



Fire and Ice Sermon Series

<http://www.puritansermons.com/>

Discourse On the Power of God

by Stephen Charnock

[Extracts from “Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God,” published by Baker Book House Company, Grand Rapids: MI, 1979, in two volumes, vol. 2, pp 86-103.]

*I*nstruct. 3. Inference from the doctrine. The blessedness of God is hence evidenced. If God be Almighty, he can lack nothing; all lack speaks weakness. If he doth what he will, he cannot be miserable; all misery consists in those things which happen contrary to our will. There is nothing can hinder his happiness, because nothing can resist his power. Since he is omnipotent, nothing can hurt him, nothing can strip him of what he hath, of what he is. If he can do whatsoever he will, he cannot lack anything that he wills. He is as happy, as great, as glorious, as he will; for he hath a perfect liberty of will to will, and a perfect power to attain what he will; his will cannot be restrained, nor his power measured. It would be a defect in blessedness, to will what he were not able to do: sorrow is the result of a absence of power, with a presence of will. If he could will anything which he could not effect, he would be miserable, and no longer God: he can do whatsoever he pleases, and therefore can lack nothing that pleases him. He cannot be happy, the original of whose happiness is not in himself: nothing can be infinitely happy, that is limited and bounded.

Instruct. 4. Hence is the ground for the immutability of God. As he is incapable of changing his resolves, because of his infinite wisdom, so he is incapable of being forced to any change, because of his infinite power. Being almighty, he can be no more changed from power to weakness; than, being all-wise, he can be changed from wisdom to folly; or, being omniscient, from knowledge to ignorance. He cannot be altered in his purposes, because of his wisdom; nor in the manner and method of his actions, because of his infinite strength. Men, indeed, when their designs are laid deepest, and their purposes stand firmest, yet are forced to stand still, or change the manner of the execution of their resolves, by reason of some outward accidents that obstruct them in their course; for, having not wisdom to foresee future hindrances, they have not power to prevent them, or strength to remove them, when they unexpectedly interpose

themselves between their desire and performance; but no created power has strength enough to be a bar against God. By the same act of his will that he resolves a thing, he can puff away any impediments that seem to rise up against him. He that lacks no means to effect his purposes, cannot be checked by anything that riseth up to stand in his way; heaven, earth, sea, the deepest places, are too weak to resist his will (Ps. 135:6). The purity of the angels will not, and the devil's malice cannot, frustrate his will; the one voluntarily obeys the beck of his hand, and the other is vanquished by the power of it. What can make him change his purposes? Who (if he please) can dash the earth against the heavens in the twinkling of an eye, untying the world from its centre, clap the stars and elements together into one mass, and blow the whole creation of men and devils into nothing? Because he is almighty, therefore he is immutable.

Instruct. 5. Hence is inferred the providence of God, and his government of the world. His power, as well as his wisdom, gives him a right to govern: nothing can equal him, therefore nothing can share the command with him; since all things are his works, it is fittest they should be under his order: he that frames a work, is fittest to guide and govern it. God hath the most right to govern, because he hath knowledge to direct his power, and power to execute the results of his wisdom: he knows what is convenient to order, and hath strength to effect what he orders. As his power would be oppressive without goodness and wisdom, so his goodness and wisdom would be fruitless without power. An artificer that hath lost his hands may direct, but cannot make an engine: a pilot that hath lost his arms may advise the way of steerage, but cannot hold the helm; something is wanting in him to be a complete governor: but since both counsel and power are infinite in God, hence results an infinite right to govern, and an infinite fitness, because his will cannot be resisted, his power cannot be enfeebled or diminished; he can quicken and increase the strength of all means as he pleases. He can hold all things in the world together, and preserve them in those functions wherein he settled them, and conduct them to those ends for which he designed them. Every artificer, the more excellent he is, and the more excellency of power appears in his work, is the more careful to maintain and cherish it. Those that deny Providence, do not only tear away from him the inner springs of his goodness, but strip him of a main exercise of his power, and engender in men a suspicion of weariness and feebleness in him; as though his strength had been spent in making them, that none is left to guide them. They would make him headless in regard of his wisdom, and bowless in regard of his goodness, and armless in regard of his strength. If he did not, or were not able to preserve and provide for his creatures, his power in making them would be, in a great part, an invisible power; if he did not preserve what he made, and govern what he preserves, it would be a kind of

strange and unskilled power, to make, and allow it to be dashed in pieces at the pleasure of others. If the power of God should relinquish the world, the life of things would be extinguished, the fabric would be confounded, and fall into a deplorable chaos. That, which is composed of so many various pieces, could not maintain its union, if there were not a secret virtue binding them together and maintaining those varieties of links. Well, then, since God is not only so good, that he cannot will anything but what is good; so wise, that he cannot err or mistake; but also so able, that he cannot be defeated or mated; he hath every way a full ability to govern the world: where those three are infinite, the right and fitness resulting from thence is unquestionable: and, indeed, to deny God this active part of his power, is to render him weak, foolish, cruel, or all.

Instruct. 6. Here is a ground for the worship of God. Wisdom and power are the grounds of the respect we give to men; they being both infinite in God, are the foundation of a solemn honor to be returned to him by his creatures. If a man makes an ingenious machine, we honor him for his skill; if another vanquish a vigorous enemy, we admire him for his strength: and shall not the efficacy of God's power in creation, government, redemption, enflame us with a sense of the honor of his name and perfections? We admire those princes that have vast empires, numerous armies, that have a power to conquer their enemies, and preserve their own people in peace. How much more ground have we to pay a mighty reverence to God, who, without trouble and weariness, made and manages this vast empire of the world by a word and gesture! What sensible thoughts have we of the noise the power of the sun, the storms of the sea! These things that have no understanding have struck men with such a reverence, that many have adored them as gods. What reverence and adoration doth this mighty power, joined with an infinite wisdom in God, demand at our hands! All religion and worship stands especially upon two pillars, goodness, and power in God; if either of these were defective, all religion would faint away. We can expect no entertainment with him without goodness, nor any benefit from him without power. This God prefaceth to the command to worship him, the benefit his goodness had conferred upon them, and the, powerful manner of conveyance of it to them (2 Kings 17:36): "The Lord brought you up from the land of Egypt with great power, and an out-stretched arm; him shall you fear, and him shall you worship, and to him shall you do sacrifice." Because this attribute is a main foundation of prayer, the Lord's Prayer is concluded with a doxology of it, "For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory." As he is rich, possessing all blessings; so he is powerful, to confer all blessings on us, and make them efficacious to us. The Jews repeat many times in their prayers, some say an hundred times, *melech ha-olam*, "The King of the world;" it is both an awe and an encouragement. We could not, without

consideration of it, pray in faith of success; nay, we could not pray at all, if his power were defective to help us, and his mercy too weak: to relieve us. Who would humbly beg, or lie as a prostrate suppliant, to a feeble arm? Upon this ability of God, our Savior built his petitions (Heb. 5:7): "He offered up strong cries unto Him that was able to save him from death." Abraham's faith hung upon the same string (Rom. 4:21), and the captived church supplicates God to act according to the greatness of his power (Ps. 79:11). In all our addresses this is to be eyed and considered; God is able to help, to relieve, to ease me, let my misery be never so great, and my strength never so vigorous; (Matt. 8:2): "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean," was the consideration the leper had when he came to worship Christ; he was clear in his power, and therefore worshipped him though he was not equally clear in his will. All worship is shot wrong that is not directed to, and conducted by, the thoughts of this attribute, whose assistance we need. When we beg the pardon of our sins, we should eye mercy and power; when we beg his righting us in any case where we are unjustly oppressed, we do not eye righteousness without power; when we plead the performance of his promise, we do not regard his faithfulness only without the prop of his power. As power ushers in all the attributes of God in their exercise and manifestation in the world, so should it be the target our eyes should be fixed upon in all our acts of worship: as without his power his other attributes would be useless, so without due apprehensions of his power our prayers will be faithless and comfortless. The title in the Lord's prayer directs us to a prospect both of his goodness and power; his goodness in the word Father, his greatness, excellency, and power, in the word Heaven. The heedless consideration of the infiniteness of this perfection roots up piety in the midst of us, and makes us so careless in worship. Did we more think of that Power that raised the world out of nothing, that orders all creatures by an act of his will, that performed so great an exploit as that of our redemption, when masterless sin had triumphed over the world, we should give God the honor and adoration which so great an excellency challengeth and deserves at our hands, though we ourselves had not been the work of his hands, or the monuments of his strength; how could any creature engross to itself that reverence from us which is due to the powerful Creator, of whom it comes infinitely short in strength as well as wisdom?

Instruct. 7. From this we have a ground for the belief of the resurrection. God aims at the glory of his power, as well as the glory of any other attribute. Moses else would not have culled out this as the main argument, in his pleading with God, for the sheathing the sword which he began to draw out against them in the wilderness (Numb. 14:16): "The nations will say, because the Lord was not able to bring these people into the land which he swore to them," &c. As the

finding out the particulars of the dust of our bodies discovers the vastness of his knowledge, so to raise them will manifest the glory of his power as much as creation; bodies that have mouldered away into multitudes of atoms, been resolved into the elements, passed through varieties of changes, been sometimes the matter to lodge the form of a plant, or been turned into the substance of a fish or fowl, or vaped up into a cloud, and been part of that matter which hath compacted a thunderbolt, disposed of in places far distant, scattered by the winds, swallowed and concocted by beasts; for these to be called out from their different places of abode, to meet in one body, and be restored to their former consistency, in a marriage union, in the “twinkling of an eye” (1 Cor. 15:52), it is a consideration that may justly amaze us, and our shallow understandings are too feeble to comprehend it. But is it not credible, since all the disputes against it may be silenced by reflections on Infinite Power, which nothing can oppose, for which nothing can be esteemed too difficult to effect, which doth not imply a contradiction in itself? It was no less amazing to the blessed virgin to hear a message that she should conceive a Son without knowing a man; but she is quickly answered, by the angel, with a “Nothing is impossible to God” (Luke 1:34, 37). The distinct parts of our bodies cannot be hid from his all-seeing eye, wherever they are lodged, and in all the changes they pass through, as was discoursed when the Omniscience of God was handled; shall, then, the collection of them together be too hard for his invincible power and strength, and the uniting all those parts into a body, with new dispositions to receive their several souls, be too big and bulky for that Power which never yet was acquainted with any hindrance?

Instruct. 8. Since the power of God is so great and incomprehensible, how strange is it that it should be contemned and abused by the creatures as it is! The power of God is beaten down by some, outraged by others, blasphemed by many, under their sufferings. The stripping God of the honor of his creation, and the glory of his preservation of the world, falls under this charge: thus do they that deny his framing the world alone, or thought the first matter was not of God’s creation, and such as fancied an evil principle, the author of all evil, as God is the author of all good, and so exempt from the power of God, that it could not be vanquished by him. These things have formerly found defenders in the world; but they are, in themselves, ridiculous and vain, and have no footing in common reason, and are not worthy of debate in a Christian auditory.

In general, all idolatry in the world did arise from the lack of a due notion of this Infinite Power. The heathen thought one God was not sufficient for the

managing all things in the world, and therefore they feigned several gods, that had several charges; as Ceres presided over the fruits of the earth; Esculapius over the cure of diseases; Mercury for merchandise and trade; Mars for war and battles; Apollo and Minerva for learning and ingenious arts; and fortune for casual things. Whence doth the other sort of idolatry, the adoring our bags and gold, our dependencies on, and trusting in, creatures for help arise, but from ignorance of God's power, or mean and slender apprehensions of it? First, there is a contempt of it. Secondly, An abuse of it.

1. It is contemned in every sin, especially in obstinacy in sin. All sin whatsoever is built upon some false notion or monstrous conception of one or other of God's perfections, and in particular of this. It includes a secret and lurking imagination, that we are able to grapple with Omnipotence, and enter the lists with Almightyness; what else can be judged of the apostle's expression (1 Cor. 10:22)," Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy; are we stronger than he?" Do we think we have an arm too powerful for that justice we provoke, and can repel that vengeance we exasperate? Do we think we are an even match for God, and are able to despoil him of his Divinity? To despise his will, violate his order, practice what he forbids with a severe threatening, and pawns his power to make it good, is to pretend to have an arm like God, and be able to thunder with a voice equal or superior to him, as the expression is (Job 40:9). All security in sin is of this strain; when men are not concerned at Divine threatenings, nor staggered in their sinful race, they intimate, that the declarations of Divine Power are but vain-glorious boastings; that God is not so strong and able as he reports himself to be; and therefore they will venture it, and dare him to try, whether the strength of his arm be as forcible as the words of his mouth are terrible in his threats; this is to believe themselves Creators, not creatures. We magnify God's power in our poverty, and debase it in our rebellions; as though Omnipotence were only able to supply our necessities, and unable to revenge the injuries we offer him.

2. This power is contemned in distrust of God. All distrust is founded in a doubting of his truth, as if he would not be as good as his word; or of his omniscience, as if he had not a memory to retain his word; or of his power, as if he could not be as great as his word. We measure the infinite power of God by the short line of our understandings, as if infinite strength were bounded within the narrow compass of our finite reason; as if he could do no more than we were able to do. How soon did those Israelites lose the remembrance of God's outstretched arm, when they uttered that atheistical speech (Ps. 78:19), "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?". As if he that turned the dust of Egypt into lice, for the punishment of their oppressors, could not turn the dust of the wilderness into corn,

for the support of their bodies! As if he that had miraculously rebuked the Red Sea, for their safety, could not provide bread, for their nourishment! Though they had seen the Egyptians with lost lives in the morning, in the same place where their lives had been miraculously preserved in the evening, yet they disgrace that power which they had observed, by opposing to it the stature of the Anakims, the strength of their cities, and the height of their walls (Numb. 13:32). And (Numb. 14:3). “Wherefore hath the Lord brought us into this land to fall by the sword?” As though the giants of Canaan were too strong for Him, for whom they had seen the armies of Egypt too weak. How did they contract the almightiness of God into the littleness of a little man, as if he must needs sink under the sword of a Canaanite? This distrust must arise either from a flat atheism, a denial of the being of God, or his government of the world; or unworthy conceits of a weakness in him, that he had made creatures too hard for himself; that he were not strong enough to grapple with those mighty Anakims, and give them the possession of Canaan against so great a force. Distrust of him implies either that he was always destitute of power, or that his power is exhausted by his former works, or that it is limited, and near a period: it is to deny him to be the Creator that moulded heaven and earth. Why should we, by distrust, put a slight upon that power which he hath so often expressed, and which, in the tiniest works of his hands, surmount the force of the sharpest understanding?

3. It is contemned in too great a fear of man, which ariseth from a distrust of Divine power. Fear of man is a crediting the might of man with a dishonour of the arm of God, it takes away the glory of his might, and renders the creature stronger than God; and God more feeble than a mortal; as if the arm of man were a rod of iron, and the arm of God a brittle reed. How often do men tremble at the threatenings and hectorings of ruffians, yet will stand as stakes against the precepts and threatenings of God, as though he had less power to preserve us, than enemies had to destroy? With what disdain doth God speak to men infected with this attitude (Isa. 51:12,13)? “Who art thou, that art afraid of a man that shall die, and the Son of man that shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy Maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundation of the earth; and hast feared continually every day, because of the fury of the oppressor?” To fear man that is as grass, that cannot think a thought without a Divine concurrence, that cannot breathe, but by a Divine power, nor touch a hair without license first granted from heaven; this is forgetfulness, and consequently a slight of that Infinite Power, which hath been manifested in founding the earth and garnishing the heavens. All fear of man, in the way of our duty, doth in some sort thrust out the remembrance, and discredit the great actions of the Creator. Would not a mighty prince think it a disparagement to him, if his servant should decline his

command for fear of one of his subjects? And hath not the great God just cause to think himself disgraced by us, when we deny him obedience for fear of a creature: as though he had but an infant ability too feeble to bear us out in duty, and incapable to balance the strength of an arm of flesh?

4. It is scorned by trusting in ourselves, in means, in man, more than in God. When in any distress we will try every creature refuge, before we have recourse to God; and when we apply ourselves to him, we do it with such slight and perfunctory frames, and with so much despondency, as if we despaired either of his ability or will to help us; and implore him with cooler affections than we solicit creatures: or, when in a disease we depend upon the virtue of the medicine, the ability of the physician, and reflect not upon that power that endued the medicine with that virtue, and supports the quality in it, and concurs to the operation of it. When we depend upon the activity of the means, as if they had power originally in themselves, and not derivatively; and do not eye the Power of God animating and assisting them. We cannot expect relief from anything with a neglect of God, but we render it in our thoughts more powerful than God: We acknowledge a greater fulness in a shallow stream, than in an eternal spring; we do, in effect, depose the true God, and create to ourselves a new one; we assert, by such a kind of acting, the creature, if not superior, yet equal with God, and independent on him. When we trust in our own strength, without begging his assistance; or boast of our own strength, without acknowledging his concurrence, as the Assyrian; “By the strength of my hand have I done this; I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man” (Isa. 10:13). It is, as if the axe should boast itself against him that hews therewith, and thinks itself more mighty than the arm that wields it (ver. 15), when we trust in others more than in God. Thus God upbraids those by the prophet, that sought help from Egypt, telling them (Isa. 31:3), “The Egyptians were men, and not gods; intimating, that by their dependence on them, they rendered them gods and not men, and advanced them from the state of creatures to that of almighty deities. It is to set a pile of dust, a heap of ashes, above Him that created and preserves the world. To trust in a creature, is to make it as infinite as God; to do that which is impossible in itself to be done. God himself cannot make a creature infinite, for that were to make him God. It is also contemned when we ascribe what we receive to the power of instruments, and not to the power of God. Men, in whatsoever they do for us, are but the tools whereby the Creator works. Is it not a disgrace to the draughtsman to admire his pencil, and not himself; to the mechanic, to admire his file and machines, and not his power? “It is not I,” saith Paul, “that labor, but the grace, the efficacious grace of God, which is in me.” Whatsoever good we do is from him, not from ourselves; to ascribe it to ourselves, or to instruments, is to overlook and contemn his power.

5. Unbelief of the gospel is a contempt and disowning Divine power. This perfection hath been discovered in the conception of Christ, the union of the two natures, his resurrection from the grave, the restoration of the world, and the conversion of men, more than in the creation of the world: then what a disgrace is unbelief to all that power that so severely punished the Jews for the rejecting the gospel: turned so many nations from their beloved superstitions; humbled the power of princes and the wisdom of philosophers; chased devils from their temples by the weakness of fishermen; planted the standard of the gospel against the common notions and inveterate customs of the world! What a disgrace is unbelief to this power which hath preserved Christianity from being extinguished by the force of men and devils, and kept it flourishing in the midst of sword, fire, and executioners; that hath made the simplicity of the gospel overpower the eloquence of orators, and multiplied it from the ashes of martyrs, when it was destitute of all human assistances! Not heartily to believe and embrace that doctrine, which hath been attended with such marks of power, is a high reflection upon this Divine perfection, so highly manifested in the first publication, propagation, and preservation of it.

Secondly, The power of God is abused, as well as contemned. 1. When we make use of it to justify contradictions. The doctrine of transubstantiation is an abuse of this power. When the maintainers of it cannot answer the absurdities alleged against it, they have recourse to the power of God. It implies a contradiction, that the same body should be on earth and in heaven at the same instant of time; that it should be at the right hand of God, and in the mouth and stomach of a man; that it should be a body of flesh, and yet bread to the eye and to the taste; that it should be visible and invisible, a glorious body, and yet gnawn by the teeth of a creature; that it should be multiplied in a thousand places, and yet an entire body in every one, where there is no member to be seen, no flesh to be tasted; that it should be above us in the highest heavens, and yet within us in our lower bowels; such contradictions as these are an abuse of the power of God. Again, we abuse this power when we believe every idle story that is reported, because God is able to make it so if he pleased. We may as well believe Aesop's Fables to be true, that birds spake, and beasts reasoned, because the power of God can enable such creatures to such acts. God's power is not the rule of our belief of a thing without the exercise of it in matter of fact, and the declaration of it upon sufficient evidence.

2. The power of God is abused by presuming on it, without using the means he hath appointed. When men sit with folded arms, and make a confidence in his power a glorious title to their idleness and disobedience, they would have

his strength do all, and his precept should move them to do nothing; this is a trust of his power against his command, a pretended glorifying his power with a slight of his sovereignty. Though God be almighty, yet, for the most part, he exerciseth his might in giving life and success to second causes and lawful endeavors. When we stay in the mouth of danger, without any call ordering us to continue, and against a door of providence opened for our rescue, and sanctuary ourselves in the power of God without any promise, without any providence conducting us; this is not to glorify the Divine might, but to neglect it, in neglecting the means which his power affords to us for our escape; to condemn it to our humors, to work miracles for us according to our wills, and against his own. God could have sent a worm to be Herod's executioner when he sought the life of our Saviour, or employed an angel from heaven to have tied his hands or stopped his breath, and not put Joseph upon a flight to Egypt with our Saviour; yet had it not been an abuse of the power of God, for Joseph to have neglected the precept, and slighted the means God gave him for the preserving his own life and that of the child's? Christ himself, when the Jews consulted to destroy him, presumed not upon the power of God to secure him, but used ordinary means for his preservation, by walking no more openly, but retiring himself into a city near the wilderness till the hour was come, and the call of his Father manifest" (John 11:53,54). A rash running upon danger, though for the truth itself, is a presuming upon, and consequently an abuse of, this power; a proud challenging it to serve our turns against the authority of his will, and the force of his precept; a not resting in his ordinate power, but demanding his absolute power to pleasure our follies and presumptions; concluding and expecting more from it than what is authorized by his will.

Instruct. 9. If infinite power be a peculiar property of God, how miserable will all wicked rebels be under this power of God! Men may break his laws, but not impair his arm; they may slight his word, but cannot resist his power. If he swear that he will sweep a place with the besom of destruction, "as he hath thought, so shall it come to pass; and as he hath purposed, so shall it stand," (Isa. 14:23, 24). Rebels against an earthly prince may exceed him in strength, and be more powerful than their sovereign; none can equal God, much less exceed him. As none can exercise an act of hostility against him without his permissive will, so none can struggle from under his hand without his positive will. He hath an arm not to be moved, a hand not to be wrung aside. God is represented on his throne like a "jasper stone" (Rev. 4:3), as one of invincible power when he comes to judge; the jasper is a stone which withstands the greatest force. Though men resist the order of his laws, they cannot the sentence of their punishment, nor the execution of it. None can any more exempt themselves from the arm of his

strength, than they can from the authority of his dominion. As they must bow to his sovereignty, so must they sink under his force. A prisoner in this world may make his escape, but a prisoner in the world to come cannot (Job 10:7). “There is none that can deliver out of thine hand.” “There is none to deliver when he tears in pieces” (Ps. 50:22). His strength is uncontrollable; hence his throne is represented as a “fiery flame” (Dan. 7:9). As a spark of fire hath power to kindle one thing after another, and increase till it consumes a forest, a city, swallow up all combustible matter till it consumes a world, and many worlds, if they were in being, what power hath the tree to resist the fire, though it seems mighty, when it outbraves the winds? What man, to this day, hath been able to free himself from that chain of death God clapped upon him for his revolt? And if he be too feeble to rescue himself from a temporal, much less from an eternal death. The devils have, to this minute, groaned under the pile of wrath, without any success in delivering themselves by all their strength, which much surmounts all the strength of mankind, nor have they any hopes to work their rescue to eternity. How foolish is every sinner! Can we poor worms strut it out against Infinite Power? We cannot resist the meanest creatures when God commissions them, and puts a sword into their hands. They will not, no, not the worms, be startled at the glory of a king, when they have the Creator’s warrant to be his executioners (Acts 12:23). Who can withstand him, when he commands the waves and inundations of the sea to leap over the shore; when he divides the ground in earthquakes, and makes it gape wide to swallow the inhabitants of it; when the air is corrupted to breed pestilences; when storms and showers, unseasonably falling, putrify the fruits of the earth; what created power can mend the matter, and, with a prevailing voice, say to him, What dost thou? There are two attributes God will make to shine in hell to the full; his wrath and his power (Rom. 9:22): “What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction?” If it were mere wrath, and no power to second it, it were not so terrible; but it is wrath and power: both are joined together. It is not only a sharp sword, but a powerful arm; and not only that, for then it were well for the damned creature. To have many sharp blows, and from a strong arm, this may be without putting forth the highest strength a man hath; but in this God makes it his design to make his power known and conspicuous; he takes the sword, as it were, in both hands, that he may show the strength of his arm in striking the harder blow; and therefore the apostles call it (2 Thess. 1:9) “the glory of his power,” which puts a sting into his wrath; and it is called (Rev. 19:15) “the fierceness of the wrath of the Almighty.” God will do it in such a manner as to make men sensible of his almightiness in every stroke. How great must that vengeance be, that is backed by all the strength of God! When there will

be a powerful wrath, without a powerful compassion; when all his power shall be exercised in punishing, and not the least mite of it exercised in pitying; how irresistible will be the load of such a weighty hand! How can the dust of the balance break the mighty bars, or get out of the lists of a powerful vengeance, or hope for any grain of comfort? O, that every obstinate sinner would think of this, and consider his unmeasurable boldness in thinking himself able to grapple with Omnipotence! What force can any have to resist the presence of Him, before whom rocks melt, and the heavens, at length, shall be shrivelled up as a parchment by the last fire! As the light of God's face is too dazzling to be beheld by us, so the arm of his power is too mighty to be opposed by us. His almightiness is above the reach of our potsherd strength, as his infiniteness is above the capacity of our purblind understanding. God were not omnipotent, if his power could be rendered ineffectual by any.

Use II. A second use of this point, from the consideration of the infinite power of God, is of comfort. As Omnipotence is an ocean that cannot be fathomed, so the comforts from it are streams that cannot be exhausted. What joy can be lacking to him that finds himself folded in the arms of Omnipotence? This perfection is made over to believers in the covenant, as well as any other attribute; "I am the Lord, your God;" therefore, that power, which is as essential to the Godhead as any other perfection of his nature, is, in the rights and extent of it, assured unto you. Nay, may we not say, it is made over more than any other, because it is that which animates every other perfection; and is the Spirit that gives them motion and appearance in the world. If God had expressed himself in particular, as, "I am a true God, a wise God, a loving God, a righteous God, I am yours;" what would all, or any of those, have signified, unless the other also had been implied, as, "I am an Almighty God, I am your God!" In God's making over himself in any particular attribute, this of his power is included in every one, without which, all his other grants would be insignificant. It is a comfort that power is in the hands of God; it can never be better placed, for he can never use his power to injure his confiding creature; if it were in our own hands, we might use it to injure ourselves. It is a power in the hands of an indulgent Father, not a hard-hearted tyrant; it is a just power; "His right hand is full of righteousness" (Ps. 48:10); because of his righteousness he can never use it ill, and because of his wisdom he can never use it unseasonably. Men that have strength, often misplace the actings of it, because of their folly; and sometimes employ it to base ends, because of their wickedness; but this power in God is always awakened by goodness, and conducted by wisdom; it is never exercised by self-will and passion, but according to the immutable rule of his own nature, which is righteousness. How comfortable is it to think, that you have a God that can do

what he pleases; nothing so difficult but he can effect, nothing so strong but he can overrule! You need not dread men, since you have One to restrain them; nor fear devils, since you have One to chain them; no creature but is acted by this power; no creature but must fall upon the withdrawing of this power. It was not all laid out in creation; it is not weakened by his preservation of things; he yet hath a fullness of power, and a residue of Spirit; for whom should that eternal arm of the Lord be displayed, and that incomprehensible thunder of his power be shot out, but for those for whose sake and for whose comfort it is revealed in his word? In particular,

1. Here is comfort in all afflictions and distresses. Our evils can never be so great to oppress us, as his power is great to deliver us. The same power that brought a world out of a chaos, and constituted, and hath hitherto preserved, the regular motion of the stars, can bring order out of our confusions, and light out of our darkness. When our Saviour was in the greatest distress, and beheld the face of his Father frowning, while he was upon the cross, in his complaint to him, he exerciseth faith upon his power (Matt. 27:46): “Eli, Eli: My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” That this, My strong, my strong; El, is a name of power, belonging to God; he comforts himself in his power, while he complains of his frowns. Follow his pattern, and forget not that power that can scatter the clouds, as well as gather them together. The Psalmist’s support in his distress, was in the creative power of God (Ps. 121:2): “My help comes from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.”

2. It is comfort in all strong and stirring corruptions and mighty temptations. It is by this we may arm ourselves, and “be strong in the power of his might” (Eph. 6:10); by this we may conquer principalities and powers, as dreadful as hell, but not so mighty as heaven; by this we may triumph over lusts within, too strong for an arm of flesh; by this the devils that have possessed us may be cast out; the battered walls of our souls may be repaired; and the sons of Anak laid flat. That power that brought light out of darkness, and overmastered the deformity of the chaos, and set bounds to the ocean, and dried up the Red Sea by a rebuke, can quell the tumults in our spirits, and level spiritual Goliaths by his word. When the disciples heard that terrifying speech of our Saviour, concerning rich men, that it was “easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Matt. 19:24), to entertain the gospel, which commanded self-denial; and that, because of the allurements of the world, and the strong habits in their soul; Christ refers them to the power of God (ver. 26), who could expel those ill habits, and plant good ones: “With men this is impossible,

but with God all things are possible.” There is no resistance, but he can surmount; no strong-hold, but he can demolish; no tower, but he can level.

3. It is comfort from hence, that all promises shall be performed. Goodness is sufficient to make a promise, but power is necessary to perform a promise. Men that are honest, cannot often make good their words, because something may intervene that may shorten their ability: but nothing can disable God, without diminishing his godhead. He hath an infiniteness of power to accomplish his word, as well as an infiniteness of goodness to make and utter his word.

That might whereby he made heaven and earth, and his keeping truth forever, are joined together (Ps. 146:5,6); his Father’s faithfulness, and his creative power are linked together. It is upon this basis the covenant, and every part of it, is established, and stands as firm as the almightiness of God, whereby he sprung up the earth, and reared the heavens. “No power can resist his will” (Rom. 9:19); “Who can disannul his purpose, and turn back his hand when it is stretched out” (Isa. 14:27)? His word is unalterable, and his power is invincible. He could not deceive himself, for he knew his own strength when he promised: no unexpected event can chance his resolution, because nothing can happen without the compass of his foresight. No created strength can stop him in his action, because all creatures are ready to serve him at his command; not the devils in hell, nor all the wicked men on earth, since he hath strength to restrain them, and an arm to punish them. What can be too hard for Him that created heaven and earth? Hence it was, that when God promised an anything anciently to his people, he used often the name of the Almighty, the Lord that created heaven and earth, as that which was an undeniable answer to any objection, against anything that might be made against the greatness and stupendousness of any promise; by that name, in all his works of grace, was he known to them (Exod. 6:3). When we are sure of his will, we need not question his strength, since he never over-engaged himself above his ability. He that could not be resisted by anything in creation, nor vanquished by devils in redemption, can never lack power to glorify his faithfulness in his accomplishment of whatsoever he hath promised.

4. From this infiniteness of power in God, we have ground of assurance for perseverance. Since conversion is resembled to the works of creation and resurrection, two great marks of his strength, he doth not surely employ himself in the first of changing the heart, to let any created strength baffle that power which he began and intends to glorify. It was this might that struck off the chain, and expelled that strong one that possessed you. What, if you are too weak to keep him out of his lost possession, will God lose the glory of his first strength, by suffering his foiled adversary to make a re-entry, and regain his former

usurpation? His out-stretched arm will not do less by his spiritual, than it did by his national Israel: it guarded them all the way to Canaan, and left them not to shift for themselves after he had struck off the fetters of Egypt, and buried their enemies in the Red Sea (Deut. 1:31). This greatness of the Father, above all, our Saviour makes the ground of believers' continuance forever, against the blasts of hell and engines of the world (John 10:29). "My Father is greater than all, and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hands." Our keeping is not in our own weak hands, but in the hands of Him who is mighty to save. That power of God keeps us which intends our salvation. In all fears of falling away, shelter yourselves in the power of God: "He shall be holden up," saith the apostle, speaking concerning one weak in faith; and no other reason is rendered by him but this, "For God is able to make him to stand" (Rom. 14:4).

5. From this attribute of the infinite power of God, we have a ground of comfort in the lowest estate of the church. Let the state of the church be never so deplorable, the condition never so desperate, that Power that created the world, and shall raise the bodies of men, can create a happy state for the church, and raise her from an overwhelming grave; though the enemies trample upon her, they cannot upon the arm that holds her, which by the least motion of it, can lift her up above the heads of her adversaries, and make them feel the thunder of that Power that none can understand: by the "blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils they are consumed" (Job 4:9); they "shall be scattered as chaff before the wind." If once he "draw his hand out of his bosom," all must fly before him, or sink under him (Ps. 74:11): and when there is and it none to help, his own arm sustains him, brings salvation, and his fury doth uphold him" (Isa. 63:5). What if the church totter under the underminings of hell? What if it hath a sad heart and wet eyes? In what a little moment can he make the night turn into day, and make the Jews, that were preparing for death in Shushan, triumph over the necks of their enemies, and march in one hour with swords in their hands, that expected the last hour ropes about their necks (Esth. 9:1,5)? If Israel be pursued by Pharaoh, the sea shall open its arms to protect them: if they be thirsty, a rock shall spout out water to refresh them: if they be hungry, heaven shall be their granary for manna: if Jerusalem be besieged, and hath not force enough to encounter Sennacherib, an angel shall turn the camp into an Aeldema, a field of blood. His people shall not lack deliverances, till God lacks a power of working miracles for their security: he is more jealous of his power, than the church can be of her safety. And if we should need other arguments to press him, we may implore him by virtue of his power: for when there is nothing in the church as a motive to him to save it, there is enough in his own name, and "the illustration of his power" (Ps. 106:8). Who can grapple with the omnipotency of that God, who is jealous of, and zealous for,

the honor of it? And therefore God, for the most part, takes such opportunities to deliver, wherein his almightiness may be most conspicuous, and his counsels most admirable. He awakened not himself to deliver Israel, till they were upon the brink of the Red Sea; nor to rescue the three children, till they were in the fiery furnace; nor Daniel, till he was in the lion's den. It is in the weakness of his creature that his strength is perfected, not in a way of addition of perfectness to it, but in a way of manifestation of the perfection of it; as it is the perfection of the sun to shine and enlighten the world, not that the sun receives an increase of light by the darting of his beams, but displays his glory to the admiration of men, and pleasure of the world. If it were not for such occasions, the world would not regard the mightiness of God, nor know what power were in him. It traverses the stage in its fulness and liveliness upon such occasions, when the enemies are strong, and their strength edged with an intense hatred, and but little time between the contrivance and execution. It is a great comfort that the lowest distresses of the church are a fit scene for the display of this attribute, and that the glory of God's omnipotence, and the church's security, are so closely linked together. It is a promise that will never be forgotten by God, and ought never to be forgotten by us, that "in this mountain the hand of the Lord shall rest" (Isa. 25:10); that is, the power of the Lord shall abide; and Moab "shall be trodden under him, even as straw is trodden down for the dunghill." And the "plagues of Babylon shall come in one day, death, and mourning and famine; for strong is the Lord who judgeth her" (Rev. 18:8).

Use III. The third use is for exhortation.

1. Meditate on this power of God, and press it often upon your minds. We reason many things of God that we do not practically suck the comfort of, for lack of deep thoughts of it, and frequent inspection into it. We believe God to be true, yet distrust him; we acknowledge him powerful, yet fear the motion of every straw. Many truths, though assented to in our understandings, are kept under covers by corrupt affections, and have not their due influence, because they are not brought forth into the open air of our souls by meditation. If we will but search our hearts, we shall find it is the power of God we often doubt of. When the heart of Ahaz and his subjects trembled at the combination of the Syrian and Israelitish kings against him, for lack of a confidence in the power of God, God sends his prophet with commission to work a miraculous sign at his own choice, to rear up his fainting heart; and when he refused to ask a sign out of diffidence of that almighty Power, the prophet complains of it as an affront to his Master (Isa. 7:12, 13). Moses, so great a friend of God, was overtaken with this kind of unbelief, after all the experiences of God's miraculous acts in Egypt; the answer God gives

him manifests this to be at the core: “Is the Lord’s hand waxed short” (Numb. 11:23)? For lack of thoughts carried out into practise of this, we are many times turned from our known duty by the blast of a creature— as though man had more power to dismay us, than God hath to support us in his commanded way. The belief of God’s power is one of the first steps to all religion; without settled thoughts of it, we cannot pray lively and believingly for the obtaining the mercies we need, or the averting the evils we fear; we should not love him, unless we are persuaded he hath a power to bless us; nor fear him, unless we were persuaded of his power to punish us. The frequent thoughts of this would render our faith more stable, and our hopes more stedfast; it would make us more feeble to sin, and more careful to obey. When the virgin staggered at the message of the angel, that she should “bear a Son,” he, in his answer, turns her to the creative power of God (Luke 1:35): “The power of the Highest shall overshadow thee;” which seems to be in allusion to the Spirit’s moving upon the face of the deep, and bringing a comely world out of a confused mass. Is it harder for God to make a virgin conceive a Son by the power of his Spirit, than to make a world? Why doth he reveal himself so often under the title of Almighty, and press it upon us, but that we should press it upon ourselves? Any shall we be forgetful of that which every thing about us, everything within us, is a mark of? How come we by a power of seeing and hearing, a faculty, and act of understanding and will, but by this power framing us, this power assisting us? What though the thunder of his power cannot be understood, no more can any other perfection of his nature; shall we, therefore, seldom think of it? The sea cannot be fathomed, yet the merchant excuseth not himself from sailing upon the surface of it. We cannot glorify God without due consideration of this attribute; for his power is his glory as much is any other, and called both by the name of glory (Rom. 6:4), speaking of Christ’s resurrection by the glory of the Father; and also “the riches of his glory” (Eph. 3:16). Those that have strong temptations in their course and over-pressing corruptions in their hearts, have need to think of it out of interest, since nothing but this can relieve them. Those that have experienced the working of it in their new creation, are obliged to think of it out of gratitude. It was this mighty power over himself that gave rise to all that pardoning grace already conferred, or hereafter expected; without it our souls had been consumed, the world overturned; we could not have expected a happy heaven, but have lain yelling in an eternal hell, had not the power of his mercy exceeded that of his justice, and his infinite power executed what his infinite wisdom had contrived for our redemption. How much also should we be raised in our admirations of God, and ravish ourselves in contemplating that might that can raise innumerable worlds in those infinite

imaginary spaces outside this globe of heaven and earth, and exceed
inconceivably what he hath done in the creation of this?

Visit *Fire and Ice: Puritan and Reformed Sermons* at
<http://www.puritansermons.com/>