lord will punish
the host of heaven, in heaven,
and the kings of the earth, on the earth.
They will be gathered together
as prisoners in a pit;
they will be shut up in a prison,
and after many days they will be punished.
Then the moon will be confounded,
and the sun ashamed;
for the LORD of hosts will reign
on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem
and before his elders he will manifest his glory.²⁶

²⁵ Colossians 1:15–17 shows that the eternal Son had created all things including all principalities, powers, thrones and dominions. Since he was their Creator he was also to be their Reconciler. There was no way in which they could transcend him who was their Maker, nor could their power ever overcome his, being of the nature that it was. Hence the victory over such powers as disclosed in Colossians 2:14–15, Hebrews 2:14–15, and I Corinthians 15:24–28.

²⁶ In terms of covenant, especially the Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants, we would expect Israel to be the target for attack by the kingdom of darkness. This is shown in the case of Daniel chapters 10–11. In regard to Jacob's dream, tradition had it that God swore to be Jacob's angel and to ensure ascendancy of Israel among all the nations. The battle with other

This passage needs close study, but it seems to comport with the international activity of evil powers of heavenly origin. If, also, we were to take Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 to be symbolic of Satan himself, although the direct reference is to the kings of Tyre and Babylon, then we can understand the plan of Satan against God.

We have seen in the New Testament that Jesus had power over these evil creatures, some of them who were in demonic form. It is surely to them he is saying in Luke 22:53, 'This is your hour, and the *power* of darkness'. We have indications in the Messianic Psalms 22 and 69 that evil supranatural forces were gathered against him on the Cross, as well as the natural forces of opposing humanity.

Christ fought such powers in casting them out as evil and unclean spirits during the time of his ministry in Palestine. We have seen that the land was virtually swarming with demonic powers. That he had been endued with power by the Spirit is clear enough, and it was a power by which he called his disciples, proclaimed the Scriptures and their meaning, healed the sick and afflicted, raised people from the dead, commanded the natural elements, forgave sinners directly, rebuked the leading powers of the nations, including the Pharisees and Sadducees, fulfilled the plan of the Cross, rose from the dead, gave commission regarding the nations and ascended to the right hand of God.

It is Paul who shows that by his death, and fulfilling the handwriting of the law that was against us, 'he [God] disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him [Christ]'. The writer of Hebrews, speaking of Christ's incarnation, shows us that at the Cross he (Christ) destroyed him who has the power of death—Satan—and delivered all those who through fear of death were in lifelong subjection to Satan. It goes almost without saying that the power Satan and his hosts exercised over Man was through their guilt of sin and diversion from God's plan. We rightly conclude that Christ's resurrection does not only seal his defeat of evil forces, but is a battle which does not have to be fought again. He has won victory over death, so that all the enemies of men and women of faith are defeated, and all humanity can come into liberty where they exercise repentance and faith. Thus Paul could speak of the 'word of the Cross' as being powerful and 'the power of his resurrection'.

CHRIST'S CONTINUING VICTORY

The plan of God for the conclusion of creation's history in all things being saved, sanctified, glorified and perfected, was through the Cross and Resurrection, totally assured. Whereas Israel had been commissioned to the priest nation among—and for—all the nations, this commission was now given by Christ to the Apostles and so to the Church which Paul called 'the Israel of God'. When Exodus 19:5–6 are seen to be paralleled in the new temple—the Church—by I Peter 2:9–11, then we would expect the full force of Satan and his minions to be loosed upon and against the Church, and this was the case. The Book of Acts shows us the action of the powers at Jerusalem in trying to prevent the preaching of the gospel of God and his Christ. We see the apostles speaking with immense powers, and so the springing up of churches. These soon began to contain those never circumcised as Israelites, and as those looking upon themselves as the true people of God.

The apostolic church now under the authority of Christ had the power of Christ working through them. Great signs and wonders and the power of the Spirit all contributed to bring a proclamation of the word of God which transformed lives and created living assemblies. Almost all Epistles teach about spiritual conflict and give warning and instructions. Not only

nations must be included in the thrust of principalities and powers against God's Israel. That the Church should later become the target of these powers is a natural step.

the apostolic epistles, but also the seven epistles in Revelation chapters 2 and 3, show us that the powers of darkness were seeking to destroy the Church, and that the churches had to be warned against the subtleties of temptations by evil powers. For example, the church at Ephesus is told its practice is correct but it has abandoned its first love. The church at Smyrna is told it is in the locale of 'the synagogue of Satan', and can expect fierce persecution but may stand firm. We are not sure of the meaning of the statement, 'I know that you have but little power', written in the letter to the church at Philadelphia. It seems that this is so because of the adverse situation in which they live, but they will triumph—whatever.

Paul, in I Corinthians 15:24–28, gives us the picture in miniature of what the Book of the Revelation expands into a grand fullness; namely, that Christ is destroying all the enemies of God:

Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 'For God has put all things in subjection under his feet.' But when it says, 'All things are put in subjection under him,' it is plain that he is excepted who put all things under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one.

Christ in the Book of the Revelation

In this book Christ appears in the first chapter as King of kings and Lord of lords, as the one who is risen from the dead, and who holds the keys of death and Hades. He holds the seven churches in his hands. In chapter 5 he is the one who is worthy to open the seven-sealed book, which must be the book of God's history unfolded by his ministry as the Lion of Judah and as the Lamb that has been slain. By opening the first seal he sets in motion the judgments and actions of God. Signs greater than happened in Egypt now happen in the world. They are indications of his total Lordship, and they are to do with the movements, the rising and falling of nations, and the judgments that are essential to close off history with its good end.

On the way we are shown the powers that the forces of darkness wield, though only because God allows them to do so for his own purposes. All the counterfeit imitations of the Triune God as Father, Son and Spirit are given their sway as the Red Dragon, the Beast and the false Prophet. The seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls of wrath have their play in the history of the clash of two kingdoms, as God against Satan, until these enemies are destroyed. This includes the triumph of the Woman of chapter 12 over against the harlot woman, Babylon, the mother of harlots. References to the Old Testament passages and prophecies are innumerable. God acts throughout the story of the Bible consistent with his own nature. The final destruction of the powers of evil, and the making of the new heavens and the new earth as a re-creation of his original creation, is a thrilling prospect to behold. It seems that the two Testaments are brought together almost as the one. In fact the Revelation is the fitting climax and conclusion to all the Scriptures. Whilst this may sound like a simple truism it is a dynamic one. The Scriptures ultimately turn out to be one full and grand story, and the revelation of the God who completes his beginnings with a glorious ending!

CONCLUSION: THE CLOSE OF THE AGE IN THE TRIUMPH OF POWER

What we have been saying in these studies is that God set out with a rich plan for his creation. He brought it into being with love, and planned that it should climax in love in the way of his own nature and in conformity to it as Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier, Glorifier and Perfecter.

The nature of the Triune God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit shows us that their power is not—as we have said a number of times—‘raw power’, but the power of love.

A fitting close to our chapter is a statement of **Karl Barth**, often quoted without verification of its reference:

This is the perfection of his divine omnipotence, that (in distinction from all abstract omnipotence) it can assume the form of weakness and powerlessness, and triumph as omnipotence also and even especially in this form.

THE POWER OF GOD AND MAN
NCTM Monday Night Studies. 1st Term, 24th March 1997. G. Bingham

Study Eight

The Power of Man, Created, Fallen and Renewed

INTRODUCTION: THE POWER OF GOD

So far we have seen in our research that ‘all power belongs to God’. Also in Psalm 147:5 we are told, ‘Great is our Lord and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure’. In his work as Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier, Glorifier and Perfecter he shows this power. What we will see a little later is that there is also a weakness of God which is in fact his power. We can do no better than to quote again Karl Barth’s saying:

This is the perfection of his divine omnipotence, that (in distinction from all abstract omnipotence) it can assume the form of weakness and powerlessness, and triumph as omnipotence also and even especially in this form.

What is clear to us in reading the Scriptures is that God goes through permutations in his acts, sometimes judging to the point where we are shocked; sometimes showing mercy and love that bewilders us because of their generous dimensions. Whatever happens it is God’s holiness, righteousness and love which governs all his acts, so that they are in conformity with his own nature, and always tend to the end when evil will be judged and God’s people prove to be his holy, glorified ones. We will have more opportunity to see these elements of God’s power.

MAN AS STRONG AND AS WEAK

Commonsense tells us that Man as he is—that is, the man and the woman together—are weak and strong *by comparison*. By comparison with an elephant or a crocodile man is weak. By comparison with a mouse he is strong. That, of course, is not how we assess weakness and strength. Man is able to control the elephant and crocodile. The mouse cannot control Man. The biblical statement of God, ‘Let us make man in our image’, tells us how extraordinary a creature is Man, unique amongst all earthly creatures and, ultimately all heavenly ones too. Notice, however, that Man cannot be truly Man unless he is dependant upon God; that is to say, unless he is in total union with him. Only then is he truly the image of God. Genesis 1:28 speaks of God’s mandate to Man. Chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis indicate that Man, placed in Paradise, is to so rule and fill the world that the bounds of Paradise will reach to the ends of the earth, transforming it as Man goes. In doing this he would prove to be under the full authority of God, and so be given the ability (*dunamis*: power) to fulfil the mandate. Psalm 8 needs to be read thoroughly to see Man’s glory and his power.²⁷

The manner of Man’s creation makes him ‘a living being’ though created from the dust.

²⁷ NCPI materials are, in order of recommended reading, *The Meaning and Making of Man* (1990); *I, the Man!* (1983); *Man of Dust! Man of Glory!* (1986); *The Wisdom of God and the Healing of Man* (1990). The bibliography in the last title should be helpful for wider reading.

He is one whom God has constantly in mind, and is the prime object of his creation. Man's original powers—before sin caused him to fall—were probably beyond what we can imagine, but here we may not speculate. The story told in the Gospels about a Roman centurion asking Jesus to heal his servant tells us how true power and authority operate. The centurion said to Jesus:

Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only say the word and my servant will be healed. For I am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave 'Do this,' and he does it.

The point is that the centurion recognised Jesus as being *under* authority and so he, Jesus, could speak *with* authority. The centurion had the whole army's authority by which he acted. Likewise Jesus was under Divine authority and so his word of command for healing would have with it the *dunamis* (power) which goes with *exousia* (authority). This illustration makes clear the relationship of power and authority. It also is intended to show that only when Man truly relates in submission to God does he have the power a human being can have.

Man lost much when he rebelled against God's authority. It was in this way he came under the power of sin, for Jesus said, 'He who commits sin is the slave of sin'. Once a person has sinned he/she is guilty and the one who is guilty automatically comes under the bondage of sin, the law, the flesh, conscience, death, Satan and his world system, including that of the principalities and powers. Thus the created being of Man is weakened. He is now incapable of living as he did when in innocency, and so is a weaker person. Paul, in Romans 5:12–21, shows that Man did not simply 'make a sin' but that he sinned principally against God, and so the whole human race, being so to speak in the loins of Adam, sinned in Adam, against him. The breaking of that essential creatorial and relational union was what weakened Man.

At the same time Man did wholly lose the image of God, which is said to be irreducible but reversible. The 'I (God) and the thou (Man)' changed. Man, from being contingent for true being upon God, sought to become autonomous, dependent only upon himself. We note in passing that he could not subsist this way and so had to devise idols to fill 'the God-shaped blank' within himself. He also passed into the power and system of Satan, 'the prince of the power of the air who now works [i.e. energises, empowers for evil, activates for rebellion] in the children of disobedience.'

Of course we always have to keep in mind that the Fall did not change the essential, ontological nature of Man. Thus Man in a very real sense can be very strong. The words 'might' and 'mighty' need to be looked at in a concordance. There is talk of 'mighty men' both in conquest and government. Israelites are asked to love God with all their might. Whatever one's hand sets out to do it should do with all its might. Authority plays a large part in human beings using their abilities. Power is often collective, as in a family or a nation. The Old Testament Scriptures are against the wrong use of both power and authority. Nations—not excepting Israel—become proud in their achievements and need to be chastened and humbled. This also goes for human persons, especially those in authority. Often men and women use their power to oppress the poor and to benefit by their poverty. The wisdom literature exalts wisdom above power. Ecclesiastes 9:16 (cf. Ps. 147:10f.; Prov. 16:32; Jer. 9:23) says that 'wisdom is better than might'. The principle of Zechariah 4:6, 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord', defines where human power and might are limited and the Divine Spirit accomplishes what Man himself cannot.

Of course we always have to keep in mind the fact that from Abel onwards there were men and women of faith who sought to live in the strength of God and enjoyed their life in union with him. They were the ones through whom God often worked signs and wonders, sometimes called 'powers' (*dunamais*). They lived under God's authority which becomes

known to us through his law. They were the covenant people, the true worshippers of God, who grew morally strong because of their participation, by worship and service, in their relationships with him. In themselves they constitute a great story.

MAN RENEWED IN STRENGTH

Jesus delegated power and authority to his disciples on occasions, and they were able to heal people and exorcise demons. It is clear from the Gospels that Jesus was a man who was strong in God's power, by his Spirit. It was not from his deity that he did powerful works. His humanity was charged with the Holy Spirit, and we have already spoken of the great works he did as well as the powerful yet simple life which he lived.

When it comes to the church we find men and women of great power and authority. The Book of the Acts is filled with the accounts of what they were and did. Whilst it is true that the apostles were especially known for their unique authority—especially in forming the apostolic truth—yet the whole church was imbued with power.²⁸ Stephen was no less dynamic in his use of signs and wonders than were the apostles. In fact he is an outstanding example of a man who was powerful in many ways. From Pentecost onwards this action of miracles, signs and wonders was seen to be part of the church's power to break through into Judaism and paganism. Let us note that the apostles did not think they did such works through any power innate to them. All special works are attributed to God as Father, to Christ himself, or to the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 3:12–16; 4:7–10; 6:8). These signs and wonders confirmed the word proclaimed (cf. Acts 14:1–3). Paul claims such works verify his apostleship (see II Cor. 12:12; Rom. 15:19f.), but he also sees the charismatic gifts as distributed throughout the whole body of the church: such charismata includes miracles and healings.

Christians Generally Are to Be Strong

There are various reasons why Christians should be strong. Having a form of religion, but denying the power thereof (II Tim. 3:5) is a scandal, since the church is proclaiming the Kingdom of God which is 'not in word but in power' (I Cor. 2:4; 4:20). The power of God is working towards and in all believers (Eph. 1:19; 3:20). By it they are inwardly strengthened through the Spirit, for Christ to dwell in their hearts by faith (Eph. 3:16). Paul's prayer, in Colossians 1:11, is that the Colossians might be 'strengthened with all *power* according to his glorious *might* for all enduring and patience with joy'. His exhortation in Ephesians 6:10ff. is for believers to 'be *strong*' (*endunamai*) in the *strength* (*kratos*) of God's *might* (*ischus*). This is in order that they might undertake spiritual warfare. Power for Christians is also linked with willingness to suffer for the Gospel (II Tim. 1:8), to do good works (II Thess. 1:11), live the life of godliness (II Pet. 1:3) and to 'abound in hope' (Rom. 15:13).

The Weak and the Strong

We need firstly to see that there is a 'weakness of God'. Paul speaks of it in I Corinthians 1:25, and not merely in irony. The fact that the power of God and the wisdom of God are found in the act and person of 'Christ crucified' reminds us that this is the way the world always sees it; that Jesus Christ was 'crucified through weakness' (II Cor. 12:4). By contrast he was raised in power in the resurrection: yet in fact the Cross–Resurrection was all power. In the light of this, Paul reminds the Corinthians converts that from a worldly point of view, they were all 'nothings', 'weaklings', and so on. It appears they have become 'strong' and that they now see themselves as 'something'. In I Corinthians chapter 8, some see themselves

²⁸ See I Corinthians 12:10; 5:4; II Corinthians 6:7; Ephesians 3:7; Galatians 3:5; I Thessalonians 1:5; Hebrews 2:4.

as strong because of strong consciences. In Romans chapters 14 and 15, some see themselves as strong in faith, and others as weak in faith. Whatever may be the case in these two instances, Paul counsels the so-called strong ones to have love for the so-called weak ones, and not to put a stumbling block in their way.

Perhaps his strongest warnings come in II Corinthians chapter 12. He is aware that many in the Corinthian church were impressed by the so-called ‘super apostles’ who claimed that they outclassed Paul. Paul was the apostle who had founded the Corinthian church and was the spiritual father of the assembly. In the last chapters of his second Letter he tries to show how weak he is. Although he has had extraordinary visions in which he was taken into Paradise, and heard things he was forbidden to utter, he virtually needed ‘a stake in the flesh’ to keep him always humble. Constant petitions for release from it brought no results; it seems he was always to need this humbling suffering. What he learned was that God’s grace was sufficient for him, for God’s strength was made perfect in Paul’s weakness. This act of giving Paul affliction was an act of the grace of God. It is for weakness that grace works. This is an important and significant lesson for one to learn.

CONCLUSION: MAN IS RENEWED IN CHRIST UNTO ALL THE POWER THAT HE NEEDS

When we look back over this Study we see how far we have come. Man was made perfect in creation, being in the image of God. That image suffered from his fall into sin, and his powers were broken; sin, death, the law, the flesh, the conscience, Satan, Satan’s powers and the world system now dominating Man. This did not prevent God pursuing his plan for the world he loved, and from the very beginning grace helped those who had faith in God. Then grace appeared definitively in Jesus Christ as he became incarnate. He was the one *par excellence*, who depended upon the Father, and lived in the power of the Spirit.

Man-in-Adam now by repentance and faith became Man-in-Christ, Man-in-the-Last-Adam. This transformed him. Ephesians 4:20–24 speaks of him putting off his old humanity (that in Adam) and putting on the new humanity (that in Christ). It says this new humanity—Christ—is ‘created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness’. This is a powerful statement, for it is telling us in one way what Colossians 3:10 says in a slightly different way—‘which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator’. We are really being told that we are regaining in life and experience more and more of the image in which once we were made. Whilst the eschatological end is conclusive, the present is an experience of being changed from one stage of glory to another. We are more and more growing into the fullness of the image of God.

Speaking in terms of power and authority, it is saying that each person in Christ is regaining the fullness of his/her true being. This true being is under the authority (*exousia*) of God, and is giving Man the ability (*dunamis*) to share with him in the filling out of his plan for all creation, the fulfilment of the mandate of Genesis 1:28–29, along with which is the mandate to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

THE POWER OF GOD AND MAN
 NCTM. Monday Night. 1st Term. 7th April 1997. G. Bingham
Study Nine

The Power of Power—Love

INTRODUCTION: POWER POWERFUL IN LOVE

Another heading could have rightly been ‘The Power of Love’, but since the Scriptures ascribe power to God but say that he is love, and never say he is power, it is probably more biblical to say that all that God is, is love. It would be equally correct to say that he is holiness and righteousness. Thus these three—love, holiness and righteousness—cannot be separated. Since his love is always holy and righteous, it is proper to say that the power of God will be manifested in and by love. Some might object when they see the horrific accounts of his judgments on both Israel and the world, to say nothing of persons to whom he directs his judgments. Ultimately we are faced with the fact that all his judgmental acts are motivated by love, however much they may appear to be to the contrary. Here, however, we are not concerned with *apologia* for the nature of God as love.

QUESTIONS OF ESCHATOLOGY AND THE TELOS

Whilst we do not have to wait until the end—the *telos*—to understand history, since God has not only given humanity promises for all time and eternity, but has sketched future history in prophetic utterances, yet the *telos* will give a full view of God’s plan for his creation. If, as the apostle John tells us twice, ‘God is love’, then that will be evident in the outcome of God’s history for his creation. When Israel cries out to God, ‘Thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer from of old [from eternity] is thy name’, then it is because Israel can appeal to God in his true nature. That nature was disclosed to Israel as his very glory. Exodus 34:6–7 was burned indelibly—and still is—on the minds of his people:

The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.’

In the Old Testament the revelation of Exodus 34:6–7 awaited Israel’s covenant with God—the covenant given to Abraham and, prior to that, innate in creation. This articulated revelation of God’s glory and his nature was always in the hearts of the people, even in the worst situations caused by sinning. It was no mere theological statement to interest priests and prophets. It was essential for Israel in judgment to know God loved Israel with an everlasting love:

‘At that time, says the Lord, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people.’

Thus says the Lord:

‘The people who survived the sword
found grace in the wilderness;
when Israel sought for rest,
the Lord appeared to him from afar.
I have loved you with an everlasting love;
therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you’
(Jer. 31:1–3).

Isaiah 54 is a chapter where Israel is shown almost as though divorced, but there is no divorce in God’s eyes and so he encourages Israel with his everlasting love:

‘Fear not, for you will not be ashamed;
be not confounded, for you will not be put to shame;
for you will forget the shame of your youth,
and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more.
For your Maker is your husband,
the Lord of hosts is his name;
and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer,
the God of the whole earth he is called.
For the Lord has called you
like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit,
like a wife of youth when she is cast off,
says your God.
For a brief moment I forsook you,
but with great compassion I will gather you.
In overflowing wrath for a moment
I hid my face from you,
but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,
says the Lord, your Redeemer’ (Isa. 54:4–8).

These and other Old Testament Scriptures still comfort the people, the Jews, but without Messiah there can never be that dynamic and definitive revelation of God as love which is found in the New Testament. Erring Israel then, as Israel now, knew the judgments to be just. They knew they had defiled the Eden God had given them—Canaan—with other gods and foul worship, and none but the angry have said his judgments were other than with equity. There was plenty communicated to them of God as love but, nevertheless, the full revelation of God as love awaited the coming of Messiah—Jesus.

In the New Testament one of the most dynamic passages regarding God’s love for his creation is the whole first chapter of Ephesians. This chapter reveals God’s mind for his creation before he created it, and his goal for it at the end-time, ‘the coming ages’. Since we have looked at this in part we will go back to it, dissect its very elements, and then, putting them together and seeing God’s plan as a whole, we will see that God’s intention for creation and his historical action within it has ever been good, that is, of love as is indicated in Exodus 34:6–7.

THE QUESTION OF THE POWER OF LOVE

John’s twice-repeated statement, ‘God is love’, is profoundly intimate, powerful and deeply theological. The passage of I John 4:7–21 shows that all that are born of God, love. They all love all. I Thessalonians 3:12 has the injunction, ‘May the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all men as we do to you’. He/she who does not love his/her fellow-being does not love God: this is clear. ‘We love [all], because he first loved

us.’

If then we have thought of love as a commodity, an influence, or an abstract power, then we are wrong. ‘God is love’ means that love is always God in action. When we love it means God loves through us, with us. Love is not only epitomised by the Trinity: the Trinity *is* love. I John 4:7–10 tells us the Father is love, that he is *fons divinitatis*—the fountain of Godhead—and Colossians 1:13 tells us that the one we know as Jesus Christ is ‘the Son of his love’, and Romans 5:5, 15:30, and Galatians 5:22 tell us the Spirit is the Spirit of love. These Three are thus one; their unity is *of* love, and *is* love.

When, then, the ascriptions attribute power to God, they do it because he is Creator, because he is Redeemer, and because he is the Completer of creation.

If we remember God’s goal was to ‘Edenise’ the world by the new creation, joining the Bride the church, to his Son the Lord of heaven and earth, and if we remember that the Holy City is open to all believers, the holy Kingdom is established and the New Temple is God and the Lamb, then the truth of the power of God will be seen to be established.

THE INTERNECINE CONFLICT OF TWO FORMS OF POWER

There are not two abstract elements in history, namely good and evil. There are just two personal powers, God and Satan, and they are in conflict all the time. It is true that God has his angelic and human hosts, just as Satan has his, but in this conflict it is not numbers or strategies which determine the final outcome: it is the *kind* of power each uses. God *is* love, holiness, righteousness, and Satan is nothing, since evil is not substantial. Satan is seemingly substantial as a fallen power, but he has chosen egoism as his way, and opposition to all that is true (ontological) as his force by which to unseat God. We cannot here, go into all that. His worshippers may well accord him all the attributes which are God’s, but that does not give them to him. Hatred, unholiness and unrighteousness are the spurious attributes that are his, but they are not substantial. They are un-ontological and anti-ontological. Left to themselves they can only accomplish *nothing*! More, they cannot separate the elect people and God’s creation from the love of God:

for I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Thus it is because of the power of love (God) that the power of evil (Satan and his minions) is defeated, and inevitably destroyed.

COMING INTO AND LIVING IN THE POWER OF GOD’S LOVE

It is one thing to present a theological argument for the inability of Satan’s power to succeed and the inevitability of God’s power to succeed, but it is another matter for human beings to know this as the reality of the world and of their own lives. It is one thing to quote John 3:16—that God loves the whole world—but it needs substantiation by God sending his Son into the world to die for it, and to save it from perishing. It requires that *act*. It is one thing to have a theological acceptance of the statement, ‘God is love’, but it is another to enter into that love. Paul spoke of ‘The Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me’, because that was what he knew. He had experienced the love of God being poured into his heart by the Holy Spirit who, himself, was given to Paul. The apostle John knew the love of God because

he was born of God, and had personally known the propitiation for his sins in the death of Christ. The early Christians—as no less the later ones—knew the outpouring of the Spirit upon them and the flooding of their hearts with the love of God. They were said to ‘walk in love’, and in knowing the love of Christ, ‘to be filled unto all the fullness of God’. Thus they knew that to claim they loved God meant they loved all others, even their brethren. The term ‘brotherly love’ took on a new and wonderful meaning. They recognised the unfailing love God had for them. The meaning of Exodus 34:6–7 was radicalised or fully revealed for them.²⁹

LOVE SHARES THE MIGHT OF LOVE WITH OTHERS

We have surely come to our irreversible conclusion that God’s love is in this, that what he planned *before* time he fully executes *in* time. The Eden that Man was to expand to the ends of the earth can only be expanded in the Last Adam, because the first one failed. The ultimate glories are guaranteed by the Second Adam and his obedience. At the same time, all Christ’s people are in him as the New Humanity, and with him they share the renewed action of the creational mandate of Genesis 1:28f. The direct mandate given to the disciples—and thus to all the church—was to bring the might of love to bear upon this fallen creation. God loves this world and all its inhabitants. Christ has died, not only for the sins of the world, but also he will renew his elect into the full image of God: and what Adam failed to do by his renegeing on the mandate, Christ and his people now accomplish together. Having given them a commission to disciple all nations, to go to the ends of the earth, and to tell the Gospel to every human being, Christ is with his proclaiming people to the end of the age.

CONCLUSION: THE MIGHT OF LOVE

Keeping in mind that we may also speak about ‘the might of holiness’ and ‘the might of righteousness’, we realise that God’s ‘might’ is not raw power, but God working in love to his people. ‘God working in love to his people’ is a good description of grace. Provided we do not only think of his prevailing might in individual terms—that is, its value for us as individual persons—but see the glorious horizon where the holy things of the *telos* are fulfilled, then we will understand something of God’s great love for his creation, as well as his transforming love for us, personally and intimately.

With all this wonderful knowledge which has come to us as a gift ‘we cannot but tell the things which we have seen and heard’. We are deeply obligated by love—not compelled by a legalism—to tell that love of God to others. God has provided the means of telling, but we must purpose to be renewed in the creational and salvational mandate. This is what Paul means by the statement, ‘The love of Christ constrains me’. So be it, likewise, for each of us. In this sense we are those sharing with God as he brings his people into love and the fulfilment of the age to come.

²⁹ For this whole paragraph see John 3:16; I John 2:5f.; 3:10ff., 16; 4:7–10, 19–20; Galatians 2:20; 5:22–23; Acts 2, 8, 10 (for the outpouring of the Spirit); Colossians 1:11; Ephesians 3:16–19. For NCPI materials on God’s love see *Where I Love I Live* (1986); *Constraining Love* (1985); *Ah, Strong Strong Love* (1993); *Twice Conquering Love* (1993).