

Divine Attributes - Power
By William Bates, (1625-1699)
Psalm 96:4-5

I. The Text Opened

A. Psalm 96:4-5

1. "The Lord is to be feared above all gods, for all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens."
 - a) Divine power is admirably glorified in the creation of the world both in regard to scope and production.
 - b) God spoke the universe into existence, without the concurrence of any material cause, from nothing.
 - c) The psalmist declares this in Psalm 96:4-5.
 - d) He commanded light to shine out of darkness, and sensible creatures from an insensible element.
 - e) He created man, the highest accomplishment of all His works, from the lowest and grossest element, the earth.
 - f) Though at first glance we might conceive that the visible world is the greatest miracle God ever performed, on further reflection we can see that the works of grace are as wonderful as the works of nature, and that the power of God is as evidently expressed in our redemption as in His creation.

II. The Doctrine from the Text

A. DOCTRINE: The incarnation of the Son of God in accomplishing our redemption demonstrates God's power.

1. "The Word was made flesh."
 - a) Before His incarnation, Christ appeared in human form to the patriarchs and in the flaming bush to Moses; but it is never said about those appearances that the Word was "made a flame."
 - b) Yet when He came into the world to save us, He assumed the complete nature of man into a hypostatical union with Himself. Christ possesses concurrently the titles, qualities and natures of God and man in that inexpressible union.
 - c) Each of the natures preserves its proper form with all the necessary consequences proceeding from it.
 - d) The human nature is joined to the eternal Word, but not changed into divinity.
 - e) Deity is united to flesh, but not transformed into its nature. There is distinction without separation: two natures, but one Jesus.
 - f) In the same subsistence the Creator and the creature are miraculously allied.
 - g) This is a work that can only be attributed to omnipotence. "Ye do err," Christ says to the Sadducees, (who denied the resurrection) "not knowing the power of God."
2. This divine power was magnified in our Redeemer's supernatural conception.
 - a) It was essential that His body be miraculously formed of
 - b) the substance of a woman by the operation of the Holy Spirit. He must be connected to humanity while remaining absolutely pure from the stain of sin.
 - c) Heaven and earth concurred to form that divine man – the king of both.

- d) The angel told Mary in Luke 1:35 who questioned how she could be a mother not having known a man, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the highest shall overshadow thee, therefore also that holy thing that shall be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God."
 - e) The prophet says in Isaiah 7:14, "The Lord Himself would give them a sign of their future deliverance. Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name" Immanuel.
3. The divine power of God effected a victory making the death of Christ victorious over all our spiritual enemies.
- a) To show what an eminent degree of power was exercised in effecting this, consider that after Satan was cast out of heaven for his rebellion, he set up a throne on the earth and usurped an absolute empire over mankind.
 - b) His power was great, and his malice was equal to his power.
 - c) The apostle represents him with his black army in Ephesians 6:12 under the titles of "principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, spiritual wickedness in heavenly places."
 - d) And yet, through the infinite power of God, "by death [Christ] overcame him that had the power of death, that is, the devil," (Heb. 2:14).
 - (1) *The Lord Christ by His death took away the guilt and power of sin.*
 - (2) *"By the cross of Christ the world is crucified to us; and we are crucified to the world," (Gal. 6:14).*
 - (3) *By His death we are vindicated from the power of Satan, "into the glorious liberty of the sons of God."*
 - (4) *For this reason, our Savior, a little before His passion, said, "now shall the prince of this world be cast out."*
 - (5) *By the cross He spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it," (2 Cor. 15).*
4. Although the resurrection and ascension of Christ are the evidences of His triumph, His death is the sole cause and origin of it.
- a) The cross was both the instrument of suffering and the trophy of His victory.
 - b) All our triumphant pains are gathered from that tree.
 - c) It is there our Savior bruised the head of the serpent and renewed His victory over him.
5. God's divine power was eminently magnified in Christ's resurrection from the grave.
- a) This was foretold concerning the Messiah by the prophet David in Psalm 16:10, "My flesh shall rest in hope, for thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thy Holy One to see corruption."
 - b) As it was ordained by God's counsel, so it was executed by His power.
 - c) Other miracles were performed by the prophets, but this was singular, one that could only be accomplished by the God of the prophets.
 - (1) *This miracle was equally necessary for His glory and our salvation.*
6. It was in God's will and plan for our redemption that He descend from heaven, the seat of His glory, and that by dying He might expiate our sins.
- a) It was equally necessary that He should rise again in order to dispense the glorious benefits He had purchased.
 - b) The apostle tells the Corinthians, "If Christ be not risen, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is also in vain," (1 Cor. 15:14).

III. The Text Applied

A. How could we believe Him to be the author of life if He remained under the power of death?

1. How could He quicken and glorify us who finally perished?
2. If He had been confined to the grave, all our hopes would have been buried with Him.
 - a) But His resurrection is the cause, pattern and argument of ours.
 - b) And this all was accomplished by the power of God, "Christ was raised by the glory of his Father," (Rom. 6:4), that is, by His eminent power; for what is stronger than death? and more inevitable than the grave?
 - c) God's omnipotence alone can break its gates and loose its bands.
3. God's divine power was glorified in the conversion of the world to Christianity and the people employed to preach the Gospel were a few fishermen with no authority or power of their own.
 - a) And yet a great and lasting change was accomplished in the world by the "mere" preaching of the gospel. Idolatry was abolished.
 - b) A miraculous change followed in the lives of men. Christians left their old sinful life behind to follow Christ.
4. This divine power in the Gospel was glorified in the conversion of the world to Christianity.
 - a) The apostle tells us, "that Christ crucified was to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Gentiles foolishness."
 - b) The Jews expected the Messiah to deliver them from temporal servitude, and establish a universal empire by force.
 - c) When instead of power they saw nothing but weakness, and instead of a glorious triumph, a disgraceful punishment, they despised the person of Christ and rejected His doctrine.
5. Nevertheless, "to these that are called according to the divine purpose, He was the most excellent power of God."
 - a) For this reason, the apostle declares, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, it being the power of God to salvation to all that believe, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."
 - b) And he prays for the Ephesians (Eph. 1:18-20) that "ye may know what is the hope of His calling and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which he wrought in Christ when He raised him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places," (Eph. 1:18-20).
6. People were so set in sin, satisfied in their own way, that only by the power of God could the Gospel work.
 - a) The pleasures of sin and zeal for false religion, the understanding and wills of men were combined in opposition to the progress of the Gospel.
 - b) The learned and ignorant, magistrates and people, men and devils joined to suppress it.

c) God chose the weak things of the world to confound the mighty, and base things of the world, and “things which are despised has God chosen: yea and things that are not, to bring to nought things that are, that his glorious power may be fully manifested,” (1 Cor. 1:27).

7. Is the world better off for Christ's coming?

a) Most assuredly.

b) The great and lasting change that was made in the world by the preaching of the gospel is a certain argument of the divine power that animated those fishermen and goes to show that no instrument is weak in God's hands.

c) It is a great miracle to render sight to the blind, but it is more miraculous to enlighten the dark mind, to see the truth and beauty of supernatural mysteries and to be brought to believe them.

d) What the sages of the world could not affect in a few select people, the gospel has done in great numbers.

(1) *The apostle declares (Col. 1:6) its admirable progress “in all the world” during his time.*

(2) *In a few years with incredible swiftness it passed through Judea, Samaria, Syria, Greece, and all the parts of the known habitable world.*

e) Tacitus acknowledges that in the eleventh year of Nero, great numbers of Christians were at Rome, at a great distance from the place where the gospel was first preached.

(1) *It appears from the writings of the primitive Christians that in the second century after the death of Christ the Roman empire was filled with Christian churches.*

(2) *The world was populated with a new generation.*

f) What secret power produced that sudden and universal change?

(1) *How did it come to pass that the gospel, contrary to the order of new things, should be so readily received, and in those places where it was most opposed?*

(2) *“The Pharisees compassed sea and land to make a proselyte,” (Matt. 23:15), but what did that get them?*

(3) *The Gospel, in a little time, converted many.*

(4) *The wonder in Isaiah was exceeded, “That a nation was born in a day,” for the world was renewed as it were in a moment by the omnipotent power of God.*